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BRUNSTETTER



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DEDICATION



To Sara Beth,
a very special Amish schoolteacher.



GLOSSARY



absatz—stop

ach—oh

amberell—umbrella

appetitlich—delicious

baremlich—terrible

bauchweh—stomachache

bruder—brother

bu—boy

daed—dad

danki—thanks

deich—pond

dumm—dumb

frosch—frog

gfarlich—dangerous

grumbier—potatoes

Guder mariye. —Good morning.

gut—good

gwilde—quilt

hund—dog

hungerich—hungry

jah—yes

katze—cats

kichlin—cookies

kinner—children

kumme—come

lecherich—ridiculous

maedel—girl

mamm—mom

melke—milk

Mir hen bang gat. —We were afraid.

naerfich—nervous

rege—rain

schmaert—smart

schnee—snow

schtiffel—boots

umgerennt—upset

vergeksagdert—terrified

Zaahweh is schlechdi kumpani. —A toothache is a bad companion.



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CHAPTER 1



Worrywart

“What are you doin’ with that?” nine-year-old Mark Miller asked when his twin sister, Mattie, came out of the house with her umbrella.

“I’m taking my *amberell* to school in case we get *rege*,” Mattie replied. “Come to think of it, maybe I should go back in the house and get my rubber *schtiffel*, too.”

“Just hold on a minute, Mattie!” Mark pointed to the blue sky above. “There’s not a single cloud this morning, so I don’t think it’s gonna rain. . .which means you don’t need an umbrella or rubber boots. Besides that, I can always smell rain when it’s comin’, and I sure don’t smell it right now.” He motioned to the porch. “You oughta just leave the amberell on the porch so we can get moving. We don’t wanna be late for school, ya know.”

Mattie frowned. “Oh Mark, quit your fussing. We’re not gonna be late. We still have plenty of time to get there.”

“But don’t forget—we’re walkin’ to school today, Mattie, so it’ll take us longer to get there.” Their bicycle built for two had a flat tire, and Dad hadn’t found the time to fix it yet, so the twins had no choice but to walk. “We won’t get to school before the bell rings if you keep foolin’ around,” Mark said.

“I’m not fooling around.” Mattie slipped the umbrella into her backpack. “And I’m takin’ this to school just in case it does rain.”

“Whatever.” Mark didn’t know where his sister had gotten the silly notion that it was going to rain today. Anyone could look at the sky and see there wasn’t even a hint of rain. It was clear and blue and one of those mornings you could see for miles. “You worry too much, Mattie,” Mark said as they hurried out of their yard. There were times, like now, when he didn’t think he’d ever understand his sister, even though she was his twin.

There were many things Mark and Mattie didn’t agree on or see the same way. Mark liked to tease and fool around, and Mattie was more serious about things. But then their differences made them special, and as Grandpa Miller often said, “The twins are unique.”

“I do *not* worry too much,” Mattie insisted. As she started walking faster, a wisp of red hair came loose from the stiff black cap she wore on her head. Sometimes Mattie wore a dark head scarf, but not on the days she went to school. She mostly wore it around the house or when she had chores to do.

"You've been worrying a lot lately," he insisted. "Last week you were worried about the fog. Said you didn't think we could find our way to school 'cause the mist was so thick. But we made it just fine and got there on time. Remember, Mattie?"

"*Jah*, of course I do." She slowed some and turned to look at him. "Why do you always have to remind me whenever I'm wrong about something?"

"I'm not tryin' to rub it in or anything," he said. "I was just tryin' to make a point."

"What kind of point?" she asked.

"The point that you sometimes make an issue of things when you oughta just learn to relax."

Mattie didn't say anything. Just blinked her blue eyes a couple of times and started walking again, even faster this time.

"So what's making ya so jumpy today?"

"Nothing. I just remember the last time it rained on the way home from school, we got soaking wet," she said. "I won't let that happen again."

"It's a nice fall day, with no clouds in the sky, and you're worried about rain?" Mark asked, walking real fast to try and keep up with her. "You know what you are, Mattie?"

"What?"

"You're a worrywart!" He chuckled. "*Jah*, you're nothin' but a silly little worrywart!"

"No I'm not."

“Jah you are.”

“I like to be prepared,” she said with a huff.

“So do I, and I’m prepared for sunshine today.”

Mark lifted one hand toward the sky while he held on to his lunch pail with the other.

Mattie didn’t say a word.



As Mattie sat at her school desk that morning, she kept glancing out the window, watching the sky. There were a few white, puffy clouds, but not a hint of rain, just like her brother had said.

Maybe Mark was right, she decided. Maybe it won’t rain today after all. But I’m glad I brought my amberell, just in case. Mattie wanted to be prepared. It was better than ending up soaking wet. Like Grandma Miller often said, *“The weather can be quite changeable at times.”*

“Mattie, did you hear what I said?” Their teacher, Anna Ruth Stutzman, touched Mattie’s shoulder.

Mattie jerked her head. “Uh, no. Guess I didn’t.”

“I asked if you did your homework over the weekend.”

Mattie gave a quick nod, thankful she’d gotten her assignment done.

Anna Ruth smiled and said, “That’s good. Now, would you please hand it to me, like the other scholars have done?”

Mattie's cheeks warmed. She'd been so busy staring out the window watching the clouds that she hadn't even heard the teacher ask the class to turn in their homework. She opened her backpack, pulled out the folder with her math assignment inside, and handed it to her teacher.

"Thank you, Mattie." Anna Ruth gave Mattie's arm a gentle pat, and then she returned to her teacher's desk at the front of the room.

Mattie liked her teacher. Anna Ruth had light brown hair, hazel-colored eyes, and a pretty face with a pleasant smile. Although she didn't tolerate any fooling around in class, Anna Ruth was always kind and patient.

Mattie's friend Stella Schrock, who sat in the seat behind her, tapped Mattie on the shoulder. Stella had dark brown hair, matching eyes, and a creamy complexion, with not even one freckle on her face. Not like Mattie, who had several freckles.

Mattie turned her head toward Stella. "What do ya want?"

"Did you bring your jump rope with you today?" Stella whispered.

Mattie shook her head. "The last time I brought the jump rope, it got caught in my bicycle chain, remember?"

"No talking, girls." Anna Ruth put one finger to her lips. "You're supposed to be copying your spelling words." She pointed to the blackboard, where she'd

written all the words. “You’ll need to learn these for the upcoming test.”

Mattie frowned. Not only had she been caught talking in class, but she also had a list of spelling words to copy, and some of them looked kind of hard.

Before Mattie started writing, she glanced over at her brother, who sat across from her. He stopped copying the spelling words long enough to frown at her, and then he put his head down and went right back to work.

Mattie looked away and tried to focus on each of the words. She could only imagine what Mark would say when they went outside for recess. Most likely she’d get a lecture from him, since he always did well with his studies and rarely talked out loud in class. Mark was especially good at spelling, so he probably thought the words Anna Ruth had given them were easy. *I’m sure he’ll pass the spelling test*, Mattie thought. *But not me. I’ll probably fail.*

The test would be given at the end of the week, and Mattie was worried. Thankfully, she had a few days to prepare, and maybe if she studied really hard, she would get at least some of the words right. Mattie would have to work twice as hard as Mark. But if that’s what it took for her to pass the test, then she was prepared to do it.



“I told ya it wasn’t gonna rain today,” Mark said as he and Mattie walked home from school that afternoon,

following their brothers, Calvin and Russell, who were some distance ahead on their bikes. “See, you were worried for nothing.” He looked at Mattie and noticed her frown. “What’s wrong? Are ya *umgerennt* because you brought your amberell to school for nothing?”

She shook her head so hard that the ties on her bonnet swished around her face.

“Then what’s wrong? Why are you frowning?” he asked, bending down to pick up a small flat rock. It would go nicely with his collection of other unusual rocks.

“I was thinking about those spelling words the teacher gave us today,” Mattie said. “Some of them are really hard.”

“No they’re not. I think most of ’em are pretty easy,” Mark said. “In fact, I can spell every one of those words without even studying, and I can write ’em in a sentence, too.”

“Really?”

“Jah. Here I go. . . Scarecrow. S-c-a-r-e-c-r-o-w. Mom put a scarecrow in the garden to keep the birds away. Toothpaste. T-o-o-t-h-p-a-s-t-e. Some people in our family forget to squeeze the toothpaste from the bottom.” Mark waited to see what Mattie would say, since she was one person in the family who often forgot to squeeze the bottom of the toothpaste to make sure there was plenty at the top. But Mattie said nothing—just kept plodding along.

“Popcorn. P-o-p-c-o-r-n. One of my favorite winter

snacks is popcorn.” Mark continued with his words and sentences. “Volleyball. V-o-l-l—”

“Okay, that’s enough.” Mattie stopped walking and tapped Mark on the shoulder. “You know you’re *schmaert*, and I know you’re smart, so you don’t have to rub it in.”

“I’m not trying to rub it in,” Mark said. “I just wanted you to see how easy those spelling words are.”

“They might be easy for you, but they’re not for me. I always have trouble with spelling.” Mattie sighed. “I’m worried I might fail the test.”

“There you go again. . .worrying about something that may never happen.” Mark grunted. “Just study those words, Mattie. I’m sure you’ll do fine.”

“I shouldn’t have said anything,” Mattie mumbled. “I knew you wouldn’t understand.”

“I do understand. I’m good at some things, like spelling, and you’re good at other things, like playing ball. Why don’t you try writing each word down several times until you’re used to spelling out the word? You could be better at spelling if you’d study harder.”

“And you could be better at baseball if you’d practice running and throwing the ball more often,” she said. “We need to play catch sometime.”

Mark knew Mattie was right, but he didn’t like playing baseball. He had trouble catching the ball, and he couldn’t run as fast as the other kids, either. He was the one who always got teased by some of the boys in

their class because he couldn't play as well as they did. What made it worse was that his twin sister could play ball better than he could. Mattie was a fast runner and could hit and catch the ball better than most of the boys. Because she was so good at baseball, and Mark wasn't, he didn't play unless their teacher said he had to. But that was a lot different than studying for a test. It was important to get good grades in school.

"By the way," Mattie said, "do you know how we got that scratch on the back fender of our bike? I noticed it the other day when our tire went flat."

Mark wondered why Mattie would even care about something like that. "Probably happened during one of the times we fell, when we were learning how to ride the bicycle built for two," he said.

"We'd better ask Dad if he has any paint. We don't want it to start rusting where the scratch is," Mattie said.

"There you go, worrying again," Mark complained. "I'm sure that scratch has been there awhile. Why are you fretting about it now?"

"Never mind, Mark. I'm sorry I even mentioned the scratch." Mattie shifted her backpack, and Mark figured it was heavier than usual today. *Too many books, and her amberell*, he thought. *She really should have left it at home.*

The twins walked the rest of the way home in silence. Mark was eager to get there so he could play with his two cats—Lucky and Boots. Of course, he wouldn't be

able to do that until he'd done all his chores.



“Where’s Twinkles?” Mattie asked Mom after they got home. “I didn’t see her outside anywhere, and I called for her several times.”

A wisp of Mom’s pale auburn hair came loose from the stiff white cap she wore on her head as she shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I haven’t seen your dog since you fed her this morning. Did you put Twinkles in the kennel before you left for school?”

“No, I forgot.” Mattie’s forehead wrinkled. “Maybe she’s in the barn. Did you, by any chance, look for her in there?”

“No, Mattie,” Mom said, shaking her head. “I’ve been busy all day, washing clothes and taking care of your little brother and sister. Besides, I assumed Twinkles was in her kennel, where she usually is during the day.”

“I need to hurry and change my clothes; then I’m goin’ out to look for her,” Mattie said, eager to find her dog.

“I’m sure Twinkles didn’t go far, and you can look for her after you’ve done your homework,” Mom reminded. “You, too,” she added, looking at Mark.

“I don’t have any homework,” he said. “I got it done during recess today.”

Mattie groaned. “Can’t I do my homework after supper?”

“No,” said Mom. “You need to do it now, because Grandma and Grandpa Miller will be joining us for supper, and I’m sure you’ll want to spend some time with them after we eat.”

“That’s true,” Mark put in. “It’s always fun to listen when Grandpa tells stories about when he was a *bu*.”

Mom chuckled. “That’s right, and I think your grandma likes to tell stories about when she was a *maedel*, too.”

“I wonder, when I grow up, if I’ll be tellin’ stories about when I was a boy,” Mark said, taking a bite of the molasses cookie Mom had just handed him. “Yum. . . this sure is *gut*.”

“*Danki*,” said Mom. “I’m glad you like it.” She gave one to Mattie as well. “Now tell me what *you* think, Mattie. Are the *kichlin* as good as usual?”

Mattie took a bite and bobbed her head. “Jah, Mom. The cookies are very good. They’re moist and chewy, just the way I like ’em.”

Mark lifted the remainder of his cookie to his nose and took a sniff. “They smell really good, too. I love the aroma of ginger in them.” He looked over at Mattie and grinned. “In case you didn’t know it, *aroma* means *smell*.”

Mattie grunted. “I figured as much.”

“Would you two like some *meilke* to go with your cookies?” Mom asked. “When Calvin and Russell got home, I gave them some cookies and milk, but they took theirs out to the barn.”

“Jah, please,” the twins said at the same time. They often did that when someone asked them a question. Mattie figured it was because they were twins and sometimes thought the same thing. Of course, even though they looked similar, with red hair and a few freckles, they were really not that much alike. Mattie liked dogs; Mark liked cats. Mark was a tease; Mattie wasn’t. Mark collected marbles and rocks; Mattie liked to decorate things with flowers. In many ways, they were as different as night and day.

While Mom poured the milk, Mark and Mattie took seats at the table.

“How was school today?” Mom asked. “Did you learn a lot?”

Mark nodded eagerly. “After I finished my homework during recess, I looked for some new words in the dictionary.” He gave Mom a wide grin. “I found one I really like, too.”

“What is it?” Mom questioned.

“*Obstinate*,” Mark replied, looking over at Mattie. “It means *stubborn*.”

Mattie rolled her eyes. “You should have been outside playin’ baseball during recess, not looking up big words.”

“I agree with your sister,” Mom said. “You ought to go outside and play at recess like the other children do, not stay indoors. You really need the fresh air and exercise.”

"I go outside sometimes and push the little kids on the swings." Mark looked at Mattie and wrinkled his nose. "And for your information, I like big words. They're fun to say, and I like finding out what they mean in the dictionary." Mark thrust out his chin. "And ya know I don't like playin' ball."

Mattie made no reply. She finished her cookies and milk, put her dishes in the sink, and took today's homework out of her backpack. While she worked on the spelling words, Mark went upstairs to change his clothes.

When he came back down, he stopped to see how Mattie was doing. "It might help if ya break the spelling words down." He pointed to her paper. "See. . .*tooth* and *paste* become *toothpaste*. And *pop* and *corn* become *popcorn*. If you take it a little at a time and write each word down several times, it might be easier for you," he said with a grin.

"Danki, Mark." Mattie couldn't believe how nice her brother was being. Sometimes he liked to tease her, but other times, like now, he was kind and helpful.

"You're welcome." Mark went over to Mom, who stood at the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes. "I'm going outside to do my chores now. When I'm done, I'll be in the barn playing with my *katze*," he said, before hurrying out the back door.

Mattie wished she could go outside and look for Twinkles right away, but she knew she'd be in trouble if she didn't get her homework done, so she continued to

write out the words the way Mark had suggested.

“I’m going to see if Ada and Perry are up from their naps now,” Mom said. “As soon as you finish your homework, you can go outside and look for your *hund*.”

Mattie smiled. “Okay, Mom.”

After Mattie wrote the spelling words down, she decided to get her math questions done. She knew she should write each spelling word more than once, but she had until Friday to take the test. So when the math questions were finished, she put her homework away and went upstairs to change her clothes.

Mattie also made a mental note to remember to ask Dad about paint for their bike fender so it wouldn’t get rusty. She’d study the words more later on. Right now, there were too many other things to think about, like where did Twinkles get to, and would she ever come home?

As soon as she’d changed into her everyday dress, Mattie tromped down the stairs and hurried out the back door.

“Here, Twinkles!” she called from the back porch, clapping her hands as loudly as she could. “*Kumme*—come here, girl!” Mattie looked toward the field where the hay had been harvested, knowing Twinkles often liked to play in there. She hoped to see the dog come bounding toward her. Unfortunately, there was no sign of Twinkles, not even a bark.

Mattie checked Twinkles’s dog dish and noticed that

only a little of the food had been eaten. "That's strange," she said, shaking her head. Normally Twinkles ate all of her food while Mattie was at school. She must not have been very hungry today. Either that or she hadn't been here most of the day. *Sure wish I'd put Twinkles in her kennel before we left for school this morning*, Mattie thought with regret.

Mattie searched all over the yard, but she couldn't find Twinkles anywhere. Then she raced into the barn, where she found Mark sitting on a bale of straw, holding both of his cats in his lap.

"Lucky and Boots missed me today," he said, smiling at Mattie. "As soon as I sat down, they leaped right into my lap and started purring." Lucky was the mother cat, and Boots was her baby. Lucky was fluffy and gray. Boots was black with four white paws.

"That's nice," Mattie said. "Have you seen Twinkles out here in the barn?"

Mark shook his head. "If she was here, she'd probably be chasin' my katze. Then I wouldn't get to pet them at all, because they'd be hissing, howling, and runnin' all over the place, trying to get away from your mutt."

"Twinkles is not a mutt." Mattie placed both hands on her hips. "She's a cute little terrier, and I'm sad that she's missing!"

Mark flapped his hand like he was swatting at a pesky fly. "Don't be so melodramatic, Mattie. I'm sure she's not missing. Probably just doesn't wanna be found."

Mattie squinted her eyes. "What does *melodramatic* mean?"

"It means you're exaggerating."

"I'm what?"

"You're makin' too much out of Twinkles being gone," Mark said. "She's probably running around somewhere, havin' a good ol' time. Maybe she's out in the field chasin' some of those wild rabbits we've seen around our place."

"But I've called and called for her, and I didn't see any sign of her in the field. Oh Mark, what if she doesn't come home soon? It'll be dark in a few hours, and she might freeze to death out there on her own." Mattie shivered, just thinking about it.

Mark groaned. "You're being melodramatic again, Mattie. It is kind of chilly at night, but it's not so cold that Twinkles would freeze to death. And I don't think she's scared of the dark."

Just then, Mattie spotted Twinkles's dog collar lying next to some wooden boxes in one corner of the barn. When she picked it up, a lump formed in her throat. "Maybe Twinkles has been dognapped!"

"What are you talkin' about?" Mark tipped his head to one side and squinted at Mattie.

"You've heard of people who've been kidnapped, right?"

Mark gave a quick nod.

"Well, I'm worried that someone may have stolen my dog, and they took off her collar so no one could identify her."

“That’s just plain *lecherich*,” Mark said. “Who’d want to take your *dumm* little hund?”

Mattie shook her head. “It’s not ridiculous, and Twinkles isn’t a dumb little dog. I’m sure lots of people would want her. Stella said once that she wished she could have a dog like Twinkles. My hund’s not only sweet, but she’s a very schmaert dog.” Mattie sniffed and swiped at the tears running down her cheeks. “I—I don’t know what I’ll do if she doesn’t come home. If anything happens to Twinkles, it will be my fault for letting her run loose today. Oh, I wish I had put her in the kennel before we left for school!”



CHAPTER 2



Muddy and Wet

Mattie had a hard time going to school the next day. Twinkles was still missing, and Mattie was worried she might never see her cute little pet again. She wished she could stay home from school and search for Twinkles or at least be there if her dog returned home. But Mom had ushered Mark and Mattie, along with their brothers, Russell and Calvin, out the door as soon as breakfast was over.

Now, as they trudged along toward the schoolhouse, Mattie kept an eye out for Twinkles. “Here, Twinkles!” she called. “Where are you, girl?” There was no sign of the dog—not even a bark or a yip.

Normally, on the way to and from school, Mattie enjoyed looking at all the pretty wildflowers in the fields or listening to the birds that flew overhead. Except for the crows, the blue jays were about the only birds squawking from the trees today. Right now, even though it was late in the season, there were still some goldenrod and asters and also the purple ironweed

flowers blooming. One thing about wildflowers—there was always something blooming from early spring until late fall. Mattie could only admire the goldenrod, though, since their little brother, Perry, was allergic to them. Mom really liked it whenever Mattie picked flowers for the table, but unfortunately, today Mattie wasn't in the mood to pick any. All she could think about was her poor little dog out there someplace, but who knew where? Mattie had been so upset last night that she'd slept with Twinkles's dog collar under her pillow. "Here, Twinkles! Here, Twinkles!" she called once more.

"You're gonna lose your voice if you keep hollerin' like that," Mark said. "And my ears will be ringing soon if you don't cut it out."

"But I've got to find my hund." Mattie sniffed and glanced all around, hoping and praying Twinkles would come bounding up to her, swishing her little tail.

"She'll come home when she's ready."

"Not if someone took her."

"I don't think anyone took her, Mattie. Just try not to worry so much."

Mattie frowned. That was easy for Mark to say. It wasn't his pet who'd gone missing. She wished Dad had fixed their flat tire last night. She could have spent more time looking for Twinkles this morning if they'd been able to ride their bike, because it would have gotten them to school a lot quicker.

When they arrived at the schoolhouse, Mattie told Mark she was going to ask some of the girls if they'd seen Twinkles anywhere.

"That's a good idea," Mark said. "I'll ask the boys. Maybe some of 'em will have information about your hund."

Mattie raced over to a group of girls who were playing on the swings. "My dog's missing," she said, trying to catch her breath. "Have any of you seen her lately?"

"Not me," Becky Hostetler said with a shake of her head.

Mattie's friend Stella brought her swing to a stop. "I haven't seen Twinkles, either."

Mattie looked at the other two girls—Anna and Karen Troyer, who were sisters. They had also stopped swinging. "What about you? Have you seen my dog?"

"No," they both said.

"How long has Twinkles been missing?" Stella questioned.

"She disappeared sometime yesterday, while I was at school." Mattie blinked several times, trying to hold back her tears. Talking about Twinkles and how much she missed her made Mattie feel sad. She was so worried that her stomach had begun to ache.

Stella got off the swing and gave Mattie a hug, while the other girls went back to swinging. "I'm sorry, Mattie. I really like Twinkles, and I hope you find her

real soon. I'd come over after school to help you look for her, but Mom's taking me shopping for new shoes."

"That's okay, Stella. I hope we find her soon, too. I miss Twinkles so much," Mattie said, grateful for the support of her best friend.



"Did you ask all the boys if they'd seen any sign of Twinkles?" Mattie asked Mark as they walked home from school that afternoon.

"I did, and no one's seen your hund," he replied, wishing he didn't have to give her that news. "Don't worry, Mattie. If Twinkles isn't there when we get home, I'll help ya look for her."

"Danki, Mark. That means a lot to me."

Even though earlier Mark had told Mattie not to worry, he felt bad that Twinkles was missing. After talking to his friends and hearing that no one had seen the dog, Mark was nearly as disappointed as he knew Mattie must be. Truth was, he'd be worried, too, if one of his cats had disappeared. Even though Twinkles often got on his nerves, he was still concerned about the dog. It wasn't like Twinkles to be gone this long—especially without food, because that playful dog sure liked to eat.

"How'd you do on the math test we took today?" Mark asked, hoping to change the subject, as they neared their home. He knew the more they talked about Mattie's missing dog, the worse she'd probably feel.

“Not very well.” Mattie sighed. “All I could think about was poor Twinkles, out there somewhere on her own.”

“Try to relax, Mattie. We’re almost home, and if she isn’t there, we can start looking for her.”

“Probably not till our homework and chores are done,” Mattie said. “You know Mom always makes us do those things first.”

“Well, I don’t have any homework, ’cause I got mine done during recess again.” Mark gave Mattie’s arm a pat. “As soon as I finish my chores, I’ll start lookin’ for Twinkles. When you’re done, you can join me.”

“Okay.” Mattie looked grateful when she smiled at him, and Mark felt good about offering to help her find Twinkles. Deep down, he wished he could find the dog by himself. He’d love to see the look on Mattie’s face if that were to happen.

When the twins went inside the house, Mom greeted them at the door with a cheery smile.

“Did Twinkles come home today?” Mattie asked with a hopeful expression.

Mom shook her head. “I’m sorry, but I haven’t seen any sign of your dog at all.”

Mattie’s chin trembled. “Mark and I want to go looking for her. Is it all right if we go now?”

“Of course you can search for her, but you need to get your chores and homework done first,” Mom reminded the twins. “If your little brother and sister wake up from their naps soon, maybe we can all

go looking for Twinkles.”

“I did my homework at school again today,” Mark said. “So all I have to do is my chores.”

Mom nodded. “That’s fine. You can search for Twinkles as soon as you’re finished.”

“If we don’t find Twinkles today, can we put some LOST DOG signs around Walnut Creek?” Mattie asked.

“Sure, we can do that as soon as we’ve had our supper this evening,” Mom said.

“Where are Calvin and Russell?” Mark asked. “I didn’t see their bikes outside. Thought maybe they could help us search for Mattie’s dog.”

“They went to the store to get a few things I need for supper,” Mom replied. “They shouldn’t be gone too long.”

Mark gave a nod, and then he bounded up the stairs to his room and hurriedly changed his clothes. When that was done, he went outside to muck out the barn while Mattie worked on her homework at the kitchen table. When he was finished with his chores, he headed for the house to see if Mattie was done with her homework so they could begin looking for Twinkles. He was halfway there when it started to rain. By the time his feet hit the porch, it was pouring.

“You two had better stay inside for now,” Mom said when Mark came in the house and stood on the throw rug because his shoes were wet. “If you go outside to look for Twinkles right now, you’ll be soaking wet.”

“But Mom,” Mattie said, her eyes filling with tears,

“if Twinkles is out there in the rain, she’ll get wet, too.”

“I’m sure she’ll take care of herself and find a place to get out of the weather.” Mom gave Mattie’s shoulder a squeeze. “Animals have an inner sense about things. Now please stop worrying and get your homework done.”



That evening during supper, Mattie could hardly eat anything on her plate. Never mind that Mom had fixed chicken and dumplings, which were always so good. Mattie had no appetite for food at all. Her stomach felt like it was twisted into one big knot. It was still raining outside, and all she could think about was her poor little dog out there somewhere by herself, getting wet. Twinkles was probably cold and hungry. She might even be scared.

“Where’s Twinkles?” Mattie’s three-year-old sister, Ada, suddenly asked. Ada had red hair like Mattie’s, and she got excited easily—especially when Mark made silly faces at her.

Mattie looked at Ada, unable to answer her question. How could she explain that her dog had run away? Ada liked Twinkles and was bound to cry if she found out the dog was missing. In fact, every time Ada saw Twinkles, she would get all excited and wave her hands, squealing with delight.

Mark came to Mattie’s rescue and tickled Ada under her chin. She giggled and wiggled and waved her hands.

“Twinkles is on an adventure and will come home when she gets tired,” Mark said when Mom told him to stop tickling Ada so she could eat the rest of her supper.

That seemed to pacify Ada, for she quickly finished eating the chicken and dumplings on her plate. “All gone!” Ada said, lifting her arms and grinning at Mom.

“I’m done, too,” Mattie’s five-year-old brother, Perry, announced as he rubbed his belly. Perry had thick blond hair like Dad’s.

“Okay, you two,” Dad said, placing his hands on Perry and Ada’s heads. “Wipe your faces, and we’ll go into the living room and play for a bit, until it’s time to have our dessert.”

Mattie forced herself to finish eating her chicken and dumplings. If it stopped raining and she was allowed to search for her dog after the dishes were done, she would need plenty of energy to help accomplish that task. Mattie knew that unless Twinkles came home, there would be no dessert for her tonight. The apple pie Mom had baked today didn’t sound appealing right now—not even the way Mattie liked to eat it, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top.

When supper was over, Mattie helped Mom clear away the dishes. She dragged her feet slowly from the table to the sink, with the worry she felt about Twinkles making her feel tired.

“Come on, Mattie. I can see that you’re really sad,” Mom said as she washed the dishes and stacked them

for drying. “You need to remain positive and ask God to watch over your hund.”

Mattie hoped Mom was right, and although it was difficult, she told herself that everything would turn out fine and that God would protect her cute little dog.

Mattie had just put the last dirty dish in the sink and was going to start drying the ones Mom had already washed when she heard a scratching sound at the back door. *I’d better see what that noise is*, she thought. *Maybe, just maybe, it’s Twinkles.*

Mattie dried her hands on a towel and opened the back door while holding her breath.

Yip! Yip! Yip! Twinkles, all muddy and wet, darted into the house, wagging her short little tail.

“*Ach*, Twinkles, it is you!” Mattie shouted. “I’m so happy you’re home!”

“*Absatz*—stop!” Mom hollered, quickly closing the kitchen door so the dog couldn’t run through the rest of the house. “Catch her, Mattie, and then you’d better fill the tub and give that hund a bath. I won’t allow her to run though the house with muddy, wet feet.”

Mattie scooped Twinkles into her arms, not even caring that her dress was getting wet and dirty. “I don’t know where you’ve been all this time,” she said, giving Twinkles a hug, “but from now on I’m gonna put you in the kennel whenever I’m gone. I want you to be safe and stay in the yard. You had me so worried, and I don’t want you runnin’ off ever again!” Mattie held Twinkles

tightly, never wanting to let her go. She had missed her little four-legged friend, and even though she didn't know where Twinkles had been, she was ever so thankful the dog had come home.

Mom smiled. "As soon as you've given Twinkles a bath, you can help me make some popcorn. And don't forget about the apple pie I made earlier today. We'll have some of that, as well."

"Can we have some of Dad's apple cider, too?" Mattie asked. Now that Twinkles was home, she was in the mood for dessert. In fact, her appetite had suddenly reappeared.

"Of course, and I'll get out some vanilla ice cream to go with the pie," said Mom. "Now hurry along."

Mattie laughed as Ada started waving her hands, and Perry jumped up and down when they came into the kitchen and heard Mom mention ice cream and pie. Feeling light on her feet, and humming softly as she held Twinkles close, Mattie headed for the bathroom to fill the tub. Now her stomach growled with hunger, when only a few minutes ago she could hardly eat a thing on her plate. All of a sudden, she was starving for apple pie and ice cream. It felt good to be relieved of all that worry.

Just outside the bathroom door, Mattie stopped and whispered a prayer: "Thank You, dear Jesus, for bringing Twinkles safely home."



CHAPTER 3



A Good Week

“You’re awfully quiet back there,” Mark said as he and Mattie rode their bike to school on Friday morning.

“Are ya daydreaming again?”

“No, I’m not,” Mattie replied. “I’m thinking about the spelling test we’re supposed to take today.” She was glad Dad had fixed their tire last night and they could now pedal quickly to school.

“You shouldn’t be *thinkin’* about it,” Mark said. “You should be practicing the words.”

“I’m practicing them in my head.”

“Humph!” Mark grunted. “You oughta say the words out loud. That’s the best way to remember how to spell ’em.”

“You really think so?”

“ ’Course I do. I’ll tell you what, Mattie,” Mark said. “I’ll say a word, spell it out loud, and then make a sentence using that word. After that, you can say another word and do the same.”

“Okay.”

“Popcorn. P-o-p-c-o-r-n. I love to eat popcorn.”

Mark glanced over his shoulder. “All right, Mattie, it’s your turn to say a word now.”

“Tearful. T-e-a-r-f-u-l-l. I was tearful when Twinkles was lost.”

“I don’t think your hund was lost, Mattie. She just didn’t come home till she was good and ready. Oh, and you spelled the word *tearful* wrong.”

“Did not.”

“Did so. You put two *l*’s at the end, and there’s only one. It’s t-e-a-r-f-u-l, not t-e-a-r-f-u-l-l.”

“Oh, guess I forgot. Let me try another one,” Mattie said.

“Nope. It’s my turn now.”

“Okay, go ahead.” Mattie figured whatever word Mark chose from the list, he’d know how to spell it. She wished spelling came as easy for her as it did him, but then, most of the things they learned in school seemed easy for Mark.

“The word I choose next is *flabbergasted*,” Mark announced.

Mattie let go of the handlebar with one hand and poked her brother’s arm. “That word isn’t even on our list. You made it up, didn’t you?”

“Nope, but you’re right, it’s not on the list. I’m gonna add it to the list so I can get extra credit,” Mark said.

She frowned. “Don’t see why you have to do that. I’m sure you’ll get all the spelling words right, so you

shouldn't need any extra credit."

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "I don't care. I like big words, and I'm gonna add it to my list."

"What does *flabbergasted* mean?" Mattie questioned.

"It means shocked or amazed."

"I see. Well, don't expect me to add any words to my list. It'll be a miracle if I can spell the words that are on the list now. I'm really worried I might fail the test. I probably didn't study as much as I should have, 'cause I was so worried about Twinkles."

"There you go again, Mattie. You're worried about somethin' that might not happen. Just practice the words some more and do your best when we take the test." Mark slapped his knee and laughed. "I just rhymed my words: *Do your best when we take the test.*"

"I will do my best," Mattie said, although she already felt somewhat defeated. "I'll practice the words in my head all the way to school."



When it came time to take the spelling test that afternoon, Mattie's stomach knotted up again. Her hands grew so shaky she almost dropped her pencil. When the teacher said each of the words, Mattie concentrated and tried to sound them out in her head. It was a good thing she'd practiced the words on the way to school; otherwise she might not remember how to spell any of them right now.

“And now the final word on the list is *worry*,” Anna Ruth told the class.

That one should be easy for me, Mattie thought, chewing on her pencil eraser. She wrote the word down on her paper then made a sentence using the word. “Mark says I worry too much.”

“All right now, class, pass your papers to the front of the room.”

Mattie did as the teacher asked. She’d done her best on the test. Now she had to wait until the end of the day to see how well she’d done.



During recess that afternoon, Mark’s best friend, John Schrock, tried to get Mark to join the game of baseball some of the other children were playing. John was Mattie’s friend Stella’s cousin, but he didn’t look anything like her. Stella had brown hair and brown eyes. John’s hair was blond, and his eyes were blue.

“Huh-uh.” Mark shook his head. “You know I’m not good at playin’ ball.”

“Aw, come on,” John coaxed. “You don’t play that bad.”

“Jah, I do.” Mark frowned. “I get tired of the other kids makin’ fun of me because I don’t run fast enough.” Even though he’d been watching the baseball game, Mark kept his distance. He wanted to make sure no one asked him to join in. Mark didn’t like to come up with excuses all the time, but it was the only way to avoid

being teased if he played the game.

“You should just ignore ’em,” John said. “Then they’ll get tired of making fun of you.”

“Maybe so, but I’d rather not play ball.” Mark moved across the schoolyard and leaned against the fence, kicking at a rock before propping his foot on the bottom rail.

John followed. “How do ya think you did on the spelling test?” he questioned.

Mark smiled widely. “Think I did fine. The words were easy.”

“Not for me.” John shook his head. “Bet I flunked that test.”

Mark thumped his friend’s back a couple of times. “Now don’t start worrying like Mattie does. You probably did better than you think.”

“I hope so.” John dragged the toe of his boot through the dirt. “So what are you doin’ after school? Can ya come home with me and play awhile?”

Mark removed his straw hat and shook his head. “Not without asking Mom first.”

John pointed to Mark and snickered.

“What’s so funny?” Mark asked.

“You oughta see your red hair right now. It’s standin’ straight up in the air.” John laughed out loud.

Mark reached up and smoothed the top of his hair; then he plopped his hat back on his head.

“Are ya sure you can’t come over to my place today?” John asked. “You can call your mother when ya get to

my house and see if it's okay."

"That's not a good idea. Mom might not go out to the phone shack to check for messages, so she wouldn't know where I was. Besides," Mark added, "Mattie and I came to school on our bike today 'cause Dad got the flat tire fixed. If I rode over to your house, she'd have to walk home by herself."

"It wouldn't hurt her to do that, ya know. It's not raining today."

"That's true, but it is kinda chilly. I'll bet it won't be long before we have some *schnee*."

John's eyebrows shot straight up. "Ya really think we'll get some snow soon?"

Mark gave a nod. "Could be anytime now that winter is near."

"I can hardly wait for some *schnee* to start falling," John said. "It's fun to build a snowman, go sledding, or ice-skate on one of the ponds around here."

"I like all those things, too," Mark agreed. "Say, since tomorrow's Saturday, maybe I can come over to your house then. 'Course, I'll have to ask Mom and Dad first, because they might want me to do somethin' else."

"I'll be home all day, so if your folks say it's okay, just come on over." John moved away from the fence. "Think I'll go play ball for a while before recess ends. Are you sure you don't wanna join us?"

"No thanks." Mark watched his friend as he walked toward the game that was now in full swing, with

laughter and cheers from those who were playing, as well as from the kids standing on the sidelines watching. He hoped his folks would say he could go over to John's house tomorrow.



“Mom, guess what?” Mattie shouted as she raced into the house after she and Mark arrived home from school that day.

“What is it?” Mom asked, stepping out of the kitchen to greet the twins in the utility room, where they were hanging up their jackets.

Mattie grinned, handing her mother a piece of paper. “I passed the spelling test and only missed two words!” She glanced over at Mark as he showed Mom his. “ ‘Course, he didn’t miss any of the spelling words.”

Mom looked at the twins’ test scores and gave them each a hug. “I’m glad you both did so well. It sounds like you had a good day.”

Mark and Mattie nodded.

“See, you were worried for nothing.” Mom gave Mattie’s shoulder a gentle tap. “You just need to do your best and train yourself not to worry. As your Grandpa Troyer used to tell me when I was a little girl, ‘There are two days in the week you should never worry about—yesterday and tomorrow.’ ”

“That’s right,” Mark put in. “Worry gets ya nowhere. Oh, and I think Mattie did well on the test ’cause she

practiced the words like I told her to do.”

Mom smiled. “I have some apples and cheese slices ready for you in the kitchen. You can have either a glass of milk or some cold apple cider, to go with your snack.”

“That sounds good. I’ll have some apple cider, please.” Mattie smacked her lips. “I’m *hungerich!*”

“I’m hungry, too, but I’ll have milk instead of cider,” Mark said. “But before we eat our snack, I wanna ask Mom a question.”

“What’s that?” Mom asked.

“John invited me over to his house tomorrow to play. If it’s all right with you and Dad, I’d like to go.”

Mom shook her head. “Tomorrow is Grandma Troyer’s birthday. Did you forget?”

Mark slapped the center of his forehead. “Oh, that’s right. I wouldn’t wanna miss that for anything. Guess I’ll have to call John and leave a message on his folks’ answering machine so he knows I won’t be coming over tomorrow.”

“I’m excited about going to Grandma and Grandpa’s,” Mattie said. “I like it when we hire a driver and go all the way to Burton.” It was always good to spend time with their grandparents, and with it being Grandma’s birthday, Mattie knew the day would be even better. She was sure they’d have lots of fun and that it would be a good day for everyone.

“Do you think Grandma Troyer will make some of her delicious corn fritters while we’re there?” Mark asked.

“I don’t think we should expect her to do that this time, since it’s her birthday we’re celebrating.” Mom looked at Mattie. “Would you like to help me bake a cake this evening to surprise Grandma with for our dessert tomorrow?”

Mattie smiled and bobbed her head. “That sounds like fun.”

“We’ll do it after supper,” Mom said. “Oh, and I spoke to your grandpa earlier today, and tomorrow evening he’s planning to make a bonfire like he usually does when we go there to visit.”

“Oh boy! I hope we can roast marshmallows!” Mark exclaimed. “Maybe Grandma will make us some hot chocolate, too.”

Mom smiled. “I’m sure she will.”

Mattie couldn’t wait to see Grandma and Grandpa Troyer, since they didn’t get to visit them as much as they did their other grandparents who lived nearby. She was also eager to see if Grandma would like the birthday present she’d made for her. Mattie had saved some of the wildflowers she’d picked a few weeks ago and hung them to dry out. She’d glued them to a piece of cardboard, spelling out the words “I love you” with different pieces of flowers. Mattie even had enough flower parts left over to make a design around the three words. After that, she’d taken an old picture frame she’d bought for a quarter at the flea market a few weeks ago and framed her finished creation. It had turned out

quite nice, and she hoped Grandma would think so, too.

What a good week this had turned out to be. First she'd done well on her spelling test, and now she had tomorrow to look forward to. *Guess Mom was right about me being worried for nothing*, Mattie thought.

Feeling like she had springs on her shoes, Mattie skipped into the kitchen, singing, "To Grandma and Grandpa's we will go. . . . To Grandma and Grandpa's we will go. . . . I am so excited. . . . Oh!"

Then Mark joined in, and they both sang at the top of their lungs, "To Grandma and Grandpa's we will go! We're so excited. . . . Oh!"