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ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

A Comedy in One Act

FOR FEMALE CHARACTERS ONLY

BY
ANNIE ELIOT

47821X'

BOSTON

Walter H. Baker & Co.

1892

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CHARACTERS.

ELINOR.

LETTY, *her niece.*

COSTUMES, modern.



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ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

SCENE. — *A parlor handsomely furnished. ELINOR discovered alone with a book, which she is not reading.*

ELINOR. How very absurd and mediæval on his part to send me a valentine! A real valentine with, I have no doubt, birds and hearts and cupids and true lover's knots—and—arrows on it. I do not think I shall be entirely satisfied unless it has a heart penetrated by an arrow. There is something about a heart, in vivid color, penetrated by an arrow, that expresses an amount of sentimental suffering otherwise impossible to delineate. I used to be very fond of the openwork ones over colored paper, but I think now I should be able to do without the colored paper. My tastes have softened down with the faded æstheticism of the age. But I should like some of those appropriate legends "stuck" here and there; something simple but convincing, such as, "True Love," or "Mine is Thine," "Think of Me," or "From a True Friend." I remember that even to the uncritical eye of youth these aphorisms, had rather the air of being attached as a work of supererogation after the real valentine was finished. They suggest conventionalized emotion in a way that is charming, and Dick and I both like our emotion conventionalized.

LETTY (*from outside*). Aunt Elinor! Aunt Elinor! Can I have an apple?

EL. (*sighing*). She's always wanting something to eat. I suppose at her age I always wanted something to eat. (*Aloud.*) Of course you can have an apple.

LET. Well, I've had three.

EL. I've no doubt of it; but you can have four—as many as you like.

LET. Well, I don't believe I'll want more than four.

EL. (*with a slight shrug*). I have a greater faith in her capabilities, founded on a brief but eventful experience! What is to me so absurd about it is that Richard should fancy for a moment that that sort of thing should really have any effect upon me. He knows I'm the least sentimental of mortals, and that all the—the accessories of lovemaking weigh with me not at all. I wish they did, I'm sure. I'd like to know the sweetness of doubt and mysteries and surprises and that sort of thing again. I would like more than all to be jealous, just faintly, deliciously jealous, but that is out of

the question. I have passed beyond that, and of all men, with Richard Morrison. I know he is in love with me, and that fact is itself everything at our age — would be everything, I mean, if I cared for him. It ought to be enough for any woman.

LET. (*from outside*). Say, Aunt Elinor, there aren't any more in the dish!

EL. Any more what? Oh! I'm sorry, but Jane will get you some if you speak to her.

LET. It isn't really very much matter, Aunt Elinor, but if Jane can just as well —

EL. Oh, yes, Jane can just as well — It would need an extra housemaid to keep that dish replenished. What was I saying about enough for any woman? It certainly couldn't have been apples — Oh! about knowing he's in love with me. Yes, and he knows I know it, and that certainly ought to be enough for him. What more could a reasonable man want? And what is the use of his telling me of it? It won't do any good! I implied that to him the other evening when he showed signs of bringing up the matter for the dozenth time, and he laughed and said, "Day after tomorrow is the fourteenth of February; I think I shall have to try sending a valentine," — as if a valentine would make matters any better! Still, I'm curious to see what sort of a composition it will be. But it is afternoon and it hasn't come yet. I should believe that he would never think of such a careless remark again, except that Richard has a dreadful way of remembering careless remarks.

(*Enter LETTY eating an apple; seats herself and swings her feet.*)

LET. Jane found some for me, Aunt Elinor, and she says there are lots more, so it's all right.

EL. (*somewhat absently*). Oh, yes, I am quite sure it will be all right.

LET. Say, Aunt Elinor, I've been reading an awfully interesting book.

EL. Have you? (*Aside.*) This taste for reading has been suddenly developed. I hope it will last. (*Aloud.*) What is it?

LET. Oh, I've forgotten the name of it, but it is awfully interesting. It's all about broken engagements and misunderstandings, and they go to the most elegant ball, and he sends her the loveliest flowers out of his own greenhouse, you know. I've forgotten what kind of flowers it is, but it is some particular kind, you know, that *means* something. It's a sort of queer name. I wish I could think of it, so if anybody ever sent me any I'd know what it was. It was in England, you know, at a manor house. I wish I could think of it. It isn't ylang ylang, you know, but —

EL. (*languidly*). Stephanotis, perhaps.

LET. Yes, I guess that's it — anyway, it's just as good. I've forgotten *what* it meant anyway, so I guess I wouldn't know. Well, he sends them to her, you know, and she doesn't wear them — oh!

there's somebody else in the house that's in love with him too, and she interferes — I think she mixes up the flowers, or something — she's an awfully mean old thing, and I should think he'd have seen through her in a minute, and known she — the other one — wanted to wear the flowers — I would, I know, wouldn't *you*, Aunt Elinor?

EL. Oh, undoubtedly! There's nothing easier than unmasking deception in books. (*Aside.*) One doesn't have anything half so interesting to do in real life.

LET. Well, it makes an awful lot of trouble anyway, and he quarrels with her, the nice one, you know, and goes off with the other. She has the most *perfectly* lovely dress on at the ball — all kind of weird and serpent-like and glittering, you know, and oh! I was *dreadfully* afraid he was going to *propose* to her — wouldn't it have been *perfectly awful* if he had, Aunt Elinor?

EL. Oh, yes; perfectly awful! (*Aside.*) It seems so long ago that I realized how perfectly awful it would have been.

LET. And, you know, all along you worry about this serpent one — she's the most deceitful thing; she's a perfect schemer — and you wonder if it will ever straighten out.

EL. Yes, certainly; it must be very interesting. (*Aside.*) I remember worrying over such misunderstandings, and really having doubts about their straightening out. It was crude, to be sure, but I fancy it was better than not caring whether they straighten out or not. (*Aloud.*) Wouldn't you like a knife and plate?

LET. Oh, dear me, no! It's awfully fussy to have a knife and a plate. I eat 'most every bit, anyway — all but just the stem and the other end. I like the core of this kind of apple — some cores I don't. Then there's an elegant scene at the end where somebody dies. I don't know just who it was, for I sort of skipped on, but it's the most *affecting* thing. I almost cried just reading it over once. And the hero — I think his name is Lionel — isn't that a nice name? so kind of odd! — he's so *despairing* — you never saw anything like the way he talks!

EL. Very likely. (*Aside.*) And yet I dare say he'll get over it. The more despairing they are, the less time they can keep it up — otherwise there would never be enough despair to go around.

LET. Don't you think it sounds splendid, Aunt Elinor?

EL. Oh, yes; there is always something very attractive about despair. But, Letty, I don't think that's the kind of book you ought to read. You know now that you are really in my charge I must be particular. I'd rather you'd choose something less — well, less emotional.

LET. What? (*Indifferently.*) Oh, well, I don't mind. It's all the same to me what I read. I don't read anyway when there's anything else to do.

EL. (*aside*). There is one thing Letty will spare me, — that is, sentimental anxieties. She has no conception of flirtation or kindred amusements.

LET. Say, Aunt Elinor, did you know to-day was St. Valentine's Day?

EL. (*somewhat startled*). Why, yes — I remembered it. How did you happen to think of it?

LET. (*with condescension*). Oh, I have always known it ever since I can remember! The boys home used to send lots. I didn't care much about the valentines, but it used to be fun to catch them ringing the bell before they could run away.

EL. How exciting! (*Aside.*) I wonder if Richard will adopt that plan. I think I might be able to catch him ringing the bell. I do not believe he runs as fast as he did.

LET. (*still with condescension*). I suppose it is so long since you had anything to do with such things as valentines and making love and — being sweet on people, you know, that you forget all about them.

EL. (*feebly*). Oh, certainly! That is the sort of thing a woman always forgets. (*Aside.*) This is, I presume, a taste of the beautiful insolence of youth!

LET. Well, it is sort of fun while it lasts, of course —

EL. (*in an undertone*). Oh, yes, while it lasts. (*Aside.*) She is not so ignorant after all.

LET. And if the boys are nice.

EL. (*in undertone*). If the boys are nice, certainly.

LET. What?

EL. Oh, nothing — only, as you say, if the boys are nice. I suppose it does make a difference.

LET. (*decidedly*). I should say as much! It makes a lot of difference. If they are not — oh, they're so stupid! They can't *do* things, and they want to sit quietly and talk.

EL. Age certainly develops curious tastes. There is something about sitting quietly and talking that I have known preferred to other pleasures — even at a ball. If the boys were nice, that is, of course.

LET. Oh, well, at a dancing party they can't be very much fun anyway! Of course (*generously*) I know I'm not out, so I don't know *all* about it.

EL. What a perilous admission!

LET. I've danced at dancing school, you know, and it isn't half so much fun as games. I think "going to Jerusalem" is *real* fun. But I shouldn't think to go dressed up in your best clothes and dance with a lot of people you don't care about would be much fun.

EL. (*smiling*). But how about dancing with a lot of people you do care about?

LET. (*doubtfully*). Well, I suppose that would be better.

EL. Much better — and so much better than only caring about dancing with one. (*Aside.*) I've always told Richard he was a goose not to dance. Not, of course, that I was referring to Richard.

LET. (*looking curiously at ELINOR*). Do you dance *now*?

EL. (*slightly nettled*). Why, of course I dance now. Why shouldn't I?

LET. (*twisting about in an embarrassed manner*). Oh, I don't know.

EL. (*aside*). I wish she'd sit still. If they taught dancing, they did not teach deportment in Walkerville. But what is the use of being impatient.

LET. I went to look on once at a hop at a hotel, and some married ladies danced!

EL. (*dryly*). Indeed?

LET. I thought it seemed awfully funny, but they did.

EL. Well, why shouldn't they?—if they danced well.

LET. (*amazed*). Why—why they were *married*—married ladies, you know.

EL. Oh, yes. (*Aside*.) I suppose at her age I should have found it less difficult to follow her line of argument. Evidently she has theories.

LET. Well, what I was going to say about Valentine's Day was—you know that elderly Mr. Morrison, don't you?

EL. (*with some indignation*). Elderly? No; I don't know any *elderly* Mr. Morrison.

LET. Oh, yes, you do too! Well, oldish then—real oldish.

EL. (*coolly*). Do you mean Dick Morrison that comes here sometimes?

LET. Dick? Well, yes; I guess perhaps you call him Dick, though it seems awfully disrespectful.

EL. (*aside, devoutly*). I am glad I can put my hand on my heart and say that Dick is five years older than I am! But how long—oh, how long—will it be before people will say that elderly—no, not that elderly—that oldish woman, Elinor Hartington. (*She sinks into gloomy reverie for a moment.*) Well, what about Mr. Morrison?

LET. (*consciously*). Oh, nothing much—only it's so funny that a man so old as he should know anything about Valentine's Day!

EL. Oh, certainly. He's nearly forty. It's high time he lost his faculties.

LET. No, not that. Of course there are lots who are real good business men after they are forty, but it's different to know about love and valentines.

EL. Certainly; you are right there. I have heard it asserted that love—and valentines—were entirely disassociated in the masculine mind from anything that meant business.

LET. Well, you know I've seen him a good deal since I came here.

EL. (*somewhat coldly*). Have you?

LET. (*frankly*). Yes; I've noticed that he has come real often, and he has talked to me a good deal each time. I suppose he always *has* been coming to see you, hasn't he?

EL. I think I may conscientiously say yes, he has—more or less.

LET. It must seem funny to see him coming now, just the way he used to.

EL. (*aside*). I fancy it would seem more curious *not* to see him coming.

LET. I know some people do like that. There are some such people at home in Walkerville. There is one — he's an old man — older than Mr. Morrison.

EL. (*satirically*). And still living?

LET. (*unconsciously*). Living? I should think he was! He goes 'round making calls 'most all the time. All the young ladies think he is dreadful, and they skip out the side door when they see him coming; but there's this other one, she's just about as old as he is, and she's always glad to see him. He always brings up at her house. Everybody laughs and says he always has.

EL. Walkerville society must be delightful — so sympathetic and observant. (*Aside.*) I begin to see that Richard and I are really pathetic figures of a bygone generation. I hadn't thought of it in that way before.

LET. Well, I don't know much about that. This cousin I was speaking of is ever so much older than you.

EL. Are you quite sure?

LET. Oh, my, yes! (*Ingeniously.*) And I don't believe she ever was as pretty.

EL. Really, you overpower me! She might have been, when we were both young. (*Aside.*) Direct flattery after such knock-down blows is sweeter than honey in the honeycomb.

LET. Oh, no, she wasn't! She isn't — well — she isn't *like* you — she's different.

EL. (*a trifle wearily*). People *are* different, I know. (*Aside.*) In spite of these mitigating circumstances, she evidently considers it an analogous case. One gets wholesome truths and glimpses of the inwardness of Walkerville society at the same time. Poor Dick!

LET. Well, I was going to tell you about Mr. Morrison.

EL. Oh, yes; you were going to tell me about Mr. Morrison. (*Aside.*) Live and learn!

LET. Well, as I say, he's talked with me a good deal since I came, and he said to me the other day — it was that day, don't you know, that some one rang the bell when he was here, and he said your doorbell was always ringing, and you said something about its being the primary object of a bell, and he said the primary object of that particular bell seemed to be to interrupt him when he had anything important to say, and you said under those circumstances, perhaps he'd have better luck if he wouldn't always be saying the same important thing, and he said he hadn't suspected you of countenancing the chestnut bell, and you said you shouldn't think he would hint at such an ordinary proceeding, and then Mr. Apgood came in, and you shook hands with him, and seemed so glad to see him, and I was so surprised, because I heard you tell Mrs. White the other day that you thought he was a dreadful bore, and he always came just when you didn't want him.

EL. (*who has been listening in a state of utter stupefaction*). Might I ask where you were during this correctly reported conversation?

LET. Why, don't you remember? I came into the room just as the bell rang, and you said when Mr. Apgood came, "Here is Letty, Richard; she will entertain you."

EL. (*slowly*). Oh, yes; I remember. (*Aside.*) This is the realization of one's most morbid dreams of the *enfant terrible*.

LET. And I tell you I just guess I *did* entertain him!

EL. I haven't the slightest doubt of it. Did you — perhaps you gave him one of those dramatic reports of social events in Walkerville, where aged men of forty winters are not yet shut out on account of the natural decay of their faculties.

LET. Well, I didn't say so much about Walkerville, though I did tell him a good deal. He seemed real interested in it too. I told him all about the socials we used to have.

EL. (*faintly*). Socials? Did he know what a "social" was?

LET. Oh, yes, of *course* he knew what they were. Why, I tell you, Aunt Elinor, I guess Mr. Morrison has been 'round a good deal.

EL. (*mildly*). Oh, you think he has? Well, yes, perhaps he has been around a good deal, but I didn't know that he'd ever been to a social.

LET. (*with superior information*). He said he'd been to a good many. I didn't belong to this one, you know, but Julia did, and it used to meet at our house. Next year I'm going to belong. Well, I told him about them, and he said he'd like to go some time, and I invited him to the next one that meets at our house, and he put the date down, because I was afraid he'd forget it, so I guess he'll come.

EL. (*aside*). Richard in Walkerville, at a social! (*Aloud.*) Mr. Morrison has a great many engagements; he's rather a hard man to get for anything, so you mustn't be disappointed if he does not come.

LET. (*easily*). Oh, no, I sha'n't be disappointed; but I guess he'll come fast enough.

EL. What is the sort of thing they do at socials? Do they play — er — "going to Jericho"? (*Aside.*) I'm sure it's no further off than Walkerville — from Richard's point of view.

LET. Jerusalem, you mean. Oh, sometimes they do. (*Laughing.*) I'd just like to see Mr. Morrison playing "going to Jerusalem." I guess if there was only one chair left he'd have to go pretty fast, unless they wanted to come down in one another's laps.

EL. (*stiffly*). I've no doubt he would. (*Aside.*) It gives me chills to think of Richard in such a situation.

LET. (*still laughing*). And the music's awfully fast just at the last. How he would go!

EL. (*aside*). Richard circling around a chair to fast music! I don't wonder the idea pleases her.

LET. But then they almost always dance. After they begin to dance they don't want to do anything else. Sometimes they engage dances, three or four ahead. Julia had four dances engaged ahead the last time.

EL. (*softly*). Indeed! How singular!

LET. I suppose the girls will think it's awfully funny to see me with a man Mr. Morrison's age, but I shall explain it.

EL. (*distantly*). How will you explain it?

LET. (*with a little embarrassment*). Oh, I shall tell them about my meeting him here, and everything, and about the valentine.

EL. What about the valentine? (*Aside.*) Perhaps she means that she is going to exhibit him in the capacity of an uncle. Could he have told her himself about the valentine?

LET. Why, the valentine he's going to send me; that's what I was going to tell you. After we'd talked a while — that is, after I'd talked a while — seems to me he don't have much to say for himself, Aunt Elinor! I had to talk 'most all the time. Don't you think he's sort of hard to talk to? Don't you have to do 'most all the talking? (*Upsets waste-paper basket and picks up the scraps.*)

EL. Not *all* the talking. Sometimes he finds language in which to reply. Sometimes he even introduces subjects which had the matter been left to me would have been avoided.

LET. Well, we didn't really talk about *subjects*, but I talked a good deal.

EL. (*suggestively*). You know you do sometimes talk a good deal.

LET. (*complacently*). Yes, I suppose I do. I guess I'm an awful talker when I get going. They used to call me a talker from Talktown. But Mr. Morrison seemed to like to hear me pretty well. I guess he hasn't forgotten how he used to talk himself.

EL. Very likely not. Memory is sometimes the last thing to desert us. But what was it about a valentine?

LET. Oh, I was going to tell you about that! It seemed as if he wanted to say something to me, and he didn't quite know how to say it. Don't you know there are people like that sometimes?

EL. Yes. (*Aside.*) But I never observed it in Richard. It is I that find myself in difficulties.

LET. So I wasn't surprised when he began to speak about valentines.

EL. And why not?

LET. (*ingenuously*). Well, you see, I could see that he liked me.

EL. (*aside*). Dick's same old way. (*Aloud.*) Naturally.

LET. And he wanted to take that way of telling me so.

EL. (*satirically*). I credited Richard with more imagination. It seems that he recognizes but one way of sentimental communication.

LET. What did you say, Aunt Elinor?

EL. I say Mr. Morrison is by way of sending valentines.

LET. Well, I hope he will not send me a comic one. I think comic ones are horrid.

EL. I fancy he will not send you a comic one — not one that is technically comic; it wouldn't be like him.

LET. Did he ever send you a valentine?

EL. (*somewhat disconcerted*). Why — I don't know — I can't say he ever did.

LET. (*triumphantly*). Then perhaps he *does* send comic ones. But I don't believe he will this time, because I think he means something by it.

EL. (*dryly*). Possibly.

LET. Can I have a piece of that cocoanut cake?

EL. Which cocoanut cake? Why, yes, certainly.

LET. I think it's awfully good cake, and Jane says we are going to have another kind to-night, so I thought that had better be eaten up.

EL. You were quite right.

LET. (*goes to the door; turns back*). Say, Aunt Elinor.

EL. Yes.

LET. Don't you tell that Mr. Morrison that I said he said anything, or that I thought he meant anything.

EL. No; I never let him think that I think he means anything.

LET. Because perhaps he wouldn't like my telling you, you know. (*Exit.*)

EL. I feel utterly dazed. The only idea that I seem to have saved from the general wreck is that there is an extreme likelihood of Richard's sending me a comic valentine! And that's something I had never thought of. What in the world does he send one to Letty for? Something she said suggested it probably. (*Pauses.*) Yet why do I refuse to put her own construction on it, — that he likes her! (*Rises; walks restlessly about.*) Why should he not? come, now — why should he not? She is pretty enough — in a way — fresh, *naïve* — just the sort of thing to fascinate a somewhat *blasé* man like Dick Morrison. What do men care for crudities of manner or speech, if a girl strikes them pleasantly? And how should he know that her grand passion is cocoanut cake? I have been told that he would tire some time of fruitlessly playing the lover with me. He has not said a direct word of love to me since Letty came! not a word! He certainly did talk with her a long time the other day. And to promise to go to a social in Walkerville! That is equivalent to a threat of blowing his brains out from a more emotional character. (*Throws herself into a chair.*) Well, I ought to be glad. I think perhaps I am glad. I'm not in love with Richard Morrison. I said that half an hour ago — and I've said it any number of times before — and he only takes me at my word. And yet — and yet — (*In a burst of impatience.*) Letty! That child! How *utterly* absurd! Men have no right to abuse their privilege of being absurd! (*A pause.*) I do not know what to think. I will let the valentine episode decide the matter! He can't be going to send the same one to both of us. When we have conned our respective valentines we may understand each other better.

(Enter LETTY with cake.)

LET. Don't you want a piece, Aunt Elinor?

EL. (*absently*). Thank you, Letty, not just now. (*Aside*.) She *is* rather pretty.

LET. I like to eat the cocoanut off the top first. (*Proceeds to do so*.)

EL. (*aside*). Richard has not seen her do that! Positively I am too annoyed to be agreeable. (*Aloud*.) While you eat your cake I shall go for a book to read. (*Rises*.) I will come back in a few moments.

LET. (*with her mouth full*). You can have the one I was reading if you like.

EL. No; I am in the middle of another.

LET. All right. (*Exit ELINOR*.) I think it's sort of funny about that old Mr. Morrison. I guess he has been paying Aunt Elinor some attention. (*With astuteness*.) I bet you anything that's what it is! But I heard her tell Mrs. Paine the other day, when she said something to her about him, that they were just nothing but friends; that they'd known each other always, and that it was perfectly ridiculous to say they were anything else. So of course she can't care anything about him, or she wouldn't say *that*! I suppose when he saw me he felt differently (*consciously*), and there can't be any harm in my just carrying on with him. Aunt Elinor won't care, and I guess I can manage *him*. (*A bell*.) There! There's a valentine now! (*Runs towards the door*.) Oh, if I was at home I'd just teaf down and see who it was before they could get away, but Aunt Elinor said I'd better let Jane go to the door. I wonder if he'll leave it on the step. (*A pause; she opens the door and calls*.) Jane! Jane! Bring it up-stairs. (*Another pause*.) Who brought it? A telegraph boy? Oh. (*Receives an envelope at the door and returns*.) Why, it's just addressed "To my Valentine." Well, of course that means me, because Aunt Elinor wouldn't expect any. (*Enter ELINOR*.)

EL. (*with some curiosity*). Who came just now, Letty; do you know?

LET. Yes; it was my valentine. See.

EL. (*aside*). Richard's writing! (*Aloud*.) But supposing there should be a mistake, Letty? Perhaps this is meant for me.

LET. (*amazed*). Why, Aunt *Elinor*, it is addressed, "To my Valentine."

EL. (*laughing, with some confusion*). Well, you know that is a little ambiguous — capable of a double construction.

LET. I don't know what you mean by ambiguous, but I am sure it must be for me — and it is the only one that has come.

EL. (*aside*). This is too ridiculous — to dispute about such a trifle! (*Aloud*.) Well, Letty, suppose you open it, then we can decide.

LET. (*opens the envelope; disappointedly*). Oh, it's only a *written* one!

EL. (*holding out her hand*). And he would have sent you a printed one — so it must be for me.

LET. Oh, well, it's verses; I guess that's all right. If it had been printed I suppose it wouldn't have been much but verses anyhow, only printed verses seem so much more the real thing.

EL. So we're apt to think about anybody's but our own!

LET. Shall I read them?

EL. (*with suppressed impatience*). Unless you will let me read them first.

LET. (*kindly*). I guess he'd like it better if I read them first myself. (ELINOR *sits down with her book and a despairing gesture*. LETTY *looks over the page*.) Would you like to hear them?

EL. (*coldly*). Just as you please.

LET. Why, Aunt Elinor, you don't mind his writing to me, do you?

EL. (*hastily*). Of course not; why should I?

LET. I didn't know but perhaps you didn't like it. Well, this is the way it goes. (*Reads with constant blundering and false emphasis*.)

“A trite old fashion — yes — at best.”

Why, I don't see why *he* should think it so very old-fashioned, do you?

“A veil whose wearer stands confest.”

I think that's awfully funny — the idea of a man's wearing a veil.

EL. (*dryly*). Probably this is intended for a comic valentine.

LET. “A” — something or other.

“A *ruse* that cares not to mislead.”

Well, he'd better have directed it more carefully then — that's all I've got to say.

“A riddle he that runs may read.”

I think that's kind of mixed up, myself.

EL. I think it's very pretty.

LET. “But ah! so is the story old,
So is my lady fair and cold.”

That's me, I suppose.

EL. (*with suppressed exasperation*). Certainly a most transparent allusion!

LET. “As fair as those of other days.”

I'd like to know *what* ones of other days. It makes a good deal of difference, doesn't it, Aunt Elinor? I'd like to know just who he meant, for some of them are real homely in the history we read at school.

EL. (*bitterly*). Oh, Helen of Troy, of course. They always begin with Helen of Troy — don't be too exacting.

LET. (*with illumination*). Or perhaps he means some of the girls he used to be in love with. I'm sure he has had time to be in love with *lots*.

EL. (*with asperity*). Possibly he has not husbanded his time properly, and consequently has not made the most of such opportunities.

LET. Oh! well, I don't mind. I ain't jealous of any of 'em.

“ Is not a wisely pleading tongue
As rare as when the world was young?”

I should think he ought to know, shouldn't you, Aunt Elinor?

EL. (*who is somewhat near suffocation*). Yes; but he could not expect you to, you know. So it must have been intended for me.

LET. “ Still does not woman's fancy hid
Her lover keep his passion hid?”

Oh, I think that's just stuff!

EL. (*rising, on the brink of tears*). I insist that you do not read any more of what was not intended for your eyes! Letty, give me that paper immediately. Your childish vanity has led you past all bounds. You may be very sure Mr. Morrison—or anybody else—would never have thought of addressing a girl like you in such terms. It was written for *me*, and I assert my claim to it.

LET. (*amazed*). But, Aunt Elinor, what would he write *you* a valentine for? You said you and he were only just friends, and *friends* don't send valentines.

EL. (*somewhat startled*). Why, yes, they do. To be sure they do—often. Why shouldn't they?

LET. (*triumphantly*). But this isn't for a friend; it's for the lady he loves—he says so farther on!

EL. (*aside*). This is dreadful—but I cannot compromise my dignity by taking it from her by force. (*Aloud, with a little hesitation.*) Well, perhaps—Mr. Morrison and I—are something more—than friends.

LET. Oh, goodness! Are you really? But he said he'd send me a valentine. And I guess if you knew how he talks to “a girl like me,” you wouldn't say so much about my vanity.

EL. (*angrily*). I will not believe he said anything to a girl like you that—that was anything at all!

LET. (*demurely*). Well, perhaps it wasn't so *much*—but—well—if you cared anything about him—I'd tell you what it was.

EL. (*almost snappishly*). I do care about him.

LET. Oh, well, then, you can have your old valentine, if it is as bad as that! (*Tosses it over.*)

EL. (*horrified; aside*). What have I said? What have I admitted? I have told this child more than I ever told Dick. (*Looks apprehensively at LETTY.*) And the little wretch is enjoying it! I knew Richard would make trouble with his foolish idea about valentines! (*Aloud, with dignity.*) Letty, you can go in the other room and write your French exercises; you have been rather impertinent.

LET. (*pouting*). I wouldn't have said anything about that Mr. Morrison if I'd thought you'd care.

EL. I do *not* care. (*Aside.*) Every shred of my dignity is going — I've contradicted myself in every point. (*Aloud.*) At least, I only care that you should not be silly and foolish.

(*Exit LETTY somewhat pettishly.*)

I wonder if I shall ever be able to look Dick in the face after the unblushing confession I have made under the — the irritating aggravations of that niece of mine. One comfort — he will know nothing of it; I will see that she does not repeat anything. Now let me see the valentine. (*Reads.*)

“ A trite old fashion — yes — at best.
A veil whose wearer stands confest;
A *ruse* that cares not to mislead;
A riddle he that runs may read.”

Can Dick have written these lines himself? Or is it bribery, corruption, and a local poet?

“ But, ah! so is the story old,
So is my lady fair and cold,
As fair as those of earlier days,
As cold as those of sweeter lays.”

That last line can't refer to my temper!

“ Is not a wisely pleading tongue
As rare as when the world was young?
Still, does not woman's fancy bid
Her lover keep his passion hid?”

There's a hint of personal experience in those lines. I'm afraid Dick sat up all night to write them.

“ And so I take this old, old way
To make her heed what I would say.
This pen, like keener pens than mine,
Shall write my love a Valentine.”

It is not so bad, so far.

“ And ask, are not old fashions best?
Can Love like Friendship not be drest,
And still be Love? And, to be true,
Must Love and Lover both be new?”

(*Pauses, and repeats the lines thoughtfully.*) I am not sure that they must. Perhaps, after all — but what nonsense this is! To be convinced by a valentine, and not a hint of a heart or an arrow or even a glimpse of colored paper. (*A trifle hysterically.*) I should think at least he might have had it *lined* with colored paper. St. Valentine's Day has bewitched us all — but I am I — and Dick Morrison is just Dick Morrison in spite of his poetry. And yet — and yet —

“ Must Love and Lover *both* be new?” . . .

Well, let us proceed: —

“ And thus with other ladies, mine
Is trusted to St. Valentine.
And will she venture, when they meet,
To tell him he is obsolete ? ”

Hum! Well, not obsolete, perhaps, but — rococo — a very good person to take a message, but the district telegraph is within easier reach. Still, there is something rather charming about receiving a valentine. I feel as if some one had asked me to go sliding down hill in the country. I wonder if I would have liked it quite as well if it had come from anybody else! The idea of Letty — Oh! that was too absurd! Those questions are worse than the catechism. I feel as if I must give them categorical answers!

“ Can Love like Friendship not be drest
And still be Love? ”

(*Laughing, a little nervously.*) Well, Richard has won a certain advantage by handing me over to St. Valentine! I feel as if he was waiting for my answer, like a telegraph boy, and it wasn't quite good form to keep such a personage waiting long. Altogether I feel myself weak and vacillating.

(*Enter LETTY eating candy from a box.*)

LET. Aunt Elinor, why, now, Mr. Morrison is in the reception room.

EL. (*with a little start; aside*). I'd almost rather it were St. Valentine!

LET. (*eating*). And I guess that valentine was for you, because I asked him, and he said it was; and he brought this with him for my valentine, — he didn't have time to send it, — and I'd rather have it anyway; and I told him what you said. Won't you have some, Aunt Elinor?

EL. (*taking candy mechanically*). Told him *what* that I said! I didn't say anything.

LET. (*easily*). Oh, yes — you know about your knowing he wouldn't write to me, because he cared about you, and you cared about him, or something.

EL. O *Letty*, why I *never* said so! How did you dare to repeat it?

LET. Why, he didn't mind a bit! He just laughed and said he guessed his valentine was addressed right after all.

EL. (*indignantly*). Well, it *wasn't*. At least I don't know *whom* it was addressed to.

LET. I told him you just knew it was for you. (*A pause.*) Well, he is waiting for you to come down.

EL. (*weakly*). Well, I don't know what he means by it!

LET. And he says you needn't be troubled about his writing poetry, he'll never do it again.

EL. I don't know why it should matter to me. (*Aside.*) I don't know either why I am bandying words with Letty in this

worse than trivial fashion. I'll go and see him myself, of course.
(*Rises, takes up valentine irresolutely.*)

"And will she venture when they meet
To tell him he is obsolete?"

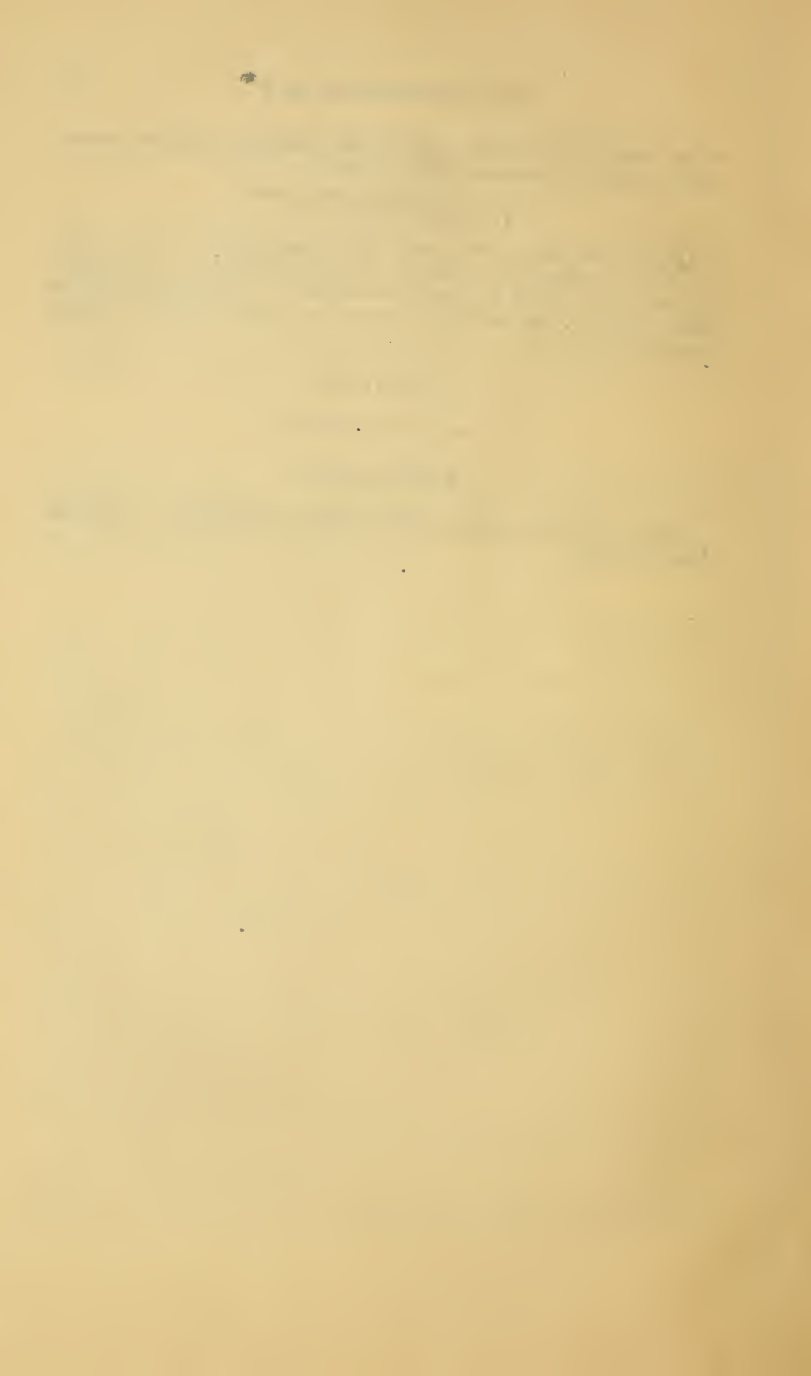
I don't quite know, I am sure. (*Exit laughing.*)

LET. (*exit slowly, or waits for curtain.*) Well, I think there's an awful fuss about a *written* valentine. I'm sure I am glad he didn't give her the candy. I guess her head *would* have been turned then.

CURTAIN.

PROPERTIES.

Apple. Cocoanut cake. Scrap-basket and papers. Valentine.
Box of candy.



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