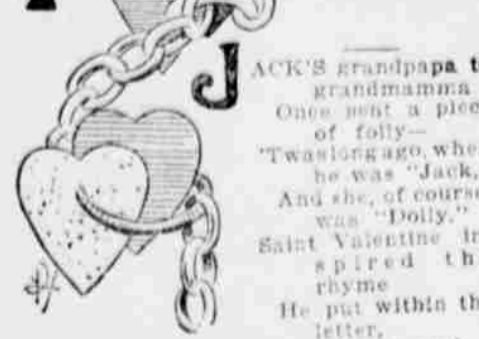


Three Valentines



JACK'S grandpapa to grandmamma
Once sent a piece
of folly—
"Twelve long ago, when
he was 'Jack,'
And she, of course,
was 'Dolly.'"
Saint Valentine in-
spired the
rhyme
He put within the
letter,
And even helped him choose the seal.
"Two hearts bound with a fetter,
"The rose is red, the violet's blue,
Sugar is sweet, and so are you."
And Jack's papa sent to mamma,
When he was just eleven,
The same rhyme for a valentine,
She being aged seven.
The envelope was tinted pink,
And up within one corner,
With bow and arrows, wings and all,
"Sat Cupid, little snerper."
"The rose is red, the violet's blue,
Sugar is sweet, and so are you."
—Eleanor A. Hunter, in Golden Days.

A SPINSTER'S VALENTINE.



LITTLE Joey Joyce came hurrying up the path of gravel and cinders leading from the gate to Miss Dryden's front door. Miss Hetty had seen him come in at the gate and she had opened the door before he had reached it.

"Well, my faithful little mail carrier," she said, "you have a letter for me, haven't you?"

Joey's smile developed into an actual grin, as he said:

"No'm, it ain't no letter. It's something better than a letter."

He had been tugging away at his reefer with his mittened hands as he spoke, and he now brought out a large, square, elaborately embossed envelope, addressed in an apparently disguised hand to Miss Hetty Dryden.

"There!" said Joey, triumphantly, as he held out the envelope; "who do you reckon sent it?"

"Some one with little to do," said Miss Hetty, rather severely. She was far from being acrid or severe in her speech, but she felt rather annoyed as she looked at the missive in her hand. Some one, she thought, was taking liberties with her, or, perhaps, holding her up to ridicule, and, kind and gentle as she was, she had spirit enough to resent either offense.

"Why don't you open it?" asked Joey. "Oh, I will presently," she said.

She got Joey a seed cake and he went on his way, disappointed and a little rebellious because Miss Hetty had not opened the envelope containing the valentine in his presence.

Hetty sat down by her work table and took a pair of small, shining scissors from her workbasket. The frown had come back to her face, which still had a youthful look, although she would be 39 her next birthday. There were but few strands of gray in the shining brown hair lying in natural waves over her white temples. She had not yet "come to glasses," and the little excitement of receiving the valentine had filled her brown eyes with a sparkle and brightness and brought a flush to her cheeks that made Miss Hetty a very pretty woman at that moment. Indeed there were those in the village who declared that Hetty Dryden was a "mighty good-lookin' woman" at any time. It was her choice that she was a spinster, living alone in her little white and green house at the end of the long village street. Had she been given to such vulgar boasting she could have told her friends that she had had "plenty of chances." Indeed, it would have taken all of the fingers and even the thumb of her plump right hand for Hetty Dryden to have "counted up" the offers she had had right there in Hebron during the past 20 years. More than one elderly widower had gone disconsolately from her gate during even the last five years, chagrined and rebellious because Miss Hetty firmly, but kindly, declined to change her name.

The last rejected suitor had been Hiram Dyer, a widower of but eight months and the possessor of eight "awful" children who had undoubtedly been largely instrumental in worrying and wearying their poor mother into her grave.

"Mebbe this is from Hiram Dyer," Hetty Dryden said, as she snipped off

the end of the envelope containing the valentine. "He said I'd hear from him again. If I felt sure it came from him, I'd send it back. I don't want him nor his valentine, either."

The valentine that Miss Hetty drew from the envelope was not made of paper lace and tinsel and embossed doves and flowers. It was instead a squarish sheet of blue lined note paper, on which was written in an evidently disguised hand:

"This night at eight,
For to know his fate,
Your valentine will wait
At your front gate.
If from your east window
A light doth shine,
He will enter in
To claim his valentine.
If all is dark
He will go away,
Leaving forever unsaid
What he wants to say.
O, be not cruel nor unkind,
But let a light shine
For your valentine."

The flush in Hetty Dryden's cheeks deepened as she let the bit of paper fall to her lap.

"Such nonsense! I'd probably never hear the end of it if I was goose enough to really set a light in my east window. But I'm not going to. Seems to me I've seen writing like that before."

She held the sheet of paper out and looked at it quizzically, with her head twisted a little on one side.

"It doesn't seem possible that any man in his right mind would do anything so silly as to make up a jingle like that and send it to a woman, even if he meant it. I just wonder who did write that?"

When a woman's curiosity is fully aroused, nothing but the facts in the case will satisfy her, and Miss Hetty was annoyed to find herself growing more and more curious regarding the identity of the sender of the valentine.

"It'd be serving him right if I set a light in my window to lure him on,

ters are just alike in both of them, although you have tried to disguise your writing in your precious jingling poetry. I've found you out, you great goose, you!"

Jared Lawson was proprietor of the only news or periodical stand in the town. He was a short, slightly portly man, rather bald, with a smooth, plump and kindly face. His blue eyes betokened honesty and sincerity, and he had almost womanly gentleness of spirit and manner. His 45 years had been full of deeds of kindness and the old ladies of Hebron were never tired of telling of how "awfully good" he had always been to his mother, who had been a feeble, fretful, exacting and complaining old body for years before her death.

It was held to be true that Jared had not married because he "couldn't leave mother," and because he very well knew that no woman could live happily with her.

The old lady had now been dead six months and Jared was living alone in the four rooms his mother and he had for years occupied above his store. It was a lonely and unsatisfactory life for a man of Jared's home-loving and strongly domestic instincts to lead.

"Poor Jared!" said Miss Hetty, as she read the jingling rhyme for the fourth time. "He must be dreadful lonesome since his mother died. He's a good man, Jared is. Any man who will be as good as he was to that fretful, trying old mother of his for 25 years is a mighty good man. I was there a lot during the old lady's last illness and it was wonderful how gentle and patient he was. And so he wants me for his valentine, does he? He certainly would be more comfortable here than in those four little rooms he's been batching in over his store. And I—well, I'll own up that I feel kind o' lonely myself sometimes, and I—I—always liked Jared."

She sat for a long time with her



"I'VE SEEN THAT WRITING BEFORE."

and then dash a dipper of cold water over him when he came to the door," she said, with unwonted severity. "I just ought to—now that writing does look kind o' familiar, even if it is wrote back-handed with a view to concealing it."

She had slipped the sheet of paper into a drawer of her work-table, and now she took it out and looked at it again.

"I've seen that writing before," she said positively. "Now I'm just going to set here an' look at it until I've studied it out where I've seen it."

She put aside her sewing and sat very still gazing at the sheet of paper spread out in her lap. Having once formed a resolution, Hetty Dryden clung to it tenaciously, even though it was of trifling importance. For fully ten minutes she sat looking at the writing in different lights. Then a suggestion of a smile came into her face, and her eyes twinkled merrily. She laid the letter on her table and walked across the exquisitely neat little room to an old-fashioned mahogany book-case. Opening the glass door of the book-case, Miss Hetty stepped upon a hassock and took down a small volume of Byron's poems bound in green and gold. Opening the book, she read on the yellow-tinted fly-leaf:

"To Miss Hetty Dryden, with many good wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, from her friend and well wisher, Jared H. Lawson."

The writing was eight years old, and Hetty had not looked at it for at least half that time, but the moment her eyes rested on it she said with conviction:

"It is the same."

Taking the book over to her work table and sitting down again, she laid the sheet of note paper down by the fly leaf on which the inscription was written.

"Yes, sir; Jared Lawson," she said, "you wrote them both. The capital let-

hands crossed in her lap and a sweetly serious, almost wistful expression on her face.

At five minutes before eight a short, rather stout man was standing at Miss Hetty's gate looking toward the window in her east room. There was no light in the window.

"I'm an old fool to think a woman like her would set a light in her window for any man, as a hint for him to come in and propose to her," said the man to himself. "I wish I'd signed my name to my fool rhyme, or that I had the courage to go in. If there isn't a light in that window by eight o'clock I'll go in and own up that I sent her that valentine. A man that hasn't the courage to ask a woman to marry him, don't deserve her and—glory hallelooey!"

A bright ray of light came streaming across the snow from the window of the east room. Jared Lawson tugged at the gate, which did not open readily, and finally he climbed over the low fence and ran toward the door calling out like a happy child.

"Hetty! Hetty! O, Hetty!"

The door opened before he reached it and Hetty stood there in the light in a cherry colored gown and snowy white apron, a smile on her face and her eyes shining.

Jared's voice trembled and there was a suggestion of fear in it as he said:

"O, Hetty, it is I—Jared Lawson."

"I know it, Jared," said Hetty, laughingly.

"And you put that light in the window for me, Hetty?"

"For you, Jared."

"O, Hetty! God bless you, my—my—dear!"

He reached out his hand to clasp her own and to hold it to his lips. Then they went into the house together with the light of new-born love radiating from their hearts and faces.—Morris Wade, in Detroit Free Press.

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