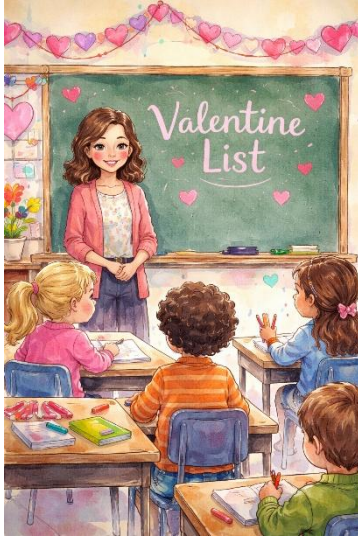


The Valentine List

By Linda Asato



The week before Valentine's Day, Mrs. Ellis wrote two words on the board: **Valentine List**.

"We'll be making Valentines soon," she said. "Today, I want you to think about who you'd like to give one to."

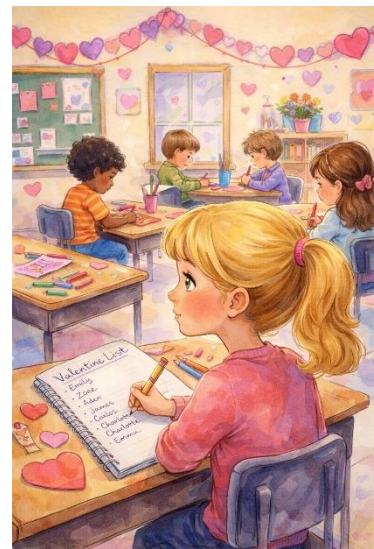
Lily opened her notebook and picked up her pencil. She wrote the first few names easily.

These were friends, kids she sat with at lunch. People who always made her laugh.

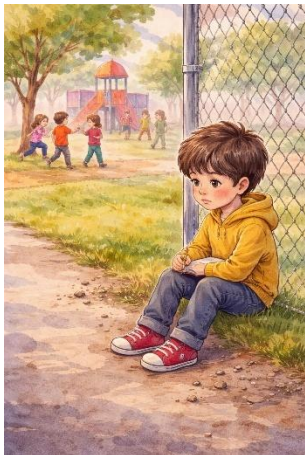
Her list filled up quickly. Then Lily paused. She looked around the room.

Some kids were talking excitedly, comparing lists. Others were already decorating their pages with hearts and stars. That's when Lily noticed Noah. Noah sat near the window. He wasn't talking. He wasn't writing either. He just stared outside, tapping his pencil against the desk.

Lily's pencil hovered above the page. She looked back at her list. It had a lot of names. But it was missing something.



At recess, Lily watched carefully. Noah walked alone



along the fence, kicking small stones as he went. When kids ran past him, he stepped out of the way.

Lily remembered something Mrs. Ellis often said: "Kindness starts with noticing."

Lily went back to her desk after recess and picked up her pencil again. At the bottom of her list, she wrote one more name. **Noah**

Valentine's Day arrived with pink decorations and paper hearts taped everywhere. When it was time to share valentines, the room buzzed with excitement.

Lily walked over to Noah's desk and placed a card gently on top.

"For you," she said.

Noah looked surprised.

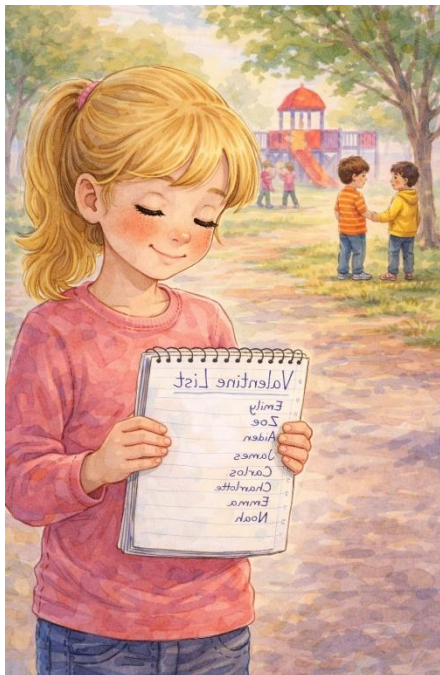
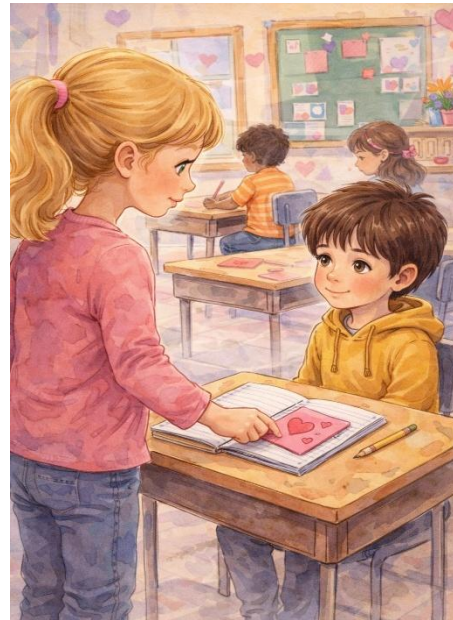
"Really?" he asked.

Lily nodded.

He opened the card slowly. Inside, she had written:

I'm glad you're in our class.

Noah smiled—not a big smile, but a quiet one that stayed.



Later that day, Lily noticed something else.

At recess, Noah wasn't by the fence anymore. He stood closer to the game. Someone passed him the ball.

At lunch, he sat at a table instead of by himself.

Lily held her Valentine list in her hands and smiled.

She realized something important.

Valentine's Day wasn't about how many cards you gave.

It was about making sure no one was left out.