

A Happy Heart

Dedication

To the children at Riverside Christian School in Yakima,
Washington. Thanks for letting me share
my life as an author with you.
To Dr. Richard Ehlers and Dr. Ben Jaramillo,
my kind and helpful eye doctors.

Glossary

absatz—stop
ach—oh
aldi—girlfriend
bensel—silly child
blos—bubble
boppli—baby
brieder—brothers
bruder—brother
burwe—boy
daed—dad
danki—thank you
dumm—dumb
ekelhaft—disgusting
fehlerfrie—perfect
felder—fields
fingerneggel—fingernails
gees—goat
geh—go
grank—sick
grossdaadi—grandfather
guder mariye—good morning
gut—good
hund—dog

Bass uff as du net fallscht.
Du kannscht mich net uffhuddle;
ich bin zu schmaert
Duh net so laut schmatze.

Geb acht, schunschd geht's letz!

Grummel net um mich rum.
Sei so gut.
Was in der welt?
Wie geht's?

hungerich—hungry
jah—yes
kapp—cap
kichlin—cookies
kinner—children
lachlich—laughable
lecherich—ridiculous
mamm—mom
mied—tired
mudder—mother
naas—nose
naerfich—nervous
narrish—crazy
nee—no
pescht—pest
retschbeddi—tattletale
schlang aage—snake eyes
schmaert—smart
schnell—quickly
schpassich—odd
schweschder—sister
wunderbaar—wonderful

Take care you don't fall.
You can't confuse me;
I'm too smart.
Don't make such a noise
when you eat.
Watch out, or else things
will go wrong!
Don't grumble around me.
Please.
What in all the world?
How are you?

Chapter 1

A *Lachlich* [Laughable] Day



This is so much fun!” Ten-year-old Rachel Yoder squealed as her end of the teeter-totter shot into the air.

“My stomach feels like it’s in my throat!” Audra Burkholder shouted when her side of the teeter-totter dropped down and then sprang up again.

Rachel waved one hand in the air. “Whe-e-e-e!” she hollered.

“Are you gonna ride that thing all day or does somebody else get a turn before recess is over?”

Rachel looked down. Freckle-faced Orlie Troyer stared at her. Rachel and Orlie had become friends during the year, but Rachel didn’t want anyone at school to know she was friends with a boy so she kept it a secret.

“Well?” Orlie asked, tapping his foot. “Can I have a turn on the teeter-totter?”

Rachel squinted at him as her side of the teeter-totter dropped again. “Is that any way to ask for something?”

“Maybe he doesn’t know how to say *sei so gut*

[please].” Audra said, wrinkling her nose. “Maybe he doesn’t know about manners.”

Orlie squatted in the dirt, raised his hands in front of his chest, and said, “Can I please have a turn on the teeter-totter?”

Rachel giggled. “You look like Jacob’s dog when he sits up and begs.”

Woof! Woof! Orlie bounced up and down.

“Oh, all right, you can have a turn while I get a drink of water.” When Rachel climbed off the teeter-totter, she held the handle so Orlie could get on.

“This is sure fun!” Orlie shouted as his end of the teeter-totter rose. A gust of wind whipped his straw hat from his head and spun it away. He tipped his head back and howled with laughter.

Rachel raced to the pump, grabbed a paper cup, and pumped the handle up and down. When the cup was full of water, she took a big drink. Then she pumped until her cup was full again.

Rachel’s brother, Jacob, nudged Rachel’s arm. “Save some of that for me, would ya?”

Water sloshed out of Rachel’s cup and splashed her dress. “Say, watch what you’re doing!”

“I figured you might need a bath.” Jacob snickered. She glared at him. “Very funny.”

“I thought so, little *bensel* [silly child].” He leaned back and laughed until his face turned red.

“Stop calling me a silly child!” Rachel dipped her

finger into the cup and flicked water at Jacob's shirt. "And there's plenty of this to go around!"

"A little water doesn't bother me," Jacob said with a shrug. "In fact, it feels kind of nice on this warm spring day."

"Puh!" Rachel hurried across the playground, still holding her cup of water. "I'm back," she said as Orlie's side of the teeter-totter shot up. "It's time for you to get off now."

When the teeter-totter came down, Orlie shook his head. "I don't want to; I'm having too much fun."

"I said you could take a turn while I got a drink," Rachel announced. "So now you need to get off."

Orlie grinned but didn't budge.

Rachel glanced at Audra as Orlie's end of the teeter-totter rose and Audra's end dropped. "Can I take your place?"

Audra pushed a strand of dark hair under her *kapp* [cap] and shook her head. "Sorry, Rachel, but I'm having too much fun."

Rachel tapped her foot impatiently. If she'd known this would happen, she wouldn't have gotten off the teeter-totter. She would have waited until recess was over to get a drink.

Suddenly, Orlie leaped off the teeter-totter, sending Audra thudding to the ground.

Audra squealed. "That wasn't nice! You should have warned me that you were getting off!"

“I decided I was thirsty!” Orlie snatched the cup out of Rachel’s hand and drank. “Ah. . .that’s better.”

“Aren’t you worried about germs?” Audra asked as she scrambled off the teeter-totter.

“Nope.” Orlie took another drink and handed the cup back to Rachel.

“*Eww.*” Audra wrinkled her nose. “That’s so *ekelhaft* [disgusting]!”

Rachel pushed the cup at Orlie. “You may as well keep it, ’cause I won’t drink from it again.”

Orlie shrugged and drank some more.

“Let’s play on the swings,” Rachel said to Audra.

“Okay.”

The girls had only been swinging a few minutes when Orlie headed toward them wearing his straw hat. He stopped in front of the swings, swayed back and forth, and fell on the ground. The paper cup flew out of his hand and landed in a clump of weeds. His straw hat flew off his head and landed in the dirt.

Rachel rushed over to Orlie and dropped to her knees. “Orlie’s what’s wrong? Are you *grank* [sick]?”

He stayed with his eyes closed, unmoving.

Audra gasped. “*Ach* [Oh], do you think he’s dead?”

Rachel touched Orlie’s arm, but he didn’t move. She clasped her hand over her mouth. “Maybe he *is* dead. I’d better get the teacher!”

Rachel raced for the schoolhouse, but she hadn’t gone far when someone pushed her. She whirled

around. There stood Orlie, wearing his tattered hat and a lopsided grin.

“Ha! Ha! I got you good!” he said, slapping his knee.

“Orlie Troyer, you should be ashamed of yourself, scaring us like that,” Audra said in a shaky voice. “We thought you were a goner. *Jah* [Yes], we sure did.”

Rachel shook her head. “Not me; I knew he was only pretending to be dead. I was just playing along.”

Orlie’s lips twitched, his shoulders shook, and he laughed so hard tears streamed down his cheeks. Then he dropped to the ground and rolled in the grass.

Orlie looked so funny that Rachel laughed, too. Soon Audra joined in.

“Now you really do look like Jacob’s dog.” Rachel pointed at Orlie. “Whenever Buddy has an itch on his back, he rolls in the grass just like you’re doing.”

Woof! Woof! Orlie sat up and begged.

Rachel giggled. “What a *lachlich* day!”

When Rachel and Jacob got home from school that afternoon, Rachel still felt like laughing. She’d laughed so much during recess that she couldn’t concentrate on her schoolwork the rest of the day. In fact, a couple of times the words in her spelling book had looked a bit blurry. She figured it was because she had tears in her eyes from laughing so much.

“How come you’re wearing such a silly grin?” Jacob asked.

“I just feel happy today.”

Jacob stared at Rachel a few seconds. Finally, he shrugged and opened the door. “We’re home, Mom!”

“Mmm. . .it smells like Mom’s been baking today,” Rachel said, heading for the kitchen. “I hope she made maple syrup cookies, because they’re my favorite.”

Jacob tickled Rachel in the ribs. “Every kind of cookie is your favorite, sister.”

Rachel giggled and tickled Jacob back.

He snickered. “Stop that. You know how ticklish I am—especially my ribs!”

“Then you shouldn’t have started it.”

“What’s all this silliness about?” Mom asked when they entered the kitchen.

“Rachel’s in a lachlich mood today,” Jacob said.

Mom removed a tray of cookies from the oven and placed them on the counter. “It’s good to be in a laughable mood. When we laugh it makes us have a happy heart,” she said, peering over her metal-framed glasses at Rachel.

Rachel nodded and smiled. “I’ve had a happy heart most of the day.”

“Wash your hands and have a seat at the table,” Mom said. “Then you and Jacob can have a glass of milk and some of my freshly baked maple syrup cookies.”

Rachel patted her stomach. “Yum. . .that sounds *gut* [good] to me.”

Rachel and Jacob raced to the sink. They reached

for the bar of soap at the same time, and—*woosh!*—it slipped off the soap dish and landed in a bowl of water sitting in the sink. *Floop!* A spurt of water flew straight up and splashed Rachel's face.

"That soap's sure slippery." She giggled and dried her face on a towel.

"I'll bet it won't be too slippery for me." Jacob plunged his hand into the bowl of water and scooped up the soap. He'd just started to scrub his hands when the soap slipped through his fingers and landed back in the water with a splash.

Rachel chuckled. "I warned you about that, Jacob."

"Will you two please quit fooling around and wash your hands?" Mom said, shaking her head. "I'm going to see if Grandpa's up from his nap."

When Mom left the room, Jacob lunged for the soap, just as Rachel bumped his arm. The soap flew in the air, bounced onto the floor, and slid all the way to the table.

Rachel laughed as Jacob scrambled after the soap, his feet sliding with every step he took.

Smack! Jacob banged into the table, knocking over a carton of milk. "Oh no," he moaned as the milk dribbled onto the floor. He took a step back, and his legs sailed out from under him. He landed on the floor with a thud.

Rachel rushed forward. "Are you all right?"

Jacob grabbed the soap and scrambled to his feet.

“I’m fine—I’m not hurt a bit.”

“I’d better get the mop and clean this before Mom comes back.” Rachel hurried to the cleaning closet and removed the bucket and mop. She leaned the mop against the counter, set the bucket in the sink, filled it with warm water, and added some detergent.

“This bucket is sure heavy,” Rachel said as she struggled to lift it out of the sink. “I’m not sure I can carry it now that it’s full of water.”

“Here, let me help.” Jacob reached around Rachel, put the soap in the soap dish, and grabbed the bucket handle.

“Careful now. You don’t want to spill any water.”

“Don’t worry; I know what I’m doing.” Jacob lifted the bucket. *Bang!* It bumped the edge of the sink, sloshing water all over the floor.

“Oh, no,” Rachel groaned.

“Look at it this way,” Jacob said with a chuckle, “the water’s already out of the bucket. Now you only have to mop the floor.”

Rachel grabbed the mop and pushed it back and forth. “This isn’t getting the water up,” she muttered. “There’s too much of it on the floor.”

“Say, I have an idea.” Jacob tossed two dish towels on the floor. He put his left foot on one towel and his right foot on the other; then he starting moving around the room.

“That looks like fun.” Rachel grabbed two more

towels, tossed them on the floor, and followed Jacob. “Whe-e-e—this *is* fun! It’s almost like skating on a frozen pond!”

“*Was in der welt* [What in all the world]?”

Rachel whirled around. Mom stood inside the kitchen door with her arms folded, frowning. “Would someone please tell me what’s going on in here?”

“The bar of soap fell on the floor,” Rachel explained. “Then Jacob bumped the table and spilled the milk. I was going to mop up the mess, but the bucket of water spilled on the floor.” Rachel drew in a quick breath. “We couldn’t get the water up with the mop, so we decided to use some towels.”

“I’m sure you meant well, but that isn’t the way to mop the floor.” Mom stepped toward Rachel.

“Don’t come in here!” Rachel shouted. “You might slip and fall.”

“That’s right,” Jacob said. “You wouldn’t want to break a bone or hurt the *boppili* [baby].”

Mom placed her hands against her bulging stomach. “You’re right; I do need to be careful.” She pointed to the mop. “One of you needs to hold the head of the mop over the bucket and wring out the water. That will make it easier to mop.”

“I’ll do it!” Jacob grabbed the mop.

Mom pointed to the sopping wet towels. “Rachel, please get some clean towels to help Jacob mop up the water.”

“That’s what I was trying to do,” Rachel said.

Mom shook her head. “Not with the towels under your feet. That’s dangerous. You need to kneel on the floor, mop up the water with the dry towels, and wring them into the sink. You’ll also need to wring out the wet ones you and Jacob used under your feet.”

Rachel nodded. “Okay, Mom.”

Mom watched until Rachel and Jacob had finished mopping up the water. When the floor was dry, she stepped into the kitchen and motioned to the table. “Shall we have cookies and milk now?”

“That sounds good to me.” Jacob smacked his lips. “All that hard work made me *hungerich* [hungry].”

Mom went to the refrigerator for another carton of milk. As she placed it on the table, Grandpa entered the room. He motioned to the cookies. “I hope some of those are for me.”

“Of course. Sit down and help yourself while I pour some milk,” Mom said.

They all sat at the table, and Grandpa smiled at Rachel. “How was your day?”

“It’s been a lachlich day.” Rachel grinned at Jacob. “Isn’t that right?”

He nodded.

“Laughable days are the best kind of days.” Grandpa reached for a cookie and dunked it in his milk. “I learned some time ago that even if things aren’t going my way, it helps to put on a happy face.”

“What are some things that make you feel happy?” Jacob questioned.

Grandpa wiggled his bushy gray eyebrows. “For one thing, I like to tell at least one good joke every day.”

Rachel touched Grandpa’s arm. “Would you tell us one now?”

“Jah, sure.” Grandpa combed his fingers through the ends of his long gray beard. “Let me see now. . .”

“Why don’t you tell the one about spinach?” Mom suggested. “You used to tell that joke when I was girl, and it always made me laugh.”

“Well, when I was a boy, my *mudder* [mother] used to say, ‘Now son, eat your spinach, because it will put color in your cheeks.’” A smile spread across Grandpa’s face as he leaned close to Rachel. “You know what I had to say to that?”

She shook her head.

Grandpa gently pinched Rachel’s cheeks. “I would say to my mudder, ‘Who wants green cheeks?’”

Rachel giggled, Mom chuckled, and Jacob snickered.

“All’s well when you laugh and grin,” Grandpa said with a wink.

Rachel gave Grandpa a hug. “I’m glad you’re my *grossdaadi* [grandfather]. I’m gonna try to make every day a *lachlich* day.”

Chapter 2

Crazy Rooster



When Rachel and Jacob arrived home from school the next day, Rachel was pleased to see that Mom had set fresh fruit cups out for a snack.

Rachel's stomach rumbled as she pointed to the treats. "Mmm. . .those sure look good."

Mom smiled. "Wash your hands and take a seat at the table."

Jacob raced for the kitchen sink, but Rachel hurried to the bathroom. After the trouble she'd had yesterday with the soap and water, she wasn't about to wash her hands at the same sink with Jacob.

When Rachel returned to the kitchen, Jacob was already eating his fruit and drinking a glass of milk. "*Danki* [Thank you], Mom, for fixing us such a nice snack," Rachel said.

"Jah, danki." Jacob smacked his lips, chomped on a hunk of apple, and slurped his milk.

"Duh net so laut schmatze [Don't make such a noise

when you eat],” Mom said. “Eat a little quieter.” She pulled out a chair and sat beside Rachel. “How was school today?”

“It was good.” Rachel plucked a piece of banana from her fruit cup and popped it in her mouth. “Audra and I played on the teeter-totter during recess again. It was lots of fun.”

Mom smiled. “It’s nice that you and Audra have become such good friends.”

Rachel nodded. When Audra had first moved to Lancaster County, she and Rachel hadn’t gotten along so well. That was mainly because Rachel had missed her cousin Mary, who’d moved to Indiana. After Rachel realized that Audra was nice and also needed a friend, she and Audra had gotten along quite well.

“Where’s Grandpa this afternoon? Is he taking a nap?” Rachel asked.

Mom shook her head. “He and your *daed* [dad] went to town to pick up some supplies for the new greenhouse they hope to build.”

“Did Henry go with them?” Jacob asked.

“No, he went to see his *aldi* [girlfriend], Nancy.”

Rachel frowned. “I’m disappointed that Grandpa went to town without me. He said I could help him choose some of the plants for the greenhouse.”

“I don’t think he and your daed are looking for flowers today,” Mom said. “I believe they went to get lumber and supplies to build the greenhouse.”

Rachel smiled. She felt better knowing Grandpa hadn't left her out of his greenhouse plans. Maybe they could shop for flowers and plants soon.

"When you two are finished with your snack, I have a few chores for you to do," Mom said.

Jacob's forehead wrinkled. "What chores?"

"I'd like you to clean the horses' stalls while Rachel feeds and waters the chickens and checks for eggs." Mom peered at Rachel over the top of her glasses. "I was going to do that earlier, but I went over to Anna Miller's for a visit after you left for school. I stayed longer than I'd planned, so I didn't get to the chicken coop."

Rachel didn't look forward to taking care of the chickens, but she knew better than to argue with Mom. "Can we play after we finish our chores?" she asked.

"Of course." Mom patted Rachel's arm. "The sooner you get the jobs done, the sooner you can play."

Jacob put an orange slice between his lips and bit. A squirt of juice hit Rachel's forehead.

"Hey! Watch what you're doing!" Rachel dashed to the sink, splashed cold water on her face, and patted it dry with a clean towel. "I'll bet you did that on purpose," she said when she returned to the table.

"Did not."

"Did so."

"Did not."

"Did—"

Mom clapped her hands. "If you don't stop

squabbling, you may not play when you're done with your chores."

"Sorry," Rachel and Jacob both mumbled.

Grinning, Jacob looked over at Rachel and said, "I love you, *schweschder* [sister]."

On her way to the chicken coop, Rachel spotted Buddy sleeping on the roof of his doghouse. His nose was tucked between his paws, and his floppy ears covered both eyes. Rachel hadn't liked Buddy when he'd first come to live with them, because she was afraid he would hurt her cat. But Buddy and Cuddles had become friends, just like Rachel and Audra. Now Rachel only had to worry about Buddy giving her sloppy wet kisses. She tried to stay away from Buddy whenever Jacob let him out of his dog run.

Rachel glanced at the barn, where Jacob was cleaning the horses' stalls. A gray and white ball of fur streaked across the lawn and ducked into the barn. Rachel figured Cuddles was probably after a mouse.

Rachel opened the door to the chicken coop. As soon as she stepped inside, she knew she was in for trouble. *Squawk! Squawk! Squawk!* Hector, the biggest, noisiest rooster, flapped his wings and flew around the coop, dropping feathers everywhere.

Rachel didn't know if Hector was carrying on because he was hungry, or if he was just being ornery. As long as he didn't try to peck Rachel or get in her

way, she didn't care how crazy he acted.

Rachel opened the lid on the bucket of chicken feed, scooped some out, and poured it into the feeders. Squawking and flapping their wings, all the chickens in the coop swarmed around the feeders, pecking at the food.

While the chickens ate, Rachel took the water dishes outside. Using the hose, she filled them with fresh water and hauled them back to the coop. She'd just set the last one inside when Hector started carrying on again.

Squawk! Squawk! Cock-a-doodle-do! He strutted across the floor with his wings outstretched. When he reached the open door, he flew past Rachel and landed in the yard. With another noisy squawk, Hector headed straight for Buddy's dog run. He stuck his head through a hole in the fence and grabbed food from Buddy's dish.

Rachel dashed across the yard, waving her hands. "Stop that, you *narrish* [crazy] rooster! You have your own food in the coop!"

Hector kept eating. *Chomp! Chomp! Chomp!*

Rachel clapped her hands. "Buddy, wake up! Hector's stealing your food!"

Buddy opened his eyes, stretched, and scratched his ear.

Rachel pointed to the rooster. "Don't you care that he's robbing your food? Chase him away, Buddy!"

With a shake of his furry head, Buddy jumped to his feet and leaped off the doghouse. *Woof! Woof! Woof!* He

rammed the fence with his nose.

Hector screeched and jerked away from Buddy's dish, but when he tried to pull his head through the hole in the fence, he got stuck. *Bawwk! Bawwk! Bawwk!*

Grrr. Woof! Woof! Buddy swiped at the rooster's head with his paw.

Bawwk! Bawwk!

Woof! Woof! Woof!

"What's all the ruckus about?" Jacob shouted as he raced from the barn. "What's wrong with Buddy?"

Rachel pointed to the chicken. "Hector was trying to steal Buddy's food. Then Buddy went after him, and now Hector's head is stuck. Can you do something, Jacob? I'm afraid Buddy might hurt him."

Even though Rachel had wanted Hector to stop eating Buddy's food, she didn't want Buddy to hurt the poor critter.

"Jah, okay. I'll see what I can do." Jacob opened the gate to Buddy's dog run and stepped inside. "Here, Buddy. Come, boy!"

Grrr. Buddy was nose to beak with the rooster and wouldn't budge.

"Bad dog! Come when I call!" Jacob grabbed Buddy's collar and pulled him away from the chicken. "See if you can get the rooster's head out now," he said to Rachel.

Rachel squatted beside Hector and placed her hands around his neck. Slowly, gently, she pulled.

Bawk! Bawk! Hector's head popped free. Looking a bit dazed, he stood there a few seconds, shook his head, and then wobbled across the yard, crowing all the way. *Cock-a-doodle-do!*

"What a narrish chicken," Rachel muttered. "He ought to know better than to stick his beak where it doesn't belong."

Jacob snickered. "Jah, just like some people I know."

Rachel glared at him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, nothing." Jacob patted the dog's head, stepped out of the dog run, and closed the gate. "Be good, Buddy. I'll come back to play with you after I finish my chores in the barn."

Buddy plodded back to his doghouse; only this time he crawled inside instead of jumping on top.

"That was a close call for the rooster," Rachel said as she walked beside Jacob.

Jacob shrugged. "That's what the critter gets for trying to steal Buddy's food."

Rachel's brows furrowed. "How would you like it if some big animal came along and tried to eat Buddy?"

"I wouldn't like it," he said.

"When the rooster was acting crazy inside the chicken coop, I was angry with him, and when he went after Buddy's food, it really made me mad." Rachel sighed. "Even so, I didn't want the chicken to get hurt."

"I see what you mean. I'll have to think about what

I'm saying from now on."

"Does that mean you won't tease me anymore?"

"I'm your *bruder* [brother], so I'll probably still tease," Jacob said. "But I'd never do anything on purpose to hurt you."

Rachel smiled and headed for the chicken coop. It was comforting to know Jacob would never hurt her intentionally. She just hoped he would stop teasing her.

"Where are you going?" Jacob called. "Haven't you finished feeding the chickens?"

"Jah, but I forgot to check for eggs."

"I have one more stall to clean, and then I'll take Buddy for a walk." Jacob disappeared into the barn.

Rachel stepped into the coop and picked up the basket Mom kept near the door. Checking under each hen, she found only three eggs. "Guess that's better than none," she said, heading back to the house.

When Rachel entered the kitchen, she was surprised that it was empty. She had figured Mom would have started supper by now. She cleaned the eggs and put them in the refrigerator, then headed to the living room to get the book she'd left there last night.

Rachel found Mom asleep on the sofa, so she picked up the book and tiptoed quietly out of the room.

Outside, Rachel sat on the porch swing and opened the book. She'd only read a few pages when she heard a horrible shriek, followed by *thump-thump-thump!*

"I hope Buddy isn't after Cuddles now," Rachel

moaned. She set the book on the swing and stepped into the yard to investigate.

She scanned the area, but didn't see anything unusual.

Thumpety-thump-thump!

Rachel bent down and peered under the porch. Two beady eyes stared back at her.

Hector wobbled out from under the porch, shaking his head and ruffling his feathers.

Rachel's mouth fell open. The crazy rooster had a yogurt cup stuck on his beak!

"Hold still, Hector." Rachel crept closer to the chicken. "Let me get that off you."

Squawk! Squawk! The rooster hopped onto the porch, shaking his head and flapping his wings.

Rachel felt sorry for the bird, but she still laughed. The critter looked hilarious, dancing around the porch, flipping his head from side to side.

She tried to corner Hector between the swing and the porch railing, but he darted around her and leaped off the porch, leaving red feathers in her hands.

Rachel ran into the yard after the rooster, but every time she came close, he turned another way. With a frustrated sigh, she went to get Jacob.

"Are you done cleaning the horses' stalls?" she asked when she found Jacob sitting on a bale of straw.

He nodded.

"I need your help again."

"What is it this time, Rachel?"

“Hector got his beak stuck in a yogurt cup, and I can’t catch him to get it off.”

“No problem. I’ll capture that crazy rooster.”

Rachel followed Jacob out of the barn. They found Hector banging the yogurt cup against the horses’ watering trough.

“I’ll catch him!” Jacob dashed across the yard, took a flying leap, and landed in the water trough with a splash!

Rachel laughed so hard she could barely breathe, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

“That wasn’t funny,” Jacob mumbled as he pulled himself out of the trough. He shook his head, splattering water all over Rachel.

Rachel jumped back. “Hey! Watch what you’re doing!”

“Since you thought it was so funny to see me wet, I thought I’d share the water with you.”

Rachel was about to tell Jacob what she thought, when the rooster wobbled up and stopped at her feet. He tipped his head back and looked at her as if to say, “Would you please get this thing off my beak?”

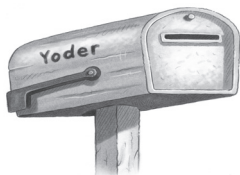
Rachel grasped the cup with both hands, and—*floop!*—it popped right off!

Hector shook his head and flew up to the fence. Tilting his head back, he let out a garbled *Cocker-doodle-de-do!*

Rachel looked at Jacob, and they both laughed. “I’m glad we live on a farm,” she said. “Around here something funny is always going on.”

Chapter 3

Disappointments



On Saturday morning a few weeks later, Rachel headed down the driveway to the mailbox. The harsh wind smacked against her body with such force she nearly toppled over. The ties on her kapp whipped around her face. The spring day had started so nicely. She hoped the wind would die down soon so she could do something fun. Maybe later she could jump on the trampoline, play in the barn with Cuddles, or catch some frogs at the creek. Those were always fun things to do.

Rachel opened the mailbox and pulled out a stack of mail. "All right! I got a letter from Mary!" she exclaimed when she saw the envelope on top addressed to her.

Rachel raced up the driveway, eager to read her cousin's words. She sat on the porch step and ripped open the letter. She'd only read the first two words, when—*whoosh!*—a gust of wind tore the letter from her hands, carrying it across the yard, along with some blowing loose straw from the piles stacked near the barn.

Rachel placed the rest of the mail on the small table near the back door and raced after the runaway letter. It zoomed across the grass, flew into the maple tree, and fluttered to the ground.

Rachel lunged for it, and—*whoosh!*—another gust of wind carried the letter away.

“Come back here!” Rachel shouted as she continued the chase. No way was she going to let Mary’s letter get away from her!

Huffing and puffing, she dashed after the letter, but it drifted on the wind and whooshed away again. She watched it sail through the air and land in the pasture where Pap’s herd of brown and white cows grazed.

The wind settled down, and Rachel climbed over the fence. Her fingers almost touched the letter, when—*snort!*—one of the cows nudged the letter with her nose, and the piece of paper flew against the fence and stuck.

“Ah-ha! I’ve got you now!” Rachel grabbed the letter, and—*rip!*—it tore right in two!

“Oh no,” she groaned. “How can I read Mary’s letter now?”

Rachel raced back to the porch, scooped up the mail on the table, and opened the door. “The mail’s here,” she said when she entered the kitchen.

Mom motioned to the table. “Just put it over there.”

“I got a letter from Mary, but the wind took it away. Then one of Pap’s cows nudged it with her nose and it stuck to the fence. When I grabbed the paper, it ripped

in two!” Rachel frowned and lifted both halves of the letter.

Mom set the broom aside. “Lay the pieces on the table, and we’ll tape them together.” She got clear tape from the desk, taped the pieces, and handed the letter to Rachel. “Here you go—good as new.”

Rachel sat at the table to read Mary’s letter. “*Dear Rachel: How are you—*” She squinted as she tried to figure out the next words. They looked blurry. “I wonder why Mary wrote with such tiny letters,” she mumbled. “I can’t read some of the words.”

“Maybe you’re having problems reading the letter because it was torn. Would you like me to see if I can read it?” Mom asked.

Rachel nodded and handed her the letter.

Mom pushed her glasses to the bridge of her nose and began to read.

Dear Rachel:

How are you doing? Are you having nice weather there in Pennsylvania? It’s nice here in Indiana, and I’m glad it’s spring. Last Saturday our family went to the Fun Spot amusement park. We liked it so much! We went on lots of rides and saw some interesting animals. I wish you could have been with us.

“I wish we could go someplace like that,” Rachel

interrupted. "All we ever do is stay around here and work."

"That's not true," Mom said. "We've had some fun times with Esther and Rudy whenever they've come here for supper or we've gone over to their house."

Rachel bit her bottom lip. Visiting her big sister was nice, but it wasn't as much fun as going to an amusement park. Maybe she should ask Pap to take them to Hershey Park. She'd heard a lot of fun rides were there.

"Where's Pap?" she asked.

"He's in the barn."

Rachel jumped up and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Mom called.

"I need to talk to Pap."

"What about Mary's letter? Don't you want to hear what else she said?"

Rachel nodded. "Jah, okay. I guess I can talk to Pap after you're done."

Mom smiled and continued to read.

How's Cuddles doing? My cat, Stripes, is fine, but I think he misses her. Maybe when we come for a visit, we can bring Stripes.

"Does she say when that might be?" Rachel asked.

Mom shook her head. "I'm sure it won't be until after school gets out."

“What else does Mary say?”

“Let’s see. . .” Mom’s glasses had slipped to the end of her nose, and she pushed them back in place again.

I went to my friend Betty’s house yesterday afternoon. We baked chocolate chip cookies and drew some pictures. We both like horses, so that’s what we drew. Next week Betty’s coming over to my house with her mamm [mom], and we’re going to bake some pies.

Rachel smiled. At one time she would have been jealous to hear what Mary had done with her new friend. Now that Rachel had Audra as a friend, she didn’t mind so much when Mary mentioned Betty in her letters.

“Is there more?” she asked Mom.

“Just a bit,” Mom said. “Here’s how Mary closes her letter: *‘Take care and write back soon. I’m looking forward to seeing you again. Love, Mary.’*”

“Danki for reading the letter to me.” Rachel raced for the back door. “I’m going to the barn to see Pap,” she called over her shoulder.

Rachel found Pap, Jacob, and Henry grooming the horses. “Can I speak to you a minute?” she asked Pap.

He nodded. “Jah, sure, what did you want to say?”

“I got a letter from Mary today.” Rachel gulped

in a quick breath. “She said her folks took her to an amusement park in Indiana.”

“That’s nice.” Pap brushed old Tom’s back.

“She said they had fun and went on lots of rides and saw some animals.”

“Umm. . .I see.”

Rachel moved closer to old Tom and rubbed his soft nose. “Could we hire a driver to take us to Hershey Park some Saturday? I think it would be fun to go on some of the rides there.” She looked up at Pap. “Can we go? Can we go there soon?”

Pap shook his head. “You know I’m in the middle of spring planting. We’ll have too much farmwork for several months. Besides, your mamm isn’t feeling up to such an outing right now.”

“Maybe after the baby is born—then can we go to Hershey Park?”

“I don’t know, Rachel. We’ll have to wait and see.”

“Couldn’t we go sometime this summer before school starts again?” Rachel persisted.

“If we go at all, it probably won’t be this year,” Pap said as he combed old Tom’s mane. “Since the boppli will be born in July, he or she will be too young to make a trip like that.”

“Then when can we go?”

“I don’t know, Rachel. We’ll have to see.”

“I never get to do anything fun,” Rachel mumbled as she left the barn. She was halfway to the house when

she saw Grandpa heading her way.

“I’m going to town to pick up some supplies for your daed.” Grandpa smiled. “Would you like to go along, Rachel?”

She nodded eagerly. “Jah, Grandpa. That sounds like fun. Will you look for plants for the greenhouse, too?”

“Not today. Your daed’s real busy with farm chores right now. He won’t start on my greenhouse until late May or early June.”

“But June’s two months away.”

“I know.” Grandpa smiled and patted Rachel’s head. “We must learn to be patient. Good things come to those who wait, you know.”

Rachel nodded, trying not to show disappointment. She looked forward to helping in Grandpa’s greenhouse, but she wished they didn’t have to wait so long.

“Do you still want to ride to town with me?”

Grandpa asked.

“Oh jah. It will give us a chance to visit awhile.”

“Okay, but you’d better go inside and check with your mamm first,” Grandpa said. “While you’re doing that, I’ll get the horse and buggy ready to go.”

Rachel hugged Grandpa and sprinted to the house. She found Mom sitting in front of her sewing machine. “Grandpa’s going to town, and he invited me to go along. Is that okay with you?”

“Not today, Rachel,” Mom said as she pumped her feet up and down on the treadle to get the machine going.

“If I can’t ride to town with Grandpa, can I go to Audra’s and play?”

“Sorry, but no.”

“How come?”

“Because you—”

“Can I go outside and jump on the trampoline?”

Mom shook her head. “If you hadn’t interrupted, I was going to say you may not play until all your chores are done.”

“But I finished my chores after breakfast.”

“You finished the ones you normally do, but as soon as I finish mending these trousers for Jacob, I want to do some cleaning.” Mom looked up and smiled at Rachel. “I’ll need your help.”

Rachel bit the end of a fingernail. She’d done enough work today. It wasn’t fair that Mom expected her to do more. She felt like all she ever did was work.

“Don’t bite your *fingerneggel* [fingernails], Rachel,” Mom said. “I’ve told you it’s a bad habit. Besides, your fingernails are full of germs.”

“Sorry,” Rachel mumbled. “I wish I didn’t have more chores to do. I was hoping to do something fun today.”

“After we finish the cleaning, maybe we can walk to the creek. That sounds like fun, doesn’t it?” Mom asked.

Rachel shrugged. If she went to the creek, she could probably wade in the water and look for frogs, but it wouldn’t be nearly as much fun as going to town with Grandpa.

Mom pushed away from the sewing machine. “I’m done with my mending now, so while I clean the living room floor and dust, I’d like you to wash the living room windows.”

Rachel groaned. Washing windows didn’t sound like fun at all!

She’d just entered the utility room to get the window cleaning solution and a clean rag when she heard the back door creak open and Grandpa call, “Rachel, are you ready to go to town? I have the horse and buggy ready to go!”

Rachel stepped out of the utility room and met him with a scowl. “I can’t go to town with you, Grandpa. Mom says I have to do some cleaning.” Her chin quivered, and she blinked a couple of times to keep her tears from spilling over.

Grandpa pulled Rachel to his side and hugged her. “It’s okay. You can go to town with me another time when you’re not so busy.”

“I’ll probably always be busy,” she said with a groan. “The older I get, the more chores I have to do.”

Grandpa patted the top of her head. “Then make your chores fun.”

“How do I do that?”

“Make a game out of what you’re doing.”

Rachel tilted her head. “Huh?”

“Let me give you an example,” Grandpa said. “When I was a *buwe* [boy] and had to wash dishes,

I pretended that the dishes were *kinner* [children], swimming in a pond.” A smile stretched across Grandpa’s face. “It was fun to make the dishes dive into the pond. It made lots of bubbles, and they splashed in my face.”

Rachel giggled as she pictured Grandpa dropping silverware into the soapy water and bubbles breaking on his nose. “Guess I’ll have to try that the next time I do the dishes.”

“It doesn’t just have to be when you’re doing the dishes,” Grandpa said. “You can pretend all sorts of things while you’re doing different chores.”

Rachel nodded. “I’ll try that on the chores I do today.”

Grandpa hugged her again. “Good girl.” He turned toward the door. “Well, I’d best be on my way. I’ll see you later this afternoon.”

Rachel hurried to the living room. She figured if she got the windows cleaned quickly, Mom might let her play.

She held the spray bottle up to the window. *Squirt! Squirt!* She squeezed the lever until the window had plenty of liquid. *Swish! Swish! Swish!* She pretended she was painting a pretty picture as she swiped the rag up, down, and all over the window.

“How’s it going?” Mom asked, stepping up to Rachel.

“Fine. I’m almost done with my picture.”

Mom eyebrows lifted as she looked at Rachel.

“What picture?”

Rachel’s cheeks warmed. “Oh, I—uh—pretended I

was painting a picture while I washed the window.”

“I see.” Mom peered at the window. “Ach, Rachel, look at all the streaks you’ve left! You’ll have to do that window again.”

Rachel leaned close to the glass and squinted. “I don’t see any streaks.”

“Right there.” Mom pointed to a spot on the lower half of the window. “Do you see it now?”

Rachel nodded. She saw it, but it looked fuzzy. “Something must be wrong with the window cleaner,” she said.

“Here, let me try.” Mom took the rag and bottle from Rachel. *Squirt! Squirt! Swish! Swish! Swish!* “There, that’s better. You probably weren’t rubbing hard enough.” She handed the window cleaner and rag back to Rachel.

Rachel leaned close to the window again and looked outside. “I think you must have missed a few spots, because some things in the yard look blurry.”

Squirt! Squirt! Swish. . .swish. . .swish—she scrubbed at the window some more.

“You can stop now, Rachel. That window’s as clean as it can be.”

Rachel leaned close to the window again and stared outside. Everything still looked blurry, but if Mom thought the window was clean enough, she wouldn’t say anything more. “Now can I go outside and play?” Rachel asked hopefully.

Mom shook her head. “We still have more cleaning to do.”

“Like what?”

“I’d like you to shake the living room rugs while I mop the kitchen floor.”

“Is that all you need me to do?”

Mom’s glasses had slipped to the end of her nose, and she pushed them back in place. “I believe so; unless I think of something else.” She smiled and left the room.

Rachel bent down and grabbed the small braided rug in front of the sofa. She hauled it to the porch. Pretending the porch was a trampoline and she was jumping on it, she gave the rug a few good shakes. Then she draped it over the railing. She went back to the living room to get the rug in front of Grandpa’s rocking chair. She gave that a couple of shakes, imagining again that she was bouncing up and down on the trampoline. When her arms grew tired, she draped the rug over the railing and returned to get another rug near the front door.

When Rachel stepped onto the porch again, she gasped. Buddy had one of the rugs in his mouth! *Grr*. He growled and shook it for all he was worth!

“*Absatz* [Stop]! You’re a bad *hund* [dog]!” Rachel tugged on the dog’s collar, but he didn’t let go of the rug.

Grr. . . *Grr*. . . Buddy continued to shake and growl.

Rachel gritted her teeth and tugged Buddy’s collar again. “If you tear a hole in that rug, you’ll be in big

trouble with Mom!” She thought about the towel Buddy had stolen from the laundry basket and ripped in two. Mom hadn’t been happy about that at all!

Grr. . . Grr. . . Shake! Shake! Shake!

Rachel let go of Buddy’s collar and cupped her hands around her mouth. “Jacob Yoder, you’d better come get your dog, *schnell* [quickly]!”

No response.

Rachel figured Jacob must still be in the barn helping Pap and Henry groom the horses. She thought about going to get him but was afraid if she left, Buddy would tear the rug.

Suddenly, an idea popped into Rachel’s head. She ran down the porch steps, raced to the water spigot, and turned on the hose. Aiming it at the porch, she sprayed Buddy’s face.

Buddy let go of the rug and howled. He leaped off the porch, circled around Rachel, jumped up, and—*slurp!*—licked her face.

“Yuk! Get down, you big hairy mutt!” Rachel shot Buddy with another spray of water.

Woof! Woof! Woof! Buddy circled her again, bounded onto the porch, and darted into the house.

“Oh great! I should have shut the door!”

Rachel raced into the house. When she heard Mom scream, “Ach no!” she knew Buddy must be in the kitchen. She ran after him.

“Look what this dog has done!” Mom clucked her

tongue as she pointed to the muddy paw prints on the kitchen floor. “Now I’ll have to wash the floor again!”

“I’m sorry, Mom,” Rachel panted, “but that flea-bitten hund grabbed one of the rugs and wouldn’t let go. He kept growling and shaking the rug.” She gulped in a quick breath of air. “So I turned on the hose and sprayed him with water. He let go, but then he ran around the yard, got his feet dirty, and ran into the house before I could stop him.”

Buddy circled Mom, barking and chasing his tail.

Woof! Woof! Woof!

When he made the next pass, Mom bent down and grabbed his collar. “Rachel, take this hund outside and put him in his dog run! Then hang the rug on the clothesline, because I’m sure it got wet from the hose.”

“Okay, Mom,” Rachel said as she led Buddy out the back door.

Woof! Woof! Woof! Buddy’s tail swished the skirt of Rachel’s dress.

“You’re nothing but trouble,” she muttered.

By the time Rachel had put Buddy in his dog run and hung the rug on the line to dry, she was tired. She trudged up the porch steps, wondering what other chores Mom had for her to do. At this rate, they would never get to take that walk, and she would probably have no time for play.

When Rachel entered the house, she peeked into

the kitchen. The floor was clean, but Mom was no longer there. Thinking Mom might have gone to the living room to do more cleaning, Rachel headed in that direction. She found Mom lying on the sofa with her eyes shut.

Rachel tiptoed across the room. “Are you sleeping?” she whispered.

Mom opened her eyes. “Almost.”

“What about our walk to the creek?”

Mom released a noisy yawn. “I’d better not today, Rachel. After all that cleaning, I’m really tired. You’re free to go outside and play while I take a nap.”

Rachel shook her head. “I’m not in the mood now.” She trudged up the stairs, stomped into her room, and fell on the bed. “Always trouble somewhere!”

She stretched her arms over her head until they bumped the headboard. “We can’t go to Hershey Park; I couldn’t go to town with Grandpa; the greenhouse won’t be built until June; I had to do chores all afternoon; and now Mom’s too tired to walk to the creek. What a disappointing day!”