

A True Diamond

CHAPTER XVI.
A QUIET SUNDAY.
(Continued.)

Mrs. Todd did not quite agree with Toney. She had strict ideas of propriety, but she was quite unable to decide what was her duty. Mr. Todd was away, and she had no one to whom he could appeal. If they both come from Australia, of course they must have been neighbours, and neighbours like a chat.

"Don't you think, miss, that if you waited till—"

"No, I can't wait; it's a question of life and death."

"Oh dear, is it, miss? Here we are, Mr. Faber is in his sitting-room. He couldn't get to church this morning. My daughter—by her first husband—is settled near here, so I drove over to see her, she having been ill, and that's how it was, you see, or we don't usually take the cart out on Sundays."

Toney was hardly listening. How should she first begin her conversation with Mr. Faber? She turned over all the plans she could think of, but each seemed difficult or impossible.

Mrs. Todd ushered Toney upstairs, and knocking at the door, she said, "Mr. Faber, here is a young lady who wants to see you about Australia. I'm sure, sir, you're wanting your tea, and I'll go and fetch it for you at once."

Mr. Faber was sitting by the fire holding a book in his hand. As he hastily rose to receive the lady, he was surprised to see a tall girl, with a face so bright that it spoke to him of health and sunshine, but he also saw at a glance that his visitor was quite unknown to him.

"I beg your pardon, at least I don't, because we always neighbour easily at home, don't we? Do you know Georgeport? That's where I was chiefly. My father was a doctor there, and I heard you had come from Queensland, so—"

Toney stopped short. She was thinking that Miss Crump's young man did look as good as good could be. He had a thin, pale face, but there was an expression of great spirituality on it which Toney described to herself as "something just heaven-blue."

"It's very kind of you indeed. I had a great friend at Georgeport, a Mr. Taylor. He met me once in the Bush and nursed me back to life."

"Mr. Taylor! I knew him! Pups said he was made of the right stuff; but hadn't he funny red hair?" said Toney, laughing happily. She was no longer puzzled now that she had found a link.

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"Shall you go back when you are well? I mean, have you a home out there, or shall you stay here? Because if you do go back you wouldn't mind taking some messages for me."

"I shall never go back. My health will compel me to stay in England," he said sadly.

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"Oh, then," said Toney happily, "you'll get a living here."

Mr. Faber looked up again. It did not seem extraordinary to him that his visitor should take an interest in his affairs, for, in Australia, every one takes an interest in his neighbour's doings, but still he was a little puzzled.

"You live now in Winchley, I suppose? If so, you must know that I have come home without interest of any sort. My father was a bookseller here. I don't expect to get a living, but when I am strong enough, I hope to begin work again. God's vineyard is large."

"I don't live in Winchley, but with Aunt Dove at Aldersfield House, and there's somebody there who knows you very well, that's why I've come here to-day; only she doesn't know you've come back. I'd thought I'd come and spy the land first, and just break it to her too, so that it shouldn't come all of a flop on her."

Mr. Faber was silent from astonishment. He had been thinking much about Anne Crump, and wondering what had become of her, but he had not dared to ask. He did not even know that she was still with Lady Dove. This knowledge however was not of much use, for he had come back as poor as he had started, having nothing to show for his fifteen years' labours but such reward as is laid up in heaven and accounted of very little value on earth.

"I conclude you mean Miss Crump," he said slowly.

"Of course! We're chums, you see, and as I heard by chance that you were here—she had told me about knowing you—I thought old friends should meet, but if you were well married, and had picnics, I thought she would like to hear about it before seeing you, and in fact, you see, I've come to clear the bush."

"How is she? It's a long time since we met, but misfortunes overtook us both in youth, and since then—"

"Why didn't you write?" said Toney, decidedly. "Pups said he never could understand why, out there, folks gave up their friends and so often didn't write home. There was one man Pups doctored in the Bush, well, he was dying, and he had saved a jolly round sum in the bank, so Pups said, 'You'd better make a will, Mr. Peel; but the poor man told him he really couldn't remember the name of the relations he wanted to leave his money too, though they had been good to him when he was a kid. That's the truth!'"

Toney had run on to allow Mr. Faber to collect his thoughts, but as Mrs. Todd's footsteps were now heard, accompanied by a rattle of tea-cups, Toney had to make the plunge.

"I must go, Mr. Faber. Miss Crump will be glad to hear of you. What shall I say to her, and when shall she come and see you? No, you'd better call on us. I've been stuffing her an easy chair. It's dreadful to be a companion for fifteen years, I mean to Aunt Dove, and to have no relations or friends, you know. She wants cheering up after that experience. Out!" and Toney fanned herself with her gloves to give full weight to Miss Crump's lonely condition.

"She isn't married or engaged?" stammered Mr. Faber.

"No! but she thought you were, as you never wrote."

"I had no prospects—I could not claim any right—"

Mrs. Todd's entrance stopped him, and Toney knew she must go.

"I must use my legs and get home like lightning, or Aunt Dove will ask questions! England isn't a free place

at all, like Australia. Good-bye, Mrs. Todd. Mr. Faber knows a friend of mine, such a nice red-haired man! and he promised to come and see me and have a talk."

"Indeed, miss! Won't you stay to tea?"

"No, I should like it, but I mustn't live by time-table now."

In another moment Toney was gone, and Mrs. Todd was left to express her astonishment to her lodger.

"Lady's Dove's niece too! Her ladyship's as proud as anything, but I'm sure this young lady is quite friendly. Still, she isn't like other young ladies! So you really know a friend of hers?"

"Yes, Mr. Todd, she isn't an impostor," and Mr. Faber smiled.

"Well, now I'm glad to hear you say that! You do hear of such strange tales in the papers that one half expects to be deceived. Of course, now, she knows Miss Crump, who knows you, Mr. Todd said the other day. Well, to be sure, not that she is often seen here; but if I should ask her to tea, you could renew your acquaintance, Mr. Todd says her father and yours were neighbours."

"I am afraid she might not wish to come. Thank you, Mrs. Todd, I have all I want," and Mr. Faber sat dreaming a dream over his lonely cup of tea.

When Toney entered the drawing-room she saw, at a glance, that the General had been as good as his word. He was entertaining Lady Dove, and Miss Crump was still sitting listlessly by the tea-table. Toney looked brilliantly happy, and was quite ready to show it when she burst into the room, fanning herself with her hat.

"Antonia, you are late! Sir Evas said he had missed you, and he has gone out again."

The General interposed, "You see, Lady Dove, house property in London is every year becoming more valuable. I can let my houses for twice the rent which I took formerly."

"You have always managed your property so well, dear General. I'm sure you must be puzzled at times to find a means of spending your income, for now you give no dinners—"

"There are always people who will act proxy," said the General, smiling; "but I must own to having a saving disposition. When I see the extravagance of some people—"

"Exactly so. With all our heavy expenses here I have determined never to get into debt."

"It is all the more praiseworthy of you to undertake new burdens," answered the General looking at Toney, who was now drinking unnumbered cups of tea by Miss Crump's side.

"Indeed, it is a very heavy responsibility. But where was the girl to go? What was to become of her? No, I told Evas that our duty was plain, and that we must not shrink from the consequences."

"I consider you deserve much credit. It is not everyone who could willingly have taken a penniless girl when money was an object. I really and sincerely hope she may eventually earn enough to keep herself, or that by some other means you may soon be relieved from such a burden."

Lady Dove might have found a pleasant answer, but at this moment Toney herself came forward.

"I was hungry, Aunt Dove! It makes me think of one of our special picnics at home, when we forgot the food and had to wait oh—so long! May we give a picnic this week, Miss Crump and I? We could have quite a nice party."

"But I am going away, Miss Toney," said the General, "you must wait till I return."

"Aunt Dove, you wouldn't have liked our picnic that day; there were so many blacks staring at us. One of them looked so odd because she was in mourning for her husband."

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"I'm glad that, having no wife, I need not arrange for that expense in my will," said the General, laughing.

"The men weren't kind to their wives at all. The poor women looked so thin. When we threw bits to the fowls, one of the poor gins snatched them up to eat them, as if she were downright starved."

"Antonia, I always thought that you had been brought up among savages, but I hope you won't repeat these stories to everyone."

"Why not, Aunt Dove? Pups said the whites had not behaved well to the aborigines, but on the Queen's birthday they get blankets given to them."

"It's very kind of the Queen," said Lady Dove. "If you have done your tea, Toney, I should wish you to go upstairs till I find time to hear your Catechism. I find, General, that girls always stumble over their duty to their neighbour."

(To be continued.)

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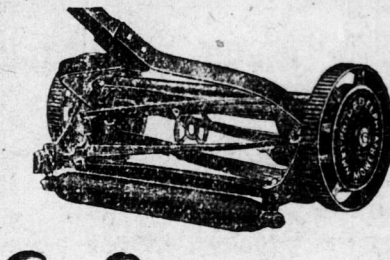
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