

# Won't You Be My Valentine

by John Beuret



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A hand-colored wood cut surrounded by a beautiful embossed lace border.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY hasn't always been a whimsical holiday for exchanging light-hearted greetings with friends and sweethearts, as we know it today. Its history is somewhat long and turbulent.

Tradition says that Valentine's Day derived its name from a young Roman priest St. Valentine, who was beheaded February 14th, 270 A.D., for refusing to renounce Christianity. While imprisoned, he composed a farewell message to the jailer's daughter who had befriended him. The night before he died he left the message with the girl, and signed it, "From your Valentine."

Actually, the Romans had been celebrating the 14th of February for years as the Feast of Lupercalia, dedicated to the pastoral god, Luperus, and to the Goddess of Love, Juno.

FOR fourteen centuries the church fought against the pagan practices which marked these festivals. As part

man maidens placed their names in an urn set up in the public square. Eligible bachelors each drew one to determine their blind dates for the coming year. When bitter sermons of denunciation made the annual festival more popular, churchmen set up competing lotteries in which the names of the saints were drawn. But being under the special protection of a certain saint didn't, by any means, prove as appealing to romance-hungry young Romans. So the festivals continued.



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About 1885 a beautiful fine embossed lace background in the center of which was applied in built-up style, lovely flowers of various kinds.

In 496 A.D., Pope Gaudens optimistically tried a new approach by dedicating February 14th to St. Valentine, and naming him the patron saint of true love. The new cleaning-up approach was only mildly successful.

During the Middle Ages, despite ecclesiastical opposition, love lotteries persisted, however, in many European countries. The French called them "chance boxes," and allotted couples one year to either get married or part company. In England it became customary for men to wear the names of the girls they drew from this

lottery on their sleeves or bosoms for several days, often encircled in a heart.

Furthermore, the church denounced as superstitions many odd customs that began to spring up concerning the lover's feast day, including the belief that if a girl would eat the white of a hard-boiled egg on St. Valentine's Eve, fasten five bay leaves to her pillow, and then go to sleep without speaking to anyone, she would certainly dream about her future husband that night.

WRITTEN Valentines appeared about the year 1400. At first, to elude vigilant — and oftentimes irate — fathers, they were hidden in hollow trees that served as trysting places. The quaint love missives were unsigned. Sometimes they were left on a young lady's doorstep by a bashful young man, who knocked and then promptly ran away.

As late as the sixteenth century St. Francis de Sales, head of the church in England, condemned Valentines publicly, and severely forbade their use, on the grounds that they were immoral. But as church opposition declined, Valentines flourished anew, while new problems arose to plague



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About 1890 this very ornate design was of the applied variety on a highly embossed background, with pieces of gauze inserted behind the applied features in the center. This Valentine measured about 7 x 10 inches.





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About 1875, lithographed in several colors and gold on plain cardboard, measuring about 4½ x 6 inches.

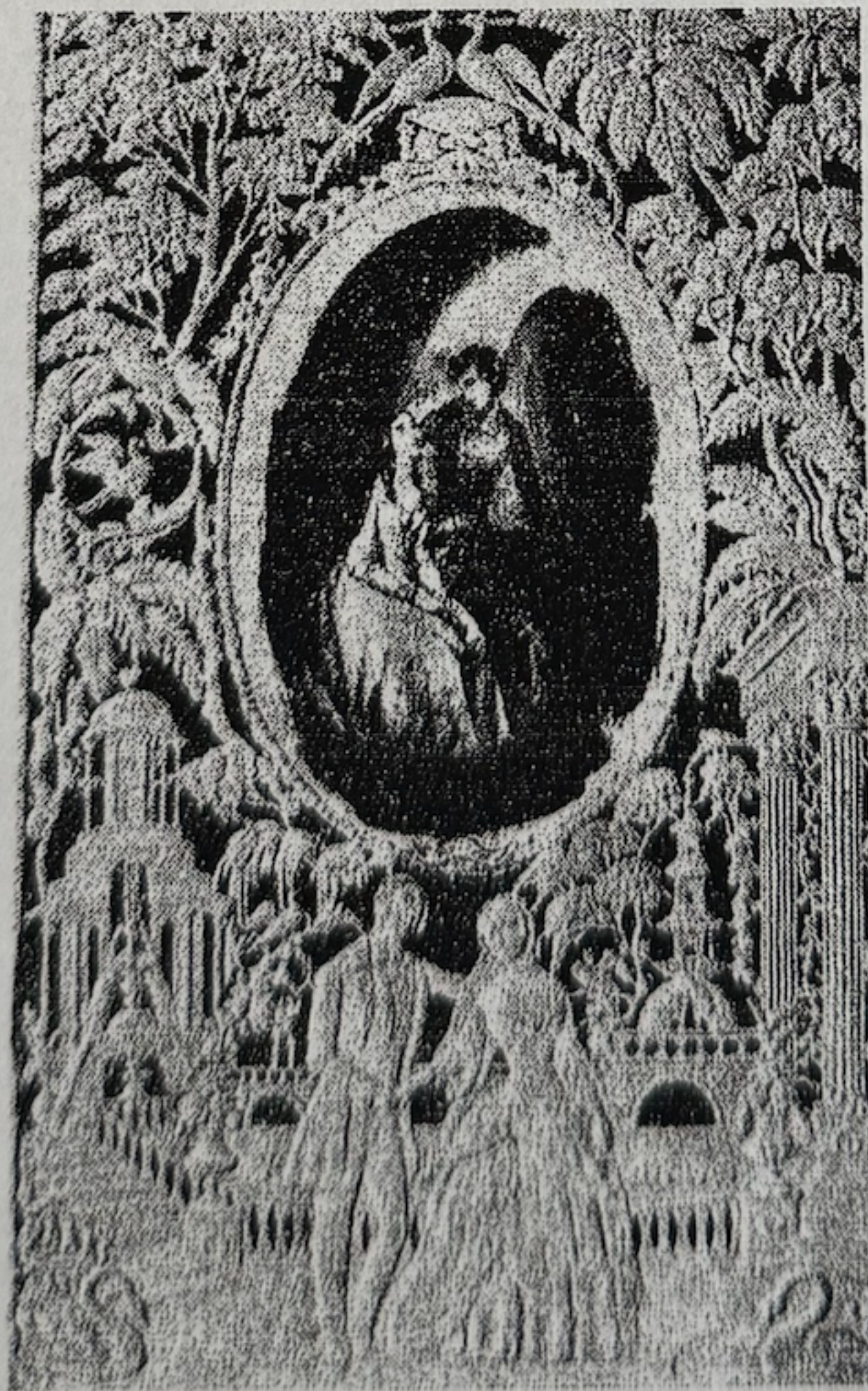
love-smitten young men. Composing new verses year after year became a brain-racking problem. The familiar "Roses are red, violets are blue," etc., theme was not only in use in the 1700's, but popular young ladies were already beginning to complain that it was getting hackneyed from over-use.

*The Young Man's Valentine Writer*, a book of standard verses that could be copied, was published in 1779, and immediately became highly popular. This handbook was followed by numerous others, including *The Beauties Of Hymen*, and *The Quirer of Lore*. Meanwhile, French gallants had begun ornamenting their February 14th billet-doux with gilt paper, ribbons, cut-out hearts, and real lace. Valentines grew in size and elegance until they became filled with cupids, paper fountains, tiny fans, flower reproductions, intricate ornamental effects, surrounded by layer after layer of filmy lace. Calling forth weeks of painstaking preparations, Valentine's Day became a very, very serious occasion. Each Valentine had to be made by hand. Pity the poor lover of the 1850's, scissors in hand, surrounded by stacks of colored paper, lace, brushes, and bottles of water colors!

ON TOP of all this, Valentines in many cases were actually considered proposals of marriage. Stern and discerning fathers even judged would-be suitors by the quality of their hearts-and-flowers missives, and the ornate Spencerian script in which verses had to be hand-written!

When an organized effort was begun to manufacture Valentines, custom veered from the overly sentimental, and the light-hearted modern Valentine was born. Publishing houses assigned their top artists to design them, and their best writers to compose the sentiments. They were beautifully printed, embossed, and die-cut. The wearisome scissors and paste-pot era was at an end.

Sufficient proof that Valentines are becoming more and more popular each year is the fact that last year Americans sent over 300,000,000 of them! For weeks, in schools throughout the land, youngsters will have fun fashioning their own this year, or buying them from the neighborhood store. Oldsters are not overlooking them, either! When a man puts five cents — or five dollars! — into a creation, decked with lace and adorned with a floral bouquet, he is really putting his heart into his message!



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About 1865, with a wood cut design in the center, hand-colored. It measured about 4½ x 7½ inches.

## Check Your Pantry Shelf

Coffee

Milk

Soap

Potatoes

Butter

Vinegar

Meat

Cheese

Frozen Peas

Bread

Pepper

Corn Flakes

Jelly

Napkins

Pie