

New Beginnings

Dedication

To the students and teachers at the Pleasant
Ridge School in Shipshewana, Indiana.
Thanks for letting me visit with you!

Glossary

<i>ach</i> —oh	<i>kumme</i> —come
<i>bensel</i> —silly child	<i>lecherich</i> —ridiculous
<i>boppli</i> —baby	<i>mamm</i> —mom
<i>bruder</i> —brother	<i>midder</i> —mothers
<i>danki</i> —thank you	<i>millich</i> —milk
<i>daed</i> —dad	<i>mudich</i> —spirited
<i>dochder</i> —daughter	<i>mupsich</i> —stupid
<i>dumm</i> —dumb	<i>naas</i> —nose
<i>gaul</i> —horse	<i>naerfich</i> —nervous
<i>gemmummelt</i> —mumbling	<i>narrisch</i> —crazy
<i>grossdaadi</i> —grandfather	<i>reider</i> —rider
<i>grossmudder</i> —grandmother	<i>rutschich</i> —squirring
<i>gut nacht</i> —good night	<i>schmaert</i> —smart
<i>hochmut</i> —pride	<i>schnell</i> —quickly
<i>jah</i> —yes	<i>schpeckmaus</i> —bat
<i>kapp</i> —cap	<i>schweschder</i> —sister
<i>kichlin</i> —cookies	<i>verhuddelt</i> —mixed up
<i>kinner</i> —children	<i>wunderbaar</i> —wonderful

Duh die katz naus.—Put the cat out.

En aldi grauns—An old grumbler

Es dutt mir leed.—I am sorry.

Fege.—Run about.

Kanscht seller gaul reide?—Are you able to ride that horse?

Schpiele gern—Like to play

Was fehlt dir denn?—What's the matter with you?

Was is do uff?—What's the matter here?

Wie geht's?—How are you?

Chapter 1

Saying Good-bye



Plunk! Plunk! Plunk! Plunk! Ten-year-old Rachel Yoder dropped four dirty spoons into the sink full of soapy water. Mom had gone outside to hang some laundry on the clothesline and left Rachel to wash the dishes. Doing dishes was not one of Rachel's favorite things to do on a sunny spring morning. She'd much rather be outside playing with her cat, Cuddles; riding on her skateboard in the barn; petting their old horse, Tom; or looking at the colorful flowers blooming in Mom's flowerbeds.

Rachel looked out the kitchen window and spotted Grandpa Schrock working in the garden. Even pulling weeds would be better than doing dishes!

At least I have two hands I can use to do the dishes, Rachel thought. When she'd broken her arm a few months ago, she'd learned to do some things using only one hand. She was glad her arm had healed and she didn't have to wear the uncomfortable cast anymore. And she was glad this was Saturday and she could go

outside to play after the dishes were done.

On the other side of the yard she saw Pap and her seventeen-year-old brother, Henry. They were building a dog run for her brother Jacob's dog. Jacob was twelve years old and was sometimes nice to Rachel, but most of the time he just picked on her. Now that spring was here and the snow had melted, Pap decided it was time to get Buddy out of the empty stall in the barn. The big, shaggy, red dog had slept there since Orlie Troyer gave him to Jacob a few months ago.

Buddy had been nothing but trouble ever since he'd come to live at their place. Rachel thought he deserved to be locked up. During the winter, when Jacob kept Buddy in the empty stall, Buddy jumped over the door and escaped several times. Rachel was glad the hairy mutt wouldn't be able to escape from his new dog run with a sturdy wire fence around it.

Rachel washed all the silverware and looked out the window again. She saw Jacob step out of the barn. Buddy was at his side, wagging his tail and nudging Jacob's hand with his nose.

Rachel frowned as she thought of all the times Buddy had licked her hand or face with his big slimy tongue.

Swish! Swish! Rachel ran the sponge over one of their breakfast plates as she continued to stare out the window, where she saw Buddy and Jacob in the backyard, playing with a ball.

Jacob tossed the ball across the yard, and Buddy raced after it. Jacob clapped his hands to call Buddy

back, but Buddy didn't come. Instead he rolled the ball with his nose, and then he took off in the opposite direction. Jacob sprinted after the dog, hollering and waving his hands.

Rachel grunted. "*Mupsich* [stupid] dog never does come when you call him." She thought about the whistle Jacob bought so he could train Buddy. But blowing the whistle never made the dog come when he was called. Buddy had a mind of his own. Rachel didn't think he could ever be trained.

She sloshed another dish around in the soapy water, rinsed it, and placed it in the dish drainer. *I hope Cuddles isn't in the yard right now. If Buddy sees my cat, he'll probably forget about the ball and start chasing after her.*

Rachel grabbed the frying pan Mom had used to make scrambled eggs for breakfast and dropped it into the soapy water. *Woosh!*—several bubbles floated into the air. One landed on Rachel's nose. *Pop!* She giggled and wiped it away then started scrubbing the frying pan.

The rumble of buggy wheels and the *clip-clop* of a horse's hooves pulled Rachel's gaze back to the window. When the horse and buggy came to a stop near the barn, Uncle Ben stepped down, followed by Aunt Irma, and Rachel's cousins—Mary, Nancy, Abe, and Sam.

Rachel saw Mom drop a towel into the laundry basket and hurry over to greet them. Grandpa set his shovel aside and headed toward Uncle Ben's buggy. Pap and Henry put their tools down and joined them. Jacob stopped chasing after Buddy and headed that way, too.

Rachel scoured the frying pan once more and

quickly dried it and her hands before putting it away. Then she flung open the back door and raced outside. “What a surprise! I didn’t know you were coming over today!” she called to Mary.

Woof! Woof! Buddy raced around the side of the house, leaped into the air, and slurped his wet tongue across Rachel’s chin.

“Yuck! Your breath is bad!” She pushed Buddy down with her knee. “Get away from me, bad breath Buddy.”

Buddy whimpered and slunk toward the barn with his tail between his legs.

Rachel hurried over to Mary, but when Mary turned to face her, she wasn’t smiling. “We—we came to give you some news,” she said.

Rachel looked over at her cousins, Nancy, Abe, and Sam. They weren’t smiling, either. Only Uncle Ben and Aunt Irma were smiling.

“What’s going on?” Rachel asked. “What news do you have?”

Mary’s chin trembled, and tears gathered in her eyes. “We’re gonna move away.”

“Moving where?” Pap asked before Rachel could voice the question.

“To Indiana,” Uncle Ben said.

Rachel looked back at Mary, and Mary gave a slow nod. “It’s true.”

Everyone began to talk at once.

“Why are you going to Indiana?”

“How soon do you plan to move?”

“Is your place up for sale?”

“We’ll surely miss you.”

Rachel stood there, too numb to say a word. Mary couldn’t be moving. She had been Rachel’s friend since they were little. *Oh, what will I do without Mary?* she silently moaned.

Pap held up his hand. “We can’t all talk at once. Let’s ask one question at a time, and then my *bruder* [brother], Ben, can answer our questions.”

“Why are you moving to Indiana?” Mom asked.

“As I’m sure you all know,” Uncle Ben looked at Aunt Irma, “my wife’s *bruder*, Noah, and his family moved there last year, and Noah bought a dairy farm.”

Everyone nodded.

Uncle Ben smiled. “Noah’s dairy business is doing real well, and he asked me to move to Indiana and be his partner.”

“But you started working at the buggy shop not long ago,” Henry said. “Why would you want to quit your new job and move to Indiana?”

“I like my job at the buggy shop, but as I’m sure you know, your *daed* [dad] and I grew up on a dairy farm. I’m sure I’ll enjoy working with the cows on Noah’s farm even more,” Uncle Ben replied.

Hearing that Mary and her family would be leaving was the worst possible news! Rachel bit off the end of her thumbnail and spit it on the ground. She’d been trying to give up her nervous habit of nail biting, but it was hard not to feel anxious about her best friend moving away. “Can’t you start a dairy farm right here?” she asked.

“Our place here is too small for that,” Uncle Ben said.

“Can’t you buy more land?” Rachel asked.

Uncle Ben shook his head. “I’m afraid not. Land here in Lancaster County is getting too expensive, and there’s not a lot of land available to buy anymore.”

Rachel looked up at Aunt Irma with tears blurring her vision. “Can’t Mary stay with us?”

Aunt Irma shook her head. “We could never leave any of our *kinner* [children] here. They will come to Indiana with us.”

Grandpa, who stood beside Rachel, patted the top of her head. “If your folks moved somewhere else, wouldn’t you want to go with them?”

Rachel looked at Mom, Pap, Jacob, Henry, and Grandpa. As much as she liked her home here, she knew if Mom and Pap decided to move, she’d want to go with them. “*Jah* [yes],” she said in a near whisper, “I’d want to move, too.”

“What about Grandpa and Grandma Yoder?” Jacob asked. “Who’s gonna look after them if you move away?”

Uncle Ben looked over at Pap. “As you know, our sister, Karen, and her husband, Amos, have been renting a place in Tennessee.”

Pap nodded.

“Amos and Karen have decided to move to Pennsylvania and buy our house. That means they’ll be living next door to our folks, same as we have been for the past twelve years.”

Rachel swallowed around the lump in her throat.

She didn't like the idea of someone else living in Uncle Ben and Aunt Irma's house—especially someone she didn't know very well. She'd only seen Uncle Amos and Aunt Karen a few times, and the last time she'd seen them she was seven years old. Aunt Karen had given birth to a baby boy named Gerald three years ago, but Rachel hadn't met him yet. *If only I could do something to keep Mary's family from moving*, she thought.

"When do you plan to move?" Pap asked Uncle Ben.

"Two weeks from today."

"Two weeks?" Rachel's mouth fell open.

"Why so soon?" Mom asked.

"Noah just bought fifty more cows, and now he's busier than ever," Uncle Ben replied. "He needs me there as soon as possible."

"Let us know when you're ready to start packing," Pap said. "We'll be there to help."

With tears clinging to her eyelashes, Rachel turned to Mary and gave her a hug. "I'm going to miss you so much!"

The day before Mary's family was supposed to move, Mary came over to Rachel's to spend the night.

"I can't believe this is the last time we'll ever have a sleepover," Rachel said as the girls climbed the steps to her room.

Mary clasped Rachel's hand. "Don't say that. We'll have more sleepovers. My family will come back to Pennsylvania to visit, and your family can come see our new home in Indiana."

Rachel shook her head as tears gathered in her eyes. "It won't be the same. We won't be best friends anymore."

"We'll always be best friends," Mary said. "My moving away won't change that."

When they entered Rachel's room, Rachel flopped onto her bed with a groan. "I wish you didn't have to go. Can't you talk your folks out of moving?"

"Papa has already made up his mind." Mary set her overnight bag on the floor and joined Rachel on the bed. "Besides, the house we've lived in since before I was a baby won't be ours after Saturday. Uncle Amos and Aunt Karen are moving from Tennessee soon, and then they'll be living in our old house."

"I know." Rachel sniffed. "I just wish things could stay the same as they are right now." She touched Mary's hand. "I'm going to miss you so much, and I—I'm afraid you'll forget about me."

"Never!" Mary reached down and opened the canvas satchel she'd brought along. "I have something for you." She handed Rachel a little faceless doll with brown hair just like Mary's. "I asked my *mamm* [mom] if I could give you my doll so you would have something to remember me by."

Rachel hugged the doll close to her chest. "*Danki* [thank you], Mary. I'll think of you every time I play with this doll." She hopped off the bed and hurried across the room. "I have something to give you, too."

"What is it?"

Rachel opened the bottom drawer of her dresser and

took out a rock she'd painted to look like a ladybug. "I signed my name on the bottom," she said, handing the rock to Mary. "That way you won't forget who gave it to you."

"I'll never forget you, Rachel. Thank you."

"I wish you could have brought Stripes over tonight, so he could say good-bye to Cuddles," Rachel said as she and Mary put their nightgowns on and got ready for bed.

"Mama didn't think it was a good idea," Mary said. "Stripes isn't good about staying in the yard, and if I'd brought him over to play with Cuddles, he could've run off. Since Mama and Papa are busy packing our things, they wouldn't want to be bothered with having to hunt for my cat."

"Maybe I can bring Cuddles over to your house to say good-bye," Rachel said as they crawled into bed. "I can't believe you're moving tomorrow."

Mary nodded and fluffed up her pillow.

Rachel stared at the ceiling. Even if they stayed awake all night there wouldn't be enough time to say all the things she wanted to say to Mary. Writing letters and a visit once in a while wouldn't be the same as spending the night at one another's house, playing in the haylofts in their barns, or eating lunch at school together. Tears trickled down Rachel's cheeks. After Mary moved away, nothing would ever be the same.

"Can you please open the window, Rachel?" Mary asked. "It's kind of stuffy in here."

"I suppose I could, but I have to be careful not to let

Cuddles in. Mom doesn't like it when Cuddles sneaks into my room and gets up on the bed."

"We could just open it enough so some fresh air gets in."

Rachel pushed the covers aside, turned on the flashlight by her bed, and padded across the room. She'd no more than opened the window, when—*meow!*—Cuddles leaped from the tree right into her arms.

"Oh no!" Rachel exclaimed.

"Is that Cuddles?" Mary asked as she sat up in bed.

"Jah. She must have been sitting in the tree hoping I would open the window."

"Bring her over here so I can pet her."

Rachel shook her head. "No, Mary. . . Mom doesn't like me to have Cuddles on the bed. She has to go back outside."

"Don't put her out just yet. I'll come over there so I can pet Cuddles." Mary scrambled out of bed and hurried across the room.

Rachel handed the cat to Mary, and Cuddles purred loudly while Mary petted the top of her head. "She sure is soft and silky, isn't she?"

"Jah, but she'd better go back out now." Rachel opened the window wider, and was about to take the cat from Mary, when—*flap! flap!*—something flew into the room.

"What was that?" Mary squealed.

"I—I don't know. I think it might have been a bird." Rachel shined her flashlight around the room. *Woosh! Woosh!* The creature flew so fast she could barely follow

it with the light.

“It’s a *schpeckmaus* [bat]!” Mary dropped to the floor and dove under Rachel’s bed, with Cuddles still in her arms.

Woosh! Woosh! Rachel dropped to her knees and shined the light again. Sure enough, there was a little brown bat flying around her room. “Yeow!” Rachel hollered as it swooped past her head. She ducked lower and scurried under the bed to join Mary and Cuddles.

“Wh—what are we gonna do?” Mary’s voice quivered. “How are we gonna get that bat out of your room?”

“Let’s lie here real quiet. Maybe it’ll fly out the open window.” Rachel reached over and stroked Cuddles’s head for comfort.

“You don’t suppose it will fly under the bed and bite us, do you?”

“I don’t think so. Pap told me once that the bats we have around here aren’t dangerous.”

Mary giggled. “Then what are we doing under the bed?”

Rachel laughed, too. “Do you want to crawl out and see if the bat’s still there?”

“No way! Do you?”

“Nope.”

“Let’s close our eyes and go to sleep,” Mary suggested. “When we wake up in the morning, maybe the bat will be gone.”

Rachel didn’t think she would sleep very comfortably on the hard floor underneath the bed, but she wasn’t going to crawl out if Mary wasn’t. “*Gut nacht*

[good night], Mary,” she said.

“Good night, Rachel.”

Cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do!

Rachel groaned and released a noisy yawn. The rooster was crowing; it must be morning. *Thwack!*—she bumped her head as she tried to sit up. Then she remembered—she, Mary, and Cuddles had slept under her bed to get away from the bat that flew into her room last night.

Rachel glanced over at Mary, still asleep with Cuddles in her arms. “Wake up. . .it’s morning,” she whispered, nudging Mary’s arm.

Mary’s eyes snapped open. “Is—is the bat gone?”

“I don’t know. I don’t hear it flying around.” Rachel started to crawl out from under her bed when the bedroom door opened and Mom stepped in.

“What in the world are you doing, Rachel? And where is Mary?”

Before Rachel could respond, Mom knelt down and peered under the bed. “What are you two doing under there, and what’s Cuddles doing in your room?”

“It was stuffy in here last night,” Rachel explained. “Cuddles came in when I opened the window. Then a bat flew in, and Mary and I were kind of scared, so we slept under my bed.”

Mom’s forehead wrinkled, and Rachel thought for sure she was in for a lecture. But then Mom’s lips lifted into a smile and her eyes twinkled. “A bat got into my room once when I was a girl.”

“What did you do?” asked Rachel.

“I hid under the bed.” Mom held onto the bedpost and laughed so hard tears streamed down her cheeks. Rachel joined Mom’s laughter, and Mary crawled out from the under the bed and started laughing, too.

Finally Mom stopped laughing. She used the corner of her apron to dry her eyes, and she looked around the room. “There’s no sign of a bat in here now. It must have flown out the window.”

Rachel took Cuddles from Mary. “I’ll put her back in the tree.”

Mom nodded. “Then we need to hurry and eat breakfast so we can take Mary home. Today’s the big move, and we need to be there to help them pack.”

Rachel frowned. With all the laughter going on in her room, she’d almost forgotten that Mary would be moving today.

As if she could read her thoughts, Mom patted Rachel’s arm and said, “I’m glad you and Mary were able to spend the night together—even if you had to sleep under your bed.”

Rachel managed a weak smile. Maybe when they got to Uncle Ben and Aunt Irma’s house, she could talk them out of moving.

When Pap guided their horse and buggy onto Uncle Ben’s driveway, Rachel thought she was going to break down and sob. Two big moving trucks were parked near the barn. Several people rushed around the yard, hauling boxes and furniture out of the house and into the trucks.

Pap halted the horse near the hitching rail, and Mom, Mary, Grandpa, and Rachel climbed down from the buggy. Henry pulled his horse and buggy in next to Pap's, and he and Jacob climbed down from it, too.

"What can we do to help?" Pap called to Uncle Ben, who was carrying a large box out to the truck.

Uncle Ben motioned to the house with his head. "There are more boxes and furniture in there that need to be put in the trucks."

For the next few hours everyone scurried about, loading the trucks, cleaning the house, and fixing snacks for those who had come to help. By noon the house was empty and both trucks were full and ready to go.

As Rachel and Mary walked through the house together, their footsteps and voices echoed in the bare rooms. There wasn't a stick of furniture or anything else left to remind Rachel that this had been Mary and her family's home. It didn't look right to see everything gone. It wasn't right for Mary to move to Indiana.

"Mary, Nancy, Abe, and Sam. . .it's time for us to head out. Our drivers are ready to go," Uncle Ben called.

A lump formed in Rachel's throat as she looked at Mary. "I wish you didn't have to go."

"Me neither," Mary said as tears filled her eyes.

Rachel rushed over to Uncle Ben and grabbed hold of his arm. "Won't you change your mind and stay here in Pennsylvania?"

He slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry, Rachel, but our plans have been made and my bruder is expecting

us to arrive at his place in a few days.”

Mom hugged Aunt Irma then turned to Rachel and said, “Say good-bye to your cousins.” She nodded at Jacob and Henry. “You boys need to say good-bye, too.”

Mary grabbed Rachel and gave her a hug. “I’ll write to you soon, I promise.”

Rachel could only nod in reply. Her throat felt like it was clogged with a glob of peanut butter. No matter how much she wanted, she knew she wasn’t in control of this situation. She’d learned that lesson all too well when she broke her arm a few months ago.

“We’ll try to visit you soon after our *boppi* [baby] is born,” Pap said as Mary’s family climbed into the trucks with their drivers.

“We’ll look forward to that,” Aunt Irma called.

As the trucks pulled out of the driveway, Rachel thought her heart was breaking in two. She wasn’t sure if she would ever see Mary again.

“You and Mary can still be friends even though you won’t see each other as often as before,” Mom said gently. “But you’re a friendly girl, and I’m sure it won’t be long until you make another best friend.” She placed her hand on Rachel’s slumped shoulder. “There’s a little song I learned about friendship when I was a girl. Would you like me to sing it to you?”

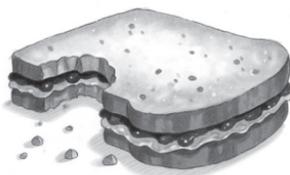
“I guess so.”

“Make new friends but keep the old,” Mom sang in a clear voice. “One is silver the other is gold.”

Rachel sniffed. “I—I don’t want a new friend. I just want my best friend, Mary!”

Chapter 2

Verhuddelt



As Rachel walked behind Jacob on their way to school Monday morning, her heart ached. With each step she took she felt more and more depressed. Mary had moved on Saturday. Their house was empty, their barn was empty, and even Mary's desk would be empty—forever.

Rachel kicked a rock with the toe of her sneaker. "It's Uncle Ben's fault," she mumbled under her breath. "He shouldn't have taken Mary away."

Jacob nudged Rachel's arm. "*Was fehlt dir denn?* [What's the matter with you?] What are you *gemummelt* [mumbling] about?"

"I wasn't mumbling."

"Jah, you were."

"I was just thinking about Mary moving and how much I'm going to miss her."

"They said they'd come to visit," Jacob reminded her. "And after Mom has the boppli, maybe we can make a trip to Indiana and visit them, too."

“But it could be a long time before they come back here for a visit. Mom might not feel up to traveling with the baby for a long time, either.” Rachel swallowed hard, hoping she wouldn’t cry in front of Jacob. If she did, he would probably call her a little *bensel* [silly child].

“I’m going to miss everyone in Mary’s family, too,” Jacob said, “but I won’t go around all droopy because they’re gone.”

“I’m not droopy,” Rachel said, frowning.

“Jah, you are.”

Rachel clamped her mouth shut and hurried ahead, refusing to argue with Jacob anymore. They walked on in silence—Jacob whistling, Rachel kicking stones as she thought about how much she already missed Mary.

When they arrived at the schoolhouse, Rachel spotted Orlie down on his knees, staring at something in the grass. Curious as to what it might be, Rachel hurried over to Orlie.

“Look what I found!” he said excitedly.

“What is it?”

“It’s a painted ladybug rock. It must be the one you made for my birthday in February.” He grinned and held the rock out to her. “Now that it’s spring and the snow’s melted, it was easy to find the rock!”

“That’s nice.” Rachel had almost forgotten about the painted rock she’d made for Orlie’s birthday and had accidentally dropped in the snow.

“You don’t seem very excited about the rock. Isn’t it amazing that I found it?” Orlie asked.

She only shrugged in reply.

“What’s wrong? Why do you look so sad?”

The mysterious glob of peanut butter clogged Rachel’s throat again and she swallowed a couple of times. “Mary and her family moved to Indiana on Saturday.”

“I probably would have known that if we’d had church yesterday,” Orlie said.

Rachel nodded. The Amish church they belonged to had church every other Sunday, and they took turns having it in one another’s homes.

“How come Mary’s family moved to Indiana?” Orlie asked.

“Her daed’s going to help run a dairy farm.” Rachel frowned. “It won’t be the same with Mary gone.”

Just then an Amish girl who looked to be about Rachel’s age walked across the yard toward them. She had dark brown hair and matching eyes, and a deep dimple in each cheek. Rachel had never seen the girl before and figured she must be new. “What have you got there?” the girl asked, pointing at the rock in Orlie’s hand.

Orlie smiled. “It’s a ladybug rock.”

She wrinkled her nose. “I don’t like bugs!”

“Not even ladybugs?” Orlie asked.

She shook her head. “I don’t like any kind of bugs.”

Orlie looked at Rachel and said, “Have you met Audra Burkholder yet?”

Rachel shook her head.

“Audra and her family moved to the farm next to our place on Saturday.” Orlie grinned. “Guess Saturday must have been moving day here in Lancaster County.”

Rachel gritted her teeth. Was Orlie trying to make her feel worse about Mary moving?

“We used to live in Ohio, but we moved here to be closer to my *grossdaadi* [grandfather] and *grossmudder* [grandmother].” Audra looked at Rachel. “What’s your name?”

“Rachel Yoder.”

“Rachel’s grandpa used to live in Ohio. Isn’t that right, Rachel?” Orlie asked.

Rachel only nodded in reply. She didn’t want to talk to Orlie or the new girl named Audra right now. “I think I’d better get inside,” she said as she started walking toward the schoolhouse.

“What’s the hurry?” Orlie called. “Elizabeth hasn’t rung the bell yet.”

Rachel ignored him and hurried up the schoolhouse stairs. After she put her lunch pail on the shelf just inside the door, she trudged over to her desk and sat down. She glanced at Mary’s old desk and blinked back tears. For the rest of this school year Rachel would have to look at the empty desk across from her and be reminded that her best friend moved away.

A few minutes later, Elizabeth rang the school bell. *Clang! Clang! Clang!*

The children filed into the room and took their seats. Audra stood up front by the teacher’s desk, red-faced and staring at the floor.

“Good morning, boys and girls,” Elizabeth said.

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

“We have a new girl with us today. Her name is Audra Burkholder. Audra and her family moved here from Ohio.” Elizabeth nudged Audra’s arm. “Would you like to tell the class something about yourself?”

Audra’s face turned even redder as she raised her head and looked at the class. “Well, uh—my mamm and daed are Andy and Naomi, and I have four older brothers. Walter and Perry are married. Jared’s sixteen, so he’s out of school already. Brian, my youngest brother, is twelve. Brian’s not here today because he has a bad cold.” Audra looked at the teacher. “Oh, and starting today, my daed and Jared will be working at the buggy shop.”

Rachel cringed. Uncle Ben used to work at the buggy shop, until he decided he’d rather be milking cows. *I wish Uncle Ben still worked at the buggy shop, not Audra’s daed and bruder.*

“We’re happy to have you in our class, Audra.” Elizabeth looked at the scholars and smiled. “During recess you’ll have a chance to get to know Audra better. Please make her feel welcome.” She pointed to Mary’s empty desk. Rachel’s heart skipped a beat. “That desk will be yours, Audra.”

No! No! No! Rachel silently screamed. Tears burned in her eyes as she watched Audra sit at Mary’s desk. Audra opened her backpack, took out a writing tablet and some books, and lifted the lid of the desk to put them inside.

When Rachel realized her mouth was hanging open, she snapped her jaw shut. *Mary’s things should be*

in there—not Audra’s, she thought. This isn’t right. It’s not right at all!

Elizabeth picked up her Bible. “I’ll be reading from Ecclesiastes 4:9–10: ‘Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!’ ”

Rachel’s heart clenched. Mary had been that kind of friend. Whenever Rachel felt sad, Mary cheered her up. Now Rachel had no best friend, except maybe Orlie. After he’d helped Rachel with her lines in the Christmas program last year, they’d had a secret friendship. Even so, she didn’t think of him as a “best friend.”

Orlie’s sharp whisper jolted Rachel out of her thoughts. “We’re supposed to stand. It’s time to repeat the Lord’s Prayer.”

Rachel stood and recited the prayer with the others, even though her heart wasn’t in it. When she filed to the front of the room with the rest of the children to sing a few songs, her throat felt swollen. She moved to stand next to Orlie, but Audra squeezed in where Rachel wanted to stand. She sighed, slumped her shoulders, and found a spot at the end of the line.

Rachel glanced at the clock on the far wall. She would be glad when it was time for morning recess and she could go outside to play. Maybe she and Orlie could talk about the ladybug rock she’d painted for him. She might also ask if he could come over to their place and help Jacob train Buddy.

The next hour ticked by slowly as Rachel worked on her arithmetic lesson. Every few minutes she glanced at the clock. Finally, Elizabeth announced that it was time for recess.

Rachel hurried outside and was happy to see that the sun shone brightly. It had been hiding behind the clouds on the walk to school. She spotted Orlie standing near the teeter-totter. She was about to head that way when she saw Audra walk up to him. No way was she going over there now!

Rachel moved over to the swings and sat down. She let her feet dangle but didn't pump her legs. It didn't feel right to swing without Mary.

Phoebe Wagler took the other swing and started pumping her legs. *Pump, pump, swing. Pump, pump, swing.* The swing moved back and forth, and Phoebe giggled excitedly. "This is so much fun! I love to swing!"

Rachel stared at the ground.

"When's your mamm due to have her boppli, Rachel?" Phoebe asked.

"This summer—probably July." Rachel decided to get her swing moving, too. Maybe then Phoebe would stop talking to her. *Pump, pump, swing. Pump, pump, swing.*

"My baby sister, Darlene, is ten weeks old." Phoebe grinned. "It's so cute when she gurgles and coos. I don't think there's anything sweeter than a boppli."

Rachel hoped her baby sister or brother would be cute and sweet. She didn't like the idea of having a fussy baby in the house.

The bell rang, calling everyone back inside. Rachel

left the swing and hurried into the schoolhouse. She'd just taken her seat when Orlie turned in his chair and said, "Audra told me her daed might let her visit the buggy shop on Saturday. She invited me to go along. How about you, Rachel? Would you like to see the buggy shop, too?"

Rachel shook her head. "I've seen it already—when my uncle Ben worked there."

"Oh." Orlie turned around before Rachel could say anything more. So much for asking if Orlie might come over to their place on Saturday. He obviously had other plans.

At eleven thirty, Elizabeth dismissed the classroom by rows to get their lunch pails. Rachel frowned when Audra's row was dismissed first.

When Rachel reached up to take her lunch pail down from the shelf, Jacob took his down at the same time. "Are you in a better mood now, Rachel?" he asked.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "What do you think?"

"I think you're an old sourpuss today. If Mom packed a bottle of Pap's homemade root beer in your lunch pail, maybe you'll be sweeter after you drink it."

"It would take more than a bottle of root beer to make *you* sweeter," Rachel muttered as she headed out to the porch to eat her lunch. She took a seat on the top step, opened her lunch pail, and took out her sandwich. Her stomach rumbled as she removed the plastic wrapping. Peanut butter and jelly was her favorite kind. She lifted it to her mouth and was about to take a bite, when a fishy smell wafted up to her nose.

“Eww. . .tuna!”

But how could that be? Rachel wondered. She’d watched Mom make her sandwich this morning, and it had been peanut butter and jelly—not tuna fish!

She looked in the lunch pail and saw an orange, two cookies, and a bottle of milk. *This isn’t the lunch Mom made for me!*

Rachel looked across the porch, where several other girls sat, and spotted Audra—eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich!

Rachel tossed the tuna sandwich in the lunch pail and slammed the lid. Then she marched over to Audra and said, “I believe that’s my sandwich you’re eating!”

Audra looked up at Rachel and wrinkled her forehead. “What makes you think that?”

Rachel handed the lunch pail to Audra. “There’s a tuna fish sandwich in here, and it’s not mine. You’re eating *my* peanut butter and jelly sandwich.” She pointed to the lunch pail sitting on the porch beside Audra. “And that’s *my* lunch pail!”

Audra’s eyes widened as she looked at one lunch pail and then the other. “I think I made a mistake,” she said. “Our lunch pails look almost alike. They must have gotten *verhuddelt* [mixed up]. Since I’ve already eaten part of your sandwich, why don’t you go ahead and eat my lunch?”

Rachel shook her head so hard the ties on her *kapp* [cap] flipped around her face. “No way! I hate the taste of tuna!”

Audra shrugged and handed the half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich to Rachel. “All right then.

Here you go.”

Rachel nearly gagged. “No thanks!” She wasn’t about to eat that peanut butter and jelly sandwich now. Not with Audra’s germs on it! “I’ll bet you took my lunch pail on purpose!”

Audra shook her head. “Why would I do that? I didn’t know the lunch pail I took was yours. I thought it was mine.”

Rachel bent down, snatched her lunch pail, and shoved Audra’s lunch pail in its place. At least she could eat the apple and banana bread Mom had packed.

She plopped down on her seat across the porch step and opened the lid. Sure enough, there was a big red apple and two slices of banana bread.

Rachel unwrapped the banana bread and was about to take a bite when she remembered that Mary liked banana bread, too. Rachel’s eyes filled with tears. She tossed the banana bread into the lunch pail and shut the lid with a *snap!* She wasn’t hungry anymore.

“Aren’t you gonna eat your banana bread?” Jacob asked, taking a seat beside Rachel.

She shook her head. “I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“It reminds me of Mary.”

The skin around Jacob’s blue eyes wrinkled. “Huh?”

“Banana bread was one of Mary’s favorites.” Rachel sighed. “Now that Mary’s gone, every time I see a piece of banana bread, I’ll think of her.”

“That’s *lecherich* [ridiculous], Rachel.” Jacob grabbed her lunch pail, flipped open the lid, and helped himself

to the pieces of banana bread.

“Hey!” Rachel frowned at him. “What do you think you’re doing?”

He shrugged. “Figured if you’re not gonna eat the banana bread then I will.”

Rachel was about to say something mean to Jacob when she noticed several children staring at her. “Fine then, I hope you enjoy every bite!” She jumped up, raced down the steps, and ran all the way to the swings.

As Rachel walked home from school that afternoon, she kept thinking about the lunch pail mix up and how happy Audra had looked eating Rachel’s peanut butter and jelly sandwich. “I’ll do something to make sure that doesn’t happen again,” Rachel muttered under her breath.

Jacob nudged Rachel’s arm. “You’re mumbling again, just like you did this morning. What’s wrong now?”

As they continued walking, Rachel told Jacob about Audra eating her peanut butter and jelly sandwich. “I think she took my lunch pail on purpose because she doesn’t like me,” she grumbled.

“Audra’s new at our school,” Jacob said. “She doesn’t know you well enough to decide whether she likes you or not.”

“Humph!” Rachel grunted. “I could tell by the way she looked at me that she doesn’t like me.”

“You’re lecherich, little benschel.” Jacob shook his head and kept walking.

“I’m not ridiculous, and I wish you would stop calling me a silly child!”

“When you stop acting like a silly child, I’ll stop calling you one.”

As Rachel hurried on, an idea popped into her head. *When I get home, I’m going to paint a picture of a ladybug on my lunch pail. That should keep Audra from thinking it’s hers!*

When Rachel and Jacob arrived home, Jacob went out to the dog run to see Buddy, and Rachel hurried to the house. She set her lunch pail on the kitchen counter and went upstairs to her room to get out her paints. When she returned to the kitchen, she spread some newspaper on the table, placed her lunch pail on it, and opened a bottle of black paint. She had just finished painting the body of the ladybug on one side of her lunch pail when Mom entered the kitchen.

“What are you doing, Rachel?”

“I’m painting a ladybug on both sides of my lunch pail.”

Mom squinted over the top of her metal-framed glasses. “Why would you want to do something like that?”

“Because there’s a new girl at school named Audra Burkholder, and our lunch pails got verhuddelt because she took mine instead of hers. The sandwich in the lunch pail I opened was tuna fish—not peanut butter and jelly.” Rachel frowned. “I think Audra took my lunch on purpose.”

“Do your lunch pails look alike?” Mom asked.

“Jah.”

“Then I’m sure Audra took your lunch pail by mistake.”

Rachel stared at her lunch pail and heaved a big sigh. “Elizabeth gave Mary’s old desk to Audra, and now every time I look over there I’ll be reminded that Mary’s gone and I lost my best friend.”

Mom clucked her tongue. “I don’t think you’re being fair, Rachel. Audra’s new at your school, and I’m sure she needs a friend. You should give her a chance, don’t you think?”

Rachel shrugged.

“Why don’t you invite Audra over to play after school? You might become good friends.”

“I don’t need a friend. Not a friend like Audra, anyway.” Rachel thought about Sherry, the English girl she’d met at the farmer’s market last summer, and wondered if she would make a good friend. Sherry had let Rachel walk her dog, even though they’d just met. The only problem was, Rachel didn’t know where Sherry lived, and she hadn’t seen her since that day at the market. Rachel needed a friend now. She needed Mary!

Mom moved over to the cupboard and took out a glass. “Sometimes the very thing we think we don’t want is exactly what we need,” she said as she filled her glass with water.

I don’t need Audra, Rachel thought. *And I don’t want her, either*. Rachel dipped a clean brush into the jar of white paint so she could paint the ladybug’s eyes and antennae. She was sure of one thing—she could never be Audra Burkholder’s friend!

Chapter 3

Raining Sideways



It's raining pretty hard. You'd better wear your boots to school this morning," Mom said as she handed Rachel her lunch pail with a ladybug painted on both sides.

Rachel peeked out the kitchen window and wrinkled her nose. Not a speck of sun. "I hate the rain!"

Mom looked at Rachel over the top of her glasses. "You know how I feel about that word *hate*."

"I know, but I just don't like walking to school in the rain." Rachel set the lunch pail on the floor, slipped her feet into her rubber boots, and put on her raincoat. "If it keeps raining, we probably won't get to play outside during recess today."

"It's been a dry spring so far and we need a good soaking," Mom said. "If you can't play outside during recess, I'm sure you'll find something fun to do indoors."

"Maybe you can sit at your desk and draw a picture, little benschel," Jacob said as he joined Rachel in the utility room.

“Stop calling your sister that name,” Mom said before Rachel could respond. “She is not a silly child.”

Rachel smiled to herself. At least she wasn't the only one being scolded by Mom this morning.

“We'd better get going or we're gonna be late for school,” Jacob said, nudging Rachel's arm.

“Just let me get my umbrella.” Rachel opened the closet door, but her umbrella wasn't there. “Has anyone seen my umbrella?”

“Where did you put it?” Mom asked.

“I thought it was in here.” Rachel squinted at Jacob. “Did you take my umbrella?”

He grunted. “Why would I want your *dumm* [dumb] old umbrella?”

“It's not dumb and it's not old,” Rachel said. “Esther gave it to me for Christmas.” Rachel's older sister always gave Rachel nice presents for her birthday and Christmas, and Rachel would feel bad if she lost the umbrella.

Jacob opened the back door. “Let's go, Rachel.”

“I'm not going without my umbrella.”

“Aw, come on. You won't melt from a little bit of rain.” Jacob snickered and shook his head.

Rachel looked out the door. “That's more than a little rain. It's coming down by the buckets. The drainage ditch out by the road is so full, it's starting to overflow. If the rain doesn't stop soon, Pap's fields will flood and turn into ponds.”

“I can't believe the way you exaggerate.” Jacob stepped onto the porch. “Are you coming or not?”

Rachel frowned. “It’s raining too hard to walk without an umbrella.”

Mom went to the kitchen and returned with a large black umbrella. “You may borrow my umbrella today,” she said, handing it to Rachel.

“Danki, Mom.” Rachel picked up her lunch pail and slipped it into her backpack.

Mom bent down and gave Rachel a hug. Then she patted Jacob’s shoulder. “Have a good day.”

“You, too, Mom,” Rachel and Jacob said at the same time.

Rachel opened the umbrella and sloshed down the muddy driveway behind Jacob. When they reached the edge of the road she noticed there were puddles everywhere.

Rachel walked carefully, stepping around the puddles. Any other time she would have enjoyed plodding through the puddles, but not today. She dreaded going to school—dreaded seeing Audra sitting at Mary’s desk—dreaded having to stay indoors for recess.

Woosh! The wind picked up and whipped against Rachel’s legs, making it hard for her to walk. *Splat! Splat! Splat!* The rain splattered on her umbrella and splashed against the part of her dress that hung below her raincoat.

“Hurry up, slowpoke,” Jacob called over his shoulder. “You’re walking too slow.”

“I can’t walk any faster because it’s raining sideways and the wind’s slowing me down,” Rachel complained. Her day was off to a very bad start.

“It’s not raining sideways. The wind’s just blowing the rain, that’s all. What a bense! you are.”

“Mom said you’re not supposed to call me a silly child anymore.”

Jacob grunted and kept walking.

Rachel gripped the umbrella tighter. Deep down she sometimes wished she could do something so Jacob would get in trouble.

Woosh! Another gust of wind came up, and—*floop!*—Rachel’s umbrella turned inside out. “No, no, no,” she groaned. “Always trouble somewhere!”

Struggling against the blustery wind and drenching rain, Rachel tried to pull the umbrella right side out. It didn’t budge. The wind was too strong, and the rain poured down so hard she could barely see.

“Would it help if I walked slower and closer to you so I can block the wind?” Jacob asked.

Rachel wasn’t sure why Jacob was being so nice all of a sudden, but she really didn’t think him walking closer to her would help that much. “Danki anyway,” she said, “but you’d better keep moving. If we walk any slower we’ll be late to school.”

Jacob shrugged and continued on. Rachel trudged wearily behind.

By the time they arrived at the schoolhouse Rachel was wet and cold. As she stepped onto the porch, she looked up at the sky and spotted a ray of sun peeking through the clouds. She hoped this was the end of her troubles for today.

Elizabeth rang the bell, and Rachel followed Jacob

inside. She'd just slipped out of her raincoat and boots when Orlie walked up and pointed at her umbrella.

"What happened to that?" he asked with a snicker.

"It turned inside out because of the wind."

"It sure looks funny." He laughed some more. "I'll bet you had a hard time staying dry under that, huh?"

"Very funny!" Rachel struggled with the umbrella but finally got it turned right side out again. Next she took her lunch pail out of her backpack and was about to place it on the shelf near the door when Phoebe tapped her on the shoulder. "Did you get a new lunch pail? I like those cute little ladybugs."

"This is my old lunch pail. I painted lady bugs on both sides so no one would think the lunch pail was hers." Rachel glanced over at Audra, who sat on the floor struggling to take off her boots.

Audra wrinkled her nose and turned her back to Rachel.

"I wish I had a ladybug painted on my lunch pail," Phoebe said. "You're really good at art, Rachel."

Rachel felt pleased knowing someone thought she could paint well. "Would you like me to paint something on your lunch pail?" she asked Phoebe.

"Oh, jah. Could you do a ladybug like yours?"

Rachel shook her head. "If I put a ladybug on your lunch pail, then it will look like my lunch pail and we might get them verhuddelt."

"How about a butterfly or a turtle?" Phoebe suggested. "Could you paint one of those?"

"Jah, sure, if it's all right with your mamm." Phoebe

was two years younger than Rachel, and Rachel didn't think it would be right to paint anything on Phoebe's lunch pail unless Phoebe's mother gave her permission.

"I'll ask Mama when I get home." Phoebe smiled. "Can you bring your paints to school tomorrow?"

Rachel nodded. "If your mamm says it's okay, maybe I can paint something on your lunch pail during our lunch recess."

"That'd be good." Phoebe scurried off to her desk, and Rachel did the same. Maybe this wouldn't be such a bad day after all.

Elizabeth opened her Bible and had just started reading from Matthew 5:22, when Aaron King, the boy who sat behind Rachel, tapped her on the shoulder. "*Psst*. . .Rachel. . .I heard about the ladybugs you painted on your lunch pail," he whispered.

Rachel only nodded in reply. She knew everyone was expected to be quiet during the time of scripture reading.

Aaron tapped her shoulder again. "I also heard you're gonna bring your paints to school tomorrow. Could you paint a frog on my lunch pail?"

Rachel smiled. It was nice to know someone else appreciated her artwork.

"*Psst*. . .Rachel, did you hear what I said?"

Rachel turned around. "Jah, Aaron," she said, forgetting to whisper. "If your folks don't mind, I'd be happy to paint something on your lunch pail."

"Rachel Yoder, stop talking and turn around. You know better than to do that when I'm reading from the Bible."

Rachel jumped at the sound of her teacher's voice. Her face heated up as she turned toward the front of the room. She raised her hand.

"What is it, Rachel?"

"Aaron was asking if I could—"

Elizabeth shook her head. "You're the one who was turned around, and your voice was the only one I heard. Make sure it doesn't happen again."

Rachel's face grew hotter. *It's Aaron's fault I got in trouble. He should be in trouble with Elizabeth, too.* She tried to concentrate on the verse of scripture Elizabeth was reading about not being angry with others, but all she could think about was how the teacher had embarrassed her in front of the class and how Aaron had gotten her in trouble. She squeezed her eyes shut to keep tears from falling. *I'm not going to paint anything on Aaron's lunch pail now!*

When the scripture, prayer, and songs were done, it was time for arithmetic. Rachel had just opened her math book, when—*bzzzz. . .bzzzz*—a pesky fly flew past her nose. *Bzzzz. . .bzzzz. . .bzzzz.*

Rachel swatted at the fly, but it buzzed past her again. Maybe, if she was real fast, she could catch that irritating fly in her hand. It couldn't be that hard; she'd seen her brother Henry do it many times.

Rachel kept a close watch on the fly as it zipped over Orlie's head, flew around Audra's desk, and zoomed back to her own desk.

When the fly buzzed in front of Rachel's face, she reached out, and—*woosh!*—trapped the fly in her hand.

R-r-zzz. . . r-r-zzz. . . Rachel felt the vibration of the fly's wings flapping against her fingers and palm.

With a satisfied smile, Rachel held her hand up to her ear. *R-r-zzz. . . r-r-zzz. . .* She heard the fly buzzing.

Elizabeth left her desk and headed down the center aisle. "What have you got in your hand?" she asked, stopping in front of Rachel's desk.

Everyone in the room stopped what they were doing and turned to look at Rachel. Rachel's face heated up. "There's—uh—a fly in my hand."

Elizabeth's forehead wrinkled. "A fly?"

Rachel nodded.

"What are you doing with a fly in your hand?"

"It was bothering me, so I caught it."

"Well, please let it go and finish your arithmetic lesson."

Rachel opened her hand, and—*zip!*—the fly flew straight up and landed on Elizabeth's nose. The children all laughed, but Elizabeth frowned. She swatted at the fly as it buzzed across the room. Then it circled Sharon Smucker, the teacher's helper, darted over Aaron's head, and flew toward Rachel's desk. Rachel reached out, and—*woosh!*—the fly was trapped in her hand again.

Elizabeth's mouth dropped open, and the children all clapped.

Rachel smiled. "Would you like me to put the fly outside?"

Elizabeth nodded. "Please do. And be sure to wash your hands once you've let the fly go."

Rachel headed to the back of the room, opened the door, and released the pesky fly. Then she hurried to the outdoor pump, washed her hands, and raced back inside.

When she returned to her seat, Elizabeth told the class to turn in their papers. "It's not raining anymore and the sun is beginning to shine, so you may go outside for recess," she said.

Rachel didn't bother to put on her coat or boots before hurrying out the door.

"That was sure something the way you caught that fly in your hand," Orlie said when he caught up to Rachel near the swings. "How'd you learn to do that anyway?"

She smiled, noticing that Orlie didn't smell like garlic today. Maybe his mother had quit making him eat a piece of garlic every day like she'd done last winter. "I learned to catch flies by watching my brother Henry," she said. "He does it all the time."

"Do you think you can teach me how to catch a fly?" Orlie asked.

"I suppose I could."

"*Eww*. . .I'd never want to touch a dirty old fly. I don't like bugs at all," Audra said, stepping between Rachel and Orlie. She looked at Rachel and wrinkled her nose. "How could you stand touching that filthy fly? Aren't you worried about getting germs?"

"My little sister's not worried about that at all," Jacob said before Rachel could respond. "She's already got the fly flu."

Audra's eyes widened. "The fly flu?"

Jacob nodded. "That's right."

"How did you get the fly flu?" Audra asked Rachel.

Rachel was about to tell Audra that she'd better stay away from her, because the fly flu was contagious, when Orlie said, "There's no such thing as the fly flu. Rachel's bruder just likes to tease."

Jacob snorted a laugh and slapped his knee. "Once, when Rachel made a shoofly pie, it turned out so bad we all thought we were gonna come down with the fly flu."

Rachel poked Jacob's arm. "If you don't stop saying mean things, when we get home I'll tell Mom you were teasing me again."

"You do and I'll tell Mom that you were showing off in class today."

"I was not."

"Were so."

"Was not."

"I don't know about you, Orlie," Audra spoke up, "but I'm not going to stay here and listen to these two argue."

"Me neither," said Orlie. "Let's head over to the swings."

As Audra tromped past Rachel, she stepped in a mud puddle, and—*splat!*—a wave of mud splashed up and all over Rachel's new dress!

Rachel groaned. "What'd you do that for, Audra?"

Audra's face turned red. "I—I'm sorry."

Rachel looked down at her dress and clenched her fists. "My mamm's not going to be happy when she sees

that I've got mud all over my new dress."

"I didn't do it on purpose," Audra said. "It was just an accident."

Rachel whirled around and headed back to the schoolhouse. *I don't care what Audra says. I'll bet she stepped in that mud puddle on purpose because she doesn't like me. Well, I don't like her either.*

As Rachel and Jacob walked home from school that afternoon, it started to rain.

"Oh, great," Rachel complained. "I hope it doesn't rain sideways again."

Jacob ignored her and kept walking.

Rachel looked down at her dirty dress. "I'm mad at Audra for splattering mud all over my dress," she grumbled. "I'm sure she did it on purpose, too."

Jacob shook his head. "I doubt it, Rachel."

"Humph! A lot you know."

"I heard Audra and Orlie talking during recess, and Audra seemed nice enough to me. Maybe you need to give her a chance."

"I wouldn't be surprised if Mom makes me wash my dress, the way she did last summer when I fell in the pond during our end-of-the-school-year picnic," Rachel said, ignoring Jacob's comment about Audra.

Jacob halted and turned to face Rachel. "If you're so upset about the mud, why don't you hold out your skirt and let the rain wash it off?"

Rachel grunted. "That's a crazy idea, Jacob."

"No it's not. Just hold out the side of your skirt and

let the rain wash it clean.”

“But then my dress will be sopping wet.”

“Would you rather that it be wet or dirty?”

“Neither.”

“Then quit complaining.”

“I’m not.”

“Jah, you are. You’ve had a bad attitude ever since Mary moved away.”

Rachel swallowed around the lump in her throat. She didn’t need Jacob to remind her of how miserable she felt without Mary. And she didn’t like him sticking up for Audra. Rain splattered Rachel’s cheeks, mixing with her tears. She felt like she’d been rained on all day.

By the time Rachel’s house came into view, her legs were so wet they felt like two limp noodles. She trudged up the back steps behind Jacob and followed him into the house.

Rachel’s teeth chattered as she slipped out of her raincoat and boots. She opened Mom’s umbrella and set it on the floor in the corner of the utility room so it could dry.

“Mmm. . .I smell something good.” Jacob’s nose twitched as he hung his coat on a wall peg near the door. “I’ll bet Mom made a batch of cookies today.”

The sweet smell of cinnamon and molasses drew Rachel into the kitchen where she saw Mom removing a tray of cookies from the oven.

“I knew it. . .cookies!” Jacob smacked his lips.

“Oh, Rachel, I found your umbrella after you left for school this morning. It was under your bed.” Mom

turned with a smile on her face, but when she looked at Rachel, her smile disappeared. “*Ach* [oh], Rachel, what happened to your dress?”

“That new girl, Audra, stepped in a puddle during recess and splattered mud all over me,” Rachel said. “I think she did it on purpose because she doesn’t like me.”

“What makes you so sure she doesn’t like you?” Mom asked.

“I think it’s Rachel who doesn’t like Audra,” Jacob said before Rachel could reply. “She’s still mad at Audra for eating her peanut butter sandwich yesterday.”

Mom looked at Rachel over the top of her glasses. “Is that so, Rachel?”

Rachel nodded. “Audra didn’t take my lunch pail today, though. Everyone knew it was mine since I painted ladybugs on both sides of it. In fact, two of the kinner asked if I’d paint something on their lunch pails.”

“You paint very well, so I’m sure you’ll do a nice job.”

“Is it all right if I take my paints and brushes tomorrow so I can paint something on Phoebe’s and Aaron’s lunch pails?” Rachel asked.

“I suppose it would be all right.” Mom pointed to Rachel’s dress. “In the meantime, run upstairs and get changed out of that dress. When you come back down I’ll have some cookies and hot chocolate waiting.”

“Danki, Mom.” Rachel hurried up the stairs, smiling to herself. Mom hadn’t seemed that upset about the mud-splattered dress. Maybe she wouldn’t make Rachel wash it after all.

When Rachel returned to the kitchen, she took a seat at the table across from Jacob. Mom placed a plate of ginger cookies in the middle of the table and gave Rachel and Jacob mugs of hot chocolate. “Would either of you like some marshmallows to go in your hot chocolate?”

Jacob nodded eagerly and so did Rachel. Mom took a bag of marshmallows from the cupboard and handed it to Jacob. He took three, gave the bag to Rachel, and she took four. She popped one in her mouth and dropped the other three in her mug.

Mom poured herself a cup of hot chocolate and took a seat beside Rachel. “Did you put your dirty dress in the laundry basket?”

Rachel nodded. “I put my wet stockings in there, too.”

“I’ll wash clothes tomorrow.” Mom glanced at the raindrops splattered against the kitchen window. “If it continues to rain, I’ll have to hang the clean clothes in the cellar.”

“I hope Buddy stayed dry in his doghouse today,” Jacob said. “When I’m done with my hot chocolate I think I’ll go outside and check on him.”

“I’m going out to the barn to see Cuddles,” Rachel said. “After that, I may write Mary a letter.”

“Speaking of Mary. . .” Mom smiled at Rachel. “When I checked the answering machine in our phone shed this morning, there was a message from your aunt Irma.”

Rachel’s eyes widened. “What’d she say?”

“Just that they’d made it to Indiana and will call

again or write a letter after they get settled in.”

“Was there a message for me from Mary?”

Mom shook her head. “I’m afraid not, but I’m sure Mary will write to you soon.”

A lump formed in Rachel’s throat and she swallowed hard. If Mary hadn’t cared enough to give her mamm a message for Rachel then maybe Rachel wouldn’t bother to write Mary a letter after all.

“I—I think I’ll go out to the barn and see Cuddles,” she mumbled.

“Mom pointed to Rachel’s mug. “You haven’t finished drinking your hot chocolate yet.”

“I’ll finish it when I come back inside.”

Jacob rolled his eyes. “It’ll be cold by then, little benschel.”

“Jacob Yoder, what have I told you about calling your sister a silly child?” Mom squinted at Jacob over the top of her glasses.

“Sorry,” he mumbled.

Mom patted Rachel’s hand. “Go on out to the barn. When you come back to the house I’ll heat your hot chocolate for you.”

“Danki.” Rachel pushed away from the table, grabbed her raincoat, and rushed out the door.

“Cuddles. . .where are you Cuddles?” Rachel panted as she raced into the barn.

“Rachel, is that you?”

Rachel glanced around. That was Grandpa’s voice, but she saw no sign of him.

“Where are you, Grandpa?”

“I—I’m over here behind the hay.”

Rachel hurried over to the bales of hay piled in one corner of the barn and found Grandpa down on his knees. “What’s wrong, Grandpa? How come your face is all red, and why are you on your knees?”

“I was moving some bales, and I pulled a muscle in my back. It hurts something awful, and I don’t think I can’t get up on my own.” He moaned. “Can you get me some help?”

“Jah, Grandpa. I’ll be right back.” Rachel dashed out of the barn and hurried into the house. She found Mom and Jacob still in the kitchen.

“Grandpa’s in the barn and he hurt his back. He says he can’t get up, so he sent me to get help.”

Mom jumped up from her chair. “Jacob, your daed and Henry are fixing some fences on the other side of the pasture. Run out there and get them right away!”

Jacob grabbed his jacket and rushed out the door.

“I’m going out to the barn to be with my daed,” Mom said to Rachel. “You can either wait here or come along.”

“I’ll come with you.” Rachel followed Mom out the door, praying that Grandpa would be okay.