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ISBN 978-1-59789-898-0

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Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.barbourbooks.com

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Printed in the United States of America.

Contents

1. Saying Good-bye	9
2. <i>Verhuddelt</i>	25
3. Raining Sideways.	39
4. Unexpected Company	56
5. A Shocking Discovery	70
6. Another Rotten Day	82
7. Chain of Events	93
8. Wishing Fishing.	105
9. Bubbles and Troubles	118
10. In the Doghouse	128
11. Skateboard Mishap	137
12. Change of Heart	146

Chapter 1

Saying Good-bye



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

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

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

outside to play after the dishes were done.

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

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

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

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

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

Jacob tossed the ball across the yard, and Buddy

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

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

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

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

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

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

stopped chasing after Buddy and headed that way, too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“To Indiana,” Uncle Ben said.

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

Everyone began to talk at once.

“Why are you going to Indiana?”

“How soon do you plan to move?”

“Is your place up for sale?”

“We’ll surely miss you.”

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

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

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

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

Everyone nodded.

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

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

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

Hearing that Mary and her family would be leaving was the worst possible news! Rachel bit off the end of her thumbnail and spit it on the ground. She’d been

trying to give up her nervous habit of nail biting, but it was hard to not feel anxious about her best friend moving away. “Can’t you start a dairy farm right here?” she asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pap nodded.

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

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

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

“Two weeks from today.”

“Two weeks?” Rachel’s mouth fell open.

“Why so soon?” Mom asked.

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

“Let us know when you’re ready to start packing,” Pap said. “We’ll be there to help.”

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

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

“I can’t believe this is the last time we’ll ever have a

sleepover,” Rachel said as the girls climbed the steps to her room.

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

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

“We’ll always be best friends,” Mary said. “My moving away won’t change that.”

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

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

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

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

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

“What is it?”

Rachel opened the bottom drawer of her dresser and took out a rock she’d painted to look like a ladybug. “I signed my name on the bottom,” she said, handing the rock to Mary. “That way you won’t forget who gave it to you.”

“I’ll never forget you, Rachel. Thank you.”

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

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

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

Mary nodded and fluffed up her pillow.

Rachel stared at the ceiling. Even if they stayed awake all night there wouldn’t be enough time to say all the things she wanted to say to Mary. Writing letters and a visit once in a while wouldn’t be the same as spending the night at one another’s house, playing in the haylofts in their barns, or eating lunch at school

together. Tears trickled down Rachel's cheeks. After Mary moved away, nothing would ever be the same.

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

"I suppose I could, but I have to be careful not to let Cuddles in. Mom doesn't like it when Cuddles sneaks into my room and gets up on the bed."

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

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

"Oh no!" Rachel exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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