

1884. Mrs. Sedgwick, dear to the piteous voice of "Aunt Sarah"...

February was a bitter cold month this year. All the earth was frost-bound; all the sunshine was cold and cruel as the mimic glow of a transformation scene on the stage.

Rhoda had been very busy all this week. She was in the village of the village...

"Oh! she can't think that, Aunt Fowler!" "Well, she does, you may depend on it; and if old St. Valentine has any gifts to bestow on the girls...

"I don't see why you have her in the house at all," said Marian, angrily. "If she hadn't been here to intrude herself, Mr. Castle would certainly have fancied either me or Tilda."

"My dear," said the fashionable dressmaker of Exelle, "she's useful. She sews well and rapidly, and what should we ever have done without all this rubbish of business if she hadn't been here to do it?"

"And if she is to be here to our Valentine party," said Marian, "I won't go into the room, that's all."

"But she is in the room, and at ways, did," cried Aunt Matilda, "with those sugar-sweet ways of hers, and the eyes, dear aunts, and no dear aunts, that are always on her lips."

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Sedgwick. "I can see through her as well as any of you. As for the Valentine party, I don't spend my money in pickled oysters and refreshments for her to gobble up. My rooms are small, and my accommodations only a select few of my particular friends. And so I shall pack her off, early to-morrow morning, as soon as Mrs. Colonel Saltwater's new antique dress is sent home, and Miss Frowley's new monse-colored velvet is finished."

"Where, ma?" eagerly questioned Marian. "I know," was Mrs. Sedgwick's oracular response. "But, ma," coaxed Matilda, "do tell us."

"I'm going to send your great-aunt Sarah a winter bonnet," said Mrs. Sedgwick, in a mysterious whisper. "She has money to leave, and I don't mind to beget her. It will only cost me the frame and feathers, because I've made it of the pieces that were left of Miss Pyle's monse-colored velvet, and the strings are cabaged off the piece of gray ribbon that Mrs. St. John sent to trim her new ulster. And Rhoda shall take it to her. She can't possibly come home the same night, for I know how the train runs."

"Well, I declare!" giggled Marian. "You really are a genius, ma," said Matilda; and Mrs. Sedgwick smiled with modest pride as she remarked what she did believe she understood herself very well.

"From the interview Mrs. Sedgwick descended to the work room, where the two apprentices were at work busting dress linings, and Rhoda, in the window, had left off studying the sunset, and was devoting her self to the knite-platings of the lower lounce in Mrs. Colonel Saltwater's antique gown. The dressmaker looked sharply around, to make sure that not a second of time was being wasted. "Come, come, Lina and Sally," said she, "do make haste! Sundown already, and those linings not finished! I never in my life saw any one as slow as you are. Haven't you about a dozen knite-platings yet?"

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