

Drusilla with a Million

by

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Chapter I

"Drusilla Doane, O Drusilla Doane!" came waveringly around the corner; and the quavering voice was followed by a little old woman who peered at the line of old ladies sitting in the sun. "Is Drusilla Doane here?" she inquired, darting quick birdlike glances from her old eyes at the curious faces that looked up at her approach.

A little white-haired woman stopped the darning of the tablecloth in her hands and looked up expectantly.

"Yes, I'm here, Barbara. What do you want of me?"

"There's two men in the parlor to see you, an' Mis' Smith told me to tell you to hurry. I been lookin' for you everywhere."

Drusilla Doane let the cloth fall into her lap, and all the other women stopped their work to stare at the announcer of such wonderful news.

"To see *me*, are you sure?"

"Yes, they asked to see Miss Drusilla Doane. You're the only one of that name here, ain't you?"

Drusilla folded her work and placed it in the basket of linen by the side of her chair.

"Yes, I guess it must mean me," she said, and rose to go.

As she passed around the house all the old ladies moved as if by a common impulse.

"Come right here, Barbara Field, and tell us all about it. Who are the men?"

"What did they look like?" questioned another.

"Take this chair and tell us all about it," said Miss Harris, the youngest of the ladies; and a place was made in their midst and the line closed around her.

"Put your teeth in, so's we can understand you."

Barbara groped around in the pocket of her apron; then, holding the end of the apron up to her face, adroitly slipped her teeth into her mouth, and sat down to become for once the center of interest to her little world.

"Now tell us all about it--what you waiting for?" said one of the ladies impatiently.

"What'll I tell?" said Barbara. "I was passin' by the door and Mis' Smith called me in and said, 'Barbara, will you find Drusilla Doane and send her here? Tell her that there are two gentlemen who wish to see her.'"

"Two men--*two* men to see Drusilla Doane!" cackled one old lady. "She ain't never had *one* to call to see her before, as I knows on."

"No," chimed in another. "She's been here five years and there ain't a livin' soul before asked to see Drusilla Doane. What'd they look like, Barbara?"

"One was tall and thin and sour-lookin'--looked like a director of a institution; and the other was short and fat and pussy and was dressed real elegant. One had a silk hat and he wore one gray glove and carried another in his hand with a cane. That was the skinny one. The pussy one wore a gray vest--that's all I had time to see--and his eyes kind o' twinkled at me."

"Did you hear what they wanted Drusilla for?"

"No, I didn't hear nothin'."

"You mean you didn't hear anything, Barbara," interrupted a querulous, refined voice. "Your grammar is dreadful!"

"I don't mean no such thing. I mean I didn't hear *nothin'* and nothin' it is." And Barbara's meek, faded old eyes glared at the little old lady in the corner, if meek, faded blue eyes could glare.

"Never mind her grammar, Lodema Ann. Why didn't you hear what they said? What was you doin' in the hall if you wasn't listenin'?"

"I told you I was just passin' through and Mis' Smith called me in."

"Don't you know nothin' about it--*nothin'!*"

"Nothin'. I've told you all I know. Can I take my teeth out now?"

"No, Barbara; keep your teeth in till we've finished with you. A person can't understand a word you say with your teeth out, you gum your words so."

"But they hurt me; they don't fit. I ain't had a new pair for twenty years and my jaws've shrunk."

"Well, keep 'em in fer a while. They won't shrink any more fer a minit. Did they look like relations?"

"Relations!" said a big, placid-looking woman who was knitting quietly. "Drusilla ain't got no relations. She ain't never had none."

"She must have had some at one time. Everybody has relations-- although *some* people I know, had rather be without them than recognize the kind they got." The sour voiced old lady directed her tones toward the seat next to her.

"If you're a meanin' me, Caroline, I want to tell you my relations is just as good as your'n, though we don't throw 'em down everybody's throat as some folks I know."

"No," said another; "Drusilla has no family; she told me so herself. One day I was telling her about my family, about my father who was so well known in the State, and my brother who became the great--"

"Now don't begin on your family, Maria. We know all about it. We ain't heard nothin' else fer the last three years. It's a good thing that some of the women in this home has something else to talk about except the greatness of their family, or we'd all be dead."

The little old lady twisted her ball of yarn viciously, causing it to roll upon the floor, and when she had stiffly followed it and picked it from the corner her face was very red, either from the exertion of stooping or from the insult she felt she had received.

"You're jealous--that's what's the matter with you! People who've no folks are always jealous of them who's had 'em; but old age has its liberties, I suppose, and we must pardon a great deal on account of it."

"Are you speakin' of me, I'd like to know? I ain't but four years older'n you. I'm only seventy-nine and you was seventy-five last May, though you didn't want us to know it was your birthday. But I seen the date in the book some one sent you, and you can't deny it."

"Never mind," broke in the placid-looking lady again, trying to pour oil on the troubled waters; "don't fight. Barbara, did they look rich? Put your teeth in again-- why can't you leave 'em alone! Teeth are fer your mouth and not fer your pocket. You do beat me and rile me dreadfully, Barbara."

"I tell you they hurt," whimpered Barbara. "I can't even enjoy the sun with my teeth in."

"Never mind. Did they?"

"Did they what?"

"Did they look rich?"

"Oh, awful. I told you they looked like directors."

"Perhaps Drusilla has friends she ain't told us about."

"No, she ain't. She told me one day she didn't have a friend or a relation in the world, and if she'd a had 'em they'd a been to see her."

"Oh, I don't know. That ain't no sign. Your friends ferget you when you're in an old ladies' home," said a voice bitterly.

"Well, I wonder who it can be! I wish she'd hurry, so's we could ask her."

"Poor Drusilla!" said a sweet-voiced little woman. "I hope some one's found her. It's awful to have no one in all the world."

"How long's Drusilla been here?"

"Let me see"--and an old lady put down her sewing. "I been here seven years, I was here not quite two years when Drusilla come. She's been the linen woman ever since."

"Yes," said a woman who showed signs of having seen better days. Her clothes still had a look of by-gone elegance and her wrinkled hands were still dainty and beautifully kept. "Drusilla's our only *charity* inmate."

The stout old lady in the corner emitted a sound between a snort and a groan.

"Charity inmate! What are we all but charity inmates!"

The first old lady drew herself up stiffly.

"You may speak for yourself, Mis' Graham, but *I* am no charity inmate."

"You're just as much of one as I am."

"What do you mean? I pay each year a hundred and twenty dollars, and I paid when I entered an entrance fee of a hundred dollars."

"So'd we all; but still this is an old ladies' charitable home."

"Mis' Graham, how can you say such things!" spoke up a voice that had not been heard before. "I consider that we *pay* our way; and my grand-nephew who was here last week considers it ample!"

"Oh, so do most of our relations who'd rather pay our way in a home than be bothered with us around."

"You may speak for yourself, Mis' Graham. I pay my way myself."

"Yes, you was a dressmaker or something and saved a little money. Well, I never worked for my livin'. It wasn't considered ladylike in my day."

"Huh! You're trying to say I'm no lady. Well, I consider that if I'm no lady and worked fer my livin', I didn't sponge off my relations and don't now."

"Cat!" hissed Mrs. Graham, and sat back trying to think of some suitable answer.

"But don't Drusilla pay nothin' at *all*?" queried another woman.

"Not a cent. I tell you, she's charity. She's a sort of servant. Ain't you seen the way Mis' Smith treats her and orders her around? She takes care of the linen to pay her way and does odd jobs fer Mis' Smith and the family."

"How did she get in if she didn't have no money at all?"

"She's a Doane, and this home was give by a Doane most sixty years ago. And the Committee felt they couldn't let Drusilla die in the poor house because of her name. It might reflect on the home, and they'd lose some subscriptions. So they took her in."

"What'd she do before she was took in?"

"She sewed for folks and nursed and done odd jobs for the people in the village. Everything she could git to do, I guess. And then she got old and folks wanted stylisher dresses, and she wa'n't strong enough to nurse much, so she had to be took in somewhere. First they thought of sending her to the county house, and then as I told you they was afraid it would look bad to have the Doane home for old ladies right here and a Doane in the county house, so she was brought here. It most broke her heart, but they've worked her well. She's paid fer her keep and more, which is more than many I know of, what with their appetite."

"You're talkin' at me now, Frances Smith, don't you make no remarks about my appetite. I'm not strong and must eat well to keep up."

"Humph, it makes you feeble to carry round. I don't know what would happen to you if you had a chance to set down once to a square meal of vittles. I guess you'd bust."

"I want you to understand, Mis' Frances Smith, that I've et better vittles than you've ever seen. When I had my home my table was the talk of the countryside."

"Yes, and if you hadn't et up everything, perhaps you wouldn't now be where you are, havin' beans on Monday and cabbage on Tuesday and soup on Wednesday and--"

The wrangling went on amongst these old derelicts sitting on the sunny side of the Doane home for old ladies. Their lives were filled with little jealousies and quarrels over petty details. They lived in the past and exalted it until they themselves had grown to believe that they had always trodden flowery pathways, until by some unfortunate chance, for which they were not to be blamed, these paths had led them, when old age and helplessness came upon them, into this home for the poor and lonely.

* * * * *

Drusilla slowly made her way to the parlor, which she entered with the wondering, surprised look still on her face--surprised that any one should ask for her, and wondering who it could be.

Two gentlemen rose as she entered, and Mrs. Smith, the Director of the home, said:

"This is Drusilla Doane. Drusilla, this is Mr. Thornton and Mr. Gale, who wish to speak with you."

They bowed over Miss Drusilla's hand, which was falteringly extended.

"We are very glad to meet you, Miss Doane. Won't you please sit down, as our business will take quite a little time to transact." Turning to Mrs. Smith: "May we speak with her alone?"

Mrs. Smith plainly showed that she shared in the curiosity of her charges in regard to the meaning of the visit to Drusilla, but she rose from her place and said:

"Oh, of course I will leave if you must see her alone."

"Thank you," said the taller of the men dryly. "Our business is with Miss Doane." He accompanied Mrs. Smith politely to the door and closed it, then, returning, drew a chair near to Drusilla.

"We are the bearer of news to you, Miss Doane."

Drusilla clasped her hands a little tighter.

"Has anything happened?" she said. "But nothing could happen that would matter to me, unless--" a panic stricken look came into her old eyes "unless--the Committee hain't decided that I can't live here, has it? They ain't goin' to send me to the county house, be they? I work real well, Mr. Thornton; I work as hard as I can. I'm sure I pay fer my keep."

The tall man cleared his throat and said stiffly: "No, Miss Doane, we are the bearer of *good* news."

The short fat man bent over and impulsively patted the hands that were so tightly clenched in her lap.

"No, Miss Doane, you don't need to worry about the county house. You're not going to it yet."

Drusilla drew a deep breath of relief, and the frightened look died from her eyes. She leaned back in her chair.

"Then I don't know what you've got to tell me. It can't be that some one I know is dead, because all of my friends died long ago."

Mr. Gale said, "Tell her, so she'll understand. You're worrying the poor soul."

Mr. Thornton took a legal looking document from his pocket and a letter.

"Miss Doane," he said, "did you ever hear of Elias Doane?"

"Elias Doane? No, I don't believe I ever did."

"Well, he was a distant relation of yours; another branch of the family. He thought he was the last one of the Doane name, as he never married. A few weeks before his death, hearing about this home he sent me up here to learn the particulars regarding it, and I found you here. I reported that there was an inmate by the name of Doane still living, and we investigated and found that you belonged to the family that we thought was represented by only one man, the late Elias Doane."

"He's dead, then. Was he a relation of mine, did you say?"

"Yes, very distantly related."

"Well, I'm glad I've had *some* relations, even if I didn't know it."

"Now, we will come to the business, Miss Doane. Our client, the late Elias Doane, was a very wealthy man, very wealthy indeed. His estate amounts to many millions, and he has left a very curious will."

The lawyer opened a paper in his hand and commenced to read, but Mr. Gale interrupted.

"Don't bother her with the will, Robert; she won't understand. Tell her about it and give her the letter."

"Perhaps that is better, as the legal terms might be confusing. The gist of the matter is this, Miss Doane. Our client, the late Elias Doane, left the bulk of his money to the many charities in which he is interested, but he left you his home at

Brookvale, near New York City, to be kept up fittingly out of the estate, and he gave you outright, to use as you may see fit, one million dollars."

Drusilla stared at him. Then her faded old face turned as white as the soft hair above it, and without a word she fell forward. For the first time in her life Drusilla Doane had fainted.

Mr. Thornton caught her in his arms and Mr. Gale sprang for the bell. Water and restoratives were brought, and within a few moments Drusilla opened her eyes--and soon she remembered. She brushed back her disarranged hair and laughed a soft, sweet little laugh.

"Well, I'm beginnin' well. All real ladies in story books faint when they hear good news."

When she was again seated in her chair and curious Mrs. Smith had been politely expelled from the room, Mr. Thornton cleared his throat and was again the precise man of business.

"As I was saying, Miss Doane, when you interrupted me, our late client, Mr. Elias Doane, left this very remarkable will and also a letter which we were to deliver to you." He handed her the letter.

Drusilla looked at it a moment as she held it in her hand. She seemed unwilling to break its seal. But the watching men opposite her caused her at last carefully, if not a little tremblingly, to tear the covering which was to reveal to her the wishes of a man, who evidently had thought of her and her happiness in his last hours. She unfolded the two pages covered with scrawling handwriting, but her faded eyes could make nothing of the strange hieroglyphics traced upon them, and she handed the letter to Mr. Thornton, saying:

"I guess it can't be nothin' private. You read it; I left my glasses in my work-basket."

Mr. Thornton adjusted his pince-nez and read:

MY DEAR DRUSILLA:

You will allow me to call you that, as it is the first and will be the last time that I will so address you; consequently you will pardon the seeming undue familiarity. I first want to say that I regret that I did not know of your existence earlier, when perhaps I could have made life easier for you --although quite likely I would have added to its perplexities. We are the last of a good family: you, Drusilla Doane, an inmate of a charitable institution, and I, Elias Doane, millionaire, philanthropist, and rare old humbug. You have passed your life in toil, trying to earn your daily bread, and have found yourself nearing the end of this footless journey that we call life, alone and friendless. I have passed my days in toil also, and find myself, at the end, as much alone and friendless as is the loneliest inmate of the Doane home. I have had bread, yes; and often eaten it in bitterness. I have had friends, yes; and doubted their sincerity. Love, wife, children, home, all have been sacrificed to pride of wealth, of power, and things--just mere things, that cannot touch the hand in times of sorrow, nor rejoice in times of joy. But I do not complain; I made my god a thing of gilt and tinsel, and he repaid me for my worship. And now I go to meet another God.

But before I go I want to give another a chance to do what I have never done--enjoy my money--if such a thing can give enjoyment. A great share of my hard-

earned dollars will go in salaries to fat officials and well-fed directors of the institutions I have endowed, but the little I have given you I want you to spend as you see fit. Throw it to the winds, if you so desire, or feed it to the squirrels in Central Park.

I am looking forward to enjoyment in seeing the way you spend the money. They say when we have passed over the river that the things of this world will no longer interest us; but, Drusilla, that is not true. I know my days will be spent leaning over the battlements watching the fools striving here below; and the biggest telescope in Heaven--or perhaps the other place--will be trained upon Drusilla Doane.

I give you a few words of advice. Better allow Thornton to act as your business manager. He is an old fool but honest. But follow your own wishes in all things except in actual business. I have directed that all the expenses of the place at Brookvale shall be met from a trust that I have created, as you are far too old to be worried with the details of the new life which you now will enter. Thornton is a nosy man and it will delight his soul to boss your servants and see that cheating tradesmen are kept in check.

Another thing I wish to say--you can act upon it as you see fit--it is simply the advice of an old man who has known his world. *Don't* subscribe to public charities; they're mostly grafts, and besides they have more of the Doane millions now than is good for them. And *don't* help the needy poor upon another man's advice; *see your poor--know your poor.*

And now, Drusilla Doane, good-by. Enjoy my million! Don't make too big a fool of yourself, nor marry your tango teacher, but spend my million, Drusilla, *spend it--* and may God rest your soul!

There was quiet for a few moments after Mr. Thornton had finished reading the letter. He folded the paper and then said dryly:

"I'm glad to know that my client appreciated and recognized my abilities, at least along some lines."

He turned to Drusilla, who seemed hardly to realize or understand the contents of the letter.

"Shall I file the letter along with the other papers, or do you wish to keep it?" he asked.

Drusilla took the letter, and folded it and refolded it, looking down at it as if it were a thing alive.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Thornton, I should like to keep it," she said. "He meant well by me, and his letter is kind though he said it in a queer way; but it is the first letter I've had from any one for a long time, and I should like to keep it. It makes it all seem more real."

The lawyer rose.

"Now we will leave you. When will you be ready to come with us to New York?"

Drusilla smiled her soft sweet smile.

"I haven't much to get ready, Mr. Thornton. It won't take me long to pack my things."

"Then shall we say that I may come for you to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow will be as well as any other day. Unless--unless Mis' Smith needs me--"

Mr. Thornton said with a dry smile: "I do not think it will be necessary to consult Mrs. Smith."

The men started for the door, and then extended their hands.

"We want to congratulate you, Miss Doane. We sincerely hope that this will be the beginning of a very happy life for you. You may command me in all things. By the way, may we see the Director?"

Drusilla started to the door, but the lawyer intercepted her.

"No; do not go yourself. Ring for her."

Drusilla sat down again, rather aghast at the idea of asking any one else to do a service for her, who all her life had been at the beck and call of other people. One of the old ladies came and was asked to bring Mrs. Smith. The Director came quickly, showing that she had not been far away.

"Mrs. Smith," Mr. Thornton said, "we will come to-morrow afternoon to take Miss Doane with us. She has been left a legacy and will no longer be an inmate of the Doane home."

Mrs. Smith's expression changed instantly.

"Why, I'm real glad. Drusilla, you know I will be the first to rejoice in your good fortune."

Drusilla's face was a study for a moment as she remembered the many shrill orders and the thousand and one ways that the Director had employed to make her lonely life harder than was really necessary; but kindness triumphed and the hard look left her eyes.

"I'm sure, Mis' Smith, you will be glad with me," she said; and she thought in her kindly old heart, "Perhaps she didn't mean to be mean; she was just too busy to think."

The men left and Drusilla was alone with the Director, whose curiosity was nearly consuming her.

"What has happened, Drusilla? Has some one left you money?"

"Yes," said Drusilla.

"Who?"

"A relation I didn't know."

"Did he leave you much?"

Drusilla said quietly: "A million dollars."

Mrs. Smith nearly fell from her chair.

"What did you say?"

"A million dollars."

"Are you sure?"

"That's what the lawyer, Mr. Thornton, said."

Mrs. Smith was speechless.

"I can't believe my ears. There must be some mistake. I'll--I'll--go and talk it over with some one. Do you want to go to your room, or will you go out to the women, Drusilla?"

"I think I'll go to my room fer a while, if I may--that is, if you don't need me, Mis' Smith."

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