



THE MILLIONAIRE GIRL

Or the Parmenter Millions

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By ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT,
Author of "By Right of Sword," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

"If you think you can get rid of this scandal by merely getting up on high stilts, you will find you are mightily mistaken," was the angry reply. "The heir of Belborough will not be allowed to marry a nameless—"

"Your ladyship's carriage is waiting," interrupted Olive, ringing the bell.

Lady Belborough's face flamed with passion. "You dare to treat me in this way and order me out of your house. You, a mere upstart, with no claim even to—"

"Belborough's carriage," said Olive to the servant who opened the door at that moment; and with a frigid bow she turned away and did not look around until her visitor had left the room. Then, with a moan of suffering, she threw herself on a couch and buried her face in her hands.

Until then she had not realized all the terrible consequences to herself which must follow if the story told on the previous day should prove to be true. Her face flushed and her blood boiled as she winced and quivered with the new shame of her thoughts.

She was on fire with impatience for the news which Mr. Casement was to bring. Mr. Parmenter's story is told in the next chapter.

With this terrible news she again sought refuge in her own room; and in solitude spent hours of bitter, poignant grief.

In the early evening Jack came over. But she would not see him, although her heart was aching for the comfort he could have given her, and scribbled a line, that she could not bear an interview yet. He persisted, and all but insisted upon seeing her; but she held to that determination.

She would see no one but Mr. Casement; and when he came he could only confirm his telegram. Such a marriage as that alleged had certainly

CHAPTER V.
Hours of Anguish.

Dr. Gregory's examination of Mr. Parmenter was very brief, and when he rose it was just as twilight fell on the clergyman and then to sign to Jack to help him carry the millionaire into the vestry.

Jack, who had taken Olive's hand in the moment of crisis, immediately complied, and the millionaire was lifted by them gently and carried out. Olive followed. She was pale, but quite self-collected.

"The restoratives are in the carriage, doctor," she whispered; but at the look which she gave in reply, she caught her breath and clenched her hands, summoning all her courage and self-command. She read in it a verdict which confirmed all her worst fears.

As she reached the vestry, a low moan escaped her tightly pressed lips, and for a moment she reeled unsteadily under the force of the blow. Mr. Casement was by her side, and he placed his hand under her arm. She turned and thanked him with a wan smile, and then, with supreme effort, nerved herself for the coming ordeal.

Mr. Parmenter was laid on a bench in the vestry, and all save Olive, Jack and Mr. Casement were shut out, while Dr. Gregory made strenuous efforts to revive his patient. But no help passed beyond all human aid, and at length the doctor abandoned an attempt which he had known from the first would be fruitless.

Olive, white to the lips, sat with her hand in her breast, waiting in tense misery and anxiety for the final verdict. "I can do no more," declared the doctor. "Heaven give me strength to bear the blow, Miss Parmenter. Your father is dead."

For a moment of intensely painful silence for all. Olive closed her eyes and bowed her head, and then rose.

"I will go home, doctor, you will see," her lips quivered and she finished the broken sentence with a mere glance of anguish at the dead body. "Oh, my dear," she cried; and, falling on her knees, she bent over her father and kissed first the forehead and then the cold lips.

"I will bring a carriage to the vestry door," said Mr. Casement. He hurried out, and during his absence Olive remained kneeling by the dead.

She had heard what the lawyer said, and on his return she rose from her knees, took a long look at the door, and with a tremendous sigh of bitter anguish turned away.

"I am ready, you will take me home, Mr. Casement. No, Jack; don't come with me," she said, as he took her hand, intending to lead her out. "Come to me later in the day or to-morrow; I will send you. But that scene in the church must be explained."

"It is nothing to me," he cried, passionately.

"Know that, my dear, I know that but—"

"I can't let you go like this," he declared. "My place is with you."

Olive turned and put both her hands on his shoulders and gazed into his eyes. "Ah, my dear, don't make it harder than it is," she cried, as she kissed him.

"He strained her to him tenderly. "You must let me come, Olive," he whispered.

"No, no," she said, shaking her head resolutely. "I know what is best. It must be good for a while. Pray God it is not for always," and with that she drew away from him and taking Mr. Casement's arm, left the vestry.

"You are a brave girl, Miss Olive; but you should have let me come with you. It is hard on him," said the lawyer as they drove off.

Olive shook her head. "No, I must first know what that terrible woman meant by her story. Oh, dear! And this my wedding day!"

Nothing more was spoken on the way to Silverbeech; and when they reached the house Olive asked the lawyer to return at once to the church and ascertain all he could as to the meaning of the strange interruption to the marriage.

"I shall be better after I have had some hours to myself," she declared, "and be quite able to talk to you this evening."

"I should like to say one thing," he answered. "Whatever this woman may mean, it can make no difference to you in regard to your fortune. I prepared your father's will and everything is left securely to you."

"I do not seem to think about such matters just now, but I thank you, all the same," replied Olive wearily, as she entered the house.

She went straight to her own room, and after she had laid aside her wedding dress she sent her maid away and remained alone, giving herself up at first unreservedly to her grief, praying earnestly for resignation, striving to submit herself to the divine will, and seeking to find strength to bear the burden of affliction.

She passed several hours in this solitude, and when in the evening she left her room, she had won her hard battle and regained her self-composure. Mr. Casement was waiting to see her and was surprised at her calmness and self-strength.

"Tell me all you know at once, please," she said. "I want something to think of so that I may not brood. What does it all mean?"

"The woman maintains her claim to be Mr. Parmenter's wife. She says

the unpalatable truth would have been kept secret," he said regretfully.

Olive was not imposed upon by this pretense, however. "You knew of this alleged marriage when you were here, then?" she asked. "Why did you not speak of it to my father?"

"It was my mother's matter more than mine," he replied, with a frown at the pointed question. "If I could have been fortunate enough to win your love, whom the grief of departure from the home she had come to love so dearly had wrought to an intense bitter resentment.

"You are a most unpleasant girl," was the angry retort. "I have no such thought. But I wish to stop you from doing further mischief. I declare on my honor that I am as sorry for you as my dear son is."

"I have no doubt that is true enough," said Olive, bitterly.

"Why are you so bitter to me? I wish to be your friend."

"It was you who killed my father in order that you and your son might rob me of my inheritance and my good name. But the wicked do not prosper. Heaven will help me to bring punishment to you."

"I will not take offense, although your words are cruelly unjust. But I wish to warn you that if you persist in unearthing your father's past you will only add to his shame and bring to light the crime which drove him out of the country."

Olive turned and looked at Mrs. Merridew sternly. "I do not believe you," she said with all the contempt she could express.

"It is true, as true as that I am speaking to you at this moment. He was concerned with others to rob his employer, Mr. Ringrose, a solicitor of Sheffield, and when the crime was discovered he fled the country and deserted me. I have said nothing of this so far, but if you persist in haunting me I may be driven to tell it all to the world. I wish to do you no more harm than is necessary to right my own wrongs."

the servant, Olive's own maid, who answered the bell.

"The servant stood white-faced, at a loss to know what to do."

"It is all right, Harrison," said Olive. "I am going now."

She went out, holding her head high, and as she crossed the hall the butler, who had been in the house ever since Mr. Parmenter had come to Silverbeech, met her and said: "The carriage is not here yet, miss."

"That person can have no carriage," cried Mrs. Merridew, overhearing.

The old man winced. "Oh, Miss Olive," he cried in a voice of pain.

"Never mind, Carpenter. I am going; that is all. Good-by."

The tears sprang to his eyes as he took the hand. "Oh, miss, that it should come to this, and, falling on his knees, he pressed his lips to her hand.

At that the girl who had come down stairs with Olive rushed forward, crying bitterly. "Oh, Miss Olive, Miss Olive, don't do that!"

Olive held out her hand to her also and she covered it with her kisses and tears. "Good-by, Harrison."

"Are my orders to be obeyed?" called Mrs. Merridew from above. "Show that woman out and close the door at once, I say."

And in this way Olive was turned from the home she loved and set out to face the hard world all but penniless, full of sorrow, and alone.

But despite all the blows of ill fortune her courage was undaunted and her heart beat high with the consciousness of innocence and the resolve to fight on until she had conquered all the forces which had banded together to ruin her.

CHAPTER VII.
"My Purpose Burns in Me."

"You are a very wilful young woman, and that is the truth," said Mr. Casement, setting his elbows on his office desk and pressing his finger tips together as he smiled very kindly into Olive's face.

There was no answering smile on her face, but an expression of intense resolve and determination. "I know you mean everything in the kindest possible way, Mr. Casement; but I can do nothing here. And my purpose burns in me."

She had gone to the lawyer at Frampton on leaving Silverbeech, and he had pressed her to make his home even until her plans could be settled.

"My wife would love to have you always with us, Miss Olive. It might be different if we were worldly people and had daughters of our own to marry off. We might then be glad if your good looks, for not many girls could stand comparison with you. But being childless we want you. Reconsider it."

She shook her head. "Don't ask me yet at all events. I must try to right matters. I am fully resolved on that. If I try and fail, heaven help me, and creep back to you, beaten and hopeless; and in need of shelter, you can ask me then. You are very good to me, indeed."

"But what can you do, my child?"

"I don't know yet. Tell me first what money I have. Is there nothing at all to come to me out of that huge fortune?"

"There would be a million if—"

"No, no, not that, please. Never hint to me of a compromise," she cried quickly.

"There is nothing, absolutely nothing except your actual personal property which you brought away from the manor."

"My jewels are my own, of course. They will sell for something. Can you arrange that for me, and at once I must have some money immediately. I shall go first to Sheffield and find out everything I can about that past time."

"Of course, you can have what money you like."

"Noting his tone, Olive looked up sharply. "Not more than they are worth I mean, Mr. Casement," she said simply.

"Suspicious, too, as well as wilful," he replied, with another kindly smile. "And you are quite determined also not to make these people prove their claim in law? We might not succeed; but we should at least prevent them from handling the money for a time."

"I must first find out the truth. If this tale is true, nothing—not the whole fortune—would make me drag my father's name through the law courts."

"Well, there is another obstacle in that way, and I am afraid," replied the lawyer, with a dry smile of satisfaction. "No one in this country except myself knows anything about your father's investments, except to a comparatively small extent. Mr. Merridew has written me about the matter, offering to place his business in my hands. He is coming to see me this morning; but he will not find me communicative."

"You must run no risks on my account. Mr. Casement is, of course," he smiled, "but I wish I could do more for you than merely throw some little hindrances in his way. I cannot blame you for the decision you have taken; if you were my child I would, except, perhaps, in one respect; but that is more for you—and well, it is for you to decide. Excuse me," he broke off, as a clerk brought him a card, "into the other private office," he told the clerk.

"You are busy. I will go," said Olive.

"Not for a moment. I wish to say just this. Until I can get the little matter of the sale of the jewels settled, you must let me be your banker, and you must make me a solemn promise on one point—whatever difficulty of any sort you get into you will write to consult me and send for me in any and every emergency. You promise?"

"Only too gladly," cried Olive, holding out her hand. "I can never thank you sufficiently for all your kindness."

(To Be Continued Next Sunday.)



CHAPTER VI.
Beggared and Homeless.

Olive bore the news of her loss of fortune with surprising fortitude. Mr. Casement kept the fact of the loss of the will to himself as long as he dared, and under the pretense of collecting all the papers of his late client, he had every nook and cranny of the manor searched during the interval between his return and the day of the funeral.

But Olive had to be told the truth then.

"What will it mean to me, Mr. Casement?" she asked.

"Probably a long legal tussle, my dear young lady. I have the instruction and a draft will, and shall, of course, endeavor to have that draft proved."

"If you fail?"

"Everything will then turn upon this alleged marriage. If that is proved to have actually taken place, I fear that all your late father's property will go to the person who claims to be his widow. But don't despair yet, of course."

"I shall never despair. It is not the money I care about, but my dear father's good name. I am resolved to clear that."

"Of course you are, and I am equally resolved to assist you. But, although you young people are accustomed to think lightly of wealth, we old ones take a different view."

"But what can Mrs. Merridew do?" was her next question.

"Nothing without a long legal fight; and I should think that some sort of compromise—"

"I will not compromise with them. If it is theirs, they shall have it, Mr. Casement. To compromise would be to acquiesce in this calamity," declared Olive very firmly. "It is true, or it is a lie. There is no halfway house. And to that decision she held unflinchingly."

But Mr. Casement had made a mistake when he declared that the Merridews could do nothing. He had spoken in ignorance of a fresh misfortune which he did not ascertain until he had returned to his office. There had been a fire there some time before, and in it the draft will had been burned.

Meanwhile Gilbert Merridew acted with much shrewdness. He had waited anxiously to ascertain whether any other will than that which he had destroyed was forthcoming, and when

taken place, and the signature, "Richard Parmenter," corresponded with his father's handwriting. The witnesses, a Mr. and Mrs. Thistleton, were alive, and had recognized the photograph of Mr. Parmenter, which the lawyer had shown to them.

She listened in silence as if it had been her sentence of death, and then said she related to be alone.

"He was to stay at Silverbeech that night, and he said that I would like to get her father's will. 'I know where it is kept,' he added. 'In the safe, and I will go abroad. It is you I want, not my money.'

"But she would not hear of it. His mother's words rang in her ears, and the hot flash of shame these words had roused mantled her cheeks again at the remembrance. She would be no man's wife until this terrible bar had been removed.

He begged and urged and argued, using every plea he could think of, but she remained immovable. "I will give it to you," she said, "but I will never see dear father's name, and I will never cease trying until I die or succeed."

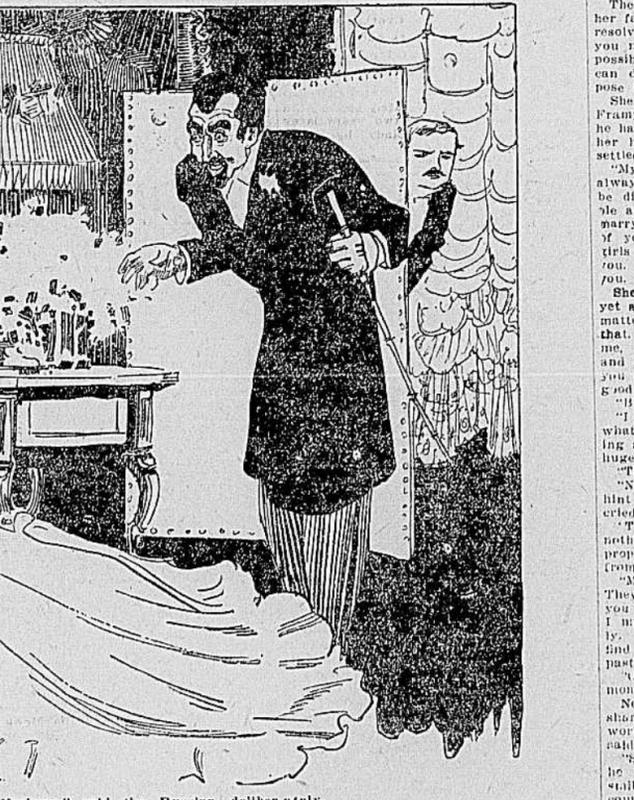
"Then will it do together," he cried.

"No, Jack, no. Don't ask me. I will be no man's wife until I can look the world in the face and claim my rightful position. It almost breaks my heart to send you away, but it must be."

And he had to leave her, unable to shake this determination.

When Gilbert Merridew arrived he began by expressing the deepest sympathy with Olive. Not a trace of his former brusqueness was shown; he was as courteous and gentle as if solicitude for her welfare had been in his mind. His desire was, he said, to be allowed to be a friend, and he gave her to understand that his former proposal of marriage had been inspired as much by the eagerness as by the love of the man.

"If only matters could have been different, if you could have seen well to have given me a different answer, all this would have been avoided, and



her sensational method of your bidding in order to blacken me in the eyes of the world and at the same time strike at my dear father's health."

"I assure you on my honor, Miss Parmenter, that you are as wrong in that conclusion as in your insult to my mother. We feel for you deeply, and are conscious that you are innocently a terrible sufferer. To show you that our sympathy is not mere surface talk, one million of your father's fortune shall be made over to you without any idea of marriage with me. If that settlement of the issue between us will satisfy you."

Olive's lip curled. "You would buy my concurrence in my father's dishonor? No, sir," she cried, raising her head proudly. "Not if you offered me every penny of the money. If that settles it, I will take it, and take it all. But neither my faith in my dear father nor my own honor is for sale. I believe that some villainy is at the bottom of this, and I am resolved to discover it. And with that declaration of war she left him."

And the law did give them the fortune. Mr. Casement had admitted that nothing could be done to upset the secret marriage. The proofs were indisputable, and the evidence could not be shaken. Merridew's offer of the million sterling as a compromise was submitted formally to him, and he went so far as to urge Olive to accept it.

But she was as firm in her refusal to him as she had been to Merridew himself. "Never," she declared. "If I will never be a party to this wrong to my father. The mere fact that they make such a large offer is, in my opinion, a proof that there is villainy somewhere, and that they are afraid I shall discover it." And from this decision nothing could move her.

She resolved to leave Silverbeech at once, and then Mrs. Merridew, who had followed her son down there, sought to use a further inducement.

She went to Olive's room just as she

had been putting all her things together for removal. There was war to the knife between the two.

"I must speak to you, Miss Parmenter, before you go," began the older woman.

"You have probably come to see that I am taking none of your property. Just what I should think of you," said Olive, whom the grief of departure from the home she had come to love so dearly had wrought to an intense bitter resentment.

"You are a most unpleasant girl," was the angry retort. "I have no such thought. But I wish to stop you from doing further mischief. I declare on my honor that I am as sorry for you as my dear son is."

"I have no doubt that is true enough," said Olive, bitterly.

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