

# The Romance of a Million Dollars

By ELIZABETH DEJEANS



## THE STORY THUS FAR.

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 reared a thief. Mrs. Brant-Olwin's jewels, valued at \$400,000, 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 chausseuse for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. Gradually Marie learns the family secrets and, despite herself, falls in love with the despised Breck. She discovers a love affair between Bella and Allen Colfax, a third nephew; receives a proposal from West, and, at Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's request, becomes a member of the family. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent arranges a party to bring Mrs. Brant-Olwin—and, incidentally, Marie—into the fold of the socially elect, and to win the former's friendship against the day of the dread revelation. Breck and "Mrs. Smith" vanish. Marie finds an anonymous note in which the return of Mrs. Brant-Olwin's pearls is offered for \$500,000. A flag is flown from Kent House to signal the writer that the offer is accepted. Marie is almost at the point of accepting West on the evening of the party. Mrs. Brant-Olwin, arriving at Kent House, breathes revenge against the man who stole her jewels.

## 14TH INSTALLMENT The Double Cross.

A number of young people came in, and it was evident they liked Mrs. Brant-Olwin. They shook hands with Marie and looked at her interestedly, but none of them paused to talk to her; they were busy greeting each other. Marie stood beside Mrs. Brant-Olwin, for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent had told her to stand there; Bella was also in the receiving group and West stood near with a watchful eye on Marie. He looked handsome, Marie thought. She felt proud of him. After all it was her dream come partially true, "a man of worth and distinction."

It was evident that West liked Mrs. Brant-Olwin; he made her say amusing things. It was evident that she was either liked or was going to be liked by almost everybody. She said something bright or amusing to every one. Marie was glad, both for Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's and Mrs. Brant-Olwin's sake. She liked Mrs. Brant-Olwin quite as much as she had liked her when she first met her.

Burton Haslett had been among the first to arrive and, after talking to Mrs. Brant-Olwin, he stood beside Marie for some time. Marie liked his gravely courteous manner, but not the intent way in which he looked at her. Marie smiled at him from beneath her lashes. He was speaking to her when Mrs. Brant-Olwin touched her arm.

"Who is that stunning looking man just coming in? A relation? He must be."

In the entrance to the drawing room, standing tall and straight, one white gloved hand touching the front of his vest, his head thrown back slightly as he looked at the gathering, was Breck. He was in evening dress, it accentuated his natural air of distinction. He was a strikingly handsome man and unmistakably a Dunbarton-Kent; Mrs. Brant-Olwin's exclamation was not surprising.

Marie could not answer. Happily their little group was looking at Breck and not at Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, for she blanched as at the sight of a ghost. A flash of vivid anger crossed West's face and Bella stiffened into ice. Breck could see how they looked at him.

Yet he came forward, lightness and strength in every movement, unembarrassed and with a casual glance for all but Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. When he stood before her he said, as any nephew would speak to an aunt he had surprised by an unexpected appearance, "I met Ward Wakefield in town; you know we were in France together, Aunt Bulah. At the last moment he was unable to come and asked me to take his place—he sent you this note," and, with his eyes steadily on her, he handed her the bit of white which he had been holding against his vest.

They were quick in an emergency, that family. Even Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said with only a trifling thickness in her voice, "I'm glad you were able to come, Breck," and West, who had come to her rescue, introduced Breck with graceful ease: "Mrs. Brant-Olwin, you have never met my cousin, Breckenridge. Ward Wakefield was more successful than we've ever been in persuading him to attend a party."

Breck bowed over Mrs. Brant-Olwin's hand, and she said with genuine interest and sympathy: "You've been an invalid since the war, haven't you? I've always

wanted to meet you. I'm real glad you're better and beginning to go out."

"So am I, Mrs. Brant-Olwin—particularly as I am going to sit beside you at dinner." It was quietly but distinctly said and accompanied by his slow smile, which impressed Mrs. Brant-Olwin, as it had impressed Marie, as pathetic.

Marie had slipped away, and Breck met Haslett's extended hand. They shook hands, a steady look into each other's eyes. Then Bella's cool voice said at Breck's shoulder: "You must meet some of these people before dinner, Breck. Come over and talk to Mrs. Granveston."

West and Haslett had moved to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's side. "What does he mean by this?" she asked, scarcely above her breath.

Greene must watch her diamonds." "Perhaps that's what brought him," Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent said with bitter contempt.

Marie lived through the dinner in a sort of painful dream set to music, the all pervading organ. She saw Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent at the far end of the table, somewhat pale, but the usual capable hostess, and Haslett beside her. Every one was talking and Marie was conscious that she herself talked. She did her best to please Mr. Granveston and John van Rouvervant. John van Rouvervant paid her compliments; all she needed to do was to smile at him and occasionally answer brightly; besides the Countess de Lanticelle was on his other side and she was exceedingly vivacious. She talked alternately to West and John van

She spoke to West occasionally; otherwise she seemed to be absordedly interested in Breck; theirs was a tete-a-tete almost throughout the dinner. Marie felt that Mrs. Brant-Olwin was an independent sort of woman. She would not care in the least whether any one remarked, as John van Rouvervant did, that "the little widow seems to have fallen head over heels for that handsome young fellow."

Marie heard the remark with commingled feelings, an ache in her throat, and a sick apprehension. From the moment Breck had appeared she felt wretchedly foreboding. That immobile, inscrutable face of his and his pathetic smile that made one want to weep from pity. She wished she could hear what he was saying; she felt an aching envy of Mrs. Brant-Olwin and at the same time a certain sympathy. She noticed the footman, who rarely moved far from his position behind the two; his face was familiar to Marie; then she realized that he was Walter Greene, the young man who had tried to question her on the day after her arrival at Kent House—a detective. And behind

ing, as if loath to part. Breck bent and said something to her and she nodded brightly, then turned to West, who stood waiting. Then Breck offered his arm to Marjorie Caswell—he had brought her in to dinner. When Mr. Granveston took Marie into the ballroom Breck and his dinner partner were dancing and West was dancing with Mrs. Brant-Olwin. But, first, West had whispered to Marie, "The next dance is mine, dear?"

As she circled the room Marie noted how Breck danced, steadily, lightly, and easily, his face utterly changeless even when he talked to his partner. Mrs. Brant-Olwin and West seemed to be enjoying their dance, but when they passed Breck Marie noticed how Mrs. Brant-Olwin looked at him over West's circling arm, a grave, tender smile, and he smiled his rare smile in return. "She is beginning to love him," Marie said to herself.

Then Mr. Granveston took her to the group that was about Mrs. Granveston. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent was there and Haslett with her, and Willetts was near them. Marie spoke to Willetts, a soft "good evening," and he smiled and flushed, then busied himself with a chair which he offered to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. "No, I'm getting the bridge people together," she said. "Come along with me—I'll need you." She patted Marie's cheek affectionately. "Have a good time, child—West is looking after you." Then she moved on, Haslett carrying her scarf and fan, and followed by Willetts.

West claimed the next dance. "This dance, sweetheart, then I must do my duty," he said, "but after that—"

He held her as a lover would, the close a man longs to make closer. But he talked little, and Marie was grateful to him. When she stole a glance upward she saw that his eyes were bright and watchful. He had great self-control, but he was excited; he was apprehensive, just as she was. Breck was with Mrs. Brant-Olwin now, and Marie saw that from behind a group of people Walter Greene was watching them; they were talking while they danced, in the same absorbed way in which they had talked at dinner. Breck's head bent to catch what she said and her face lifted to his.

Gradually the ballroom cleared. Groups moved into the drawing rooms; those who did not play cards were talking together. Bella was not dancing; she was with the card players. West brought partners to Marie: she found herself surrounded by young men, most of them mere boys. She felt at ease with them, and most of her partners wanted a second or third dance. She wondered achingly how much longer she must continue to dance, conscious all the while of those two, Breck and Mrs. Brant-Olwin, dancing together.

She allowed herself to be led into the conservatory, but then Breck brought his partner into the conservatory and they stood talking together. Mrs. Brant-Olwin's hand in his, as if he were bidding her a lingering goodby. Then Walter Greene came in and began searching for an imaginary object behind the palms. Marie burned with a sick anger. Where was Breck going? To Mrs. Smith? Was he parting with Mrs. Brant-Olwin in this intimate fashion while Mrs. Smith sold Mrs. Brant-Olwin's jewels to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent? Was all this attention to Mrs. Brant-Olwin simply a cover to the things which had happened elsewhere?

It had been most noticeable, Mrs. Brant-Olwin had danced with others; she had made flying visits into the drawing rooms and into the card room, she had been everywhere at once, not forgetful that she was the guest of honor. But, when the party settled down to cards and dancing, she had danced again and again with Breck. And, save for his duty dance with Marjorie Caswell, Breck had danced with no one else. Not once throughout the entire evening had Marie been able to detect so much as a glance in her direction. And now he was going—where? Mrs. Brant-Olwin went with him into the music room. Then Marie saw Mrs. Brant-Olwin talking to Bella in the drawing room. Breck must have gone. He had gone without a word or a look. Marie's fingernails dug into the palms of her clinched hands. She smiled at the boy who was telling her of his football achievements and wanted to scream. From the moment she had longed and longed to believe in Breck, and he had dealt her blow after blow. There was nothing left for her but allegiance to those who had shown her affection, tender consideration.

Then West took her away from her partner. They danced, and Marie felt the excitement West was trying to curb. "I love you little Marie—I love you," he whispered. His oddly light eyes



She stood close to the door and listened.

"To cover his tracks," West answered, and Haslett said, "There is no telling. You have the money with you still?"

"In the belt—next to me. They couldn't get it without killing me."

"They would never attempt anything like that," Haslett said decidedly. "Don't be anxious; I shall not leave your side all evening and I'm going with you tonight. I'll tell Greene not to take his eyes from him and we must have Willetts close to us. They are not planning a double-cross—I think as West does, that he came in order to appear to have no connection with the thing—he's looking to the future. Is Wakefield's note genuine?"

"It seems to me." She slipped it into West's hand. "You know his handwriting better than I—I know they were together in France."

West went into the hall for a few minutes, then came back. "Wakefield wrote it—you'll have to give him Wakefield's place.

Rouvervant, or to both of them. She seemed to admire West extremely.

But to Mr. Granveston, Marie was forced to pay closer attention, for he talked to her of Canada. In the early days his father had made a fortune in the fur trade. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent had shown good judgment when she placed Marie between the two elderly gentlemen; John van Rouvervant had a penchant for pretty girls and Mr. Granveston would appreciate her. Both thought her charming and Mr. Granveston became really interested, for Marie had much to tell him of the present day fur trade.

But it was of the two at West's right of whom Marie was acutely conscious; Breck and Mrs. Brant-Olwin; of Breck's face, grave, except occasionally when he smiled. He did not forget to talk now and then to the girl on his right, Marjorie Caswell, Mrs. Granveston's granddaughter, but it was to Mrs. Brant-Olwin he gave his attention.

Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent stood Willetts. Marie had recognized him at once, though he looked strange in a footman's livery. Why were they there? What did they think would happen? And she must sit there and talk and smile like these others who suspected nothing.

Just before they left the table the organ sank into silence. For a few minutes there was only the sound of voices, then suddenly the orchestra in the ballroom invited them to forsake the banquet room. As they left the table Mr. Granveston said: "I am going to take a dinner party's privilege and claim the first dance. I'm over 60, but thank Heaven, I still have the use of my feet—I was a great dancer back in the old Quebec days. You dance, of course—a little fairy like you?"

Marie danced! Many a soldier she had delighted. She smiled at him. "I dance a little, monsieur—you shall see." But she was watching Breck and Mrs. Brant-Olwin; they stood together talk-