

A True Diamond

CHAPTER VIII.

(Concluded.)
A. Choice Supper.

Toney and Miss Crump cleared away in a few moments, just before a very soft knock was heard. Sir Evas, it can be truly affirmed, had not entered this room for fifteen years, so it was quite strange to him. It certainly looked very bare and ugly, except for Toney's flowers.

"There you are! You are a dear! Do you know, uncle, I was so disappointed in you when you said just now you wouldn't come. Pups never refused a woman's request if he could possibly help it, and I thought there was just a little likeness between you and him. Very little, of course, because he was just perfect."

"Thank you, Toney. Good evening, Miss Crump. Well, you wild girl, what do you want?" Poor Sir Evas felt shy and awkward, but Toney did not let him off easily.

"Several things. First place, Uncle Dove, didn't you want us at your dinner? I guess you were dull, now own up!"

"I don't remember thinking about," said Sir Evas, who certainly had not given Miss Crump a thought.

"That was real ungrateful. However, you weren't very lively on the terrace, were you? Now sit in this arm-chair and tell me if it's comfortable."

Sir Evas was caught in the trap. "Well, not so soft as it might be. Oh, is that the destination of your fleece wool?" and he laughed outright. "It sounds like the Argonauts."

"I don't mind about it being a golden fleece; but you must own, uncle, that that isn't a chair which would rest you after doing—" She paused, and Miss Crump put in:

"Oh, indeed, Antonia, it's not at all bad, I'm sure."

"Don't, Crumpet. You won't speak the truth; you know it's like boards; but we can do it all ourselves, uncle. If you'll give us a fleece. At home I could do no end of upholstering work, and wool was cheap."

"Oh, it's cheap enough here, worse luck!"

"Well, then, let's use it and be comfortable. I'll tell the shepherd of somebody you have given leave. I didn't like to do it all out of my own head, you see, uncle dear."

"Certainly, but wouldn't it be easier to buy a new chair?"

"There would be no fun or romance then! I'd like to make my Chum comfortable. Don't you know the reward of honest labour?"

Sir Evas rose; he felt very guilty, and was wondering how he could get away unseen and unheard.

"Oh, uncle," said Toney, rising too, and guessing his thoughts, "where did you leave that cigar? Is it smouldering in the grave, as John Brown is

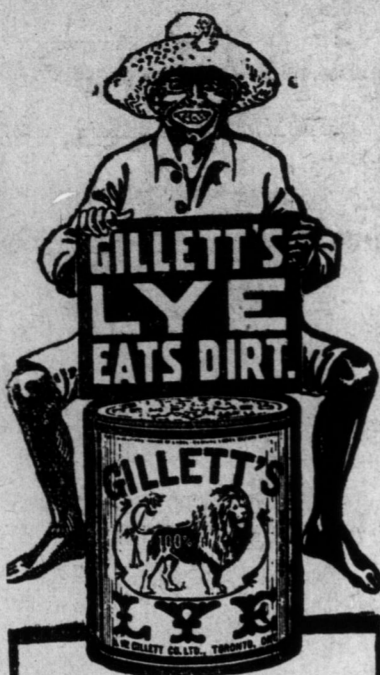
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doing? You know the Yankee John Brown, don't you? If not I'll sing it to you."

"Not now, thank you, Toney." "Now you are kind and civil. Well I'll go down with you. I can't come into the drawing-room because I've no frock. I don't mind, you know, because I like you up here best."

"I thought of buying you something to-morrow. I'm going to town and so we cannot have our ride."

"Then bring some pretty stuff, uncle, and plenty of it. It will do for both of us. There, take care not to fall over Trick. He's quiet at present. Don't rouse him."

Toney politely conducted Sir Evas to the terrace, and strange to say, he felt quite cheered by the episode, and smiled and smoked contentedly till he re-entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER IX.
Forget-Me-Not.

Toney was up very early the next morning, and was soon seated before a large desk busily engaged in writing.

"Aunt Dove said I must copy an pin up this time-table, so I had better be on the safe side; but, oh, it's rather hard work! When that is done, Trick we will go out for a walk, and then we can begin our gymnastics."

Toney's pen flew fast, for she was rapid in all that she did, and she seemed to be composed of very active and untiring particles. When she had done her writing she ran downstairs followed by Trick. Then she made a dash into the kitchen for provision ("grub" she called it to herself), and was soon engaged in disposing of her half sheets of paper. Then off they ran to the park, where the dewy grass and the chorus of bird-life welcomed this new expression of existence.

"Caw! caw! The rooks were building their nests, lambs were frisking round their mothers, and the colts were enjoying an early meal."

"It's only poor me that has to be cooped up all the morning, Trick. Now's my time for physical development. Come along, I saw some drying-poles yesterday, and they'll do beautifully for my jumping exercises."

So when Sir Evas was being driven quickly down the avenue, he was astonished to see two tall poles stuck on the opposite sides of a flower-bed, with cross-bars attached. Toney, armed with another bar, was taking a short run, and suddenly making a marvelous spring over the poles, she alighted on the flower-bed.

"Good heavens! the girl will break her neck!"

Jim pulled up, and Sir Evas was down in a moment.

"Did you see me, Uncle Dove? Good wasn't it?"

"My dear Toney, a young lady, a—"

"It's all right—come on purpose. It develops muscle, you know, and then it's so useful. I could jump over Boss if she would stand still."

"You'll be kicked to death if you try."

"Oh, no; don't be anxious! I say, uncle, you won't forget the frocks, will you? Chum and I must give an evening party when we have re-stuffed our chairs."

Sir Evas was already climbing back into the dog-cart, and Jim had just whipped on the mare, when Toney sprang on the step.

"By Jove! It's most dangerous!" exclaimed poor Sir Evas.

"Oh, no; not for me," laughed Toney, proud of her feat. "I can get off anything going at any rate. You must just throw yourself down away from the carriage. It only wants a little courage and practice. It is quite easy."

Jim had, however, pulled up, and Toney was not allowed to exhibit her skill in this particular.

"What did your father do with you? Toney, listen, do try and—"

But Toney had skipped off, good advice being never a thing for which she waited long. Sir Evas, looking back before turning the next corner, saw his poor relation just vaulting the cross-bar, and he went his way, meditating on the extraordinary agility of the female mind and body.

If Sir Evas had received a shock Lady Dove's next experience was one which made even more impression on her mind than the vaulting did on his.

The breakfast bell had rung, and she walked hurriedly down to read prayers. Toney and Miss Crump were seated side by side, and both looked so demure that a ray of hope dawned on the lady's mind. Her influence had never failed to quiet any one, and now it was going to do its work even with Toney.

Lady Dove read prayers in a very solemn voice. She was usually thinking of the need of discipline for one or other of her audience, and to-day, naturally, her mind reverted to Toney's sins. In the middle of these thoughts, however, she looked up in order to make her voice sound more impressive, when, to her horror, her eyes alighted on a large half sheet of paper pinned up on the door of the dining-room. The heading was visible even from her place at the table. On it was printed, "Toney's Time-Table." Then she suddenly recollected that she had herself told Toney to pin it up, without saying where it was to be pinned. How dreadful to have her door spilt by pins! Her eyes glanced at the other door through which the servants always entered. Oh, horror! here, too, was the pinned half sheet with the title, "Toney's Time-Table" printed on it. What should she do? She came to a very speedy ending of prayers, but as the servants filed out she heard very audible giggles from Rose and Jane.

"Antonia! what have you been doing? What have you pinned up on these doors?" she asked sternly.

"Can't you see, Aunt Dove? It's my time-table. I got up very early this morning to do them. I have so little memory, and I thought I had better just be often reminded, and you said—"

"Take them down, if you please Miss Crump, and put them in your sitting-room."

Miss Crump obeyed, turning very red.

"Indeed, Lady Dove, I did not know—"

"Sit down to breakfast, Antonia. You have but little time to eat before going to the Vicarage."

"I shan't take long, Aunt Dove. I can bolt my food in no time. Pups said it was wrong, but that some young stomachs seemed to be excepting."

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tions to all rules. Mine is an exception."

"Antonia, what indelicate ideas you have!"

"Indelicate! Oh, Aunt Dove! It's in the Bible and Prayer Book. 'A proud look and a high stomach.' Is that indelicate?"

"The Bible is not meant to be quoted."

"Is it a mute too, Aunt Dove?" and Toney laughed.

"Really, Antonia! Miss Crump when you come back I shall want you to interview Mrs. Homes, and tell her that she was very careless over the soufflé. The books, too, must be looked over, and I want some notes written, and—"

"Light duties," murmured Toney, thoughtfully, thinking of her conversation with Sir Evas. "Has Miss Crump any more things to do in the morning, Aunt Dove?"

"I am not talking to you, Antonia."

"No, but I do want to fit myself for the future. You see, Aunt Dove, it would be very saving if I could be your companion, wouldn't it?"

Lady Dove looked at Toney's face but there was not a shade of a smile upon it. Before seeing Toney she had had the same thought.

"It will be many years before you are fit for such a position of trust, Antonia. Miss Crump can always be relied upon."

Miss Crump blushed. It was certainly the first time she had received praise from her hard task-mistress.

"Yes, indeed, Aunt Dove. Miss Crump is a treasure, isn't she? I thought so when I first saw her."

(To be continued.)

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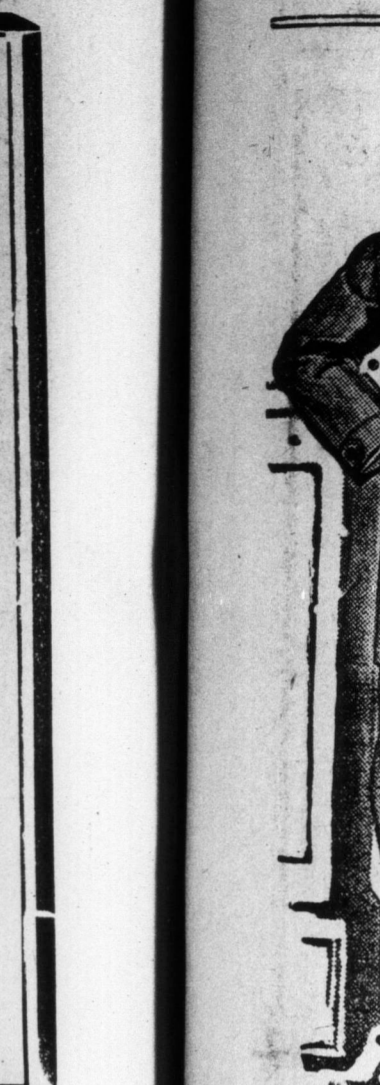
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