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To my friend Diane Allen, who created a special spot for the frogs that visit her garden.



GLOSSARY

ach-oh

blumme-flowers

boppli-baby

bruder-brother

bu-boy

daed-dad

danki-thanks

dumm-dumb

dunner-thunder

felse-rocks

fleissich-busy

frosch-frog

fuuss-foot

gfarlich-dangerous

gnechel-ankle

Gut nacht. -Good night.

hungerich-hungry

hund-dog

jah-yes

katz-cat

kichlin-cookie

kinner-children

kumme-come

mamm - mom
melke - milk
naerfich - nervous
nixnutzich - naughty
oi - egg
rutschich - squirming
schee - pretty
schtinke - stink
schmaert - smart
schpass - fun
shtock - bush
verhuddelt - confused
warem - worm
wasser - water
wedderleech - lightning
Wie geht's? - How are you?
wunderbaar - wonderful
zaeh - teeth
zehe - toes



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Sneaky Frog

A-choo! A-choo! Mattie Miller sneezed as the wind lifted a cloud of green clippings and spread it across the yard. Her nine-year-old twin brother, Mark, was busy mowing the lawn and didn't seem to notice the trail of grass he'd kicked up with the push mower as it swirled through the air. Mattie was glad mowing the grass wasn't one of her after-school chores. She'd be sneezing even worse if she had to push the old mower. Mark had said earlier that he enjoyed doing it, though—especially since it was the first mowing of the season. Once the grass had been cut, it made the whole yard look nice and tidy. The lawn even looked healthier and thicker after a good mowing.

Watching her brother, Mattie thought about how earlier this morning during breakfast, he had pulled a fast one on her. She'd eaten half of her dippy egg and was reaching for the toast to finish dabbing up the yoke when she discovered the toast that had been there a few seconds ago was gone. Since Mattie had been

daydreaming during breakfast, she wondered if she'd eaten the other half of her toast without realizing it. She had been about to ask Mom if she could have another piece when she glanced over at Mark and saw a sly look on his face. That prankster had taken her toast! Mark liked to play tricks and make people laugh, but Mattie didn't think the joke he'd played on her this morning was funny.

Shrugging her thoughts aside, Mattie hurried across the yard to her little garden plot, anxious to see if any flowers had come up. It was springtime now—Mattie's favorite season of the year—especially after a long, cold winter. Today in Walnut Creek, the air felt warmer than it had yesterday. Even with the little bit of wind, it was nice enough not to be wearing a coat. Mattie was in good spirits, and even Mark's little joke at breakfast hadn't ruined her mood.

Signs of spring were everywhere, and winter's harshness was finally behind them. Local markets were already selling different types of flowers. They were bursting with color and their lingering scent, and Mattie couldn't help but feel happy just being around all the colorful blossoms.

Even though the pollen from trees could be a nuisance, it was heavy in the air as the leaves started sprouting, leaving layers of green dust on everything it clung to. On a breezy day like this, Mattie could see a haze of green swirling off the pine branches where it had also settled.

Pollen and grass made Mattie sneeze, but flowers

gave her a wonderful feeling. She'd planted some tulip, crocus, and daffodil bulbs last fall and figured they should break through the ground most any day. She couldn't wait to see them, and when they bloomed, she planned to pick a bouquet for Mom, or maybe she would decorate the fence, like she'd done last summer.

Kneeling on the grass, Mattie peered at the soil near the wooden sign Dad had made for her garden. It said: MATTIE'S CORNER.

Using her hands, Mattie removed a clump of wet leaves that had blanketed the garden during the winter, but so far, there was no sign of the flowers. To Mattie's surprise, a small green frog hopped out of the upside-down clay pot Grandpa Troyer had given Mark to use as a frog house. With a noisy *Ribet! Ribet!*—it jumped and landed in the ceramic dish filled with water that Mark had gotten for Christmas and used as a frog pool.

“Mark, *kumme*—come quick!” Mattie shouted, cupping her hands around her mouth. “Your *frosch* just came out of hibernation!”

Mark apparently didn't hear Mattie shouting at him, for he kept mowing with a big grin on his face. He sure seemed to be enjoying himself as he pushed that old lawn mower back and forth across the lawn.

Mattie knew her brother would be even more excited than she was to see the frog, so she jumped up, raced across the yard, and tapped Mark's shoulder.

“What do ya want?” Mark asked, stopping what he was doing and turning to face Mattie. His cheeks were flushed, almost matching his thick, red hair. “Can't you

see that I'm *fleissich*?"

"I realize that you're busy, but I wanted you to know that a frosch came out of the frog house, and he's in the little frog pond you made for him."

Mark let go of the mower and raced across the yard. Mattie followed right on his heels. When they reached her little garden plot, Mark dropped to his knees and peered at the ceramic dish. "There's nothin' in here but water," he mumbled. "No sign of a frosch at all."

Mattie stared at the dish, unbelieving. "But—but he was here a few minutes ago."

Mark squinted his blue eyes while frowning at Mattie. "Are you tryin' to get even with me 'cause I teased you at breakfast this morning?"

She shook her head so hard that the ties on her black head covering swished around her face. "I am not trying to get even. There really was a frosch, and it must be around here someplace."

Mark grunted. "Well there's not one here now, and I need to get back to mowin' the lawn. I wanna get it done so I have time to play." He hurried off before Mattie could say anything more.

"Mark doesn't believe me. He thinks I made it all up," Mattie muttered, going down on her knees. Still no sign of that disappearing frog. If she had made up the story about seeing the frog, it would have been a good way to get back at Mark for taking her piece of toast this morning. But Mattie knew it wouldn't be right to get even.

"Whatcha lookin' at?" Mattie's six-year-old brother, Perry, asked when he joined her beside the garden.

“I was looking for Mark’s frosch,” Mattie replied. “It was here before, but now it’s gone.”

Perry, who had blond hair like Dad’s, pointed to the small green bush behind the garden plaque Mattie had made Mark for Christmas. “Is that a frosch, sittin’ under the *schock*?”

Mattie bent down for a closer look. Sure enough, the frog sat under a bush, all puffed out, as big as you please. *Ribet! Ribet! Ribet!*

Mattie jumped up, raced across the lawn, and stopped behind Mark. Perry followed her there. “That frosch is back,” she said, tapping Mark’s shoulder.

Mark quit mowing, and his eyes widened. “Are you sure about that?”

She gave a quick nod. “*Jah*. Perry spotted the frosch under a *schock*.”

Perry bobbed his head in agreement, looking quite pleased with himself.

Mark wiped his sweaty forehead with the back of his hand, leaving a streak of green above his eyebrows. “You’d better not be teasin’ about this, Mattie. I don’t have time for silly games.”

“I’m not teasing.” Mattie grabbed her brother’s hand and led him over to the bush. Perry came, too. “Your frosch is right there,” she said, pointing to the spot where she and Perry had seen the frog.

Mark got down on his knees and peered under all sides of the bush. “There’s no frosch here.” He clambered to his feet and shook his finger at Mattie, the way Mom sometimes did when she was scolding one of

her children or trying to make a point. “Now, enough with your silly games! I have work to do.” With that, he dashed across the yard and started mowing the lawn again. This time Perry went with Mark and helped push the mower. Mattie thought their little brother would just get in the way, but Mark didn’t seem to mind, for he began to whistle as he and Perry moved the mower around the yard.

Mattie went back to her garden. Leaning down to peek inside the frog house, she slowly tipped it back. The only thing she saw inside was a squiggly earthworm, tunneling its way into the damp dirt.

“Ewww. . .” Mattie quickly lowered the frog house. Then she noticed a few weeds wrapped around the wooden sign Dad had made for her birthday last summer. She grabbed one of the weeds and gave it a tug. Suddenly, the frog leaped out from behind the miniature rosebush Mom had helped her plant. *Ribet! Ribet!* He landed on top of the frog house. Mattie snickered. That cute little frog looked like an ornament, sitting there like that.

She jumped up, eager to tell Mark that the frog was back. He just had to believe her this time!

As Mattie dashed across the yard, Mark’s cat, Lucky, streaked in front of her in pursuit of a mouse. Mattie, trying to get out of Lucky’s way, stumbled and fell flat on her back. *Oomph!*

Mark stopped mowing and raced over to Mattie while she struggled to get up. “What happened, Mattie? Are you okay?” he asked, reaching his hand out to her.

“Thanks to your *katz*, I tripped, but I’m fine.” Once Mattie was on her feet, she brushed the grass clippings from her plain green dress, then she pointed to her garden plot. “The frosch is back. He’s sitting on top of your frog house as though he belongs there.”

Mark folded his arms. “I hope you’re telling the truth, Mattie. That frosch had better be there this time.”

She bobbed her head. “It is. Kumme, Mark. Come quickly!”

Mark followed Mattie across the yard, and Perry came, too. When they got to her garden, they dropped to their knees. Mattie couldn’t believe it, but the frog was gone again!

“Where’s the frosch?” Mark questioned. “He’s sure not sittin’ on top of the frog house like you said.”

“No frosch,” Perry said, shaking his head.

“I—I can’t figure it out,” Mattie stammered. “He was here a few minutes ago, honest.”

Wrinkles formed across Mark’s forehead. “If he was here, then where is he now?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I—I don’t know. That sneaky little frosch keeps disappearing. He’s as bad as you—always playing jokes on me.”

Mark tapped his foot and frowned at Mattie. “I’m tired of this silly game. You’re the one playin’ jokes, Mattie, and I need to finish mowing the lawn. So please don’t bother me again!” Mark took Perry’s hand and tromped off toward the mower.

Mattie couldn’t help but notice that her twin brother’s smile was no longer there. *I can’t believe*

that crazy frosch, she thought. *He keeps hiding, and it's making me look foolish.* Mattie wondered if the frog might be afraid of people. Maybe she could add a few ferns to her flower bed, especially around the frog house and its little swimming area. That way, once the ferns grew thicker, it would give the frog more cover as well as some shade from the hot sun. Maybe then he wouldn't be so scared and wouldn't hop away.

Mattie knew exactly where to get some ferns, too. Recently, she'd seen some fiddlehead ferns beginning to curl up out of the ground. They grew near the creek across the road from where she often picked wildflowers. One day soon, on the way home from school, she and Mark could stop and dig up a few of those ferns to bring home and plant in her garden.

For now, though, Mattie figured she'd better give up on the frog. When she heard Twinkles, her brown-and-white terrier, barking, she hurried over to the kennel to let the dog out. Since none of Mattie's flowers were coming up yet and the frog kept disappearing, it might be more fun to play fetch with Twinkles than to sit and look at her garden. She could have the dog do some of the tricks she'd taught her, like rolling over, sitting up, and walking on her hind feet.



Mark couldn't believe Mattie would tease him like that. He figured it had to be because of the toast incident earlier that morning. If she really had seen the frog in her garden, then it would still be there. He pushed the

mower as fast as he could, anxious to get done so he could do something else. Perry had gotten bored with helping Mark push the mower, so he'd gone back into the house. That was fine with Mark. Perry's legs were short and he couldn't walk very fast, so it was easier and quicker for Mark to do the mowing himself.

When I'm finished with the lawn, maybe I'll go to the barn and see if my cats are there, Mark thought. It was always fun to let Lucky and Boots play with a ball of string or even just sit with them on a bale of straw and scratch behind their ears.

By the time Mark finished with the lawn and had put the mower away in the shed, his forehead was damp and a layer of green pollen covered his straw hat. Even though it wasn't real warm out today, he'd worked up a pretty good sweat.

Mark took off his hat and watched the green dust fly as he hit it across his legs. Then he reached for the roll of paper towels Dad kept on a shelf near the door of the shed. Even on his tiptoes, he couldn't quite reach it. *Sure wish I was as tall as Mattie,* Mark thought. *We're twins, and it's not fair that she's taller than me. I'm a boy, and I oughta be taller than my twin sister.*

Mark usually wasn't jealous of Mattie, but ever since his sister's growth spurt, he'd been envious of her height. Mattie's long legs made it easier for her to run, which might be why she could sprint so much faster than Mark.

Mark looked around the shed, searching for something to climb on so he could reach the shelf where the

paper towels were kept. He spotted a step stool at the other end of the building and went to get it. Placing the stool in front of the shelf, Mark was about to climb up when Mattie came in.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m gonna use this wooden stool to get the roll of paper towels,” he answered.

“Want me to get it for you?” she asked.

He shook his head determinedly.

“I just wanna help.”

“I don’t need any help. I can do it myself.” Mark climbed onto the stool, grabbed the roll of paper towels, and stepped down. After he’d wiped his sweaty forehead and thrown the paper towel away, he climbed onto the stool and set the roll back on the shelf.

Mattie stood there a minute, staring at him; then she turned and went out the door.

Mark returned the stool to the place he’d found it. *I wonder if I’ll ever be tall like my brother Ike. I’m sure he wouldn’t have had any trouble reaching those paper towels*, Mark thought as he stepped outside and closed the shed door.

As he headed for the barn, Mark heard a *Ribet! Ribet! Ribet!* He tipped his head and listened. There it was again. *Ribet! Ribet!* “That sounds like it’s comin’ from Mattie’s little garden,” he said.

Mark quickened his steps. When he came to the garden, he stopped and listened. *Ribet! Ribet! Whoosh! Plop!* A little green frog landed right on Mark’s foot! He chuckled and bent down, scooping the frog into his

hands. Then Mark hurried across the yard to the porch where Mattie sat holding her dog.

“Look what I found,” Mark said, holding the frog out for Mattie to see.

“Where was it?” she asked, looking up at him.

“In your garden. I heard the frosch but didn’t see it at first—not till it leaped onto my *fuuss*.” Mark snickered. “Think I’m gonna call him Hoppy Herman.”

“See, I told you he was there,” Mattie said, bobbing her head. “Now don’t you wish you’d believed me?”

“I thought you were just pullin’ my leg,” Mark said.

Mattie’s eyebrows furrowed. “I would never do that. If I pulled your leg, you might lose your balance and fall over.”

Mark leaned his head back and laughed. “When someone says somebody’s pullin’ their leg, it means they’re teasing them.”

Mattie gave Mark’s arm a little poke. “Why didn’t you just say that?”

Mark opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say a word, Mattie’s dog caught sight of the frog. *Yip! Yip! Yip!* Twinkles leaped into the air and touched the frog’s nose with the tip of her long, pink tongue.

Ribet! Ribet! The frog jumped out of Mark’s hands, landed on the grass, and hopped away.

Mark groaned. “Oh great! Now I’ll have to search for that sneaky little frosch all over again!”



CHAPTER 2



Disappointing Day

“Hurry and finish your breakfast so we can be on our way to Millersburg,” Mom said, handing Mattie a bowl of cereal with sliced bananas on top. She looked over at Mark, who’d already been given his cereal, and smiled. “We’ll be shopping for new shoes, so let me know if your old ones are getting too tight.”

“Mine sure are,” Mark said, nodding his head. “My old sneakers pinch the ends of my *zehe*.”

“If your shoes hurt your toes, then your feet must be growing,” their brother Ike, who was seventeen, said, bumping Mark’s arm. Ike had auburn-colored hair, like Mom’s, and he was nearly as tall as Dad.

“My feet are about all that’s growin’ on me,” Mark mumbled. “Don’t think I’m ever gonna be as tall as you are, Ike.”

“Give yourself some time,” Dad said. “Remember, Ike’s eight years older than you, and as I have said before, there’s plenty of time for you to grow tall like your *bruder*.”

“That’s right,” blond-haired Calvin, who’d recently

turned twelve, agreed. “It took me awhile, but I’m getting taller every year. You will, too, Mark; I’m sure of it.”

“Maybe Calvin’s right,” thirteen-year-old Russell said, reaching for his glass of milk. Russell also had blond hair, and he looked a lot like Dad, only shorter.

Mark sighed and leaned his elbows on the table. “I sure hope so ’cause I’m gettin’ tired of bein’ so short.” He appreciated his family trying to be supportive, but it didn’t make it any easier to deal with the fact that everyone in their family, except for Ada and Perry, was taller than him.

Mom gave Mark’s shoulder a gentle squeeze. “Don’t worry about it, son. You’ll grow in good time; just wait and see.”



As they made their trip to Millersburg that morning, Mattie began to feel drowsy. It was a little over ten miles from their house to the Walmart store, and by horse and buggy, it took much longer to get there than it would have if Dad had hired a driver. Perry and their little sister, Ada, who was three, rode up front with Mom and Dad, while Mark, Mattie, Calvin, and Russell sat in the back. Ike had decided not to go since he’d made plans to be with some of his friends today. That was fine with Mattie. There really wasn’t room for one more person in the buggy. They were sitting close together as it was. If Ike had come along, he’d probably have ridden his bike or taken his own horse and buggy. Since Ike was the oldest brother, he often went many

places on his own.

Enjoying the warmth of the spring day, Mattie closed her eyes, almost ready to nod off. The movement of the buggy and the rhythmic *clip-clop, clip-clop* of the horse's hooves made it even harder to stay awake. She was nearly lulled to sleep when Mark poked her arm. "Wake up, sleepyhead. We're almost there."

Mattie opened her eyes, stretched, and yawned as she sat up straight. Maybe she wouldn't feel so tired once she got out of the buggy and started walking around the store.

"Hey, watch it," Calvin fussed. "You almost gave me a black eye stretchin' your arms out like that."

"Sorry," Mattie apologized. "If we weren't squeezed in so tight in the backseat, we'd all have more room." She noticed, as they turned into the parking lot, that the store looked really busy today with all the vehicles in the parking spaces and many still rolling in from the main road.

"Can we go to the bicycle department first?" Mark asked as Dad secured their horse to the hitching rail on the far end of the parking lot.

"I don't know; we'll see," Dad replied. "Your *mamm* has a list of things she needs to buy, so where we start in the store will be up to her."

Mark looked at Mattie, and Mattie looked at Mom, who was busy helping Ada and Perry out of the buggy. "Can we go to the bicycle department first?" Mattie asked, tugging on the sleeve of Mom's dress.

"We'll see," Mom said. She took Ada and Perry's hands

and started walking across the parking lot toward the store. Mark, Mattie, and the rest of the family followed.

Mattie couldn't help noticing all the colorful hyacinths and tulips on the stands outside the store's entrance. The fragrance from the flowers smelled so wonderful, and their sweet scent even followed them inside the store. She hoped once more that the bulbs she had planted in her little garden would come up soon so she'd have some flowers of her own.

Dad tapped Mom's shoulder and said, "See over there? It looks like the store is giving away free ice cream cones in celebration of spring." He pointed to a sign at the end of one aisle.

"Ice cream! Ice cream!" Perry shouted.

"Ice cream! Ice cream!" Ada repeated, clapping her hands and wiggling around. Ada often did that when she got excited.

Mom put her finger to her lips. "Shh. . . Calm down, you two. We'll have some ice cream first, and then we'll get our shopping done." She looked over at Dad. "Is that all right with you, Willard?"

Dad gave a nod. "An ice cream cone—even a small one—sounds good to me. You know how I am," he said, chuckling as he patted his stomach. "I like ice cream as much as our *kinner* do."

"I'd rather go to the bicycle department first," Mark said. "Mattie and I have been saving up our money to buy something for our bike. We can get our free cones after we're done."

"That's right; I want a new bell," Mattie said

excitedly. Even though getting ice cream sounded really good, she knew she could wait awhile.

“I want a new light for our bike,” Mark announced.

“If you have enough money, maybe you can buy both,” Dad told the twins.

“Let’s go there and look right now.” Mark grabbed Mattie’s hand and gave it a tug.

“All right,” Mom agreed. “But come right back here when you’re done because we don’t want to hunt for you all over the store when we finish eating our ice cream.”

“We’ll meet you right here,” Mark said before he and Mattie skipped off down the aisle.

When they reached the bicycle department, Mattie, feeling even more excited, grabbed a bell off the shelf. “This is exactly what we need!” she proclaimed. “And look, it’s only ten dollars.”

Mark wrinkled his nose. “But we just have twelve dollars between us, Mattie. If we buy the bell, we won’t have enough left to buy a light for our bike, and that’s more important than a bell.”

Mattie shook her head determinedly. “No it’s not. We need a bell so people will know we’re coming.”

“We need a light so we can see where we’re goin’ when it’s dark,” Mark insisted.

“But we hardly ever ride our bike at night,” Mattie reminded her brother. “Mom and Dad don’t like us riding when it’s dark because it could be *gfarlich*.”

“But it wouldn’t be so dangerous if we had a light on our bike,” Mark argued.

Mattie groaned. She didn’t think their folks would

let them ride at night, even if they did have a light. At this rate, they'd never get anything bought for their bike. And if they didn't hurry, they might miss getting some ice cream because she didn't know how long the store would be giving away free cones today.

Mark nudged Mattie's arm. "Come on, Mattie. Please say we can buy the light for our bike. We can get the bell when we save up more money."

"Oh, all right," Mattie said with a sigh. "But we'd better figure out a way to make some money because I don't want to wait very long to buy a bell."

"We'll work somethin' out." Mark grinned and plucked the light off the shelf; then he headed to the cashier to pay for it.

A short time later, the twins returned to the front of the store, where they were supposed to meet their family.

"What took you so long?" Dad asked, looking at Mark.

"We had a little trouble deciding what to get," Mark replied.

"What did you get?" Russell wanted to know. "A light or a bell?"

"We got this!" Mark opened the package and held up the light. "It's a nice one, too, don't ya think?"

Russell nodded. "You're right about that. I believe it's as nice as the one I have on my bike."

"We didn't have enough money to get the light and a bell," Mattie said, "so we'll have to wait on a bell till we earn more money."

"I'm sure Grandma and Grandpa Miller will have

some chores you can do, especially now that spring is here,” Mom said. “But right now we need to get our shopping done.”

“What about our ice cream cones?” Mark asked. “Mattie and I are anxious for that.”

“That’s right,” Mattie eagerly agreed. “I’m hoping for a vanilla cone.”

“Sorry, but they stopped giving out free ice cream right after Ada and Perry got their cones,” Dad said.

“Oh no!” Mattie moaned. She couldn’t have been more disappointed. No bell for the bike, and no free ice cream.

“Guess maybe we should have waited to look in the bicycle department till we got our free cones,” Mark said with a frown. “I really wanted some chocolate ice cream.”

“Sorry about that.” Mom patted the twins’ shoulders. “When we get home, you can have a few of those chocolate-chip *kichlin* I made yesterday morning. Right now, though, we need to head to the shoe department so that everyone can try on new shoes.”



Mark wasn’t happy about not getting any ice cream. In fact, he was jealous of his brothers and little sister because they’d gotten a cone and he and Mattie hadn’t. He figured Mattie was probably upset about it, too, because she walked through the store behind Mom with her head down and shoulders slumped. Some things weren’t fair! The only thing that made Mark feel a little

better was knowing that he'd be going home with a new pair of sneakers. He had told Mom that his old shoes were getting too tight, and even the little bit of walking they'd done so far today had made his feet hurt. Some new shoes that fit well should solve that problem, though.

When they reached the shoe department, Mom helped Mattie and Ada find new shoes while Dad helped Mark, Calvin, Russell, and Perry choose. It didn't take long for everyone to find a pair of shoes they liked—everyone but Mark, that is. All of the shoes he'd tried on had either been too big or too small. There wasn't a single pair in his size!

"It's not fair," Mark complained as Dad paid for their purchases. "I'm the one who needed new shoes the most, and I'm the only one in our family who didn't get any shoes today." He felt more envious now than ever. No ice cream and no shoes. What a big disappointment!

"It's all right," Mom said. "We'll look at the Shoe and Boot Store in Charm after you get home from school on Monday. Hopefully, they'll have a pair of shoes there that will fit you."

"But I need them now," Mark complained, tears welling in his eyes. It was hard to keep from blubbering like a baby. "My zehe hurt somethin' awful."

"I have a temporary solution for your hurting toes," Mom said. "You can wear Calvin's old shoes until you get some new ones."

"I don't wanna wear Calvin's hand-me-down shoes." Mark wrinkled his nose and made a face. "Calvin's feet *schtinke*."

“I’ll wash the shoes so they won’t smell bad,” Mom said, giving Mark a quick pat on the back.

A lump formed in Mark’s throat. He wanted his own brand-new shoes, and he didn’t want to wait for them, either. *Well, Mark thought, at least this morning something went right. Mattie and I got a new light for our bike. If I would have agreed to buy a bell, I’d have nothin’ at all to show for coming here today.*

On the way home, Mark had a hard time watching Russell, Calvin, and Mattie hold tightly to the box of new shoes on their laps. Mark knew that even Perry and Ada were happy as they sat beside Mom in the front of the buggy, chattering and giggling while they pointed to their new shoes.

“Hey, would you look at that!” Dad exclaimed, pulling the horse and buggy onto the shoulder of the road. There in the field, not far from the Millers’ home, were a cow and a calf. “Looks like that cow may have just given birth,” Dad said, pointing to the wobbly little calf standing near its mother.

Normally, seeing something like this would have excited Mark. While everyone commented about the little calf, Mark looked away.

“Isn’t it cute?” Mattie asked, nudging Mark’s arm with her elbow.

He shrugged his shoulders but gave no reply. Didn’t anyone care how badly he felt about not getting new shoes today?

“Look how the other cows are standing around.” Mom pointed at some of the cows that were mooing at

the calf. “It’s as if they are welcoming the baby cow into their herd.”

What’s the matter with me anyway? Mark thought. *It’s not every day I get to see a brand-new calf right after it’s born.* He knew it was wrong to feel so jealous, even to the point where he couldn’t enjoy this amazing scene. It should have been exciting to see this mama cow and her baby, but he couldn’t seem to stop his negative thoughts. *Mom did say we would go shopping for a new pair of shoes after school on Monday,* he reminded himself. Even so, that didn’t make up for not getting any ice cream like the rest of the family had, not to mention that Mark was still wearing his old, too-tight shoes. Today was definitely a disappointing day!



CHAPTER 3



Stinky Shoes

“I can’t believe I have to wear Calvin’s old sneakers,” Mark complained as he and Mattie pedaled their bike to school Monday morning. “They’re too big, and they look *dumm*. It’s hard to pedal with these shoes on.”

“They’re not that much bigger than your feet, and they don’t look dumb,” Mattie said, letting go of the handlebar with one hand and tapping Mark on the shoulder. “Just keep pedaling; you’re doing fine.”

“It’s not fair that everyone else got new shoes on Saturday but me.” Mark started pedaling faster. “I just wanna get this day over with so I can go home.”

“Don’t forget, Mom said she’d take you to the Shoe and Boot Store after school,” Mattie reminded. “Hopefully you’ll find something that fits you there.”

“I hope so, too, ’cause I sure wouldn’t want to wear Calvin’s schtinke shoes all the time.”

“I’m sure they’re not stinky anymore. Mom washed them, and they look fine to me.”

Mark wrinkled his nose. “Well, they’re not my shoes, and they’re too big, besides.”

“Maybe you should have stuffed some tissues inside the shoes to take up the extra space,” Mattie suggested. “Anyways, you only have to wear them for a few more hours today, and then you can stop complaining when you get your new ones. Besides, the ones you’re wearing are better than your old shoes. Remember how tight they got and were making your feet hurt?”

“What? I can barely hear you,” Mark shouted when a noisy truck passed them by on the road, kicking up a bit of dust that blew in his face.

“Oh, never mind.” Mattie coughed. “Just keep pedaling.”

When the twins arrived at the schoolhouse, they parked their bike and hurried across the yard to join their friends. Mark kept up with his sister the best he could, but he felt like a clown wearing oversized shoes.

“How come you’re walkin’ so funny?” Mark’s friend John Schrock asked as Mark approached.

“It’s these dumm shoes I have to wear.” Mark paused to wipe his runny nose with a hanky he’d pulled from his pocket; then he pointed to his sneakers and frowned. “They belong to my bruder Calvin, and they’re too big for my feet. Besides, Calvin’s feet schtinke. Even though Mom washed the shoes, I’m afraid the smell’s still there and that it’ll make my feet stink, too.”

John snickered and poked Mark’s arm. “I heard once that if your nose runs and your feet smell, it means you were built upside down.”

“Very funny,” Mark mumbled.

“Aw, don’t look so serious,” John said. “I was only

tryin' to make you laugh.”

“I’m not in the mood to laugh about these shoes,” Mark said. Usually he was eager to tell or even listen to a joke, but not right now. He felt downright cranky today.

“If you don’t like your bruder’s shoes, then how come you’re wearin’ them today?” John questioned.

Mark explained about his old shoes being too tight and said he had to wear Calvin’s hand-me-down shoes until he could get a new pair. “And I hope that’ll be today when I go shopping with my mamm after school,” he quickly added.

“What store are you goin’ to?” John asked.

“The Shoe and Boot Store in Charm.”

“I got my last pair there,” John said, motioning to his black shoes. “There were several other people lookin’ for shoes that day, too, so I was lucky to find a pair in my size.”

Mark frowned. “I hope that doesn’t happen to me. Mom said she thought the store in Charm would have shoes for me, and I’m wishin’ for that, too.”

Mark couldn’t help but notice how much taller John was getting. Just a year ago, they were the same height. If it weren’t for the fact that John’s hair was blond and Mark’s was red, they could have almost passed for brothers. Not anymore, though. Lately, John had shot up ahead of Mark. It looked like he was getting skinnier, too. Or maybe he just looked that way because he’d grown taller. Although John looked kind of lanky these days, Mark would have taken that over being short any

day of the week. John and Mark had been good buddies for a long time, and Mark didn't like feeling envious of his friend. Regardless, the feelings were still there.

Just then, the school bell rang. "Guess we'd better get inside," Mark said. "We sure don't wanna be tardy."



When Mattie and Mark arrived home from school that afternoon, Mom met them at the door. "How was your day?" she asked with a cheerful smile.

"It was great," Mattie said, grinning at Mom. "When we played baseball during recess today, I made a home run."

"That's good," Mom said. "I'm sure those who were on your team were happy about how well you played." She turned to Mark then and placed her hand on his shoulder. "How was your day, son?"

Mark's mouth turned down at the corners. "It would have been better if I hadn't had to walk around in shoes that were too big for my feet." He leaned against the wall with his fingers clenched and his arms held tightly at his sides. "It seemed like the longest day ever."

Mom gave Mark's shoulder a squeeze. "We can take care of that right now. I have the horse hitched to the buggy, and if you're ready, we can head for the Shoe and Boot Store in Charm."

Mark's face brightened. "I'm more than ready!"

Charm was one of Mattie and Mark's favorite little towns to visit. It was only about a six-mile ride from their home, and it took them through some of

the prettiest countryside. Charm didn't have a lot of businesses, like some of the bigger towns in Holmes County, but there was one store in particular that Mark and Mattie liked to visit. It was a cheese store, and they usually had samples that people could try before they bought. Swiss cheese was Mark's favorite, but Mattie liked cheddar. She wondered if Mom and Mark would stop at the cheese store today. She wished she could go with them.

Mom gave Mattie's arm a gentle pat. "I need you to keep an eye on Ada and Perry while we're gone. They're napping right now, but make sure they get a snack when they wake up. Oh, and don't let them go outside to play by themselves."

"Can't Calvin or Russell watch Ada and Perry?" Mattie questioned.

Mom shook her head. "They're out in your *daed's* wood shop, sweeping sawdust off the floor and helping Ike clean up."

Mattie gave a reluctant nod. "Okay, Mom."

"Remember now, if you have any homework, you'd better get that done right away," Mom quickly added. "You can do it while you're eating a snack."

"I don't have any homework today," Mattie said.

"Okay then. We shouldn't be gone too long." Mom grabbed a napkin and three cookies, handed them to Mark, and then ushered him out the door.

Mattie sighed. It didn't seem fair that Mark got to go off with Mom while she was expected to stay here and watch Ada and Perry. Those two had a lot of energy

and could be a handful at times. She hoped they would sleep until Mom got home. That would give her some time to do a few things by herself. One of the first things she planned to do right away was to fix herself a snack. After that, she wanted to go outside and see if the flower bulbs she'd planted in her garden were coming up yet. With the warm weather they'd been having, maybe they would have popped up by now.

Wish I could go over to Grandpa and Grandma Miller's today, Mattie thought. I'd like to know if any of Grandma's flowers have come up.

Mattie took three cookies from the cookie jar and placed them on the table. Then she went to the refrigerator and got out the milk. After she'd poured herself a glass, she took a seat at the table.

Mattie looked around the kitchen, which was usually bustling with noise and activity. She guessed she'd better enjoy the quiet while it lasted because it wouldn't be this peaceful once Ada and Perry woke up.

The kitchen window was open partway, and Mattie could hear the birds singing outside. More than any other time of the year, springtime was filled with the pretty songs of chirping and tweeting birds. A lot of them were migrating back from the south, where they'd spent most of the winter months. It was nice to hear their melodies filling the air, and Mattie couldn't help but smile at how happy they sounded. She knew just how they felt, for she loved springtime, too.

Mattie watched out the window as some little wrens gathered materials for the nest they'd started making.

She wondered if a robin would build its nest in the flowering bush outside their living-room window, like one had done last spring.

Mattie had just finished eating her second cookie when Ada and Perry tromped into the room, wide-eyed and giggling as they tickled each other.

“Kichlin!” they shouted at the same time, pointing to Mattie’s cookie.

Mattie groaned. She hadn’t even finished her snack and already the little ones were up and needing her attention. Now she’d have no time to herself. It didn’t seem fair. She probably wouldn’t get to go outside to look at her garden now because she’d have to take Perry and Ada along and keep an eye on them while they ran around the yard playing.

“Kichlin! Kichlin!” Ada shouted, tugging on the hem of Mattie’s dress.

“Kichlin!” Perry repeated.

The peace and quiet Mattie had enjoyed only minutes ago was now replaced by two little chatterboxes.

“Oh, all right,” Mattie said with a sigh. “Take a seat at the table, and I’ll get you both some kichlin and *melke*.”



“Right here are the racks where the boys’ shoes are displayed,” Mom said as she and Mark headed down one of the aisles at the Shoe and Boot Store.

Mark smiled, looking at all the shoe boxes. He could hardly wait for his new sneakers. He felt sure that somewhere among these rows of shoes, a new pair awaited him.

“Let’s see now. . .” Mom studied each of the shelves, and when she came to the end, she slowly shook her head. “I’m sorry, Mark, but I don’t see any shoes in this store that are the right size for you.”

“What?” Mark could hardly believe it, and he hoped Mom was wrong. “There has to be a pair in my size.” He started going through each of the shoe boxes, hoping a pair of shoes his size had been put in the wrong box. Mark had been waiting to get new shoes the whole weekend, and now he was worried that he might have to keep wearing Calvin’s stinky old shoes for a long time.

“I don’t see any,” Mom said, taking another look at all the boxes. “Let’s go speak to the owner of the store. I see a lot of empty spots here on these racks, so maybe he has some shoes in the back room that haven’t been put out yet.”

Mark’s hopes soared as he followed Mom to the front of the store, where Herman Bontrager stood behind the counter. “Do you have any youth size six black sneakers in your back room?” Mom asked.

Herman shook his head. “Sorry, I don’t. The last pair that size was sold earlier today.”

Mark moaned and slouched against the counter. “Oh no! Now what’ll I do?”

“I can order a pair of shoes in your size,” Herman said.

“How long would that take?” Mom questioned.

Mark held his breath as he waited for Herman’s answer.

“It’ll probably take about a week to get here,” Herman replied. “Shouldn’t be more than that. The

shoes come in rather quickly once I place the order.”

Mark’s throat felt swollen, and he blinked against the tears clouding his vision. *A whole week? Does Mr. Bontrager think that’s quick? Why me?* Mark wondered. This was a huge disappointment, and now he felt grumpy again. He was even more envious of his sisters and brothers. None of them had to wear a pair of stinky, hand-me-down shoes. Even worse, Mark would have to wear them for another whole week!