

Back to School

Dedication

To my daughter, Lorine, a *wunderbaar* [wonderful] schoolteacher. And to my granddaughters, Jinell, Madolynne, and Rebekah, who enjoy doing many fun things at their country school.

Glossary

ab im kopp—go crazy

ach—oh

aldi—girlfriend

baremlich—terrible

bauchweh—stomachache

bensel—silly child

blentsching—spanking

boppli—baby

bopplin—babies

bruder—brother

daed—dad

daer—door

danki—thank you

dummkopp—dunce

dumme—hurry

ekelhaft—disgusting

fingerneggel—fingernails

galgedieb—scoundrel

grank—sick

kapp—cap

kinner—children

jah—yes

mamm—mom

maus—mouse

meis—mice

Mondaag—Monday

naerfich—nervous

nixnutzich—naughty

pescht—pest

rutschich—squirring

schnell—quickly

schtinkich—smelly

sei—hogs

uffgschafft—excited

wunderbaar—wonderful

Gern gsehne.

Guder mariye.

Raus mit!

Sis mir iwewel.

Was in der welt?

Wie geht's?

You are welcome.

Good morning.

Out with it!

I am sick at my stomach.

What in all the world?

How are you?

Chapter 1

First-Day Troubles



Where's my sneaker? I can't find my other sneaker!" Rachel Yoder glanced down at her feet. On her left foot she wore a black and white sneaker, but her right foot was bare. *I can't go to school with only one shoe!*

Rachel dropped to her knees and peered under the sofa. No sneaker there; just a red checker piece from Pap's favorite game.

She crawled across the room to Mom's rocking chair and peeked underneath. Nope. Just the ball of blue yarn Rachel sometimes used when she played with her kitten, Cuddles. *Where could that sneaker be?*

Rachel had found one sneaker by her bed when she'd gotten up but couldn't find the other sneaker in her room. She grunted. "If that sneaker's not upstairs in my bedroom and it isn't down here in the living room, then where is it?"

She snapped her fingers. Maybe someone had hidden her sneaker so Rachel would be late for the first day of school. That wasn't something Henry, her sixteen-year-old brother, would do. But Jacob, who was almost twelve and liked to tease, might have taken it.

Rachel scrambled to her feet, stubbing her bare toe on the rocking chair. "Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!"

Hopping on one foot, she limped to the stairs and hollered, "Jacob Yoder! Did you take my sneaker?"

Jacob peeked around the banister at the top of the stairs and wrinkled his nose. "What would I want with your *schtinkich* [smelly] old sneaker?"

"It is *not* smelly!" Rachel frowned. "And I can't go to school today with only one shoe on my foot."

Rachel's mother poked her head through the kitchen doorway. "Then you'd better plan to go barefooted, because if you and Jacob don't leave soon, you'll be late for the first day of school."

"Not if I ride my skateboard. Then I can get there in half the time."

As Mom stepped into the hallway, her silver-framed glasses slipped to the end of her nose. "No skateboard, Rachel! It's much too dangerous for you to ride that thing to school."

"I'll stay on the shoulder of the road, I promise."

Mom shook her head. "Absolutely not. You and Jacob will walk to school, same as you've always done—with or without your shoes."

Rachel stared down at her feet, her right foot bare with the aching toe, and the left foot clad in a black and white sneaker.

This isn't good. Not good at all. She wished she had asked for a bicycle for her birthday instead of a skateboard. But she was sure her parents would have said no. Rachel had seen English children ride bikes to school, but none of the Amish *kinner* [children] she knew owned bikes. Even if she did own a bike, Mom probably wouldn't let her ride it to school.

Mom, and everyone else in the family, treats me like a boppli [baby], Rachel thought.

"If you can't find your other sneaker, why don't you wear your church shoes?" Jacob suggested as he tromped down the stairs in new black boots Pap had bought him.

Rachel looked at her mother.

"*Jah* [yes], sure," Mom said with a nod. "Hurry to your room and put them on. Be sure to fix your *kapp* [cap], too, because it's on crooked," she called as Rachel dashed up the stairs.

"Always trouble somewhere," Rachel mumbled, straightening the small white covering perched on her head.

Rachel hurried to her bedroom closet. She usually kept her black leather church shoes on a wooden bench underneath her dresses. She bent to get them and discovered they both were missing.

Rachel blinked and scratched the side of her head.

“*Was in der welt?* [What in the world?] Now where have my church shoes gone?”

Rachel looked around the closet but only found a box of small rocks she planned to paint so they looked like ladybugs, a stack of games and puzzles, and the wooden skateboard Jacob and Henry had made for her birthday. She gazed at the skateboard longingly, wishing she could ride it to school.

With a frustrated sigh, Rachel ran to her bed. She dropped to her knees and peered underneath, but no church shoes were under her bed. She just saw the same dust balls she'd seen when she'd looked for her sneaker, and an old faceless doll with one missing arm.

Rachel clambered to her feet and raced to her dresser. She pulled open each drawer and rummaged through the sweaters, socks, and underwear. No sneaker or church shoes there, either.

“I don't need this kind of trouble,” Rachel wailed as she banged the bottom drawer shut.

“Rachel! Jacob's ready to leave for school, so you'd better hurry,” Mom called from downstairs.

“I can't find my church shoes!” Rachel shouted in return.

“Then you'd best go barefooted.”

Rachel sucked in her lower lip. She couldn't walk to school in her bare feet. Her toe still hurt from where she'd stubbed it. Besides, too many pebbles lined the shoulder of the road between their house and the

one-room schoolhouse. She thumped the side of her head. “Think, Rachel. Where did you put your shoes last Sunday after church?”

She took a seat on the edge of the bed and closed her eyes. *Let’s see now.* . . . She remembered coming to her room to change out of her Sunday dress. Then she’d taken off her shoes and—

Rachel jumped up and raced out of the room. “I know where my church shoes are!” she hollered, taking the stairs two at a time.

“You’d better slow down or you’ll slip and fall,” Mom scolded, shaking her finger at Rachel.

“You said I’d be late for school if I didn’t hurry. I know where my church shoes are, so I need to get them right now!” Rachel hurried past Mom and nearly bumped into Jacob, who had just stepped out of the kitchen with his lunchbox in his hand.

“I’m heading out now, so if you’re not ready to go, then you can walk by yourself,” he said with a frown.

She placed her hands on her hips and scowled. “Go ahead. I don’t need you to walk with me anyway!”

“I would prefer that you walk together,” Mom said as she joined them near the back door. “There’s safety in numbers, you know.”

Jacob tapped the toe of his boot against the hardwood floor. “Then hurry up, Rachel. Time’s a-wasting.”

“I need my church shoes. I remember putting them in the utility room last Sunday so I wouldn’t forget to

polish them before our next preaching service.” Rachel darted into the utility room and halted in front of Pap’s wooden shoe-shining box. There sat one of her good shoes—but only one. The other one was not there.

“Oh, no,” she groaned. “Not another missing shoe.”

Rachel grabbed the shoe and ran back to her brother. “Jacob, did you take one of my church shoes?”

“Right.” He snickered. “Like I would want one of your schtinkich shoes.”

“My shoes are not smelly, and if you’re playing a trick on me—”

Mom held up her hand to quiet Rachel and then faced Jacob. “Do you have your sister’s church shoe?”

He shook his head. “’Course not. Why would I take her dumb old shoe?”

“You don’t have time to look for it now,” Mom said, glancing at the battery-operated clock on the wall.

“Rachel, it looks like you have no choice but to go to school in your bare feet today.”

“I’ve got a better idea.” Rachel dropped to the floor, slipped the church shoe on her right foot, and stood. “Now I have one shoe on each foot.”

Mom clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth. “But the shoes don’t match, Rachel.”

“I don’t care. At least my feet won’t hurt on the walk to school.”

Jacob nudged Rachel’s arm with his elbow. “You’re such a *bensel* [silly child].”

She pushed his elbow away and grabbed her lunchbox from the counter. "I am not a silly child!"

"Think what you like, but don't complain to me if the kinner at school make fun of you today." Jacob snickered and headed out the door. "Everyone will probably think you're a little benschel."

Rachel figured Jacob would probably say things to irritate her all the way to school; but to her surprise, he walked a few feet ahead of her and never said a word. That was fine with Rachel. She'd rather daydream than talk to her brother anyway.

As Rachel continued to walk toward the Amish schoolhouse, her mind wandered. She thought about the skateboard she wished she could ride to school. She pictured Cuddles, her sweet little kitten, and thought about how much fun they had playing together. Then Rachel spotted a fancy red car speeding down the road, and she thought about how wonderful it would feel to go for a ride in a fast-moving car with the top down. Rachel figured she'd probably never get to ride in a convertible, but it was fun to think about sitting in the passenger's seat with the wind blowing the ties on her kapp, and her stomach jiggling up and down as the car bounced over the bumps in the road.

By the time Rachel and Jacob arrived at the schoolhouse, she'd forgotten all about her missing shoes—until a dark-haired Amish boy who looked to be about her age stepped onto the porch at the same time

she did and pointed to her feet. “Say, how come you’re wearing two different shoes?”

Rachel frowned. She didn’t even know this boy, so why should she answer his question? Besides, he smelled funny—kind of like the fresh cloves of garlic Mom used when she made savory stew.

“Who are you?” she asked, sucking in her breath as she stepped backward.

He smiled, revealing deep dimples in his cheeks. “I’m Orlie Troyer. My family moved here from Indiana last week. What’s your name? And why are you wearing shoes that don’t match?”

“My name’s Rachel Yoder.” She stared at her feet. “I couldn’t find both of my sneakers this morning, and I could only find one church shoe, so I wore one of each.”

Orlie snickered. “Only a bensel would wear two different shoes.”

Rachel stared into Orlie’s chocolate-colored eyes and gritted her teeth. “I am not a silly child, and I can wear whatever shoes I want!” She released her breath in one long puff of air and took another step back.

“Ha! I say anyone who wears shoes that don’t match has to be a bensel,” he taunted.

Rachel gripped the handle of her lunchbox so hard, her fingers numbed. It was bad enough that she’d had to put up with Jacob’s teasing. She didn’t need anyone else bothering her today.

Orlie shifted from one foot to the other and stared

at Rachel with a big grin on his face. It made her feel like a fly caught in a spider's web. "How old are you, Rachel?" he asked.

"I turned ten this summer."

His smile widened. "I turned ten last February."

"That's nice." Rachel tried to push past Orlie, but he stood with his arms folded and his legs slightly spread, blocking the schoolhouse door.

"Are you in a hurry to get inside?" he asked in a teasing tone.

"As a matter of fact, I am."

"Not me. I don't like school so much." He wrinkled his nose. "Fact is, I'll be glad when I graduate eighth grade and can work for my *daed* [dad] in the blacksmith shop he's planning to open soon."

Rachel grunted. Orlie was short and thin. She didn't think he would have enough strength to do the hard work of a blacksmith, but she kept her opinion to herself.

When Orlie finally stepped away from the door, Rachel pushed past him. But *bam!* She tripped on a loose shoelace and fell flat on her face.

"Ugh!" She pulled herself to her feet, feeling the heat of embarrassment flood her cheeks.

Orlie held his sides and howled. "That's what happens when you don't tie your shoes. Maybe you should have come to school in your bare feet!"

Rachel jerked open the schoolhouse door.

Hope I don't have to sit near him today! she thought, glowering.

The schoolteacher, Elizabeth Miller, greeted Rachel inside the door. “*Guder mariye* [Good morning], Rachel.” When Elizabeth smiled, her blue eyes twinkled like fireflies.

“Good morning.” Rachel was glad to have such a kind young woman as her schoolteacher. Elizabeth was a pretty woman with golden hair. She’d taught at the Amish one-room schoolhouse for two years, and Rachel had never heard her say an unkind word to any pupils, whom the Amish referred to as “scholars.”

Soon everyone was sitting behind desks. Rachel knew Elizabeth might rearrange the seats, but for now, she was happy to be seated at a desk across the aisle from her cousin Mary.

“How come you’re wearing two different shoes?” Mary whispered, pointing at Rachel’s feet.

Rachel grimaced. She was beginning to think wearing the mismatched shoes was a bad idea. “I’ll tell you later.”

Teacher Elizabeth tapped her desk with a ruler, and everyone got quiet. “Good morning, boys and girls.”

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” the scholars said in unison.

“We have a new boy in our school this year. His name is Orlie Troyer. He recently moved here to Pennsylvania from the state of Indiana.” The teacher smiled at Orlie. “I hope everyone will make him feel welcome.”

All heads turned toward Orlie, whom Rachel soon discovered had taken a seat at the desk directly behind her. Orlie grinned and nodded at Rachel. She turned back around. *I hope Teacher moves that fellow to a different desk.*

Elizabeth opened her Bible and read from 1 Corinthians 13:11: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.”

Rachel cringed. Jacob thought she was a silly child for wearing mismatched shoes, and so did Orlie. Did God think she was a silly child, too?

She shook her head. No, she knew she was a child of the King, and that meant she wasn't silly in God's eyes.

After the scripture reading, the scholars stood by their desks and repeated the Lord's Prayer. After the prayer, everyone filed to the front of the room and stood in rows according to their ages. Then they sang a few songs in German, the language Amish children spoke at home. Orlie, who was in the third grade, just like Rachel, had somehow managed to stand right beside her. He kept staring at her, and every time he opened his mouth, the smell of garlic drifted to Rachel's nose.

Rachel leaned away, but Orlie moved closer. Was he trying to pester her? Did he dislike her so much that he wanted to make her miserable?

Rachel was relieved when the singing time was over and she could return to her seat. At least with Orlie sitting behind her, she couldn't smell his breath so much.

Teacher Elizabeth wrote the math lessons for grades three to eight on the blackboard. Then she and her sixteen-year-old helper, Sharon Smucker, worked with the first and second graders, who needed to learn the English language better. When the clock on the wall behind the teacher's desk said ten o'clock, Elizabeth dismissed the scholars for morning recess.

Eager to be outside and away from Orlie, Rachel hurried to the swings with Mary.

"That new boy is sure a *pescht* [pest]," Rachel said, glancing over at Orlie, who stood across the schoolyard talking to Jacob and some of the other boys. She bit off a piece of her fingernail and spit it to the ground.

Mary wrinkled her nose. "That's so gross. Why do you have to do that to your *fingerneggel* [fingernails], Rachel?"

"I only chew my fingernails when I'm nervous or upset. That Orlie has me upset," Rachel explained.

"So, why do you think Orlie's a pest?" Mary asked.

"He made fun of me because I'm wearing two different shoes."

Mary giggled and pointed to Rachel's feet. "That is pretty strange."

"Can I help it if I couldn't find matching shoes this morning?" When Rachel looked across the yard, she noticed that Orlie was staring at her instead of talking to the other boys. "He's doing it again."

"Doing what?"

“He’s staring at me, just like he was doing before school started.”

“Maybe he likes you.”

“He doesn’t even know me.” Rachel shrugged. “Besides, I don’t like him.”

“Why not?”

“Because he likes to tease and stare at me.” Rachel wrinkled her nose and made a choking sound. “He smells like garlic, too.”

Mary nudged Rachel’s elbow. “Didn’t you hear what the bishop said during church last Sunday?”

“What was that?” Rachel had been daydreaming during part of the service and had missed hearing most of the bishop’s sermon, so she wasn’t sure what Mary meant.

“He said we’re supposed to love everyone. Even those who are dirty or smell bad.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You didn’t have to stand beside Orlie during singing. He’s not sitting behind you, either.” Rachel grabbed the chain on her swing, pushed off with one foot, and spun around until the ground began to whirl. “I’m flying,” she hollered, leaning her head way back. “I feel like a bird soaring up in the sky.”

“The ties on your kapp are flying, too,” Mary said. “If you’re not careful, you’ll lose it.”

Rachel ignored her cousin and continued to spin. But suddenly, her stomach churned. She climbed off the swing as the teacher called them inside, and she could barely stand.

Rachel took a couple of shaky steps, stumbled backward, and held her stomach. “*Ach* [Oh], I don’t feel so good.”

“What’s wrong?” Mary asked, reaching for Rachel’s hand.

Rachel pulled back. “I—I think I’m gonna be sick.” She turned and dashed for the outhouse.

When Rachel stepped out of the outhouse several minutes later, Orlie stood right outside the door, as though he’d been waiting for her. “Your face looks kind of green, Rachel. Are you *grank* [sick]?”

Rachel clenched her fingers so hard they ached. “I’m not sick. Just got dizzy from too much twirling on the swings, and I—I lost my breakfast.”

“You should know better than to spin like that, little bensel,” Orlie said, shaking his head. “Didn’t your *mamm* [mom] teach you anything?”

“My mom’s taught me plenty, and I am *not* a silly child!”

“My mom’s taught me plenty, and I am *not* a silly child,” Orlie repeated with a grin.

“It’s not polite to mimic,” she said.

Orlie shook his head. “It’s not polite to mimic.”

“Then stop doing it.”

“Then stop doing it.”

Rachel was tempted to say something more, but she figured Orlie would just copy her if she did. So she hurried to the schoolhouse and took a seat behind her desk. This day couldn’t be over soon enough as far as she was concerned. She’d had enough first-day troubles!

Chapter 2

Lunchbox Surprise



I don't feel like going to school today. Can I please stay home?" Rachel asked her mother when she entered the kitchen the following morning.

Mom turned from the stove, where she was frying bacon. "Are you grank?"

Rachel shook her head. "I'm not sick, but I—"

"If you're not grank, then you'll go to school, same as always."

"But, Mom, Orlie will be there, and he'll probably tease me again."

"Who's Orlie?"

"He's a new boy at school. His family moved here from Indiana," Jacob said as he came into the kitchen.

"I see. Son, have you finished your chores?" Mom asked, turning back to the stove.

"Jah, but Henry and Pap are still doing theirs, and Esther's milking the cows. Pap said to tell you they'd be

in for breakfast in about ten minutes.” Jacob hung his straw hat on a wall peg near the door and went to the sink to wash his hands.

“The bacon and eggs should be done by then, so that will work out fine and dandy,” Mom called over her shoulder.

Rachel sighed. Didn’t anyone care about her problem with Orlie?

Mom looked at Jacob. “Would you please set some juice out?”

Jacob pointed to himself. “Who, me?”

She nodded. “Jah, I was talking to you.”

“Okay.” He dried his hands on a towel and headed to the refrigerator.

Mom nodded at Rachel. “I’d like you to set the table.”

“I was just about to.” Rachel pulled a stool to the cupboard. Then she climbed up and removed six plates and six glasses, which she placed on the counter. As she opened the silverware drawer, she decided to bring up the subject of Orlie Troyer again. “Orlie made fun of me yesterday, just because I was wearing two different shoes.”

“Well, you can wear matching ones today,” Mom said, “since soon after you left for school yesterday I found both of your shoes out in the barn. I figure that mischievous cat of yours must have hauled them there, because I discovered her playing with the sneaker.”

Rachel frowned. She knew Mom didn’t like Cuddles to be in the house, and now that she thought the cat

had taken Rachel's shoes, Rachel hoped Mom wouldn't say Cuddles couldn't come inside anymore.

"I don't think Cuddles could have taken them," Rachel said. "She's just a kitten. I don't think she's strong enough. And I think they're too big for her to carry."

"That cat is big for a kitten, though," Mom pointed out. "She might have dragged the shoes out there by the laces."

"Even if it was Cuddles, she didn't hurt my shoes," Rachel said. "She probably wanted something of mine to keep her company."

"Puh!" Mom waved the spatula like she was batting a fly. "That cat's been nothing but trouble since the Millers gave her to you."

Rachel didn't think her kitten had been a bit of trouble. In her opinion, Cuddles was a nice little kitten, who had kept Rachel company and helped her not to feel so scared when she'd been locked in their neighbor's cellar. But there was no use saying all that to Mom. What really mattered was how Rachel was going to get out of going to school.

She hurried to put the dishes, glasses, and silverware on the table, then moved over beside her mother. "I'm done setting the table now. Do you need my help with anything else?"

"You can scramble some eggs while Jacob pours the juice."

Jacob grunted. "I think I should have stayed in the

barn and helped Pap and Henry with their chores.”

Mom squinted her blue eyes as she glared at Jacob. “What was that?”

“Nothing, Mom,” Jacob mumbled. He picked up the pitcher of juice and poured some into the first glass, while Rachel went to the refrigerator and took out a carton of eggs. She’d just finished mixing them in a bowl, when she decided to bring up the subject of Orlie again.

“Orlie teased me when I threw up after twirling on the swings yesterday. He mimicked me, too, and kept staring and whispering to me all day.”

“He probably has a crush on you, sister,” Jacob said before Mom could respond. “Boys tease when they’re trying to impress a girl.”

“He doesn’t have a crush on me, and he certainly doesn’t impress me!” Rachel’s forehead wrinkled, and she fought the urge to bite a fingernail. “I don’t like him much, either.”

“That’s not nice to say, Rachel,” Mom said with a click of her tongue. “If you give the boy a chance, you might find that he’s quite likeable.”

“I doubt it,” Rachel said with a huff. “Besides, Orlie’s a pescht, and his breath smells funny—like he gargled with garlic juice.”

Mom’s glasses slipped to the end of her nose as she pursed her lips. “The Bible says we are to love everyone, Rachel.”

“It’s hard to love someone who’s making your life miserable.”

“God wants us to love even our enemies.”

“I could like Orlie better if he didn’t tease me, stare at me, or smell like garlic.” As though Rachel’s fingers had a mind of their own, one of them slipped right between her teeth.

“No nail biting, Rachel,” Mom scolded.

“Biting your nails is a disgusting habit,” Jacob put in.

Rachel pulled her finger out of her mouth and held her hands tightly against her sides. She felt more nervous today than any other time she could remember. She dreaded what Orlie might do to tease her. She’d always liked going to school—until Orlie Troyer had come and ruined it all.

“Can’t I stay home from school just this once?” she begged, ignoring Jacob’s nail-biting comment. He was no better than Orlie Troyer. Jacob just wanted to upset her.

Mom shook her head so hard the ties on her kapp swished from side to side. “You may stay home only when you’re sick. Is that clear?”

Rachel nodded and sighed deeply as she reached for the stack of napkins in the center of the table. She realized she wouldn’t get her way on this, so she could only hope and pray that Orlie wouldn’t bother her again today.

When Rachel entered the schoolyard with Jacob later that morning, she noticed Mary playing on one of the teeter-totters with some other girls. Rachel was about

to join Mary, when Orlie stepped out from behind a bush, blocking her path. “I see you’re wearing matching sneakers today,” he said, smirking and pointing at her feet.

She merely shrugged and fought the temptation to plug her nose as the strong aroma of garlic greeted her yet again.

Orlie stared at her with a peculiar look on his face, and Rachel felt like a bug about to be squashed. “Can I ask you something, Orlie?” she questioned.

He nodded. “Jah, sure. Ask me anything you like.”

“What did you have for breakfast this morning?”

“Eggs, sausage, and biscuits. Why?”

Rachel fidgeted with the ties on her kapp as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other. Should she ask why his breath smelled so bad, or would that make him tease her more? “Well, I was wondering—”

“Well, I was wondering—” Orlie mimicked. He tipped his head to one side, and a chunk of dark hair fell across his forehead. “What were you wondering, Rachel?”

She drew in a deep breath. “Did you have anything with garlic on it?”

Orlie’s face turned red as a pickled beet. “My mamm gives me a clove of garlic to eat every morning. She says it’s to keep me from getting a cold.” He shuffled his feet and glanced around as though he were worried someone might hear. “When we lived in Indiana, I got sick a lot and missed many days of school. Mom didn’t want me

to miss school this year.”

Rachel stifled a giggle. She figured the garlic remedy probably worked pretty well, because with breath that bad, nobody would want to get close to Orly. So he sure couldn't get any cold germs from anyone!

“You're not gonna tell anyone I eat a hunk of garlic for breakfast every day, are you?”

Rachel shook her head. No need for that. Anyone coming near Orly would know he'd eaten a good dose of garlic. No wonder Pap called garlic “the stinking rose.” Phew! She could hardly stand the disgusting odor.

The school bell rang, and Rachel felt a sense of relief. With Orly sitting behind her, she wasn't close enough to him to smell his horrid breath. Unless she turned around, of course, which she had no intention of doing on purpose.

“Good morning, boys and girls,” Rachel's teacher said with a smile as the scholars took their seats.

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” the children said in unison.

Elizabeth opened her Bible. “Today I'll be reading from Mark 12:30 and 31. ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.’”

Rachel reflected on those verses. She thought loving God with her whole heart, soul, mind, and strength was

easy enough, because God was a loving God who cared for His people and deserved everyone's love in return. Loving her neighbors wasn't too hard, either, since Rachel liked most of the folks who lived near them.

Then she thought of Orlie and frowned. Orlie wasn't so easy to love, however; but maybe she didn't have to, since he wasn't a close neighbor. Of course, Mom had reminded her this morning that the Bible said everyone should love even their enemies. Orlie wasn't exactly an enemy. So, if he wasn't Rachel's neighbor and he wasn't her enemy, maybe she didn't have to love him at all. Maybe the best thing to do was to pretend Orlie didn't exist. Yes, that's what she would do.

Rachel felt someone tap her on the shoulder. "*Psst. . .* Rachel, didn't you hear the teacher?"

Rachel sat there, determined to ignore Orlie.

Tap. Tap. He thumped harder this time.

Rachel whirled around. "What do you want?"

"It's time to stand and recite the Lord's Prayer."

Rachel turned back around and realized everyone else in the room was standing—and staring at her! She quickly jumped to her feet. So much for her plan to ignore Orlie Troyer.

The rest of the morning went fairly well, but at noon, when Rachel sat on the porch to eat her lunch, she discovered an unwanted surprise. Inside her lunchbox was a tuna fish sandwich with a hunk of wilted lettuce.

“Yuck! I don’t like tuna,” Rachel moaned. She thought tuna was disgusting, and it made her feel funny bowing her head to say a silent prayer of thanks for something she wasn’t even thankful to eat. She closed her eyes. “Please God, no more tuna,” she whispered out loud to let Him know how serious she was.

Orlie plopped down beside Rachel and tapped her on the shoulder just as she finished praying. “What’d you say?”

She grunted and slid to the edge of the porch, hoping he would take the hint and find somewhere else to sit. “Nothing.”

“Yes, you did. You said something about tuna.”

Rachel figured she may as well tell Orlie what she was upset about or he’d probably keep bothering her. “I asked my mamm for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich today, and she gave me tuna instead.”

His eyebrows lifted a little. “You don’t like tuna?”

“No way! It’s oily and fishy and tastes really gross.”

“No way! It’s oily and fishy and tastes really gross.”

Rachel ground her teeth together and stared at him. “Stop mimicking me.”

“I like tuna just fine. For that matter, there’s not much I don’t like in the way of food,” Orlie said with a nod.

Rachel didn’t comment on Orlie’s last statement; she just sat there trying to think of what to do with the disappointing sandwich she held in her hand and

wishing Orly would sit with the boys out on the lawn.

“Course there’s some things not related to food that I don’t like,” Orly continued. “Want to know what they are?”

“Not really. Why don’t you just eat your lunch and leave me alone?”

“I don’t like buzzing bees, stinky pigs, dogs that bite, or smelly cow manure,” he said, as if he hadn’t heard Rachel’s request. “And I don’t care much for dirty little mice, either.”

Rachel rolled her eyes skyward. Then she glanced around to make sure no one was watching. She was in luck. Everyone seemed busy eating their own lunches, and no one was looking Rachel’s way. Since Teacher Elizabeth had brought her lunch outside and was sitting on a quilt under the maple tree, Rachel figured she could sneak back into the schoolhouse unnoticed. She grabbed the sandwich, hurried across the porch, pulled open the door, and dashed to the garbage can. With only a slight hesitation, she dropped the sandwich in and headed back outside to finish eating her lunch.

Since Orly was still sitting on the porch, Rachel decided to take her lunchbox and sit on the grass near Mary. Unfortunately, Orly followed and flopped down beside her. She looked the other way, and her stomach rumbled as she stared at her lunchbox. She only had a thermos of milk and one apple left. At this rate, she would starve to death before supper time.

“Want half of my sandwich?” Orlie offered. “It’s bologna and cheese.”

“No thanks,” she said with a shake of her head. No way was she going to eat anything of Orlie’s. It might have garlic on it.

Chapter 3

Dinky



I'm sure glad this is Saturday and there's no school," Rachel said as she climbed the stairs from the basement and followed her sister into the kitchen. Pap, Henry, and Jacob were working in the fields, and Mom had gone to Grandpa and Grandma Yoder's place soon after breakfast to help Grandma clean her house.

Esther set down the wooden box she'd brought up from the basement and turned to face Rachel. "You don't like school this year? You've always liked it before."

"I like school just fine. I *don't* like Orlie Troyer."

"He's that new boy at school, right?"

"Right. And Orlie's a real pain—always teasing, staring at me, mimicking things I say, and blowing his garlic breath right in my face." Rachel wrinkled her nose and tapped the side of her head. "It's enough to make me go *ab im kopp* [go crazy]."

Esther chuckled. “Oh, Rachel, how you do exaggerate. I’m sure nothing that boy could ever do or say would make you go crazy.”

Rachel shrugged. Esther could think whatever she wanted; she wasn’t the one who had to put up with Orlie’s irritating behavior. “There’s another reason I don’t like school this year.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

“I have to walk with Jacob every day, and he complains because I walk too slow,” Rachel said. “I wish I could ride a bike to school, like some English kinner get to do.”

“Some folks believe other people’s bread tastes better than their own,” Esther said.

Rachel nodded. “Mom has told me that more than once.”

“It’s true. We shouldn’t waste time wanting things others own. We should be happy with what we have.”

Rachel tried to be satisfied, but sometimes it wasn’t so easy. “Even if Mom and Pap did let me have a bike, Mom would probably say I’m too young to ride it to school.” She shook her head and groaned. “Why does everyone treat me like a baby?”

Esther patted Rachel’s arm. “Being the youngest member of the family must be hard.”

Rachel nodded. “If Mom had another boppli, I wouldn’t be the baby of the family anymore. Maybe then Mom and Pap would realize I’m grown up and

would let me do more things.”

“Jah, maybe so, but since Mom hasn’t had any *bopplin* [babies] since you were born, she probably won’t have any now.” Esther rubbed a spot on her lower back. “Whew! That box was heavier than I thought. Guess I should have asked Pap or one of the boys to haul it up from the basement for me before they headed out to the fields.”

“I could have helped you with it,” Rachel pointed out. Sometimes she felt her older sister treated her like a baby, too. Just because Rachel was only ten years old didn’t mean she wasn’t strong or couldn’t help with certain things. At least she should be allowed to try.

“You can help me now.” Esther motioned to the box sitting near her feet. “I want to check these good dishes over thoroughly for any cracks or chips; and then we need to wash them so they’ll be ready in plenty of time for my wedding on the first Thursday of November.”

Rachel sighed. November seemed like a long time off, especially since she had to go to school every day between now and then. And she had to face that teasing, smelly-breath Orlie Troyer.

“Are you sighing because you don’t want to help me?” Esther asked, reaching for the box.

“Oh, no. I’m happy to help,” Rachel was quick to say. “I was just thinking that your wedding seems like a long time from now. I wish it could get here sooner.”

“It’s only two months away, and we have a lot to

do, so I'm sure the time will go quickly. If Mom hadn't gone to help Grandma clean her house this morning, she'd be here now, helping me." Esther smiled. "So I really appreciate your help, little sister."

Rachel pulled her shoulders back and stood as tall as she could. It was nice to be appreciated. "I'm sure I can do whatever Mom would have done."

"Jah, I'm sure you can." Esther dropped to her knees by the box. "Now first we open the box and take out the dishes."

"Okay." Rachel knelt beside her sister and fought the urge to rip the box open herself. She knew it would be better to let Esther do that, since the dishes were Mom's best china and would be used at Esther and Rudy's wedding.

Esther's hands shook like leaves fluttering in the breeze as she slowly lifted the lid. "I'm so *uffgschafft* [excited] I can barely make my fingers work."

Rachel didn't see why her sister was so excited about opening a box of old dishes, but she didn't say anything. She didn't want to hurt Esther's feelings.

When Esther lifted the lid, Rachel saw a row of delicate white china cups with little pink roses. Esther smiled slightly as she removed each one and set it carefully on the floor by the box. The layer under the cups held plates, and when Esther reached inside to remove the first one, the shredded paper surrounding the dishes moved a little. At first, Rachel thought it

shifted from the movement of the plate, but when a little gray blob with beady eyes poked its head out of the paper, she knew what had happened.

“Ach! It’s a *maus* [mouse]! It’s a maus!” Esther hollered, jumping to her feet. “That’s so *ekelhaft* [disgusting]!”

“It’s not disgusting. It’s only a baby mouse that must have found its way in through here.”

Rachel pointed to a small hole in the side of the box. She reached inside and picked up another plate, and the whole box seemed to move. Five little gray mice scurried about, ducking their heads in and out, and pushing shreds of paper in every direction.

Esther let out an ear-piercing screech and hopped onto the closest chair. Her eyes looked like they were ready to pop right out of her head, and her face was as white as a pail of goat’s milk.

Rachel could hardly keep from laughing at her silly sister. “Want me to catch the mice and take them outside?” she asked.

“Jah, sure. If you think you can.”

“Of course I can.” Rachel had a way with animals, and she certainly wasn’t afraid of a little old mouse, so she marched to the pantry and pulled out a paper sack. Then she hurried back to the box and reached inside. She felt brave and grown-up. One by one, she picked up the baby mice and placed them carefully into the sack.

“It’s safe for you to get off that chair now,” she said, trying not to smile at her sister’s anxious expression.

Esther clung to the chair like she feared for her life. “H—how do you know there aren’t more creepy mice inside that box?”

“Well, let me see.” Rachel slipped her hand into the box again, while she hung on to the sack with the other hand. She dug around one side and then the other, dipping her fingers up and down and all through the shreds of paper. “Nothing is in here now except for more dishes.”

One of Esther’s brows rose to a jaunty angle. “Are—are you sure?”

“I’m very sure,” Rachel replied with a nod. “But if you’re scared, then you can wait until I come back to the house. Then we can take the rest of the dishes out together.”

Esther lifted her chin and frowned at Rachel. “I am not scared. I just don’t like mice. I especially don’t like the idea of their dirty little feet climbing all over my good wedding dishes.”

I just don’t like mice. I just don’t like mice. Rachel remembered hearing similar words the other day at school. But who had said them? Who had told her they didn’t like mice? She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to remember, but nothing came to mind. Oh well, she guessed it wasn’t important. She needed to get the baby mice outside so Esther could climb down from that chair.

“I’ll be back soon,” Rachel announced.

“Jah, okay.”

As Rachel opened the back door and stepped onto the porch with the bag full of mice, for some reason an image of Orlie Troyer popped into her mind. Thanks to Orlie, Rachel didn't like going to school anymore, and that wasn't fair. Well, she wasn't one to give up easily. If she could find a way to get Orlie to quit bothering her, she would do it. If she could only find something Orlie didn't like and tease him with it, maybe he'd finally leave her alone.

The bag in Rachel's hand vibrated as the mice skittered inside.

"That's it!" she shouted. "Orlie's the one who said he didn't like mice!"

A smile spread across Rachel's face. She decided she would turn four of the baby mice loose in the field behind their house, but she had other plans for mouse number five.

Rachel trudged across the yard, climbed over the fence, stopped to pet the old horse Pap had put out to pasture, and headed for the cornfield. When she got there, she opened the sack and released four of the mice. "Good-bye little *meis* [mice]. Have a good life."

She crossed the pasture, gave old Tom another pat, climbed over the fence, and headed for the barn. There she found some coffee cans in a cupboard under her father's workbench. Pap liked to save the cans to store his nails and other things. Rachel figured since her father had several empty cans, he wouldn't miss

just one. She placed the paper sack that held the baby mouse onto the workbench, then wadded up a clean rag she'd found in one of the workbench drawers and put it on the bottom of the can. Then she took a screwdriver and poked a few holes in the plastic lid of the can.

"All right, little maus, in you go." Rachel opened the sack, removed the mouse, and placed it inside the can. "This will be your new home until Monday morning," she said with a satisfied smile. "And from now on your name will be Dinky."

The little gray mouse wiggled its whiskers at her as she put the lid on the can.

Suddenly Cuddles scampered across the floor and stopped at Rachel's feet. The kitten stared at Rachel with sad eyes, meowing for all she was worth.

Rachel felt bad because she hadn't spent much time with Cuddles lately, so she sat on a bale of hay, placed the coffee can beside her, and lifted Cuddles into her arms. "Hey, there, sweet kitten, have you missed me?"

Cuddles uttered a pathetic *meow*, then she licked Rachel's nose with her sandpapery tongue.

Rachel giggled. "That tickles."

Cuddles snuggled against Rachel and began to purr. Rachel closed her eyes. The kitten's warm body and her purring felt so good that Rachel knew she could easily fall asleep. She opened her eyes, determined not to give in to the sleepy feeling, and sat there stroking Cuddles behind her ears.

Suddenly, Cuddles's nose twitched, and her ears perked up. *Meow!* She leaped off Rachel's lap and landed near the coffee can that held Dinky captive.

"Oh no, you don't," Rachel scolded when Cuddles sniffed the lid of the can and swiped at it. "That mouse is going to be my pet, and he's got a job to do at school on Monday morning." She picked up the can and rushed out of the barn.

Quickly, she made her way to the house and slipped inside the front door, so Esther wouldn't hear her from the kitchen. Then, as quietly as she could, she tiptoed up the stairs and went straight to her room. She scurried to her bed, dropped to her knees, and slid the coffee can as far underneath the bed as she could. She'd give Dinky food later so he'd have plenty of energy for his mission on Monday morning.

Rachel glanced at the clock by her bed and realized she'd been gone quite awhile. Esther probably wondered what was taking her so long, so she needed to hurry and get back to the kitchen.

Esther stood at the sink, washing the wedding dishes. "What took you so long?" she asked. "I was beginning to wonder if you were ever coming back."

"Sorry. On my way out to the cornfield, I stopped to say hello to old Tom; and then on the way back to the house, I spent a few minutes in the barn with my kitten." Rachel wasn't about to tell her sister about Dinky. If Esther knew, she'd probably tell Mom and

Pap about Rachel's plans.

Esther flicked a soapy bubble at Rachel. "I started washing the dishes without you."

Rachel grabbed a clean towel from the drawer near the sink and reached for a china cup. "I'm here now, so I'll dry the dishes."

Esther smiled. "*Danki*. [Thank you.]"

"You're welcome."

As Rachel dried each dish, she carefully set it on the counter. The last thing she wanted to do was to break one of Esther's wedding dishes. Mom would scold her for sure if that happened. Esther probably would, too.

When they finished with the dishes, Esther told Rachel, "I've been thinking. . ."

"What have you been thinking?"

"You mentioned earlier how much you dislike walking to school with Jacob."

Rachel nodded. "That's true."

"Why don't you see if Mom will let you wait at the end of our driveway until some of the other scholars go by? Then you can walk with them."

"I suppose I could, but Jacob would probably tag along, and he'd still badger me about walking too slow," Rachel answered. "Then the others would probably make fun of me, too."

Esther pulled Rachel to her side and hugged her. "I know it's hard being a child, but someday, when you're grown and married with kinner of your own, you'll

realize your school days weren't so bad after all."

Rachel shook her head. "That won't happen, because I'm never getting married. Not ever!"