Arrivederci

Linda M. Dengle*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1969 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress). http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Arrivederci

Linda M. Dengle

Abstract

HE SAT on the sidewalk, a compact little unit; legs crossed and his head down between his knees. Danny’s forehead pressed against the sidewalk. His back stuck up into the air, and I could see the bones of his vertebrae in a straight row marching up to his neck and down again even through the thickness of his jeans. Also, I thought, like the spines on the back of a dinosaur...
HE SAT on the sidewalk, a compact little unit; legs crossed and his head down between his knees. Danny’s forehead pressed against the sidewalk. His back stuck up into the air, and I could see the bones of his vertebrae in a straight row marching up to his neck and down again even through the thickness of his jeans. Also, I thought, like the spines on the back of a dinosaur.

Only an agile six-year-old could have folded up so easily. Looking from my porch, I couldn’t see his arms—they must be folded against his chest then tucked in when he sat down.

I had been sitting on my front porch for about ten minutes. I hadn’t seen him come so I knew he had been out there for quite awhile. And I knew it was Danny.

In the first place no one had the figure Danny had—thin all over, long legs and long arms and so loose and free-moving tho his movements were as distinctive as his face and his speech. It did have to be him; who else I thought would plop down in the middle of the walk for so long.

“Mom,” I hollered, “How long’s Danny been out there on the sidewalk?”

“For pete’s sake,” came the answer with more curiosity than concern, “What’s he doing now?”

“Well, he’s kind of sitting out there in front with his head down on the walk. . . . . . . . . just kind of sitting there, I guess.” Mom came out to look, then went back to her kitchen and lunch.

“Sheesh.”

But Danny held a little more fascination for me. He sat there about thirty feet from me. Not moving. I had come outside to read my book in the sun and now only looked up occasionally—to make sure he was there.
When two chapters had gone by and my bottom was getting a little numb, I looked up again at Danny—who was still there—and I got up to stretch. I walked down the front walk, then, cutting across part of the lawn came up beside him. “Danny,” I called in a mock whisper and speaking in my faraway outer-space tone. “Danny.”

He looked up. Or rather tried to straighten up and sit but couldn’t so he just lifted his head and craned his neck to look up at me.

His forehead was bright red, full of big and little dents each an even brighter red and inlaid with bits of cement and sand.

“For Pete’s sake, Danny,” I said. “Doesn’t that cement hurt?”

“Hheeeecckk, no!” came the answer. “Maybe it feels good.”


“Right. And just what are you ‘finkin’ about,” I answered mocking his slurred word.

“Oh. Well, just stuff like the feel on my forehead—And that if the sidewalk vibrates when someone goes past. You know something?”

“No, what.”

“I knew you were coming. I felt ya.”

“Super.” I pretended to be bored. “Super-duper, in fact.”

He straightened his back up now—it was cramped and his face twisted a little. “Know what else?” he asked.

I sat and crossed my legs beside him and listened in a mock benevolent pose. “NOOooozz, what?” I was giving him a hard time, yet on he went. A tangent, rambling, earnest . . .

“Linda,” he said. “I was just sitting out here feeling the ants go up my leg and my squunched up arms and legs. You know, I might like to roll but my back bones stick out too far. Man, I bet I’d kill it.”

“You might, Danny. You really might.”

“Linda, do you know Danny Harold?”

“No.”
“He's in my same grade at school. I guess I just wondered if you knew him.”

I looked at him; now just staring off into space—his eyes squinted though the sun was at his back. Not a blank look, just a look; pensive, a little dreamy and dazed.

“Hey, Danny,” I said. “Why don’t you come up on our porch and I’ll get Cindy to come out.”

He turned his face and looked at me—just a look. “Nah,” he replied, “I’ll come but you don’t need to get her. I don’t really like her too much.”

We stood up—slowly because our legs had been crossed tightly and the blood cut off. On the porch I sat down in the lawn chair I’d moved there and Danny sat down on the top step. Just looking out onto the summer grass and the empty walk and street. Then he lay down on the top step and closed his eyes; he was all stretched out on his side—all four feet of him. All skinny, six-year-old four feet.

I heard him begin to sing to himself then. Lying almost at the doorstep—and singing. And it was “Tiptoe Through the Tulips.”

“Danny,” I said. “You’ve got to be kidding me. Not Tiny Tim?”

His half muffled voice came up to me. “Sure is,” he said absently.

“Danny,” I said when he’d finished. “MMMmmm . . . yes, dear???” a sickly sweet tone came back.

“Danny,” I tried again. “What do they think of you in school?”

“MMMmmm, they all think I’m a real bad honey.” This time it was a twang coming from him.

“Oh, God.”

A couple of seconds passed. He sat up, then got to his feet. He took one flying leap and was down the five steps.

“Ha,” he called up to me with a swish of his head and a melodramatic leer. “Ha,” he called again with more force.

Then he turned and started across the yard. I watched; and in the middle of a step, he turned with a hop and yelled with an air of knowledge, “Arriverderci and all that good stuff.”