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How does a shy, well-mannered eight-year-old girl profess her love? She writes a romantic letter to the object of her affection, of course! A new school year had started, and I had just enough free time before recess one day to carefully compose a passionate note on a strip of paper ripped from a previous class assignment. The communiqué read:

Dear Ricky,

I love you! Will you be my boyfriend?

Love,

Pam

I located Ricky on the playground, participating in an aggressive game of four-square. (He, of course, occupied Square A.) Not wanting to lose my last droplet of courage, I boldly approached him at the first break in the action. I thrust the note into his hand, then turned to walk away.

And how does an outgoing, macho eight-year-old boy respond to such an overture? He gets physical, of course! Ricky's periwinkle eyes no longer reflected the thrill of competition. They were now filled with undeniable rage as he glared directly into mine and growled, "I'm going to beat you up!!!!" He verified his intentions by taking one threatening step closer to me. If recess had lasted even two more seconds, one can only imagine what would have happened to me. Thankfully, I was saved by the freeze bell! We stood in place until the teachers' dismissed us to our class lines under their watchful supervision. I avoided the areas Ricky was known to haunt at lunch; and for once thanked God that we were in different classrooms!

But I still had to get home from school in one piece! How was I going to manage such a feat? I decided I would take the "baby" route that day. Older students in my neighborhood usually exited Crosby Elementary School and headed left on West St., then turned left to enter their specific blocks by walking down John St. The other route was called the "baby" way because Shetland

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Ave. was deemed to be safer due to the sidewalk that ran three-quarters down the length of the street. There was no sight of Ricky when I left campus that day. I turned right onto West St., reached the corner, and turned right onto Shetland Ave. I noticed that my blood stains were still visible on the sidewalk from the nasty fall I had taken (resulting in five stitches to my chin) while trying to run away from Joe-Joe when we were in kindergarten. I couldn't waste my time brooding on past history, I had to escape the present danger! It seemed to take forever to get to the end of that one street; but at last I reached Strathmore Ave. and turned right to walk past the side of the house facing Shetland and the side of the Doege's house facing my street, Fredrick Drive.

I was finally on the home stretch, Fredrick Drive! I made it to the driveway that separated the Doege and Long houses, and began to relax. That sense of security was shortlived as I was suddenly ambushed by Ricky and his band of cohorts! My first encounter with Ricky had left me paralyzed, but that wasn't going to happen again! My survival instinct kicked in, and every muscle in my body snapped into harmonious motion to help me flee. With lightning speed I darted past the Kubacek's house, flew across the street in front of the Morissey's place, then raced straight up my front yard, slamming the front door behind me as I entered the house. I leaned against the door, panting and gasping, tears of terror streaming down my face. I was safe for the moment, but what if they came knocking on the door?

My mom called from the kitchen, "Pamela, there's no need for you to slam the door like that!" Oh, yes, there was! I certainly wasn't at a loss for words this time! I gave her a detailed explanation of what had transpired. She offered the appropriate words of compassion and reassured me that she would ask Charlene (Ricky's mother) to have Ricky restrain from attacking me. I trusted her to do just that since, at first glance, the look on my mom's face was one of sympathy and understanding. However, she wasn't completely successful at hiding the small twinkle in her eye or slight upturn of her mouth when I related the incident to her. Did she know something I didn't? The only thing I had learned was that it was safer to love someone from afar than to reveal yourself to the object of your affection. And I promised myself that from then on, I would play it safe and avoid Ricky altogether!