

FOR A MILLION OF MONEY,

By Arthur W. Marchmont. Author of "By Right of Sword," "When I Was Czar," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I. Helms to a Million. It would have been difficult to find a happier girl in the whole county of Oxfordshire or, indeed, in the whole of England, than Olive Parmenter, the heiress of Gregory Parmenter, the millionaire, as she sat in the rosy at Silverbeech on the morning of her birthday, a lovely day in June. She was reading a letter from her lover, and letting it fall on her lap, leant back smiling in response to the thoughts which the letter had produced. Almost everything that a girl could wish for in life was hers. No one questioned her claim to beauty, a little above the middle height, she had a supple figure of exquisite mould, with the free carriage of perfect balance, every movement and gesture being inspired by natural grace. Her face was as beautiful as her form. Her broad forehead, white as alabaster, was surrounded by a wealth of wavy chestnut hair; dark, almost black eyes and lashes shaded, eyes of deepest blue—striking contrast, and her features, although delicately chiselled, were eloquent in character, self-reliance, and strength. Snow and again a troubled expression flitted across her face and drew her brows together. This was at the thought of her one care—her father's health. Her mother's death some years before, had deeply affected Mr. Parmenter, and he had brought his wealth and only child to England, purchasing the fine estate of Silverbeech, at Beborough, and seeking to forget his sorrow in a complete change of scene and life. But the long strenuous life in a hot climate spent in amassing his huge fortune, amounting to a million in money, had told on a none too robust constitution; and the blow of his wife's death was one from which he had never entirely recovered. His life was now centred in love which she returned passionately, a love which she returned with her whole heart; but he knew that his days were numbered, and one great desire was to see her happily married before his end came. And that desire was now close to realization. During the previous year, the doctors had sent him to Naumham on account of his heart trouble; and, feeling everything that several operations had, he had acquiescently undergone from letting the fact of his enormous wealth be known. At the same hotel was staying a young soldier, Lieutenant John Fenwick, who had been invalided home from the South African war, and recruiting his health before taking a position at the Foreign Office. The two young people were thrown much together, and in a few weeks one another before the handsome young soldier knew that Olive was the only child of the millionaire Silverbeech, and Olive learnt that Jack was the son and heir of Lord Beborough, whose castle and lands lay so close to her home. It was a love match in the fullest sense; and Mr. Parmenter had gladly given his consent. But some difficulties had come from the other side; and now, on her birthday, Jack had written to say that he was coming over with great gladness, and her heart warmed and her cheek flushed with delightful anticipation. "Jack has written to his mother at last," she told herself, her very veins tingling with delight at the thought; and she picked up the letter, and upon a path near broke in upon her reverie. She glanced round and rose, with an instinctive shudder of dislike, as a man of about thirty years of age, with dark, handsome, strong features, and bold, compelling eyes, raised his hat and bowed, saying with a confident smile, "I wish to be first with my congratulations, Miss Parmenter, and I saw you straight here instead of going first to the house. May I wish you many, many happy returns of the day?" "Thank you, Mr. Merridew," she replied, giving him her hand and withdrawing it instantly. "My father is in the house."

"I came to see you, please. I wish you to do me a great service," she said, and she did not resume her seat, but stood as if expecting him to leave her. "I have something of great importance to say to you. Please sit down again."

And then came lovers' talk. Jack told his great news, which was that Olive anticipated—the engagement was sanctioned. He brought out the ring and placed it on her finger, and for a long time the world was forgotten by them both in that wondrous harmony of young love which no man or woman has ever yet understood, or can ever recall without a thrill of emotion. Then together they went to tell Mr. Parmenter the news; and when he heard it he brought a deeper tint to Olive's cheeks, and a delight which she could not suppress. "There is only one thing now, I shall only consent on one condition—that the marriage takes place within a month."

CHAPTER II. The "Honorable" Mrs. Taunton. Gilbert Merridew was by no means delighted by his refusal by Olive. He had not anticipated any other result; and he had only made the proposal as one step towards the object he had in view. "That object was to secure Mr. Parmenter's millions; and the first and obvious object of the interest of our government can you get that?"

CHAPTER III. The Marriage Must be Hastened. "My dear Miss Parmenter—Will you let me write to express to you my sincere regret that I should have allowed myself to be carried to such an excess in my interview with you today, as to have detained you so long. I am, however, a man of emotional impulses; and today my feelings for you went beyond all control. I earnestly beg your forgiveness, and I am sure I have but made my cause more dear to you. That love has become a part of my life, and I should be very sorry to repeat what I said to you yesterday."

CHAPTER IV. At the Altar Steps. "What a lovely sweetheart, and what a matter with the matter?" asked Jack, after the loving greetings between Olive and himself, which his mother had preferred not to witness. "Olive told him her father's wish. 'The best news I ever heard in my life,' he declared, earnestly, with joyous smile. 'But it might have been better.'"

CHAPTER V. "I am very troubled about him, Jack, and so is Dr. Gregory." "We'll do our best to make him as happy as we mean to be, and then, if happiness makes for long life, he will live a long time, many years to live yet."

CHAPTER VI. "I suppose it is foolish," replied Olive, suppressing a sigh; "but I cannot shake off a feeling of depression as if something were going to happen."

(To be Continued.)