

[Written for the Wisconsin]

*Dolly's Diamonds*

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by Louise Phillips

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Sweet little Dolly Miller was sorely perplexed. Her grandmother had died a few months previous to the opening of our story, and had bequeathed to her “beloved god-daughter and grandchild, Dorothy Higginson Miller, one pair of very valuable diamond earrings”—so the will read.

Why the old lady should have said “one pair,” as though she were the owner of a dozen pairs at least, or why they should be designated as “very valuable,” I cannot say. I am in as much of a quandary upon these points as Silas Wegg was in regard to his name—“I don’t know why Silas, and I don’t know why Wegg.”

It had seemed a very lovely thing in prospective to be the proprietor of a pair of diamond earrings. It had reconciled Dolly in a great measure to her grandmother’s death. She remembered how she had looked and longed at the pretty, sparkling jewels, then, as a great treat; on her occasional visits to her mother’s old home, they would be brought forth from their velvet-lined morocco case, and held up before Dolly’s admiring eyes; and she would be told it had been the intention, originally, to leave them to her mother, but as that good lady had put the idea quite out of the question by dying a few years previously, nothing now remained but to leave them to Dolly. And to Dolly they were left.

When the estate was settled up the legacy was forwarded to her, and now her trouble began. Of course the whole world of thieves and vagabonds knew of her treasure—so she thought—and where could she keep them out of harm’s way? When she asked her father he only said, “Pooh! pooh! Child, don’t bother me with such folderol. Keep them anywhere; they will be safe enough. Wear ‘em. Ask Fidelia.”

And meanwhile he thought the question disposed of now and forever. But little 17-year-old Dolly thought otherwise. One piece of his advice she would take—viz., to “ask Fidelia.”

Miss Fidelia Nevertire was Mr. Miller’s second cousin, and had been the housekeeper since his wife’s death. Dolly called her “Auntie,” as it would have seemed absurd to call her cousin, as she was hundreds of years older, as it appeared to Dolly, and as for saying Miss Nevertire every time she addressed her, it was not to be thought of. She was a generous-hearted woman, though rather crotchety; and it must be confessed that her grammar was a little out at the elbows. This last fact might have mortified Dolly a little, had she not borne in mind how kind and indulgent her good friend was to her. So this trouble was likely to end, as all her others ended in “asking Fidelia.”

“Well,” said Miss Nevertire when consulted on the subject, “I don’t care where you put ‘em as long as you don’t throw no responsibility onto me. I hain’t the first idea that I should save anything in case of fire, exceptin’ them big felt slippers of mine and that old wooden chair, and that’s because they’re handy and on my mind. I always keep them slippers settin’ by the bed in case I should be took sick in the night, though I never was; but I’m ‘fraid that if I should stop puttin’ ‘em there, something would happen sure, and—”

“And so you keep them there as a sort of amulet,” said the impatient Dolly.

“Sort of omulet!” sniffed Miss Nevertire. “That’s what comes of sending girls to seminaries instead of learnin’ ‘em house work. Why, Dorothy child, an omulet is made of eggs and things and the wooden chair”—continued the indefatigable lady, as though she had met with no interruption—”sets by the bed too, with a tumbler of water onto it, in case I should need a drink, though I never did, but—”

“That is another species of ‘omulet,’” laughed Dolly. “But, Auntie, dear, the house might take fire in the daytime, when I was away, you know, and then, not having the slippers and chair on your mind, you might think of my diamonds.”

Aunt Fidelia began to cough violently at this point. I have read that orators, when at a loss for a word, would clear their throat, and Miss Nevertire, when crossed in any of her opinions, would be seized with a violent fit of coughing. As soon as she had recovered from it she asked, pathetically: “Dorothy, dear, don’t you think my cough grows worse?”

“It does seem rather aggravated this morning,” said Dolly: “but, no doubt, it is the result of this cold east wind. Well, Auntie, have you decided what to do with my diamonds?”

“We will talk of your diamonds some other time, Dorothy,” returned Miss N., severely.

Poor little Dolly had to be contented with this for the present. She had displeased her aunt very much by suggesting that some misfortune might happen in daylight. It was a fixed idea in that lady’s mind that fires and robberies always occurred in the night; and when the first struggling beams of day appeared she felt delivered from two evils at least.

By dint of much coaxing, Dolly received permission from Aunt Fidelia to place her “very valuable” ear-rings in the dark recesses of a drawer in that lady’s bureau. You must see by this time that our sweet little girl, like most sweet little girls, was a sad coward; and if you should hint that the burglar who might chance to visit Dolly’s room by night would be referred to Miss Nevertire’s bureau drawer for the plunder they were in search of, I could but agree with you by saying that I have the same suspicion myself.

But our heroine did not disgrace herself in any such way; for, contrary to all precedent, Miss Nevertire thought, it all happened in the day-time. Dolly was invited to a party at

the house of her dearest friend, and would not have thought of such a thing as wearing her precious ornaments, but that her friend said: "You must wear your diamonds, Dolly, for Cousin Dick is coming from the city, and I want him to see that we have diamonds out here, occasionally. Oh! Did I tell you that Dick had joined the detectives?" This was said with such an air that it would have given a bystander to believe that the detective force had long stood with open arms to receive this brilliant addition to their order, and that at last Dick had kindly consented, etc., etc.

In the morning preceding the evening of the party, Dolly took out her diamonds for the purpose of rubbing them up a little, I suppose, in order to dazzle the young detective as much as possible. But as she was going out to purchase some female fascinations wherewith to bewitch the poor young fellow still more, she returned them, as she averred, to their hiding place. As to that I cannot say but I *do* know that when she went to equip herself with them preparatory to going forth to conquer, lo! They were gone, and the place that had known them for so many weeks knew them no more. Dolly looked the drawer over and over, much to the distraction of Miss Nevertire's "fixins," before going to "ask Fidelia." When she did ask her that lady said solemnly: "Dorothy Miller, my harp's been hung on the willers for a good many years, but seems to me the branches never hung so low and droopin'-like as they do this minnit. To think of your diamonds bein' took right from under my face and eyes as one might say. But, land alive, Dorothy. I remember now, that rag-man that was here to-day while you was down town—of course he took 'em. I left him in the kitchen more 'n ten minutes while I went up in the garret to hunt up—my patience! I just remember that I kinder thought I heard steps, but s'posed it was—your father, Dorothy what will he say—and the party? Ain't it time you was fixin' to go?"

She might have rambled on in this incoherent fashion all the evening without receiving any interruption, so paralyzed was Dolly with astonishment, had she not mentioned the party. At that word a sense of her irreparable loss overpowered her, and she burst into tears. "Oh! Auntie," she sobbed, "how could you leave that man alone a minute when you knew my diamonds were in your room, and that he could go right to them—for of course that's all he came for. He found out where they were kept before he entered the house; that's the way they always do." If you had asked the little thing the next minute whether by "they" she meant rag-men, thieves generally, or young detective officers, I don't think she could have told you, her mind was in such a state of confusion.

To think of the dreams she had dreamed about the impression herself and diamonds were to make on "Cousin Dick," and now the visions were dispelled by a breath—or a ragman! In a little while she grew calm, and concluded to go to the party minus diamonds.

Arrived there, she explained the absence of those ornaments to her friend before entering the parlor. You may be sure it took very little time for the story to circulate through the room, and Dolly's diamonds formed the principal topic of conversation. Cousin Dick took a deep interest in the matter, which of course was quite natural, and he found it necessary to converse very often with Dolly on the subject, which was quite natural also, as Dolly had placed the case in his hands to "work up." He said he would be obliged to

call the next day, and, if possible, find some clue to the thief. This, also, you will admit, was the most natural thing in the world, now wasn't it?

Accordingly, very early next morning that officer arrived and found Dolly having an interview with her father, which he was just concluding by advising her to "ask Fidelia." "Cousin Dick," however, anticipated her for that tune, and himself asked Fidelia about the matter, and I must say that lady gave him a faithful and minute account of the whole matter. Beginning with Dolly's birth, then going back through the lapse of years she gave him an outline history of Dolly's grandmother. Then swooping down the long corridors of time she returned to the dropped stitch in the thread of her narrative, and deliberately proceeded to unravel all that young maiden's life, enriching it with many an anecdote and incident of her pure young days. And strange to relate the young detective showed no sign of weariness and inattention.

At length, owing to some instincts that housekeepers possess, she felt that it was time to "see about dinner," and cordially invited the young man to stay and share the meal with them; after which she promised to tell him the rest. And he stayed!

"Cousin Dick, the detective" deserves honorable mention for the unwearied efforts he made to recover the lost jewels. It appeared to be no trouble whatever for him to walk up to Mr. Miller's several times a day to ask the most trifling questions. Do not imagine that this was all he did. He made several trips for the purpose of waylaying the rag-man, and finally accomplished his purpose and this "Israelitish" brother was brought back in disgrace.

He protested his innocence, and gave good references for his character; but appearances were so strong against him that he was thrown into jail. This melted tender-hearted Dolly to tears. In vain "Cousin Dick" talked law and justice, in vain Aunt Fidelia tried to reason with her. Poor little Dolly felt as though she were the criminal, and grew very low-spirited, and although usually such a busy little housewife, grew very negligent in the vital matter of dusting, much to Miss Nevertire's displeasure.

The suspected thief had been incarcerated for about five days, and Dolly's dusting had been neglected for the same length of time. Aunt Fidelia could endure it no longer so she marched through the room where Dolly was sitting, armed with a large yellow cloth-duster, saying as she passed: "I'm goin' to take an inch or two of dust off of your bureau and tables; Dorothy; I'll give fern a thorough dustin' for once, I can tell you." She hoped this last hit might rouse Dolly from her despondency, for said tables were covered with little keepsakes and trifles that were the delight of Dolly's soul.

But nothing could Dolly think of but the poor man thrown into prison for her sake. In imagination she heard the clanking of his chains, and the hollow groans that issued from his damp, dark dungeon. Dolly had never visited the county jail, and her ideas of such places were very vague and gathered in substance from the "Prisoner of Chillon."

Presently, Aunt Fidelia's clarion notes were heard issuing from the doorway of Dolly's room, and each step in the flight of stairs having the same effect on the tones that a sharp does in music, by the time the voice reached her niece's ears it had reached the high C, when it formed itself into these words:

"Dorothy! Dorothy Miller! Dorothy Hig-gin-son Miller! I've got your di'monds!" This was the charmed word that opened the ears of the deaf. Dolly flew upstairs into the room, and arrived there quite out of breath. There stood Aunt Fidelia holding the lost ornaments up to the light, surveying the stones with a critical air.

"I guess they're all 'right, Dorothy, though mebbe they'd put in false stunes and sold the di'monds. I've read of 'em doin' it. How in the world do you suppose he got 'em back here into that little chiny mug that your Aunt Semanthy—leastways she wasn't your own aunt, you know, bein' as she was—"

"Oh. I remember now," said Dolly, "I laid them in that mug while I put on my hat, and thought I took them out again when I went down stairs; but must have forgotten them. Oh, dear! dear!" sobbed the unhappy girl, "this is worse than ever. That po-or, po-or rag-man will die, and I shall never be happy again. But I know what I'll do," said she, brightening up, "I'll sell the ear-rings if they were grandmother's, And give the money to him."

"To the rag-man if he dies," asked Miss Nevertire, scornfully, "or mebbe you mean the detector. Dorothy Miller! you can't fool me. I heard the man come upstairs that day, I know, and now he's got some pal of his'n, that's what they call their friends, to put 'em back in the house, and he hain't had tune to tell him the particulars; so the pal takes it for granted they were took from your room, and puts 'em back there. It's the clearest case of the kind I ever see." As it was the only one that had ever occurred in her experience, her last remark was quite true.

"But Auntie, I remember putting them there just as distinctly— Oh, how ever could I have forgotten it?"

"Oh, I know you, you've been frettin' and stewin' ever since they put the man in prison, and you say this jest to get him clear. Well, jest look after your di'monds, Dorothy, and ask somebody if they be di'monds that's my advice." And coughing violently she left the room.

The "detector" was soon notified of the recovery of the lost property, and the suspected man set at liberty. It was at Dolly's request that he came to the house, where she humbly and tearfully begged his pardon, being frequently interrupted by the significant sniffs of Miss Nevertire. Upon being presented with a nice little sum of money by Mr. Miller, the victim freely forgave them all, and left the house a happier and a richer man.

Of course the story was soon noised abroad, and again Dolly was rendered miserable, this time by the jokes of her acquaintances. Even “Cousin Dick” could not help quizzing her a little.

“Dear, dear,” sighed the poor little thing, “why did my grandmother leave me those earrings and get me into all this trouble? I wish I had never been baptized Dorothy Higginson Miller, and then it would never have happened.”

Miss Nevertire was a devout Presbyterian, so ignoring the fact that it was her name Dolly regretted, took her remark as a slur upon infant baptism, and immediately picked up the gauntlet.

“Why Dorothy,” said she, “I’ve no patience with you. If I had forty children, which it aint no ways likely I ever shall, I’d have ‘em, all baptized. Just think, Dorothy, how handy it is if you want to get property: you can prove just when you were born.”

“Yes, I know all that,” answered Dolly; “but suppose, in order to get property, you *don’t* want it proved just when you were born. In that case one would wish they had never been baptized—just as I do now—” added Dolly, who, it must be confessed, was rather cross. As Miss Nevertire’s cough came on at this juncture, further conversation was impossible.

You must know that I would not have taken the trouble to tell you all this about Dolly and her affairs unless I had intended to marry her to someone, and to whom could I marry her but the young detective? So we will marry her to that worthy young man. If he ever detects the fact that she is a simple little body, let him reflect that she may make him a better wife than if she were more learned. Some wise scribbler has said that we cultivate our intellects at the expense of our hearts, and no doubt he knew what he was writing about. They always do!

Shortly after Dolly’s marriage and removal to a neighboring city she was much surprised by receiving a letter from Miss Nevertire, containing the following item:

“I can’t say as I’m engaged yet, Dorothy; but I see a cloud rising in the east about as big as a man’s hand. Marthy Spencer and Josiah Martin are married, and Widder Fields and Deacon Bascom are goin to be, so mebbe I’ll foller their lead. When you’re in Turkey you must gobble, you know. How would you like me for a step-ma, Dorothy?”

Soon the cloud in the east grew larger than a man’s hand—grew as large as a man in fact. Confidentially the cloud shortly assumed the proportions of Mr. Miller. Finding himself lonely after Dolly’s departure, though he appeared to take very little notice of her when she was there, he began wondering what would become of him if his faithful housekeeper should follow her example. Coming to the conclusion that he must ask some female to take compassion on him, he followed the advice he had so often given his daughter and—“asked Fidelia.”

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