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BRUNSTETTER



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To the children of my Amish friends who live in Ohio,  
and a special thanks to everyone who shared some  
of their humorous childhood memories with me.





## GLOSSARY

*absatz*—stop

*ach*—oh

*aldi*—girlfriend

*appenditlich*—delicious

*baremlich*—terrible

*boppli*—baby

*bruder*—brother

*buch*—book

*busslin*—kittens

*daed*—dad

*danki*—thanks

*daremlich*—dizzy

*dumm*—dumb

*frosch*—frog

*grank*—sick

*hochmut*—pride

*hund*—dog

*hundli*—puppy

*hungerich*—hungry

*jah*—yes

*kaes*—cheese

*kapps*—caps

*katze*—cats

koppweh—headache  
kumme—come  
mamm—mom  
meh—more  
melke—milk  
narrisch—crazy  
oier—eggs  
pannekuche—pancakes  
pescht—pest  
schlang—snake  
schmaert—smart  
schpass—fun  
schtinke—stink  
voll schpaas—very funny  
windle—diapers  
wunderbaar—wonderful

Guder mariye, schlofkopp—Good morning, sleepyhead  
Ich verschreck net graad—I don't frighten easily  
Is fattgange—Go away



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## INTRODUCTION



The Amish are a group of people who, due to their religious beliefs, live a plain life without the use of many modern things. Early Amish people lived in Europe, but many came to America in the 1700s so they could worship freely. More than 250,000 Amish now live in the United States and Canada.

The Old Order Amish wear plain clothes, much like the American pioneers used to wear. For everyday, the women and girls wear plain, solid-colored dresses and small head coverings, or *kapps*, on their heads. Some may wear dark head scarves when they are working around their homes and yards. For church, funerals, weddings, and other special occasions, Amish women and girls wear white aprons over their dresses. Amish men and boys wear plain cotton shirts, trousers with suspenders, and straw hats. For church and other special occasions they wear dark pants with matching jackets and black felt hats.

Because they believe electricity is too modern to have in their homes, Amish people use kerosene, propane gas, coal, diesel fuel, and wood for heating, cooking, and running their machinery and appliances. Telephones are not allowed inside an Old Order Amish

home, but some Amish have phones in their shops, barns, or sheds outside the home. Amish people use a horse and buggy when they travel within ten to fifteen miles from their homes, but ride in cars with hired drivers to take them on longer trips where it's too far to drive with their buggies.

At one time, most Amish men farmed for a living, but now many work in various jobs. Some are blacksmiths, harness makers, carpenters, painters, storekeepers, or might work in several other trades. Some Amish women who need to work outside their home earn money by selling eggs, fruits and vegetables, or handmade items such as dolls, quilts, and craft items. Others work in gift shops, bakeries, or restaurants, and some have other occupations as well.

Amish children, called "scholars," usually attend one-room schoolhouses from grades one to eight. Once they finish the eighth grade and leave school, they spend time learning a trade so they can get a job and earn money to support themselves and their families. The children learn three languages: English, German, and Pennsylvania-Dutch, which is the language they usually speak when they are with family and friends. German is spoken when the ministers read the Bible and preach during church services. English is learned when a child attends school in the first grade, and it's spoken when the Amish are with other people who aren't Amish.

The Amish hold their church services every other week, in the home, shop, or barn of different church

members. The largest Amish community in the United States is in Holmes County, Ohio, where my story about Amish children, Mark and Mattie Miller, is set.





## Flying High

“*Kumme*, Mattie! Let’s play a game!” Mattie Miller’s eight-year-old twin brother called to her from across the yard.

Looking toward Mark, Mattie shook her head. “I don’t want to play a game right now.” She’d been lying on a blanket in the grass, looking at the puffy white clouds above, and didn’t want to be disturbed.

“Aw, come on, Mattie. It’ll be *schpass!*” Mark ran through the grass in his bare feet, kicking up several grasshoppers, and then he plopped down beside her.

“If you think it’ll be fun, it probably won’t be for me,” Mattie mumbled. “Besides, I’m busy right now.”

“Busy doing what? You don’t look busy to me,” he said, removing his straw hat and tossing it on the ground.

Mattie held back a chuckle. When Mark took off his hat his thick red hair stuck straight up. She was glad her hair never did that. Of course, Mattie usually wore her long red hair pulled up in a bun, with a small black cap on top of her head. Sometimes, for playing

or doing chores, she would wear a dark-colored scarf, like she had on today.

“Can’t you see that I’m watching the clouds?” she asked, once the urge to laugh at Mark’s hair had passed.

Mark leaned back on his elbows and looked up at the summer sky. “Know what a cloud’s made of?”

“Cotton?”

“No way! Clouds are droplets of water or ice crystals that float high above the earth.”

“Is that so?”

“*Jah.*” Mark looked kind of smug as he nodded and said, “Did you know that clouds come in all different sizes and shapes?” He knew a lot about many things, but Mattie knew a few things he didn’t know—about flowers, dogs, and the best way to hit a baseball when it was coming toward you really fast.

“There are several types of clouds,” Mark went on to say. “There are cirrus, cirrostratus, cirrocumulus, altocumulus, and cumulus clouds.”

“Those are all such big words.” Mattie frowned. “Can’t we just call them clouds?”

“We could, but I thought you’d like to know the names of each type of cloud. Now, cumulus clouds are the most common kind. They’re usually fair weather clouds.”

“Like we’re having today?”

“That’s right,” Mark said with a nod.

The twins stayed on the grass for a while, watching the clouds drift lazily across the sky.

“Look over there, Mark!” Mattie pointed to a particularly unusual-looking cloud. “That one’s shaped

like a swan. Isn't it pretty?"

"Uh-huh." Mark didn't look all that impressed, but then what did a boy know about things being pretty?

"Look there." Mattie pointed up and to the right. "That one looks like a big fish."

"I see them both, but they're quickly changing. Now they don't look like a swan or a fish anymore. It must be because of the different air currents movin' them around." Mark nudged Mattie's arm. "Are ya ready to play a game with me now?"

"Oh, all right." Mattie knew if she didn't do what Mark wanted, he'd just keep pestering her until she finally gave in. As much as she loved her twin brother, sometimes—like now—he was so full of energy she couldn't keep up with him.

Mark helped Mattie to her feet, and then he led her into the center of the yard. When he pulled a strip of dark blue material from his pants pocket, Mattie became a bit concerned.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"This is a blindfold, and I'm gonna put it over your eyes. Then I'll tie it around the back of your head."

Mattie shook her head vigorously. "I don't want to be blindfolded! I won't be able to see where I'm going, and I might trip and fall on something."

"There's no need to worry," Mark said with a grin. "I'll look after you, and I'll even hang on to your arm."

Mattie was suspicious about playing this game with Mark. Besides being smart, he was also a big tease and liked to play tricks on her whenever he could. For now,

though, she decided to play along with her brother and let him have his fun.

“I don’t know about this,” Mattie said.

Mark gave her arm a little squeeze. “It’ll be okay, I promise.”

“Well, okay.” Mattie stood patiently as Mark started to put the piece of cloth over her eyes.

“Oops, wait a minute,” he said. “You have some grass in your hair. Let me get it off before I put the blindfold on.”

Mattie watched as he concentrated on getting all the loose grass out of her hair. In many ways they were alike. When they stood side by side you could see right away that their hair was the exact same color of red, and their blue eyes matched, too. But in many ways they were as different as night and day.

*I’m glad I was the one who ended up with a few freckles on my nose, and not ears that stick out a bit the way Mark’s do,* Mattie thought. She would never tease her twin brother about it, though. It was bad enough that some of the boys they knew sometimes teased him about his ears, as well as being so smart. A few of them made fun of his red hair, too.

“Okay, I’ve got all the grass out of your hair now,” Mark said, as he tied the blindfold behind Mattie’s head. “I’m gonna spin you around, and then I’ll walk you all around the yard. When we stop, you’ll have to speculate where you are.”

Mattie tipped her head. “Speculate? What’s that?”

“It means ‘guess.’”

Mattie was confused. Mark was always using words she didn't understand. Sometimes, when he wouldn't tell her what those big words meant, she had to get a dictionary and look them up so she'd know what he was talking about. "What happens if I guess where I am?" Mattie asked.

"You win the game, plus you get a prize." Mark snickered. "But if you don't know where you are, then I win the game and I get a prize."

"What's the prize?"

"If you win, I'll do one of your chores tonight; and if I win, you'll have to do one of mine."

Mattie wasn't sure she liked this game, but she knew their yard quite well and thought she'd be able to guess where she was with no trouble at all. If she won, it would be nice to have Mark do one of her chores. Maybe she would ask him to wash the dishes. While he was stuck in the kitchen with his hands in soapy water, she'd be in her room playing with her dolls or reading the book about flowers she'd been given for Christmas last year.

"Okay, little *bruder*; spin me around," she finally agreed.

"I am not your little brother, because we were both born at the same time."

"But Mom said I was born ten minutes before you, so that means I'm older and you're my little *bruder*."

"Whatever!" Mark put his hands on Mattie's shoulders and spun her around several times.

"*Absatz!* Stop! You're making me *daremllich!*"

“You won’t be dizzy once we start walking.” Mark took hold of Mattie’s arm and led her across the lawn. She knew they were still in the yard because she could feel the cold grass tickling her bare toes.

“Is it time for me to guess where I am?” she asked.

“Not yet.”

Mark gave Mattie a couple more spins, and then led her off in another direction. She wouldn’t admit it to Mark, but she felt mixed up. Mattie hoped he didn’t ask her to guess where she was now, because she really wasn’t sure.

Suddenly, Mark let go of Mattie’s arm. She teetered back and forth, feeling even dizzier than before, and struggling to keep her balance. When the spinning sensation finally stopped, she took a step forward and reached out her hand. “Mark?”

No reply.

“Are you there, Mark? You said you would hold on to my arm, but you’re not holding it now. Mark, where are you?”

Still no response.

“Mark, you’d better answer me right now.”

Nothing. Not even a peep.

Mattie turned, and with her hands outstretched, she took a few steps in the other direction. “Mark Miller, you’d better not leave me out here like this!”

*Tee-hee.* She heard Mark snicker from somewhere nearby.

“What’s so funny? Where am I, Mark? And where are you?”

“It’s okay. You’re just a little discombobulated right now.”

“Dis-com-what?”

“Discombobulated. It means mixed up, or confused. Now, take three steps forward,” Mark said.

Holding her arms straight out, Mattie counted out loud as she began to walk. “One. . .two. . .three. . .”

“That’s good. Now turn to the right—no, I mean left. Then take two more steps.”

Mattie turned and—*smack!*—bumped into something.

“Ouch! Did I just smack into the barn?”

“Sorry about that,” Mark said. “Just take a step back and turn to the right.”

Gritting her teeth, Mattie turned in the direction Mark told her to, knowing she definitely did not like this game! She’d only taken a few steps, when something prickly stabbed her knees. “Yeow! What was that?”

Mattie jumped backward and something went—*crunch!* She knew she wasn’t on the grass. “Am I in Mom’s flower bed?”

Mattie pulled the blindfold off her head and realized that she was in one of Mom’s flower beds and had broken off a piece of the rosebush. She saw Mark several feet away, laughing and clutching his stomach.

“It’s not funny! I’m done with this silly game!” She started to walk away, but turned back around. “Oh, and I guessed where I was, so you’ll have to do the dishes for me tonight.”

Mark opened his mouth like he was going to say

something, but just then Mom shouted from the porch, “Mattie Miller, what were you doing in my flower bed? You’ve ruined some of my beautiful roses!”

Mattie explained about the game she and Mark had been playing, and how he’d let go of her arm. “First I bumped into the barn, and then—sorry, Mom, but I somehow ended up in the flower bed.”

“You certainly did.” Mom frowned and shook her finger at the twins. “You two had better find another game to play. If you don’t, I’ll give you both some work to do.”

“I’m sorry, Mom, it won’t happen again,” Mattie said, looking at the flowers she’d ruined.

“Apology accepted. Just please see to it that you and your brother stay out of trouble.” Mom started to turn toward the door, but whirled back around. “Oh, I’ll be leaving shortly to pick up Perry and Ada at your Grandma and Grandpa Miller’s.”

“Okay, Mom.” No way did Mattie want to make Mom angry or do any extra work, so she went back to her blanket and flopped down to watch the clouds some more. It was one sure way to stay out of mischief—especially with her twin brother!



While Mattie reclined on the grass staring up at the clouds, Mark went to the barn and sat on a bale of straw, trying to think up something else that would be fun to do. It had been funny to see his twin sister blindfolded, stumbling around the yard, not knowing

where she was. It wasn't so nice, though, that Mattie had gotten in trouble for tramping on Mom's flowers. He wished now that he had been more careful when he'd guided Mattie around the yard, and he probably shouldn't have let go of her arm.

Mark stared up toward the loft at the rafters overhead and watched as a spider spun its web. *Maybe I'll go see if I can find a bug to put in the spider's web,* he decided. *After all, the poor thing needs to eat, and I don't see any flies here in the barn right now. Of course, that could be because Dad hung so many strips of flypaper around the barn.*

Determined to find at least one suitable insect for the spider, Mark left the barn and walked around the yard for a bit. The wind had begun to blow, but the sun was still out. It didn't take long until he spotted a grasshopper that had jumped out of the weeds and onto the wagon wheel propped against the barn.

Walking slowly toward the wheel, Mark leaned in carefully and made a quick grab for the bug. He knew he'd caught it when he felt the jagged legs of the grasshopper looking for an escape inside his cupped hands.

Once Mark was back in the barn, he climbed up into the hayloft and studied the web. Even though it hung just over from the loft, it was close enough for Mark to throw the bug in and watch what would happen next.

Mark had always liked investigating things, so he intently watched as the insect stuck fast to the spider's web and began to squirm. Mark had the perfect perch there in the loft. In fact, he was almost eye level with the

web. It was like having a front-row seat.

In no time at all, the spider apparently felt the vibration of the web and moved in to claim its prey. Mark watched in fascination as the spider quickly spun some of its webbing around the grasshopper, and then went back to its original task of building and repairing other parts of the web.

*I suppose that old grasshopper will get eaten sometime later*, Mark thought, giving the spider one more glance before climbing back down the ladder. After he'd taken a seat on the bale of straw again, he took his wooden yo-yo out of his pocket and played with that awhile. He was getting pretty good with the different tricks he could do with the yo-yo, especially the one called "walking the dog."

It wasn't long before Mark became tired of playing with the yo-yo. "Sure wish there was something really fun to do," he mumbled. *Wish Mattie would come out here to play. I'll bet she would have freaked out watching that sly old spider trap the grasshopper in its web. But boy, I sure thought it was neat.*

Mark was glad it was still summer, and they wouldn't have to go back to school for a few more weeks, but for the last several days he'd become bored. If he told Mom or Dad that, they'd probably find some job for him to do around the house or yard, so he guessed it would be better if he just sat here—even if he was really bored.

*Meow! Meow!* Mark's cat, Lucky, rubbed against his leg.

Mark reached down and rubbed a spot behind Lucky's silky ears.

The big, fluffy gray cat started to purr and leaned in closer for more attention.

Any other time Mark would have enjoyed petting Lucky and listening to her purr. Not today, though. Mark wasn't in the mood for sitting and petting. He wanted to do something fun and daring, and it was always better if you had someone to share the excitement with.

Lucky took a few steps, like she was going to walk away, but then she dropped to the floor and rolled over onto her back. Lying there with all four feet in the air, she looked at Mark as if to say, "Aren't you going to rub my big belly?"

Mark gave the cat a couple of pats. "That's all you get for now, Lucky."

Lucky let out a pathetic meow—and plodded away, her belly almost dragging on the cement floor. In another week or so she'd give birth to a batch of kittens, and Mark could hardly wait. He hoped Mom and Dad would let him keep at least one. New kittens were always so cute and a lot of fun.

Glancing around the barn, Mark spotted a big black umbrella leaning against the wall near the door. Dad used it to escort Mom out to the buggy whenever it was raining real hard.

*Bet that old umbrella would make a good parachute,* Mark thought. He'd never seen a real parachute, except for a picture of one he'd discovered

in a magazine at the dentist's office. The umbrella was a lot smaller than a parachute, of course, but with the way the wind was blowing outside, he figured the umbrella would work just as well.

Mark mulled things over in his head a few more minutes; then he jumped up, ran across the room, and snatched the umbrella. After looking it over real good he realized that it was almost like new and didn't have any holes in it. *I bet four people could fit under this big umbrella with no trouble at all. Hmm. . . I wonder if I could talk Mattie into using it as a parachute. Think I'll go ask.*

Mark leaned the umbrella against the bale of straw and hurried out the door, ducking, as two swallows flew swiftly out of the barn. "Hey Mattie," he hollered, startling his twin sister and causing her to jump when he squatted down beside her. "Wanna play a new game with me? It's one we haven't played before, and I promise it'll be exciting and a lot of fun."

"The last game we played sure wasn't fun. Not for me, anyways." Mattie slowly shook her head. "I sure don't need any more excitement like that."

"I'm sorry about all that. I promise this game will be different, 'cause it's the most exciting game we've ever played."

Mattie, looking a bit more interested now, said, "What's the name of this game?"

"It's called 'flying high.'"

Mattie's forehead wrinkled as her eyebrows pulled together. "I've never heard of a game by that name."

“That’s ’cause it’s a new game, and we’ve never played it before.”

Mattie shook her head. “No thanks. I don’t think I want to play another one of your games.”

“But this game is different.” Mark gave Mattie’s arm a little tug. “Come on, Mattie. You’ll see—it’ll be lots of fun!”

“Oh, all right, but this game had better not get me in trouble like the last one did.”

“I’m sure it won’t.” Mark pulled Mattie to her feet, took hold of her hand, and they ran into the barn.

“Wait right here while I get the parachute,” Mark said. He glanced up at the rafters near the loft. “Oh, and while you’re waiting, check out that spider up there and see if it ate the grasshopper I threw into its web awhile ago.”

Mattie tipped her head and looked up at the loft. “I’m not sure I want to see any spider eating a bug. That’s pretty disgusting.”

“No, it’s not. It was interesting how that spider spun a web around the grasshopper. It happened so fast, you wouldn’t believe it.”

Mattie looked at him like he’d lost his mind. “Well I’m not interested in seeing anything like that, but what about this parachute you mentioned? We don’t have a parachute, Mark.”

“Jah, we do. It’s right there.” Mark pointed to the umbrella, propped against the bale of straw he’d been sitting on earlier.

“That’s not a parachute; it’s an umbrella,” Mattie said.

“I know, but I’m sure it’ll work like a parachute. I checked it over real good, and there are no holes in it either.”

Mattie shook her head. “Don’t be silly, Mark. We’re not going to be jumping out of an airplane, and even if we were, we wouldn’t use an umbrella for a parachute.”

“I realize that,” Mark said. “We’ll be jumping off the roof of the chicken coop.” He grinned widely. “You can go first, and then I’ll give it a try.”

Mattie’s blue eyes widened, and she blinked a couple of times. “No way! I’m not jumping off any roof, and neither should you. That would be dangerous!”

“We won’t get hurt. We’ll have the umbrella to slow down our fall. Besides, think how much fun it’ll be to float down to the ground. I’ll bet it will feel just like we’re flying. Better yet, we’ll have a soft landing because we’ll be jumping into that pile of hay Dad put on the back side of the coop the other day.”

Mattie shook her head a little harder this time. “I am not jumping off the roof of the chicken coop! If you think Mom was mad about the flowers, think how upset she’ll be if she finds out that we jumped off the roof of the chicken coop. Besides, why would you want to risk hurting yourself? And another thing. . . Why would you want me to go first?”

“Slow down, Mattie. You’re getting all worked up for nothing.” Mark shrugged and then put his hands on his hips. “But suit yourself if you don’t wanna try it. I’m not gonna get hurt, and you’re the one who’s gonna miss out on knowing what it’s like to fly. Besides, no one can

see us from up there, so we won't get caught either."

"Mark, you really oughtta think things through before you try such a stunt. I don't wanna know how to fly. Birds fly; people walk, and I'm not a bird." Mattie scowled at him.

"I'm not a bird either, but I am gonna find out what it feels like to be one, and since we're twins, I think you should try it, too. Just imagine what our friends will say when they learn what we can do."

"No way! I don't care what anyone says—I am not crazy enough to jump off the roof and probably end up getting hurt. But if you want to do something so foolish, then go right ahead."

"Will you at least climb up on the roof of the chicken coop with me?" Mark asked.

"I suppose I can do that, but only to watch."

Mark hurried to get the umbrella and then he handed it to Mattie. "Here, hold this while I get the ladder so we can climb on top of the chicken coop."

"This is really *dumm*," Mattie mumbled as she held on to the umbrella and followed Mark out of the barn and over to the chicken coop. "Jah, it's really a dumb idea."

When Mark set the ladder in place and climbed onto the roof, she mumbled even louder, "If Mom and Dad find out about this, you'll be in big trouble—and I'm worried that you'll get hurt."

"They won't find out. Mom went over to Grandpa and Grandma Miller's to pick up Ada and Perry, remember? And Dad and Ike are way out in the field

today fixing fences,” Mark called over his shoulder. “And quit talking about me getting hurt, ’cause I’m sure I won’t.”

“What about Calvin or Russell? If they see us, they’re sure to tell Mom or Dad about this.”

“No they won’t. They’re selling produce from our roadside stand today, so none of them can even see what we’re doing.”

“Oh, that’s right. Still. . . I don’t know about this crazy notion you have.”

“Will you relax? I’ll be fine, really.” He figured once he’d shown Mattie how much fun flying could be, she’d want to give it a try, too.

When Mark stepped onto the roof of the chicken coop, he looked down to be sure the stack of hay was still there. Sure enough, the hay was right where Dad had put it earlier this week.

“Are you sure you don’t want to fly like a bird?” he asked Mattie, who now stood beside him, eyes wide and looking really frightened.

She shook her head. “It’s gotten awfully windy, and I still don’t think you should do this, Mark.”

“The wind is exactly what we need.” Mark held out his hand. “Just stop talking and give me the umbrella.”

Mattie handed it to Mark, and just as he opened it up—*woosh!*—a big gust of wind almost lifted him off his feet.

Mark wobbled, and the wind pushed him back. . . back. . .back, toward the other side of the roof.

“Look at me! I’m fly. . .ing high!” Mark shouted as

another gust of wind lifted him straight up. And then he was falling. . .down. . .down. . .down. . .until—*splat!*—he landed in something soft and squishy, but he knew right away that it wasn't hay.

“Phew! What is that horrible odor?” He slowly exhaled and opened his eyes. “Oh no! I've landed in a pile of stinky manure!”



## CHAPTER 2



### A Hard Lesson

Mattie looked down at Mark and gasped when she saw him sitting in the middle of the manure pile. “Oh Mark, are you okay?” she hollered.

“No, I’m not okay! I just landed in manure!”

“Are you hurt?”

“I—I don’t think so.” As Mark stepped out of the manure pile, lifting one foot, and then the other, it made a squishy sound. “Nothin’ seems to be broken. But I’m sure a big mess. And, *phew!*—this malodorous stuff really stinks!”

Mattie plugged her nose. She might not know what *malodorous* meant, but even from up here on the roof of the chicken coop she could smell the stench. “I’ll be right there!” she shouted down to Mark.

Mattie scurried down the ladder, and raced around to the other side of the coop. Poor Mark stood there, slowly shaking his head. He really was a mess. Globes of gooey manure clung to his shirt and pants, and some of it was stuck between his bare toes.

“You look *baremlich*,” she said, trying not to laugh.

"I know I look terrible, and I feel just as bad. Guess I'd better get in the house and take a shower right away, before Mom gets home and Dad and Ike come in from the fields," Mark said.

"Huh-uh! No way! You'll track manure into the house. Better let me wet you down with the hose first."

Before Mark had a chance to respond, Mattie raced across the yard and turned on the hose. Then she dragged it back through the grass and aimed it right at Mark, blasting his shirt, pants, and bare feet with plenty of water.

"Hey, that's really cold!" Mark jumped up and down.

"Of course it's cold. It's water from the hose, so what did you expect?" Mattie shot another stream of water at her brother while trying to stifle a giggle. "If you don't hold still, I'll never get all that manure washed off!"

Mark continued to hop up and down as she pelted him with more water. "Ye-ow! Think I'm gonna freeze to death!" he hollered.

"Oh, don't be such a *boppli*."

"I'm not a baby, and I bet you're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"'Course not." *Well, maybe a little*, Mattie thought. "Just hold still!"

Mark rushed toward Mattie, grabbed the hose from her hand, and turned the water on her.

"Absatz! Absatz! That's really, really cold!"

"I'll stop when you promise not to spray me with any more water." Mark looked down at his clothes. "Most of the manure's off anyways, and I'm sick of bein' cold."

Thanks to you, I have goose bumps on top of goose bumps!”

“You’d better get in the house and take a shower now,” Mattie said, smiling. “You’ll warm up then.”

Mark shook his head. “I ain’t gonna drip water on Mom’s clean floors, so I’d better stay out here in the sun and dry off first, before I go in the house to take a shower.”

“Aren’t, Mark.”

He tipped his head to the right. “Aren’t Mark, what?”

She tipped her head to the left. “Huh?”

“I don’t know. You said, ‘aren’t Mark,’ and I just asked, ‘aren’t Mark, what?’ ”

She shook her finger at him, the way Mom often did when she was scolding one of her seven children. “Stop trying to confuse me. The reason I said ‘aren’t’ is because you said ‘ain’t,’ and *ain’t* isn’t good English.”

Mark grunted. “Now you’re confusing me.”

“No, I’m the one who’s confused, and I think—”

Mattie’s words were halted by the *clip-clop* sound of horses’ hooves approaching in the distance. She glanced at the road, then back at Mark. “Uh-oh. You’re in big trouble now. Mom’s home.”

The wind had calmed down to just a breeze, and as the horse and buggy got closer, Mattie watched Mom push a strand of auburn hair back under her black outer bonnet that had blown loose.



Mark raced for the house. Mattie was right beside him.

They'd only made it halfway there when Mom, who had just pulled her horse and buggy up to the hitching rail near the barn, hollered, "Absatz!"

Mark screeched to a stop, and when Mattie bumped into his back she plugged her nose. "Phew! You sure do *schtinke!*"

"I wouldn't stink if that gust of wind hadn't pushed me to the wrong side of the chicken coop."

"I know, and when it lifted you into the air, I was really scared."

"Not me. I wasn't scared till I landed in that pile of manure."

"Phew! What's that awful smell?" Mom asked as she approached the twins. Three-year-old Ada and five-year-old Perry held on to her hands. Mom looked at Mark's clothes, where a few blobs of manure still clung, and frowned. "What have you been doing? Have you two been up to mischief again?"

"Not me," said Mattie. "Mark sort of—well, he landed in the manure pile when he was seeing if he could. . ."

Mom's eyebrows shot up as she stared at Mark. "What on earth is your sister talking about? Why would you be playing in a pile of smelly manure?"

"I wasn't playing in it, Mom. I was trying to show Mattie how to use Dad's big umbrella as a parachute, so we climbed onto the roof of the chicken coop, and—"

"The wind came up and pushed Mark backward," Mattie said, finishing Mark's sentence. "Then another gust of wind lifted him into the air, and when he came down, he landed in the pile of manure."

Perry started to laugh, but Mom's mouth dropped open, and her blue eyes widened in disbelief. "You—you did what?"

"Well, I thought I could fly, and since there was hay on the ground where I was gonna jump, I didn't think I'd get hurt." Mark paused and gulped in some air. "I—I sure didn't think the wind would push me over to the other side of the roof, or that I'd end up landing where the pile of manure was."

Mom's frown deepened, and she let go of Perry and Ada's hands so she could shake her finger at Mark. "You ought to know better than to do something so foolish and dangerous. Why, you could have been seriously hurt!"

Mark hung his head, feeling really foolish. Mom was right, he could have gotten hurt. "Sorry, Mom," he mumbled. "I know it was dumm and I'll never do it again."

"I should say not," Mom said with a click of her tongue. She pointed to the house. "Now get inside and take a shower. Oh, and put your smelly clothes in a plastic bag. I don't want them stinking up the other clothes in the laundry basket."

"What about the umbrella?" Mark asked. "It's still in the manure pile, and I—I think it's broken."

"Just leave it there for now. I'll have your *daed* take care of it," Mom said. "But of course, if it is broken, you'll need to buy a new one."

"But Mom, I don't have enough money to buy another umbrella," Mark argued.

"Then I'm sure your *daed* will find some extra chores

for you to do so you can earn the money,” Mom added as she took Ada and Perry’s hands again and moved toward the house. “In fact, if he doesn’t find some chores for you, then I certainly will!” she called over her shoulder.

Mark shot Mattie a quick glance, wondering if she was glad he’d been the one to get yelled at this time, and then he hurried into the house behind Mom. He was lucky she hadn’t given him a worse punishment. And he definitely wanted to get cleaned up before Dad came in from the fields and saw what he’d gotten into.



During supper that evening, Mattie looked over at Mark and noticed a strange expression on his face. He hadn’t said a word since they’d started eating their meal. Was he dreading the extra chores Dad had given him to do because of all the mischief, or was there something else on her twin brother’s mind? Maybe she would let Mark off the hook and not make him wash the dishes for her tonight.

“Won’t be long now and you’ll be going back to school,” Dad said, touching Mattie’s arm. “Are you ready to begin the third grade?”

“Wish I didn’t have to go back to school,” Mattie said. “I can’t wait till I graduate from eighth grade and get to stay home with Mom all day.”

“Staying home with your *mamm* won’t be as easy as you think,” Dad said, handing Mattie the basket of homemade bread.

“That’s right,” Mom said with a nod. “Learning how to be a good homemaker will mean a lot more chores, as well as learning to do many things you haven’t done before.”

“Like what?” Mattie wanted to know.

“Like sewing, quilting, baking, and cooking meals.” Dad handed Mattie the bowl of mashed potatoes. “You’ll need to know how to do those things before you get married.”

Mattie scrunched up her nose. “Don’t see why I’d have to learn all that, ’cause I’m never gettin’ married. Boys are weird, and they do dumm things.”

Dad chuckled and gave Mattie’s shoulder a pat. “You’ll change your mind about that someday.”

Mattie didn’t think so, but she decided not to say anything more about it, because graduating from school was still a ways off, and it would be several years before she was even old enough to think about marriage.

Mattie glanced across the table at her oldest brother, Ike. She had learned that when Ike was her age, his hair used to be bright red like hers and Mark’s. But since then his hair had grown darker and turned a deep auburn color like Mom’s. Ike had recently started going out with a girl named Catherine. Mattie had never heard him say anything about wanting to get married though. Of course, Ike was only sixteen, so he probably wouldn’t think about getting married for a few more years. Then there was Russell, who’d turned thirteen in April, and Calvin, who was eleven. It was obvious who they took after. Their hair was as blond as Dad’s. And

as far as Mattie knew they had no interest in girls, other than to tease them, the way Mark often did.

Mattie looked over at Mark. He still hadn't said anything, and she couldn't figure it out. It wasn't like him to be so quiet.

She gave his arm a little nudge with her elbow. "How come you're not saying anything?"

"Can't think of anything to say," he mumbled around a piece of Mom's juicy fried chicken. "Besides, can't you see that I'm eatin' my supper?"

"We're all eating, but we're all talkin', too," Mattie said.

Mark grabbed the meat platter and forked another piece of chicken onto his plate.

Mattie continued to eat her meal as she listened to Mom and Dad talk about some things that had been going on in their community lately. When she got bored with their conversation she turned her attention to her little brother, Perry, whose hair was so blond it was the color of the palomino horse down the road from where they lived. She watched as Perry fed Ada his green beans. Mattie knew Perry didn't like green beans, but apparently Ada did, for she was chomping away and smacking her lips as if the beans tasted like candy.

Mattie giggled to herself, seeing the green beans stuck in Ada's red hair. It looked almost as funny as the time Ada had dumped a bowl of macaroni on her head.

Mom and Dad didn't seem to notice what was going on, because they were talking about Dad's woodworking business, and how many orders he'd recently gotten

for new tables and chairs. Mattie thought about interrupting their conversation to tell them what Perry was doing, but figured she'd probably be accused of being a tattletale if she did, so she decided it would be best to keep quiet.

As Mattie ate, she wondered if there was a way she could get out of going to school. She liked their teacher, Anna Ruth Stutzman, well enough, and she enjoyed playing with her best friend, Stella Schrock, during recess. What she didn't like about school was learning her multiplication tables and trying to spell difficult words. Mark didn't have a problem with either of those. In fact he could spell words that Mattie couldn't even pronounce. It was funny how one minute Mark would use some big word, and the next minute he'd say "ain't," which even Mattie knew wasn't proper English.

*He probably just does that to irritate me,* Mattie thought.

Mark reached over just then and tickled Ada under her chin. Ada giggled and started waving her hands, like she always did when she got overly excited.

"Not now," Mom scolded, looking over at Mark. "This isn't the time or place to be fooling around. If Ada gets too excited she might knock something over. And how'd those beans get in her hair?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Mark stopped tickling Ada and reached for another piece of chicken. Mattie couldn't believe he could eat so much food.

"Would someone please pass me the sugar bowl?" Mom asked. "I didn't put enough sweetener in my iced tea."

“Jah, sure.” Mattie reached for the sugar bowl and quickly passed it to Mom.

As soon as Mom lifted the lid on the bowl there was a—*Ribbit! Ribbit!*—then a little frog, covered in sugar, hopped out of the bowl and landed on the table with a thud!

Mom screamed so loud that Ada flinched and started crying. Even the green beans fell out of her hair. Then Dad leaned forward and grabbed hold of the frog. “Alright now,” he said with a very stern look, “who’s the one responsible for putting that *frosch* in the sugar bowl?”

No one said a word. Mattie and her brothers just sat there. She knew for certain that it hadn’t been Ada, because she was too little to do something like that. Same for Perry. And Ike was old enough to know better, so that left Russell, Calvin, or Mark.

“Well, who did it?” Dad asked again, squinting his brown eyes as he looked at each of the children.

Mark’s cheeks reddened as he hung his head. “I’m the one who put the *frosch* in the sugar bowl,” he admitted. “It was supposed to be a joke, and I never thought Mom would. . .”

“You about startled me out of my wits,” Mom said. “What in the world were you thinking?”

Before Mark could respond, Dad pushed his chair away from the table. Then, looking down at Mark with a deep frown, he said, “I’m going to put the *frosch* outside. You’d better finish your supper quick, because when I get back, we’re going to settle this matter.”



## CHAPTER 3



# Spilled Milk and Sour Juice

“Dad was pretty upset with you last night, wasn’t he?” Mattie asked when she met Mark in the hallway outside their bedrooms the following morning.

Mark nodded. “Jah, and because of the umbrella stunt and me putting the frosch in the sugar bowl, I’ve gotta clean out the chicken coop every day for a week and do some other extra chores, too.”

“I hope you learned a good lesson,” she said, squinting at him, the way Mom did when she was scolding someone.

Mark frowned. “I don’t need a lecture from you, Mattie. I know puttin’ that frosch in the sugar bowl was wrong, and thinkin’ I could fly was really dumm. I sure won’t do either of those things again. Just wanted to have a little fun, that’s all.”

“Your idea of fun is sure strange, but it’s good you’re not going to do anything like that again, ’cause I think it really scared Mom.”

“Didn’t mean to scare her. It was meant for you.” Mark snickered. “Just thought it’d be funny to see your

expression when you opened the lid and saw that little amphibian.”

“Oh, so that ‘amphibian,’ which I guess means ‘frog,’ was meant for me, huh?”

Mark gave a nod.

She poked his arm. “You tease too much, Mark. And for your information, *Ich verschreck net graad.*”

Mark scrunched up his nose. “Well, you may not frighten easily, but I’m sure you would have been startled if that little ol’ frog had jumped in your plate.”

Mattie nodded. “I wouldn’t have liked that at all.”

“I’m sorry,” Mark said as he hurried out the door to do his chores.

When Mattie entered the kitchen, she found Mom in front of their propane-operated stove, frying hickory-smoked bacon.

“Umm. . .that sure smells good,” Mattie said, smacking her lips. “Are we having fried *oier* to go with it?”

Mom shook her head. “I’m low on eggs this morning, so I’ve decided to make *pannekuche* to go with the bacon.”

“Pancakes are my favorite thing to have for breakfast.” Mattie’s mouth watered just thinking about all that melted butter and warm maple syrup drizzled over a stack of big fluffy pancakes. “How come we’re low on eggs? Are the chickens sick?”

“It could be they sense the cooler weather coming, or it could be because our chickens are getting older,” Mom explained. “As chickens age, they lay fewer eggs.”

“Maybe we can get some little peeps to raise so

we can have more egg-layers,” Mattie suggested. She thought it would be fun to have some baby chicks.

“Well, we probably won’t think about that until springtime. Winter will be coming sooner than we think, and the cold weather can be too harsh on baby animals,” Mom said. “Now, why don’t you get started setting the table while I mix the pancake batter? We’ll eat as soon as your daed and the boys come in from doing their chores.”

Mattie knew that Dad and her brother Ike would head for the woodshop as soon as they’d eaten. Now that the hay was all cut, they wouldn’t be spreading manure in the fields until autumn, which was still a few weeks away. So until then, most of their time would be spent in the shop.

Mattie wasn’t sure what Mark, Russell, and Calvin had planned for the day. She’d made her own plans, however. Right after breakfast, once the dishes were done, she planned to pick some daisies and decorate the porch railing, as well as the fence that separated their driveway from the alfalfa pasture.

“Where’s Ada and Perry?” Mattie asked as she began setting the table. “I figured they’d be in here waiting to eat. Seems like those two are always *hungerich*.”

“You’re right about them always being hungry.” Mom chuckled. “Perry went out to the barn to see if Lucky’s had her *busslin* yet, and Ada’s still sleeping.”

Mattie wrinkled her nose. “I hope you can find a home for all the kittens, ’cause we don’t need any more *katze* around here.”

“Since it’s Mark’s cat he’ll probably want to keep one of the kittens, but we’ll try to find homes for the rest of Lucky’s babies.”

Mattie wished her dog, Twinkles, would have some puppies. As far as she was concerned, a puppy was a lot more fun to play with than a kitten. A pup could be trained to do tricks, too. Mattie had been working with Twinkles, and she could already do several good tricks, like roll over, sit, and play dead. The only thing Mark’s cat did was eat, sleep, purr, and scratch. Of course, she did catch some mice now and then.

Mattie winced, thinking about the last time she’d been scratched by Lucky. She’d heard the way the cat purred whenever Mark stroked her belly, but when Mattie tried doing that a few weeks ago, Lucky hissed, stuck out her claws, and scratched Mattie’s hand. That was the last time Mattie went anywhere near Mark’s annoying cat!

By the time Mattie finished setting the table, Mom had the pancake batter mixed. “If you’ll go wake Ada, I’ll start making the pancakes.”

“Okay, Mom.” Mattie left the kitchen and tromped up the stairs to Ada’s room. She found her little sister curled up at the foot of the bed, with her sheet wrapped around her feet. Her flushed cheeks almost matched her flaming red hair.

“Wake up, sleepyhead.” Mattie gently poked Ada’s arm.

Ada opened her eyes, but they were just tiny slits. “*Is fattgange, Mattie.*”

“I’m not going away.” Mattie bent down and tickled Ada’s feet. “Mom has breakfast almost ready. It’s time to get up.”

Ada closed her eyes and pulled the sheet over her head.

Mattie pulled the sheet aside and shook her sister’s arm. “Mom’s making pannekuche.”

Ada’s eyes opened wide and she leaped out of bed. “Yum! Yum!”



“You doin’ alright today?” Russell asked Mark as they left the barn and followed Dad, Ike, Calvin, and Perry toward the house.

“Jah, sure. Why do you ask?”

“Figured you might be feelin’ out of sorts,” Russell said, keeping his voice so low, only Mark could hear. “After getting in trouble with Dad last night I can sure understand, ’cause I’ve been in your shoes a few times myself.”

“I’m fine.” Mark didn’t want to talk about this again. He just wanted to forget he’d ever put that frog in the sugar bowl and been punished for it. It probably seemed to Mom and Dad that he’d been misbehaving a little too much lately. But really, all Mark wanted to do was have some fun.

Russell thumped Mark’s back. “Say, how’d ya like to go fishin’ with me and Calvin later this morning? We’re going to the pond by our neighbor’s place.”

Mark grinned at his brother. “Sure, that’d be great.”

“All right then, after Dad and Ike leave for work, we’ll get our fishing poles and head for the pond.”

Mark felt pretty good about going fishing, and when he entered the house and smelled hickory-smoked bacon and maple syrup, he felt even better.

“Did Lucky have her busslin yet?” Mom asked.

Mark shook his head. “She was in her box though, so I bet it’ll be soon.”

Mom smiled. “Well, wash up now and take a seat,” she said, motioning to the table. “The pancakes are done, and we’re ready to eat.”

After everyone was seated at the table, they bowed their heads for silent prayer. Mark asked God to bless the food and help him catch lots of fish today.

When the prayers were finished, Mom passed the platters of pancakes and bacon around.

Mark reached for the maple syrup and was getting ready to pour it on his pancakes when he bumped Mattie’s elbow as she was about to pick up her glass of milk. *Thunk!* The glass toppled over and milk spilled onto the table.

“Oh no!” Mark and Mattie both groaned.

“It’s okay. I’ll take care of it,” Mom said, rising from her seat.

While Mom wiped up the mess with a dishtowel, Mattie turned to Mark and said, “Can’t you be more careful?”

“Sorry,” Mark said. “Guess if you were right-handed like me, we wouldn’t be bumping arms.”

Mattie grinned. “Or if you were left-handed like me,

we wouldn't be bumping arms.”

“Mark can trade places with Calvin,” Mom said.

“That won't work,” Calvin spoke up, “ 'Cause I'm right-handed, too.”

“You're left-handed,” Dad said to Russell. “Why don't you trade places with Mark?”

“Okay.” Russell left his chair and exchanged seats with Mark.

Mom handed Dad the platter of bacon. “While I'm up getting Mattie another glass of *melke*, would anyone else like some?”

“I'd rather have orange juice,” Mark said.

“Are you sure about that?” Mom asked. “The orange juice will taste sour after eating pancakes and sweet maple syrup.”

“I'm sure it'll be good.” Mark smacked his lips. “I really do like orange juice.”

“Very well, then.” Mom went to the refrigerator and took out two pitchers—one with milk in it, and one full of orange juice. She poured Mark a glass of orange juice and handed it to him, just as he finished eating his pancake.

Mark took a big drink and puckered his lips. “Yuck! This juice is really sour!” He set his glass down. “I've changed my mind. Can I have some *melke* now?”

“Jah, you can, but not until you've finished your orange juice,” Dad said. “We don't waste food or drink around here, and your mamm did warn you about the orange juice being sour.”

Mark drank his juice down as fast as he could.

He'd just finished the last of it, and was reaching for the pitcher of milk, when Ada knocked over her glass. *Splat!*—icy cold milk went all over Mark's plate and ran onto his clothes.

“This is not starting off to be a very good day,” Mark mumbled as he raced up the stairs to change his clothes. “Sure hope the rest of my day goes better!”