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Joyce's Journal

A monthly dispatch from Joyce A. Miller, Writer



HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!

Do you wonder if the holiday is spelled Valentine's Day or Valentines Day? The day in question is the day of Saint Valentine and therefore it belongs to him. When something belongs to someone, we use the possessive apostrophe and so, Valentine's Day is the correct spelling.

I thought you might like to read what Valentine's Day was like 100 years ago, so I found this story in a February 14, 1924, newspaper.

Dot's Valentine is a sweet story about a little girl and an artist. Oh, how I wanted that artist to be Gari Melchers! But no, the artist in the story is Anthony Guino. I could find no information on Anthony Guino so perhaps he was a character made up by the author of the story. I did find an Antonio Guisini who was an Italian painter in the 1920s of realistic still lifes of fruits. I suppose a painter of fruits could paint hearts, ribbons, and bows, too.

I got another agent rejection on my **Corinne** story from Amy Collins of Talcott Notch Literary Agency. Amy works from her 40-foot motorhome while traveling with her two dogs and her husband, and I thought we would make a good team. But she felt that **Corinne** was not a fit for her list at this time, so she had to pass. I'm still waiting on a reply from the agent that I met at last year's writer conference.

A GLIMPSE OF
WHAT'S INCLUDED:

Dot's Valentine

I'm going to be interviewed in February by Leah Jones for her podcast **Finding Favorites**. **Finding Favorites** explores your favorite thing (aka something you love): how you found it, why you love it and why other people might love it. Guests are not experts in the topic, but experts in themselves and why they like the things they like! I will let you know when it's available for listening and you can find out my favorite thing! Can you guess?

As noted above, as a bonus for this month's newsletter I'm including the story **Dot's Valentine**.

Would you share your favorite Valentine's Day story with me? I love a good love story! Pop it in an email to me or post it on Instagram and tag me!

I live in the Church Hill section of Richmond, VA with my husband and my retired racing greyhound. Before I started writing, I worked for 30 years at a nuclear physics research laboratory.

Do what you came here for!



JOYCE A. MILLER, WRITER

www.joyceamiller.com

@JOYCEAMILLERWRITER on Instagram

Dot's Valentine

--from the New Castle Herald, New Castle, PA on February 14, 1924

For a week, Dot had watched her older brother and sister making valentines for all their friends. Tad certainly could make dandy straight arrows with a ruler, and Ida drew the cutest birds and bows of ribbon and hearts, too. Dot was only six and wasn't in school. But she was always learning from Tad and Ida.

Soon, Dot was making valentines, too. That is, she was trying to make just one for her best, best sweetheart, which was Mumsey, of course. Ida lent her a red crayon pencil.

"You're too young for paints, dearie," she said.

So, Dot made hundreds of red hearts with the crayon pencil, then she made red birds and red ribbons and red arrows. But no matter how hard she tried, none of it looked just right.

"If you will give me a new piece of drawing paper, I'll tear up all my ugly pictures and make some better ones," she said to Tad.

"Don't do that," replied her brother. "You're just a little kid and you can't expect to draw perfectly. Bring your valentines here and let's see 'em."

Dot unwillingly brought over her valentines.

"If I could only make one good one," she said. "I'd be satisfied."

Tad took the bits of paper and looked at them.

"Say, Ida!" he called. "Come and see what Dotty's been doing!" Ida came over and looked.

"Why, Dot!" she cried. "These are awful nice. Who taught you to draw so well? They're better than a lot that the children in our class are doing. I believe they're better than ours! Why, Dot!"

"Yes," said Tad. "There's something about them that makes them different. Sis, I believe we've got a genius in our family!"

Dot was very much pleased with this praise and she took her valentines to see if they looked any different.

"Just copied you, of course," she said.

"You shall use my paints if you'd like!" cried Ida.

"And don't tear up those valentines," said Tad. "If you don't want them, give them to me. I'll use them."

My, Dot was happy! The paint box had all colors in it. Blue and Green and Yellow and Brown and Black and Red and Purple. Dot began to paint and paint. But the next day when she was at home alone, she looked at her valentines again and they seemed very ugly to her.

“Birds don’t look like this,” she sighed. “I know just how to draw but my hands won’t do it. I know! I’ll go out front and sit on the steps and draw sparrows. I’ll take crumbs out and scatter them so the sparrows will come. Then I’ll copy them.”

No sooner said than done! Soon the little girl in her fussy pale green tam and scarf and warm coat and galoshes was seated on the lowest step of the front stoop busily drawing the sparrows which eagerly picked up the crumbs she had thrown them.

People passed by on the sidewalk and smiled at the busy little maid. One of the passers by was a tall man with a reddish beard trimmed to a sharp point at the chin. He looked at Dot, then he looked at the sparrows. Then he stopped.

“Will you show your drawing to me?” he asked.

Dot was shy of strangers, but when she looked up she found something in the man’s face which made her trust him. She held out a sheet of paper on which she had been working. The man looked at the drawings and then he sat down on the step beside Dot.

“Yes, you have it in you,” he said, and Dot wondered what he meant.

He took the pencil and began to draw a bird. Just a few strokes and the thing was done! It was so easy and simple, and yet it was beautiful. Dot’s eyes grew big.



He Took The Pencil And Began To Draw A Bird

“Oh,” she exclaimed. “That was ’actly what I was trying to do!”

Then before she knew it, she was chattering away to the stranger, telling him all about Tad and Ida and Mumsey and the valentine.

“You see,” she explained, “none of my valentines suit me. Tad and Ida say they’re grand. But I don’t feel satisfied.”

“Ah, me,” sighed the man. “How well I understand! That’s just how every artist feels.”

“I want to make a heart in the middle and three birds flying above it close together,” said the little girl. “I want them to be holding a ribbon which will trail down and make a lover’s knot underneath the heart.”

“I see,” smiled the man, “like this.”

He turned the paper over and quickly drew the valentine just as Dot had explained.

“I have some crayons here,” said Dot eagerly as she watched the picture coming. “Here’s blue and red and yellow.”

Oh, it was wonderful seeing the pencils fly over the paper! A touch here and a touch there. Every tiny stroke counted. Then it was done! Such a beautiful valentine! No gold on it, no bright colors, but Dot’s baby soul was full of art, and she knew that a master’s hand had brought it all about.

Now he was lettering something in queer pretty printing.

“I must go little friend,” he said, handing her the pencils and paper. “Keep on trying. You’ll succeed if it’s in you. And don’t forget me!”

He was off in a minute and Dot looked at the valentine in a dazed way. She could read a little, but not enough to make out the printing, so she took it into the house and waited for somebody to come home.

Tad and Ida soon came and Tad read it for her:

“To my little unknown valentine, from Anthony Guino.”

“Why, who’s he?” Tad puzzled, but Ida ran and got the newspaper.

“I remember that name,” she exclaimed. “Here. Was that the gentleman?”

Dot looked at the picture in the paper and nodded her head. It was the very man.

“Well,” Ida read. “he’s a famous Italian painter. No wonder he can draw!”

When Mumsey and Dad heard about it all and saw the valentine, they decided that it must be framed. “It’s too valuable to be kicked about,” said Dad.

Dot gave everybody she knew valentines that year. “Because,” she said, “if a great artist doesn’t feel satisfied with his pictures, I can’t expect to feel satisfied.”

“And how does it feel, honey, to be a great artist’s valentine?” asked her mother.

Dot drew a long breath and said, “I feel as if I’ll never stop trying to draw my very best.”

Her mother’s arms held her tight, and she added, “But I’m not anybody’s valentine, darling Mumsey, except yours!”