

*Out of Control*

# Dedication

To the students and teachers at the Honeybrook School in Topeka, Indiana. Thanks for letting me visit with you!

# Glossary

<i>ach</i> —oh	<i>jah</i> —yes
<i>aldi</i> —girlfriend	<i>kapp</i> —cap
<i>appetitlich</i> —delicious	<i>kinner</i> —children
<i>baremlich</i> —terrible	<i>koppweh</i> —headache
<i>bauchweh</i> —stomachache	<i>kumme</i> —come
<i>bensel</i> —silly child	<i>maedel</i> —girl
<i>blappermaul</i> —blabbermouth	<i>mamm</i> —mom
<i>blatsching</i> —spanking	<i>maus</i> —mouse
<i>boppli</i> —baby	<i>melassich</i> —molasses
<i>bruder</i> —brother	<i>mupsich</i> —stupid
<i>buwe</i> —boy	<i>retschbeddi</i> —tattletale
<i>daed</i> —dad	<i>schmaert</i> —smart
<i>danki</i> —thank you	<i>schnee</i> —snow
<i>dappich</i> —clumsy	<i>schneeballe</i> —snowball
<i>dumm</i> —dumb	<i>schnell</i> —quickly
<i>ekelhaft</i> —disgusting	<i>schweschder</i> —sister
<i>grank</i> —sick	<i>ungeduldich</i> —impatient
<i>guder mariye</i> —good morning	<i>verhuddelt</i> —mixed up
<i>gut</i> —good	<i>wasserpable</i> —chicken pox
<i>hund</i> —dog	<i>wunderbaar</i> —wonderful

*Halt ei, sell geht zu weit!*—Stop, that's going too far!

*Sis nau futsch!*—It's all ruined now!

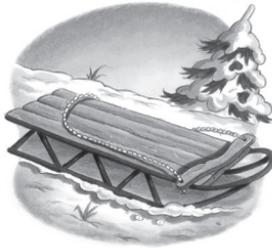
*Dummel dich net!*—Take your time, don't hurry!

*Gern gschehne.*—You are welcome.



# Chapter 1

## Sledding Troubles



*Woosh. . . Woosh. . .* The wind whistled under the eaves of the house, rattling Rachel Yoder’s bedroom window.

*Thump-thumpety-thump!* Rachel’s heart pounded inside her chest. She shivered and pulled the quilt under her chin. She had thought she was getting less afraid of storms. But it was hard to be brave in a dark room with the wind making strange noises. What if the windows broke? What if the tree outside her bedroom window toppled and crashed onto the house?

Rachel closed her eyes and prayed, “Dear God, protect this house and all of us in it. Help me not be afraid.”

Rachel drew in a deep breath. She felt a bit calmer, and her heart wasn’t beating so fast. Maybe now she could sleep.

*Tap-tap. Tap-tap.*

Rachel's heart raced again. She tipped her head toward the window and listened. *Tap-tap. Tap-tap.* Was someone knocking on the glass? Had they climbed the tree outside her window? Were they trying to enter her room?

*My imagination is just playing tricks on me. The wind is just blowing a tree branch against the window.*

*Screech. . . Screech. . .* The new sound reminded Rachel of fingernails on a blackboard.

*There's no reason to be afraid, she told herself. God is watching over me.*

Rachel pushed the quilt aside, turned on the flashlight she kept by her bed, and plodded across the chilly wood floor. She lifted the dark green window shade and pressed her forehead against the cold glass.

*Screech. . . Screech. Tap-tap. . . tap-tap.*

Rachel gasped when she saw a small pink paw flopped against the window.

"Cuddles!"

She quickly opened the window, and a gust of cold wind swept into the room. "You silly kitten! What are you doing in that tree on such a cold, snowy night?"

Cuddles's pathetic *meow* was drowned out by the wooshing wind.

Snowflakes swirled into the room. Rachel picked up the cat and shut the window. "Poor Cuddles," she whispered against the cat's frosty head. "Did you get locked out of the barn?"

Cuddles meowed again and licked Rachel's chin with her sandpaper tongue.

Rachel giggled. "You're sure getting heavy, Cuddles. Before long you'll be a full-grown cat."

*Meow!*

"Do you want to sleep with me tonight?"

*Meow! Meow!* Cuddles pushed her paws against Rachel's chest and purred.

"You're getting me all wet!" Rachel felt the cold dampness through her nightgown and shivered. She plucked a small blanket from the doll cradle Pap had made her last Christmas. Then she wrapped Cuddles in the blanket and placed her at the foot of the bed.

Rachel was about to crawl back in bed, when Cuddles wriggled free from the blanket, leaped into the air, and landed on Rachel's pillow. The cat purred as she kneaded the pillow, first with one paw and then the other.

"Stop that!" Rachel scolded. "You're getting my pillow wet!" She picked up the cat, wrapped her in the doll blanket again, and placed her back on the end of the bed. "Now go to sleep, and I'll see you in the morning."

Rachel crawled into bed and pulled the quilt under her chin. The howling wind didn't bother her nearly so much now that Cuddles was near. She closed her eyes and was almost asleep when she heard *screech. . .screech. . .*

Her eyes popped open and she sat straight up.

Cuddles was scratching a bedpost.

“Don’t do that! You’ll mark up my bed.” Rachel pushed the covers aside and climbed out of bed. She wrapped Cuddles in the doll blanket and placed her at the end of the bed. “Now go to sleep.”

Rachel was about to climb into bed again, when Cuddles sprang off the bed, slid across the floor, and bit into the shoelaces from one of Rachel’s shoes. She flipped her head from side to side. *Bump. . . bump. . . bump. . .* the shoe thudded against the hardwood floor.

“*Shh. . .* If you’re not careful, you’ll wake Mom and Pap.” Rachel grabbed the shoe and put it in her closet. Then she picked up Cuddles and put her on the bed. “If you make me get up again, I’ll put you back outside.”

*Meow!* Cuddles tipped her head and looked at Rachel as if to say, *“I’ll be good. Please, don’t put me in the cold.”*

“All right then.” Sighing, Rachel got into bed, pulled the quilt up to her chin, and closed her eyes. She listened for several minutes, but all was quiet. Cuddles must have finally gone to sleep.

When Rachel woke up the next morning, she rushed to the window and lifted the shade. The wind had stopped howling and the snow had quit falling. A perfect day for sledding!

Rachel thought about her new friend, Orlie. He’d told her that he thought the new sled he’d gotten for Christmas was the fastest around.

“We’ll see about that,” Rachel murmured as she slipped her nightgown over her head. “I’ll bet my trusty old sled will go faster than Orlie’s shiny new one. He just likes to brag.”

She opened her closet door and took out a long-sleeved dress. “I’d better dress warmly today if I’m going to race my sled during recess.”

After dressing, Rachel hurried downstairs to the kitchen. Mom was in front of their gas-operated stove, stirring a pot of oatmeal. The spicy aroma of cinnamon tickled Rachel’s nose and made her stomach rumble.

“*Guder mariye* [good morning], Rachel,” Mom said with a cheery smile.

“Good morning, Mom.”

“Did you sleep well last night?”

“The wind kept me awake at first, and then after I brought—” Rachel clamped her hand over her mouth. She had almost blurted out that she’d let Cuddles into her room.

“What’s the matter?” Mom asked, squinting her blue eyes. “Why are you covering your mouth?”

Rachel dropped her hand. “Nothing’s wrong. I slept okay. How about you, Mom?”

“Except for your *daed’s* [dad’s] snoring, I slept fairly well, too.” Mom touched her stomach and smiled. “I guess I should get used to not sleeping so much. When the *boppli* [baby] is born in July, I’ll be up several times during the night to feed the little one.”

Rachel grimaced. She wasn't sure she wanted a new baby in the house. What if Mom and Pap loved the baby more than they loved her? What if she had to do more chores after the baby came?

"Would you please set the table?" Mom asked, touching Rachel's arm.

"*Jah* [yes], okay." Rachel reached into the cupboard to get the glasses, but her elbow bumped the box of brown sugar on the cupboard. The box tumbled to the floor, and—*splat!*—brown sugar spilled everywhere.

"Always trouble somewhere," Rachel muttered. "I'll clean it up right away, Mom." She hurried to the cleaning closet for the broom and dustpan.

*Swish! Swish!* She swept sugar into the dustpan. *Swish! Swish!* Just a few more sweeps and it would be done.

Rachel bent over to pick up the dustpan, when—*woosh!*—a gray-and-white ball of fur streaked into the room. The dustpan flew out of Rachel's hand, and brown sugar flew everywhere. Some even landed on Cuddles's head.

"Oh no," Rachel said with a groan.

"What's that cat doing in the house?" Mom rubbed the spot on her nose where her metal-framed glasses should have been. Instead, they had slipped to the end of her nose. "I wonder if one of the men left the back door open when they went to do their chores," she said, pushing her glasses back in place.

Rachel frowned. Come to think of it, she hadn't seen Cuddles on her bed this morning. The silly kitten must have hidden so she wouldn't be put out in the cold.

Rachel knew Mom didn't like Cuddles to be in her room—especially not on the bed. She wondered what she could tell Mom that wouldn't be a lie. Should she admit that she'd let Cuddles into her room last night, or should she let Mom think the cat had entered through an open door this morning? Maybe it would be best if she just kept quiet.

"However the cat got in," Mom said, "she's caused a mess. The troublesome creature needs to go back outside, *schnell* [quickly]."

"I'll put her out." Rachel scooped Cuddles into her arms, opened the back door, and set the cat on the porch. "You'd better go out to the barn now." She shook her finger. "And if you don't stop getting into trouble, Mom might not let you in the house anymore."

"Why didn't you bring your sled this morning?" Rachel asked her brother Jacob as she trudged through the snow, pulling her sled toward the schoolhouse.

"Don't feel like sledding." Jacob kicked at a clump of snow with the toe of his boot.

"Are you afraid my sled might beat yours in a race? Is that why you left it in the barn?"

Jacob shook his head.

"Then why didn't you bring it?"

“I just told you. . .I don’t feel like sledding today.”

“How come?”

“You ask too many questions, little *bensel* [silly child].”

“I’m not a silly child. Will you ever stop calling me that?”

“Maybe someday. . .when we’re both old and gray.”

Rachel frowned. “Very funny.”

Jacob reached down and scooped up a handful of snow. He waited until Rachel walked past him, then *splat!*—the cold, wet snow hit the collar of Rachel’s coat. Some ran down her neck.

Rachel shivered and glared at Jacob. “I think someone ought to wash your face in the snow!”

“Who’s gonna do it?” Jacob taunted. “*You*, little *bensel*?”

Rachel was tempted to say something mean to her brother but figured he would say something even meaner.

*You’re the silly child*, she thought as she hurried along. *Someday you’ll be sorry you teased me so much, and I hope it’s before we’re both old and gray.*

When Rachel arrived at school, she spotted several sleds lined up near the porch. Orlie Troyer stood nearby talking with another boy.

“Guder mariye, Rachel,” he said. “I see you brought your sled with you today.”

“Good morning.” Rachel leaned her sled against the building. “I can hardly wait for recess. It will be so much fun to go sledding.”

Orlie motioned to his sled. "I'm sure I'll have more fun than anyone else, since I've got the fastest sled here."

"I'll bet my sled's faster," Rachel said.

Orlie wrinkled his freckled nose. "Bet it's not."

Before Rachel could respond, Orlie said, "How about if I race you at recess and we'll see who has the fastest sled?"

Rachel nodded. "I'd be happy to race you. I was going to suggest that."

Just then their teacher, Elizabeth Miller, rang the school bell. Jacob nudged Rachel's arm. "We'd better get inside."

"Jah, okay." Rachel hurried into the room with the rest of the children who'd been in the snowy schoolyard.

Rachel hung her coat on a wall peg near the door and placed her black outer bonnet and lunch pail on the shelf above. Then she went to her desk.

Elizabeth tapped her desk bell, signaling for everyone to get quiet. "Good morning, boys and girls."

"Good morning, Elizabeth," the children said.

Rachel was happy that Elizabeth was back from her trip to Tennessee. She'd gone there shortly before Christmas to see her grandmother. Rachel had missed Elizabeth.

Elizabeth opened her Bible and read from Proverbs 14:5: "A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies."

Rachel cringed as she thought about this morning

when Mom had wondered how Cuddles had gotten in the house.

*As soon as I get home I'd better tell Mom the truth about letting Cuddles into my room last night,* Rachel decided.

"*Psst.* . . Rachel, stand for prayer." Mary nudged Rachel's arm from across the aisle.

Rachel jumped to her feet and bowed her head as she and the other children said the Lord's Prayer.

After the prayer, everyone filed to the front of the room and sang one song in English and one in German.

When the children returned to their seats, classes began.

For the next hour, Rachel concentrated on her schoolwork. When it was time for morning recess, Rachel hurried to the back of the room, slipped into her heavy wool cape and black bonnet, and rushed out the door.

"Can I take a quick ride?" Rachel's cousin Mary asked when Rachel grabbed hold of her sled.

Rachel's eyebrows furrowed. "Didn't you bring your sled today?"

Mary shook her head. "One of the runners is wobbly. Papa hasn't fixed it yet."

Rachel stared at her sled. Morning recess wasn't very long. If she let Mary borrow the sled, she might not have enough time to race Orlie. Still, Rachel didn't want to be selfish. "I'll let you use my sled after I race Orlie," she said.

“Please, Rachel.” Mary pouted. “I’ll just take one quick ride—I promise.”

“Maybe Mary would like to race me,” Orlie said, pulling his sled beside Rachel’s.

Mary shook her head. “I just want a nice ride down the hill. I don’t want to race anyone.”

“That’s okay. It’s Rachel I promised to race anyway.” Orlie gave Rachel his slanted grin. “We can have our race as soon as Mary brings your sled back up the hill.”

Rachel nibbled on her lip. As much as she wanted to race Orlie right now, she wanted to please her cousin, too. Mary was Rachel’s best friend, and if she didn’t let Mary use the sled, Mary might think Rachel was selfish.

“Okay, Mary,” Rachel said. “Just one ride, though. Remember, I’m supposed to race Orlie. He thinks he can beat me.”

“Jah, okay.” Mary grabbed the rope on Rachel’s sled and pulled it to the hill behind the schoolhouse where the others were sledding.

Rachel followed. “Just one turn,” she reminded her cousin.

Mary sat on the sled and grabbed the rope attached to the steering handles. “Would you please give me a push, Rachel?”

Rachel placed both hands on Mary’s back. “One. . . two. . . three!” She pushed hard, but the sled only moved a few inches.

“Try it again, Rachel!” Mary directed over her shoulder. “You’re not pushing hard enough.”

Rachel gritted her teeth. “I did push hard. The sled doesn’t want to move.”

“If it won’t move, then it sure won’t beat my sled,” Orlie said.

“Maybe some snow is stuck to the runners.” Mary climbed off the sled and kicked at a clump of snow underneath the runners. Then she climbed back on. “Let’s try it again.”

“*Ooph!*” Rachel grunted as she gave Mary another hefty shove. This time the sled glided down the hill, but at a snail’s pace.

Orlie snickered and nudged Rachel with his elbow. “You won’t beat me on that slow sled!”

Rachel frowned. If her sled wouldn’t go any faster than this, how could she beat Orlie?

“I think I’ll take my sled for a trial run,” Orlie said. “As fast as my sled goes, I should be back up here before Mary makes it to the bottom.”

Rachel frowned again. Could Orlie’s sled really be that fast?

Orlie jumped on his sled, pushed off with his feet, and—*zip!*—he sailed down the hill so fast it looked like he was flying.

“Oh great,” she muttered. “Unless I can figure out some way to make my sled go faster than that, I’ll never win a race against Orlie.”

“That wasn’t much of a ride, was it?” Rachel asked when Mary trudged up the hill several minutes later. Orlie was right behind her, wearing a triumphant smile.

Mary shrugged. “I thought the ride was okay.”

“Maybe I need to wax the runners.” Rachel wished she’d brought one of Mom’s candles from home. Her brother Henry had told her once that candles worked well for waxing sled runners.

Orlie sauntered up to Rachel and shook his head. “Your sled is really slow. Are you sure you want to race me, Rachel?”

“Maybe you shouldn’t race Orlie,” Mary said. She leaned close to Rachel’s ear. “His sled is really fast, and yours goes really slow. I don’t see how you can win a race against him.”

Rachel patted her cold cheeks to warm them as she pondered the problem. “I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” Orlie called as Rachel hurried toward the schoolhouse.

She just kept trotting.

Rachel returned several minutes later with a candle she’d borrowed from their teacher. She smiled at Mary. “I’ll take my sled now, please.”

“What are you planning to do with that candle?” Mary asked.

“You’ll see.” Rachel squatted beside her sled, flipped it over, and rubbed the candle back and forth across the runners. “That should do the trick!” She turned the sled

over again, grabbed the rope, and pulled it to the edge of the hill. "I'm ready when you are, Orlie!"

"Ready as I'll ever be!" Orlie looked at Rachel and winked. "This will be a piece of cake."

Rachel nodded. "I'm sure it will, only it will be *my* piece of cake."

"We'll see about that," Orlie grunted.

"Want me to say when to start?" Mary asked.

Rachel nodded. So did Orlie. All the other children lined up at the top of the hill to watch.

Mary cupped her hands around her mouth. "Get ready. . . Get set. . . Go!"

Everyone cheered as Rachel and Orlie pushed off with their feet. Orlie's sled whooshed ahead of Rachel's, but Rachel's sled picked up speed as it zoomed down the hill. It went so fast she could barely hold the rope. "Yippee!" she hollered. "I'm going to win this race!"

*Whap!*—the rope snapped in two. Rachel could no longer control which way she was going. "Oh no!" she cried. Rachel's sled was out of control—she headed straight for the creek!

## Chapter 2

### A Troublesome Day



Rachel rose out of the water sputtering and mumbling, “Always trouble somewhere.”

A hand reached out to Rachel. Orlie stood in the water beside her sled. “What happened, Rachel? Are you okay?”

“I—I’m not hurt. I’m sure I’ll be fine once my clothes are dry.” Rachel tried to get up on her own, but fell back in the water with a *splash!*

“Here, let me help you,” Orlie offered, extending his hand again.

Rachel took Orlie’s hand, clambered to her feet, and plodded out of the water, pulling her sled along.

Mary stepped up to Rachel. “You shouldn’t have waxed those runners so much. What were you thinking?”

“I thought if I waxed the runners it would make my sled go faster so I could win the race,” Rachel explained.

“My sled did go faster. If the rope hadn’t broken, I would have won.”

“Jah, right,” Orlie said, shaking his head.

Mary grabbed one end of the broken rope while Rachel grabbed the other. As they sloshed back up the hill, Rachel grumbled. She didn’t like being wet and cold, and she didn’t like losing the race. She wished she hadn’t raced Orlie at all. She wished it was summer!

When Rachel entered the classroom, Elizabeth exclaimed, “Rachel, your clothes are wet! What happened?”

Rachel explained about the race and the broken rope that caused her to lose control of her sled.

“You shouldn’t have waxed those runners,” Mary put in.

“I—I know. You s—said that already.” Rachel’s teeth chattered so much she could barely talk. “If the r—rope hadn’t broken, and the cr—creek hadn’t b—been in the way, I would have w—won that race.”

“You don’t always have to win, Rachel,” Mary said.

Rachel just rubbed her hands briskly over her cold arms.

“Rachel and Orlie, you both need to stand in front of the woodstove until your clothes are dry,” Elizabeth instructed. “Otherwise, you might catch a cold.”

“I’m not that wet, Teacher,” Orlie said. “Just my boots and the bottom of my pants got wet when I went to help Rachel.”

Elizabeth nodded. "Then take off your boots and socks and set them by the stove."

Orlie did as their teacher said then sat at his desk.

"What about my schoolwork?" Rachel asked. "How can I do that if I'm standing in front of the stove?"

"Maybe we could move your desk closer to the stove," Elizabeth suggested.

Rachel opened her mouth to reply, but all that came out was a big *ah-choo!*

Elizabeth's forehead wrinkled. "I think it will take too long for your clothes to dry with you still wearing them. You probably need to go home for the rest of the day."

"What about the spelling test tomorrow?" Spelling was Rachel's best subject, and she didn't want to miss studying for it.

"I'll give you the list of words," Elizabeth said.

"You can practice them at home." She motioned to her helper, Sharon Smucker, who was helping the younger children with their coats. "Sharon, would you please get your horse and buggy ready and take Rachel home?"

"Of course I'll take her home." Sharon smiled at Rachel. "I should have the horse and buggy ready to go in a few minutes, so you stay here where it's warm. I'll pull up out front when I'm ready."

"*Danki* [thank you]." Rachel moved closer to the stove, and Sharon hurried out the door.

When Rachel arrived home from school, she found

Mom sitting at the kitchen table, reading the newspaper. The fire in the woodstove crackled and snapped, spilling its warmth into the room.

Mom looked up as Rachel stepped in. “Rachel, what are you doing home from school so soon?” She glanced at the clock on the far wall. “It’s not even noon yet.”

Rachel explained about the sled going out of control, and how she’d landed in the creek.

Mom squinted. “*Ach* [oh], Rachel, you’re right—you are soaking wet!”

Rachel sneezed. “That’s why Elizabeth sent me home. She didn’t think my clothes would dry fast enough in front of the woodstove at school.”

“You could go back to school after you change clothes,” Mom suggested, “but I’m worried you might catch a cold.”

“Elizabeth said I could stay home the rest of the day.” Rachel lifted her backpack. “She gave me a list of spelling words to study.”

“That’s good,” Mom said with a smile. “While you’re getting out of those wet clothes, I’ll run warm water in the tub so you can take a bath. After you finish your homework, you can help me bake a shoofly pie.”

Rachel licked her lips. “Yum.” She always enjoyed eating one of Mom’s delicious molasses-filled pies.

After Rachel had gone over her spelling lesson, Mom set out a glass pie pan. “After the pie is done, I’ll whip

some cream, so we can have it with our pie tonight.” Her glasses had slipped to the middle of her nose, and she pushed them back in place.

“That sounds *gut* [good],” Rachel said as she put her choring apron over her dress. “Mom, I’ve been wondering about something.”

“What’s that?”

“Since your glasses never seem to stay in place, why you don’t get some new ones.”

“New glasses wouldn’t do me any good,” Mom said.

“Why not?”

Mom reached under her glasses and rubbed the skinniest part of her nose. “The bridge of my nose is very narrow. I’ve always had trouble keeping my glasses in place.”

Rachel touched the bridge of her own nose and frowned. She hoped she never had to wear glasses.

“Why don’t you get out the pie ingredients while I roll the dough?” Mom motioned to the cupboard across the room.

“What do I need?”

“You’ll need molasses, baking soda, brown sugar, eggs, and hot water for the filling. For the crumb part, you’ll need flour, brown sugar, butter, nutmeg, and cinnamon,” Mom said. “Oh, and would you please get some salt? I’ll need to fill the salt shaker on the table before we have supper.”

Rachel hurried to the cupboard where Mom kept

baking supplies. She set out each item while repeating it to Mom so she wouldn't forget anything. She didn't want the shoofly pie to turn out terrible, like the cookies she made last summer when she used baking soda instead of baking powder and didn't put in enough sugar.

Mom watched Rachel measure the ingredients. When the filling and crumbs had been mixed in a bowl and put into the pie shell, Mom smiled at Rachel and said, "It looks like I have enough dough left over for another pie. Why don't you make the second pie? Then you can put both pies in the oven."

"Will you watch me make the second pie?" Rachel asked.

Mom covered her mouth and yawned. "I'm feeling kind of tired, so I thought I'd lie on the sofa awhile."

"Are you okay, Mom?"

"I'm fine—just tired," Mom said as she turned on the oven. "I'm sure you'll do okay, but if you need any help, follow the recipe in the cookbook on the counter."

*Mom sure is tired a lot lately. I guess it's because she'll soon have a baby. Rachel looked at the pie she'd put together with Mom. I did all right when Mom was here. I hope I don't mess things up on my own.*

Rachel propped the toe of her right foot on the heel of her left foot as she stared at the ingredients on the counter. "Everything's here. I just need to make sure I put the right amount of each ingredient in the pie."

As Rachel added a cup of molasses to the bowl, she

thought about the spelling test they would have at school tomorrow. Even though spelling was her best subject and she'd already read through the list, she wanted to study more so she'd get a perfect score.

She glanced at her backpack, hanging from a wall peg near the back door. Maybe she could study for the spelling test while she made the pie. *Jah, that's just what I'll do!*

Rachel placed her spelling words on the counter next to the cookbook. As she added another ingredient to the bowl, she said the first spelling word: "Celebrate. C-e-l-e-b-r-a-t-e."

She stirred the filling with a wooden spoon as she said the next word. "Mediate. M-e-d-i-t-a-t-e." She shook her head. "No, it's mediate, not meditate. M-e-d-i-a-t-e." Rachel moved to the next word. "Selection. S-e-l-e-c-t-i-o-n. These words are so easy—a piece of cake," she said with a giggle. "No, make that a piece of pie."

Rachel continued to repeat the spelling words as she added the rest of the ingredients and poured half the filling into the pie crust. Next, she sprinkled half the crumb mixture over the filling then added more filling and the rest of the crumbs. Carefully, she carried the pie to the oven and set it on the rack. Then she did the same with the pie she and Mom had made together. She closed the oven door and set the timer for ten minutes.

Rachel grabbed her spelling words and sat at the

table. Soon the kitchen was filled with warmth from the stove and a delicious aroma of pies baking in the oven.

*Ding! Ding! Ding!*—the timer went off. Rachel turned the heat down to 350 degrees and set the timer for fifty more minutes. Rachel set two cooling racks on the counter and went back to the table to study her list of spelling words.

*Ding! Ding! Ding!*—the timer went off again.

When Rachel opened the oven door this time, the sweet smell of molasses rose with the steam. The edges of both pies were lightly brown—just perfect. She removed the pies and set them on the cooling racks then headed back to the table. If she studied her spelling words until Mom came back to the kitchen, she was sure to get a good grade on the test.

After supper that evening, Mom announced that she and Rachel had made shoofly pie for dessert.

“Yum.” Jacob smacked his lips. “Is there any whipping cream to go with it?”

“Jah, there is,” Mom said as she set one of the pies on the table. She smiled at Rachel. “I put the second pie shell in an aluminum pan, so this I know is the one you baked yourself. Would you like to cut and serve it for us?”

Rachel nodded, feeling pleased with herself. The pie she had baked looked as good as the one in the glass pan that she’d helped Mom make. She was sure her pie

would taste delicious.

Rachel hurried across the room, took out six plates, and placed them on the table—one each for Grandpa Schrock, Pap, Henry, Jacob, Mom, and one for herself. Next, she got out a knife and cut the pie into six hefty pieces. She lifted out the first one and placed it on Grandpa's plate. Since he was the oldest member of their family, she thought he should be the first to taste her delicious pie.

While Rachel was serving the others, Grandpa dipped a spoon into the bowl of whipping cream Mom had set on the table. He winked at Rachel and forked a piece of pie into his mouth. As he began to chew, a strange look came over his face. His bushy gray eyebrows pulled together. His nose twitched. His lips curled up at the corners.

Rachel figured Mom probably hadn't put enough sugar in the whipping cream.

Pap took a bite of his pie and quickly reached for his glass of water.

"This pie sure looks good," Henry said. He took a bite, dashed across the room, and spit the pie into the sink. "Ugh! That tastes *baremlieh* [terrible]! What did you do to this pie, Rachel?"

"I—I don't know. I thought I did everything Mom told me to do with the first pie." Rachel's throat felt clogged and tears sprang to her eyes. First the mishap with her sled at school and now a ruined pie!

Couldn't she do anything right? This had sure been a troublesome day!

Jacob tasted his pie then, and quickly dumped it in the garbage can. "This is the worst shoofly pie I've ever tasted! It's not even fit for a fly." He squinted at Rachel. "We'll probably all get the fly flu after eating this, and then our faces will turn blue."

"Jacob Yoder, that's a terrible thing to say," Mom said, shaking her head. "I'm sure Rachel didn't ruin the pie." She poked her fork into her piece and took a bite. Her lips curled, the way Grandpa's had, and she reached for her glass of water. "Ach, Rachel, the pie's not sweet enough, and it tastes salty."

Jacob placed his plate in the sink next to Henry's. "Maybe Rachel ruined the pie on purpose so we'd all get the fly flu and our faces would turn blue."

Rachel's chin quivered. *I won't cry in front of Jacob. I won't give him the satisfaction.*

"Stop teasing your sister, Jacob," Pap scolded. "I'm sure you couldn't bake a pie any better than hers."

"Bet I could."

Rachel was on the verge of telling Jacob that he could help Mom do the baking from now on, but Mom spoke first. "How much *melassich* [molasses] did you use, Rachel?"

"One cup," Rachel replied.

"How much brown sugar did you put in the filling?"

"Brown sugar?" Rachel stared at a stain on the

tablecloth. “I—uh—think maybe I forgot the brown sugar.”

“Did you put brown sugar in the crumb mixture?” Grandpa asked, his bushy gray eyebrows lifting high on his forehead.

Rachel pursed her lips. “I’m not sure. I was studying my spelling words while I mixed the ingredients. That must be why I forgot the brown sugar.”

“Did you use any salt?” Mom asked.

Rachel thought hard. “Jah, I think I did. It was sitting on the cupboard, so—”

Mom shook her head as she clucked her tongue. “The recipe I use calls for cinnamon and nutmeg in the crumb mixture, but no salt.”

“But a box of salt was on the cupboard,” Rachel sputtered.

“I asked you to set that out so I could fill the salt shaker on the table, remember?”

Rachel nodded slowly.

“No wonder Rachel’s pie tastes so baremlich,” Jacob said when he returned to the table. “Can I have a piece of the pie you made, Mom?”

Mom shook her head. “Not until you apologize to your sister for saying her pie is baremlich.”

“But it is terrible,” Jacob insisted. “In fact, it’s the worst shoofly pie I’ve ever tasted!”

Rachel couldn’t stand anymore. Sniffing, she ran out of the kitchen and up the stairs two at a time. She

flew into her room and flopped onto her bed. She lay there staring at the ceiling. “I am a little bensel!”

A few minutes later, the door creaked open, and Mom stepped into the room. She sat beside Rachel and took her hand. “A ruined pie isn’t the end of the world.”

“Jacob and Henry think it is. They always make fun of me when I mess up.” *Sniff! Sniff!* “I can never do anything right.”

“That’s not true.” Mom pointed across the room to the collection of rocks Rachel had painted. “You made those look like ladybugs and turtles. Not everyone can paint as well as you do, daughter.”

Rachel swiped at the tears rolling down her cheeks. “I thought I might try painting a rock to look like Cuddles sometime.”

“That’s a fine idea,” Mom said with a nod.

Rachel remembered that she hadn’t told Mom the truth about the cat in the house last night. She swallowed hard and sat up. “I—I need to tell you something, Mom.”

“What’s that?”

“When Cuddles bumped into the dustpan this morning, and you said you wondered how she’d gotten inside, I should have told you the truth.”

“What truth?”

“I heard scratching at my window last night. When I opened it, Cuddles was in the tree, begging to get in.” Rachel drew in a quick breath. “The wind was howling,

and it was cold out there in the snow, so I—”

“Let the cat come into your room,” Mom said, finishing Rachel’s sentence.

Rachel nodded.

“Was Cuddles on your bed?”

“Jah.”

“You know I don’t mind the cat being inside as long as she’s wearing a flea collar, but I don’t approve of her being on your bed.”

“I’m sorry for letting Cuddles sleep on my bed,” Rachel said. “And I’m sorrier for not telling you sooner.”

Mom gave Rachel a hug. “I accept your apology, and I’m glad you told the truth. Confession’s always good for the soul.”

Rachel nodded and nestled against Mom’s chest. At least the troublesome day had ended on a good note.

# Chapter 3

## True or False



*Wheeee!*” Rachel stretched out her legs as she hung onto the rope dangling from the hayloft in their barn. “This is fun!” she shouted to Jacob, who was cleaning one of the horse stalls. “Do you want to take a turn?”

Jacob held up the shovel in his hands. “I’d like to, but I’ve got work to do.” He squinted at Rachel. “If I’m not mistaken, you’re supposed to be in the house, studying for tomorrow’s history test.”

Rachel let go of the rope and dropped into the mound of hay below. “I’ll study later. Right now I think I’ll visit old Tom,” she said, scrambling to her feet.

Jacob frowned. “You’ll be sorry if you flunk that test.”

“I passed my spelling test last week.”

“That’s different; you like spelling.”

It was true—spelling came easy to Rachel. History was harder for her, and she didn’t enjoy it nearly as much as she did spelling.

“I’ll study later.” Rachel headed for the stall where Pap’s old buggy horse was kept when he wasn’t in the pasture. Old Tom couldn’t pull their buggy anymore, so Rachel visited him as often as she could.

As Rachel stepped into Tom’s stall, the sweet smell of fresh hay tickled her nose.

She was glad Tom had a nice warm place to stay during the cold winter months. She was glad Pap had kept the horse even though he was getting old and couldn’t do much.

“How are you doing, Tom?”

Tom dropped his head, and Rachel stroked his silky brown mane. “Are you warm enough here in the barn?”

Tom whinnied and nuzzled Rachel’s hand with his warm nose.

“Sorry, but I didn’t bring you a treat today,” Rachel said. “If Mom has any apples, I’ll bring you one tomorrow.”

Tom lifted his head and snorted. He moved away from Rachel and found a spot to lie down in the hay.

Rachel figured Tom wanted to take a nap, so she left the stall and went to look for a ball of string, hoping to play with Cuddles. She found some string on a shelf where Pap kept his tools. She hurried toward a pile of straw on the other side of the barn, where Cuddles liked to sleep.

“What are you up to now?” Jacob asked as Rachel passed him.

“I’m going to play with Cuddles.”

“I thought you were gonna study for the history test.”

“You’re not my boss,” she mumbled. “I said I would study later.”

Who did Jacob think he was, trying to tell her what to do?

“Never said I was.” Jacob leaned the shovel against the wall. “I’m done cleaning, so I’m gonna do my homework. Are you sure you don’t want to do yours now, too?”

She shook her head. “I can study after supper.”

“Suit yourself.” Jacob shrugged and headed out the door.

Rachel hurried over to the pile of straw, but Cuddles wasn’t there. “Where are you, Cuddles? Come, kitty, kitty,” she called.

She spotted Cuddles in the far corner of the barn, chasing a tiny gray mouse. “Stop it!” she scolded. “Leave that poor *maus* [mouse] alone.”

Cuddles paid no attention to Rachel and continued the chase. Round and round the barn she went—leaping in the air, swiping with her paws, and meowing for all she was worth.

Rachel hollered for Cuddles to stop, but her yelling made no difference. “If you hurt that *maus*, you’ll get no supper tonight.” She shook her finger as the cat and mouse whizzed past again. “I won’t let you chase my bubbles anymore!”

The mouse darted into a hole near one of the cow's stalls. Cuddles slammed into the wall. *Meow!* She shook her furry head and looked up at Rachel as if to say, "*Don't you feel sorry for me?*"

Rachel clucked her tongue, the way Mom often did. "That wouldn't have happened if you had listened to me."

Cuddles swiped a paw across Rachel's shoe. *Meow! Meow!*

Rachel thought about how sad she felt whenever she got in trouble. Maybe Cuddles felt that way, too. She bent down and scooped the cat into her arms. "I love you, Cuddles, but you must learn to listen."

Cuddles responded with a sandpaper kiss on Rachel's chin and began to purr.

Rachel found a seat on a bale of straw and placed Cuddles on her lap. It felt nice to sit in the warm barn and stroke her silky cat. It was a lot more fun than sitting at the kitchen table, studying for a history test she didn't want to take.

Rachel leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes. *It's supposed to be a true or false test, so it might not be too hard. Maybe I can guess at which answers are right and which are wrong.*

During supper that evening, Rachel told her family about Cuddles and the mouse. "I hollered at Cuddles," she said, reaching for a pickle, "but the cat kept chasing that poor little maus."

“There are some things we just can’t control,” Grandpa said. “Stopping a cat from chasing a mouse is one of those things.”

“That’s right,” Pap said with a nod. “Cuddles was doing what comes naturally for a cat, and it wasn’t something you could control.”

Rachel bit into the pickle and puckered her lips. She loved dill pickles, even if they were a bit tangy.

“Did you get all your homework done?” Mom asked, turning to Rachel.

Rachel opened her mouth to reply, but Jacob spoke first. “She never even opened her books.” He stared at Rachel. “All she’s done since she got home from school is play in the barn, dangle from the rope, pet Old Tom, and chase Cuddles.”

Pap’s eyebrows drew together as he frowned at Rachel. “Don’t you have a history test in the morning?”

“Jah. I’ll study after supper,” she said.

Pap nodded and reached for the platter of roast beef. “I hope you do well on the test.”

Rachel hoped that, too.

When supper was over and the dishes were done, Rachel headed for the stairs leading to her room.

“Don’t forget your schoolbooks,” Mom called. “You left them on the counter near the back door.”

Rachel turned back and scooped up the books. When she entered her room, she placed the books on her dresser and sat on the end of her bed. “*Brrr.*” She

rubbed her hands briskly over her arms. “It sure is cold up here.”

She reached for the extra quilt at the foot of her bed and wrapped it around her shoulders. Then she moved to the window and lifted the shade. The moon shone brightly, making the snow-covered yard glisten like a blanket of twinkling fireflies. It was a perfect night for sledding.

Rachel shivered as she thought about her recent sledding experience when she ended up in the creek. She would have to be more careful the next time she took her sled to school.

She leaned close to the frosty window and blew on it. A circle formed on the glass where her hot breath made contact. Using her finger, she drew her name. She blew again, and the clock by her bed kept time with her breathing. *Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Breathe in. . . blow out.*

Rachel stretched her arms over her head and yawned. She felt so sleepy. Maybe she would stretch out on the bed and rest awhile before she studied.

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

Rachel sat up with a start. Was that the rooster crowing? Their old red rooster had never crowed in the middle of the night before.

She rolled over and stared at the clock by her bed. It was 6 a.m.!

Rachel glanced down at her wrinkled dress and

gasped. *I must have fallen asleep last night and never got ready for bed!*

She scrambled out of bed and hurried to her dresser. When she opened a drawer and took out a pair of clean socks, she spotted her schoolbooks on top of the dresser. “Oh no! I didn’t study for the history test!”

Rachel glanced at the clock. It was too late to study now. She needed to get washed, dressed, and hurry downstairs to help Mom with breakfast. *Maybe I can study on the way to school. Jah, that’s what I’ll do.*

As Rachel trudged through the slippery snow toward the schoolhouse, she found it hard to hold her history book, which she had taken out of her backpack. Each time she took a step, the book shifted in her hands.

“Always trouble somewhere,” Rachel grumbled as the book snapped shut.

“If you weren’t trying to study while you walk, you wouldn’t have so much trouble.” Jacob snickered. “My silly *schweschder* [sister], the little *bensel*.”

Rachel glared at Jacob. “I am not a silly child!”

“Jah, you are.”

“Am not.”

“Are so.”

And so it went until Rachel and Jacob reached the schoolhouse. Between trying to keep her history book open and arguing with Jacob, Rachel hadn’t studied at all. If she didn’t think of some way to control this situation, she would probably fail her history test.

Rachel stomped the snow off her boots and was about to enter the schoolhouse when someone tapped her shoulder. She whirled around. There stood freckle-faced Orlie, wearing his usual crooked grin.

“Are you ready for another sled race during recess?” he asked.

Rachel shook her head. “I didn’t bring my sled with me today.”

“Maybe you can borrow your cousin Mary’s sled.” Orlie nudged Rachel’s arm. “Mary said her daed fixed her wobbly runner last night, so she brought the sled with her today.”

“No thanks. I’m not interested in racing you again.”

“You don’t feel like taking another swim in the creek, huh?”

Rachel ground her teeth together. Orlie teased as much as Jacob. Did he enjoy making fun of her?

She pushed past Orlie and stepped into the schoolhouse, where a burst of toasty air greeted her. Elizabeth had stoked the woodstove so the scholars would be warm and snug.

Rachel hoped to have time to study for the history test during the morning, but Elizabeth kept everyone busy with arithmetic problems.

Rachel had a hard time concentrating on arithmetic when she only wanted to open her history book and study for the test they’d take after their noon recess.

When Elizabeth announced that it was time for

morning recess, Rachel thought she might have time to look at her history book. But Mary insisted that Rachel join her and the other girls in a snowball fight against the boys.

“Oh, all right,” Rachel finally agreed. She didn’t want to disappoint Mary.

Everyone put on their coats, gloves, and hats, and hurried outside.

“Let’s wait until each team has one hundred snowballs made before we start,” Phoebe Byler suggested.

Aaron King grunted. “If we took the time to make that many snowballs, recess would be over before the snowball fight began.”

“Aaron’s right,” Orlie put in. “Let’s have each girl make three snowballs, and each boy make five snowballs.”

“That’s not right,” Rachel spoke up. “Why should the boys get to make more snowballs than the girls?”

“Because there are eighteen girls and only twelve boys.” Orlie planted his hands on his hips like he was the boss. “That will give the girls fifty-four snowballs and the boys will have—”

“Sixty!” Mary shouted. “That’s not right!”

Jacob stepped forward. “Jah, it is. Since there are fewer boys than girls, we need an advantage.”

“No, you don’t,” Becky Esh said with a shake of her head.

“Do so.” Orlie insisted.

“Do not.”

“Do so.”

“Do not.”

Rachel threw a snowball. *Splat!* It hit Orlie’s cheek and ran down his neck.

“Hey, that was not fair! I wasn’t ready!” He bent down, scooped a handful of snow, and threw it at Rachel.

She ducked, and the snowball whizzed over her head. “Ha! You missed me!” she shouted as she ran away.

Orlie chased Rachel, and everyone started making snowballs fast and flinging them at whoever got in their way. So much for a snowball fight with the girls against the boys!

Soon Elizabeth called to the children. A group of laughing red-nosed, rosy-cheeked scholars returned to the schoolhouse and hung up their coats, hats, and gloves. After everyone was seated at their desks, the curtain dividing the room was drawn, and grades three through eight were given a reading lesson, followed by a time of questions from the teacher about what they had learned.

At eleven thirty, the children were dismissed by rows to wash their hands, get their lunch boxes, and return to their seats. It was too cold to eat outside like they did on warmer days. After eating their lunches, the children were allowed to play outside until twelve thirty.

*I have plenty of time to study for the test now, Rachel*

thought as the other children donned their coats and filed out the door.

Rachel remained in her seat. She was reaching for her history book when Elizabeth asked, "Aren't you going outside to play with the others?"

"Not this time." Rachel shook her head. "It's too cold out, and I thought I would—"

"If you're not going outside, would you like to help me cut out some paper stars?"

"What are they for?" Rachel asked.

"Each time someone gets a perfect score on a lesson, he or she will get to pick out a star and write his or her name on it," Elizabeth replied. "A perfect score on a test will get the scholar two paper stars."

"Oh, I see."

"We'll put the stars around the schoolhouse and see if we can get so many that they go up to the ceiling." Elizabeth patted Rachel's head. "If you and I get some stars cut out now, we'll have enough to give everyone who gets a perfect score on the history test this afternoon."

Rachel knew if she spent the next half hour cutting out paper stars, she would have no time to study for the test. She couldn't tell Elizabeth she didn't want to help because she hadn't studied.

"Won't Sharon help you with the stars?" Rachel asked.

Elizabeth shook her head. "I asked her to go outside

with the scholars.” She frowned. “After the snowball fight during morning recess, I figured either Sharon or I should be outside to be sure everything goes well.”

Forcing a smile, Rachel nodded and said, “Okay, I’ll help you cut out the stars.”

Elizabeth gave Rachel a stack of colored paper, a pattern to trace the stars, and a pair of scissors; then she returned to her own desk and cut out stars, too.

Rachel hummed as she traced the first star onto a sheet of bright yellow paper. This was a lot more fun than studying for the history test would have been.

Lunch recess was over sooner than Rachel had hoped, and when everyone took their seats, Elizabeth said it was time for the middle-grade scholars to take their history test.

As Rachel stared at the true and false questions on the paper she’d been given, a knot formed in her stomach. She didn’t know any of the answers. She could only guess.

*What if my guesses are wrong? she fretted. How can I face Mom and Pap if I fail this test?*

Rachel tapped her pencil along the edge of her desk. *Tap-tappety-tap-tap.*

She set the pencil down and placed her arms on top of the desk. Still, no answers came. She looked at the front of the room and stared at the letters and numbers on a wide strip of paper above the blackboard. *Think, Rachel. . . think hard. True or false? False or true?*

Suddenly, an idea popped into Rachel's head. She knew how she might be able to pass the test!

Orlie's desk used to be behind Rachel's, but last week Elizabeth had moved him in front of Rachel, because he kept whispering and tapping Rachel's shoulder. If Rachel craned her neck a bit, she had the perfect view of Orlie's desk.

In that moment, Rachel made a hasty decision. She would copy the answers from Orlie's paper.