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HER PROMISE TRUE

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"A Man's Privilege," etc.

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CHAPTER I. — Hugh Gilbert and Belle Wayland are bidding each other good-bye at Brighton. Belle promises to run and 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, has arrived and has invited her mother and her to dine with him that evening. Mrs. Wayland goes but Belle fulgins against her mother 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 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 her plans accordingly. She decides to intercept the letter before it reaches the lovers. Lord Stanmore comes down to see the lovers. Lady Stanmore comes down to see the lovers. Lady Stanmore comes down to see the lovers.

CHAPTER III. — Belle begins a diary in order that she may send an account of each day to her absent lover. Lady Stanmore was as good as her word, or, rather, her telegram. She duly arrived at Brighton in time for afternoon tea, and she and Mrs. Wayland were speedily closeted together in her private room.

"Now tell me all about your pet grievances," said Lady Stanmore, leaning back in an easy chair before the fire, and holding out her snuff box to her. "Well, of course, just what I wrote about that absurd girl Belle," answered Mrs. Wayland.

"It's neither absurd nor unnatural to have a lover at her age," replied Lady Stanmore, coolly; "it's what was sure to happen. But you know in her case she can afford to indulge in no such folly, and I as good as told her so," said Mrs. Wayland sharply.

"Then it was extremely foolish of you to do so; that was not the way to proceed." And that was the way, then? asked Mrs. Wayland, spitefully, "as you think yourself so clever."

"I should simply have enlarged on the extreme discomforts of poverty—sympathetically of course—and then have tried the effect of another lover."

Lady Stanmore laughed as she said the last words, and showed her small white false teeth. She was a much better looking woman than Mrs. Wayland, whatever the other might think. She was some years younger, for one thing, and she had not Mrs. Wayland's dissatisfied expression. She also wore a wig, but it was quite undetectable, and one of her most intimate friends denied its existence.

"She has got another lover, then, I believe," said Mrs. Wayland, in reply to her sister's advice; "your brother-in-law Stanmore evidently admires her; I am certain of it."

"Jack!" exclaimed Mrs. Stanmore, incredulously. "Not he. He may admire her; no doubt he does, for she is a remarkably pretty girl, and Jack, as a rule, admires all pretty women. But he's not a marrying man."

"How do you know? Now, when he has come into the title, he is very likely to marry, I think."

"No, that woman Seymour has him too firmly in her leading strings."

"What! does that affair still go on then?" "Just the same, I believe; and of one thing you may be certain, if Mrs. Seymour affected to be devoted to Jack Dudley, she will be far more devoted to him now that he is Lord Stanmore; she is a horrid woman, I think."

"She is handsome," said Mrs. Wayland, in reply to her sister's advice. "Oh, yes; but she treats poor Fred Seymour as disgraceful. They say his father spoke to him about her."

"He's a kind of half-wit, isn't he?" "He has exactly the proper amount of wit to be the husband of such a woman as she is. I detect Mrs. Seymour."

"You are quite spiteful about her, Lucy," said Mrs. Wayland, with a disagreeable little laugh.

"Perhaps I am," replied Lady Stanmore, calmly. "Poor Stanmore is gone, but she actually tried to make love to him, as well as to Jack. And it is a remarkable feminine peculiarity that though one may not be in love a bit with one's husband, one can yet be jealous of him."

"That's true," answered Mrs. Wayland, grimly nodding her head.

"Quite true, and if I could do a bad turn to Mrs. Seymour ever now, I would gladly do it. She would be just mad if she thought Jack was thinking seriously of you, Belle; but I don't believe it."

"Wait till you see them together; he has eyes for no one else."

"Well, I shall see."

"Just at this moment Lady Stanmore's maid knocked at the door, and brought in a note."

"One of the waiters gave me this, my lady," she said; "it is from Lord Stanmore." Lady Stanmore gave an amused glance at her sister, as she opened the note.

"You need not wait; come when I ring," she said to the maid.

"A new brother's attention," she continued, smiling, as the maid disappeared; "it is from Jack to ask us to dine with him to-night. Perhaps you are right, and he really may admire Belle."

"I am sure he does, and you can aid it, Lucy, if you choose."

"I would do anything to spite the Seymour. But come, Linda, we have talked long enough, and I want to lie down for an hour before dining, as I looked tagged, and I hate to do that."

"A hint for me to go, I suppose?" "No, but plain speaking, which is best between near relations. I will send a message to Jack that we will dine with him as I suppose you have no idea of refusing?"

"No, certainly not; for the present good-bye then; I hope your nap will refresh you after your appearance."

Mrs. Wayland accordingly took her leave, and her sister reflected languidly as she went—

"How disagreeable Linda always is; I do not wonder that they say poor Wayland hated her."

Mrs. Wayland, on her part, was at the same moment thinking of her sister somewhat disparagingly.

"Lucy is certainly aged," was her mental comment; "and the airs and graces she gives herself—lying down, indeed, to freshen herself up! Well, she needs freshening."

But the rest that Lady Stanmore indulged in decidedly improved her appearance, and at dinner she looked extremely well. She always dressed with perfect taste, and she took care that everything she put on became her. Mrs. Wayland looked with envy at the moss-green velvet and costly lace her sister wore.

"She never grudges anything for herself," she thought, and this idea did not tend to make her more amiable. But she tried not to show her ill-temper, and as their host did his best to make himself agreeable, the dinner passed off very pleasantly. And Lady Stanmore noticed that her brother-in-law's eyes constantly rested on the charming face opposite to him.

"There is no doubt of her beauty," thought Lady Stanmore. "Well it would be very strange."

She was reflecting on what her sister had told her regarding Stanmore's supposed admiration for Belle, and thinking of some former passages in his life. She knew a great deal about Jack for he always remained Jack to her mind. Her own husband had frequently been called upon to assist his somewhat—in those days—graceless younger brother.

"But he is greatly improved," cogitated Lady Stanmore, critically examining Stanmore's appearance. He was always good-looking, but his style is better than it used to be."

This improvement—as Stanmore very well knew—was due to the fact that he was now relieved from all monetary cares, and in a more assured position in life. Formerly he had always spent more money than he had to spend, and it had not been pleasant to him; the lectures he had received on this subject both from his brother and his wife. But still Lady Stanmore had always kept on good terms with him. She had only thought it her duty sometimes to point out the error of his ways to him, and "Jack" had not liked it.

But now, of course, everything was changed. "Jack" was the head of the house, and many things that had formerly been in Lady Stanmore's possession were now in his. Redvers Court, where she had entertained for years, was one of the heirlooms of the new lord. If she went there now it would be as her brother-in-law's guest, but all the same, Lady Stanmore had no intention of giving up going there, if she could help it.

She therefore smiled on Jack and was very gracious to him, and Stanmore responded cordially.

"You will always be Jack" to me, you know," she said; "the handsome, wild Jack whom I used sometimes to scold."

"You were very good to me," answered Stanmore, smiling also; "but I thought I don't object to be called handsome in the present company, I do to be called wild," and he looked at Belle as he spoke.

"The quiet, sedate Jack then, if you like it better," said Lady Stanmore with a little laugh. "Belle, do you think he looks as if he had been sedate or quiet?"

"What a question, Aunt Lucy," replied Belle, and a merry gleam stole into her bright hazel eyes.

"I never heard him called wild at any rate," said Mrs. Wayland, who generally contrived to say the wrong thing.

"I think you for denouncing my character," Mrs. Wayland, answered Stanmore, who quite understood Mrs. Wayland.

Again Lady Stanmore laughed. "Just as if Jack believed her stupid flattery," Stanmore certainly did not; but all the same it was his role at the present moment to be civil to Mrs. Wayland for the sake of Belle. And to the sake of Belle also he was particularly civil to his sister-in-law. And Lady Stanmore's shrewd eyes quickly understood his motive. She understood it better, too, after an interview he had with her on the following morning, for when breakfast was over, he proposed that they should go out for a walk together.

"I want a chat with you, Lucy, about family affairs," he said, and Lady Stanmore went with him willingly.

He certainly began talking about family affairs, and business with their lawyers, etc., but presently his mind veered to a more pleasant theme.

"By the way, Lucy," he said, "your niece is a remarkably pretty girl."

"Yes, she is pretty," replied Lady Stanmore, but by no means enthusiastically; she was too clever to show any enthusiasm on the subject to Stanmore.

"But I should think a bit self-willed," answered Stanmore. "I hate your patient Gifford; they are all humbugs as a rule. No, I think Miss Wayland a charming girl."

"She's an improvement on her mother certainly."

"My dear Lucy, forgive me for saying so, but I detect your bias."

"My dear Jack, I quite agree with you," said Lady Stanmore, laughing.

"How she could have such a daughter I cannot understand," went on Stanmore. "Belle is not the least like her."

"No, I see no likeness, certainly."

"His young lady my lovers, then, Lucy?" continued Stanmore, with a slight hesitation in his voice, which Lady Stanmore instantly noticed. "I saw her sitting on the seawall one day with a young man; I think she told me they called him Gilbert."

"Gilbert?" repeated Lady Stanmore, as if she were trying to remember the name.

"Oh, it might be young Gilbert, the Vicar of Northbridge's son; he is in the Army, I think, and he and Belle are old acquaintances, but I never heard of any love making between them. But a girl like Belle is sure to have lovers! I suppose."

"Yes," answered Lord Stanmore slowly, "and then he dropped the subject, but his words had not fallen on deaf ears."

Lady Stanmore had, indeed, become convinced that her brother-in-law's admiration of Belle was serious and sincere. So much so that when she returned to the hotel she at once sought her sister.

"I have something to say to you, Linda," she said, as she entered Mrs. Wayland's room, and closed the door behind her. "I want to know exactly how far that affair with Belle and young Gilbert went?"

"Well, I told you," answered Mrs. Wayland, truthfully. "They flirted at Northbridge, and he followed her here; but I won't hear of it; nothing will induce me to hear of it; I would rather tell the girl everything."

"What a foolish, blundering woman you are, Linda," replied Lady Stanmore, sharply. "What is the good of going on in that absurd way? Tell the girl everything! Why, it would be an act of madness, not only for the girl's sake, but for your own. I have a moment for asking you the question that I did about Belle and young Gilbert. I've had an interview with Jack—I beg his pardon—with Stanmore this morning, and I believe now that for once you are right, and that he does seriously admire Belle."

"There! I told you so," exclaimed Mrs. Wayland, truthfully. "They flirted at Northbridge, and he followed her here; but I won't hear of it; nothing will induce me to hear of it; I would rather tell the girl everything."

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sell him all I did, and I will. It will be like talking to him."

She began her diary, therefore, the day before they left Brighton, for Redvers Court. These are some of her simple words—

"We leave here to-morrow, so I went to-day to the very spot where I promised always to be true to Hugh. But the sea was wild and stormy, and the spray beat on my face, instead of the sunshine, as it did when I was with him. And I felt so sad, so sad! He said a year at least, and it seems so long to wait. Twelve long months passing slowly away, and I never see his face. I wonder if Aunt Lucy will hear anything about him from Mrs. Balfour. I will write to him from Redvers Court; it would be no use writing from here, as my letters would arrive at Bombay perhaps before he did, and might be lost. I should not get an answer at once. I did not stay long on the sea-wall to day. I felt cold and miserable, and was glad to get back to the hotel. We are to dine with Stanmore to day; we seem always dining with him."

The next entry was dated Redvers Court—

"This is really a beautiful, old-fashioned country house. We came down yesterday, and got here in time to dress for dinner, and the place is really charming. What a thing it is to be rich! Everything here is in such perfect taste; so quiet, so serene, and the long corridors with the lofty, magnificently decorated rooms, make one feel so small!"

"But the gardens! How shall I describe them? They are beautifully kept, and the smooth, green lawns, the trim box hedges, and the bright, autumnal tawers, lying bathed in the morning sun, as I saw them first today, are simply perfect. Mother did not come down to breakfast, and there were only Aunt Lucy and Stanmore present. After breakfast was over Stanmore said to Aunt Lucy—

"Well, Lucy, are you going to sort your love letters this morning?"

"Aunt Lucy looked at him sharply."

"Yes, Jack," she answered.

"Poor Stanmore's of course," continued Stanmore, with a laugh.

"Of course," said Aunt Lucy, and she gave a little shrug, which is a trick of hers. "Then in that case, I saw who I saw them first today, are simply perfect. Mother did not come down to breakfast, and there were only Aunt Lucy and Stanmore present. After breakfast was over Stanmore said to Aunt Lucy—

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