

# A True Diamond

CHAPTER VIII.  
A Choice Sapper.

Another result of this system was that the supper was a very varied meal. The kitchen people were too busy "to bother about that supper," and Jane did not dare to take upon herself to purloin any of the good things that came out from the dinner. The result was usually that she prepared a very small amount of cold meat and some bread and cheese, which was grandly called Miss Crump's supper.

When Toney came in very hungry she found this fare spread out for her and Miss Crump in the sitting room.

"This is a cold collation, Crumpet dear! Is this your supper?"

"Oh, anything does for me, dear."

"I imagine that inside you're made just the same as Aunt Dove, and I know I am! What if I cooked a bit of supper for you, Crumpet dear? I'm first-rate at cooking. I can toss up anything."

"Oh, no, indeed! It's impossible; it mustn't be done."

"You bet, Mrs. Homes don't know how to do little things! Here, whisk all this into that work-basket, and I'll forage. We'll have a rare good supper to-night!"

"Miss Antonia—Toney, dear, what will Lady Dove say? I beseech you."

But Toney's actions, when she was in a hurry, were like lightning, and the loaf, the dry cheese, and the cold meat, wrapped up in the small tablecloth, were packed in a large basket and on their way to the kitchen.

Just then there was a full in the routine of the kitchen. Dessert had gone in, and Mrs. Homes was sitting down, directing Rosa about some dripping, when a scuffle and a rush were heard and Toney stood before her, holding up a large white bundle.

"Lor, miss, how you frightened me!" said Mrs. Homes.

"I didn't mean to," said Toney, cheerfully. "Did you think this white thing was a ghost? Well, so it is!"

"A ghost, miss!" Mrs. Homes started up, and Toney's merriment filled the kitchen.

"It's the ghost of our supper! We want the body of it. Now look, Mrs. Homes, Crumpet and I aren't greedy; but, look here, what would you think of that if it was your supper?"

Toney spread out the cloth and showed the cold mutton bones, the ancient cheese, and the dry loaf.

"Well, miss," said Mrs. Homes, raising her head in anger. "I've had no orders about supper upstairs. I've enough to do with the late dinner."

"Now, dear Mrs. Homes, don't be huffy with me! It's not your fault, I'm sure, it's somebody's mistake; but I don't want to give you any more trouble, so if you'll let me stand at your fire I'll soon make things straight. At home, you know, we let people come and have a bit of firing if they liked. We were just neighbourly there, you see, and I'm a first



rate cook. Real talent that way."

"You, miss!"

"Well, yes, it's true. Puss often had nothing but what I could cook. This mutton bone will make a nice little hash. Rosa shall get me a little gravy, and Mrs. Homes, aren't mutton rooms good? Ketchup will do, however, and pepper and salt. Stars, you'll see! There's no time for pudding, but we'll toast this old cheese, and there must be some fruit or something left from uncle and aunt's dinner! I mean to give my Chum, a treat. Her appetite's delicate. There's a look of slow liver, don't you think about Miss Crump?"

There was no withstanding Toney, in her busy, earnest mood, and gradually Mrs. Homes' anger began to melt. "Tisn't fit work for you, missy. Leave me to do it."

"Fit work! Why, Mrs. Homes, I'm real poor, lots poorer than you are, bet. Just a poor relation. But you see, it's as well to make the best of the situation, and Crumpet is tired to-night."

"Her ladyship wouldn't like you be here, missy. If you'll just go, I'll send you up something, and Rosa shall take it."

"But you can't do the cheese in just a homely way, can you, dear Mrs. Homes?"

"Yes, miss, my poor mother was that fond of it when I was a girl that I often did it for her."

Toney looked hopeful.

"Ah, that's right. Well, I'll go back if you say I must, and tell Rosa to bring me up a nice tablecloth. Puss was so particular on that score. I will have nothing on it, Toney, he of ten said, let's have it white and clean."

"I shouldn't have thought you minded such things, missy," said Mrs. Homes, laughing in spite of herself at Toney's remarks.

"I had to! I'll tell you what, cook dear, some day when we have time, I'll get a day off my time-table, I'll invite you to supper and do all the cooking."

"Oh, miss, whatever are you talking about! But if you'll just go up again I'll see what I can do."

Toney looked regretfully at the chest, but obeyed. In a few minutes she was back again in the sitting room. The room looked very different now that it was adorned with choice flowers, and that a woman's hand had been at work. Miss Crump, however, was sitting on the edge of her chair, trembling with fear. Suppose Lady Dove should come up before Toney returned! Suppose—At last Toney did burst in. Her entrance was always like the rush of fresh air into a hot room.

"I'm very sorry, Crumpet dear, cool wouldn't let me toss you up a little supper. That's what it is to live in a prison-house. You must make the best of it. You see we have lost what we had even."

"Oh, I don't mind about that, indeed I don't. I'm often too tired to eat the mutton; but you, Toney, you haven't had any supper."

Trik was curled up in front of the fire and cocked his ears at the word supper.

"I'm just famished, I'll own. It's dreadful to have an appetite like mine. Never mind, Chum, we'll tell stories, and I'll make my waist-band very tight. That's what the men in the bush do if they can't get any food. I assure you it does for some hours."

"The servants will be so angry! I will look as if I complained, and what will Lady Dove say? Oh, dear, I wish you were not quite so—"

This amused Toney immensely, s

she started up, woke Triek, and began to examine the furniture, with a view to improving the comfort of Chum's abode.

"To be in this arm-chair is like sleeping on deck with no pillow! I'll tell you what, Chum, we'll undo it and stuff it again. Next time Uncle Dove goes shopping he shall bring back some nice horsehair. I wonder if we could get some from the horses' tails here. No, that won't do; but wool! A fleece dried, washed and carded; uncle could give us that."

At this moment Rosa, with a face wreathed in smiles, knocked at the door and entered, carrying a tray on which reposed a supper such as poor Miss Crump had never had in her life before. Mrs. Homes had been touched on her tenderest point, and everything was as if Sir Evas himself had ordered a private repast.

"Is there anything else you can think of, miss?" asked Rosa, who could now follow the dictates of her heart as Mrs. Homes had set the example.

Toney looked critically at the dishes.

"No, Rosa, I'm hungry, so I'm not very particular to-night. By the way, don't forget to put something in my hiding-place for to-morrow morning. Plain bread and butter and just something else will do."

Rosa said, "Yes, miss," and disappeared with quite a new excitement in her life.

Jane of course was much offended, and recounted her woes to Mrs. Stone. She had never had no orders, and if it hadn't been for her Miss Crump wouldn't have had any supper at all, etc. It need only be added that Toney was the subject of conversation in the housekeeper's room that evening, and that Miss Crump's supper was never again a thing without joy.

Lady Dove was congratulating herself that Antonia was upstairs and well out of mischief. Sir Evas, however, was anxious to know why Toney could not come downstairs.

"She has no frock for the evening. I must tell Rivett to do one up for her to-morrow. My old grey silk will do out up."

"I've to go to town to-morrow. I might bring some stuff," said Sir Evas, who was rather tired of his wife's old grey silk, and had a wish to see Toney in something new.

"Stuff! Really, Evas, you don't know how to shop. You would get something that would not wear and that would spot. This wild girl ought to be dressed in sack-cloth."

"Hales would think she was an anchorite, he was preaching about anchorites the other day. After all, Melina, the girl brightens up the house a good deal."

"I'm glad you think so, Evas. I'm sure there has been no peace since the set foot here, but of course men—"

Sir Evas knew he had called down a storm on his head, so he said hastily that "as it was a fine night he would have a stroll in the garden," and taking a cigar he went off, leaving his wife to do some important accounts before she sent for Miss Crump.

His ill-luck took him round under the sitting-room window, and worse still, it made him cough just as he looked up at the light shining brightly through the uncurtained glass. In a moment Toney's curly head popped out, for a sound against a high wall carried very distinctly upwards.

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"Uncle Dove! I'm sure that's your cough! Uncle Dove!"

"Ahem! What is the matter?"

"Well, 'tain't a robber, or fire, or murder, uncle; but just your advice is wanted. Do you think you'd like to give it to us? We have set our hearts on a fleece of wool."

"A fleece of wool? Good gracious, what for?"

"I can't explain well from up here. I'd have to shout so. Uncle Dove, just step through the little door below, and come up the back stairs. Nobody'll see you. I don't mind your cigar; but Miss Crump does, and you must leave that weed somewhere on the way. Triek doesn't like it very much either. He'd bark if you brought it here."

"I don't think I want to come, Toney," said Sir Evas, coughing again. What would Melina say if he was heard of in Miss Crump's sitting-room? That was his private thought.

"Don't want to come when two ladies ask you, Uncle Dove! Well, I won't ride with you any more, or—"

"Just for a minute then, Toney," and Sir Evas stunk in through the side door as directed, and crept up the back stairs.

Toney drew her head in again, laughing.

"It's just to make him sit on that hard chair that I want him. Experience is worth so much more than only words."

"Oh, but Toney! how could you! And this supper not cleared away, and—"

Poor Miss Crump thought seriously at this moment of resigning her situation. These startling doings were too much for her nerves.

"That won't take a minute, Chum dear, I did not notice it before, but your evening dress is really very shabby. How long have you had it? Puss let me dress as I liked by day, so that I pleased him in the evening; but when—Well, I made a bonfire of all my dresses before I left. Wish I hadn't. I know Aunt Dove will dress me in grey. I can't bear that colour. Oh! there he comes! Isn't he going softly, he's afraid of somebody."

(To be continued.)

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