

The Romance of a Million Dollars

(Continued From Page Seven.)

By Elizabeth Dejeans

were shinning; Marie knew he was to be put off no longer.

Before the dance was over he stopped suddenly and drew her into the conservatory. He took her to a couch behind the palms. "Now I want my answer," he said. He put his arm about her; for the moment he looked as grim as Breck. "What is it, Marie?"

Marie had determined on her answer, but suddenly her resolution failed her. "Monsieur—have patience and wait a little, until—"

A wild look crossed his face. "I won't wait!" He caught her to him, kissed her again and again, pantingly, her head bent back against his circling arm, his hand beneath her chin holding her lips to his. He held her in a grip of steel. "Are you his—or mine?" he panted against her lips. "I will have—my answer!"

Marie lay perfectly still. When he lifted his head and looked down at her she lay motionless and with eyes closed. She looked strange; her face looked pinched and shadows circled her eyes.

He loosed his hold. "Marie!" he said sharply. "Look at me!"

She drew herself up slowly and pressed her hands to her face, but she said nothing. There were long moments of perfect silence.

West's flush had faded. "What is it?" he demanded. He looked like a man who had lost everything on a throw of the dice.

Marie drew a long breath, then she straightened. "It is only that I know now—how greatly a man can suffer. I wish to be forgiven that I have not understood." The color had risen slowly to her cheeks and her eyes grew brilliant. "I have put uncertainty away forever—and the man who is despicable. I feel happy." She slipped her hand into his, her head bent. "Monsieur—do you not understand?"

He had not realized until her hand lay in his. "Marie!" He drew her to him, breathing his relief. "I thought—I had lost!" He regained his usual self-control. "If you are happy, I am the happiest man alive. I know you well, little Marie—if you say you are happy, that you have put away a man who is—unworthy—you are speaking the truth." He took her hand and kissed it; took a ring from his pocket and slipped it on her finger. "It's a Dunbarton-Kent ring, my father's gift to my mother," he said gravely.

Marie looked at it, a cluster of diamonds in an old-fashioned setting. "I am glad it is of the family," she said softly. She lifted her hand and pressed the ring to her cheek, turned her lips to it and kissed it, then looked at him with shining eyes. "To your family I shall give devotion and you I shall try to reward as you deserve. And now, monsieur, I wish so much to go to my room for a little and think of what has happened. Will you excuse me for a little time?"

West laughed softly. "You are a quaint being, my little Marie. But you're much of a woman; when I let myself go, loosed my hold on the caveman, I won you; and now you want to dream a little, shut away in your room. But I want to talk of the future. When—?"

He had stopped abruptly. Marie had not noticed, but West had seen through the screen of palms; Walter Greene had come into the conservatory and was looking around him as if in search of some one. "I'll be back in a few moments, dear," West said hur-

riedly to Marie. "Please don't go till I come back," and he went to Walter Greene.

The detective said something to him, then they left the room together. Marie's hand went to her heart. "In my happiness I have forgotten!" she said half aloud.

She sprang up and started to follow them. She had almost reached the banquet room when some one caught her by the arm. "Wait a minute, Marie Angouleme."

It was Bella who had stopped her. "I want to speak to you," she said coolly. She was dressed in street clothes and carried a handbag. She looked as if ready for a journey, and Marie remembered that Bella had said that she was leaving that night, before the party was over.

As always, Bella aroused vivid antagonism in Marie; unconsciously she brushed her arm where Bella's cold fingers had rested. "Speak quickly, then, mademoiselle—I wish to go to my room," Marie returned curtly.

There was a mocking gleam in Bella's eyes. "I was going to advise you to go—after I've told you something that will interest you. Come over here behind the palms where people won't see us."

Marie hesitated, then followed her, and Bella said, without preamble: "The jewels are going to be turned over to Aunt Bulah tonight in exchange for \$500,000." Then her lip curled in scornful amusement at Marie's suddenly widened eyes. "Mrs. Smith has done pretty well, hasn't she, behind your back? Aunt Bulah got their offer last night and accepted it, and today at noon she got a note fixing the place of meeting—the cottage, at half past two tonight. They give her permission to take two people with her—she's going to take Haslett and a detective. It'll be an interesting meeting—I thought you'd like to know," Bella added sardonically.

Marie said nothing. She looked at Bella with eyes that did not see her; she was thinking.

"I knew you would be interested," Bella continued with cool enjoyment. "I thought you might like to have this key to the cottage," and she held it out to Marie in the palm of her hand. "You're not likely to let her walk off with him—and \$500,000 dollars. It's a considerable sum, even when divided by three."

Marie looked at the key, then she took it, but she did not utter a word.

Bella turned to leave her, the smile still curving her lip. "I won't keep you from your room any longer. Let us hope that somebody cleverer than either one of you three hasn't double-crossed you. Goodby, Marie Angouleme."

Marie paid no attention to her going; she held the key tightly in her hand and stood still thinking. Her little face carven. Five hundred thousand dollars! And worse, an abominable scheme, theft and extortion, being brought to a successful conclusion! Had she not said to West, "To your family I shall give devotion?" Marie's lips tightened and her eyes grew hard.

She watched for a few moments, until there was no one in the conservatory, and then she stole out and went quickly through the banquet room and the music room and cut across the drawing room into the hall. No one stopped her; in the ballroom they were dancing the last dance before supper, the waiters were arranging the chairs

in the banquet room. Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent was at the far end of the drawing room, talking to some people who were leaving. Haslett was not with her, but Willetts stood not far away.

Marie gained the upper hall and her bedroom door; her hand was on the knob; then she paused, startled, for she heard some one speaking in her room. She recognized West's voice, raised in anger: "This is some of his work I tell you. What is the use of asking why he did such a thing? Why has he done a dozen other unaccountable things. Aunt Bulah will never forgive this last outrage, nor will I. Let him ever dare to show his face at Kent House again!"

Marie did not go in. She stood close to the door and listened. It was Haslett who answered sternly. "The pearls have been here; they have been hidden here. There is the proof of it—look at those pieces of chamois and that ring that was overlooked. The pieces of chamois have the imprints of pearls. The jewel box that held the collection was bulky—the jewels were wrapped separately so they could be put into this narrow space in her trunk. I'm not accusing anybody—but you can see for yourself where jewels have been. Greene made the discovery—it was understood when he came out here he would make a final search. He reported to you, and not to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, for she's at the breaking point as it is."

West's voice was milder. "Yes, of course. But I know Marie had nothing to do with it. And there's nothing we can do—except to wait and see what happens tonight. The important thing is to get the jewels."

"But will we get them? Whoever took them out of this trunk; was in a hurry, a thief relieving a thief of his plunder, it seems to me."

"Or Breck taking them from the place where he had put them," West said impatiently. "Doubtless he had his reasons for putting them there, and certainly there is a good reason for his having removed them—they have to have them tonight."

It was Walter Greene's voice that cut in. "I went through that trunk when we got it from the boarding house two months ago. There was no double bottom to it then—I'd take my oath on it. And no pistol in the trunk, either. It's an amateur's job, anyway, the way that lining's been taken off and put back. Any one could detect it. Miss Angouleme would have, if she ever went to the bottom of her trunk. Perhaps she might throw some light—"

"Mention Miss Angouleme's name again and I'll throw light into you!" West interrupted furiously. "I know what he's capable of—any scheme to discredit her! I've felt from the beginning that they'd do her a harm if they could. She has no more idea that her trunk has been tampered with than Aunt Bulah has. Miss Angouleme's as honest as the day—any one who intimates anything else shall answer to me!"

"There, there," Haslett said. "No one is intimating anything. I want to get the pearls tonight—that is all that's worrying me. We can do our investigating and suspecting afterwards. Greene, put those wrappings back in the false bottom and put back the lining as nearly as possible as you found it. Put the ring back, too, and the

pistol. Pack the trunk just as it was, and put it back in the closet where it was. We'll go, and you can lock the door again. Keep close watch on this room, and Jones will be watching outside. Willetts is going with us to the cottage."

Haslett and West were coming out, for Marie heard the key turn in the lock. She sprang away from the door.

Across the hall Bella's door stood ajar, offering her shelter, and Marie reached the room and closed the door just as Haslett and West came out of her bedroom. As on the train, Marie stood braced against the door; as a farewell the enemy had dealt her a telling blow; fastened suspicion on her, and suspicion is a difficult thing to combat; there had been good reason for Bella's look of triumph.

It was some moments before Marie moved from the door. Bella had left her light burning; the room wore a denuded look; and the little things a woman collects about her were gone. Evidently Bella had taken all her belongings.

For a few moments Marie walked the floor, her clenched hands pressed to her burning temples. She was angrier than she had ever been in all her life before, a profound, settled rage, a consuming sense of outrage that demanded reparation. "A doublecross," Bella had said; well, it would be something more than that! But she must not stay here—her plan would succeed only if she was careful. Walter Greene would come out of her room in a few minutes and be on the watch; both he and Haslett suspected her; they had always suspected her.

Marie put the key Bella had given her in her bosom. Then she set the door ajar and looked out. The door of her room was closed still, and she saw no one, so she stole out and went downstairs. There they were still at supper, and Marie went to the card room, where refreshments were being served, and sat between Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent and Mrs. Granveston. The latter said, "My dear, your eyes look like great black saucers and your cheeks like two flames," and Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent patted her shoulder. "Don't tire yourself out—go to bed whenever you want to."

But for her own flushed cheeks, Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent would have looked haggard; her eyes were strained and tired.

Then West searched her out and she danced with him several times, smiling softly at the things he said to her. At last Marie went to her room and West went with her to her door. It was 1 o'clock. "I am most sleepy and tired," Marie sighed wearily. "I shall sleep so soundly even thunder could not wake me."

"You've promised to tell Aunt Bulah in the morning, Marie," he said, and kissed her.

"Yes, she promised again; her eyes were almost closed."

But when alone, with her door securely locked, Marie was wide awake. She turned on the lights and drew down the window shades.

Without instituting any apparent search, she made sure that there was no one hidden in her room, in her bathroom, or in her clothes closet. Then, with her closet door half closed, she opened her trunk and took from it her chauffeur's uniform, but she wasted no time in examining the trunk. She took out the pistol, hesitated,

then put it back again in the trunk; her chauffeur's uniform she left on the floor of the closet. Going back into her room, she undressed, donned her night dress, and, going to the window, raised the shades; any one who was watching without would have a glimpse of her in night dress and with hair down. Then she turned out the lights and got into bed.

But Marie did not stay there; in less than 10 minutes she crept out cautiously, and, as many and many a time when a light would have been a target for a shell, she dressed in the dark. She twisted up her hair in a knot and put on her chauffeur's uniform, even her thick leather driving gloves. Then she went to the window, crawling on her hands and knees, and when she raised her head cautiously above the sill and looked out. The guests had not all gone yet; there were several cars collected beyond the porte cochere.

Marie sat crouched and saw one car after the other circle the driveway and watched their tail lights vanish in the park. There was only one car left. Mrs. Brant-Olwin's limousine, and her chauffeur was having trouble with it; he could not start it. Mrs. Brant-Olwin stood in the porte cochere, and West tried to help the chauffeur discover what the trouble was. They both gave it up finally, and it was arranged that West should take Mrs. Brant-Olwin home in his roadster. He brought it from the garage and Mrs. Brant-Olwin climbed in laughingly beside him. Her chauffeur seated himself on the running board. Then the roadster slipped along the driveway and disappeared in the park. Some one turned out the light in the porte cochere; there was darkness and quiet on that side of the house.

Marie crawled over to the door into the hall and laid her ear to the crack. Presently several people came upstairs and went into Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's room; Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent and Haslett, possibly Willetts with them, Marie thought, and they would wait there until it was time for them to go to the cottage. It must be 1:30. Green was on watch in the hall, probably, and Jones might be stationed where he could watch her windows. But she would have to risk that; she dared not delay any longer.

Marie stole back to the window and cautiously straddled the sill. She reached and laid hold of the ropes attached to the flag pole which she had noticed in the morning. Gradually she drew herself out until she hung by her arms. There was a moment of smothering terror lest the ropes should break; they gave a little; her body sank suddenly a foot or so lower than the window sill, a sickening sensation. But she clung to the ropes then let herself down hand under hand, setting her teeth against the agony in her strained shoulders.

She reached the ground at last, and she sank down in exhaustion; until her arms ached less, she could not move. She lay close pressed against the house, smothering her heavy breathing, dreading that she would be discovered.

But she was not molested. Then she began her crawling progress across the lawn, across the driveway, and into the park. She crawled on hands and knees, lay flat every now and then and listened, then crawled on.

(To Be Continued.)

The \$10,000 Beauty

(Continued From Page Four.)

By Henry Kitchell Webster

that she hadn't had any expenses so far, which, of course, was literally true. But they took it for a beautiful gesture, the final perfect touch of the southern aristocrat.

"The joke of it is, you know, that Marguerite wrote the story that impressed you so much in absolutely good faith. So many well bred southern people talk badly that there was nothing in the girl's speech to give her away. And all the rest of the minutiae fitted in. Her dress, her air, her reticence, even her wanting nothing but coffee for breakfast."

"But about 11 o'clock they brought her around to me to photograph, and after she'd sat for about 15 minutes she began to cry. When I asked her what the matter was she said she was hungry. She was, of course, simply starving. She'd been too excited to eat any lunch the day before. She hadn't had a chance to dine, and the reason she'd declined breakfast was because Marguerite had handed her the bill of fare and the sight of the prices had paralyzed her with horror. She had 22 cents in her ribbon bag at that time and she wasn't dead sure that she wasn't expected to pay for what she ate. Naturally I took

her out and fed her full. And in the course of the next couple of hours she told me the story. An amusing one, don't you think? Different, anyhow, from the one Marguerite printed."

And here Zachary unlocked his legs, looked at his watch, and yawned, under the impression, apparently, that he'd reached the end. "Good Lord!" I cried, "you can't stop there."

But Zachary apparently thought he could. At least, he pretended he did. All the response I got to my first attempts to learn what had happened to the girl since was a vituperative attack upon my profession. He said he thought most short story writers—and he didn't even in mere politeness except me ought to be in jail, and would be if the courts took proper views in the matter of responsibility. We'd be found to be accessories before the fact in about half the non-professional crimes that were committed nowadays. We poisoned people's minds with romantic ideas about what they were entitled to. He went on at great and tiresome lengths about this and I'd about given him up when he swooped down to earth again and snatched Rosemary Brown's case as an example.

"What happened to her?" he quoted accusingly. "What could happen to her? The girl was a simple fanatic. She found out that she was of age in Illinois and that disposed of the last chance, if there'd been one, of her going back to Bowling Green."

"I got them to take her in at the Carolina—I've some friends there who promised her a wing—and she settled down as serene as if her \$10,000 had been as many shares of bank stock. Outside the way she spent money for clothes there was nothing silly about her actions. It was just her fundamental idea that was insane. She was living up to that southern aristocrat stuff that Marguerite had wished on her. Some day a beautiful young prince was going to leap from his limousine on the boulevard and fling himself at her feet."

"I wanted her to get a job before the last of the celebrity died out—while the getting was good—but it was weeks before she would listen. Nice and friendly and grateful and all that, but completely impervious—solid ivory! At last, though, I picked up something that interested her."

"You know Braddock's, of course, the big advertising agent. Well,

he was going to launch a campaign on a new condensed milk—Cornflower is the name of it. He wanted a cornflower girl. Exclusive, do you see. He was going to teach 50,000,000 people to associate that face with cornflower milk and with nothing else. He was willing to pay a hundred a week indefinitely—for a year, at least."

"Rosemary didn't bite at that hard, but she agreed to go and see Braddock about it and she came back from his office all signed up and with that kind of look I've told you about, as if she were walking in her sleep. I didn't know what sort of fool idea she might have in her head, but I warned her that Braddock was a married man with a couple of grown up children. She said she knew that. She'd met the son that afternoon. He'd come around, while she was waiting in the outer office, to see about getting an advance on his allowance. Well, there it was!"

"I hope," I remarked severely, that you warned the father at once."

"No chance," said Zachary. "He went up to Charlevoix for a month that same day, and it certainly wasn't my fault that he left young Jim behind. And when the boy began hanging around the studio

I thought I might as well use him. He was keen on posing and he was a lot more the type I needed for that work with her than anything else I could hope to get."

"It is a bit awkward," he conceded, avoiding my eye and trying to maintain a false air of unconcern. "How well Braddock will like having his daughter-in-law's face plastered all over the United States in condensed milk advertisements I don't know."

"Daughter-in-law!" I echoed feebly. "Already!"

Zachary nodded. Married this morning. And came into the boulevard studio to have their pictures taken. Didn't know they were going to find me there and were as startled as I was. I hope Braddock does forgive them," he added. "I took about \$200 worth of pictures of her, in her wedding dress and so on. She wanted a whole set to send to Amy Belle."

What I couldn't forgive Zachary for was his revolting hypocrisy in talking virtuously to me about accessories before the fact; and this I plainly told him.

"Well," he said, pretty meekly for him, "with a fanatic like Rosemary on your hands, you're lucky to get out at that."

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