

Christmas Shopping
A Reader's Theater Script
Adapted from *Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown*
by Maud Hart Lovelace

Characters:

Betsy, 12 years old
Tacy, her friend
Tib, her friend
Winona, a friend from school
Mr. Cook, the Book Store owner
Harness Maker
Clerk, at the Department Store
Narrator 1
Narrator 2



NARRATOR 1: School had let out for the Christmas vacation. That meant that Betsy, Tacy, and Tib had an important engagement. For years on the first day of Christmas vacation they had gone shopping together.

TIB: Let's take Winona this year.

NARRATOR 2: Winona had come to be quite a friend of theirs. They often stopped after school to slide down her terrace, a particularly steep and hazardous one, or to play show in her dining room. Winona loved to play show; she was always the villainess.

TACY: I'd like to take her. She'd be pretty surprised, I guess, at the way we shop.

BETSY: She certainly would be.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy, Tacy, and Tib went to find Winona and asked her to join them.

BETSY (to Winona): You see, we usually make our Christmas presents, or else our mothers buy them for us ... the ones we give away, I mean.

WINONA: Then why do you go shopping?

TACY: We go shopping to shop.

NARRATOR 2: The three of them smiled. Winona looked mystified.

BETSY: We've done it the same way ever since we were children. We always take ten cents apiece, and we always buy just the same things.

WINONA: What do you buy?

BETSY: You'll see, if you want to come along.

NARRATOR 1: They liked to tease Winona because she was such a tease herself. Winona's black eyes snapped.

WINONA (shortly): I'll come.

NARRATOR 2: They made plans to meet the next day at a quarter after two. Betsy didn't want to leave home until the mail came. (She and Tacy and Tib were watching every mail for the hundred dollars she was expecting for a story she had written.)

NARRATOR 1: But the mail came, and there was no letter for Betsy. So they hurried down to call for Winona, running and sliding in the icy street.

NARRATOR 2: Winona was waiting in front of her house wearing a crimson coat and hat. She looked like a rakish cardinal against the snow. She gave her pocket book a swing.

WINONA: Does it matter if I take more than ten cents?

BETSY (indignant): Of course it matters. It isn't allowed.

WINONA (grinning): That's all I've got anyway. Just asked for fun.

TACY (angrily): You go way back and sit down.

NARRATOR 1: But she didn't mean it. They started off downtown. The fluffy white drifts had packed into hard ramparts guarding the sidewalks. The four had to keep to the sidewalks after they passed Lincoln Park. The streets were crowded with sleighs and cutters. Chiming bells added to the Christmassy feeling in the air.

NARRATOR 2: Front Street was very Christmassy. Evergreen boughs and holly wreaths, red bells and mistletoe sprays surrounded displays of tempting merchandise in all the store windows. In one window a life-sized Santa Claus with a brimming pack on his back was halfway into a papier-mache chimney. Winona stopped to admire it.

WINONA: Look here! This will tickle the little kids.

BETSY: The little kids?

WINONA: The ones that believe in Santa Claus.

BETSY: Gee whiz! I didn't think we were little kids any more. I thought we were twelve years old; didn't you, Tacy?

TACY: I was under that impression.

TIB: Why, we are! What do you mean?

WINONA: Are you trying to tell me that you believe in Santa Claus?

BETSY, Tacy, Tib: Certainly, we do!

WINONA: Well, of all . . .

NARRATOR 1: Winona stopped, words failing her, and looked at them with a scorn which changed to suspicion as she viewed their broadly smiling faces.

TACY: I expect to believe in Santa Claus when I'm in high school.

BETSY: I expect to believe in him when I'm grown up and married. I hear him on the roof every year; don't you, Tacy?

TACY: Sure I do. And I've seen the reindeer go past the bedroom window, lots of times.

TIB: You see, we've made an agreement about him. We've crossed our hearts and even signed a paper."

WINONA: You three take the cake! All right. I believe in him too.

NARRATOR 2: They came to Cook's Book Store.

BETSY: We start here.

WINONA: Is that where we spend our dimes?

TACY: Mercy, no! We don't spend them for hours yet. We just shop. Choose a present.

BETSY: I know what I'm going to choose. Little Men. I got Little Women last year.

NARRATOR 1: They went in and said hello to Mr. Cook. His bright eyes looked out sharply under his silky toupee.

MR. COOK: (good naturedly) You never pass me up, do you?

TIB: This year we brought Winona Root. She's another customer for you, Mr. Cook.

MR. COOK: Customer! Customer! Oh well, look around.

NARRATOR 2: They looked around. They looked around thoroughly. They read snatches in the Christmas books. They studied the directions on all the games. Tacy chose a pencil set, and Tib chose colored crayons.

BETSY, Tacy, Tib: Choose! Go ahead and choose! Choose whatever you like.

NARRATOR 1: Winona chose a book about Indians.

NARRATOR 2: But then they put them back. Next they went next door to the harness and saddle maker's shop. There wasn't much to choose here, just whips and buggy robes. Getting into the spirit of the game, Winona cracked a dozen whips before she chose one. Betsy and Tacy chose robes, with landscapes printed on them.

NARRATOR 1: There was a tall wooden horse standing in the window. It was almost seven feet tall, dapple gray, with flashing glass eyes and springy mane and tail. Every year the harness and saddle maker let Tib sit on the horse. He looked at her sadly now as she put her foot in a stirrup and swung nimbly upward.

HARNESS MAKER: If the horseless-carriages keep coming to town, I'll have to take that fellow down.

NARRATOR 2: That gave Tib an idea.

TIB: *I* know what *I'll* choose then! I'll choose this horse. I'll put him up in our back yard and all of us can ride him.

BETSY: Tib! What fun!

TACY: I wish I'd thought to choose him.

BETSY: It's a spiffy idea, Tib!

NARRATOR 1: Winona had an idea even spiffier.

WINONA (casually): Let's go choose horseless carriages. The hardware-store man sells them.

NARRATOR 2: For a moment Betsy, Tacy, and Tib were dazzled by this brilliant plan. Then Tib scrambled down from the horse. Saying good-bye to the melancholy harness and saddle maker, they raced to the hardware store.

NARRATOR 1: Sure enough, there was a horseless carriage on display there. They inspected it from every angle, and the curly-haired hardware-store man let them sit in it for awhile. He was very obliging. All four of them chose it, and while they were in the store they looked at skates and bicycles.

WINONA: I could use a new sled.

NARRATOR 2: So they looked at sleds too.

NARRATOR 1: At the Lion Department store they shopped even more extensively. There were

many departments, and they visited them all. The busy clerks paid little attention to them. They wandered happily about:

NARRATOR 2: They chose rhinestone side combs, jeweled hat pins, gay pompadour pouffs. They chose fluffy collars and belts and pocket books. They chose black lace stockings and taffeta petticoats and embroidered corset covers.

NARRATOR 1: It was hard to tear themselves away but they did so at last. They went to the drug store where they sniffed assiduously. They sniffed every kind of perfume in the store before they chose, finally, rose and lilac and violet, and new-mown hay.

BETSY: I want new-mown hay because it's the kind Mrs. Poppy uses.

TACY: Mrs. Poppy! That reminds me of her party. We'd better go to the jewelry store and choose some jewels.

BETSY: Goodness, yes! I need a diamond ring to wear to that party.

NARRATOR 2: They hurried to the jewelry store. The clerks there weren't very helpful, however. They wouldn't let them try on diamond rings, or necklaces, or bracelets. They wouldn't even let them handle the fat gold watches, with doves engraved on the sides, which looked so fashionable pinned to a shirtwaist.

BETSY (to Winona): They act this way every year. Let's go to the toy shop. That's the nicest, anyhow.

NARRATOR 1: The toy shop was what they had all been waiting for. They had been holding it off in order to have it still ahead of them. But the time for it had come at last.

NARRATOR 2: At the toy shop it was difficult to choose. In blissful indecision they circled the table of dolls. Yellow-haired dolls with blue dresses, black-haired dolls with pink dresses, baby dolls, boy dolls, black dolls.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy, Tacy, Tib, and Winona had stopped playing with dolls, except on days when they were sick, perhaps, or when stormy weather kept them indoors. Yet choosing dolls was the most fun of all. They liked the dolls' appurtenances too.

NARRATOR 2: They inspected doll dishes, doll stoves, sets of shiny doll tinware, doll parlor sets. There was one magnificent doll house, complete even to the kitchen. Winona asked the price of it.

CLERK: That sells for twenty-five dollars.

WINONA (thoughtfully): Twenty-five dollars? Hmm! Well, it's worth it.

NARRATOR 1: When they were through with the dolls they began on the other toys. Trains of cars,

jumping jacks, woolly animals on wheels. But after a time, Winona turned to the others.

WINONA: Gee! I'm getting tired. When do we spend our dimes?

NARRATOR 2: The clerk who had told her the price of the doll's house looked at her.

CLERK: (incredulous) Dimes! Dimes!

NARRATOR 1: She settled her eye glasses on the thin ridge of her nose and looked at the four severely. When she finally turned away, Betsy turned to the others.

BETSY (whispering) Right now!

WINONA: I hope we spend them for something to eat.

BETSY: We don't. But after we've spent them, we go to call on our fathers. And you can't call on four fathers, without being invited out to Heinz's Restaurant for ice cream.

WINONA: I suppose not. Well, what do we buy then?

NARRATOR 2: Betsy turned and led the way to the far end of the store. There on a long table Christmas tree ornaments were set out for sale. There were boxes and boxes full of them, their colors mingling in bewildering iridescence. There were large fragile balls of vivid hues, there were gold and silver balls; there were tinsel angels, shining harps and trumpets, gleaming stars.

BETSY: Here, here we buy.

NARRATOR 1: She looked at Winona, bright-eyed, and Winona looked from her to the resplendent table.

TACY (explaining): Nothing is so much like Christmas as a Christmas-tree ornament.

TIB: You get a lot for ten cents.

NARRATOR 2: They gave themselves then with abandon to the sweet delight of choosing. It was almost pain to choose. Each fragile bauble was gayer, more enchanting than the last. And now they were not only choosing, they were buying. What each one chose she would take home; she would see it on the Christmas tree; she would see it year after year, if she were lucky and it did not break.

NARRATOR 1: They walked around and around the table, touching softly with mittened hands. Betsy at last chose a large red ball. Tacy chose an angel. Tib chose a rosy Santa Claus. Winona chose a silver trumpet.

NARRATOR 2: They yielded their dimes and the lady with the eye glasses wrapped up four packages. Betsy, Tacy, Tib, and Winona went out into the street. The afternoon was drawing to a

pallid close. Soon the street lamps would be lighted.

WINONA: Which father shall we call on first?

BETSY: Mine is nearest Heinz's Restaurant.

NARRATOR 1: So they walked to Ray's Shoe Store, smiling, holding Christmas in their hands.



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