Valentine's Day in Italy

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Did you know that San Valentino was Italian? The patron saint of love lived in Roma in the third century. But when we took a deeper look, we found that our celebration of l'amore has even more ancient roots.

San Valentino was born in Terni, a small town in central Umbria. Little is known of his life, though there are numerous legends of his ardor to convert his neighbors to Christianity. When he moved to Rome, he began to marry Christian couples in secret. Word spread to Emperor Claudius II, who demanded that Valentino renounce his faith. Valentino refused and was martyred on February 14, 269.

For more than 200 years, Valentino was one on a list of many saints whose feast days were only lightly observed at Mass. However, in the fifth century, his story was remembered when the Catholic Church was struggling with Lupercalia, a raucous ancient Roman fertility festival celebrated from February 13 to 15. Remembering Valentino's passion for the conjugal, the pope decided to appropriate the pagan ritual with the saint's feast day.

As the centuries marched on, poets like Chaucer and Shakespeare romanticized San Valentino and his day of love, popularizing and softening the celebration across Europe and eventually the New

World. Finally, in the early 20th century, Hallmark got involved, and here we are, amid a tornado of hearts, candy, and cards.

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