

# The Romance of a Million Dollars

## By ELIZABETH DEJEANS

**D**UNBARTON-KENT'S millions are held in trust by his widow for two nephews, Breck and West, and a niece, Bella. They are to divide the fortune provided none commits a crime—and Breck has been reared a thief! Mrs. Brant-Olwin's jewels are stolen, and \$100,000 and some gems disappear from beneath Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's pillow. Breck and a mysterious "Mrs. Smith" are suspected, but he denies all. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent centers her efforts on recovering the gems and protecting the family name. Into this atmosphere of mystery and suspicion walks lovable Marie Angouleme to become chaffouse for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. Gradually Marie learns the family secrets and is attracted despite herself toward the despised Breck. She discovers a love affair between Bella and Allen Colfax, a third nephew; herself receives a proposal from West, and is invited by Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent to become a member of the family. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent reveals that she has offered Breck \$400,000 for the return of the Brant-Olwin jewels, and West boldly tells her she should have made the offer to "Mrs. Smith."

### TENTH INSTALLMENT.

"You Would Make an Excellent Mrs. Smith."

WILLETTS did not like West's tone. All Kent House knew that West was vastly taken with Marie Angouleme, and Willetts had expended some irritated thoughts on the subject. The kind of man the little girl ought to marry was the plain sort, like himself. It was all right enough for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent to be kind to the little girl, but to take her out of her station and foist her into another, marry her to her nephew and things like that, was rank foolishness; there was quite an active jealousy stirring in Willetts. Possibly it was jealousy sensing jealousy that made West eye Willetts so coolly.

Willetts addressed himself pointedly to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. "The little girl was worrying about the pup's being hungry, so while she was with you last evening I got some supper into it and put it to bed in the garage. When the little girl came back and went to her room I locked up the garage and I took the house and garage watch and set Jones about something else. Well, when I unlocked in the morning the pup was gone. I circled that garage a dozen times last night, and there was only one way that pup could have been swiped, and that was by some one's climbing the storehouse roof and letting himself down into the garage through the ventilator windows, then going by the way he came. I'll grant that Breck could have done it, but I won't grant it to any one else about the place," Willetts said, with decision, "and I'll grant it to him only when I happen to be off my guard, for I saw what I thought was his shadow on his window shade until early this morning. Now, what I've come to say is that I'm convinced he's been fooling us this long time—that it's dummy he sets up in his chair whenever he wants to take a midnight stroll."

"But we searched his room a dozen times!" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent exclaimed. "You know how we have searched it for the jewels or some clew to where they might be."

"Sure. And I searched it again tonight while you were all at dinner," Willetts returned, dryly. "There's a big pot-bellied, long-necked water pitcher in his bathroom and a walking stick in his cupboard and a measuring stick just about as long as his shoulders are wide lying on his desk, and a roll of cotton in one of his desk drawers. With plenty of soap out of which to manufacture a nose and chin to stick on in the inverted water pitcher and cotton laid on for hair, with bath towels and his dressing gown draped on the cross stick, made out of his cane and the measuring stick, a stuper man than Breck could manufacture a dummy that would throw quite a respectable shadow. I may be wrong about the soap face and the cotton hair; he may carry a mask and wig about with him in his breast pocket which he uses on the water pitcher; but I venture that some three nights a week, ever since his trouble began, Breck has been at large. The other nights he's there, either with his shades up or down. If you want to deceive the public, even a detective, establish a habit. I take my hat off to him."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's lips had dropped apart and West's face had grown expressionless. It was West who asked the practical question: "How does he get out of the house and in again."

"How did he get into the garage

and out again?" Willetts retorted. "Jones and I can't be on all sides of the house at once! There are two oaks growing close to Miss Bella Dunbarton-Kent's bedroom windows, and she's away half of the time. I've watched those trees pretty carefully. But while I was watching them and Jones was doing his best on the other side of the house, Breck may have been maneuvering the roof and sliding down the front porch pillars. Or the low roof of the servants' quarters would serve him nicely—or any down pipe that came handy. Don't ask me—I know I've done my best."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent had regained her usual harassed expression. "You have, Willetts—you have been a great comfort to me," she assured him. "Go on doing the best you can. I've hoped and hoped that by keeping as close a watch on him as we could that we might find the jewels. And, too, I've wanted the place guarded—if Mrs. Brant-Olwin's detectives were

ing, though she had no great affection for these two, Bella and West, she was considering their future and the future of Kent House.

He broke the silence. "Well, I wish we could get at the goods—that's what Jones and I are here for, of course. I hope they may materialize through that Smith woman. Mr. Haslett's working for that. I guess I'll be off, now I've told you what I'm certain of about the dummy. But there's nothing to be done about it except not to let him or any one else know that we suspect. That's important, for slick though he is, we may be able to trail him some night and get a clew to the jewels." Willetts was anxious to save Marie a possible scolding, so he added: "It might be best not to set the little girl wondering about the way her dog disappeared, so the less said about it to her the better, I should think."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent nodded. "Yes, I'd like someone in this wretched household to be happy—I could even endure the presence of a puppy from Colfax hall. Good night, Willetts."

As soon as the door closed on him West said, thoughtfully, "I suppose that is the way Breck managed his meetings with the Smith woman. I've wondered. But where? Hardly at her house—he'd not risk that—not after the night Marie recognized her." He

at the other." She laughed shortly. "What a situation! It would be comic if it were not so horrible."

"Try to forget it," West urged. "You'll get the jewels and he'll go—I'm convinced of it. Try to think about your party—certainly we owe Mrs. Brant-Olwin anything we can do for her. Go to bed now Aunt Bulah, do—try to sleep."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent rose with a heavy sigh. "I envy that child upstairs—she can sleep. My bed's been a place of torment—for weeks."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent was mistaken; Marie had not slept. Before midnight the house had settled into perfect quiet except for the big clock in the hall below, which tolled the hours and the half hours. When she could be still no longer Marie had sat up in bed with a blanket about her shoulders and had looked out through her windows at the black gulf dotted by occasional lights which indicated the sound. It was a dark night, no moon and no stars. She was afraid to turn on the lights, afraid even to get up and move about her room, for she might startle a nervous household.

She was wretched; she had deceived Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. She had told her half-truths, for it would have been impossible to explain and not break her promise to Colfax. Marie felt a passionate affection for the big woman who had kissed her as one would a daughter. "I ought to tell her everything—it is most dangerous to her interests, such a man as Colfax knowing everything that goes on here and all her plans; yet it is impossible for me to speak. If I should break my promise, Colfax in his anger might do something that would be harmful to the entire family. It is a miserable position for me."

Marie had stared into the darkness and had tormented herself into a state of dazed distress. She had flashes of thought, but mostly

little, but looked assiduously after Marie's comfort. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's face softened when she saw her. "Well! I thought you were still asleep or I'd have brought you down with me. There wasn't a sound in your room, and I meant to let you sleep."

Marie did not say that she had not slept at all and that for the last two hours she had been sitting dressed and waiting for the soft notes of the Chinese gong which had brought the others down to breakfast. "I have been awake some time, thank you, madame. I sat and looked at the pretty room and then at the passing boats upon the water."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent eyed Marie's white face and heavy eyes anxiously. "After breakfast walk a little in the park and later on take a nap. I never sleep well myself in new surroundings."

Marie thanked her, then, bent upon giving pleasure to the two people who were trying to make her happy, she said to West: "From my window I saw you walking in the park this morning, but if you are not tired perhaps you will walk again—with me?"

It cost Marie an effort which made the color come in her cheeks, and then she grew white again, for Breck lifted his eyes and looked at her in a way that made her want to weep, haggard eyes in a set and stony face. Then, swiftly, he looked at West, the steady narrowed look of the man who would knife his rival. West met his eyes as steadily, but without antagonism, merely a calm observance of Breck.

They all saw it. Marie grew pallid and Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent looked apoplectic under the restraint she put upon herself. But West said with quick pleasure: "Will I walk with you? Rather! It's kind of you, little Marie. The jonquils are coming up in the lawn border—I ordered some for you from the florist yesterday. Do you like a garden? To fuss among flowers?"

"My aunt at St. Felix had a most lovely garden. I worked in it often. At the convent I studied flowers, also." Marie knew only that she was making some sort of an answer for it had occurred to her suddenly that a jealous man would look as Breck had looked, appealingly at her, then threateningly at his rival. Marie felt a sudden elation.

West was talking lightly. "You had a 'Botany Book' I suppose, and, under a plain little pressed daisy wrote 'Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum,' and things like that?" There was laughter in his voice, but his eyes were bright and keen.

Breck rose. "Excuse me, please," he murmured, and left the room. He moved with extraordinary lightness and opened and closed the door in a noiseless way that suggested vividly the midnight prowler.

Marie lost all animation; the weight returned to her chest. For a moment she had forgotten completely; forgotten Mrs. Smith, everything. The thought that Breck hated his cousin because of her had made her happy, but the lightfooted way in which Breck had left the room made her feel ill; she felt a sickening self-distrust. She was glad Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent was speaking. Then she was startled by what she heard.

"I am going to give a dinner dance for Mrs. Brant-Olwin, so don't make any engagement for the twenty-first," she was saying to Bella. "I want you to take charge of the decorating; you're good at that."

A ripple of expression disturbed Bella's regular features; Marie thought that she looked taken aback. But she said quietly enough. "Very well, Aunt Bulah." Then, after a pause, "I was going to Philadelphia on the night of the twenty-first—you wouldn't mind if I left before the party was over?"

"No, do as you like," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said with a touch of irritation; "only don't appear to slight Mrs. Brant-Olwin. I want you to go this afternoon to call on her—with me."

Again there was a slight pause. "Of course, I'll go if you think it's best. You've called on her once before, but I never have and she doesn't love me. Perhaps it would be better for me to make friends with her at the party—it would appear a little less as if the entire family were suddenly laying itself at her feet."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent considered a moment. "You're right," she decided. "Besides"—there was ill suppressed irritation in her voice—"you've doubtless made plans of your own for today."

"I was going into town this morning to meet the Brests. I was going for a week's trip south with them," Bella returned imperturbably, "but I can go this evening just as well, and I can come back on the 20th instead of the morning of the 21st, as I in-

she simply suffered. It was abominable what Bella was doing, deceiving her aunt, giving herself to such a man as Colfax. If ever a woman was possessed by a man, that woman was Bella—it was written on the face she had lifted from his shoulder. Undoubtedly when she was absent from Kent House for days at a time and Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent thought she was with friends in the city, she was with Colfax. She was another such woman as Mrs. Smith, secret and dangerous. There must be times when Breck was wretched over what he had done. Perhaps by some means Mrs. Smith had compelled him to do it? Though she ached for a home and kindness, she should not have accepted Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's offer. She should have left Kent House. But if she had gone she would have lived in still greater anxiety, wondering all the time what was happening at Kent House. She was between two fires. And what was she going to do about West? She had promised Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent that she would try to love him.

Daylight is almost always a comfort to frayed nerves; complexities are better defined, more easily grasped, and the fear that lurks in darkness, pressing upon a distressed spirit, withdraws its oppressive hand. Marie brought a white face and a fairly resolute spirit with her to the breakfast table. They were all gathered there, Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent looking tired and grim; West grave until Marie appeared, when his face brightened; Bella looking as impenetrable as usual and with her knitting in her lap, and Breck wearing his usual stony countenance.

It was a silent meal. West ate

"You keep away from Allen or I'll kill you."

about I wanted to know it. But I don't want any more men knowing a secret that's hard to keep. I have perfect confidence in you and Jones, and all any of us can do is our best. But, Willetts, why should Breck want that puppy? I don't understand it."

"Just a bit of defiance," West cut in. "The same object he had in taking the tires and tools. Sometimes I can explain him only by thinking that he's cunningly insane."

"Insane, nothing" Willetts burst out. "His head's in as good condition as his eyes and his feet—he can see in the dark and he can walk as light as a cat. He's a clever man, Breck, or he'd have cleared out long ago with the loot—he knows there's more to be gained by staying—you'd give him more for those jewels than any one else would."

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent and West looked at each other, but said nothing. Willetts saw the exchanged glance, and, as often before, he felt a sincere pity for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. She was a big-hearted, honest woman. It was a great pity she was so bent on protecting the family name. It was partly because she adored her husband's memory. Frequently, when considering the situation, Willetts said to himself: "Damned if I'd be worked by the slick crook! I'd give him over to the law and brave the scandal." Nevertheless, Willetts respected her for the struggle she was mak-

looked at his aunt's troubled face. "Don't worry so, Aunt Buelah," he begged. "What Willetts has told us doesn't alter anything—what we want is the jewels. Their being able to see each other and confer is a help rather than otherwise; they'll arrive at a plan so much the sooner. They want to be rid of the jewels. Let Haslett try to get in touch with her, and you go right on with your party for Mrs. Brant-Olwin. And don't worry so much."

"He has my hundred-thousand dollars, and he's likely to extort a small fortune from me in addition. Why exert himself to steal tires and puppies?" Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said bitterly.

"To accomplish exactly what he has accomplished—keep you worried sick and in dread of him. The more he can worry us—he certainly worried me tonight by his looks and what he said—the more we will pay to be rid of him. That's an easy sum in crook arithmetic."

