

Valentine Challenge

A classmate's resourcefulness brought youthful romance back into the classroom.

By Audrey Corn

I went to school in Brooklyn, N.Y., in the 1940s. It was the custom, back then, for each classroom to have a valentine mailbox. In the early grades, everyone liked to exchange cards. Woolworth's sold inexpensive "cutout" cards in packets of 24, so no child went home empty-handed.

Valentine's Day was fun until fifth grade, when several of the boys stopped sending cards. By sixth grade, *all* the boys had stopped sending cards. They said that Valentine's Day was a stupid holiday. They said that they didn't like cards. And they *especially* didn't like girls.

My friends and I told one other that the valentine box was just as exciting without the boys. My friends and I were liars. We missed getting cards signed from "Your Secret Admirer" and "Guess Who?" and "Yours Till Niagara Falls."

Sally finally got tired of pretending. "I wish I could send valentines to some of the boys," Sally grumbled.

"You can send valentines to anyone you please!" Millie retorted.

"I'd be too embarrassed," Sally said.

"Well, *I* wouldn't be embarrassed!" Millie boasted.

"You would too!" Sally said.

"Would not!" Millie insisted.

"Liar! I *dare* you to send a valentine to ... to... *Richard!*"

Every girl in the sixth grade had a crush on Richard.

"Fine! I'll send a valentine to Richard!" Millie said without hesitation.

"To Richard. *And you gotta sign your name.*"

Now Millie *did* hesitate. The rest of us remained silent, waiting for Millie's reply.

Finally, Millie made up her mind.

"OK, I'll send a valentine to Richard. *And I'll sign my name. And tomorrow I'll let all of you read Richard's card before I put it in the valentine box.*"

Millie kept her word. The next morning, she showed us her card. On the inside she had written "To Richard." *And she'd signed her name!*

Every girl in our sixth-grade class watched in awe as Millie boldly dropped her signed valentine into the box on Teacher's desk. As far as we were concerned, Millie had met Sally's challenge. Sally, however, remained skeptical.

"We'll be watching on Valentine's Day. If Richard doesn't get his card, we'll know you took it

out of the mailbox," Sally said.

"Richard will get his card," Millie promised.

Valentine's Day fell on a Wednesday that year. After lunch, the boys slumped in their seats, looking bored, while Teacher walked up and down the aisles, handing out valentines to the girls.

Suddenly Teacher stopped at Christopher's desk. Then at Matthew's desk. Then at Joseph's desk. Teacher made 11 stops. Every boy in the room received a card that was identical to Richard's. And Millie had signed her name, bold as brass, inside each card!

The boys looked around the room and saw that they all had the same card. They started to laugh. And laughter often works miracles. Right away, the mood of the party brightened. The boys stopped looking bored. The girls stopped looking sad.

Joseph's mother had sent in cupcakes. Patricia's mother had baked cookies. Teacher provided the pink lemonade and the candy hearts that said "I Love You" and "Be Mine."

Life was good back in the Good Old Days. ❖

