

PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

Her Promise True.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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CHAPTER I. I. H. HUGH Gilbert and Belle Wayland are bidding each other good bye at Brighton as he is about to sail for India with his regiment. Belle promises to be true and to wait for him until he returns. Upon her return to the hotel, where she and her mother are stopping, she finds that Lord Stanmore, who is brother-in-law to her mother and her mother's brother, has arrived and has invited her mother and her to dine with him that evening. Mrs. Wayland goes to Belle's sudden illness and is left apparently asleep in her room. After dinner Mrs. Wayland discovers that Belle has gone out to meet Gilbert and is very angry. Mrs. Wayland writes a letter to her sister, Lady Stanmore, and the latter comes immediately to Brighton.

CHAPTER II. Lady Stanmore comes to Brighton and has an interview with Mrs. Wayland in which they decide Belle's future. Lady Stanmore reads a letter from Gilbert to Belle and lays her plans accordingly. She decides to intercept letters between the lovers. Lady Stanmore becomes deeply interested in Belle and invites her sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland, and Belle to spend a few weeks at her country residence.

CHAPTER III. Belle begins a diary in order that she may send an account of each day to her absent lover.

CHAPTER IV. Lady Stanmore thinks over the situation. She decides that Belle is not in love with Jack. Lord Stanmore calls upon the party, and invites them to visit him at Hurst Hall. He is greatly amused with Belle. Lady Stanmore opens a letter from Hugh Gilbert to Belle and burns it.

CHAPTER V. Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That night she writes to her mother. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Belle and Hugh Gilbert are engaged.

CHAPTER VI. Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That night she writes to her mother. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Belle and Hugh Gilbert are engaged.

CHAPTER VII. Lord Stanmore becomes jealous of Sir Dick. Belle tells Lady Stanmore of her engagement and that Lady Stanmore's idea. They go to Hurst Hall.

CHAPTER VIII. Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That night she writes to her mother. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Belle and Hugh Gilbert are engaged.

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CHAPTER X. Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That night she writes to her mother. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. Belle writes to Hugh Gilbert. Belle and Hugh Gilbert are engaged.

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CHAPTER XII. Stanmore rescues Belle from drowning. She takes cold and has a severe illness. A letter arrives for Belle during her illness and is destroyed by Lady Stanmore.

CHAPTER XIII. Belle is convalescent. Stanmore proposes to her and in her anxiety to show Hugh Gilbert that she has forgotten him, she accepts the offer. Stanmore and his sister-in-law arrange matters and Belle acquiesces. The marriage is arranged for an early day.

CHAPTER XIV. The eve of the wedding. Lady Stanmore writes to her friend in Bombay and tells her of the marriage and specially requests that the news be told to Hugh Gilbert whom she represents as a friend of her friend.

CHAPTER XV. THE ICE WOMAN. Lord and Lady Stanmore return to Redvers Court. Belle is not happy and Stanmore sees that she is. He is learned to love her. Sir Dick and Lady Stanmore call upon them and invite them to dine at Hurst.

CHAPTER XVI. FLYING WITH FIRE. Sir Dick grows more in love with Lord Stanmore's wife which causes him to mother much uneasiness. Lord Stanmore also notices the young man's infatuation and warns Belle against encouraging him. They dine at Hurst and Belle is presented to Mr. Trevelyan the vicar and Sir Dick's old tutor, and his daughter Amy who has known and loved Sir Dick from her childhood as the mother who grew up together but who only regards Amy with a sisterly affection.

CHAPTER XVII. An unfortunate face. Lord and Lady Stanmore have an understanding and are better friends. She tells him all about her interview with Sir Dick. The Stanmore's get an invitation to a ball at Marchmont Court. They go and there Belle and Hugh Gilbert meet. After the shock has somewhat died away she requires for his wife and learns that he has never been married.

CHAPTER XVIII. The lost letters. Belle and Captain Gilbert have mutual explanations in which Lady Stanmore's treachery is revealed. Lord Stanmore is introduced to Gilbert and asks him to dine with them the following day. Belle accuses her aunt of destroying her letters and the latter acknowledges her guilt but nothing of the situation is told to Stanmore who remains in the dark. Gilbert very kindly and invites him to Scotland for the shooting season and at Belle's request the latter consents to do so.

CHAPTER XIX. Gilbert hears of Belle's accident on the lake and of Stanmore's appearance on the scene in time to save her life and the result.

CHAPTER XX. The whole party go to Strath-haven and are charmed with its beauty. A row on the lake and its result. The Marchmonts furnish their own shooting box and invite Gilbert to join them. He is inclined to do so as he does not feel at ease at Strath-haven but to stay and Belle discusses the matter and she requests him to stay for a few days more.

CHAPTER XXI. A stray shot. Gilbert is wounded by a shot from Mr. Marchmonts gun. Belle hears the news and almost betrays her love for Gilbert. A doctor and nurse are summoned from London and the wound is pronounced not dangerous.

CHAPTER XXII. An old friend. Belle makes many anxious enquiries about Gilbert and sends him a rose by Jim Marchmont. Lady Stanmore receives a letter from Mrs. Marchmont who is expected in a day or two to stay at their new shooting box, in which she tells her that Mrs. Seymour is coming to stay with her at Glenwrath. She tells Belle and wishes her to go away with her during Mrs. Seymour's stay but Belle declines.

CHAPTER XXIII. Mrs. Seymour. Lady Stanmore leaves Strath-haven first telling Lord Stanmore of Mrs. Seymour's expected arrival. The latter comes to Scotland and Belle meets her. Gilbert makes his first appearance downstairs since the accident and is received by Belle. He is still very weak and faints away while listening to Belle reading.

CHAPTER XXIV. A NEW FEAR.

Some minutes elapsed before Hugh Gilbert recovered from the death-like faint into which he had fallen. Then with deep-drawn sighs he slowly opened his eyes, and when they fell on Belle's white upraised face he tried to speak, but no words came from his pallid lips.

"You are better? You know me?" she whispered, huskily, still holding his hand in her trembling one.

Again Gilbert tried to speak, but his voice still failed him.

"I knew it would happen," repeated the professional nurse, evidently quite pleased that her prediction had come true. "This is the first day Captain Gilbert has been up, my lady and yet he would come downstairs."

"Try some champagne," said Belle. "Nurse, ring for some champagne. That will revive him more quickly."

The wine was brought at once, and after Gilbert had taken some of it, the color stole faintly back to his face, and he regained his voice.

"I am ashamed to give so much trouble," he said, in a low tone.

"Do not speak of it; do not talk thus," answered Belle, and she rose from her knees by his side, and took a down cushion from one of the couches and placed it under his head. "Now you must rest and keep quite still," she added.

He did as she told him; in fact he was so weak to do anything else. He closed his eyes again, and Belle stood watching him,

trembling with agitation and fear. She had never believed him to be so ill; they had deceived her, she was thinking; and other thoughts, too, came surging through her brain. Could she let him go back alone to India to die? She had never before realised the great love that was in her heart towards him never at least since they had met again. Now, with her eyes fixed on his pale wasted face, she knew that her life was bound up in his; that if he died she would not care to live.

Presently he again opened his eyes, and met Belle's frightened anxious gaze.

"I am better now," he said still speaking in a very faint low voice.

Belle made no answer; she went a step nearer to him, her eyes still fixed on his face. "It is in my heart to say 'Get better for my sake; live for my sake,' but a feeling of womanliness stayed the words on her lips. But Gilbert seemed to understand the unspoken thought.

"Yes, I will try to get better," he said, and he held out his right hand which Belle clasped in her cold trembling one.

The nurse had gone out of the room to get something she wanted, but neither Belle nor Gilbert spoke again until her return. She stood near him holding his hand, and Gilbert could almost hear her heart throbs. Then, presently, the nurse came back carrying some strong beef essence, and Belle turned away. But those few moments of silence could never be forgotten.

When the Scotch doctor once more appeared to look after his patient he found him considerably improved.

"Eh, mon, ye look a' the better for the change," he said, regarding Gilbert with his shrewd professional eyes.

"But he fainted, doctor, as I said he would," instantly remarked the nurse.

"He's not fainting now, anyhow," answered the doctor. "But ye mustn't sit up too long, Capt in Gilbert, and ye'll be down all the sooner."

Gilbert took this sensible advice, and was assisted by the doctor and nurse upstairs. But before he parted with Belle he had a few words to say which were sweet to the listener's ears.

"I will see you again to-morrow," he said; and Belle knew that he would keep his word.

She went out after he left her, and wandered alone on the hill-side. New thoughts had come into her heart; new hopes. Those moments of inexpressible pain when she had feared that Gilbert's life was ebbing away had revealed to herself feelings that now she knew she had no power to resist.

It was late when Stanmore and his guest Sir John Lee returned, and Belle saw nothing of them till the next morning. They apparently had had a lively dinner party the night before, and Sir John Lee expressed great admiration for Mrs. Seymour at breakfast.

"She is really a splendid woman," he remarked; but Stanmore scarcely spoke on the subject.

"They want us to dine there, Belle to-morrow evening," he said. "Will you go?"

But Belle shook her head.

"I should rather not," she answered; "these long night drives tire me too much."

"They are talking of getting up picnics, and all sorts of things," continued Stanmore, who did not urge Belle to dine at Glenwrath. "They are really quite lively neighbours."

"They have so many young people," said Belle, smiling.

"You talk as if you were a grave, elderly matron, Lady Stanmore," answered Sir John Lee, smiling also, "instead of what shall I say, lest I make Stanmore here jealous?"

"I am not at all jealous," said Stanmore, rather grimly.

"Instead of a beautiful, charming young woman then," continued Sir John, still smiling.

Belle made him a pretty bow.

"That is a very neatly turned speech, Sir John," she said. "Every woman likes to be told she is charming, whether she believes or not."

"By-the-bye, how is Gilbert?" interrupted Stanmore.

"He was downstairs yesterday for a very short time," answered Belle. "But he seemed very weak."

"You saw him then?" asked Stanmore.

"Yes, for a few minutes in the drawing-room, and I am sorry to say he fainted."

"It was too soon for him to be downstairs."

"The doctor gave him leave, and the nurse was with him," said Belle. "The doctor thought that the change had done him good."

"He'll have to be very careful."

"After this there was nothing more said about Gilbert, and as usual Stanmore and Sir John Lee soon started for the moors. During the morning, however, the Misses Marchmont drove over to see Belle, and to entreat her to join in a picnic they were talking of getting up.

"They say the scenery is so lovely about here, Lady Stanmore," said Helen Marchmont, the eldest girl, decidedly suggestively.

"Yes, it really is," answered Belle; but somehow she did not feel in the mood to go picnicking among the hills.

She was glad, indeed, when the Marchmonts left. Their lively talk jarred a little on her ears, and her own thoughts pleased her better. She was glad, however, to see the Scotch doctor when he arrived early in the afternoon, and yet more glad to hear the good account he had to give of his patient.

"The lad's really a bit better, my leddy," he told her after his visit upstairs; "and he bade me tell ye he was like to ha' a cup of tea wi' ye about four, if ye ha' no other engagements."

"I have none," answered Belle; "I shall be very pleased to give him some tea."

"But he must be kept verra quiet, ye know," continued the doctor; "the least excitement would hurt him; but I'm sure I can trust him safely in yer hands."

"I shall be very quiet," said Belle gently, and a soft colour stole to her face.

It seemed to her, after this, as if four o'clock would never come. But the unsteady hand of time goes on—winging or weighted according to our moods—and as the hour struck Gilbert, with his doctor and nurse in attendance, appeared. He walked more strongly than he had done the day before, and when Belle rose to receive him, he smiled at his hand to her.

"He looks a vast better, doesn't he?" said the doctor, with some pride in his tone, looking at his patient's face.

"If he only doesn't over-do it, as he did yesterday," remarked the nurse coolly.

"Tut! woman, dinna be always fashin'," replied the doctor. "The best side is the one to look on."

The nurse shook her head. She was a perfectly healthy-looking young woman this, nay, sturdy-looking; yet she took gloomy views of everything in life, and sighed when a smile would have been much more cheering.

"She's been crossed in love, I opine," the doctor once told Gilbert, with a twinkle of his grey eyes; and perhaps this idea was a right one, and some man may have wisely seen that his future would not be a bright one were he to keep his vows to Janet Mackay.

Be this as it may, she was a worthy creature, and knew her business thoroughly, though, we may say, sadly. But had she not lived in the shadow and of the world all her life, with sickness and death daily near her? And some of the gloom of her surroundings seemingly ever rested on her heart.

Now, after she had comfortably settled her patient, she looked at Belle, who was standing near by, and sighed again. Perhaps she had heard in the household that the marriage of my lord and lady was not considered a particularly happy or suitable one; perhaps some memory of her own lost romance was passing through her mind, as she scanned Belle's fair face, and then glanced at the handsome, though wasted one, of the young soldier near her.

She quickly let her sentiment for reality.

"Now you must take some beef essence," she said to her patient.

"I thought I was promised some tea?" answered Gilbert, smiling and looking at Belle.

"The essence is much better for you," insisted Janet Mackay, and Gilbert was forced meekly to obey her.

But she did not stay with them long. After once more impressing upon Gilbert to be very quiet, she left them—the doctor having already done so—and then Belle began telling Gilbert of the Misses Marchmont's visit, and the proposal to join them in a picnic.

In fact she avoided all exciting subjects, and the afternoon passed away without one allusion to the past. All the same, its memory gave the commonplace words they spoke a subtle sweetness and filled their hearts with a strange joy. They were near each other, they were alone; and this to them was more than words can tell.

CHAPTER XXV.—A SPRAY OF HEATHER.

A few more quiet days passed, and Gilbert began to gain strength rapidly. He saw Belle each day, but not a word passed between them that the whole household might not have listened to. By a tact, but mutual consent, they spoke not of the past nor future. What that future had in store for them they could not tell; they allowed the present to suffice.

He came downstairs each afternoon, but after three or four more days he made his appearance one morning. Belle, as usual, was alone; Stanmore and Sir John Lee had gone to shoot on the moors at Glenwrath, but were to return at dinner time, and young Marchmont was to accompany them back. Belle was sitting in the breakfast-room shortly after they had started when the door opened, and to her surprise Gilbert entered.

"You!" she said, starting to her feet, and holding out her hand.

"Yes," answered Gilbert, "the morning is so fine that I defied the nurse and all her predictions of evil, and insisted on getting up, and I think if you will, I might venture out of doors for a few minutes."

But before Belle could reply, a portentous knock was heard outside, and a moment later the nurse walked in with wrath on her brow.

"I cannot be answerable for this, I Captain Gilbert," she began.

"Of course you are not answerable," said Gilbert, smiling, "since I came down against your positive command."

"But what will be the consequences?" continued Janet Mackay; "you will be thrown back; you will probably faint, and the doctors will blame me, and say I am incompetent."

"I promise you that the doctor shall not blame you," answered Gilbert, still smiling. "I will tell them that you had a wifin man for a patient, who would not do what you told him."

"Then you never will get better," said Janet, holding up her hands.

"I mean to try, nevertheless," retorted Gilbert, good naturedly; and without another word the nurse disappeared, and Gilbert and Belle looked at each other and laughed.

"What a funny woman she is," said Belle.

"But really a good creature; only she takes a dismal view of everything. However, I mean to have my own way, and if you will go with me I should like to walk up and down the terrace for a few minutes."

"Of course I will go with you, if you are sure it will do you no harm."

"I am quite sure; I feel a sort of new life in me today, and the air will do me good."

A few minutes later they were on the terrace outside. In the air was all the freshness of the morning; the freshness of the hills. It brought a faint tinge of color to Gilbert's pale, dark face, and gave vigor to his frame. He looked at Belle, and a wave of deep tenderness swept over his heart.

"Belle—" he said, almost tremulously.

"Yes," she answered, looking up with her bright hazel eyes in his face.

"When I am gone—"

"Oh! do not speak of it!" interrupted Belle, excitedly. "I cannot bear to think of it; I will not!"

Hugh Gilbert made no answer. He, too, could not bear to think of it—this parting which seemed like the end of life to both. They were silent for the next few minutes, but the deepest and strongest emotions were surging in their hearts.

"It seems like fate," at length said Gilbert.

"Let us leave it to fate then," answered Belle, in a low concentrated voice.

"But for your sake—" continued Gilbert.

But here he paused, for as some momentous words were about to pass his lips the pony carriage from Glenwrath was seen by both approaching the house, and Gilbert did not speak what he meant to say.

"Here are the Marchmonts," said Belle, quickly.

"So I see," answered Gilbert, and they turned and walked along the terrace to meet their visitors.

The two lively girls jumped lightly out of their pretty pony chaise before they reached them, and advanced with outstretched hands.

"You out! Well, this is delightful," exclaimed Helen Marchmont, addressing Gilbert with genuine pleasure in her voice and manner.

"My first outing," he replied, smilingly.

"I am so pleased," she answered. "And dearest Lady Stanmore, do you know what we have come for?" she added now, looking at Belle.

"Well, what have you come for?" asked Belle.

"To run away with you. We will take no excuses. We promised Jim that we should take you back with us, as we are going to have lunch out on the moors with the men. Now you must not say no."

"I am afraid—" began Belle, but Miss Marchmont interrupted her.

"No, you must not be afraid you cannot go," she said. "Captain Gilbert, you make her go."

"You had better go, I think," said Hugh Gilbert, looking at Belle.

Belle hesitated; she did not wish to go; she did not wish to leave Gilbert, but she was half-afraid to refuse.

"It will be such fun," continued Miss Marchmont. "Jim has got another Cambridge friend staying with us; so we have five men, and with Lord Stanmore and Sir John Lee, we will have seven. Mother and Mrs. Seymour will join us too; so it will be quite a picnic. I only wish you could go also, Captain Gilbert."

"I fear that would be impossible," said Gilbert; "in fact I know my nurse would look me up if I attempted. I have had a row with her already this morning."

"Is she so dreadful? How horrible to have a nurse."

"Sometimes very necessary, though. But I must not grumble; I am getting well fast now."

"And then you have to come to us," continued Miss Marchmont. "And when you come we shall have our real picnic, and Lady Stanmore will come too."

"Yes," answered Gilbert, and again he looked at Belle.

"But we cannot let you escape to-day; we really cannot," went on Miss Marchmont, again addressing Belle. "They will all be so disappointed if you do not come. Our new man has heard the others raving about you, to be absolutely dying to see you."

It ended in Belle being over-persuaded against her will to accompany the Misses Marchmont to the moors. And something in Gilbert's manner, in his looks, made her think that he wished her to go.

"Very well, I will," she said at length, "but we had better see you safely indoors first," she added glancing at Gilbert.

"Miss Janet Mackay will see after me," he answered, smiling. "I am momentarily expecting her."

The girls laughed and finally carried off Belle in triumph. But she looked back twice to the terrace where Gilbert was still leaning as they drove away.

"Certainly Gilbert is very good-looking," said Helen Marchmont. "He has such well-cut features, he can stand illness or anything else."

"Oh, he'll soon pick up; I wish he could have come to-day. He's the best-looking man, after all, that we have got."

In this lively style of conversation Miss Marchmont talked the whole day to the Glenwrath Moors. Their wild beauty possessed no attractions to her, but the brown-coated stalwart young sportsmen there did. They had already commenced lunch when the party from Strath-haven appeared. All the young men sprang to their feet as Belle and the two girls drew near the spot where lunch was going on. But Stanmore did not move. He was half-lying at Mrs. Seymour's feet, Belle noticed, who was seated on a grey granite jutting boulder, with a plaid over it. But Belle actually joined the party he too rose, and made a step forward to meet her.

"So the young ladies have persuaded you to come?" he said. "You remember Mrs. Seymour?" he added.

"Oh! yes," answered Belle, and she held out her hand to Mrs. Seymour, who now also rose.

She made some remark about the beauty of the scenery and the day with her great eyes fixed the while on Belle's face, as though to read her very soul. Belle replied courteously and quietly, and was turning away when Helen Marchmont hurried up.

"You see we've brought her, Lord Stanmore," she said. "And who do you think we nearly brought too!—Captain Gilbert."

Gilbert? answered Stanmore, in a surprised tone. "Did you see him?"

"Oh, yes; he was out walking on the terrace with Lady Stanmore when he arrived at Strath-haven."

"Ah," said Stanmore, and for a moment he glanced at Belle's face, who was conscious that a flush rose to her very brow. But he made no further remark on the subject.

He resumed his seat on the leather at Mrs. Seymour's feet and went on with his luncheon while Jim Marchmont procured a plaid for Belle to sit on, and attended on her during the rest of the meal.

"I am so glad dear old Gilbert feels well enough to be out," he said. "He promised to come to us, you know, as soon as he could."

"This is the first day he has been out," answered Belle, and it was against his nurse's orders.

"Oh, but if he's able to get into the air he will soon be all right. He's pulled himself together wonderfully well considering, don't you think so?"

"I hope so," said Belle, but her tone was not very bright.

At this moment, however, Helen Marchmont brought up their "new young man," as she called him, to be presented to Belle, and the conversation about Gilbert naturally ceased. Mr. Benson was a young Cambridge man, lively and agreeable, and a friend of Jim Marchmont's, and he did his best to please the pretty Lady Stanmore, of whom he had heard so much, and whose acquaintance he was very proud to make.

But though Belle chatted to him and smiled, she was not thinking of his pleasant words. Her mind was at Strath-haven, and she still seemed to see before her the pale dark face whose features she knew so well. But Mr. Benson did not know this, and he flattered himself during the afternoon that he was making a very agreeable impression on Lady Stanmore. The sportsmen, indeed, gave up the guns for the rest of the day, and everyone declared they enjoyed themselves. Only Belle felt weary, and was glad when the time came for the party to separate.

But Stanmore had a word to say to her in private, as they were returning to the Lodge.

"So," he said. "Captain Gilbert was out today, Belle, was he?"

"Yes, for a few minutes only," answered Belle.

"In that case he had better be thinking of paying his visit to Glenwrath presently," continued Stanmore. "It isn't exactly the thing, you know, Belle, for you to be wandering about alone with him."

He said nothing more, and Belle made no reply, but during the evening he suggested something of the same kind to Jim Marchmont, which that quick-witted young man instantly understood, and acted on.

"Do you know, my dear fellow," he said to Gilbert, before he retired for the night "I think you are well enough to come to us now?"

I am not up to much yet," answered Gilbert. "Not, I am afraid, to mix with all your lively party."

"Oh, you can just be as quiet as you like at Glenwrath," continued Marchmont; "and mother, you know, is there to look after you, and you can, of course, bring your gun, and all that sort of thing. And to tell you the truth, Gilbert," added Marchmont, half in jest, half in earnest, "I believe my lord here is getting a bit jealous of you and his pretty wife."

A sudden flash of Gilbert's pale face scarlet, as he listened to these words.