Little Brother

Nancy Voggenthaler*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1951 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Little Brother

Nancy Voggenthaler

Abstract

'SHARP KID,” they said. “Really on the ball.” ”And kinda sweet, in a funny sort of way.” Yes, that’s what they said, and Sue felt a warm, maternal glow when she secretly adopted Davey for her little brother...
"S\textsc{harp kid}," they said. "Really on the ball." "And kinda sweet, in a funny sort of way." Yes, that's what they said, and Sue felt a warm, maternal glow when she secretly adopted Davey for her little brother.

Small talk in the midst of an afternoon's work, a cup of coffee together. Someone to listen to frank admissions of troubles and triumphs. A smile of reassurance or of friendly pride. A nice guy to have around for laughs. Once she even thought it might be fun to go out with him. Too bad he was so short.

. . . The bright warm sun sifted through the window and played teasingly on the swiftly moving typewriter keys. Ordinarily, Sue would have enjoyed a day like this with its comfortable warmth and clear freshness. But today she was restless. She pulled a finished sheet from her typewriter and reached for a cigarette.

"How wonderful it would be to go for a long walk this afternoon," she thought. She stared absently at a dust filled streamer of sunlight and her eyes wandered to its glaring pool of light on her scattered papers.

The phone rang, and she welcomed the shrill interruption. Flopping across an easy chair, she picked up the receiver. She heard Davey's voice on the other end, and for a moment she was a bit startled. "How about a nice, relaxing tramp through the woods, Sue?" he asked.

Sue didn't say anything for a moment. "Why did he think of that?" she wondered. "What a coincidence—or is it?"

"Silly!" she reprimanded herself, "I guess you don't have to be psychic to think of a hike on an afternoon like this."

"Hey, sleeping beauty, get hep! I'm talking to you."

"Huh? Oh Davey, I'm sorry. I was just thinking."

"Save the strain, pal. I'll be over in ten minutes and you can relax that brain for the rest of the day. See ya!"

"But . . . A sharp click cut off her answer. Slowly, she put the receiver back on its hook and leaned against the
back of the chair. "I suppose I should have said 'no' right away, but then I can always study tonight," she rationalized. "And it's such a perfect day to be outside . . . even with your little brother."

She piled her papers neatly on the desk, and ran a comb through her short black hair. She made a face at herself in the mirror and sat down to wait for Davey . . .

"Watch that fence, kid, it's kind of tricky." Davey knew she could take care of herself, but he kind of liked to show her who was boss sometimes. Sue slipped through the barbed wire and stood waiting for him to follow. The sun almost sparkled on his blonde crewcut, as he bent his head to cross through. His broad back, tanned by the new spring sun, was smooth and brown.

"Why, he's handsome," she thought. "It's funny that I never noticed before."

Davey caught up with her, and they walked along in silence . . . comfortable and close. "You jerk!" Sue told herself. "You can't feel this way about a buddy. Not little David."

"Hey, watch it, Susie. Leave us not walk through the water!" Davey was grinning at her, and for some dopey reason, she had to swallow before she answered him. "I see it," she answered crossly. Immediately, she was sorry, but he did irritate her a little. Those eyes, calm and steady, yet laughing . . . did they see too much? Things that even she wasn't sure of?

He jumped across the narrow stream, and held out his hand for her to follow. His grasp was warm and firm, and she frowned. "One just doesn't fall for one's little brother this way," she thought, "especially when said brother is too short to fall for."

"For heavens sake, woman, where are you going now?" Sue turned and saw Davey, still standing by the stream. "We hungry, tired wanderers must have our rest and nourishment, you know." He produced a wax paper bundle from his pocket and waited for her to sit down. The grass was cool and soft under her warm body, and she rolled luxuriously and ungracefully onto her stomach.

"Well, gee whiz, pal, why didn't you tell me you brought chow? I'm starved—as usual." She wished he would stop
looking at her like that. Those eyes again . . . deep, penetrating, questioning.

“Well, how about a sandwich?” He reached into the paper and pulled out a flattened, dripping sandwich. He handed it to her and their hands touched, and the eyes smiled a little . . . kind, tender. And the mouth was smiling with the eyes. Sue wished she didn’t feel quite so weak and funny.

He reached over and touched her wrist, and the eyes weren’t smiling. “O.K., funnyface, let’s not play cat and mouse anymore. Sure, it’s kind of scary, but I knew you’d come around one of these days. I was just beginning to wonder how long it would take.”

The tears seemed to rise from the bottom of her stomach, and she found her head buried in his shoulder. “Don’t look at me that way, Dave. There isn’t anything wrong. I’m just a little mixed up, that’s all.”

Dave smoothed her rumpled hair. “That’s O. K., Susie,” he said, and his eyes crinkled into a smile, “that little brother of yours just took you by surprise.”


A Girl and Her Father

THAT AFTERNOON we walked inland from the camp on the coast at Ghajn Tuffeiha. North of us through the terraced valley we could see the other side of the island. There the sun shone on the blue water of St. Paul’s Bay and on the white and pink and yellow houses out on the point at Ras il Kama. The floor of the valley itself was in shadow and the air was still. Birkin walked along beside me, silently puffing away on his pipe. We followed the winding road, now and again passing small groups of sandstone houses. Outside each a few children played. Occasionally we saw a man at work in one of the fields.

The tops of the stone walls on either side of the road had been hollowed by hand and in the open channels ran clear water. Periodically the channel was tapped and at such a