

# The Romance of a Million Dollars *By Elizabeth Dejeans*

## THE STORY THUS FAR.

**D**UNBARTON-KENT'S millions have been left with his widow, in trust for two nephews, Brock and West, and a niece, Bella. They are to divide the fortune provided some certain conditions—and Brock has been robbing a thief! Mrs. Brant-Olwin's jewels are stolen and \$100,000 and some guns disappear from beneath Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's pillow. Brock and a mysterious "Mrs. Smith" are suspected, but he denies all. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent centers her efforts on recovering the guns, forcing Brock to leave, and protecting the family name. Into this atmosphere of mystery and suspicion walks lovable Marie Angoulême, our heroine, to become chauffeur for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. She learns the family secrets from Allen Colfax, a third nephew, whom she discovers embracing Bella and when she demands the reason for her own cold treatment by the household. Marie finally wins the affection of Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent and is invited to become a member of the family; West proposes and is rejected, as Marie has been attracted, despite herself, to the number Brock. On the morning she moves to Kent House she finds a revolver in her room, and a note reading: "Carry this wherever you go; you may need it." At dinner Brock subtly warns her of danger.

## NINTH INSTALLMENT.

\$400,000 in Jewels!

**M**ARIE had undressed and had carefully disposed of her red gown, pondering meanwhile an entirely new idea. Perhaps Brock was a little insane? West seemed to think that he was. That would explain many things: Brock's brooding, withdrawn look and the strange things he said and did. Probably from the time he was a child he had not been altogether right in his mind. Think of the life he had lived, a neglected boy, locked up in prison, where he must have brooded. His uncle must have had a good influence upon him, but that had not been for long. There had been no one to care for him, and he had begun to steal again. Then those fearful years in a German prison! Perfectly sane men had lost their minds under such privations and sufferings. Men came out of prisons with faces carved and still like Brock's and minds quite changed.

And those who were unbalanced had strange hatreds. Brock seemed to hate West. Whenever he looked at West his eyes were like knives. It was terrifying, the way in which he had looked when he said, "If one wanted to drown one's enemy—" And the warning "Wipe in which he said, "Look the roadster over well before you ride in it, Marie Angoulême." He wanted to frighten West and he wanted to frighten her. He had given her the pistol in a secret and terrifying way. He was trying to frighten her away from Kent House, and instigating him was Mrs. Smith. She would use a man who was not quite sane. She was capable of anything.

Hot and at the same time shivering, Marie locked her door, then got into bed and gathered the covers about her. Her heated brain evolved question after question. Why did Bella's height and long lines remind her constantly of Mrs. Smith? She had not noticed Bella particularly that first day when Gibbs had brought her into the library. Bella had been seated at a distance, and ever since she had seen her only when she was wearing her veil and her long fur coat. But the moment she saw her in the Colfax house without her coat she had reminded her vividly of Mrs. Smith. It was strange, that hateful woman's resemblance to Bella and Brock—light eyes with black lashes like Brock's and a body like Bella's, long and strong and graceful.

Then came tormenting thoughts. Brock must meet Mrs. Smith often and secretly. Doubtless he loved her passionately, as Bella loved Colfax. Most likely Mrs. Smith had not really gone away, but was hidden in her house. Certainly Brock had been going to meet her that night when she was playing the piano. She was going out to meet him, that was why she was putting on her fur.

Marie was so tense and excited that when some one knocked on her door her heart leaped into her throat and she could neither speak nor move. She found her voice only when the knock was repeated. "Who is it?" she asked.

"Have you gone to bed?" It was Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent.

Marie hurried to let her in and Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent closed the door, then looked Marie over, her flushed face and wide eyes and her little figure in its nightgown.

"I suppose you were asleep? But it's early, and I want to talk to you," she said. "Get back into bed, child—I'll sit beside you."

man as Brock. If Marie had fixed her affections on him there was a bitter heartache in store for her.

"I'll sit here beside you," she repeated. "I simply wanted to ask you something."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's coming was a relief from wretched, terrifying thoughts, and Marie lay as close as possible to the chair. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent drew up to the bed. "I am most glad you have come, madame," she said with sincerity.

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent put her hand on Marie's shoulder and looked into her eyes. "Marie," she said gravely, "you know, don't you, that I am fond of you and would stand by you in any trouble? And, too, that I would never pry into your heart out of mere curiosity?"

Marie braced herself instantly to answer questions and yet keep her secret; Willetts must have told Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent that she had talked with Colfax, also about the spaniel. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's manner was affectionate, but purposeful. "I am certain of it, madame," she said gravely.

"I want you to tell me then, child, truthfully and honestly—do you love my nephew, Brock?"

That question was utterly unexpected. Marie flamed scarlet, but also she shrank and shivered, and her answer was instant: "No, madame." She met Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's keen look with flushed cheeks.

"Has he ever made love to you, child?"

"Never, madame. I am certain that he does not even like me—he has always avoided me."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent drew a breath of relief. The shiver that had run through Marie's body was as convincing as the shudder that had shaken her when she had told of her experience with Mrs. Smith. But there was flushed misery in Marie's eyes as well, and Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent persisted.

"How do you feel toward him, child? What do you think of him?"

Marie tried to explain carefully and yet truthfully. "At first, madame, I thought Mr. Brock a strange but lovable man, and I felt great pity for what seemed his loneliness. But now that I know him better I shrink from him. He is too strange. As this evening at dinner, things he said were frightening to me. And at the same time, as Mr. West also feels, I have pity for him that he should be as he is. Please excuse me that I speak so of any one in your family, but of my feelings to him I am telling exactly the truth—I think of him as an unfortunate man." Marie felt that she was telling the truth; she had covered the face of her love and had buried it—alms, perhaps, but she did not realize that.

"It's the best way to think of him," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said.

She was tremendously relieved. West had been right to some extent; Brock had appealed to the girl's imagination. But there was no mistaking Marie's shiver. She had sensed in Brock the things she did not know and had been repelled. She could rely on Marie's instinct and she could keep her at Kent House. More than half of Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's consternation had been because she would lose Marie's companionship. As she had told Marie, she had carried about with her an empty heart.

With a sudden stir of affection she slipped her big arm under Marie's shoulders and drew her close, and, with a caught breath of surprise and joy, Marie flung her arms about her neck. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent kissed her and Marie kissed her again and again, on both cheeks.

"You're sweet, child," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent whispered, and Marie returned. "O, madame, it is all love for you in my heart. I wish to do only what will make you happy."

"Be kind to West, then, child. He has his faults, but at bottom he's a fine sort and he loves you. Outwardly West is lively and carefree; but he's not a happy man—there's a restless craving something about him which I have never been able to understand—that and an intense reserve. Love will make a fine man of West, I think. I would like to see one member of this family happy," and she sighed.



"It was strange, that hateful woman's resemblance to Bella and Brock."

felt toward Brock, who is an anxiety to us all. Owing to circumstances, when you first came here, and for which I'm sorry enough now, you saw more of Brock than of any one else. I got into a panic after dinner, thinking that perhaps the reason you didn't respond to West was because you might have taken a fancy to his cousin. I might have known better—your instinct is pretty true. I'm a plain spoken old woman, I don't know how to be anything else, so out I came with my question." She patted Marie's shoulder again. "But it's all right now."

Marie wished that she could tell her everything. She laid her hot cheek against Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's hand. "There is one person whom I know I love," she said tensely, "and that is yourself."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent patted her cheek then and smoothed her hair. "Good-night, child; good-night."

When Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent returned to the library West was pacing the floor. It was a perturbed face he turned on her when she entered. In all her experience with West—and he had been part of her household since he was twenty—Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent had never seen him look as he did now. Since Marie had taken hold on him he had shown more genuine feeling than she had observed in him in all the years she had known him. He was so evidently suffering that she felt a stir of affection for him.

She closed the door behind her. "It's all right, West," she said reassuringly. "The honest little soul told me the truth, as I knew she would," and she related exactly what Marie had said. "She shivered when she talked of Brock, and it was more convincing even than what she said. She'll avoid him; you have nothing to fear, so quiet down."

West had quieted. He drew a long breath. "It's a relief! Thank heaven, you didn't rage at her."

"I had no intention of raging at her," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said with feeling. "If there was anything between them I was to blame—I let Haslett have his way. I didn't forget that for a moment. I've liked the child from the beginning—I loved her tonight. I've had little enough affection bestowed on me these last few years. I've felt a desolate old woman since your uncle died. You shall have your chance, West; if she grows to care for you, well and good; marry her and be happy—I shall rejoice over it."

But if you don't succeed the child shall have a home with me. When the time comes, as it will, when we can't hold up our heads here on the north shore, she shall go with me—if she wants to."

West smiled at her. "You have a big heart, Aunt Bulah."

"And a big body," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent supplemented a little dryly. "I hurt your artistic sense a thousand times a day. But that's neither here nor there—Marie's quaint enough to satisfy your liking for the unusual, so go ahead and win her, then make a home somewhere for yourselves."

"I will," he said firmly. "That's exactly what I want to do. But, Aunt Bulah, I'm still desperately anxious." They had spoken in low tones, now he dropped his voice to a whisper. "Brock has some object in talking and acting as he did tonight. I've been trying to think it out, and I've decided that he is afraid of Marie—he wants her out of the way. He must know that she recognized Mrs. Smith that night in the park. Certainly the woman must have told him about her experience on the train, and they are both of them keen enough to have made the connection. They are afraid of her. And I'm afraid for her. Brock was trying to terrify her tonight—I think she's in actual danger."

The look of grim distress returned to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's face. "They wouldn't dare to hurt her," she said anxiously.

"Their kind will dare almost anything—to remove an obstacle. That incident on the train would be a telling bit of evidence against Mrs. Smith. I believe, as Haslett does, that either she had Mrs. Brant-Olwin's jewels with her on the train, or she had made some journey connected with them."

"If only we could get the jewels into our hands!" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said longingly.

"Yes, I know. But, Aunt Bulah, I'm thinking of Marie," he urged. "Don't keep her here. I don't want harm to come to her. I don't want her to be mixed up in any exploit there may be. I love her, Aunt Bulah—can't you understand?" He was tensely earnest.

"I know, West," she said distressedly, "but where could she go where she would be as safe as she is here? I talked that over with Haslett the morning after she was hurt, and it was his advice to keep her here with me. I was considering you, too. Here you can be in the same house with her."

Send her anywhere that's a distance from here—clear away from all this mess!"

"You talk as if she were a bale of goods!" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent retorted with sudden exasperation. "I've offered her a home with me, I tell you. The child has a mind of her own and a will of her own—I can't pack her off, hither and yon, at my pleasure! She wouldn't accept even her traveling expenses—she's independent. She wouldn't stay here if she didn't think that she's earning her keep. If I showed her that I didn't want her here she'd go into town and work, and that's the worst possible thing she could do. You see, West," she said more calmly.

"I went over the whole situation with Haslett. He thinks it would be a great mistake to let her leave Kent House. Of course, he takes a lawyer's view; he says that to let her fall by any chance into the hands of Mrs. Brant-Olwin's people would be fatal; that she could give them the clue they want. He advised me to keep her here and to attach her to me; make her our friend in every possible way. God knows, I haven't acted out of mere self-interest in offering her a home; I love the child; nevertheless I realized that Haslett was talking sense. And, West, Brock's a crook, like his father, but I won't believe for a moment that he'd do a bodily harm to that child. He wouldn't do it. That woman, might, if she were in terror of capture, as she was on the train, but I don't believe she'd do it deliberately—there'd be too much danger in it for herself. I'm sorry you're worried, but Marie is going to stay here. If between us we can't protect her we're a poor lot." She ended with a decision that dismissed appeal.

"Perhaps you're right, you and Haslett," West said doubtfully, "but I shall be anxious about her—I can't help it—he looked ugly this evening."

"Keep watch over her, West. And make her care for you—that's the important thing."

West was studying the fire. "If only there was some way out of this trouble! Those damned jewels! Aunt Bulah, I haven't meddled with suggestions or advice; Haslett is much more capable of advising than I am; but I've thought for some time that there might be a way out."

"What way?" she asked quickly.

"Ransom the jewels. It makes me sick—let's putting a premium on crime—but isn't it the only way out for us? I believe it's what they're playing for—their deep game. Haslett Haslett ever suggested it?"

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent hesitated. "Haslett has more than suggested it, West," she said finally.

"What do you mean?"

"He made Brock the offer after we talked the morning after Marie was hurt."

"No!"

"Yes, he did. He went to the farm and took Brock aside and made him the offer—four hundred thousand; the full value of the jewels. I gave my consent to his doing it—it was his advice."

"What did Brock say?" West asked scarcely above his breath.

"Haslett said that Brock looked at him without any expression at all, except that the muscles in his face twitched. Then Brock turned his back on him and walked away—not one word."

West had flushed hotly. "God! Think of it being possible to offer such an insult to a Dunbarton-Kent!"

But Mrs. Smith won't. They've counted on your making some such offer—they're clever crooks. She'll demand a stiff sum, but with it divided between them, or shared, Brock will cease to trouble us. He'll go."

"Perhaps Haslett had something of the kind in mind when he said that the one thing was to find Mrs. Smith?" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent asked quickly.

"Of course he did. Think of being rid of this incubus, Aunt Bulah, if it can be settled in that way I'll contribute something toward the ransom—till Haslett so."

"Go see him—talk to him yourself, West."

"I have kept out of it so far, but I will," West said with decision.

"I suppose we can find a safe way of returning the jewels—if we're fortunate enough to get them," she added with a sigh.

As was characteristic of West, he indulged in at least an outward light heartedness. "A safe way! Drop them down her chimney, tie them to her door knob, let her come out from trying on a thousand dollar gown and find them on the seat of her limousine." Then he said longingly, "Life to Marie and a clear future—it's too much to hope for. Don't worry, Aunt Bulah," he said, affectionately. "Right is right, after all."

"One might question the 'right' of what we're doing," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent returned, grimly. "Mrs. Brant-Olwin would probably have a different opinion."

"She loves her pearls," West said, succinctly. Then, "I didn't tell you, I was afraid you'd worry, but she's back—she telephoned me just before dinner."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent looked anxious. "I did hope she would stay away. I'll have to call on her, and I'm a poor dissembler."

"I'd be as friendly to her as possible," West advised. "She feels that you've never really given her your social countenance. It may help us in the future. I've always liked the little woman."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent sat thinking for a time. Then she announced abruptly, "The thing I ought to do—it would make a friend of her—is to give her a party. The right sort, West—a dinner dance, with all the people included who have held off from her, I'd make them come and be charming to her. It would be a triumph for her—she'd forgive our family a good deal, if ever I have to ask a favor of her."

West considered a moment. "Well—why not?" he decided. "Do it. I'll get some men out from town—men she'd like to meet."

"I'll have Haslett—have her meet him. It's just as well she should meet him and like him."

"Surely."

"A week from Friday, that's—" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent began, then paused to listen. "Some one knocked, West!"

"I'll go," he said. "It sounds like Gibbs' circumspet tap," and he rose and went to the door.

West was right; it was Gibbs whose gentle knock had interrupted their conference. "The night watchman is asking to see Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, sir," he announced, and West saw Willetts looming behind Gibbs' portly body.

"It's Willetts, Aunt Bulah," West said.

"Tell him to come in," she answered, apprehensively. "More trouble, I suppose!" Gibbs gave way to Willetts and vanished in the direction of the pantry. West stepped out into the hall, looked up the stairway, and into the adjoining rooms, then returned to the library, closing the door behind him.

"Nobody's about out there, Aunt Bulah. I'll leave you two to talk."

"No; stay," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said, anxiously. "Willetts has something important to tell us."

"It's more a suspicion of mine than anything," Willetts explained. "Just that I'm pretty certain that many a night when we thought Brock safe in his room he's been out, quite likely in town or at the Smith house, or anywhere else he chose to go."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent looked startled and West asked, gravely, "What makes you think so?"

"Well, there was something happened last night—or yesterday rather—the little girl brought a spaniel pup into the garage. She'd been out walking up on the High Road, and Colfax layd her and gave her the dog. When we came back from my driving you to the dressmaker's, Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, I missed her from the garden and was out looking for her and saw Colfax talking to her and saw her bring away the dog. It was all right enough," Willetts added quickly, for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's brow had darkened. "I was there and saw it all, Colfax just noting about as usual and of course wanting to get her into trouble with you over his having given her the dog. Besides, she told me about it; that she didn't want to talk to him and wouldn't answer his questions and didn't want to listen to his grievances. The little girl's all right," Willetts said positively. "The baby spaniel appealed to her, that's all—she's been pretty lonesome. She told me about it; she's all right. This morning when the pup was gone she thought it had gotten out of the garage some way and had gone back to Colfax Hall."

West had been eyeing him keenly. It was evident that Willetts was still another friend Marie had made. "Certainly she's all right, though you didn't always think so," he said. "We don't need to discuss that; just go on with your story."

(Continued Next Sunday.)  
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