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# Her Promise True.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I, II, III.—Hugh Gilbert and Belle Wayland are bidding each other good-bye at Bright ton as he is about to sail for India. Belle promises to be true and to wait for him. On her return to the hotel, where she and her mother are stopping, she finds that Lord Stanmore, whose brother was the husband of Mrs. Wayland's sister, has arrived and has invited her mother and her to dine with him that evening. Mrs. Wayland goes, but Belle feigns 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 an account of the affair to her sister, Lady Stanmore, and the latter comes immediately to Brighton.

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

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

CHAPTER VI.—Lady Stanmore thinks over the situation. She takes a cold and is unable to go. Jack, Lord Richard Froby calls upon the party, and invites them to visit him at Hurst Hall. He is greatly smitten with Belle and writes her a letter from Hugh Gilbert to Belle and burns it.

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

CHAPTER VIII.—Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That lady decides to write Mrs. Wayland.

CHAPTER IX.—Lord Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. She falls in love with Sir Dick. Her court is prolonged. Sir Dick Froby proposes to Belle and is refused. Lady Stanmore gets a letter from Mrs. Balfour.

CHAPTER X.—The same ship with Hugh Gilbert. It contains the starting news of Hugh Gilbert's marriage to Miss Vane. Belle is told the news and is greatly shocked. She takes a morning walk and breaks through the ice.

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

CHAPTER XIII.—Belle is convalescing. Stanmore proposes to her and in her anxiety to show Hugh Gilbert that she too has forgotten she accepts the offer. Stanmore and his sister-in-law arrange matters and settle 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 she should write to Belle. She tells her of the news she has told Hugh Gilbert whom she represents as a friend only of Belle's.

CHAPTER XV.—The Ice Woman. Lord and Lady Stanmore return to Redvers Court. Belle is not happy and Stanmore sees that she has not learned to love him. Sir Dick and Lady Probyn call upon them and tell her of their plans.

CHAPTER XVI.—PLAYING WITH FIRE. Sir Dick grows more in love with Lord Stanmore's wife which causes his 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. Trewayne the vicar and Sir Dick's old tutor, and his daughter Amy who has known and loved Sir Dick Froby from his boyhood as they have grown up together but who only regards Amy with a sister's affection.

CHAPTER XVII.—Sir Dick offers a diamond pendant to Belle but it is refused; she tells him that his confession of love and a pleasant friendship and he goes home in despair. He decides that life is not worth living and attempts to shoot himself but his mother who had feared something and had followed him screaming when she sees what he is about to do and the bullet goes through his cheek. Lord Stanmore believes Belle is to blame for encouraging Sir Dick and reads her a lecture which she resents.

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

CHAPTER XIX.—The lost letters. Belle and Captain Balfour have mutual explanations in which Lady Stanmore's treachery is revealed. Belle is introduced to Gilbert and asks him to dine with them the following day. He agrees to do so and she writes him a letter and the latter acknowledges her guilt but nothing of the situation is told to Stanmore who receives Captain Balfour's kind and invites him to Scotland for the shooting season and at Belle's request the latter consents to go.

CHAPTER XX.—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 XXI.—The whole party go to Strathearn and are caught in its beauty. A row on the lake and its result. The Stanmores furnish their own shooting box and invite Gilbert to join them. He is inclined to do so as he does not wish to ease at Strathearn, but he and Belle discuss the matter and she requests him to stay for a few days more.

CHAPTER XXII.—A stray shot. Gilbert is wounded by a shot from Mr. Marchmont's 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 XXIII.—An old friend. Belle makes many anxious enquiries about Gilbert and sends him a note by Jim Marchmont. Lord Stanmore receives a letter from M. de Marchmont who is expected in a day or two to stay at their shooting box, in which she tells her that Mrs. Seymour is coming to stay with them at Glenworth. She tells Belle and wishes her to go away with her during Mrs. Seymour's stay but Belle declines.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Mrs. Seymour. Lady Stanmore leaves Strathearn after first telling Lord Stanmore that 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 XXV.—A new fear. Stanmore and Sir John Lee discuss the Marchmonts who have called and persuaded Belle to accompany them to a picnic. Gilbert continues to improve and goes daily to Belle's boudoir for a cup of tea.

CHAPTER XXVI.—A spray of heather. Gilbert is able to be out again and he and Belle have a walk on the terrace. They are joined by the Marchmont girls who have come to carry Belle off to a picnic. Lord Stanmore suggests to Jim Marchmont that it is time for Gilbert to leave Strathearn and be accordingly makes preparations to go to Glenworth for a time. "That spray of heather shall lie on my breast after I am dead."

CHAPTER XXVII.—A picnic. Belle overhears a conversation between Mrs. Seymour and Lord Stanmore in which the latter says he regrets the mistake he made in marrying Belle. A storm comes up during the picnic party, and Belle and Gilbert take shelter in a cave.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—More than a life. Belle and Gilbert have an interview, in which their flight is planned. Stanmore discovers that Belle has left him and goes with Hugh Gilbert.

CHAPTER XXIX.—Belle's letter is received by Stanmore; she tells him now that she married him through pique and relates the deceit practiced by her aunt and its awful consequences. Stanmore tells Mrs. Seymour the news. Jim Marchmont defends Gilbert. Lady Stanmore receives a call from her brother-in-law in which she accuses her of her deception and they become enemies.

CHAPTER XXX.—A new light. The news of Belle's flight is heard at Hurst and Lady Probyn breaks the news to Sir Dick and also tells him of Amy Trewayne's love. Sir Dick proposes to Amy and is accepted.

CHAPTER XXXI.—Her answer. At the Bungalow, Hugh and Belle discuss the past and future and Belle tells him she does not regret the step she has taken in leaving her home for him. Hugh goes out for the afternoon and returns ill with an attack of fever. Belle watches beside him and prays that either he may be spared or that she be taken also.

CHAPTER XXXII.—His great desire. Hugh recovers consciousness and tells Belle that he has arranged with the English clergyman to perform the marriage ceremony as soon as the law permits, which will be in two days. The day after the marriage, all preparations are made; the clergyman and witnesses are on hand, but Hugh dies before he can make her his wife.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.—DARKNESS.

In a darkened silent chamber of the bungalow Belle sat alone. Her eyes were tearless, her heart was frozen, her mind numb. Nothing in the world concerned her now; it had become for her a dreary waste, a hateful place where she must remain whilst all that made life worth living was gone.

She was vaguely aware that food was placed beside her by her faithful servant—food which she could not eat—that men came and went, that the doctor and several officers had spoken to her pityingly, and had looked at her with grave eyes.

She hated the glare of the sun that made all things abroad seem bright and joyous, falling on the masses of soft yellow flowers in the compound, on the plants trailing luxuriantly from the walls, on the dusty white road, up and down which bullock carts slowly passed laden with luscious fruits, with provisions, with water casks—the road which in the afternoon became noisy with the roll of smart carriages, in which were seated fashionably dressed English women on their way to visit friends, without care, without a sorrow, wholly indifferent to the fact that within one of the bungalows they passed, a stricken woman sat with her head.

Towards the close of the day, whose horror would remain with her so long as life lasted, the doctor who had been absent a short time entered the room, and going up to Belle took her hand. His good-natured face bore traces of grief, his voice was full of sympathy.

"My poor child," he said, soothingly, "you cannot go on like this. You have eaten nothing all day; you will make yourself seriously ill."

"What does it matter?" she asked in a dull weary voice that expressed more pain than a cry.

"I have no wish to survive him. I have no wish to live."

"But your life is valuable to others, to your friends," the doctor persisted.

"I have no friends," she replied, mournfully, "now that the truest and dearest friend woman ever had has been taken from me," and she shuddered as she spoke.

"I know what your grief must be, my poor child," remarked the doctor, his voice a trifle husky because of its struggle with honest many tears, "and I would be the last in the world to intrude on or to chide it, but you must take heart, and you must not say or think you are alone in the world for I am anxious to be your staunch friend and there is someone in the next room, one of the kindest women that ever lived, who is waiting to take you to her heart."

"A woman?" Belle said, incredulously, for she knew that the woman of the English colony—with many of whose names scandal had been busy—despised her as a person it was impossible for them to visit or to meet, for she had openly defied the laws, which they had only broken in secret.

"Yes," replied Doctor Malone, "a woman who wants to be your friend."

"What is her name?" Belle asked wearily.

"Mrs. Balfour. I believe she knows your relatives. She has the sweetest nature in the world, and no sooner did she hear of your loss than she begged I would take her to you. May I bring her in?"

Without waiting for an answer, which he feared might not be favorable, Doctor Malone hurried out of the room. For some seconds the stricken woman could not recall the circumstances connected with this name, but when she did their memory came to her with bitter pain.

Mrs. Balfour was the woman whose name had been used by Lady Stanmore as an authority for news which the former had never written; and though it was through no fault of her own, yet her name was connected with the vile plot that had ruined two lives. It was too late now, or Belle would have declined to see the visitor who, a moment later, entered with the doctor.

The instant she saw this tall, aristocratic looking woman, with gentle dark eyes, a grave, calm expression in her delicately cut features, her hair snow white, Belle realized that she had found a friend. Dressed in black, Mrs. Balfour advanced with almost a timid air, and without waiting for a conventional introduction, placed one arm around Belle's neck and kissed her forehead.

"My poor, stricken child," she said, in a low, sweet voice. "I knew and liked the man you loved; I was his friend; won't you let me be yours?"

The voice, the manner and the words of the visitor touched some secret spring in the forlorn mourner's heart, and before she could find words to reply tears rushed into her eyes, and she was sobbing pitifully upon Mrs. Balfour's breast.

The little doctor stole quietly from the room and left them together.

This was the first time Belle had cried since the great blow had fallen and stunned her; and now it seemed as if the ice of her grief being broken, the tears pent up in her bursting heart found vent and gave her relief. Mrs. Balfour was too wise a woman to strive to check this storm of sorrow, or to offer consolation where none could yet be felt; so she merely held the girl to her breast, letting her feel that there was her harbour, her protection in this dark hour of her loneliness and grief.

"He was so noble—he was so faithful, and so true," Belle sobbed out presently, "and I at one time believed him false. Oh! it was cruel! I was not worthy of him."

"But you proved to him that you loved him."

"Yes. I would have proved it with my life if necessary. But you do not know how he suffered, how I suffered because of the wicked lies of a worldly woman."

"Who was that?" Mrs. Balfour asked.

"My aunt, Lady Stanmore."

"I knew her when we were girls at school. But tell me," said Mrs. Balfour, thinking it would relieve Belle to narrate her story, "tell me how she behaved to you."

Between bitter sobs the stricken woman dwelt on the tragic chapter of her life, condemning herself for her credulity, and up-

raising herself for ever having doubted the man now lost to her. "And now," she concluded, "my sole desire is to join him soon. I know that he will wait for me; I am sure we shall not be parted for long."

The grave, sweet-faced, gentlewoman who heard her, looked with dim eyes at this poor child who had been deeply smitten against, and whose sorrow seemed greater than she could bear.

"My dear child," Mrs. Balfour said, in her low, sympathetic voice, "in this world few of us are allowed to be perfectly happy, even for a brief time. I have lived a great many years, and seen much of life. I have witnessed great griefs, and heart tragedies, and bitter wrongs, that had to be borne patiently, and lived down, and sometimes hidden from prying eyes. Your sorrow is dark, my child, your loss is overwhelming, but other women, weak and helpless as you, have known grief as terrible, and you will not be less brave than they."

"What sorrow could be greater, what loss more irreparable than mine?" Belle sobbed out, in the anguish of her intolerable pain.

"I know your heart is bruised, and I pity you from my soul; but remember, my child, there is no wound so deep that He cannot heal; there are no tears so bitter that He cannot dry." Mrs. Balfour answered in her sweet, low voice.

"No, no. There is no comfort for me; there is no hope, only want to die," she answered, rebellious in her anguish.

"May not your child, your little one, bring comfort to its mother's heart—bring some recompense for your grief?"

Belle raised her tear-streaming eyes to the face of her comforter and shyly kissed her. "Ah! if I had had a mother, even a friend, like you, how different might have been my life," she said sadly.

"All my children died in infancy," replied Mrs. Balfour, in a hushed voice. "I am a lonely woman," and she kissed Belle's forehead with the tenderness of a mother.

Then came a request on the part of the visitor which she knew there would be some difficulty in getting Belle to accede to.

"I am here, my dear, with the intention of taking you away; your presence here can do no good now, come and make your home with me for as long as you like."

"I cannot leave him until the last," she said, her heart beginning to heave anew with sorrow at thought of the final parting.

"But it will only distress and weaken you to remain," Mrs. Balfour persisted.

"What does that matter? I have but a few hours more with him; I cannot, I will not leave him until all is over," she answered, through her tears.

"Now shall I ask you; but if you like I will stay here, or in one of the adjoining rooms, that you may know you are not quite alone."

"Thank you, my dear kind friend. May I call you friend?" she asked timidly, remembering how she had been shunned by her sex since her arrival in India, twelve months ago.

"Call me mother," Mrs. Balfour replied. A little later and all was over.

Passively as a child, Belle allowed herself to be led to the carriage that waited outside the compound wall, and driven from the home where she had known perfect happiness and desolating grief; the home that was haunted by a thousand memories of joyous trifles.

Mrs. Balfour spoke no word, for words she knew would now be powerless to penetrate the darkness of this wretched woman's soul; she only held the sufferer's hands in her own believing that her touch would convey a sympathy that would surely be understood.

That night Belle lay with dry and sleepless eyes, staring into the darkness as if in search of some familiar sight she longed to see. Her head ached, but pain was scarce felt because of the agony that tortured her heart, and her hands burned as she stretched them out to vacancy.

She was dimly conscious that when Mrs. Balfour entered the room next morning she was accompanied by Doctor Malone, who gave her a draught which she swallowed with the docility of a child. Then came a period of oblivion; long hours of sleep rested her body and calmed her mind; but her first lucid thought was that she had to face her fate, to endure her loneliness, to mourn her loss. If only she could escape from a life whose burden was too heavy for her to bear.

In the weeks that passed, Colonel and Mrs. Balfour behaved with a kindness and consideration, with a sympathy and attention, that were calculated to soothe the afflicted woman and distract her mind from her grief. The rooms that she occupied opened on a verandah, that led to the gardens of the compound, with their trees, their mango, and tamarind and palm trees, and their mass of luxuriant flowers, yellow, crimson, and white, their shrubs of emerald green, of purple black, and dead gold. She saw no visitors save Doctor Malone, who was constant in his attentions, and her hostess took care that she was not intruded on or disturbed by the men and women who throughout the day flocked to the Colonel's hospitable bungalow.

Doctor Malone good-naturedly volunteered to save Belle all trouble regarding business matters; and assisted by Colonel Balfour and Captain Richards, he had arranged for the sale of her furniture and the letting of her bungalow. And these men, knowing that she was almost penniless induced their friends to attend the auction of her household goods and give extravagant prices for articles and ornaments, of which their wives assured them they had no need and had better have left untouched.

The contents of the bungalow were anything but costly, and even the sum they brought from generous purchasers seemed small indeed as a capital on which to depend; learning which Hugh Gilbert's friends, who had one and all been brother officers, who had one and all heartily liked him, subscribed a sum that was added to the proceeds of the sale, and which Belle was led to believe resulted solely from the auction.

No sooner did she recover from the prostration caused by her shock, than she prepared to leave India and return home. When Mrs. Balfour learned this, she said to her—

"You see, my dear, that I have no child of my own; that though I am always in the midst of company I am yet a lonely woman. I think I understand you, and I am sure I love you; stay with me, and be as a daughter to me."

Belle was overcome by gratitude, for she realized all that life would mean to her under the proposed circumstances. The peaceful home which she who was homeless would gain, the sympathy and affection



such as she had never received from her mother which this friend was ready to give her, the protection that she in her equivocal position would meet with, all came before her.

But her pride was unwilling to burden others not only with herself, but with the life about to be born.

"Oh! kindest, best, and most unselfish of friends," she said, her voice full of emotion, "don't think me ungrateful, don't think that I, a woman, whom all other women shrink from, don't value your offer; but I cannot, cannot accept it; I can only pray God to bless and reward you for your goodness to me."

"My dear child, I have thought well over my proposition, which also meets with my husband's consent, and again I say, stay with me as my daughter, remain here in the shelter and protection of my home," Mrs. Balfour said with deep tenderness in her voice.

"How can I refuse anything you ask? And yet I cannot stay. I shall go back to my mother; she is the one who must protect me. She and her sister married my life, they must help me to bear my burden," Belle answered.

And to this resolution she adhered. She saw that Mrs. Balfour in her generosity overlooked the slight and sneers, the prejudice and animosity to which she would be subjected by harbouring and adopting one who was a mother, though not a wife. Nor would Belle depend on those on whom she had no claim.

Mrs. Balfour was disappointed and grieved by this decision, to which however after repeated attempts to persuade Belle to alter her mind, she was obliged to submit. She did this the more readily as she saw that the climate of India was trying a constitution which had been weakened by nervous shock and subsequent prostration. There was nothing therefore to be done but to find some woman returning to England who would take charge of Belle.

To discover such a difficult task. Nearly every mail carried a dozen English women, taking home their children, accompanying their husbands, or returning in search of the health a tropical climate had ruined; but on the suggestion being made to them that they should chaperon a woman whom all of them had heard of, they had instantly declined, some of them with indignation, none of them without severity.

But at last a woman was found who consented to undertake the task. This was Mrs. Rebecca Smithers, the widow of a Methodist preacher, whose son by some strange freak of fate had become a subaltern, and who had been attended to India by his watchful surviving parent. This lady, who was frigid of manner and a practiser of all the virtues, had spent the greater part of her time in India in giving advice and distributing tracts, both of which were about the only things this rigid economist parted with easily.

Before entrusting Belle to her care, Mrs. Balfour extracted a promise from this lady who was solicitous for the salvation of others, that she should refrain from reminding Belle of the penalties that awaited her, and from exhorting her to follow the example of those whose strange histories were dramatically set forth in certain tracts. To this Mrs. Rebecca Smithers consented, for though her heart was set upon heavenly things she had an eye to her son's advancement, and was worldly enough to strive to curry favour with his Colonel's wife.

The day came when Belle was to sail for home and England; when she was to leave in a foreign land all that was mortal of her dear friend and true lover; when she was to begin the new life lying dark and uncertain before her.

On the evening of the previous day she had gone alone to the English Cemetery where numbers of men in the springtime of their lives lay sleeping for eternity. The spot which of all others on earth was most sacred to her was well known to her. She had spent hours there, communing, as she believed with one bound to her by the unbreakable ties of her intense love, and here she came to say farewell.

In the sacredness of that hour she emptied her heart to him of all its affection: she dedicated herself to him; she besought him to wait for her in the shadowy land he had reached, where she would join him so, to part from him never again.

Next day she stood upon the deck of a P. and O. steamer as it steamed out of Bombay Harbor, waving her handkerchief to her kind friends, Colonel and Mrs. Balfour, whom she saw through a mist of blind tears. And there she remained for hours in the midst of a noisy throng of homeward bound passengers, watching the land that had witnessed the brightest and darkest chapters of her life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—COMING HOME.

The homeward voyage tried Belle severely in many ways. The excitement of her departure, even the intensity of her grief, had prevented her from realizing her condition, which, however, was soon brought home to her. Weak in body and distressed in mind she lay in her cabin, not speaking for hours, not reading, weariness and dejection weighing her down.

As she drew nearer and nearer to England she felt more and more anxious as to how she would be received by her mother. Mrs. Wayland, who had always been absorbed in her own complaints, who was worldly, exacting and irritable, had never shown Belle much affection or kindness, and was hardly likely to do so now. Nor had she once written to her daughter since her elopement. Still Belle reflected that

she was her mother, and as such must give her the shelter and protection which she sorely needed now.

Mrs. Smithers busied herself in giving unsolicited counsel to her fellow passengers, generally selecting sinners of the opposite sex who were lonely bachelors or forlorn widowers as the special objects of her zeal. Her attitude towards Belle, whom she spoke of as 'that young woman' was one of frigid patronage. She kept her word to Mrs. Balfour and did not offer tracts to Belle, but she satisfied her conscience by leaving them under the invalid's pillow, dropping them into her workbasket, or placing them beside her chair.

At last the day came when Southampton was reached, and a few hours later Belle driving through the familiar London streets, towards her mother's home in South Kensington. As the four wheeled cab drew up to the door, she cast a look at the house, as if she would learn what she might expect. Not knowing whether her mother was yet living here, or if she were in town, Belle bade the driver wait, and not remove her luggage until she told him. Then she rapped timidly at the door.

It was opened by a servant whom she had not seen before, and on enquiring for Mrs. Wayland Belle was told she was at home. On the maid inquiring what name she should give, Belle got over the difficulty by answering—"Say her daughter wishes to see her."

The servant's countenance expressed surprise, but without making any remark she opened the door of a sitting room, and said—"Please walk this way, ma'am."

Belle entered the room which she knew so well, and sank down upon the chair nearest to her. She was weary from a long journey, her pulse was beating feverishly, and her lips were so dry she felt she could scarcely speak.

Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed, and no one came to her. Suspense became unbearable, and she was about to ring and ask the maid if she had given her message, when the door was flung open and Lady Stanmore entered, and quickly closed it behind her.

Belle rose, advanced a step, and then remained stationary. Something in her aunt's bearing chilled her to the bone. Lady Stanmore uttered no word, but with the air of a tragedy queen surveyed the shrinking, black-clad figure, the pale frightened face before her. Her own face, cold and hard, bore a spurious look of youth, because of the exceeding freshness of her complexion and the yellow glitter of her abundant false hair.

"Aunt Lucy," Belle called out, in a voice so weak that it sounded little more than a whisper.

"You have come back!" Lady Stanmore answered indignantly. "You have the impudence to come back to those whom you have disgraced."

"Spare me, oh spare me!" Belle implored, "for I have suffered much, and am weak!"

"I know all that has happened, and you deserve what you have got," Lady Stanmore said, vindictively.

"Cruel, cruel, cruel!" Belle cried out, in a breaking voice.

"You wretched little fool. I schemed and planned to save you from making an idiot of yourself by marrying a penniless nobody."

"Stop, I will not hear you speak slightly of the man I loved—whom still I love," Belle said, stoutly.

"I placed you in a position you would never have been able to gain by yourself, and what thanks have I received? You disgrace yourself by running away at the first opportunity with a man without wealth or position, leaving Stanmore free to marry the odious woman I detest."

Belle looked at the hard pitiless face before her, with its glittering eyes and cruel mouth, then bracing herself up for an effort, she said in a calm voice—

"You who have ruined my life are accountable for any wrong I have done. You stole my letters, you forged another's woman's name to the falsehood you wrote, you deceived me by your lies. You destroyed not my happiness alone, but that of the man I loved."

"How dare you speak to me like that?" cried out Lady Stanmore, bursting with rage. "You, who are neither a maid, wife, nor widow! How dare you speak to any respectable woman?"

"You are a wicked woman," answered Belle with spirit. "I would not do what you have done for all the world's wealth."

"You disgraceful person, I forbid you to speak to me," shouted Lady Stanmore, beside herself with rage.

"So long as I live I shall never speak to you again—never willingly so you again after this day. I will go to my mother," replied Belle, and she moved towards the door.

Before she reached it, however, Lady Stanmore stepped in front of her and laughed aloud in scornful triumph.

"Your mother!" she said. "Come, it's time this farce should end. God only knows who your mother is; my sister certainly is not your mother."

Belle clung to the back of the chair with both hands, and began to tremble violently, the pitiless face in front of her, with its pink cheeks and yellow hair, glaring at her with hatred and scorn and mockery in its every line.

"This is another of your falsehoods," Belle said.

"Insolent creature, how dare you!" "I don't believe you; as you have lied before for your own ends, you are ready to lie again for the same reason."

"You will soon know whether I speak the truth or not," Lady Stanmore said with a sneer. "When Wayland, who was notoriously a disreputable man, proposed to marry my sister, he told her she must adopt and bring up as her own a child of his whose mother must be nameless. At the time he was a wealthy man, and she consented. You have always been repugnant to her; but now you have disgraced yourself she has acted on my advice of repudiating you and of sending you about your business, as she ought to have done years ago."

The words fell as blows upon a heart already sorely bruised. A thousand things that rose in a minute to the surface of her memory, told Belle this statement was true. She recalled the threat Mrs. Wayland had made to inform Hugh Gilbert of a secret which she said would prevent him from marrying him; other hints of this mystery had been given in moments of irritation; and between Mrs. Wayland and Belle there had never been the affection and sympathy that should exist between mother and daughter.

She had thought herself miserable and lonely before, but she was now a thousand