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A True Diamond

CHAPTER XVII.

A QUIET SUNDAY.

(Continued.)

"I wish I were a lag, Aunt Dove! Do you know, Pups always knew a lag when he met him."

"A lag! More heathens, Antonia?"

"Only an old ticket-of-leave-man."

"Dreadful! Pray go, Antonia."

When Toney and Miss Crump had disappeared, Lady Dove turned towards the General, and sadly shook her head.

"You see, dear General, that the girl has been brought up amongst the worst society. What can be expected of her?"

"What indeed?" said the General, rising to go. "I must really help you, Lady Dove, in settling this puzzling question."

Toney herself had skipped upstairs in the highest spirits, whilst poor Miss Crump followed more slowly and wearily. She had spent her evening in reading Lady Dove to sleep.

"Dear Crumpet, now I can laugh! Trick, dear, come out and was you tall for joy. To-morrow we shall have this chair finished, and then our dresses. Oh, Chum dear, we must make them quickly. I've been to see a friend this afternoon—an Australian friend—and I'm wild with delight."

"So I see, Toney."

Miss Crump was very weary; Toney was almost too much for her.

"You didn't rest after all! Too bad, but I'll tell you what, you must leave off being a companion! It doesn't suit you at all, dear Crumpet."

"Oh, have I complained? It's only sometimes that I feel the weariness and the monotony to be almost unbearable. The monotony, Toney, is worse than the work."

"Well, you must leave it all, and I'll take your place. It will be odd!"

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"Come when you're called, do as you're bid, shut the door after you, and you'll never be child!"

Toney seized Trick and danced round the room. Suddenly she paused.

"I must calm myself and see the General! Why there he is walking on the terrace! Oh, Trick! come along but don't lift up your voice."

Toney tucked up Miss Crump in the bush shawl, gave her a book, and then slid down the banisters at an alarming speed, landing herself with a thud on the marble hall. Her duty to her neighbour went suddenly out of her head!

Trick looked very sad because he could not follow his mistress's example, but had to come down the stairs like an ordinary mortal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Paving the Way.

"General Stone, I want to speak to you in private. I have so much to tell you. I know you will be so very, very glad about it."

The General started. He had been deep in thought, and had not heard Toney's step.

"What shall I be glad about, Toney?" The girl seemed to him like a new type of humanity; there was nothing sordid about her thoughts or her words.

"Don't you guess? Well, I'll tell you. It's just the beautifullest romance which you could imagine. At least, I suppose you don't imagine them now, you are too old; but when you were young you must have been in love?"

"You think everybody is in love when they are young."

"Oh yes, I suppose so, I'm not old enough yet; but we had such romances out there. I could tell you heaps out this is my very, very own."

"Your own, Toney?"

"Yes, my very, very own. I've planned it beautifully, just like planning a campaign, you know. It's about Miss Crump. Aren't you pleased?"

Not for the world would the General have owned to Toney that he did not care two straws for Miss Crump's romance.

"Of course," he said, smiling.

"Do walk faster, Trick is staring at your heels. Yes, I've been and seen him, and he has no 'gin' and no piccaninies. He's quite, quite free, and very much in love, I'm sure."

"What the missionary!"

"Yes, and you and I must find him a living. I am going to prepare Crumpet for all this. How would you do it—suppose you had to break such news to a friend of yours?"

"Well, I don't know; but suppose they don't like each other?"

"Oh, they must, you know. Both look so faithful! I'm sure that's safe; but they can't live on air. Will you find a living for him? Of course; a bishopric would be better; but bishops' wives have to be worldly, and Crumpet couldn't be that, could she?"

Toney laughed so much at this idea that Trick began barking for the sake of good fellowship.

"My dear Toney, I have no living to give away, I assure you, besides—"

"Oh, but you have friends, I know. Aunt Dove said that you were a very

influential man, and that it was very necessary to keep in with you, so of course it means that you can get livings. Besides, he's just as saintly as you like, and he's worked fifteen years among the Kanakas, and Crumpet has worked fifteen years with Aunt Dove! You see, they are even."

"My dear child, you'll be the death of me! What ridiculous notions! However, we'll see what can be done about a living. That is easier to get than money to live upon. The church is going to—"

"Pups said early Christians managed better than we do, they shares things. Have you tried the whistle?"

"No, not yet. I'm waiting for a night alarm in town."

"It might bring Aunt Dove out if you tried it here. I forgot that."

"What about your duty to your neighbour, Toney?" said the General. "You seem to be telling me mine."

"Am I? Oh no, you do your duty 'm sure, always. I must go back hén, I'd forgotten the Catechism; but I do know it. Pups used to hear me say it when I was four years old."

"Your father was a wonderful man Toney, but not very worldly wise."

"No, not at all worldly wise, but still he was very knowing. Now, he would have told me how to break this news to Crumpet; you know, about her lover—and you won't. Do you think she'll faint? I do hope not."

"I hope not. Wait till I'm gone to-morrow, Toney. You would call me up I fear, if there was no one else at hand."

"Uncle Dove would be more useful, because I think Aunt Dove used to faint when she wanted something. Not really, you know, only make-believe, but make-believes are often more troublesome to cure."

"Well, I wish you well through it, Toney. Don't forget about your whistles if you want spare cash."

"I don't want any yet till Crumpet gets married. We must rig her up. I rather fancy Aunt Dove won't like parting with her at all. She is a very useful person."

"I suppose she is; but Lady Dove would easily find another companion."

"Oh, I shall apply when Miss Crump goes, and then I shan't cost Aunt Dove so much. I'm learning everything. I'll train Trick to wake me early, and the servants are really very nice. By the way, you won't forget to tip Jim, will you, early to-morrow? I'm going to save his money for him. Good-bye for the present. You will see about the living, or shall I ask Mr. Waycott? Do you know that this Mr. Faber saved Mr. Waycott's life when he was young, and he'll do all he can when he knows he has come home?"

"Oh, Waycott knows him, does he? Well, that sounds more hopeful."

"Indeed, I've told you everything exactly, General Stone. Pups said I was a good judge of people. He thought Trick and I had about the same amount of instinct. Oh, I've forgotten my duty to my neighbour again. Can you say it?"

"No, I'm sure I can't. Ah! there is Sir Evas and my brother."

But Toney disappeared like lightning. She was just a little doubtful about the General's great joy at her news, but she hoped that he would

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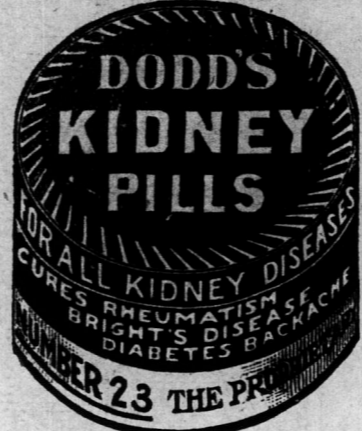
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come round when he fully understood the wonderful romance of Miss Crump and Mr. Faber's lives.

Lady Dove, suddenly looking out of the window and thinking that the evening was very delightful—for she required fresh air after her afternoon's rowing—forgot Toney's Catechism, and strolled out to join her husband in the garden, through which 'forgetfulness' Toney had time to do what she wanted.

When she got back to the sitting-room she found Miss Crump fast asleep in the still unfinished arm-chair. The girl sat down very quietly on a low stool opposite the companion, then she put Trick on his honour not to bark. After this, resting her chin in her palms, she earnestly contemplated her sleeping friend.

As she slept, Miss Crump's strained expression seemed to disappear. The face assumed a rounder look, and a faint ray of her first youth was visible. After all, Miss Crump was only thirty-five, and had her life been other than it was, she might still have been called a young woman. The hands were small and shapely, but thin and worn, whilst the blue veins in them looked like the veins of a transparent leaf.

(To be continued.)

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