

# The Romance of a Million Dollars

## by ELIZABETH DEJEANS

Dunbarton-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 rearred 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 chaffeeuse 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 she has offered Breck \$400,000 for the return of the jewels. Detective Willetta reports that Breck prowls about at night after placing a dummy at a window. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent plans to entertain in honor of Mrs. Brant Olwin, so she will be more lenient when the dreaded exposure comes. Bella tells Marie to "get together with Breck and restore the jewels." Marie finishes back that, with a little paint and a different costume, Bella would "make a good Mrs. Smith." Marie joyously discovers Breck is jealous of West.

### INSTALLMENT XI.

#### Bella, the Mysterious.

They went out together into the gusty April day. The wind clutched at Marie's hat and twisted her skirt about her knees. West pulled his cap down over his eyes and gave Marie a helping hand across the lawn. "I didn't realize it was blowing so hard," he said.

"Upon such a day I wish for my chauffeur's uniform," Marie returned.

"I like you much better as you are. But look there! What's the matter with my statuesque cousin?"

Marie brushed the hair out of her eyes and looked: Fully in the open, half way between the slope of lawn and the sound, stood Bella, her back toward them, apparently staring at the ruffled water. The wind billowed her light morning gown and had loosened her hair, setting it swirling about her head. She presented an extraordinary appearance, altogether out of keeping with her usual severe dignity. Though the wind was cold, she seemed oblivious of it; she suggested an upheaval, the elemental broken loose. Marie looked, then looked away. She said nothing, but her lips tightened.

West scrutinized Marie, but he said nothing until they had struggled into the park. Then he asked her lightly, "Poor old Bella! Something wrong with her—what is it, Marie?"

"Maybe the wind can tell you, monsieur," Marie returned as lightly. "To great dignity a storm is sometimes disturbing."

"I think you could be a whirlwind on occasion, Marie." He eyed her amusedly, yet keenly.

"I have never whirled upon you, monsieur."

It was easy to bandy words now. She felt excited; she could laugh again, and the will to fight was tingling in her blood. Since her talk with Colfax there had seemed nothing to fight for, only the stubborn determination not to be driven from Kent House and a bitter detestation of Mrs. Smith.

"Whirled on me! The Lord forbid!" West said fervently. "I'm being careful—I'm not going to make a nuisance of myself today. Let's take hands and run away from the wind? Come!"

They sped down the slope of the park, literally racing with the wind, and came to a stop at the park wall, laughing and breathless, Marie's hair loose on her shoulders.

"You look—" West said, and stopped. His blonde face was aglow. He was going to help her arrange her hair, but she backed from him. "My hat, monsieur—please hold my hat—until I become respectable."

"O, very well," he said lightly, but his face darkened. He watched her twist up her hair, a consuming gaze that enveloped her, her daintiness, the vivid color in her cheeks, and her parted lips and softly rounded throat. He looked frowningly over his shoulder at the Smith house. "Fancy any one's marring that," he said through his teeth.

"What?" Marie asked, startled by his tone.

"I was thinking of what happened you on the train—to your throat."

"I think such a thing will not happen again," Marie said firmly. "So Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent told you?"

"About that experience? Yes. But I'm not so sure it will not

happen again. It's one of my greatest anxieties."

"I'm not afraid," she said resolutely.

"And I'm sick with fear over you. That woman—" he stopped, Marie felt certain, because he remembered that he must not speak of the family trouble and Mrs. Smith's connection with it. "I believe she's a dangerous criminal," he added.

Marie said nothing. Happily another gust of wind flung her fur tippet in her face. "Ugh! This wind is terrible!" she exclaimed. "I will not again ask a gentleman to walk with me until I have carefully considered the weather. I think we must go back."

"O, not yet!" West objected instantly. "It's been a happy walk for me—you're more like yourself. You've seemed so unhappy ever since you came into Kent House. I want you to come to the cottage with me—I want to show you my workshop. We'll be out of the wind there."

Marie hesitated. She was longing to get back to her room and think.

"Do come," he begged, and he added firmly, "I promise not to make a nuisance of myself. I want to tell you some things, not about myself, but about other people."

Marie yielded; it was a small thing to do for one who had been as kind to her as he had been. Her mind and her heart were full of Breck; she felt excited and hopeful—and sorry for West. It was hard to love and not be loved in return.

They struggled along to the cottage door, and West took a key from his pocket and unlocked it, ushering Marie into a large room. There was only the one room, with a beautifully beamed chapel-like ceiling of dark wood and bookshelves built into the walls. In one side of the room was a wide and deep fireplace, with paneling on either side. There were casement windows above the bookshelves, but the large windows above the paneling on either side of the fireplace were designed to furnish most of the light for the room, and Marie saw at once why Mrs. Smith's house had ruined the cottage, for the foundation wall of the Smith house must have almost entirely shut out the light. The windows were boarded up now; the only light in the room was from the casement windows, which were on the park side of the cottage.

The Smith house stood on a terrace, which was almost on a level with the Kent House park wall. Before the house had been built there had been a restful view of the sound glimpsed through the huge trees of Colfax hall. On a sun clear morning like this the cottage was sufficiently lighted, for the casement windows looked eastward, but even on a sunny afternoon the place must be gloomy. It was a despicable thing to ruin a neighbor's house in that way, Marie thought; no wonder Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent was angry over it.

Marie felt oppressed; Mrs. Smith's baleful presence seemed to hover over the place. The room had been so beautiful, its woodwork chosen evidently because of its exquisite grain. The floor was also of lovely dark polished wood and the furniture of the same wood, carved and richly upholstered. It had been the retiring place of a studious and artistically inclined man; an escape from the big house to perfect quiet. But now there were the melancholy suggestions of an abandoned dwelling; the book shelves were empty; there had been paintings above the bookshelves and they were gone, and so were the rugs. There was a huge divan before the fireplace, but no cushions; in the corner, on the fireplace side of the room, was a wide and heavy and elaborately carved secretary, old-fashioned in its bulk and height, a sort of desk and cupboard combined, and its companion piece was the massive table in the center of the room. But the carving of both was thick with dust; the doors of the secretary hung ajar, and the splendid table was covered with common white oilcloth. The place had been stripped of everything but the furniture, and the hangings at the window had been replaced by ordinary window shades.

On the oilcloth cover of the table were dried lumps of sculptor's clay, some rusty sculptor's tools, soiled water cups, and a box of paints and brushes thick with dust. At the right of the fireplace, against the rich paneling, was a rough pine table, on which were coils of tiny wire, insulators, bits of copper, piles of little disks that looked like miniature talking ma-

chine records, a litter of all sorts of things an electrician might use. There were several nude dolls on the table, from which the body stuffing had been removed, grotesque objects that would seem to have no connection with the electrical apparatus to which wires were attached. The wires were evidently let into the wall from the outside and were attached to the paneling behind the table, then to the apparatus on the table. To Marie it seemed a desecration, using this chapel-like place for a workshop, and the contrivance of an evil mind, shutting out the light from those splendid windows. The gusts of wind struck against the house, as if angry at such a deed.

While Marie looked about her West went to the fireplace and set a match to the fire which was laid there. Then he came back to her. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It seems to me wicked!" she said, indignantly, pointing to the boarded windows. "Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent told me of it."

"It was wicked," he returned decidedly. "Little good may it do to

thoroughly interested now. "It is a most unusual idea," monsieur.

"A good educator, too!" West said, with enthusiasm. "Think of what might be taught children by means of these records. And the stories the children's toys would tell; the Teddy bear or the Uncle Remus rabbit would be wonderful things, instead of mere cotton stuffing made interesting only because of the child's imagination."

"It is most wonderful," Marie agreed. "It would be like becoming a god to a world of children—teaching them through their toys good thoughts and how to live well." She looked at West with respect and admiration. "Such a work as yours must absorb every moment of your time. Had I such an idea, I would work ceaselessly."

"It's what I ought to do—but what I want to do—but Kent House and its troubles drive me wild!" He tossed the record on the table and flung more wood on the fire. "Perhaps there'll be an end of it before long," he said through his teeth, "then I can work in peace." He turned and looked at Marie and broke into a smile. "Tell me, small person, what did you say to my cousin Bella that sent her flying out into the wind? You're potential, you know, in spite of being so tiny."

"I suppose, monsieur, she went into the wind because she wished to do so."

"A sphinx couldn't do better." He sat down beside her, his face grown

saying: her little card house of hope had fallen about her ears, for, if Bella was sitting in the library during that evening when she, Marie, was gazing over the wall at Mrs. Smith, Bella was not Mrs. Smith. She was back again just where she was before she built her house of cards, only she understood Bella somewhat better.

She felt utterly depressed, lifeless. "Thank you that you have told me," she said tonelessly, "and it is kind of you to feel anxiety over me. I think, however, that there is no reason to be fearful."

"Kind!" he said with sudden passion. "I love you—I'm worried to death over you—in more ways than one! I'm tempted to tell you everything! If anything happens to you, it would kill me!" He breathed quickly and ran a nervous hand through his hair. "But—I can't tell you—I don't know that it would do any good, anyway—some women will love a man—in spite of everything—as Bella's doing!"

Then he spoke more quietly. "Listen, Marie; I want to tell you some things about Mrs. Smith. They say she is a foreigner of some sort, probably a Russian. She is a confirmed gambler, and always plays for large sums. She disappears, then appears again, a mysterious woman, and with no apparent connections. Such a woman comes in contact with crooks and thieves—she may well be at the head of some gang of criminals, the most dangerous kind of a woman. If she is in fear of the law—and from your experience with her on the train and from the way she disappeared after you recognized her in the park, I think it's likely—if she is afraid of you, she would not hesitate to put you out of the way. You see, dear, for a number of reasons, I'm desperately anxious about you. I told you once I wanted you to stay at Kent House, but that was before I realized the danger you were in here. Aunt Bulah doesn't realize it; she doesn't know to what desperate lengths crooks and thieves will go when they are hard pressed; but I do. She wants you here, but, if she felt it was for your good, I know she would make a home for you somewhere else, help you in any way she can. So would I. It's because I love you unselfishly that I'm begging you to go away from Kent House for a time—only a little time. Marie—until we are certain that that woman—he pointed to Mrs. Smith's house—"will not come back, and until there is a happier state of things in Kent House itself. Marie, I beg you to go—for your sake I beg you to go!" He ended in passionate pleading.

Marie made no answer. She understood so much better than he thought she did why he urged her to go "for a time"; if they ransomed the jewels Mrs. Smith would go, and so would Breck, and Kent House would be at peace. Perhaps it would be best for her to go, she thought despairingly; "against hope, she had believed in hope."

She ran her fingers absently over the upholstery on the arm of the divan, thinking of the future; how would she be able to endure it? Then her forefinger touched something, a hair clung to its moisture, giving her a queer thrill, a hair from the pelt of some animal. Marie lifted her hand and looked at the hair, then looked at it more closely. A wave of heat passed over her, and she sat upright, staring at her hand.

"What is it?" West asked, surprised, and Marie answered involuntarily: "It is a hair from the tail of a sable." She was seeing distinctly the row of tails on Mrs. Smith's sable stole—the light above their berths had made the hairs glisten; they were unusually long and beautiful, those hairs, like this one.

West took her hand and looked at the hair; then looked into her startled eyes. "You're certain?" he asked.

"Yes," she was thinking, "How did it get here?"

"So this is where they—!" He caught himself up. "It's a hair from some dog," he declared. "When anybody says 'sable' in my presence I have visions of Mrs. Smith. Ugh! I've worried about you until my nerves are on edge." He sprang up, shaking his shoulders. "Let's get out of here, dear—where the air's more wholesome."

Marie was thinking of Mrs. Smith and of another who must have been beside her on the divan; many times she had wondered where it was they met. She looked up at West with wide hurt eyes. "Do others than yourself have the key to this place?"

"Yes, there are several keys. But do rub that thing off your finger, then forget it." He held out his hand to help her to rise.

Marie started to rise, but she held the hair tightly between her thumb and forefinger. Then she lost her feet, for they were startled by a thunderous bang and a rush of wind into the room which swept up the ashes in the fireplace and

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Fully in the open, half way between the lawn and the sound, stood Bella, her back toward them, apparently staring at the ruffled water.

those who did it! But come over to the fire. It's as cold as a vault in here."

Marie followed him. "See," he said, "this is my work table. It looks as if I spent my time dissecting dolls, doesn't it?"

Marie was more interested in the havoc Mrs. Smith had wrought; Bella would be quite capable of doing a think like this. "I do not see how you can work here," she said, still indignant. "To me this is like a destroyed church—it is pitiful."

"I know, but I wanted quiet, dear. Who could work in Kent House? Breck used the place first—he used to sleep here and do his studying here; then Bella did some clay modeling here; that's her litter on the table. When she gave it up I took to working here in the mornings. It's the only time the light is any good. Then, too, it was the only place where I could have my electric wires strung around without inconvenience to any one—up at the house Aunt Bulah would be in terror of my setting things afire."

He took up one of the disks from the table. "Sit down and I'll tell you what I've been trying to do—my model's in Washington, so I can't show it to you. I have been working over an electric contrivance to put into the body of a doll. I want to manufacture a life-like, talking doll, controlled by electricity. The speeches for the doll are on these little records. There's no reason why it can't be done, and think what a wonder and delight it would be to a child! Think of a dinner party of dolls, and their conversation carried on just by turning on a switch. It would make a fascinating entertainment for children, wouldn't it?"

Marie looked at him wide-eyed,

"Bella is one of the people I want to talk about. Don't quarrel with her, Marie. I think Bella has her serious troubles, though I don't know what they are, exactly. I do know that under that cold surface of hers she's seething and that she doesn't love you. I know that Aunt Bulah seems never to have discovered that under all her calm Bella is a violent woman. She can be wildly jealous and revengeful, and that kind of a woman is dangerous; don't give her an opportunity to hurt you. Let me explain a little: The night Breck and Colfax fought and you were hurt, Bella and I were sitting in the library—we had been there all evening. Then Gibbs came in and asked for some lint and stuff which was in Bella's closet and, though Gibbs declared he didn't know what had happened, Bella jumped to the conclusion that Colfax was hurt. She went wild. 'Allen's hurt! Allen's hurt!' she kept repeating and she quieted down only when I went out and found out just what had happened and came back and told her. Then she flew at you. 'So she went down there to meet Allen!' she kept insisting. It was a revelation to me—evidently she cares for Colfax, a thing she has kept from everybody. If it's true, I'm sorry for Bella. Any woman who persists in clinging to a man in spite of every warning and in spite of her own knowledge of him is simply committing suicide!" Then he added, more quietly: "But not for anything would I make trouble for Bella by talking about what I suspect. I felt I must tell you, though, for it's not Mrs. Smith only that I'm afraid might do you a harm; Bella's a danger, too."

In the beginning, Marie had listened with interest, but now she was not thinking of what he was