

# The Romance of a Million Dollars

By Elizabeth Dejeans

**THE STORY THUS FAR.**  
**P**RETTY Marie Angouleme, chauffeuse employed by Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, social leader with an income from millions, discovers there is an air of distrust and dread about the household, which includes Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's two nephews, Breck and West, and a niece, Bella. Even Marie is not held above suspicion of being a spy or detective. Finally, although attracted to the somber Breck, she finds a friend in West. Wandering about the estate, she traces music to a "spite house" built by a mysterious "Mrs. Smith," and recognizes the player as the terrible "woman in sable" who had tried to strangle her. She is about to scream when Breck puts his hand over her mouth and is felled by Allen Colfax, third nephew, who is distressed by Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent. When Marie awakes, Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent is attending her injuries. One of Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's detestable reveals Breck has visited Mrs. Smith and she has fled; he tells her she had best be ready to flee. West, repulsed in a proposal of marriage to Marie, names Breck as his rival. Marie is baffled by her failure to make a friend of Breck.

### SIXTH INSTALLMENT.

The Truth About Breck.

MARIE caught her breath. "Monsieur—"

West bent to kiss her and Marie recoiled her usual slowness. She left the muff in his hands and put the road between them.

"I prefer that we walk more apart," she said, poised for flight, her manner half grave, half mischievous. "I think I love this Kent House greatly, but whether I love a Dunbarton-Kent—or that I am most uncertain. And I do not kiss when I am asked—unless I wish to."

"I am in earnest, Marie," West said decidedly. "But you are in earnest too suddenly, monsieur."

"I'm usually sudden—when there's something I really want."

"And I am most unsteady. The thing I wish for at this moment is my muff—my hands grow cold," and she shivered with a mock chill, her small feet patting the ground, about as tantalizing an object as man could look upon.

West eyed her unsmilingly; then, suddenly, he relaxed. "Well, be 'unsteady' if you want to—it'll be all the same in the end—you'll go with me wherever I want you to go. You were a quaint thing when you were a little chauffeur—I thought about you all the time I was in Washington, and the other night in the garage, when you were crying. I didn't know whether I was in love with you or not. But, when you were hurt, I knew. In spite, you're a formidably lovable person and the prettiest thing on earth. Now here's your muff—will you come for it?"

"I think not, monsieur."

The half serious laughter in her eyes had lodged in his. "May I bring it across the road to you?"

"I think it will be best for you to throw it to me."

"O, very well—catch!"

Marie secured her muff. "Now we walk to the house, but, please, you on your side of the road and I on mine," and she walked off resolutely but with the corners of her mouth rebellious.

West looked both exasperated and amused. "You're pretending," he asserted. "At this moment you're thinking about as hard as you ever did in your life."

It was true. Marie was walking jauntily, but in her muff her hands were tightly gripped. "Indeed, monsieur? Of what is it I think so profoundly?" she asked with determined lightness.

"Mostly of the great mystery, my black-browed cousin, Breck."

It was so correct a guess that Marie caught her breath. She was embarrassed beyond words, and they walked in silence up the driveway to where the lawn touches the park and again they were in sight of the house. Then West came determinedly to her aid.

"Wait a moment, Marie," he said, earnestly. "You must listen to me. I'm not dependent in any way on my aunt, I can marry any one I please and whenever I please, and I love you. I think you are the 'unsteady' sort—I'm glad you are. I'm going to make you love me."

"As for Breck—Marie, don't wonder so much about him. There are things I can't tell you, but the girl who lets him take hold of her imagination is in for serious trouble. Don't misunderstand me, Marie—I'm not saying this because I'm jealous. I'm not in the least jealous of your interest in him, for if you knew the truth about Breck—and you will if time could not even pity him. I understand perfectly why Breck is a tantalizing mystery to you: it's because you are tender hearted. It's a quality I love—your sweet clear through. But, Marie, if Aunt Bulah suspected for a minute that you have any particular interest in Breck she would be ruthless."

"I'm telling you because I love you. I want you to stay here and win out with everybody. I want you to feel that you have a home and such a woman as my aunt devoted to you; Aunt Bulah is a power, in a way—she can do a great deal, either for you or against you. You know that I'm speaking for your own good, don't you, dear?"

There was forceful earnestness in every word he had uttered. Marie had grown white. "I must believe that you speak for my good, monsieur."

"I do, Marie. I'm a Dunbarton-Kent; it hurts to have to say what I have about a member of my family, but I love you too

much not to warn you. Will you try to love me, Marie?"

Marie looked at the hand he laid on her arm, then up into his earnest face. "I like you very much, and I am grateful, but to love you—I do not know. I—I must think," she said unsteadily.

His brows came together, then suddenly he smiled. "That's somewhat doubtful encouragement, little Marie, but I must abide by it, I suppose. You think, and I'll try to help you to think. We'll leave it that way for the present, but, Marie, I never give up anything I've set my heart on, so think hard, sweetheart."

There was no coquetry in Marie's answer, and she withdrew from his touch gently. "I will, monsieur. At the same time I am proud that you care for me, for I am so unimportant a person. I wish now, please, to go to the garage alone."

"Very well; we'll say an revoir here. But you'll find fresh roses in your room—they'll help you to think kindly, I hope, and, raising his cap gravely, he went off across the lawn to the house."

"Mon Dieu!" he whispered to himself as she went on up the driveway. "Mon Dieu! Now I do not know at all what to do."

She was so excited and troubled by her thoughts that even so odd a thing as Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent's sending to the garage for the little dress Marie had worn that morning scarcely stirred her into surprise. She gave Gibbs the dress and went on with her thoughts, or, more correctly, her longings.

After lunch Willetts came to the garage and took out the limousine. He said he was going to drive Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent, but he did not say where she was going.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, evidently desirous of lingering as long as possible. Marie looked flushed and vivid, a tempting vision.

"I feel quite tired," Marie answered. "This afternoon I think I shall lie down because of my head."

"That's right," Willetts said approvingly. "I'll tell Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent you're being sensible. You want to take good care of yourself."

Then West came to take out his roadster and Marie fled to her room. She was thankful that he did not try to talk to her. She lay down and told herself that she would remain lying down until dinner time, that it was the right thing to do.

But when the sun began to slant through her window the urge was too much for her. She got up and began to dress hurriedly. Why should she not do as she had planned in the morning? What harm could it do? She would be so much happier if she knew.

With nervous haste she arranged her hair so that it stuffed out becomingly beneath her toque, and her fur she left open in front so as to show her pretty blouse. She pinned one of West's roses on her blouse, then quickly removed it; the red color was becoming, but wearing it made her uncomfortable. She compromised by wearing a string of red beads which a French soldier had given her, and when she remembered what he had said her face quivered into a smile, and suddenly she kissed the beads:

"It is the color that draws love, mademoiselle."

Then Marie went down into the garage, but not out by the front way. She went through the storeroom and rapidly across the shrub dotted space behind the garage and into the far end of the park. To reach the road to the farmhouse she must either send a circle through the park or go straight through the park and walk along its outer edge until she came to the road, a considerable walk and two fences to climb. She chose the latter way.

"They all speak ill of him, not one person is his friend. He is not allowed any longer even to come to the garage!" she breathed passionately. "I do not care if I try to discover for myself. I cannot bear it any longer!" and she mastered her barb wire fences without any great difficulty.

First there was a plowed field, then the farmhouse pasture. Marie kept close to the edge of the park, where there was undergrowth, until she came to where the road to the farmhouse emerged from the park. Then she chose the stump of a tree and sat down. From her position she could see the farmhouse and barn, but she was well hidden from the park by the undergrowth behind her and by the big oak tree. Marie knew that feeding time was over; she sat still and waited.

She did not have to wait long; Breck came out of the barn and started down the road to the park. He walked slowly and with observant eyes on the semi-circular sweep of park. When half way down the road he bent as if taking something from the ground and his backward glance swept the farmhouse and what could be seen of the high road. Then he came on deliberately as before. It was not until he came quite near that Marie noticed he was carrying something white in the bend of his arm. She saw it only vaguely, for in her excitement everything but his face looked blurred. His face she saw with peculiar distinctness; it almost carved immobility, and the shadowed eyes.

From the first moment Marie had seen Breck Dunbarton-Kent she had thought him the handsomest and the strongest looking man she had ever seen, and now, throbbing with excitement and scarlet from embarrassment, she felt rather than saw his splendid physical perfection, his well carried head, and wide shoulders.

She felt a quiver of delight oddly mingled with the fear that he would simply lift his cap and pass her by without a word or the slightest change of expression. His eyes were fixed on her, but a marble face would have shown as little recognition. When he came to within a few feet of her, without knowing in the least what she was doing, Marie stood up.

He stopped close beside her. "I saw you coming," he said. "I brought you something."

Marie changed from red to white with alarming suddenness, for she was swept by the discovery that he did not smile simply because the muscles of his face were unaccustomed to smiles; and that his eyes were shadowed and watchful because of habit. His voice was gentle.

"Yes—monsieur—" she said with difficulty. She did not know why, but she wanted to cry.

"See!" he said.



She saw distinctly two persons in the room, Allen Colfax, standing facing the window, and, with arms about his neck, a woman.

Marie's misty eyes followed his glance downward to the curve of his arm in which was cuddled a spaniel pup, a fluff of white with black spots. From between its long, silky ears it was staring roundly at Marie.

"She's a cocker spaniel," Breck explained, his voice soft, his expression changeless. "They're affectionate and little trouble."

"O—" Marie said unsteadily. She was trying to wink the tears out of her eyes. The result was that they hung on her lashes and she crimsoned with confusion.

Breck looked down at the foreshortened view of wet lashes and quivering lips, and the muscles in his cheeks twitched, whether with a desire to smile or from some other emotion it would be difficult to tell.

"Suppose you sit down and take her in your lap," he suggested quietly. "She'll soon make friends with you."

Marie was glad of the chance to hide her face. "It is a most beautiful dog," she said with greater composure.

"This baby's weaned; you can feed her almost anything now. She'll be amusement for you."

Marie lifted her wide eyes. "You mean you give her to me?"

"Yes—to take with you when you go away, if you want to." After a keen survey of the park, Breck had backed against the twin trees. His trunk hid him from any one who might be in the park and he could see any one who might be about the farmhouse or on the High Road. He looked down at Marie. "I've named her, but perhaps you won't like her name."

Marie's mouth began to curl upward at the corners. There was a circle of warmth about her heart. If she could make him smile, she would feel like dancing because of joy. "I think I guess the name," she said, eyes laughing.

"Well!"

"Miss Angora Lamb."

Marie saw the smile down in his eyes, then creep slowly over his face, as if struggling with stiff muscles. "Poor Gibbs! No-guess again."

"I think I shall call her Dorothy, which means a gift of God."

Then, suddenly, he straightened and looked at her in the shadowed way that set her nerves apart from him. "It's best to leave things as they are for the present," he said evenly. "Tell me—do you love my cousin, West?"

It was an abrupt question, shot at her from beneath keenly observant eyes, and Marie flamed scarlet. Out of her confusion of feelings, sickness at heart, pain, and surprise, she answered swiftly:

"He's at least as kind. I think I shall not leave Kent House immediately, monsieur."

"I judged as much, from what I have observed," he returned as coldly as Marie had ever heard him speak. "I'll wait a little and see," he lifted his cap. "Thank you for coming, Marie Angouleme, and I am sorry you think I'm not kind. I hope you may never think anything worse of me than that, and he replaced his cap and strode off. Marie looked after him until the walking tears dimmed everything. "I should not have told him that he was not kind," she said in sorrowful regret. "I should not have questioned. It is worse than if I had not come—nothing is plainer to me than it was before."

But Marie was not telling herself the exact truth. What hurt her most was the way in which Breck had hung his head. It was some time before Marie thought of the spaniel. She was feeling wretched

enough; the ache in her had become a tormenting pain. She did not know which hurt her the most, the determined way in which Breck had urged her to leave Kent House or the way in which he had hung his head when she questioned him. When she thought that possibly the neglected dog was following Breck she felt desperate. Breck would think she cared nothing for his present.

She thrust through the undergrowth which made a hedgehog of the fence and anxiously scanned the field behind Colfax Hall. At the rear of the house were tall trees and a tangle of shrubbery, but the field was fairly open, patched here and there by weeds. To Marie's relief, half way between her and Colfax Hall, she saw the spaniel. The little animal was nosing the ground and going in the direction of Colfax Hall.

Marie climbed the fence and started down the field in pursuit before it occurred to her that the spaniel was in danger. Colfax's fierce huge dog would with one snap end the life of anything so tiny and helpless as a spaniel. It was probably the scent of Colfax's dog that the spaniel was nosing. And there was danger to her, too. She and her little dog were trespassing.

She looked everywhere for the animal. It had not gone up the road to the farmhouse, and she had not seen it in the park. Marie searched the park for quite a radius. The high park wall ended at the edge of the park; then there was a fence which ran along the road to the farm and up to the high road. It divided the Kent House property from the neglected grounds of Colfax Hall, and finally it occurred to Marie that the spaniel might have wandered off beyond the fence.

Terror gave speed to Marie's pursuit, but the spaniel was in search of its own kind, and having reached a well worn path, was running toward the house. Marie did not think of stopping—it was Breck who had given her the dog. For his sake she would have faced both Colfax and his mastiff. When the spaniel disappeared in the tangle of shrubbery she plunged after it, praying fervently that Colfax and his dog might not be at home. She tore through the shrubbery just in time to see the spaniel maneuvering with difficulty the steps of a side porch. There was a blanket beneath one of the windows on the porch, and the dog hastened to it and nosed it eagerly; evidently it was the resting place of the mastiff—when the animal was at home.

For a paralyzing instant Marie was certain of it, for the woman wore a hat with a flowing veil, which hid her hair, and her face was hidden by Colfax's bent head. They were clasped in each other's arms, cheek to cheek, a passionate embrace. Marie stood aghast an instant too long, for Colfax lifted his head suddenly and the woman turned and looked, revealing not Mrs. Smith's rich hued face, but the faxen fairness of Bella Dunbarton-Kent. In the instant before Marie fled she had the queer impression that Mrs. Smith must have transformed herself into a blonde, bleached lashes and brows and hair, for the long, strong, graceful lines of the body were so like Mrs. Smith's and yet the woman was certainly Bella Dunbarton-Kent. Allen Colfax was looking at Marie over Bella's shoulder, brows raised and lips parted in blank amazement, which lowered on the instant into a look of rage.

Marie tiptoed up the steps and across the porch. She seized the spaniel, intent on getting away as rapidly as possible, and she did not think about the window, but as she lifted the dog she glanced in apprehensively, and what she saw held her fast for a brief space of dumb astonishment. She looked into a large and high ceilinged room, carpeted in red and furnished in heavy old mahogany. The evening sun streamed into it, so she saw distinctly the two persons in the room, Allen Colfax, standing and facing the window, and Marie looking at Marie over Bella's shoulder, brows raised and lips parted in blank amazement, which lowered on the instant into a look of rage.

Marie sprang off the porch and ran into the shrubbery and straight up the path which led to the high road. She heard Colfax on the porch; she knew he was running after her; then she heard him call, "Come back here!" She ran for her very life.

But it was impossible to outdistance him. There was a path giving on the high road, and Marie scrambled over it. Colfax cleared it at a bound. He was within a few feet of her then, and Marie whirled and stood at bay.

"I came—only to get—my dog!" she panted. "If you touch me—I shall scream—I shall scream!" she said wildly. She was holding the spaniel tightly to her heaving breast; her eyes, and her voice, and her cheeks were afebr.

Though he came close, Colfax did not touch her—and it was not going to hurt you!" he commanded. He looked at the dog; he was hot, panting, and scarlet. "A likely story!" he said angrily.

"It is—quite true. My dog ran away to your house—and I was afraid your dog would kill her. She ran up on your porch—so I went to get her. I could not help seeing in your window."

"How long were you there? You better tell me the truth."

"I wish to speak only the truth. I was there only a moment."

"What did you see?"

"I saw—the woman who was there."

"What woman?"

"I thought at first it was—some one else—but it was not."

"Indeed! Who was it?"

"It was Mademoiselle Bella—Dunbarton-Kent."

"You're mistaken," Colfax said more quietly. "It wasn't Bella, but some one who looks a good deal like her."

Marie knew she was not mistaken and that he was not telling the truth. If only she could get back safely to Kent House with her dog! She was afraid of Colfax; he was a big, reckless-looking creature, as broad shouldered as Breck, but he did not have Breck's clean look. On that first day when she had gone to his house by mistake and he had frightened her, he was so drunk he had been scarcely able to keep his feet. He was seemed to be sober now, but flushed and angry. One of his eyes was blackened—Marie remembered his fight with Breck—and it made him look ugly.

Marie was frightened, but she tried to be tactful. "It does not matter to me who the lady was, monsieur. I am sorry, I did not mean to see into your house. It was accidental. All I wish is to take my dog back now to Kent House, so I say good-by," and she backed away from him.

"No you don't!" Colfax said roughly. "They call you 'The Little Detective' at Kent House. I haven't believed it—you look like a little innocent to me—but blamed if I don't believe it now. You'll not go a step until you've given me a promise you'll keep—that you won't tell Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent or any one else about what you saw today."

Marie flamed first into anger. "I am not a little-tale! I would never run to Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent with stories of her niece! Then, stung by the thought that when Breck

had named the spaniel he was making fun of her, she flared almost into tears. "I do not understand why I am insulted! Why am I called a detective? I do my work and am honest! Why? A little detective?"

Colfax's expression changed; he looked anxious, angry, then angry. "You won't carry this to the old lady then?"

"I would certainly not tell Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent that I saw you and her niece embracing," Marie retorted hotly. "Of what business of mine is it? If you wish that promise, I give it."

Colfax looked as relieved that Marie was not afraid of him. It occurred to her suddenly that she could make him tell her why she was called a detective. Then it rushed over her, her great opportunity.

"But I ask something in return," she added promptly. "I wish to know what is the trouble in this Dunbarton-Kent family that makes them all so strange. Why do they treat Mr. Breck Dunbarton-Kent as they do, and also why does he act so strangely?"

Colfax looked nonplused. Then he collected himself. "O, it's just an abominable mess. I tell you, Marie Angouleme, I really haven't a bit of hard feeling because you used your fists on me that day. I think you're drunk—I'm a fool when I'm drunk. When I get worried I drink, and then I do fool things. You're not a little detective or any of the rest of it—I take that back. I know you were not on us. I think you're a nice little thing; that's why when I heard you scream the other night I went for Breck—there was no telling what he was up to. So I'm giving you good advice; there's going to be a worse state of things at Kent House; it's sure to come, and the less you know about it the better. Don't get mixed up in it—just quietly clear out."

Marie eyed him for a moment. He did not look angry, but he had a disquieted, reckless appearance. He was quite the kind who, when drinking, would not care what wild thing he did, an irresponsible man, as Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent had said. Evidently he and Bella were lovers—a secret affair—for when driving Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent and Bella they had passed him often and Bella had looked over her head always, just as Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent did. They were deceiving Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent.

Marie distrusted Colfax utterly. She felt he was trying to be pleasant simply because he was afraid she would tell Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent about his affair with Bella, and, naturally, he would want her to leave Kent House as soon as possible. But it was strange that he should say to her almost exactly what Breck had said. Breck had refused to explain, but this man would have to tell her what he meant by such advice. She would make him do it.

Marie's little face was set hard. "I have no intention of leaving this Kent House unless Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent should tell me to go," she said firmly. "I like this family—these are those who have been kind to me. But there is a thing I am determined to know—why is it that even you speak ill of Mr. Breck Dunbarton-Kent?"

Colfax looked down. His hung head reminded Marie painfully of Breck's; he looked so like Breck that all but his slight mane and the dissipated lines in his face. "Confound it!" he muttered. Then he shrugged.

"Curiosity killed a cat—it never killed a man," he said. "I bet it killed many a man, though. Look here, it's dangerous for me to tell you. I'd rather not tell you, Marie Angouleme. Hang it! My mother was a Dunbarton-Kent!" He looked thoroughly disturbed.

But Marie was immovable. "I will tell no one," she promised firmly. "Of it and of your secret I will say nothing to anybody. I promise you, and I keep a promise."

For a moment Colfax looked at her as keenly as Breck might have done. "You won't, I guess," he said bitterly. "Perhaps Breck's the one you like. But you're making a big mistake. West's a gentleman—he's straight. He's been courted all his life, but it hasn't spoiled him. He loves justice and unusual things. Look here, he has his own fortune, too, and he doesn't have to wait for his third of the Dunbarton-Kent money. West won't quarrel with any one—he's always treated me like a cousin—like West. Everybody likes West. West and Breck and Bella, the Dunbarton-Kent money is to go to them; Mrs. Dunbarton-Kent has only the income from it during her life. But there's a proviso in Mr. Dunbarton-Kent's will that, if either of his heirs should commit a crime, come under the law, he or she, will lose his or her portion. It's a queer thing, not that you're not a fascinating girl and good enough for anybody—that West has fallen in love with you. If you're wise, you'll leave Kent House and let West court you somewhere else and marry you and keep you away from all this family trouble. That's my well meant advice, so don't ask me any more—just take it."

"It is not advice for which I asked," Marie flung at him. "I am not in love with anybody and least of all with any person's money. More than ever I wish you to tell me the thing I asked."

"Well, hear it then!" Colfax said in exasperation. "You have me in a corner. I can't afford not to tell you. Breck was born and reared a thief. Before he was twelve years old he was a skillful pickpocket. When he was fourteen he took to porch climbing. He spent his fifteenth year in a reformatory. Then an old New England preacher took him into his family. He stole a lot of bills from under the old man's pillow while he was asleep and started out west with it and was caught, and that time Breck went to prison—"

He was interrupted by Marie's gasp. She was dead white and staring. Her arms had grown lax and the spaniel slid to the ground.

"It's true, every word of it," Colfax said. "It happened away up in Maine, but Haslett, Mr. Dunbarton-Kent's lawyer, heard of it, for there was a trial and Breck gave his right name, Breckridge Dunbarton-Kent; the police had always known him as Ken Smith. Then Mr. Dunbarton-Kent went to Breck's rescue. He did all he could to get Breck a short sentence—they gave him two years. Mr. Dunbarton-Kent was an awfully good sort, a good business man, too. He'd made a lot of money and he'd helped West's father to make money. Bella's father was no account and when he died Mr. Dunbarton-Kent took Bella into his family. When West's father died, he gave West a home, too, and looked after West's money."

"That was the kind of man Mr. Dunbarton-Kent was. He had faith in Breck, for there was something to be said for him. Breck's father had been the black sheep of the family crooked, but he could be—the Dunbarton-Kents had lost track of him years before—Mr. Dunbarton-Kent hadn't even known that his brother had a son. Breck's father was about as low down the scale as a man could get when he died and left Breck to shift for himself. Stealing came easy to him; he'd been raised among crooks; you couldn't blame him so much."

(Continued Next Sunday.)

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