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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 Brighton as he is about to sail for India with his regiment. Belle promises to be true and writes to meet him that evening for a final farewell. Upon 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 out Belle feels 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 they decide 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, to 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 decides that Belle is not in love with Jack. Lord Richard Probyn calls upon the party, and invites them to visit him at Hurst Hall, a great suit of Belle. Lady Stanmore opens 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 Lady ridicules the 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. Balfour.

CHAPTER IX.—Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Lady Stanmore confesses to Belle that she is her sister-in-law. Mrs. Wayland falls ill and the story at Redvers court is prolonged. Sir Dick Probyn proposes to Belle and is refused. Belle writes a letter to Hugh Gilbert from Mrs. Balfour who went to India on the 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. In taking a morning walk she has a seizure.

CHAPTER X. XI. 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 not forgotten him, she accepts the offer. Stanmore and his sister-in-law, strange 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 Hugh Gilbert whom she represents as a friend of Belle's.

CHAPTER XV.—The Ice Wagon. Lord and Lady Stanmore return to Redvers Court. Belle is not happy and Stanmore sees that she has not learned to love Sir Dick and Lady Probyn call upon them and invite them to dine at Hurst.

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. Trevelyan the vicar and Sir Dick's old tutor, and his daughter Amy who has known and loved Sir Dick Probyn from his boyhood as they have grown up together but who only regards Amy with a sisterly affection.

CHAPTER XVII.—Sir Dick offers a diamond pendant to Belle but she refuses; she tells him that his confession of love must end 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 screams 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 forgotten 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. After the shock has somewhat died away she enquires for his life and learns that he has never been married.

CHAPTER XIX.—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 told to Stanmore who receives Captain Gilbert very kindly and invites him to Scotland for the shooting season and at Belle's request the latter consents to go.

CHAPTER XX.—The whole party go to Strathmore and are charmed with its beauty. A row on the lake and its result. The Marchmonts furnish their own shooting boxes and invite Gilbert to join them. He is inclined to do so as he does not feel at ease at Strathmore, but he and Belle discuss 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. 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 XXII.—An old friend. Belle makes him at once by Jim Marchmont. Lady Stanmore receives a letter from M. S. Marchmont who is expected in a day or two to stay at their new shooting box, in which she tells her that Mr. 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 XXIII.—Mrs. Seymour. Lady Stanmore leaves Strathmore after 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. Stanmore and Sir John Lee discuss who the Marchmonts who have called. Gilbert continues to improve and goes daily to Belle's boudoir for a cup of tea. Belle is able to be out again and he and Belle have a walk on the terrace. They are joined by the Marchmonts who have come to stay at Belle's (to a picnic). Lord Stanmore suggests to Jim Marchmont that it is time for Gilbert to leave Strathmore and be accordingly makes preparations to go to Glenworth for a time. "That spray of heather that I saw on my breast after I am dead."

CHAPTER XXV.—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 upon during the picnic party, and Belle and Gilbert take shelter in a cave.

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

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

CHAPTER XXVIII.—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 Trevelyan's love. Sir Dick proposes to Amy and is accepted.

CHAPTER XXIX.—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 XXX.—His great desire. Hugh regains 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 for their marriage dawns, all preparations are made; the clergyman and witnesses are on hand, but Hugh dies before he can make her his wife.

"She will do whatever I ask her, and I promise you she will give you a home until you are ready to face the world again," Stanmore responded encouragingly.

"A home," repeated Belle, wistfully, for the sound of that word to one who was without shelter or protection came as a blessed relief to one so wretched as she was.

"Yes, she will give you what this woman here would have deprived you of," Stanmore said, looking towards his sister-in-law.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am," Belle said.

"It is I who am grateful that Fate sent me here in the nick of time to save you from the cruelty of one who should have been the first to protect you. But before we go I must say a few words to her."

Saying which he slowly advanced to where Lady Stanmore lay back in her chair, her head uplifted, her eyebrows raised, her whole manner assuming an air of indifference which she hoped would cover the uneasiness and dread she really felt.

Stanmore looked at her critically, but without any pity; the memory of her cruelty to her nephew for the disagreeable task before him.

"There is a very serious charge about to be brought against you," he began, speaking without passion, "and though I hoped I might never see or speak to you again, yet I came here to-day thinking it kinder you should hear of it from me in the first instance."

"A serious charge against me?" she said, but there was no surprise in her voice, only a lurking horror.

"Against you. A few weeks ago I sent some of the family jewels to be re-set in a way my future wife desired. No sooner had the jeweller begun his work than he found the original diamonds, had been taken out and replaced by paste."

Lady Stanmore's face had grown rigid, her eyes were full of terror, but her natural effrontery came to her aid. "Do you mean to insinuate that I have stolen the family diamonds?" she cried out with apparent indignation.

"Family diamonds to the amount of fifteen thousand pounds have certainly been abstracted from their settings and their place supplied by mock jewels," he answered.

"And do you dare to charge me with this fraud?" she asked hotly.

"That is the intention of my lawyer."

"This is monstrous, scandalous. Do you mean to say you will allow such a charge to be brought against me?" she exclaimed, the look of terror deepening in her face, "against me, your brother's widow?"

"I cannot help the unfortunate fact that you were my brother's wife," Stanmore replied coolly.

Overcoming her resentment at this reply she said, "But you surely do not believe that I am guilty?"

"I must confess," replied Stanmore, "I did not doubt that the woman who had forged a letter and burned others not addressed to herself, would be guilty of this fresh act of felony."

"And is it because of your hostile and prejudiced opinion that I am to be charged with robbery?" she asked, wrathfully.

"By no means. I concealed my opinion, and the matter was given into the hands of the detectives."

"The detectives?" she said, fear and indignation struggling for mastery in her voice.

"They are a body of men hated by those who have cause to dread them," Stanmore remarked dryly.

"I have no fear of them," she said angrily.

"So much the better for yourself. It may interest you, however, to hear they have been very industrious."

Lady Stanmore drew a quick breath, but refrained from asking further questions, though anxious to hear more.

"The jeweller with whom the family have dealt for years, and who reset some of the diamonds and polished up all of them at the time of my brother's marriage, is prepared to take his oath the diamonds were at that date genuine. At my brother's death they passed into the hands of the bankers, and were only brought out on my marriage. It would be absurd to think that Belle had the jewels taken out and their place supplied by paste."

"Oh, surely you don't believe I could do such a thing," Belle said, full of nervous dread.

"Not for a second," Stanmore answered reassuringly.

"Why is it absurd to think she took them out and sold them for the benefit of her lover?" Lady Stanmore asked.

"Well, if for no other reason," answered her brother-in-law, "because the detectives have found the man employed to take the diamonds from their settings and to dispose of them. He not only gives the date of the transaction, which was just two years before my brother's death, but he gives a close description of the person who brought the jewels to him, a description that answers to your appearance in a marvellous manner."

Lady Stanmore saw that her identity could and would be surely proved that there was no longer a chance of her denial being believed, and that her only hope lay in confessing the robbery and pleading for pardon.

Some years after her marriage she had plunged into a reckless extravagance with which her allowance had been unable to keep pace. When swamped by debt and threatened by her dressmaker, her milliner, her glove-maker, she had in an unfortunate moment sought relief from those pressing creditors by having some of the family diamonds taken from their settings and replaced by paste.

At the time she had fully intended to have had the jewels put back some day, but instead of that she had again yielded to temptation and repeated the act. That which at first seems a serious transaction loses something of its gravity every time it is repeated, and so it was with Lady Stanmore. Again and again, when pressed for payment of debt, she had resorted to this easy means of raising money, until at last she had defrauded her husband and his heirs to the amount of fifteen thousand pounds, a sum she then saw she could never replace.

Nor did this, after a while, trouble her much. The paste was excellent, the imitation so like the real that none but an expert could detect the difference and she trusted her acts might never be discovered in her lifetime. One of her reasons for wishing Stanmore to marry Belle was, be-



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cause she could readily persuade the latter not to have the jewels reset, when of course the chances of detection were considerably lessened.

But now her deliberate fraud would be brought to light. She was at the mercy of this man whom she had offended, insulted and who would doubtless be influenced by his future wife, whom Lady Stanmore had spoken evil of, and who heartily detested her. There was nothing before her save exposure and penal servitude, if her brother-in-law did not show her mercy.

In a few moments her attitude had completely changed. Instead of being proud and defiant, she became humble and subservient. A terrible fear seized possession of her; years of life in a prison cell was not to be contemplated without terror. She must plead for pardon whilst there was time.

"Stanmore," she said, in a harsh, dry voice, "I have been foolish. It was I who took the jewels, at times when I was hard pressed for money. I intended to retrench, to buy them back and replace them in their settings some day, but I was never able. Deal mercifully with me; we are old friends and I am your brother's widow."

"If it were possible for me to show you mercy, your cruel conduct to this unfortunate woman would have been enough to make me as hardened to you as you were to her," he answered.

"Forgive me," she said, "but I have done so much to me," pleaded Belle, who had listened with horror to what had passed between them. "Have pity on her."

"I was wrong to treat her as I did, but I will make amends," Lady Stanmore said, ready to do anything which might save her. "I am willing she should live here; no one shall ever know she was my sister's child; I shall be as kind to her as if she were my own; I will do all I can for her."

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"I forgave you long ago," he replied.

She sighed heavily, put one hand to her forehead, and with the other clutched a table near her to prevent herself from falling. They were both beside her in an instant.

"Poor child," said Stanmore, "the wonder is she didn't faint before, considering all she has gone through in this room. Are you better now, Belle?"

"I am weary, terribly weary," she muttered.

"Ring the bell, Stanmore. I will see that she is put to bed at once," said his sister-in-law.

"Very well. I will go now, but I will call to enquire after her to-morrow."

"And when you call," Lady Stanmore said humbly, "bring me some hope. I am a wretched woman; have pity on me."

CHAPTER XLII.—LAST SCENE OF ALL.

That night Belle was taken suddenly ill, when nurse and doctor were sent for in haste. To both it seemed as if her case was desperate, as if her last hour had come. In the faint grey of morning her child was born dead.

A long period of unconsciousness for the mother followed, when a faint flame of life just flickered in her body. There were times when the doctor thought her pulse had ceased to beat, when he listened anxiously for the throbbing of her heart. The morning light was shining full into the room when she opened her eyes, that shone with feverish brightness, and looked around her.

"My child," she said, in a low, tremulous voice. "Where is my child?"

"It is dead," the nurse answered.

Belle sighed and closed her eyes once more.

"Are you in pain, my dear?" the kindly woman asked.

"No, no, I am only weary," Belle murmured feebly.

There was a stir at the door, and Mrs. Wayland entered. Her rheumatism had prevented her from coming to see Belle before, and now having been obliged to mount a flight of stairs, she moaned over the result of her exertions.

"She is better, I hope," Mrs. Wayland said to the nurse.

"A little better, ma'am."

"Unlike me. She has youth, and it is not racked with pain. Her constitution was always excellent; whereas I have no appetite," Mrs. Wayland said, pitifully.

Attracted by the voice, Belle opened her eyes once more, and raised them to the woman she had believed to be her mother, whom she had not seen for many months, during which her life had been lifted from its placid course, electrified by love, and wrecked by loss.

"Ah, Belle, you are better I hear," remarked Mrs. Wayland. "I thought you would be; young people have so much in their favour; they have so much vitality."

If Belle understood her she made no reply. She was too tired and weary to speak, she only wanted rest and silence.

"I hear your child is dead," continued Mrs. Wayland, who had seated herself at some distance from the bed; "a mercy for which we cannot feel too grateful, under the circumstances."

The invalid stirred uneasily, and sighed profoundly.

"With such a relief to your mind you are sure to recover. You have youth on your side and an excellent constitution; not like me, who—"

"I think she had better not be disturbed," said the nurse.

"She is sleepy, perhaps; she was always a little stolid. Well, I will go; help me to rise. My knees, you see—"

"Please don't speak," said the nurse; "she must be kept quiet."

Mrs. Wayland regarded with surprise a person so singularly wanting in sympathy, and with all the haughtiness she could assume, left the room in silent indignation.

Later in the day Lord Stanmore called, and was met by his sister-in-law. His first inquiries were for Belle.

"She has been very ill; the doctor thought she could not live through the night. In the morning her child was born dead, and now she seems somewhat better," Lady Stanmore explained.

"Out of danger?" he asked.

"I think not. She is very weak."

"Poor child; hers was a wrecked life."

Lady Stanmore hung her head, for the words were an accusation against herself.

"Perhaps it would be the best and happiest thing that could befall her if she died," he remarked. "What is left for her in life? Poor Belle!"

"I did not know you were so fond of her."

"I did not know it myself until now. She was sweet and simple as a child, and through no fault of her own, her life was spoiled. How helpless we seem to guide and master our own fate?"

"Tell me—have you seen your lawyers? I haven't slept a wink last night thinking of what may be before me. I could never endure it, never. But you have some news for me; you bring me hope," Lady Stanmore said, anxiously watching his face.

"What mercy do you deserve? Think of that poor young creature whose life you have ruined."

"We cannot undo the past; I would if I could. Tell me, tell me—is there any hope for me?" she persisted.

"There may be some loophole of escape," Stanmore answered.

"What is it?" she asked, with breathless eagerness.

"I am not anxious that a scandal should be raised, neither are my lawyers, and they have made a suggestion."

"I will do anything, rather than—than—"

"Tango to go!," Stanmore said. "Well, their plan is this: That out of the fifteen hundred pounds a year you now enjoy as widow of the late Lord Stanmore, you make over to me and to my heirs, a thousand and a year for fifteen years, in case you live so long; but to provide against the contingency of your death, you must also insure your life and give me the policy, so that in case of your demise I may receive the sum necessary to cover the amount of your funds."

Lady Stanmore saw that her compliance with this suggestion would reduce her to a state that she described to herself as beggary. Fond of high living, extravagant in her toilettes, desiring to keep pace with wealthy friends, and to present a dashing appearance to the world, she was, notwithstanding her robbery of the family diamonds, deeply in debt. To give up a thousand a year, and out of the sum remaining to pay heavy interests on a life insurance, would leave her in a condition which she regarded as poverty.

She would have to fall out of the circle of her fashionable friends, to live plainly, to dress shabbily and rent small lodgings in an obscure street, where she would share the attendance of a stately maid with half-a-dozen other lodgers. The prospect seemed odious.

"On your complying with these conditions you will be spared the scandal of a trial and the sentence of condemnation as a felon," Stanmore said.

"These conditions are terribly hard; if I agree to them what is to become of me? My sister cannot help me; will you?" she said, her eyes appealing to him.

"I will never give you a penny," he replied, determinedly.

"You are terribly hard," she replied, in an injured tone.

"But not so hard as you would have been on others."

"Will you not forgive me and have pity on me?" she asked.

"I may as well tell you at once I haven't the slightest pity for you; and that if you don't agree to this suggestion of my solicitors I shall let the law take its course," Stanmore replied.

"I agree, I agree," she answered promptly. "There is nothing else left for me but to comply with your conditions, but I don't know what is to become of me."

She strove to stifle her hard voice that it might appeal to him, whilst her cold eyes looked into his beseechingly, but all in vain.

"A woman like you will always be well able to take care of herself," he replied, quite unmoved.

She turned quickly away that he might not see the anger that flamed in her face and bent her head that he might think his words had crushed her, and so relent. Indeed, she was striving to produce some tears, when both were startled by the loud ringing of a bell, and a instant later the sound of footsteps and heard hurrying through the hall and up the stairs.

"What can it be?" Stanmore asked, in a startled voice.

"I hardly know; perhaps it is Belle," she answered.

"Go and see," he said, interrupting her, and he flung open the door.

She hurried up the stairs, he following after a second's hesitation, and both overtaking the nurse, who being momentarily absent had been summoned by the servant she had left with the patient. The nurse hurried to the bed where Belle, with wide open eyes that were unconscious of her surroundings, was muttering some words in a low feeble voice; but they were not so low as to prevent them being heard by Stanmore, who remained in the lobby outside, hesitating as to whether he should enter, and seeing all through the open door.

"You went so sudden and so soon," she said, "but I knew you would wait for me. And now, my love, I am coming to you."

She smiled and strove to hold out the arms she was too weak to raise. The nurse sent in all haste for the doctor. Lady Stanmore sank into a chair waiting for what might happen, and forgetting for the moment her own misfortunes in the paths and tragedy of the scene before her.

"My love, my own, take me, take me," Belle said in a whisper, for I am tired."

She gasped for breath, the nurse raised her gently, wiping the damp from the forehead which was now white as marble and almost as cold.

"I never regretted it, never. How warm the day is. Oh, don't go, Hugh; I love you, I have always loved you; only they wrecked my life," she muttered.

Her breathing grew more difficult, and with an effort she moved her head, whilst her glassy eyes fixed themselves on vacancy, as if she saw some sight unseen by others.

"Wait, I will come with you, only wait for me—Hugh—Hugh—" she faltered, speaking with difficulty. A moment later she shuddered and heaved a deep sigh. Those who listened could no longer hear her breathe. The silence was interrupted by the hasty entrance of the doctor, who bent above her and took one of her white hands in his. A moment later, and he laid it back with gentle reverence.

"It is all over," he said, gravely.

"Poor child! poor unhappy child!" murmured Stanmore, the tears which rushed to his eyes blotting the scene from his sight.

[The End.]

Between Friends.