

Willie's Flower-Pot

"Mamma, what are you doing?" asked Willie, looking at his mother as she filled a little earthen pot with mould.

"I am going to plant a little geranium slip," said mamma.

"Oh!" said Willie, "what for?"

"That it may grow," said mamma, "and then next summer I shall have ever so many of those pretty red flowers you like to much in Aunt Fannie's garden."

"Yes," said Willie. "If you plant things, they always grow, and you get a good many more of 'em?"

"Yes," said mamma, thinking of geraniums.

Then the pot was laced in the sunny window, and every morning Willie peeped into it with a queer, solemn look, as though a new mystery had dawned upon him. One day he asked mamma for a little flower-pot of his own, and having obtained it, he placed it carefully beside the other, and took to peeping into that with even more solemnity.

One day, a few weeks after, pappa came home with tickets for the opera in his pocket. Of course one wears one's very best to the opera, and mamma went to her room to attire herself. But when the dress was on, and the gloves and the white cloak and cloud at hand, the finishing touch, the diamond pin and earrings were not to be found. Someone had taken them from their velvet casket in a room which was seldom, if ever, left alone. Mamma was not rich, and these were valuable possessions. Naturally there was much search and commotion, and the whole evening was spoiled in a great degree, for not only the loss, but the mystery of it, weighed upon the loser's mind. It could not be supposed that a faithful old nurse-maid was guilty, and the fat cook never came up stairs. Who had been in the house besides these? A ne'er-do-well cousin of the family, who had paid a visit of some weeks when out of business, and a dressmaker. It was so terrible to suspect any one, but a professional thief would not have taken the diamonds and left a watch that lay beside them, and mamma and papa put their heads together in vain to solve the mystery.

There were inquiries made, hints thrown out that would have led any repentant purloiner to restore the lost jewels. But nothing came of them. And as they were too valuable to lose, serious measures were at last taken to discover the real thief. A detective was employed, and he, a grave, serious man, with an acute eye and a deep voice, after a prolonged interview with papa, declared that he thought he could put the finger on the person.

A few days after, he returned with the information that he had put his finger on the man, and that it only remained to prove what he had done with them.

“It’s that cousin of yours, young Noakes,” he said. “He’s got a bill for cigars here, and for wine there. He’s running about with a dressy young girl to all sorts of places of amusement. The little dressmaker wears an alpaca to church, and no woman would steal diamonds and do that. Her father and mother are pious old Methodists, with plenty to live on; and she’s engaged to a young carpenter. Cook hasn’t a relation. The nurse don’t know what diamonds are worth. It’s your cousin.”

“Oh, I am sorry,” said mamma. “I thought Jack Nokes was wild, but I had no idea he was wicked. Really I can’t believe it now.”

“When a young man is wild you may expect anything of him,” said the detective. “And I suppose as it’s in the family, you’d like it hushed up? Just want the things back nothing else.”

“Certainly,” said papa.

“Certainly,” said mamma. “Poor Jack! How would his mother feel, if she was alive to know it. I shall tell him that—“

“Not a word to him,” said the detective. “You see, of course, he’d deny it; and you’d never be sure who took them. You couldn’t bring it home. I don’t think they are sold yet. The young woman probably will undertake that. I have my eyes on her. She’s followed wherever she goes.”

“This is terrible!” said mamma.

“Terrible! Terrible!” said papa. “No, we’ll not punish poor Jack; only, of course, my wife wants her diamonds. They were her father’s wedding present to her. Poor Jack Noakes.”

“What’s Jack Noakes done?” asked Willie, who was in the room.

“No matter, dear,” said mamma. “Oh, I hope you will grow up to be a good man.”

“Yes, ma’am, of course,” said Willie. “I’m goin’ to be a farmer and plant things, so they’ll grow up and I’ll have more of ‘em. Is that good?”

“Yes, that will be good, Willie,” said mamma thinking of country innocence and city vice.

Then Willie went and peeped into the pot very, very wisely.

Late in the evening the detective called for funds and to mention that the young woman had been seen on Jack Noakes’ arm peeping into a jeweler’s window.

“It is growing quite expensive—the detective business,” said papa. “I really can’t see why I shouldn’t just speak to Jack myself. If he has them, he’ll hand them over to me, and no more need to be said about it. I am sure he is guilty as the detective is.”

“I’m not,” said mamma. “Jack was such a dear little boy, and he has not a bad face. Who could believe Jack bad, to look at his round face and bright eyes? There may be a mistake, or, if not, that wicked woman is at the bottom of it.”

So they waited and said nothing. Jack Noakes came to tea, and Willie sat on his knee and told him that he had a flower pot, and was going to grow things and get plenty of ‘em.” But though there was a certain constraint in their reception of him, neither papa nor mamma could quite make up their minds that he was a thief as he sat chatting with them.

Moreover, he told them quite frankly that he was engaged to one Miss Lily Bell, and that if ever he had anything to live on they would be married.

She was a doctor’s daughter, and kept house for her father, and it was plain that the detective had been mistaken about her, and that she was a “very nice young lady, indeed.”

“And if he is mistaken there, why not elsewhere?” asked mamma. I think we’d better dismiss this detective and give up the diamonds.”

“No,” said papa. “He would go through with the affair now. He must know the truth.”

At breakfast time the detective called again. He did not refuse a cup of coffee, or, indeed, anything else that was offered him; but he had begun to doubt that the girl had anything to do with the matter. She had only bought a jet pin worth a dollar at the jeweller’s. Jack Noaked had kept his secret.

“Have you told him that you have missed the diamonds? He asked.

“Yes,” said mamma. “Oh, really I feel sure he is innocent.”

“I want to find my diamonds, of course, but—”

“Mamma,” piped Willie, perched up at one end of the table, “don’t bovver about your diamonds. You’ll have plenty more.”

“Hear the child,” cried mamma. “I ought not to talk before him.”

“And so mamma must not bother about her diamonds?” asked papa.

“No; she’ll have plenty more,” said Willie, eating buckwheat cake and honey.

“How, my dear?” asked the detective.

“I know,” said Willie; “it’s a secret.”

“That child knows something about those jewels,” said the detective. “Now, my little man, who took your mamma’s diamonds out of her room?”

“Nobody,” said Willie.

“Answer me,” said the strange man, a little sternly, whereupon Willie burst into tears and would say nothing. Altogether his manner was so odd that everyone began to see that there was something in the matter at which they had not guessed; and mamma led the boy to her room, and there, holding him in her arms as she sat in her rocking chair, began judiciously:

“You didn’t want to tell that man, did you?”

“No, mamma.”

“But you know who took mamma’s earrings and pin.”

“Nobody took ‘em. Oh, mamma, I meant to s’prise you.”

“To surprise me?”

“Yes, mamma. Don’t you know you told me if anyone had heaps and heaps of diamonds they’d be wick. Well, you told me, if you planted things they’d grow, and you’d have plenty?”

“Yes, dear.”

“And so I planted your diamonds in my flower pot, but they haven’t come up yet. When they do you’ll have a diamond tree and be ever so wick.”

The secret was out. In a few minutes the detective had the pleasure of investigating the depths of Willie’s flower pot and bringing out the jewels, and papa had the satisfaction of settling his little bill; and Jack Noakes wondered why his cousins were so exceedingly polite to him when next they met; for, though the mystery of the flower pot was revealed to him, he never knew he had a detective at his heels for four mortal weeks, and that the shabby man with the big hat drawn over his eyes, who was always leaning against the lamppost near Dr. Bell’s house, had been ready to arrest them both on the very first opportunity.

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