A Cake for the Old Mill



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About This Book

At a Glance

- **Reading level:** English level A1+ (CEFR)
- **Age:** 7+
- **Length:** 11 chapters · ±12,600 words

Edition

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Version	Date	Notes
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About the Story

The Series

Rosie's Bakery sits on Main Street in the little American town of Maple Falls, where Evie and her mom bake fresh bread every morning and cakes to order. Evie loves to bake — and most of all to decorate, with a ring of red cherries on top. In each book she takes on one baking job, from the first mixing bowl to the last cherry, while her little brother Billy tastes everything and Crumble the shop dog waits for a crumb. Warm, gentle stories for children just starting to read English.

This Book

It is January. The old mill by the river will soon be a hundred years old, and Mrs. Reed wants a cake for a hundred people!

Evie has an idea: three big, flat cakes side by side, with one picture on top. The river, the mill and the round water wheel. And one red cherry on every piece!

Then Mom gets the flu: a week in bed, and no baking. Now the kids have to run the bakery. Every day they tell Mom everything. Even the things that go wrong.

But then there are no eggs in all of Maple Falls…

Where can the kids find eggs in the snow?

Chapter 1: A Cake for a Hundred



On Monday morning, there was snow on Main Street. There was snow on the cars. The big maple tree down the street was white.

In the bakery kitchen, it was warm. The bread was out of the oven. The five kids sat at the big table, and June sat in her baby chair and looked at the snow.

Evie looked at the clock, and then at the door. She could not sit still.

“Two more minutes,” said Tess.

Before Dad went to the mill that morning, he smiled at Evie. “Mrs. Reed comes at ten.”

They all knew about the cake. Dad brought the news home in October. It was a cake for the mill, for a hundred people. Now it was January, and today was the day.

Ding! The bell on the shop door rang. Crumble ran to the shop. Evie ran after him.

A tall woman came in through the door. She had short gray hair, and she wore a red wool hat with snow on it. She wore a long brown coat, and there was white flour on the sleeves.

"Morning!" she said in a big voice.

"Good morning," said Evie. "Are you Mrs. Reed?"

"I am! And you are Evie. Your dad talks about you and your cherries every day."

Mom came out of the kitchen. "Mrs. Reed! Come into the kitchen. It is warm there."

Mrs. Reed went in after Mom and took off her red hat. Then she shook her coat, and white flour fell from the sleeves.

Mom sneezed.

"Sorry!" said Mrs. Reed. "That is my flour. It comes home with me every day."

"And it is in my bread every day," said Mom, and she laughed.

Mrs. Reed sat down at the big table.

"Sorry," she said again. "I talk loud. The mill is very loud, so I talk loud at the mill. And at home, and here."

Billy laughed. "Are you Dad's boss?"

"I am. And your dad makes good flour." She put her hands flat on the table. "Now, the cake. My grandpa built the mill by the river, a hundred years ago. On Saturday the mill will be a hundred years old."

"A hundred years old!" said Sam. "That is very old."

"Older than Grandpa!" said Billy.

"Much older," said Mrs. Reed. "Older than me, too." She laughed, very loud. "On Saturday we have a party at the mill. The people from the mill come with their kids, and the town comes, too. About a hundred people!"

"A party at the mill!" said Billy. "Can we see the big wheel on the river?"

"The big water wheel, too," said Mrs. Reed. "You can all see it on Saturday."

Sara took out her pencil and her list, and she wrote down the day. "Saturday is good," she said. "The buns were last Saturday."

"The first Saturday of the month is for buns," said Tess. "This Saturday is the second one."

Last Saturday, there were steamed buns with a red dot in the bakery. The kids made them from Tess's recipe.

"And Grandma knows," said Sam. "Mrs. Hill wrote to her about the buns in short words. Tess helped."

Mom smiled. "Now, the cake. A cake for a hundred people is too big for one pan."

"Too big for our oven, too," said Evie.

"So we bake sheet cakes," said Mom.

"Sheet cakes?" said Billy. "What is a sheet cake?"

Mom went to the shelf. Grandma Lee's bamboo steamer stood there, next to the cake pans. Mom took down a big pan, very big and very flat.

"A sheet cake is a big, flat cake," said Mom. "You bake it in a big, flat pan, and then you cut it into squares."

"A sheet is on my bed," said Billy.

"Yes," said Mom. "And a sheet is big and flat, too."

"Squares?" said Sam. "Not round?"

"Not round," said Mom. "Small squares, one square for one person."

"Can I carry the pans?" asked Sam. "I carry. That is my job."

"We have three," said Mom. "They are big, but they are not heavy."

Sam carried the pans to the big table, one by one. He put them down side by side.

Tess looked at the first pan for a long time. "How many squares in one sheet cake?" she asked.

"Six this way, and six that way," said Mom.

"Six times six," said Tess. "Thirty-six squares in one cake." She looked at the three pans. "Thirty-six, and thirty-six, and thirty-six. A hundred and eight."

Tess never needed a pencil for numbers.

"A hundred and eight pieces," said Mrs. Reed. "For a hundred people."

"Eight extra," said Tess.

"A baker always bakes extra," said Sara.

Mom smiled at her. It was Mom's old line. Now it was Sara's line, too.

Evie looked at the three pans side by side on the big table. One, two, three. She could see it already.

"Mrs. Reed," she said. "Three cakes, side by side. And on the three cakes, one picture."

"A picture?" said Mrs. Reed. "What picture?"

Evie put her hand on the first pan. "This cake is the river, with blue icing." She put her hand on the middle pan. "This cake is the mill." Then she put her hand on the last pan. "And this cake is the big water wheel. Round."

"Side by side, they are one picture!" said Sara. "The river, the mill and the wheel."

Mrs. Reed looked at the three pans. Then she stood up.

"My mill on a cake?" Her big voice was very big now. "Yes! Yes!"

June laughed in her baby chair. Crumble barked.

"And one red cherry on every piece," said Evie. "That is my mark."

"A hundred and eight cherries," said Billy. "And one for me."

"Billy!" said Sara. But she laughed, too, and Evie had to laugh with her.

"We are going to bake your mill, Mrs. Reed," said Evie.

Mrs. Reed looked at the clock. It was half past ten, and she had to go back to the mill. She put on her red hat. "The big stones do not wait for me! Thank

you, Rosie. Thank you, kids. On Saturday my mill will be a hundred years old, and I want to see it on a cake!"

The bell rang. Then she was gone, out into the white street.

After the door closed, nobody said a word for a moment. Sara looked at her list. Tess looked at the pans.

"Three sheet cakes for a party," said Sara at last. "A river, a mill and a wheel. And a hundred and eight cherries. It is a long list."

"And one for Billy," said Sam.

Mom took the big pans back to the shelf. There was no flour from Mrs. Reed in the air now.

Then Mom sneezed. And again. And again.

Chapter 2: Mom in Bed



On Tuesday morning, Evie came down the stairs, and then she stopped.

The kitchen was dark and cold. There was no bread in the oven, and there was no smell of bread.

Every morning, Mom was in the kitchen first. Every morning, the kitchen was warm. But not this morning.

Evie turned on the light.

“Where is Mom?” said Evie.

Dad came down the stairs with June, and he did not smile.

“Mom is in bed,” he said. “She could not get up. She is very hot, and she has a cough.”

Billy came down in his pajamas. “Why is it dark? Where is the bread?”

“No bread today,” said Dad. “Mom is sick. I am going to call the doctor.”

The doctor came at nine, with a big black bag and snow on her boots. She went up the stairs with Dad. Evie and Billy had to wait in the kitchen. Evie gave June her milk, and Billy looked at the stairs.

After the doctor came down, she sat at the big table with them.

"Your mom has the flu," she said.

"The flu?" said Billy. "What is the flu?"

"The flu is worse than a cold," said the doctor. "You get a fever, so you are very hot. You get a cough. And you are very, very tired."

"Is it bad?" asked Evie.

The doctor smiled. "No. Your mom needs a week in bed. Lots of water and lots of sleep. In a week she will be fine."

"A week?" said Billy. "And the bakery?"

"No baking for your mom," said the doctor. "Not this week. The flu goes from hands to food." She looked at Evie and Billy. "And you two stay out of her room. You can talk to her at the door."

After the doctor left, Dad called Grandpa. Then he took a glass of water up the stairs. Evie and Billy went up after him.

They stood at the door of the bedroom. Mom was in bed under two blankets. Her face was red, and her hair was all over the pillow. She smiled at them.

"Hello, my bakers," she said. "I have a fever, and I am very tired."

Evie wanted to run in and sit on the bed. But she could not go in. The doctor said so, and it was hard.

"You heard the doctor," said Mom. "A week in bed. And the cake for the mill is on Saturday." She closed her eyes. "Then we call Mrs. Reed. We say no."

"No!" said Billy.

Evie thought of the three big pans, side by side. The river, the mill and the wheel.

"No, Mom," she said. "We can do it."

Mom opened her eyes. "Three sheet cakes, Evie. And the bread every morning, and the shop. That is too much work for kids."

"There are five of us!" said Billy.

"Five kids, and no grown-up," said Mom. "Who opens the shop? Who takes the money? And who makes the bread at five in the morning?"

Evie did not know, and Billy did not know either. Mom sneezed, and then she coughed.

Then somebody came up the stairs, slow and careful. It was Grandpa, with snow on his cap and a big pot in his hands.

"Chicken soup," he said. "Hot soup for Rosie."

He stopped at the door, next to the kids. Dad took the soup in to Mom.

"Thank you," said Mom.

"Your dad told me on the phone," said Grandpa to Evie. Then he looked at Mom. "So here I am, Rosie. I will sit in the shop. Every day."

"Every day?" said Mom.

"Every day. I know the bread, and I know the people. And the people know me."

Dad came back to the door. "And I am here at five in the morning. And every evening."

"At five?" said Billy. "It is dark at five!"

Ding! The bell rang down in the shop. Billy ran down the stairs, and then he ran up again, fast.

"Sara and Tess and Sam are here!" he said. "Sara has a message!"

Sara came up the stairs, with Tess and Sam after her. They had snow on their hats. Now there were five kids and Grandpa at the door, and Crumble, too.

Mom laughed, and then she coughed.

"Grandpa called Mrs. Hill this morning," said Sara. "Then Mrs. Hill called my mom. Now I have a message for you." She looked at her list. "Here is the

message. Mrs. Hill says, 'I can count money. I can sit at the little table by the window. Every day.'"

"Mrs. Hill?" said Mom. "In the snow and the ice?"

"I will bring her," said Grandpa. "On my arm. Slow and careful."

"And we can bake," said Tess. "I measure. Sara checks the list. Evie does the icing."

"And I carry," said Sam. "And I guard the door."

"Three cakes," said Tess. "The oven takes two pans at a time. So two cakes first, and then one."

"And I taste," said Billy.

Mom looked at them all for a long time. Nobody said a word. Evie held her breath.

"Yes," said Mom at last.

Billy jumped up, and Sam clapped his hands.

"Wait," said Mom. "Yes. But you tell me everything. Every day. Even the things that go wrong."

"Everything," said Evie.

"Everything," said Sara and Tess and Sam.

"Even when I eat a cherry?" asked Billy.

"Even when you eat a cherry," said Mom, and she smiled.

"And the oven?" asked Sam. "You watch the oven. That is your job."

"I can still watch it," said Mom. "From here."

"How?" said Billy. "The oven is down the stairs."

"With you, Billy," said Mom. "When the kids do not know what to do, you run up the stairs and ask me. Then you run down with my answer."

"Up and down?" said Billy. "All day?"

"All day."

Billy thought about it. "OK. But I still taste first."

That evening, Dad called Mrs. Reed. Evie could hear her big voice from the phone, all the way across the kitchen.

"The flu? Poor Rosie! And the kids are baking my mill? Good! Tell Rosie to sleep!"

Dad laughed. "Rosie knows now."

Later, Mom ate a little soup, and her fever was not so high now. Dad came down the stairs. "I set my alarm clock for a quarter to five."

"A quarter?" said Billy. "A quarter is money."

"On a clock, a quarter is fifteen minutes," said Dad. "So a quarter to five is fifteen minutes before five."

"Then I will set my alarm clock, too," said Billy.

"You do not have an alarm clock," said Evie.

"Then you can wake me up," said Billy.

Before Evie went to bed, she set her alarm clock for a quarter to five.

The alarm clock rang at a quarter to five. Outside it was dark, and snow fell.

Chapter 3: Five O'Clock



Evie turned off her alarm clock. Then she went to Billy's room.

"Billy," she said. "Wake up. It is bread time."

Billy opened one eye. "Is it morning?"

"Not yet," said Evie.

At five o'clock, the light was on in the kitchen. Outside, snow fell past the dark window. Evie turned on the big oven. Dad came down the stairs from Mom's room, with an empty glass.

"Mom is asleep again," he said. He washed his hands at the sink for a long time. "The flu goes from hands to food. Not in this kitchen."

Then somebody knocked on the shop door. Evie ran through the dark shop and opened it. *Ding!*

Sara, Tess and Sam stood outside in the snow, with warm hats on. Across the white street, Mrs. Lee waved from her door.

"Our moms said yes," said Sara.

Sam yawned. "It is very dark at five."

They all went into the warm kitchen. Dad stood at the big table. Before they started, he closed his eyes.

"Dear God, please help Rosie get well," he said. "And help us with our work today. Amen."

Dad opened his eyes. "OK," he said. "But I am not a baker. I make flour."

"Then we teach you," said Evie. "Mom taught us. Now we teach you."

So the kids taught Dad.

"Bread needs four things," said Evie. "Flour, water, yeast and salt."

Tess measured the flour, the water and the yeast. Sara read her list. Dad took a jar from the shelf. "Is this the salt?"

Sara put a little on a spoon and tasted it. Then she tasted a little again. "Yes. That is the salt."

"Why two times?" asked Billy.

"The salt jar and the sugar jar look the same," said Sara. "So I check the salt twice."

Dad mixed it all. "Now push, fold, turn," said Evie. Dad pushed the dough with his big hands. He folded it, and he turned it.

"This is hard work!" said Dad.

"Mom does it every morning," said Billy.

Then the dough had to rise for an hour, under a clean white towel. Sam put his head on the big table, and soon he was asleep.

After the dough was big, they made round loaves. Evie made one, and Sara made one. Dad made one, too. It was not very round.

"Dad, your loaf is not round," said Billy.

"No," said Dad. "Do we tell Mom?"

"We tell Mom everything," said Evie. "Even the things that go wrong."

Dad laughed. "Then the next one will be rounder."

Then they made the rolls, small and round. Sam woke up and made rolls, too. Tess counted them all. "Forty-eight," she said. "Four dozen. Two dozen on each pan."

Now there were three pans on the table: two pans of rolls and one pan of loaves. Dad picked up the first pan. "OK. All three in the oven!"

"No," said Tess. "Three is too many. The oven takes two pans at a time."

So the rolls went in first, and the loaves had to wait. Soon the kitchen smelled of warm bread. When the timer rang, Dad opened the oven.

"The rolls are brown," he said. "Are they done?"

Were they done inside? Evie could not tell. Mom always knew.

"Do not look at me," said Dad. "I make flour."

"I can ask Mom!" said Billy, and he ran up the stairs.

He stopped at Mom's door. "Mom! The rolls are brown. Are they done?"

Mom opened her eyes. "Tap the bottom," she said from her bed. "Hollow? Then they are done."

Billy ran down the stairs. "Tap the bottom! Hollow? Then they are done!"

"Hollow?" said Sam. "What is hollow?"

Dad turned a roll over. He tapped the bottom with his finger. *Tock, tock.*

"It sounds empty," said Tess. "That is hollow."

Billy tapped a roll, too. *Tock, tock.* "They are done!"

After the rolls came out, the loaves went in. Dad tapped them, too. *Tock, tock.*

Dad brought June down to her baby chair. Then he put bread in two big baskets. "My round," he said.

"Your round?" said Sam. "Is it round, too?"

Dad laughed. "No. My round is a drive. Every morning I take bread to a few houses. One house, then the next, then the next. At the end of my round, I go to the mill."

At seven o'clock, somebody knocked on the shop door again. It was Grandpa, with snow on his cap. Mrs. Hill was on his arm, with her cane.

"Slow and careful," said Grandpa. "Here we are."

Mrs. Hill sat down at the little table by the window. Grandpa put the money box in front of her.

"Good," said Mrs. Hill. "I take the money. I know everybody. I know their money, too."

Grandpa turned on the lights in the shop and sat down behind the counter. "Seven o'clock," he said. "Rosie's Bakery is open."

The bell rang and rang. People came in from the snow, and every person asked, "How is your mom?"

"She has the flu," said Billy. "She is hot and tired. And a little bored."

The people in the shop were very kind. A man gave Billy a bag of oranges for Mom.

"That is very kind," said Grandpa.

"People are kind in Maple Falls," said Mrs. Hill. "I know. I am old."

Billy had a job in the shop, too. He put the rolls in the bags. In the kitchen, Sara and Tess made a list for the three sheet cakes, and Evie stayed with June.

At ten o'clock, Mrs. Green came in, with snow on her coat. "Morning!" she said. "A dozen rolls, please. Mr. Green eats four at lunch!"

She gave the money to Mrs. Hill.

"Money for twelve rolls," said Mrs. Hill. "Thank you."

Billy took a bag and counted the rolls into it. He counted slowly. "One, two, three, four, five …"

Mrs. Green asked Grandpa about Mom.

"… nine, ten, eleven —"

Then June cried in the kitchen. It was a big, loud cry.

Billy turned and looked at the kitchen door.

"It is OK, June!" said Evie from the kitchen. "I am here!"

Billy closed the bag and gave it to Mrs. Green.

"Thank you, Billy," she said. "Tell your mom we say hello." The bell rang, and she went out into the snow.

At four, there were only a few rolls left, and no loaves at all.

In the evening, Dad came home from the mill, with white flour on his coat. Grandpa locked the shop door. Mrs. Hill counted the money at her little table.

"Every loaf is sold," she said. "And all four dozen rolls."

"On the first day!" said Dad. "Well done, bakers."

But Tess did not smile. She looked in the basket. She counted the rolls that were left.

"One too many," she said.

Chapter 4: A Baker's Dozen



"One too many?" said Dad. "What do you mean?"

Tess held up the last roll. "We made forty-eight rolls. Mrs. Hill has money for forty-eight rolls," she said. "But here is one roll."

Sara looked at the roll. "So somebody paid for a roll. And they did not get it."

Nobody said a word. Then Billy's face went red.

"Mrs. Green," he said. "I counted her rolls. Nine, ten, eleven … and then June cried."

"And then?" asked Evie.

"Then I closed the bag." Billy looked down at his shoes, and he felt bad. "I did not count to twelve."

"She paid for twelve rolls," said Tess. "And she got eleven."

"So nobody knows," said Sam. "Only us."

It was very quiet in the shop. Mrs. Hill looked at Billy over her round glasses. She did not say a word. She waited.

Billy looked at the roll in Tess's hand for a long time. Then he looked up.

"We have to tell her," he said.

Grandpa smiled at him. "Yes, Billy. You have to tell her. And then she gets a baker's dozen."

"A baker's dozen?" said Sam. "What is a baker's dozen?"

"A baker's dozen is thirteen," said Grandpa. "Long ago, bakers gave one extra. So nobody got too little."

"Thirteen?" said Billy. "But she has eleven, so she gets two more!"

"Eleven and two is thirteen," said Tess.

"Then we go now!" said Billy.

Dad looked out at the dark street. "Not now. It is late, and we have only one roll."

"Then we bake new rolls in the morning and take two to her," said Evie.

"The Greens live at number eight," said Mrs. Hill. "I know everybody."

Grandpa put on his cap. "I can come with you after the shop opens," he said. "Slow and careful, in the snow." Then he took Mrs. Hill home on his arm.

After the shop was closed, the kids went up the stairs. Dad took a glass of water in to Mom. The kids stood at the bedroom door.

Mom sat up in bed. Her face was not so red now. "Hello, my bakers," she said. "Tell me everything."

So they told her. Evie told her about the bread at five, and Sam told her about the oranges.

"And my loaf was not round," said Dad.

Mom laughed, and then she coughed. "Not round at all?"

"Not very," said Dad. "Tomorrow it will be rounder."

Then it was Billy's turn, but Billy did not say anything. He could not look at Mom.

"Billy?" said Mom.

"One thing went wrong today," said Billy.

"Tell me," said Mom. "Even the things that go wrong."

So Billy told her about Mrs. Green and the eleven rolls. He told her about June's big cry and about the roll in the basket.

"And what are you going to do?" asked Mom.

"We are going to tell her," said Billy. "Tomorrow, with two rolls. That is a baker's dozen."

Mom looked at him for a long time. Then she smiled. "Tell me tomorrow," she said.

The next morning, Billy was up before the alarm clock. "Bread time!" he said at Evie's door.

At five, Sara, Tess and Sam came again, with snow on their hats. They made the bread and the rolls with Dad. Dad's loaf was rounder today, not very round but rounder.

Before the shop opened, Billy took a small paper bag. He put two warm rolls in it and counted out loud. "One, two." Then he counted again. "One, two."

"Two," said Tess. "I counted, too."

"I can take them on my round," said Dad.

"No," said Billy. "I have to give them to her. I counted her rolls."

Dad smiled and put on his coat. "OK. Then they are your rolls."

At seven, Grandpa came with Mrs. Hill on his arm. She sat down at her little table. "Go," she said. "Sara and I can sell the bread for ten minutes. I am old, but I am fast with money."

Tess and Sam stayed in the kitchen with June. Evie, Billy and Grandpa walked down Main Street in the cold. Billy held the bag in both hands. He

wanted to run, but he had to walk slowly. The snow was deep, and Grandpa was old.

At number eight, Billy knocked on the door.

Mrs. Green opened it, with her round glasses on and her silver hair in a neat bun. "Billy and Evie! And Grandpa, too! In all this snow!"

Billy held up the bag. "You paid for twelve rolls yesterday, but June cried and I stopped at eleven." He took a big breath. "You got eleven. Here are two more. A baker's dozen."

She looked at the bag. Then she laughed a big, happy laugh. "Eleven! I did not count them! Look, a baker's dozen. Thirteen rolls!"

Mr. Green came to the door, too. "Thirteen?" he said. "Then I eat two!"

Grandpa laughed, and Evie had to laugh, too.

Mrs. Green took the bag. "Thank you, Billy, and thank you for telling me," she said. "Long ago, my mother bought bread by the baker's dozen. Now I have one, too."

Back at the bakery, Billy ran up the stairs, and Evie ran after him.

"Mom!" said Billy at the door. "We told Mrs. Green, and she laughed! And Mr. Green is going to eat two!"

Mom opened her eyes. "You told her," she said. "That was right."

That was all, but Billy smiled all the way down the stairs.

In the kitchen, Sara and Tess stood at the big table with the cake list. Today they had to start the cakes.

"Flour, sugar, butter, milk and eggs," Sara read. "One sheet cake needs six eggs."

"Then three cakes need eighteen eggs," said Tess. "Six and six and six."

"I carry," said Sam. He took the egg box from the fridge and walked very slowly to the table. Tess opened the egg box.

"Six eggs," she said. "Only six."

"We need eighteen, and we have six," said Sara. "So we need twelve more."

"A dozen more is easy," said Billy. "Sara's mom has eggs in her store."

So Evie and Sara put on their hats and ran down Main Street to the store. Sara's mom stood by the door. "Hello, Sara. Hello, Evie," she said.

"Mom, we need eggs for the mill cake," said Sara. "Twelve eggs, please."

Her mom shook her head. "I am sorry, girls. I have none."

"None?" said Sara.

"None, not one egg," said her mom. "Molly's dad brought farm eggs last Friday, and they are all sold. Every week a big truck brings eggs from the city. But this week the truck did not come. The snow on the roads is too deep. The egg store is empty, too."

She showed them the egg shelf. It was empty.

Evie looked at the empty shelf. Then she looked at Sara.

"No eggs," said Sara. "No eggs in all of Maple Falls."

Chapter 5: Eggs in the Snow



Evie and Sara walked back up Main Street with empty hands. At her little table, Mrs. Hill looked at them over her round glasses.

“No eggs?” she said.

“None,” said Sara. “Not one egg in all of Maple Falls.”

In the kitchen, Evie told the others about the empty egg shelf and the big truck from the city.

“No eggs?” said Sam. “Then no cake?”

Tess looked in the egg box. “Six eggs,” she said. “That is one cake, not three.”

Nobody said a word. Then Billy jumped up from his chair.

“Molly has hens!” he said. “Not only on Fridays!”

“What do you mean?” asked Sara.

“Molly’s dad brings eggs on Fridays,” said Billy. “But hens lay eggs every day!”

Evie smiled at him. "Billy, that is a good idea."

"I know," said Billy.

Evie ran to the phone on the kitchen wall. Billy said the number of the farm. Then Molly's dad said, "Hello?"

So Evie told him everything. Mom had the flu. The kids had to bake the cake for the mill. And there were no eggs in Maple Falls.

"Do you have eggs?" she asked. She held her breath.

"The hens lay fewer eggs in winter," said Molly's dad. "But they lay. We have three dozen. Molly counted them this morning. We can bring them after lunch. My truck is big, and I drive slow."

Evie put the phone back on the wall. "Three dozen eggs!" she said. "After lunch!"

"Three dozen is thirty-six," said Tess.

Billy jumped up and down. "My idea! That was my idea!"

"Molly's dad says the hens lay fewer eggs in winter," said Evie. "But they lay."

"Fewer?" said Sam. "What is fewer?"

"'Fewer' is not so many," said Tess. "It is for things you can count. Fewer eggs, but less milk."

Then Billy stopped jumping. "Mom does not know about the eggs," he said. "We tell her everything."

So Billy and Evie went up the stairs. They stood at Mom's door.

"It is not a good thing, Mom," said Billy.

"Tell me," said Mom. "Even the things that go wrong."

So Billy told her about the empty egg shelf. Mom sat up a little. "Oh, no. And the cakes?"

"But then I had an idea!" said Billy. "Molly has hens!"

"Her dad is going to bring three dozen eggs," said Evie. "In his truck, after lunch."

Mom put her head back on her pillow. "In all this snow," she said. "That is very kind. Thank him for me."

After lunch, Billy stood at the shop window. No cars came down the white street. Then a truck came, very slowly. It stopped in front of the bakery.

"They are here!" said Billy.

The bell rang. Molly came in first, with an egg box in her arms and snow on her red braids. Her dad came in behind her with two more boxes. He was very tall, and there was snow on his green cap.

"No hat, Molly?" said Grandpa from behind the counter.

"It is in my pocket," said Molly. "I like snow on my braids."

She put her box down on the counter. Then she looked at Evie, and she smiled.

"You gave me two eggs at the fair," she said. "Now I give you thirty-six."

For a moment, Evie could not say a word. She thought of the fair, and of Molly's broken eggs on the floor. "Thank you, Molly," she said at last.

Molly's dad took off his green cap. He shook the snow from it. "How is your mom?" he asked.

"Hot and tired," said Billy. "And she says thank you."

Molly's dad smiled. "Tell her the hens say hello."

Mrs. Hill looked at the egg boxes. "Thirty-six eggs in the winter," she said. "Those are good hens."

"The best hens in Maple Falls!" said Molly.

"Molly," said her dad. "Our hens are not in Maple Falls."

Molly laughed. "Then the best hens on the farm!"

Then Molly looked up at her dad. "Can I stay and help?"

"If Evie says yes," said her dad.

"Yes, please!" said Evie.

"Then I will come back for you at four," said her dad. Before he went out, he put his cap back on. The bell rang. The truck went slowly back up the white street.

After the truck was gone, Sam took an egg box. "I carry," he said. "And I never run with eggs." He walked to the kitchen very, very slowly.

In the kitchen, Evie took Mom's green spare apron from the drawer, and Molly put it on. There was still snow on her braids. She shook it off.

Sara looked at her list. "Every kid has a job," she said. "Molly, you know eggs. You check the eggs."

Molly looked at every egg, one by one. "No broken eggs," she said. "Not one."

"Thirty-six and six," said Tess. "Forty-two eggs."

"Three cakes need eighteen eggs," said Sara. "Now we have more than enough."

Tess looked at the big, flat pans on the shelf. "We never baked a sheet cake," she said. "So first we bake one test cake."

"A test cake?" said Sam. "What is a test cake?"

"A test cake is a cake for us," said Tess. "We bake it. We look at it. Then we will know. Tomorrow we bake the three big cakes."

"And we eat the test cake," said Billy. "I taste first."

So they made the test cake. Tess turned on the oven. She used the same heat as for Mom's round cakes. Sara read the list, and Tess measured. Molly broke six eggs into the big bowl with one hand.

"With one hand!" said Billy. "How?"

"I am a farm girl," said Molly. "I break eggs every day."

Evie mixed the batter. Then she and Tess put it in a big, flat pan. The pan went in the oven, all alone. Sam stood in front of the oven door.

"Nobody opens the door," he said. "I am the door guard."

Tess set the timer. They waited. Soon the kitchen smelled of cake. But after a long time, the smell was not so sweet.

"Is it OK?" asked Molly.

"Ten more minutes on the timer," said Tess.

So they had to wait. Then the timer rang. *Ding!* Evie and Tess took the big pan out and put it on the table.

The edges were dark brown. Tess tapped one with a spoon. *Tock, tock.*

"Hard," she said. "The edges are hard."

"But look at the middle," said Sara. "It is light and nice."

Evie took a knife and cut a small piece from the middle. The knife came out wet. The middle of the cake was still wet.

Nobody said a word. Billy looked at the dark brown edges. Then he looked at the wet middle.

"It is brown and wet," said Billy. "How can a cake be brown *and* wet?"

Chapter 6: Too Big for the Oven



Evie looked at the brown and wet cake, and she felt bad. Six good eggs, and the cake was no good.

But Billy did not wait. He ran to the stairs. “We tell Mom everything,” he said.

He ran up the stairs and stopped at Mom’s door. He never went in. That was the rule.

“Mom!” he said. “The test cake went wrong.”

Mom opened her eyes. “Tell me,” she said. “Even the things that go wrong.”

“The edges are dark brown and hard,” said Billy. “And the middle is still wet. Is the cake too big for the oven?”

“No,” said Mom. “The oven is big enough. What heat did you use?”

Billy did not know, so he ran down the stairs again.

“Tess!” he said. “What heat did you use?”

"The heat for Mom's round cakes," said Tess.

Billy ran up the stairs. "The heat for your round cakes!" he said at the door.

Mom sat up a little. "Then the heat was too high," she said. "A sheet cake is big and flat. The edges get hot fast. They get brown and hard before the middle is done. A big cake needs a low heat. And a long time."

Billy ran down the stairs. "Low heat!" he said. "Long time!"

"How low?" asked Sara.

Billy ran up the stairs and down again. "A little lower," he said. "And Mom says Tess can work it out."

"Work out?" said Sam. "What is work out?"

"You think hard about it," said Tess. "Then you know the answer."

Tess went to the oven and turned the heat lower. Then she looked at the timer, and her lips moved a little. Evie watched her. Tess was very good with the oven.

"Lower heat, so more minutes," said Tess at last. "Forty minutes."

"Forty minutes!" said Billy. "That is a long time."

So they made a new test cake. Molly checked six more eggs and broke them into the big bowl, with one hand again. Sara read the list, Tess measured, and Evie mixed. Then Evie and Tess put the batter in a clean pan.

The pan went in the oven at the lower heat. Sam stood in front of the oven door.

"Nobody opens the door," he said. "I am the door guard."

Tess set the timer for forty minutes. Then they had to wait.

But Billy could not wait. He ran up the stairs again.

"Mom! The new cake is in! Forty minutes!"

He ran down and up again.

"Mom! Molly broke the eggs with one hand!"

Mom laughed, and then she coughed. “Tell Molly I say well done.”

Billy ran down to tell Molly, and then he ran up again.

“Mom! Can we eat the brown cake?”

“Eat the edges,” said Mom. “Not the wet middle. It is not done.”

So the kids cut off the hard edges. Billy ate the first piece. *Crunch.*

“Hard but sweet,” he said.

Then he ran up the stairs to tell Mom that, too.

He ran up and down, again and again. “Mom, it smells good!” “Mom, Sam is still at the door!” “Mom, is forty minutes long?”

From the shop, Grandpa called, “Slow and careful on the stairs, Billy!”

“Slow and careful,” said Billy. This time he walked up the stairs, very slowly.

“Mom, I walked this time,” he said at the door.

Mom smiled. “I love your news, Billy. Every time.”

In the kitchen, Tess looked at the stairs every time Billy went up.

At last the timer rang. *Ding!* Evie and Tess took the pan out and put it on the table.

The cake was golden at the edges, and it was golden in the middle. Tess tapped an edge with a spoon. It did not go *tock, tock.*

“Soft,” she said.

Evie took a knife and cut a small piece from the middle. The knife came out clean.

“Not wet!” said Sara. “It is done!”

Billy ran up the stairs. “Mom! It is golden! The edges and the middle!”

“Is it even?” asked Mom.

Billy ran down. “Mom asks, ‘Is it even?’”

“Even?” said Sam. “Mom says ‘even’ every day. ‘Even the things that go wrong.’”

“Here ‘even’ means something else,” said Tess. “It means the same all over. The same at the edges and in the middle.”

Evie looked at the cake. Golden edges, golden middle. “Then it is even,” she said. “Golden and even.”

Billy ran up one more time. “It is even!”

“Then you did it,” said Mom. “A low heat and a long time. Well done, my bakers.”

Billy came back down slowly and sat on a chair. “My legs,” he said.

“Twenty-two times,” said Tess. “Up the stairs. I counted.”

“Twenty-two!” said Molly. “On our farm, only Pepper the goat runs that much.”

Sara wrote on her list. “Then Billy has a new job,” she said. “Billy is the stair runner.”

“The stair runner?” said Billy.

“One more job for Billy,” said Sara.

Billy thought about it. “Tasting is better,” he said.

They all laughed. Then Evie cut the new test cake into squares. “Billy, you taste first,” she said.

Billy ate a square. “Better,” he said. “Much better than the brown and wet one.”

Molly took a square, too. “A very good test cake,” she said.

“A test cake is a cake for us,” said Sam. He took two squares to the shop, one for Grandpa and one for Mrs. Hill. “I carry,” he said.

Then Molly checked the egg boxes. “Thirty eggs left,” she said.

Sara looked at her list. “Three cakes need eighteen eggs,” she said. “We still have more than enough.”

“And now we know,” said Tess. “Low heat. Forty minutes.”

At four, the bell rang. It was Molly’s dad, with snow on his green cap.

“Time to go, Molly,” he said. “The road is white and slow. We have to be home before dark.”

“Before dark?” said Sam. “It is not dark.”

“Not yet,” said Molly’s dad. “But in January it is dark at five.”

Before Molly went out, she took off Mom’s green apron. Evie put two squares of the test cake in a small box. “For you and Molly’s mom,” she said.

“A test cake?” said Molly’s dad, and he smiled. “Then we will test it at home.”

Then Molly and her dad went out to the big truck. It went slowly up the white street, and Molly waved from her seat. The kids waved back from the shop window.

On Friday morning, after the bread was done, the first two cakes went in the oven. Low heat, long time. The third cake had to wait for its turn.

Then, up the stairs, June woke up. She began to cry.

Mom could not pick her up, not with the flu. Dad was at the mill. Grandpa had six people in the shop.

Evie looked at the oven. She looked at the stairs.

Chapter 7: June



June cried and cried. It was a big, loud cry, and it came all the way down the stairs.

“Who can get June?” asked Sam.

Nobody said a word. Billy looked at Evie. Sara looked at Evie, too.

Evie looked at the oven. Two big cakes were in there. The third cake stood on the table and waited for its turn.

These were the cakes for the mill. Evie wanted to stay at the oven. She wanted to take them out herself.

But June needed her. And Evie could not be in two places.

She had to choose.

Then she looked at Tess. Tess stood next to the oven, with her eyes on the timer. Tess knew the low heat and the forty minutes. Tess never opened the oven too soon.

Evie trusted Tess. She trusted her with the big cakes.

"Tess," said Evie. "The oven is yours."

Tess's eyes went big behind her round glasses. "All three cakes?"

"All three," said Evie. "Two now, and then the third one."

It was hard for Evie to say it. It was hard to give the oven away. But she trusted Tess, so she said it.

Tess stood very straight. "I have it," she said.

Sam ran to the oven door. "And nobody opens the door," he said. "Only Tess."

Evie chose June. She went up the stairs, slow and careful. At the top, she stopped at Mom's door. Mom sat up in bed.

"Evie? Is that June?"

"Yes, Mom. I am going to get her."

Mom looked sad. "I want to pick her up," she said. "But I cannot. Not with the flu."

"I can," said Evie.

She went into June's room. June sat in her crib, and her face was red and wet. She held up her arms.

"Hello, June," said Evie. "I am here."

She picked June up. June put her wet face on Evie's neck, and the big cry stopped.

At Mom's door, Evie held June up. Mom smiled from her bed. "Hello, my June," she said.

June looked at Mom, and she did not cry at all. Then Evie took her down the stairs.

In the kitchen, Evie took June to the corner by the window, far from the hot oven. She put a blanket on the floor. Then she sat down on it, with June on her lap.

From the corner, Evie could see the oven and Tess.

"Twenty more minutes," said Tess.

June looked around the kitchen. Then she began to cry again.

"Oh, no," said Billy. "Not again."

He took a bowl from the shelf and put it on his head. "Look, June! A hat!"

June looked at him. She did not cry.

Sam took a bowl, too, and put it on his head. But he did not leave the oven door. "A door guard needs a hat," he said.

Now there were two boys with bowls on their heads. Billy's bowl was too big. It fell down over his eyes.

"Help!" said Billy. "I cannot see!"

June laughed. It was a big, happy laugh, and they all laughed with her. Even Tess laughed, but she still watched the timer.

Then June looked up at Evie. Her mouth moved a little.

"Ee —" said June.

Evie held her breath.

"Ee —" said June again. Then she laughed.

Billy pushed the bowl off his head. "She said 'Billy'!" he said. "She said 'Billy'!"

Sara looked up from her list. "She did not say 'Billy'," she said. "She said 'Ee'."

"But 'Ee' is in 'Billy'," said Billy. "Bil-ly. Listen. It is at the end!"

"It is a sound," said Tess. "A sound is not a word. Not yet."

"Try again, June," said Billy. "Say 'Billy'. Bil-ly."

June tried. "Ee —" Then she took Evie's hair in her hand and pulled.

Evie did not say anything. She only smiled at June.

Billy ran to the stairs. "I have to tell Mom!"

He ran up to Mom's door. "Mom! June said 'Billy'!"

Then he stopped. “No,” he said. “She said ‘Ee’. But maybe it was ‘Billy’.”

Mom laughed, and then she coughed. “‘Ee’?” she said. “Then I want to hear it, too. Soon.”

Then the timer rang. *Ding!*

Evie began to stand up, with June in her arms. Then she sat down again.

“Tess has it,” she said to June.

Tess and Sara took the two big pans out and put them on the big table. The cakes were golden at the edges, and golden in the middle. Tess tapped an edge with a spoon.

“Soft,” she said. “Golden and even.”

After the two cakes came out, the third cake went in. Tess set the timer again. “Forty minutes,” she said. “Low heat, long time.”

“Nobody opens the door,” said Sam. He still had the bowl on his head.

So they waited again. Evie looked after June in the corner, and Tess watched the timer.

At last the timer rang again. Tess took out the third cake. It was golden and even, too.

Now there were three big cakes on the table, side by side. Evie came to see them, with June in her arms. Not one brown edge. Not one wet middle.

“Well done, Tess,” said Evie.

Tess smiled a big smile, and her face went pink. She was very proud.

Billy ran up the stairs. “Mom! Three cakes! Golden and even! Tess did the oven!”

Mom answered from her bed. “Then the oven was in good hands.”

Billy ran down again. “Mom says the oven was in good hands.”

“Good hands?” said Sam. “What are good hands?”

Evie looked at Tess. “Hands you can trust,” she said.

Tess looked at her hands and smiled again.

"And June?" said Billy. "Mom asks about June, too."

"Tell her June is in good hands, too," said Sara. "Evie's hands."

So Billy ran up one more time. From the kitchen, they could hear Mom laugh.

At four, Grandpa came to the kitchen door with Mrs. Hill on his arm. "I am taking Mrs. Hill home before dark," he said. "The street is icy today. Then I will come back."

Mrs. Hill looked at the three golden cakes. Then she looked at the bowl on Sam's head.

"Good cakes," she said. "Funny hat."

After Dad came home from the mill, he put June to bed. The three cakes were cool now, and Sara and Tess made the icing.

Evie took the icing bag.

"What is that?" asked Sam.

"An icing bag," said Evie. "You squeeze the bag, and the icing comes out at the end. Then you can draw with it. Tonight I am going to draw the mill."

First, Evie drew the river, with blue icing. Then she drew the mill, with a red roof. Last, she drew the big water wheel.

Then she looked at it for a long time.

The wheel was not round. Not round at all.

Chapter 8: The Wheel Is Not Round



The kitchen was very quiet. The kids all looked at the three cakes.

The picture went across all three. On the left cake was the river, all blue. But the river did not stop there. It ran on as a blue strip along the bottom of the other two cakes. Above the strip, the icing was white, for the snow.

In the middle was the mill. It was brown. It had a red roof and a big door. It stood in the snow, just above the river.

On the right was the big water wheel. It stood in the blue river. But it was too long and too thin. It was the shape of an egg.

“It is an egg!” said Billy. “A big brown egg in the river!”

“A wheel has to be round,” said Sam. “An egg wheel cannot turn.”

Evie could not laugh. She put the icing bag down. Her face went hot.

She was angry. She was not angry with Billy or Sam. She was angry with herself.

"I drew it too fast," she said. "I wanted to be done. Now Mrs. Reed's mill has an egg!"

She took a spoon. "I am going to take it all off. The mill, too."

Sara put a hand on her arm. "Evie. It does not have to be perfect. We fix it."

Evie looked at her. Those were Evie's own words. A long time ago, they baked a hundred cupcakes. Evie said those words to Sara then. Now Sara said them back to her.

"But how?" said Evie. "My hand cannot draw a round wheel. I tried."

Tess did not say a word. She looked around the kitchen. Then she bent down and took out the big pot.

"The bakery pot!" said Sam. "From Grandma Lee's dinner!"

Tess took off the lid and held it up. It was flat and very round.

"First we take off the egg," said Tess. "Then I press the lid into the icing. Lightly. Only a little. Then there is a round line. The line is a guide."

"A guide?" said Sam. "What is a guide?"

"A guide shows you the way," said Tess. "Evie draws on the line. Then the wheel will be round."

So they fixed it. First they had to take off the egg. Evie did it with a spoon, slow and careful. Sara put new white icing there. Then she put new blue icing at the bottom, for the river.

Tess held the lid over the cake on the right. Sam held his breath. He could not look. Tess pressed the lid down, lightly. Then she lifted it up.

There was a thin, round line in the icing. The top of it was in the white snow. The bottom of it was in the blue river.

Evie took the icing bag with the brown icing. She drew on the line, slow and careful. Then she drew lines from the middle out to the edge of the wheel.

She stood back and looked.

The wheel was round. Not an egg at all.

"Round!" said Billy.

"Round," said Tess. She looked very happy.

Evie was not angry now. "Thank you, Tess," she said. "And thank you, Sara."

Evie took the jar of red cherries from the shelf. "Sara, can you count them?"

Sara made little piles of ten on a plate. She counted by tens. "Ten, twenty, thirty, forty ..."

"By tens?" asked Sam.

"By tens is easy," said Sara.

She went on. "... ninety, a hundred. And eight more. That is all of them."

"That is a lot of cherries," said Sam.

Sara wrote the number on her list. Before the cherries went on, Evie washed her hands. Nobody looked at Billy.

Billy looked at the plate. One cherry sat on top of a pile. It was very red and very round.

He took it. He put it in his mouth.

Then he stopped. His face went red.

"A hundred and seven," said Billy. "I ate one."

"Billy!" said Sara.

"On Monday I said, 'And one for me,'" said Billy.

Tess looked in the jar. "None," she said. "There are no more."

Evie looked at the cakes. Then she looked at Billy. She began to laugh.

"Then one piece has no cherry," she said. "That one is for Billy."

Billy thought about it. "OK," he said. "I ate my cherry already."

So Evie put the cherries on, one by one. Tess showed her where the pieces were. Six this way, and six that way. One red cherry went on almost every piece.

Only one piece had no cherry. It was on the left cake, in a corner of the river.

"My piece is blue," said Billy. "Blue is the best."

After the last cherry was on, Dad came down the stairs. June was asleep. He looked at the cakes for a long time.

"That is the old mill," he said. "The red roof and the big wheel. Mrs. Reed is going to love it."

He smiled. "But first the cakes go to bed. In the shop. The shop is cool at night."

Sam held the kitchen door. Dad carried the cakes to the shop, one at a time. He put them on the counter, side by side. The river was on the left. The mill was in the middle. The wheel was on the right.

"Good night, cakes," said Billy.

Then they all went up the stairs. Dad took a glass of water in to Mom. The kids stood at the door.

Mom sat up in bed. Her face was not so red now. "Hello, my bakers. Tell me everything."

So they told her. Evie told her about the blue river and the red roof.

Then she stopped. For a moment, she did not want to tell Mom about the egg. The wheel was round now. But Mom wanted to hear everything. Even the things that go wrong.

"Mom," she said. "First the wheel was not round. It was the shape of an egg."

"An egg?" said Mom. She laughed, and then she coughed.

"I was angry with myself," said Evie. "But Sara said, 'It does not have to be perfect. We fix it.' And Tess pressed the lid of the pot into the icing. Lightly. Then I drew on the line."

Mom looked at Tess. "The lid of the pot? Tess, that was a very good idea."

Tess's face went pink.

Mom smiled at Evie. “First an egg, then a round wheel. Now I know the whole story.”

Then it was Billy’s turn. “Mom,” he said. “I ate a cherry.”

Mom laughed. “Even when you eat a cherry,” she said. “Thank you, Billy.”

Then Dad took Sara, Tess and Sam home through the snow.

On Saturday morning, Evie looked out of the window. More snow. A lot more snow.

And three big cakes had to go to the river.

Chapter 9: The Road to the River



Dad looked out of the shop window. “Where is my truck?” he said.

The truck stood in front of the bakery. But nobody could see it. There was only a big white pile of snow.

“I have to shovel,” said Dad.

He put on his coat and his boots. Then he took the big snow shovel. He went out into the cold.

The kids watched from the window. Sara, Tess and Sam were there, too. They came early, with snow on their hats.

Snow flew from Dad’s shovel. First they could see the doors of the truck. Then they could see the wheels.

After a long time, Dad came back in. His face was red, and his hands were cold.

“The truck is free,” he said.

“Free?” said Billy. “‘Free’ means no money.”

Dad laughed. "Yes. But a free truck has no snow around it. Now it can go."

Then his face was not so happy. "Mrs. Reed called. The road to the river is OK. But at the mill, the path is all deep snow."

"A path?" said Sam. "What is a path?"

"A small road for feet," said Tess. "Not for cars."

"The truck cannot go on the path," said Dad. "And it is a long path. Three big boxes in deep snow? That is hard."

"Then you shovel the path!" said Billy.

"It is too long to shovel," said Dad. "That is an hour of work."

Nobody said a word. Then Evie looked out of the window again.

Grandpa came down Main Street, slow and careful. Behind him, on a long rope, came his old wooden sled. The two long runners under it were red.

"Grandpa's sled!" said Billy.

Ding! Grandpa came in, with snow on his cap.

"No shop today," he said. "Today the town goes to the mill. And I know that path. In this snow, you need a sled." He smiled. "My sled is long enough for three boxes."

"Three boxes," said Evie. "Three cakes!"

The three cakes were still on the counter, side by side. Evie took three big, flat boxes from the shelf. They were white, with white lids.

Dad put one cake in each box, slow and careful. First the river, then the mill, then the wheel. Evie closed the lids.

Sam came to the counter. "I carry," he said. "That is my job."

"Not these boxes, Sam," said Dad. "They are too big for you."

Sam looked at the boxes. He looked sad.

"You can pull the sled," said Evie. "You and Billy."

Sam thought about it. "Pull? OK," he said. "Pulling is a job, too."

Before they went, the kids ran up the stairs to Mom's door. Dad went in with a cup of tea.

Mom sat up in bed. "I want to come, too," she said. "But I cannot. Not with the flu."

"We will tell you everything tonight," said Evie.

"Everything," said Mom. "Even the things that go wrong."

"Nothing is going to go wrong," said Billy.

Mom smiled. "Then tell me the good things, too."

Across the street, the Lees' big gray car stood in front of their house. Dad carried June to the car. She had a warm hat on. Dad put her baby seat on the back seat of the car. Then he put June in it.

Mrs. Lee got in on one side of June, and Grandpa on the other. Mr. Lee got in the front and started the car.

"First we get Mrs. Hill," he called. "See you at the mill!"

Dad put Grandpa's sled in the back of the truck. The shovel went in, too.

Evie, Sara and Tess got into the back seat. After they sat down, Dad gave them the boxes, one by one. Sara had the river. Evie had the mill. Tess had the wheel.

Each girl had a big box on her lap. They held the boxes flat on their laps, with both hands.

Billy and Sam sat in front, next to Dad.

"Hold them flat," said Dad. "Then the cakes will not slide."

Dad drove very slowly. "Slow. Careful," he said.

"That is Grandpa's line," said Billy.

"Today it is my line, too," said Dad.

Main Street was white. Out of town, the fields were white, too. Under the snow, the road had bumps. At every bump, the truck went up and down a little.

"Flat," said Tess at every bump. "Flat. Flat."

Sara laughed, but she held her box very flat. Evie did not laugh. She looked at the box on her lap. The mill was in there.

Nothing slid. Not one box.

Then they saw the river. It was dark and quiet, with white snow on both sides.

And then they saw the mill. It was big, with snow on its red roof. On the river side, the big water wheel went round and round.

"The wheel!" said Billy. "Look, Sam!"

"It is round," said Sam. "Not an egg."

They all laughed. Even Evie laughed.

Dad stopped the truck at the side of the road. Evie could see the mill door. But the path from the road to the door was long. It was all deep snow.

Billy jumped out. His legs went into the snow, up to his knees.

"Deep!" he said.

The big gray car stopped behind the truck. Grandpa waved from the car window.

Dad took the sled out of the truck. The girls got out with their boxes, very slowly. Dad put the three boxes on the sled, one behind the other. The river, the mill, the wheel.

"I go first," said Dad. "I make a path for you."

Dad went first, with big steps. His boots made a path in the deep snow.

Billy and Sam took the long rope. They pulled. The sled was heavy. They pulled again. Then the sled began to move. It went over the snow, slow and easy.

Evie walked next to the sled, with one hand near the boxes. Sara and Tess walked behind it.

"Slow," said Evie. "Slow and careful."

"We are slow!" said Billy. "We are very, very slow!"

The mill door came closer and closer.

Then the front of the sled went up. Bump! There was a stone under the snow. The sled went up and down, hard.

The middle box slid to the side. Evie put out her hand and stopped it, just in time.

But they all heard it. A small sound. It came from inside the box.

Billy and Sam stopped pulling. It was very quiet on the path. Sam held his breath.

"What was that?" said Billy, very quietly.

Evie did not want to look. But she had to look.

Evie lifted the lid. A crack ran across the middle cake — right through the mill.

Chapter 10: A Hundred Years



Nobody said a word. They all looked at the crack.

It ran from one side of the cake to the other. It went right through the brown mill.

Evie felt very sad. Three days of work, and now this.

“This morning I said, ‘Nothing is going to go wrong,’” said Billy in a small voice.

“It was the stone,” said Tess. “A stone under the snow.”

Then the mill door opened. Mrs. Reed stood there, with white flour on her sleeves.

“Morning!” she called in her big voice. “Come in, come in! It is cold out there!”

She looked at the kids. Then she looked at the open box.

Evie did not wait. “Mrs. Reed,” she said. “The middle cake has a crack. Right through your mill.”

Mrs. Reed bent down and looked in the box. For a moment, she did not say a word. Then she stood up.

"Bring the boxes to my office," she said. "It is warm there, and it is not so loud."

Dad and the girls carried the three boxes in. Sam held the door.

Inside, the mill was warm. And it was loud, very loud. White flour lay on the floor. It was on the walls, too. In the middle of the mill, two big stones went round and round.

"Do not go near the stones," said Dad.

Billy put his hands over his ears. "Now I know!" he shouted. "Mrs. Reed talks loud because the mill is loud!"

"That is right!" called Mrs. Reed, and she laughed her big laugh.

Her office was a small room with a desk. Mrs. Reed closed the door. Now the mill was not so loud. Dad put the middle box on the desk. Then he and Mrs. Reed had to go. A hundred people were on the way.

Evie looked at the crack again. She took a big breath.

"It does not have to be perfect," she said. "We fix it."

Sara smiled. "Those are your words," she said.

"But how?" said Billy. "We have no icing."

Sara put her hands in her coat pockets. In one pocket was the icing bag, with the last brown icing. In the other pocket was a small jar of white icing.

"The last icing," she said. "It was on my list. For the things that go wrong."

Tess put her hands flat on the two sides of the cake. Then she pushed, very lightly. The two sides came together again. Now the crack was only a thin line.

Evie took a spoon. She put white icing on the crack in the snow, slow and careful. Then she took the icing bag. Where the crack ran through the mill, she drew with the brown icing.

At last, Evie stood back. The icing bag was empty.

"Where is the crack?" said Billy.

"It is still there," said Tess. "Under the icing. But nobody can see it."

Evie laughed. She did not feel sad now.

After Evie closed the box, they carried the three boxes to the big room. The big room filled with people. The mill workers came with their kids. They had white flour on their coats. Then the Greens came, and Sara's mom.

Mrs. Hill came last. She came along Dad's path to the door, very slowly, with her cane. Grandpa was on one side of her, and Mr. Lee was on the other. Mrs. Lee walked behind them, with June in her arms.

Mrs. Hill sat down on a chair by the long table.

"One cane and two arms," she said. "Today I cannot fall."

Then Mrs. Reed clapped her hands. She did not need a chair to stand on. She had her big voice.

"Hello, Maple Falls!" she called.

The room was quiet. Only the stones went round.

"A hundred years ago, my grandpa built this mill," said Mrs. Reed. "He built it by the river, with his own hands. Today my mill is a hundred years old!"

The people clapped and clapped.

"Listen," said Mrs. Reed. "Can you hear the stones?"

They could hear them. Round and round.

"After a hundred years, the stones still turn," said Mrs. Reed. "Every day, they make flour. And every loaf at Rosie's Bakery begins here."

"Our bread begins here!" said Billy.

"Every loaf," said Dad. "I make the flour. You make the bread."

"And now," said Mrs. Reed, "the cake!"

The three boxes stood on the long table, side by side. Evie, Sara and Tess lifted the lids. First the river. Then the mill. Then the round wheel.

The room was quiet. Then the people said, "Oh!"

Mrs. Reed looked at the cakes for a long time.

"That is my mill," she said. Her big voice was soft now.

Then she bent down, close to the middle cake. "And the crack?" she said. "I cannot see it!"

"We fixed it," said Evie.

Dad took a big knife. He cut the cakes into squares, six this way and six that way.

"I taste first," said Billy. "That is my job."

"Not today, Billy," said Mrs. Reed. "Today I taste first. It is my mill!"

"OK," said Billy. "It is your mill."

Mrs. Reed took a piece of the mill. She ate it slowly. Then she put up her hand. The room was quiet again.

"The best cake in Maple Falls," she said. "And the flour is ours!"

The mill workers laughed and clapped. Dad looked very proud.

Then the pieces went around the big room. Sam carried the plates, two at a time. The red cherries went around the room, too.

Evie gave Billy his piece. It came from the left cake, from a corner of the river. It was blue, and it had no cherry.

"A plain piece," said Evie.

"Plain?" said Sam. "What is plain?"

"'Plain' means nothing on top," said Tess.

Billy looked at his plain blue piece. "My cherry is in here," he said, with a hand on his tummy. "I ate it on Friday."

He took a big bite. "Blue is the best," he said.

On Mrs. Lee's lap, June looked at the cake with big eyes. She looked and looked.

There were only a few pieces left. Evie went to Mrs. Reed.

"Can I keep one piece back?" she asked. "For my mom. She watched the oven all week, from her bed."

"For Rosie?" said Mrs. Reed. "Yes! Take a good one."

Evie kept back a piece from the middle cake. It had a bit of the red roof, and one red cherry on top. Before they went home, Mrs. Reed found a small box in her office. Evie put the piece in it.

They drove home through the snow. Evie held the small box very flat on her lap. "Flat," said Tess at every bump. This time Evie laughed.

At home, somebody waited at the top of the stairs.

Chapter 11: June's First Word



It was Mom.

She sat on the top step, in her warm robe. Her face was not red now, and she smiled down at them.

"Mom!" shouted Billy. "You are up!"

"I could not stay in bed," said Mom. "I wanted to hear it all."

Before anybody could stop him, Billy ran to the stairs. Evie ran after him.

"Stop!" said Mom, and she put up her hand. "Not up the stairs. I have no fever now, but the doctor says no hugs yet. One more day. Tomorrow I will give you all a big hug."

So the kids had to sit on the bottom steps. Evie sat at the very bottom, with the small box on her lap.

Dad came in last, with June in his arms. He gave June to Evie.

"Now tell me everything," said Mom. "From the start."

"It began with a sneeze!" said Billy. "On Monday, Mrs. Reed came, and you sneezed and sneezed!"

"Yes," said Mom. "That was the flu."

"Then the alarm clock rang at a quarter to five," said Evie. "And we made the bread with Dad."

"Then Mrs. Green got too little," said Billy. "Eleven rolls! So she got a baker's dozen."

"Then there were no eggs in all of Maple Falls," said Sara.

"And Molly came with thirty-six eggs," said Sam.

"And the test cake was brown and wet," said Tess. "The heat was too high."

"Too much heat and too little time," said Mom. "Billy told me."

"And my wheel was an egg," said Evie. She laughed. Last night she could not laugh about it, but now she could.

"And I am the stair runner!" said Billy. "On Thursday, I ran up the stairs twenty-two times!"

"The stair runner?" said Mom. "That is a good name. I heard you every time."

Then Mom looked at them all. "And today?" she asked.

Billy looked at Evie.

"Today one thing went wrong," said Evie.

"Tell me," said Mom. "Even the things that go wrong."

So they told her. Sam told her about the deep path and Grandpa's old sled, and Billy told her about the stone under the snow. Then Evie told her about the crack, right through the mill.

Mom put a hand over her mouth. "Oh, no," she said. "Through the mill?"

"I told Mrs. Reed at once," said Evie. "Then we fixed it with the last icing."

"It was on my list," said Sara.

"Now nobody can see the crack," said Tess.

Mom smiled. "It does not have to be perfect," she said.

"We fix it!" said all the kids.

After they told her about the crack, they told her about the party. The big room filled with people. The mill workers came, and the Greens, and Mrs. Hill. Mrs. Reed tasted first, not Billy.

"She said, 'The best cake in Maple Falls,'" said Billy. "And I ate a blue piece with no cherry."

Evie opened the small box and held it up. Inside was the piece from the middle cake, with a bit of the red roof and one red cherry on top.

"I kept it back for you, Mom," said Evie. "You watched the oven all week."

Mom looked at the piece. Then she looked at the kids.

"You ran the bakery for a week," she said, and her voice was soft.

"We did," said Evie. "With Dad and Grandpa and Mrs. Hill."

"And Molly and her hens," said Billy.

"And all of Maple Falls," said Dad.

Then June moved in Evie's arms. She put a small hand on Evie's face and looked up at her.

"Ee-vee," said June.

Nobody moved. Nobody said a word. Evie held her breath.

"Ee-vee," said June again, and she laughed.

"She said 'Evie'!" said Sara.

"That is not a sound," said Tess. "That is a word. Her first word!"

Then they all cheered. Billy jumped up and down on his step, and Sam clapped his hands. Even Dad cheered. Crumble barked and wagged his tail.

Up on the top step, Mom had wet eyes, but she was not sad at all. "I wanted to hear it," she said. "And I heard it!"

Evie could not say a word. She only held June close. June's first word was Evie's name.

Billy came down one step. "Now say 'Billy'!" he said. "Bil-ly! Bil-ly!"

June looked at Billy. Then she looked down at the small box in Evie's hand.

"Cake," said June.

For a moment, it was very quiet. Then they laughed and laughed, and Sara had to hold on to Tess.

"Cake?" said Billy. "Not 'Billy'?"

Mom laughed, too. "Of course," she said. "She lives in a bakery."

"OK," said Billy. "Cake is a good word. Tomorrow she will say 'Billy'."

Dad took the small box up to Mom. She ate the red cherry first, and then a bit of the red roof.

"Mrs. Reed is right," said Mom. "The best cake in Maple Falls."

Then the bell rang in the shop. Ding! Grandpa came to the kitchen door, with snow on his cap.

"Rosie!" he said. "You are up!"

"Only up to the top step," said Mom. "In my robe."

"Grandpa!" said Billy. "June has a first word! Two words!"

"'Evie' and 'cake'," said Tess.

Grandpa laughed his warm laugh. "Of course," he said. "She lives in a bakery."

"That is my line!" said Mom, and they all laughed again.

Then Grandpa looked at the five kids on the steps. He looked very proud.

"A week in the bakery, and a cake for a hundred people," he said. "Now I have a job for you. In March, the sap runs again in my old maple trees."

"Runs?" said Sam. "Sap has no legs!"

"Here 'runs' means the sap comes out of the trees," said Tess. "Into the buckets."

"For the maple syrup!" said Billy.

"Yes," said Grandpa. "This year you make the syrup. I only watch."

The kids looked at him. "We make it?" said Evie. "Not you?"

"You," said Grandpa. "With my old buckets and my big pan. And Tess says 'Now!' at the red line."

Tess's face went pink.

Then the kids cheered again. Billy cheered the loudest. "And I taste first!" he said.

"Of course," said Grandpa.

Sara took out her pencil and her list. At the top of her list she wrote: March. Maple syrup. By the kids.

Up on the top step, Mom pulled her warm robe close. "And in March, I will come, too," she said. "No flu, and lots of hugs."

Evie looked down at June in her arms. June looked up the stairs, at the small box in Mom's hands.

"Cake," said June.

And they all laughed.

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