
An emergency husband

Gwynne Agnes M

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AN EMERGENCY HUSBAND

BY

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CHAPTER I

AN EMERGENCY FIANCÉ

IN a private sitting-room of an exclusive residential hotel in the heart of Melbourne, sat a young girl clad in mourning. Gwendoline Vaughan gazed at the hurrying traffic as it dashed past in the street below, but trams, motors or other vehicles were all the same to her, for her mind's eye was more active than her body's. She was too much occupied in thinking of her present situation, as well as of her future prospects, to pay attention to the comings and goings of the world outside. Her uncle's death, which was the reason for her sombre apparel, had placed her in a puzzling position. She had sorrowed greatly at losing this relative with whom she had lived, happily enough, since her father's death; but she would have mourned more sincerely had he treated her in a reasonable way by his will. Instead of leaving her an unencumbered inheritance, he had bound her down with conditions which made it seem prob-

able that, in the end, she would have no inheritance at all.

Always an eccentric man, he had made an unusual disposition of his estate. Holding that every woman needed a man's guidance throughout her life, he made it a condition that Gwendoline should be engaged and married within a specified time before she could claim the fortune he had to bequeath. Should these conditions not be fulfilled, the whole estate was to be equally divided between his wife's nearest relatives. Gwendoline was feeling resentful at her uncle's provision. She recalled the few misunderstandings she had had with him, all to do with her vaunted independence of spirit. She used openly to boast that she never intended giving her life into the keeping of any man. They had argued the question together several times, each claiming a victory for their own opinion. Now, from out the grave, her uncle sought to compel her to strike her colours and own herself defeated. It was, indeed, humiliating to one of her proud young spirit. Had he only left her enough to live on in any case, it would not have mattered. But, if she failed to carry out his wishes, she would get nothing.

She had met few men while an inmate of her uncle's home. He preferred a quiet life.