

# How To Trick Your Sister

by ReadWorks



The plan was perfect. Rick had been working on it all week: in Math class, English class, and History class. He sat in the back of the room, deep in thought. To the teacher, it looked like he was taking notes. In fact, he *was* taking notes-but not on Algebra, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or the Spanish-American War. Rick was a schemer, and now he had dreamed up the greatest scheme of his career.

He was going to ruin his sister's birthday party.

Rick didn't have anything against Emily. She was a nice enough sister. She helped him do the dishes, she kept out of his room, and on long car trips, she let him sleep when he wanted to sleep. But Rick loved playing tricks, and when it came to tricks, there was no better target than Emily.

She liked her life to be orderly. She liked everything in its place. When she was taking notes in school, she used nine different pens-all different colors-in an organizational scheme so complex, it would take FBI scientists weeks to decode it.

Rick was not like that at all. He was a messy kid. He liked his bedroom to be covered in dirty clothes and crumpled-up paper. He liked his music loud and his fireworks louder. And surprises were his favorite thing in the world.

The notebook he used in the back of math class didn't say "MATH" on it. It said, "Surprises-Top Secret! Do Not Open!" In it were the records of every trick he had ever played. There was the time he made his sister think all her dolls had moved away. There was the time he'd hidden Dad's car keys and made him two hours late for work. And there was his last great accomplishment-the time he disconnected the oven, and made Mom think that Thanksgiving dinner would never be finished.

That last trick would be hard for most kids, but Rick, though he never did great in school, was smart with his hands. His father was a mechanic, and had shown him all sorts of neat things he could do with machines. Rick could fix washing machines, dishwashers, showers and garage door openers. He could also, when it suited him, disconnect them completely.

"I am a mechanical wizard," he wrote in his notebook. "No! A genius. Better yet-an evil genius."

This was going to be his greatest triumph. All he needed was a remote control, a few bits of radio equipment and two dozen small fireworks. If there were a Nobel Prize for evil, he thought he would win it, for sure.

The night before her party, Emily couldn't sleep. It was always like that when she was excited. She kept playing the party over in her mind. All the girls from her class were coming and everyone was going to have a wonderful time. With her mother's help, Emily had planned everything down to the last detail. She had filled a binder with plans for games they would play, stories she would tell and outfits she might wear. She had settled on a pale green dress with matching sandals. It was a simple outfit, but that was perfect. She didn't want anyone to know how much she was looking forward to this.

The girls at school were nice to Emily, but there were none who would call her their friend. She was a shy person. In class, she always knew the answer, but never raised her hand. When she was with the other girls, she was like that too. Even when she knew the right thing to say, her mouth would freeze. She couldn't say it. At night she would torture herself with the knowledge that she was funny, charming and smart. She just didn't know how to make that side of her come out.

Perhaps it would happen at her party. Perhaps she would emerge from her shell like a very organized butterfly. Perhaps at school the next week, she would have friends.

If the party didn't work, it certainly wouldn't be her fault. This would be the finest birthday party of the season. The napkins would be colorful. The games would be fresh and exciting. And the cupcakes would be out of this world.

"Are you sure you want cupcakes?" her mother had asked. "Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I don't see what's wrong with a nice ordinary caramel cake. I'll make you one myself!"

"I know you will, Mom," said Emily. "You've made one for me every year since I was born. Caramel cakes are delicious, but they're boring. Cupcakes are popular. Cupcakes are fun."

Her mom agreed. They would have cupcakes: two dozen of them in every color of the frosting rainbow. To keep Rick away from them, her mother had placed them under lock-and-key. She had arranged for his friend Andy to come over during the party. They would be in the basement playing

video games the entire afternoon. Emily didn't think it was possible for Rick to ruin her party if he wasn't allowed out of the basement.

She hadn't counted on a remote control.

Rick was proud of his handiwork. Each firework was attached to a tiny remote detonator, the size of a pea. He stashed them in the back of the pantry, the morning of the party, before his mother made him go into the basement to hang out with Andy.

"You two just stay down here until all the girls have gone home," his mom said. "I don't want you doing anything that might upset your sister."

"I promise I won't come through that door until the party is over," said Rick. His mom didn't understand why he was smiling.

In the basement, Mom had laid out a platter of sandwiches, soda, and cookies for Rick and Andy, but Rick was too excited to eat. From upstairs, he heard the telltale signs of a girl's birthday party: screaming, squealing and laughter loud enough to shatter a window.

"It sounds like they're having a lot of fun up there," said Andy, who wished he could be part of the party.

"Not for long," said Rick. "Hand me that step ladder."

He had promised his mother he wouldn't come through the door, and he was going to keep that promise. There was a small window on the far side of the basement, just big enough for him to crawl through. With Andy holding the ladder, Rick unlatched the window, squirmed through the frame, and crawled into the backyard.

"Wait here," said Rick. "Don't close the window. I'll be back in five minutes."

"Can I play FIFA?" asked Andy.

"You can play whatever you want! Just don't close this window."

He army-crawled around the house to the door that led into the kitchen. Through the window, he saw his mother arranging the cupcakes on a tray. It was nearly time to strike.

In Rick's family, the tradition was to sing "Happy Birthday" while the cake was still in the kitchen. Only when the song was over would mom bring out the cupcakes, candles lit, and frosting shimmering. This was Rick's opportunity.

Mom went into the dining room and the singing started. Moving quickly but silently, Rick opened the kitchen door and went to work, nestling a tiny firework in the bottom of each cupcake. He resisted the urge to eat one of the little cakes. This was no time to goof around. By the time the song had finished, the cakes appeared undisturbed, and Rick had disappeared.

"All right girls," said Mom. "Here we go! Cupcakes, just like I promised."

"I want the green one!" said Rachel McKeown.

"I want the red one!" said Angela Beck.

"I want the pink one and the yellow one and the blue one and the rainbow one!" said Mary Kucan, who really loved cupcakes.

"Hold on, hold on, hold on," said Mom. "There's plenty for everybody. The one with the rainbow is for Emily."

"Thanks Mom," said Emily, as she placed the cupcake on the plate.

"These look awesome," said Angela.

"Totally," said Rachel.

"I want to eat them all," said Mary. "Can I eat all of them?"

"This is perfect, Mom," said Emily. "Thanks so much."

And it was perfect. Everyone from school was here, and they were all having a great time. Emily had been funny; she had been fun. "This is the best party any of my friends have ever thrown," Rachel had told her. No one at school had ever called her "friend" before. The party had gone wonderfully, and Rick couldn't spoil it now.

"All right, girls," said Mom. "Dig in."

And that was when the explosions started. Two dozen little pops-like hail falling on a tin roof-went off, one after the other. When the girls' ears stopped ringing, there was smoke in the air and icing covering every surface: pink icing on the table, green icing on the ceiling and rainbow icing all over Emily's green dress. After a moment, the silence was broken. Emily started to cry.

As the tears began to slip from her eyes, she felt a firm grip on her elbow. "Don't," said Rachel. "Do not cry. We're going to get him. Say it with me. We are going to get him."

"We are?" said Emily.

"He's pretty handy, isn't he? Are you good with machines too?"

"I guess so. My dad taught us all sorts of things."

"Then we'll need a little motor and a lot of fishing line."

"What are we going to do with it?"

"Tell me," said Rachel, with a mischievous grin spreading across her face. "What is your brother's favorite thing in the world?"

It was an hour before Mom let Rick out of the basement. She was furious. But she was so confused and upset, that she didn't even know how to punish him yet.

"Go to your room," she said from the top of the basement stairs.

"Why?" he asked. "What happened? I was down here the whole time. Wasn't I, Andy?"

Andy didn't say anything. He was too smart to get involved in family fights. He slipped out behind Rick's mother, and went to wait for his father to pick him up. Mom stood there, jaw clenched and face red.

"Just go to your room," she said. "Go!"

Rick whistled quietly as he walked to his bedroom, pausing in the dining room to inspect the scene of the carnage. In his head, he began imagining the way he would write this down in his journal of nasty tricks. Never before, he thought, has a birthday party been so thoroughly ruined. This one will go down in history. At the table, Emily and one of the other girls from school-Rachel, maybe?-sat quietly. They said nothing to him as he passed them by, whistling just a teeny bit louder.

He opened his bedroom door and found everything just the way he liked it. Clothes were piled on the floor, dirty cups and bowls were on all the windowsills, and his journal was just where it was supposed to be-hidden behind the bookshelf by the door. As he reached for it, he heard a whirring noise, and the journal jumped away from his hand.

"What the heck?" he said. He grabbed for the journal but it jumped away again, slipping across the floor like a gecko. Someone had tied a string to it, and the string was connected to some unseen machine. He chased the journal across the room, into the hallway and down the stairs. It gained speed as it was dragged into the dining room. He took the corner too fast, slipped on a piece of cake and watched helplessly as his life's work was dragged through gobs of icing.

"Stop it!" he said. "It's getting icing all over! Emily-stop it!"

Emily said nothing, but Rachel allowed herself a tiny smile. By the time Rick was on his feet again, the journal had been dragged into the hallway. He chased it all around the first floor-from the kitchen to the living room and back one last time into the dining room, where he slipped a second time. He followed the book into the den but didn't see where it had gone. Finally, he heard a crackling sound, and saw his journal burning in the fireplace. It was already too late to save.

Rick burst into the dining room, face red with icing and rage.

"You!" he said. "You destroyed my journal. You, you, you! You played a terrible trick on me!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Emily, as she licked a bit of icing off her finger. "You can ask my friend, Rachel. We were here the entire time."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What trick does Rick play on his sister?

- A. He hides her car keys and makes her two hours late for work.
- B. He disconnects the oven and makes her think that Thanksgiving dinner will never be finished.
- C. He sets off fireworks inside the cupcakes at her birthday party.
- D. He attaches a string to her notebook and uses a motor to pull it into the fireplace.

2. What is the resolution at the end of the story?

- A. Tears begin to slip from Emily's eyes because the cupcake icing has gotten everywhere.
- B. Emily keeps playing the party over in her mind instead of going to sleep.
- C. Emily feels a firm grip on her elbow and tells Rachel that she is good with machines.
- D. Emily takes revenge on her brother by pulling his journal into the fireplace with a string and motor.

3. Emily is excited for her birthday party.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A. Emily cannot fall asleep the night before the party.
- B. Emily helps her brother do the dishes and lets him sleep on long car trips.
- C. Emily uses nine different pens to take notes in school.
- D. Angela Beck wants to eat the red cupcake.

4. Why does Rick decide to ruin his sister's birthday party?

- A. He is a messy kid who likes his bedroom to be covered in dirty clothes.
- B. His sister's birthday party is a great opportunity for playing a trick.
- C. He can fix washing machines, dishwashers, showers, and garage door openers.
- D. He army-crawls around the house to the door that leads to the kitchen.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A. a girl who wants to eat all the cupcakes at someone else's birthday party
- B. a trick that a boy plays on his sister and the trick she plays in return
- C. a mother who gets mad when her son plays a trick on her daughter
- D. a journal that a boy uses to keep a record of the tricks he plays on people

6. Read the following sentences: "He sat in the back of the room, **deep in thought**. To the teacher, it looked like he was taking notes."

What does the phrase **deep in thought** mean?

- A. It means that someone is sitting in a short chair very close to the floor.
- B. It means that someone is sitting in a tall chair very far from the floor.
- C. It means that someone is thinking a lot about something.
- D. It means that someone is not thinking very much about something.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Rick tricks Emily; \_\_\_\_\_ Emily tricks Rick.

- A. in contrast
- B. for instance
- C. first
- D. then

8. What trick does Emily play on Rick?

9. Why does Emily play a trick on Rick? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

10. How does Emily feel at the end of the story? Explain your answer with evidence from the passage.