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Myra's Valentine

Clarissa Mackie

MYRA WATTS' black eyes darted busily to and fro as she sorted the mail on St. Valentine's day. Myra had been postmistress at Littleford for 12 years, and it was said that she knew the handwriting of every man, woman and child in the village. And gossip whispered that Myra always read messages on picture postals before handing them through the window to their indignant recipients.

Outside the closed window was an expectant crowd pressing close to the pigeon-holes, watching Myra and her assistant as they poked letters into the boxes and twisted their necks in a vain endeavor to read addresses, for Myra had a most aggravating way of putting letters in with the addresses upside down.

All the time Myra was sorting the mail her eyes were wistfully searching for a letter addressed to herself—for Myra Watts had never received a valentine during all her 40 years.

"Humph!" she sniffed impatiently, as she thrust a large embossed envelope into a box, "that Timpkins boy has sent a valentine to Lissy Edwards—I wonder what her ma'd say if she knew it? And here's one he's sent to May Weeks—the impudent young puppy—and here's one—for Ella—I wonder?" Myra deftly tucked the fancy envelope into her own private box, and, having finished distributing the morning's mail, pushed open the window and proceeded to hand it to the eager girls and boys who pressed into the tiny post office.

The last one to appear at the window was Ella Flagg, the little milliner

whose shop was next door to the post office. Ella was a faded blond, with light blue eyes and a face that once had been vivaciously pretty, but now was sad and wistful. People had decided that Ella Flagg had begun to droop from the moment that Will Chandler left Littleford and went to California. Some wondered whether Ella ever heard from Will, but Myra could have told them that she did



"That Timpkins Boy Has Sent a Valentine to Lissy Edwards."

not—only Myra didn't have much to say about Ella Flagg. Once they had been close friends, but for many years they had been estranged.

Ella's mute, questioning face appeared at the post office window. Myra nodded curtly, handed Ella a newspaper and a letter containing a circular. Then she turned her back and began to close up the office for the noon hour.

When she was all alone Myra locked the door and took Ella's valentine out of her own box. It was postmarked from a town in California, and the handwriting was unmistakably that of Will Chandler. Myra knew it at once. She had had several notes from Will before he fell in love with Ella Flagg.

The envelope was addressed to Ella Flagg.

Myra's black eyes blazed jealously as she held the missive up to the light and discerned through the thin paper the dainty decoration of a lovely valentine.

A little printed verse could be plainly read:

Amid these wilds I wander in despair,
I sigh for her, so faithless, yet so fair.
Ye streams, ye woods, ye breezes tell
The agonies of soul for her I feel.

A bit of doggerel verse—yet it set Myra's heart to beating rapidly.

Will Chandler had sent this valentine to Ella Flagg—what wonder-working thing was this Love which could bridge the long years of estrangement?

Year after year Will Chandler had sent a similar message to Ella Flagg—and Ella had never received it! Still, Will had doggedly sent the valentines. Nothing in between, but on the days devoted to the kindly saint, Will sent some message to his old sweetheart—and Ella never got it!

Myra Watts might have explained, but she didn't.

Today her eyes glowed fiercely as she hid the letters away in her bureau at home.

"They ought to be my valentines," she defended herself. "So I'll keep 'em here!"

That night Myra closed the post office at eight o'clock and started for home. Her way led past the little house where Ella Flagg lived with an invalid mother. When Myra passed Mrs. Jacob Hill's house that good lady ran out with a paper hat bag in her hand.

"Oh, Myra," she panted, "do you mind leaving this at Ella Flagg's house? She's promised to fix my spurning bonnet tonight so's I can go to Uncle Benny's funeral tomorrow. I'm much obliged," she called over her shoulder as she hurried into the house.

Myra turned into the Flagg gate and went around the path to the side door. There was a light in the sitting room and Myra peeped through the glass panels of the door before she knocked. What she saw there stayed her hand.

Ella Flagg was all alone in the room. Myra knew that Mrs. Flagg was asleep in the adjoining bedroom. Ella's fair head was pressed disconsolately into the cushions of the sofa and her thin shoulders were heaving convulsively.

Clenched in one thin hand was a crumpled envelope and Myra shrewdly guessed it might be some old love letter from Will Chandler.

Myra's tough little heart suddenly melted—was this evening a repetition of many other endings of St. Valentine's day? Had Ella Flagg hoped each year that she would receive some message from her absent lover?

And then the full realization of the misery she had caused brought a dreadful feeling of wretchedness to her heart.

"I must tell her," decided Myra suddenly; "I must tell her about the letters I have kept back—and when he comes after her, I must tell him, too, and I must help her get ready for her wedding—it's my punishment!"

Softly she opened the door and went inside.

When Will Chandler came home to claim Ella Flagg for his bride, people marveled that Myra Watts appeared as Ella's maid of honor, and they could

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not understand what had healed the breach between the old friends.

Myra might have told you that it was a bundle of suppressed letters and valentines which Ella Flagg had burned that memorable night when Myra made confession of her wrongdoing; but she kept her secret, and so did Ella, and Will Chandler refused to listen to her story because he was so glad and eager to hold Ella in his arms again.

And when another valentine day came around Myra sorted the mail, quickly, deftly, and in another spirit. When at last she came to a large embossed envelope postmarked California, where Will and Ella were living with old Mrs. Flagg, a beautiful color suffused her dark face.

"Come out here and live with us," wrote Ella on the back of the valentine she sent. "Will knows of a splendid position for you, and it is summer all the time in California."

Myra went, and she says it is summer all the time in her heart, too, ever since that night when she unburdened it to her friend and brought happiness to three sorrowing souls.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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Work With a Will.

Whatever your work, do not wait to "feel just like it," before you begin to do your best. If you wait for inspiration you are doomed. Disregard your moods. Pay no attention to your feelings. If it is time to work, set about it, not half-heartedly, but with the whole-souled energy which is an admirable substitute for enthusiasm. To wait till you feel like it before you do your best, is to waste life and power.