



A True Diamond

CHAPTER XVIII.
Paying the Way.

(Continued.)

Toney indulged in a good think. She knew that without her this wedding would most likely never take place; but she also fancied that Aunt Dove, to save money, would accept her in Miss Crump's place. The girl mentally put herself in this situation, and it was by no means a pleasant picture which she imagined. But she faced it bravely. To make Miss Crump happy meant that she must walk in the companion's tight shoes; it meant, too, becoming a still more strictly guarded prisoner than she was at present. But Toney had never really thought first of herself, and though it was a struggle, she resolutely fought it out.

"Pups did such heaps of disagreeable things for other people, of course I must do the same. Perhaps Crumpet will come and see me sometimes, or I might get a week out if Uncle Evas really turned his hand to helping. Oh, I'm so strong, it won't be really so bad for me, and Aunt Dove will save by it. Then I've got Trick, and poor Crumpet had nobody. Of course I can do it. Now I think I'll wake her up and break the news to her."

Toney seized Trick—he was very tired of being good—and held him up close to the sleeping Miss Crump's face.

"Kiss her, dear, your nose is so cold, that must wake her. It wakes me, you know, Trick, and that's why you do it."

It did wake Miss Crump, who started up as if she had heard the warning bell.

"Was it for me, Toney?" she said, sitting bolt upright.

"No, it was not the bell, only Trick's nose. I believe Aunt Dove's forgotten all about my duty to my neighbour! Ten to one she's gone out, so lie still, Crumpet dear, and let's have a talk."

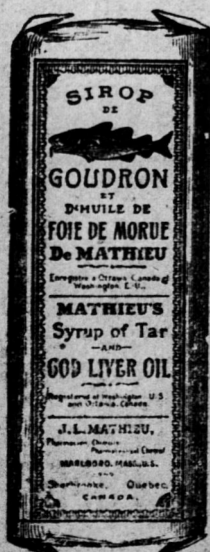
Miss Crump set up and smiled; she had been dreaming of old days and the young look was still in her face.

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She felt a lump in her throat, and the future years of Aunt Dove's companionship appeared to her as nothing, if they could gain freedom for this sad human being.

"I'm speaking all the truth, every bit of it, Chum dear. He's here, and he's longing to see you. I told him to call upon us."

"Oh no, no, you should not have done that. Besides, 'Lady Dove' couldn't spare me, and—and I dare say Henry is no richer than he was. He was not one to make money, he never was—oh no, no."

Miss Crump suddenly rose and paced the "little room," which since Toney's arrival seemed homelike.

After a few minutes Miss Crump became calmer; indeed, when she sat down again, she looked much as usual, only her hands still trembled as she took up a book. Toney was a little disappointed to see her so calm again.

"Crumpet, you do believe me, don't you?"

"Perhaps—I don't know. I must not excite myself. I gave all that up long ago. I can't do my work if I think of things."

Toney found out then that people cannot at once be happy when they have been long accustomed to sorrow.

But Toney's time for sorrow had not yet come; she could not be happy for long, and when the dinner bell rang she jumped up, for she knew that Miss Crump would prefer being left alone to have a grand talk about the news.

"Aunt Dove, you never came to hear my Catechism," said Toney cheerfully, when the soup was being taken round. "Perhaps you thought I didn't know it, but I do, at least I did know it out there, but here one seems to forget all the old things. Your duty to your neighbour somehow is more difficult."

"I was engaged," said Lady Dove. "I shall hear it another time. Must you really leave us to-morrow, dear General? We shall miss you sadly."

"No one is very much missed," was the General's answer.

"I can tell you all the news in a letter," said Toney encouragingly. "I must learn to write notes. There's a book on Aunt Dove's table which tells you how to begin to all the grand people."

"I prefer your own unassisted genius, Toney," he answered, smiling.

"Do you? Well, that is nice of you!" That night Toney lay awake for full five minutes scheming how she was to make everything come right for Miss Crump, then happy, dreamless sleep blotted out all her earthly puzzles.

The time-table began again the next morning, but before Toney was expected to appear, the arm-chair had been covered and placed in the very middle of the room, so that its full glory might be seen. It was a very creditable piece of work and the girl was proud of it, because, thought she, Crumpet would look so much prettier in a becoming arm-chair when he came to ask the important question: Would he come, or had she made her journey in vain? How would they meet? These questions were worked into the brilliant cretonne, and finished off by a dance round the chair with Trick. The noise brought in Sir Evas, who thought the house was on fire, or that some misfortune had overtaken that marvellous Toney.

"Toney! It's only you! Good gra-

vous! Your aunt will be coming down soon. This isn't your timetable, is it?" and he laughed.

"No, but it's the birthday of the chair cover! Look, Uncle Dove! Do you think—just try to imagine what I tell you—do you think this arm-chair would be the right place for your young woman, if you wanted to pop the question?"

"Toney! I don't want to do that; you know I'm married."

"But if you weren't married, and if you were dreadfully in love, do you think if she sat in that chair in the middle of the room, that you would at once fall on your knees? I'll put a soft mat for you."

"My dear Toney! Gentlemen don't fall on their knees, they have too much regard for their clothes."

"Oh dear, then whatever do they do? Uncle Dove, do be serious, please, it's most important."

"Important for whom?"

"For Crumpet! I want her to have an offer just here, but you won't tell, will you? It's a deep secret, only I don't like to do anything underhand, and you are master here."

"Am I? Well, but I can't supply Miss Crump with a lover. It isn't possible. You told me Jim was already engaged two deep."

"Jim! Oh, uncle! Why, Crumpet is a lady; she has a very choice mind. I'm sure, and he is quite a saint, something like King Arthur."

(To be continued.)

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