

all to be—brown. I'm sort of tired of—brown. I—wish red went. Winny, I daren't, truly.'

'Hetty Ann!' Winny sprang up. 'Oh, Hetty Ann, I've a perfectly splendid idea!' Catching hold of Hetty Ann's hands, Winny pulled her to her feet, whispering something in her ear with as much mystery of manner as if they two were not in sole possession of the big, quiet house.

'Oh!' Hetty Ann's colour came and went. 'Winny, I daren't, truly.'

'Yes, you do dare. Mind you do it to-night.'

'Oh, Winny! I daren't—I—'

'Promise. If you promise, you'll do it. If you won't promise, I won't be friends with you forever—so now!'

If Hetty Ann was good at keeping promises, Winny was equally good at fulfilling threats. Hetty Ann wavered. All the girls liked to be friends with Winny Dunbar, and Hetty Ann had never had a friend of her own before. Then she glanced at the clock. 'I must go,' she declared. 'It's half-past four, Winny.'

But Winny was standing in front of the door, both hands outstretched. 'Please, Hetty Ann,' she coaxed, 'I do want you to have a nice Christmas. I shan't enjoy mine half as much if you don't, and Miss Amanda'll be glad afterwards—anyhow, if she ain't she ought to be—so it's really for her good, you see.'

And Hetty Ann promised.

'Only I wish I hadn't gone in,' she thought, running swiftly up the road. 'Oh, I hope Miss Amanda won't be vexed about my being late. If she is vexed about that and then—'

Miss Amanda looked up from her sewing as Hetty Ann made her breathless appearance. 'Been kept after?' she asked.

'No'm. I stopped in over to Winny Dunbar's a few moments.' Hetty Ann hung up her cap and coat and put away her books. She had taken kindly to the regular, orderly routine of Miss Amanda's extremely limited household.

Now she began to lay the table for the early supper, glancing a little anxiously from time to time at the tall, upright figure sewing beside the window. Miss Amanda hadn't scolded her for being late, but what would she say when— She wished she hadn't promised.

Miss Amanda folded up her work and drew down the shades; then she lighted the hanging lamp, with its crimson shade. The low, square room looked very warm and snug, the big stove sending out a cheerful glow through its rounding front of isinglass. Hetty Ann loved this time of the day—the sense of comfort and protection the homely old room breathed.

If she only hadn't promised! Why it seemed as if it ought to be Christmas enough—just to be Miss Amanda's—'adopted.'

Miss Amanda glanced in her turn more than once at Hetty Ann's troubled face. Not even to herself was she willing to admit how fond she was growing of the child, so deep was the interest her advent had brought into her lonely life.

'Know your lessons all right to-day, Hetty Ann?' she asked as they sat down to supper.

The brown face opposite brightened. 'I was head of the class in spelling, and I didn't miss in anything.'

'H'm,' Miss Amanda said; 'I was always pretty good at spelling myself.'

There was distinct approval in her voice, and Hetty Ann glowed. But after supper, washing up the dishes in the kitchen, with only old Tabby lapping her saucer of milk on the hearth for company, the troubled look came back to Hetty Ann's face.

Would Miss Amanda think her ungrateful? Would she wish she had not adopted her? Still, Winny had said that at Christmas—if Winny hadn't told her—a new dress for best, that would make two new dresses this winter.

Shaking the dishwater from her fingers, Hetty Ann drew up her long gingham apron. Below, the long, straight folds of her brown flannel skirt hung down nearly to the tops of her stout, serviceable shoes. Winny's school dress was a bright plaid, and her ribbons

were red. Winny had made her promise—it was wicked to break promises. Suppose—a red dress that was soft and plained, with lace at the neck and sleeves—and perhaps Miss Amanda would let her wear it next 'speaking day.'

'Hetty Ann!' Miss Amanda called from the sitting-room. 'Ain't you got those dishes washed up yet?' And Hetty Ann came back to the present.

She was strapping up her books the next morning when Winny came over. 'Did you do it?' Winny demanded the moment Hetty opened the door.

'I—it's ready. I haven't—'

'See here, Hetty Ann! I'll let you off from that promise.'

'Oh, Winny!' Hetty Ann's relief was evident.

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As she settled herself in the train and opened her bag to take out her ticket Miss Amanda caught sight of a folded slip of paper. She took it out, opening it wonderingly. Who could have put it in her bag? Then her brows contracted.

Dress—red.

Gloves—kid, tan-coloured.

Shoes—shiny tips.

Stockings—black ribbed.

'Little Women.'

Cologne.

Handkerchiefs—pretty ones.

Candy.

'Under the Lilacs.'

Pretty box.

There was a bright spot of color on both Miss Amanda's cheeks when she finished reading that list. Hetty Ann should go without any Christmas whatever; but she should not go without the reason why.

Miss Amanda returned the slip of paper to her bag, snapping the clasp sharply. She would attend to some shopping for herself, and return home by the noon train.

Miss Amanda sat up very straight, her eyes on the long line of white fields bordering the track. She was disappointed in Hetty Ann. It had been a mistake, perhaps, taking the child. And then a sudden thought came to her. Miss Amanda took out the list again, studying the writing carefully. No, that was not Hetty Ann's writing. Winny Dunbar had been over that morning, and—Miss Amanda's thoughts worked rapidly, searching for evidence in favour of Hetty Ann. She remembered now finding Winny alone in the sitting-room. Her bag had been on the side table, too. She had brought it down before breakfast; and Winny had looked as if she were up to some mischief. Winny was a—

The flush on Miss Amanda's face was not all of anger now. But why should Winny have taken it for granted that she didn't intend giving Hetty Ann any Christmas, or had Winny overheard that night, and chosen this way to show her disapproval of Miss Amanda's plans? Of course, she should not take any notice of such a piece of impertinence.

She was glad, however, not to be obliged to deprive Hetty Ann of the Christmas she had already planned for her.

The clerk took down a heavy piece of brown serge in response to Miss Amanda's request, unrolling and holding it up before her. It was the exact shade she was looking for, and yet—

Hetty Ann would look good in red. Quite inconsequently Miss Amanda's thoughts went back to a red dress she had had the winter she was fourteen. She turned to the waiting clerk: 'Show me this quality in a deep red, if you please.'

From the dress goods Miss Amanda made her way to the ribbon counter, and the ribbons she bought were red. At the glove counter she made one last stand, asking for woollen gloves; but somehow they seemed very woollen; and, 'in for a penny in for a pound,' Miss Amanda pushed aside the woollen gloves, asking for kid, tan-coloured.

And all the while she told herself that she was a foolish, soft-hearted old maid to be swayed by what was neither more nor less than a piece of childish pre-