

*A Short Story*

# LOOSING DUTCH

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AGE 8 TO 12



STUART R. DENIKE

## Loosing Dutch

Blond curls bounced about as the four-year-old repeatedly looked up and down the street. One foot stretched out towards the forbidden pavement.

“Christina!”

Startled, she whirled around to face Brian. She hugged her favorite stuffed animal, ‘stuff dog’, tightly to her chest. “I didn't do it!”

“You are not to play near the street.” Brian tried to look stern.

“You cross,” she said, shyly looking out from under the mass of curls.

"Yes, but I'm eight." Brian thought she looked just like Annie in the movies, or maybe Shirley Temple. "Now stay behind the fence," he said, "and I'll bring Dutch out."

Brian pushed the kitchen screen door open. He nearly got flattened as Dutch bolted out between his legs. The dog was a mix of German Shepherd and Boxer. The smartest thing on four legs, Brian was sure.

When Dutch saw Christina, he took off like a shot. As the animal neared the street, Dutch suddenly skidded to a stop. He looked both ways for traffic. Then he trotted smartly across, right up to Chrissey. She had been watching with her head between two fence pickets. Dutch gave her a big slurp in the face and then jumped the fence to get petted.

"I love Dutch," Chrissey told Brian as he came up.

"I guess he loves you too, Chrissey."

"He's so smart."

"Yes, he is. So smart that he knows how to safely cross the street.

That's something you can't do yet."

"I can too!" She stamped her foot to let him know she meant it.

"Not by yourself. See you later, Chrissey. Come on Dutch."

It had been a hot and busy summer afternoon. Now it was the time of day when all the kids stopped their play and went home to collect nickels,

dimes and quarters. Everyone would meet back at the corner to wait for the Good Humor ice cream truck.

Brian wondered where Chrissey was. Her big brother usually had her across the street and in line by now.

Dutch began to jump up and down. He was always the first to hear the tinkling of the truck's bells. Dutch also loved ice cream.

Brian didn't know how many times Dutch had done it before, but yesterday the dog had stolen an ice cream. He had plopped himself in front of Chrissey and just stared at her. Eventually, Chrissey had taken her popsicle out of her mouth.

"See Dutch?" she'd said, holding out the treat. One Gulp and it was gone - - all but the stick.

Brian had to ask his mom for more money to buy Chrissey another popsicle. Now he looked at Dutch. "No stealing today," he warned. The dog cocked his head to one side. "Don't give me that puzzled look; you know what I mean." Dutch dropped down to the ground, and he rested his head on his paws. "Oh, don't look so unhappy. I'll give you some of mine." A wet tongue licked Brian's hand. "You're really something else, you know it?" Brian patted the grinning head. "I guess I don't have to worry anyway. Chrissey isn't here today."

Slowly, ever so slowly, the ice cream truck came closer and closer. Then finally - - hurray! Some of the kids had trouble making their choice. When it came to Brian's turn, he knew exactly what he wanted. He had saved enough to buy an orange creamsicle. His favorite! Brian folded down the sticky wrapper and took that first delicious bite. "Hmmm, boy, that's good!" He took another bite and held the piece out to Dutch. But instead of gobbling it down, Dutch leaped toward the road. The truck was pulling away and Brian saw Chrissey running.

"No, Christina, no!" yelled her brother.

"No, Dutch" yelled Brian.

Christina was in the path of the moving truck. As the front bumper was about to crash into her, she was suddenly knocked clear. The ice cream truck quickly stopped, but Dutch lay twisted on the pavement.

"Dutch, oh Dutch," Brian softly said. Big, brown eyes looked up at him. Then, gulp, went the melting, forgotten creamsicle. The dog gave a silly grin and licked Brian's hand -- as if to say sorry --, and closed his eyes. Brian gently stroked the animal's head until the breathing stopped.

He heard Chrissey crying behind him. "It's your fault", Brian screamed at her, and then he ran. He ran to get away. He ran to make it not real. He ran to stop the pain; he ran to keep his tears private; he ran to hide in his room.

“Brian, may I please come in?” It was Mom.

Brian sat up on his bed and wiped his eyes and nose. “OK”.

His mother sat next to him. She put her arm around his shoulders. “Are you all right, now?”

“Why did he have to die!”

“He saved Christina.”

“It's not fair!”

“You wouldn't have wanted Christina hurt or killed.”

“No, but - - ”

“Dutch saved one of God's Children.”

“But he was one of Gods creatures, too. Does God love some more than others?”

“No. We are all here on this earth to serve some purpose. I'm sure of that. It seems to me that Dutch was here for a reason too, to save Christina.”

“But he died!”

“Brian, it's a terrible shame the he did, but Dutch had a good life. He had a wonderful friend in you. He didn't want to die, but he knew that he had to save Christina. He loved her too, remember.”

“It's not fair!”

“No, it's not, but many things in life aren't.”

The following morning when Brian came outside, Christina stood waiting across the street. He couldn't stand the sight of her, so he ran around back. Every time he checked, Chrissy was still there. Finally Brian went over to her.

“What are you standing here for? What do you want?”

The little girl slowly held out stuff dog "for you," she softly said.

“You think this will replace Dutch?” Brian knocked it out of her hands.

“Dutch was real! You understand? Real, not some dumb toy. And you killed him!” Brian saw the tears in Chrissey"s eyes. He saw the quivery lips. But he left the toy dog in the dirty, wet gutter, and he raced back across the street. When he turned around, Brian saw Chrissey bend down and touch her beloved stuffed animal. Leaving it there, she walked away sobbing.

“Guess I'm pretty mean, huh?” Brian said to the empty space where Dutch should have been, "That was a rotten thing to do." For an instant Brian could see the cocked head and that silly dog grin.

It took Brian most of the afternoon, but finally he was satisfied. He walked across the street feeling much better than he had all day. Under his arm was a squeaky clean ‘stuff dog’ dried and fluffed-up with his mom’s hair dryer. And around its neck, like a collar, was tied a bright, red ribbon.

“Just like the collar Dutch wore,” Brian told Chrissy, as he handed her the favorite toy. “I can’t be mad at you, because Dutch loved you!”