

A True Diamond

CHAPTER XII.

NEW ARRIVALS.

"No, Aunt Dove, here he is, but he can't talk, he's so blown."

"Antonia!" said Lady Dove, horrified, as she saw the girl's general appearance, "Antonia, go to your room at once. You are very untidy."

Toney needed no second bidding. She remembered Miss Crump and the flowers, and was soon in the dining-room.

"Oh, Toney! I am late—that ride—it was very nice, but—"

"Ah, yes. According to that timetable, I ought to be doing my lessons, but there's time for everything. Pups used to say that. Crumpet, have you written your notes?"

"No, and they must go by post time; but the table too, must be pretty, because Lady Dove says the General may leave his money to Sir Evas."

"Well, leave me the table. Flowers know me, they arrange themselves, so don't be uneasy."

Miss Crump was only too thankful and disappeared to finish writing notes.

Toney left to her own devices, sat down and thought a few moments. Then, making a rush into the garden, she seized a boy who was weeding, and making him hold a basket, she very soon gathered all the flowers which she required.

"Money," she thought laughing. "Well, Pups would be tickled by the idea. The General shall have quite a flowery reception, so as to make him leave his money to Aunt Dove. Gracious stars! She is kind to him!"

When the work was done, Toney looked at it with satisfaction.

"It's real pretty! Nice flowers; but they must be hurt at being used as a bait for money. Oh, Diggins, I'm going, don't look so severe, and mind you give the General the very best of everything to eat, because Aunt Dove says he may leave her his money. He can't eat the flowers anyhow!"

When she got upstairs, she found Miss Crump, who had just finished her task.

"Oh, Toney, you are a kind girl. I never could have done both, and I don't know what Lady Dove would have said."

"There would have been a little breeze, wouldn't there?"

"If you please, Miss Whitburn," said Rivett entering, "you are to dress and go down to dinner, and I'm sure I've no time to dress you."

Rivett had grown stern and hard in service, and had a profound contempt for Miss Crump.

"It's grey silk," said Toney. "I knew it would be. Never mind, here are some flowers I can use. I'll rig myself up alone, thank you, Rivett, don't wait on me. You know I'm of no

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consequence," and Rivett retired, feeling a little ashamed of herself.

Miss Crump, of course, helped, and between them Toney was arrayed in an old-fashioned grey dress of Lady Dove's, which Rivett had meant to inherit. With her born love of flowers Toney seized some roses, and pinned one here and there on the bodice and skirt and stuck one in her hair. Thus adorned she made as pretty a picture as loving hearts could desire.

"You do look pretty," said Miss Crump with a smile of real satisfaction. She had slowly been forgetting what beauty was like. "When I come down to tea—"

"Here is a posy for your dress. See it's the loveliest rose in the greenhouse," and Toney brought it out from a glass in triumph.

"Lady Dove! Oh, Toney!"

"Never mind, I picked it. She would like you to have it, Crumpet, if you had money to leave her. If you don't put it on, Chum dear, I'll—"

The bell rang, and Toney flew downstairs without finishing her sentence.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO SILK DRESSES.

Toney's behavior at dinner was all that could be desired, for the simple reason that she felt very sleepy, and had some trouble in keeping herself awake to answer even the few questions addressed to her. The old general had taken a fancy to the bright girl who had met them at the station; but he was now agreeable surprised to find at table quite a decorous young lady in a grey silk dress adorned with pretty roses. Lady Dove was also very affable, and though she did not address Toney more than was necessary, she was glad to find that she was "awed by society," as she put it to herself. The taming process was going on satisfactorily she thought, and Antonia's presence made the dinner table look brighter than it otherwise would have done.

Captain Stone had a passion for politics and buttonholed Sir Evas, whose principles were as old fashioned as they were correct. He had an intense horror of Radicals, though holding all their best ideas, "A good old Tory," and "good old port," were to him things necessary in a gentleman's establishment.

General Stone entertained Lady Dove with news of the fashionable and philanthropic world, news which she much appreciated.

"Miss Whitburn is a good walker I am glad to see," said the General, when dinner had nearly run its dreary course. "You won our race by a foot, as mine had not touched the ground."

"But Uncle Dove was late, so the race was really lost!" said Toney, winking up. "We met Mr. Waycott and that made us a little late."

"Ah, young Lewis Waycott, so he has come back to his property. A fine house, and he is a promising young man, I hear," said the General, turning to Lady Dove.

"I fear he has many of his father's faults," said Lady Dove, looking sad. "The house is certainly interesting, but the property is not worth much."

"He should improve it; but all landlords are poor nowadays. He must make a rich marriage."

"Does that mean marrying a lady because she has a lot of money?" said Toney, blushing with indignation, much to the General's amusement and to Lady Dove's secret annoyance.

"Yes, I think that is the plain meaning," said the General, smiling.

"No prudent man would do otherwise," said Lady Dove.

"I'm glad I have no money; and that I'm only a poor relation," said Toney in a loud voice, "because then, I suppose, General Stone, no one will ever ask me to marry them for my money."

"Antonia! girls never speak about such things."

"Why not, Aunt Dove? There was a girl out home who was married at sixteen, so I suppose she had first to speak about it, and anyhow one must form opinions."

"Quite right," said the General. "Then, Miss Whitburn, you wish to marry a penniless gentleman and to live on love in a cottage?"

"I could make the cottage very pretty. In Pups' jolly old book about King Arthur and his knights, it said

that there were three things proper for a man to have in house."

"What were those three things? Pray tell us," said the General.

"They wouldn't agree with your ideas," said Toney meditatively, shaking her head, "besides they belonged to good old times."

"Pray let us hear them, for I belong to those times myself."

"Well, the three things were, "A virtuous wife, "His cushion in his chair, "And his harp in tune."

"Eh, what's that?" "Sir Evas said, turning towards Toney."

But Lady Dove rose majestically, and Toney followed her into the drawing room, where Miss Crump was trying to hide herself and her lovely rose in a far corner of the big room.

"Aunt Dove, that old General is a very worldly man, isn't he? He didn't seem to mind at all about love. But it is a dreadful thing to marry any one without loving them very, very much."

"You are not old enough to judge, Antonia. A girl should never talk about such a subject, and in future avoid it if you please. Miss Crump, the flowers were not badly done, though arranged more fantastically than is usual with you."

"I am sorry, but—"

Lady Dove waved her hand. "Antonia, where did you get those flowers you are wearing? I do not see the reason of your adorning yourself in this way."

"Oh! Aunt Dove, flowers are just the best part of life! and they do like giving pleasure. If I musn't gather them here, I'm sure Mr. Waycott—"

Lady Dove hastened to put an end to such an idea; but really the girl was terrible. She would not be put down. A vague idea that she would always remain irrepressible made her change the purport of her next remark.

"I did not say you might not pick flowers in moderation—quite in moderation; but I do think that for your personal adornment something less rare—"

At this moment Lady Dove's eyes fell on the trembling Miss Crump and her magnificent Marchal Neil.

"Where did you procure that flower, if you please, Miss Crump?"

"Indeed, Lady Dove—"

"I conclude that it comes from my garden, if so, considering your position, I think it very reprehensible conduct on your part."

Toney was at once up in arms. How can you say that, Aunt Dove? Why, I took that Rose and gave it to Miss Crump myself, and I said that if she did not wear it I would never forgive her."

"And pray, Antonia, who gave you leave to give my flowers away?"

"I thought flowers were meant to be picked, and you did say Miss Crump looked dull, so I thought, Aunt Dove, this would just please you. Why it gives her a touch of—"

Oh, I can't explain, but she's like a flower somehow herself."

"Nonsense, Antonia!"

"If it is nonsense I shall give her just the free daisies. May I pick the daisies in the park?"

"Indeed, Lady Dove, I said you would not like it," murmured Miss Crump.

"You must ask me another time, Antonia, for permission to pick flowers. I don't say I shall refuse, but—"

"But some of them are Uncle Dove's flowers, aren't they? I heard him say 'my gardener' this morning."

"Miss Crump, will you go on with the book we began till the gentlemen come in, if you please?"

The poor companion, quite abashed, hastily found the book and turned over the pages, whilst Toney, who was told to listen, sat bolt upright, and in two minutes fell fast asleep in her chair, nodding like a funeral plume.

When the gentlemen came in she did not wake till Miss Crump, seeing her in this position, hastily went up to her to wake her.

"Toney, Toney," she whispered; but the hurried whisper did not sufficiently enlighten Toney as to her present position, for she started up calling out:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear, this is a dull place!" in a loud clear voice.

"Antonia!" said poor Lady Dove, as the old General burst out laughing, and Sir Evas said "Ehem!"

"Gracious stars! Why, I was asleep. What did I say, Uncle Dove?"

"Nothing of consequence, Toney, I'm sure."

"I was dreaming. I thought that I was reading Rollin's History to Aunt Dove; but it was Miss Crump's reading that sent me off. Uncle, now, don't you think that the rose in her black frock looks nice?"

"Yes, certainly—charming."

"You like her wearing it, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, certainly," said poor Sir Evas, who was quite unconscious of his wife's frowns given to him behind her fan.

General Stone looked round at the peony-cheeked Miss Crump. He knew the poor companion by sight, and on his previous visits had always given her something between a bow and a nod on his arrival, and the same greeting when he last caught sight of her, that is, if he remembered it; but to-day he found that he had to look at her more closely.

"Don't you like flowers, General Stone?" said Toney.

"Extremely, Miss Whitburn."

"You must call me 'Toney,' please; I'm not out or anything. I never shall be what English people call 'out,' because unless you have money, no one cares whether you are out or in."

"I don't think you will efface yourself as much as that," said the General with a smile.

"I don't want to efface myself at all; but of course as I can't be of any use in being married for money, other people won't take any notice of me. You said as much at dinner, you know."

"I made a great mistake, I see."

"Well, now you are nice to own up! Isn't he, Miss Crump?"

Miss Crump again wished to sink under the ground. Her duty was to handle tea cups and not to agree about the General's niceness. She murmured something unintelligible.

Sir Evas had taken Captain Stone to the library to show him a plan for some cottages, leaving Lady Dove on metaphorical thorns. She saw that the General was interested in the girl and so she dared not scold her before him.

"You know that Miss Crumpet—Crump, I mean, the other is my pet name for her—is very shy. She effaces herself, don't you think?"

"Antonia, my dear," said Lady Dove, laughing softly. "You will tire this kind General."

Toney looked anxiously at the General's face, but seeing no token of weariness she continued.

"I was only saying that Miss Crump doesn't make the most of herself. I'm not one bit shy, you see."

"I should like not to disagree with you on that point," said the General with a bow.

"No, it would be no use if you did. Pups said I formed strong opinions at once. Do you?"

"I fear I do."

"Well, then, don't you think that Miss Crump effaces herself?"

"I'm sure she does."

"And you don't think that is right, to you? One ought to expand and live all one's life. Pups said that. Do tell me, Generals ride a good deal, don't they?"

"A good deal. I hear you are a good horsewoman."

"She did not fall off our old pony," put in Lady Dove kindly, as if Toney were five years old.

"But indeed, Lady Dove, this young lady—"

Toney winked hard at the General, which action almost made him forget his politeness, for he nearly laughed out loud.

"What I mean is, how long does it take to get a good seat? Pups made me ride when I was three years old."

"It depends. A raw recruit now—you must give him three months."

"That is long! I'm teaching someone. Oh, there's Uncle Evas. Where are our frocks?" (This was in a loud whisper.)

"Ah, yes! the parcel must be outside. By and bye, my dear—"

(To be continued.)

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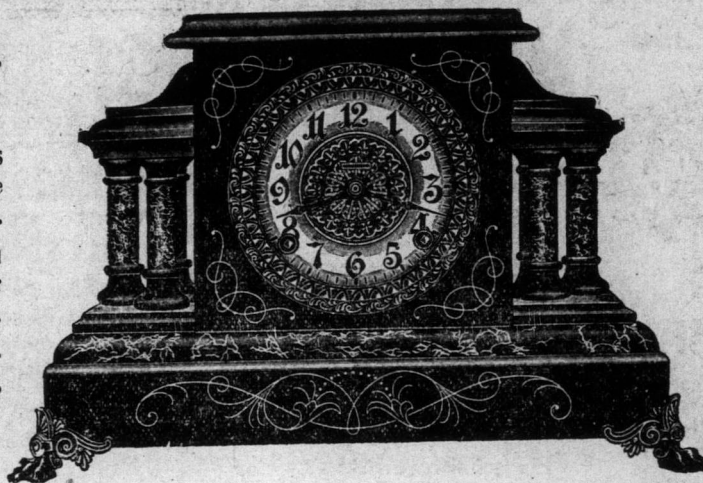
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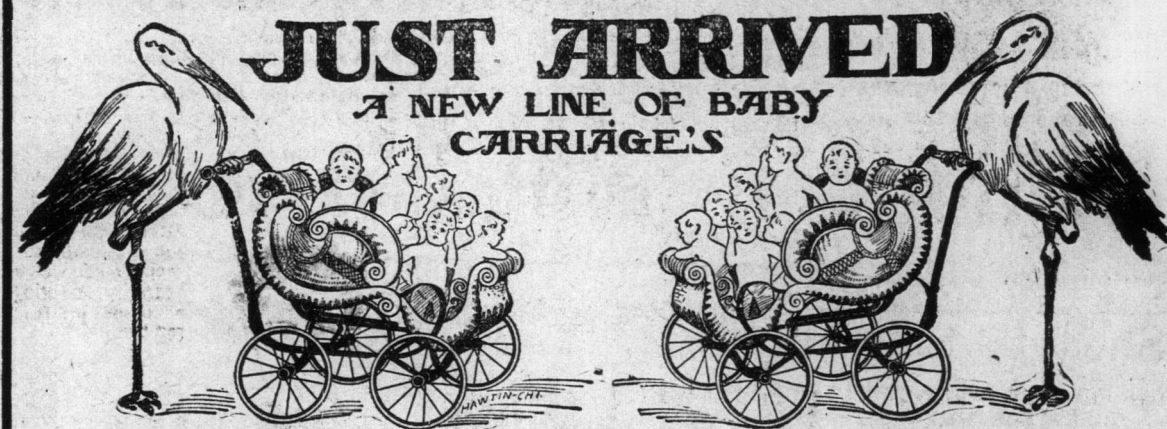


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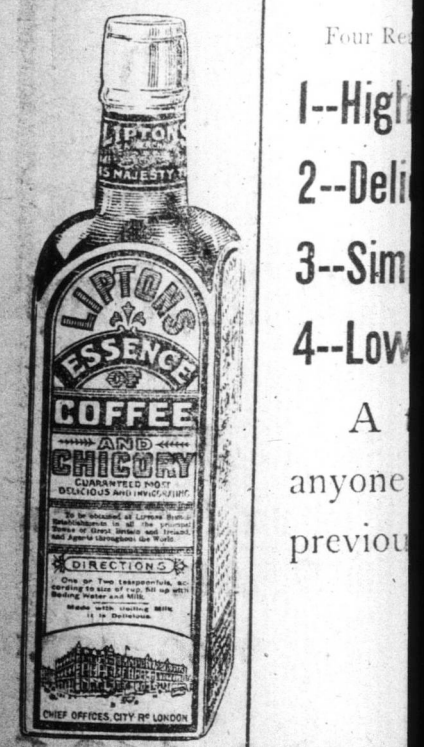
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