

## CHAPTER VII

### An Appointment

VIRGINIA seemed to find speech impossible, and it seemed to him that he could see the tears gathering in her eyes.

"Forgive me," he said, leaning over the table towards her. "I ought to have asked you differently, I know, but I am so afraid that you will slip away, as you did before, and that I shall lose sight of you again. You want some one to take care of you, dear, and I am going to do it."

She looked at him with swimming eyes, and he laid his hand softly for a moment upon hers.

"Mr. Mildmay," she said, "you must not say such things to me. It is quite impossible, entirely and absolutely impossible."

"I don't believe it," he answered calmly. "You will have to give me some very good reasons before I go away again and leave you."

"Reasons!" she faltered. "Oh! there is every reason in the world. You don't know me, or anything about me, and you know very well that I am doing things here that no nice girl would do."

"I know nothing of the sort," he answered, smiling, "because you are a nice girl. But, on the other hand, of course, I am glad to hear that your

search, whatever it may be, is over. You can tell me about it or not, just as you please. Perhaps I may be able to help. Perhaps you would like to tell me. If not, it doesn't matter."

She found speech difficult, almost impossible. He seemed so sure of his position, so absolutely confident that there could be nothing which could possibly separate them.

"But you don't understand," she tried to say. "I am not the sort of person at all whom you ought to think of marrying. I am very, very poor, and I am over here because I betrayed a trust, to try and steal back something which was lost through my carelessness. I might be put in prison for what I am trying to do. All sorts of things might happen to me. You mustn't have anything to do with me."

He smiled, and rested his hand for a moment once more upon her thin white fingers.

"Little girl," he said, "I believe in you, and that is quite enough. I shall get a special licence to-morrow."

She laughed a little hysterically.

"Forgive me," she said, wiping her eyes, "but over in New York they call Englishmen slow. How dare you talk of special licences, when I have told you that I cannot, that I will not even think of marrying you!"

He looked at her with sudden keenness.

"Is there any one else?" he asked gravely.

She was forced to speak the truth.

"No, there is no one!" she said.

"Good!" he answered. "I thought not. As a matter of form, have you any further reasons why you won't marry me?"

"I don't—care for you enough," she gasped.

"You will very soon," he answered reassuringly. "I really can make myself quite an agreeable companion. You haven't seen enough of me yet. Of course I know I'm rather taking you by storm, but I am not going to leave you alone in a strange city, indulging in some melodramatic game of hide and seek. You don't need to do that, Virginia. I am quite as rich as ever you will want to be, and if any one has suffered in America through your carelessness I think I can make amends for you more completely than you can by trying to break the laws of this country. You know, dear, I am not curious, but I really think you had better tell me all about it. It will make things much easier."

She shook her head.

"It isn't my secret," she answered, "and besides, it's a dangerous one. Whoever has the paper which was stolen through my carelessness, and which I am going to try and get back, goes every moment in danger of his life."

He smiled at her a little unbelievably.

"That may be all very well in New York," he said, "but here in London one doesn't do such things. One keeps the law here, for we have an incorruptible police."

"You don't understand," she said sadly. "This is really something great."

"Can't you buy this paper or whatever it is?" he asked, "or rather couldn't I buy it for you?"

She shook her head.

"The man who has it refused a million dollars for it," she said simply. "Indeed, I must not tell you anything more. Please, Mr. Mildmay——"

"Guy!" he interrupted.

"Guy, then," she continued, with something very much like a blush, "forget all that you have said to me, at any rate for the present. Perhaps later on, when this is all over——"

"You won't want me then," he said. "It's just now you need some one to look after you. You are too young, and forgive me, dear, too simple, to be mixed up in such affairs as you have been speaking of. There is only one way to really protect you, and that is to get that special licence to-morrow."

"But you mustn't talk about it, think about it even," she protested. "It's impossible."

"No, I think not!" he answered. "Come, I am going to make you drink a glass of my wine. You are looking positively woe-begone. That's right, drink it down," he added, as she sipped it timidly. "Now tell me what you are going to do for the rest of the evening."

"I am going," she said, "to try and save the life of the man who has the paper which was stolen from me. Incidentally I may be able to get it back again."

"Can I come too?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" she answered. "It isn't an

affair for you to be mixed up in, and besides it would spoil my chance."

"You are not encouraging," he said. "Seriously, Virginia, do let me come."

"No!" she answered, glancing at the clock, "and I must be going in a very few minutes."

"You haven't told me when you will marry me yet," he reminded her.

She looked at him piteously.

"Please don't be foolish," she said. "I cannot marry you, I can never marry you. I told you that before. You must please put it out of your head. I am going now, and it must be"—her voice trembled a little—"good-bye!"

"It will be nothing of the sort," he answered. "Do you care for me a little, Virginia?"

"I—perhaps I do," she faltered.

"I thought you did," he whispered, smiling. "I hoped so, anyhow. That settles it, Virginia. You haven't a chance of getting away from me, dear. You may just as well make up your mind to be Mrs. Mildmay as soon as I can get that licence."

"You are the most impossible person!" she declared in despair. "How can I make you believe me?"

"Nohow," he answered. "Let me come with you, please, this evening."

"I will not," she answered firmly. "Do believe me, please, that it is impossible."

"Very well, then," he answered, "you shall have

your own way, but on one condition, and that is that you tell me where I can find you to-morrow. I shall probably have the licence then."

Virginia looked around the room as though seeking for some means of escape, and yet she knew that every word he uttered was a delight to her; that a new joy, against which she was powerless to fight, was filling her life. It was absurd, impossible, not to be thought of, and yet all the time his insistence delighted her. He had so much the air of one who has always his own way. She felt her powers of resistance becoming almost impotent, and she watched their dissipation with secret joy. How was it possible to resist a lover so confident, so authoritative, especially when her whole heart was filled with a passionate longing to throw everything else to the winds and to place her hands in his. Perhaps by to-morrow, she thought, things would seem different to her, but in the meantime she gave him the address of the boarding-house in Russell Street. How could she help it!

"I shall be there," he said, "sometime before twelve to-morrow morning. You won't be going out before then?"

"I—suppose not," she faltered.

He called the waiter and asked for the bill for his dinner. Hers she had already paid. She rose to her feet.

"Please," she said earnestly, "do not come out with me. I am going now, and where I am going I must go alone."

He glanced opposite, to where the three men were still sitting.

"Very well," he said, "I will let you go. You will permit me, I presume, to see you out of the restaurant?"

He walked down with her to the door, and would have called a hansom, but she answered that she preferred to walk.

"I have an automobile here if you will use it," he said, "and I will engage not to ask the man where he drove you."

I am not afraid of that," she answered, "but I would rather walk, if you please. I have only a very little way to go."

He took both her hands in his firmly.

"Virginia, dear," he said, smiling down at her, "good-night, and remember that I am coming to see you to-morrow, and that I am going to bring that special licence. You are going to marry me whether you want to or not, and very soon too."

Virginia hurried away, breathless.