Apple Muffins for Molly



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About This Book

At a Glance

- **Reading level:** English level A1+ (CEFR)
- **Age:** 7+
- **Length:** 10 chapters · ±11,000 words

Edition

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Version	Date	Notes
1.0	November 2026	First edition

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 September, and the apples are red at Molly's farm. Evie, Sara, Tess, Billy and Sam come to help, with five baskets. The rules are easy: lift and twist, and never shake a tree! But Billy is in a hurry, and he shakes a branch. Apples fall all around his feet, and every one gets a brown spot. Nobody sees him…

Evie has an idea: apple muffins for the farm stand by the road! But the first muffins are wet at the bottom, and Pepper the goat eats paper, hats — and maybe muffins, too.

Can five kids turn one big mistake into a good day for Molly's farm?

Chapter 1: Bring a Basket



It was a cool Saturday morning in September. The sun was up, but the air was cold.

In the bakery kitchen, Sara took out her list and read it out loud.

“Five baskets,” she said. “The red wagon. Water. Hats.”

“Five baskets?” said Billy. “Molly’s dad said, ‘Bring a basket.’ That is one basket.”

“Molly’s dad said, ‘Bring a basket,’” said Sara. “There are five of us. We bring five.”

Tess counted the baskets on the table and pushed up her glasses. “Five,” she said.

Billy picked up the biggest basket. “This is my basket,” he said. “It is the biggest. I am going to fill it to the top.”

“I carry,” said Sam. He picked up two baskets. “That is my job.”

Mom put a hat on Billy’s head, and one on Sam’s head.

Crumble sat by the door and looked up at Billy.

"Can Crumble come?" said Billy.

"No," said Mom. "A farm has hens. Crumble and hens? No."

Crumble lay down and put his head on his paws.

"We will come back soon, Crumble," said Evie.

Baby June stayed at home, too. Mrs. Lee came across the street to look after her.

Dad put the baskets and the red wagon in the back of his truck. Mom and Sara sat in front with Dad, and Evie, Billy, Tess and Sam sat in the back seat.

"We are going to pick apples!" said Evie.

"And we are going to eat apples," said Billy.

"Pick first," said Mom. "Then eat."

They drove out of Maple Falls, past the mill and the river. The big water wheel went round and round.

Sam waved at the mill. "Hello, mill!" he said.

"Hello, Sam," said Dad in a big, low voice.

Sam looked at the mill, and then at Dad.

"That was you!" he said, and Dad laughed.

After twenty minutes, Dad stopped the truck at a white gate.

Evie looked around. Behind the gate stood a big red barn. Next to the barn was a small white house with a porch. Behind the house was a low hill, and on the hill the apple trees stood in long rows.

Tess counted the rows. "Ten long rows," she said.

"And the apples are red," said Evie. "Molly's dad was right."

In the yard, brown birds walked here and there.

"Look, birds!" said Sam.

"Those are hens," said Tess. "A hen is a girl chicken. Hens lay eggs."

"Molly's eggs!" said Evie. "Her eggs come from these hens."

Then a girl ran to the gate. She had red hair in two braids, and she wore a yellow dress.

"Molly!" said Evie.

"You came!" said Molly, and she opened the gate. "Come in, come in!"

A woman walked behind her. She had light-brown hair in one long braid. She wore a green apron over a long blue dress.

"This is my mom," said Molly.

"Hello," said Molly's mom. "Welcome to our farm."

"At the fair, Molly said you had a cold," said Evie.

Molly's mom laughed. "That was in August," she said. "No more cold!"

She shook hands with Mom. "Thank you for the eggs at the fair," she said. "Molly told me all about it."

"Where is your dad?" Billy asked Molly.

"In the barn," said Molly. "He is coming soon. But first, come and see our farm stand!"

"What is a farm stand?" said Sam.

"Come and see," said Molly.

She ran down to the road. The kids ran after her.

By the road stood a long wooden table with a small roof over it. On the table were baskets of red apples and boxes of eggs. At the end stood a small wooden box with a thin hole in the top.

"This is our farm stand," said Molly. "It is our little shop."

"Who sells the apples?" said Sara.

"Nobody," said Molly. "Nobody sits here."

"But who gets the money?" said Sara.

Molly put her hand on the little box. "This is the honesty box," she said.

"Honesty box?" said Sam. "What is an honesty box?"

"People stop their car on the road," said Molly's mom. "They take apples. Then they put the money in the box."

"And nobody watches?" said Billy.

"Nobody watches," said Molly.

"I can watch!" said Sam. "I can watch the honesty box all day."

Molly laughed. "No, Sam. That is the good part. Nobody watches. The people are honest."

"Honest?" said Billy.

"Honest people say what is true," said Molly's mom. "And honest people pay. Nobody has to watch."

She looked at the five baskets. "Later I am going to fill this stand with your apples."

Then they heard a little bell. Ding, ding.

"Oh no," said Molly. "Pepper!"

A small goat came down to the road. She was white, with a black head and two short horns. A little bell hung from her neck.

"A goat!" said Sam.

"That is Pepper," said Molly. "She lives in a pen by the barn. But the gate of her pen is open again!"

Pepper walked up to Sara and looked at her list. Then she took it in her mouth.

"Hey!" said Sara. "That is my list!"

Pepper chewed. Chew, chew, chew.

"Pepper, give it back!" said Molly.

Pepper did not give it back. She chewed and chewed, and her bell went ding, ding.

"Goats chew paper," said Molly. "And hats. And sleeves."

Billy put his two hands on his hat.

Molly took the list out of Pepper's mouth. "No, Pepper," she said. "Paper is not good for you."

The list was wet. It had a big hole in the middle. Sara looked at it, and for a moment she was a little angry.

Then Pepper looked up at her. A small piece of paper hung from her mouth.

Sara laughed. Then they all laughed.

"It is OK," said Sara. "The list is in my head." She looked at Pepper. "Five baskets. The red wagon. Water. Hats. No goats."

Molly took Pepper back to her pen and shut the gate. Then she came back to the kids.

Billy picked up his big basket and looked at the long rows of trees.

"Come on!" he said. "The apples!"

He ran to the first row.

Then the barn door opened, and Molly's dad came out. He was tall, with reddish-brown hair. He had a tall ladder on his shoulder and a short ladder in his other hand.

"Good morning!" he said. "You came. And you brought a basket."

"Five baskets," said Sara.

He laughed and put the two ladders down by the first tree.

"Billy," he said. "Wait a minute."

Billy stopped.

"Before you pick," said Molly's dad, "you learn the rules."

Chapter 2: Lift and Twist



Molly's dad stood under the first tree. The kids and Molly stood in front of him. Mom, Dad and Molly's mom stood behind them.

"Rule one," said Molly's dad.

He took a red apple in his big hand. "Do not pull the apple," he said. "Lift it up. Then twist it."

He lifted the apple a little and twisted it. The apple came off the branch, and it was in his hand.

"Lift and twist," he said. "That is all."

"Why not pull?" said Sam.

"If you pull, you can break a little piece of the branch," said Molly's dad. "And next year, a new apple grows on that piece."

"No pulling," said Tess. "Lift and twist."

"Now you, Sam," said Molly's dad.

Sam took an apple in his two small hands. He lifted it. He twisted it. The apple came off.

"Lift and twist!" said Sam, and he held the apple up high.

"Rule two," said Molly's dad. He pointed at a small green apple. "Is this apple red?"

"No," said Billy. "It is green."

"On these trees, red apples are ripe," said Molly's dad. "Green apples are not ripe. They stay on the tree. They wait."

"Ripe?" said Sam. "What is ripe?"

"Ripe means ready," said Molly. "A ripe apple is sweet. A green apple is hard and sour."

Billy made a face. "Sour? No, thank you."

"Green apples wait," said Sara. "Red apples go in the basket."

"Rule three," said Molly's dad. He put his hand on the tall ladder. "This is the tall ladder. Only a grown-up goes up the tall ladder."

Then he put his hand on the short ladder. "And this is the step ladder. It has three steps. Kids can go up the step ladder. But a grown-up holds it. Every time."

"Every time," said Sara. She tapped her head. "It is in my head. Next to the list."

Molly laughed.

"Rule four," said Molly's dad. He did not smile now. "Do not shake the tree. Not the tree, and not a branch. Never."

"Why not?" said Billy.

"An apple that falls gets a brown spot," said Molly's dad. "The brown spot is soft. Nobody buys an apple with a brown spot."

"Not at the farm stand?" said Billy.

"Not at the farm stand," said Molly's dad.

Tess counted on her fingers. “Four rules,” she said. “Lift and twist. Only red apples. Kids on the step ladder. And no shaking.”

“Good,” said Molly’s dad. “Now I am going to get more baskets from the barn. Five baskets fill up fast!”

He laughed and walked down to the barn. Molly’s mom went back to the farm stand.

From the barn came a little sound. Ding, ding. Billy put his hands on his hat.

Dad picked up the tall ladder. “I am a grown-up,” he said. “This is my ladder.”

He put it against a big tree and went up. Soon Billy could see only Dad’s boots.

Evie went up the step ladder, and Mom held it.

From the step ladder, Evie looked around. She could see the red barn, the white house and the farm stand by the road. She could see all ten rows.

Then she picked. She lifted an apple and twisted it. Lift and twist. Lift and twist. She put the apples in her basket, one by one.

“I love this!” she said.

Nobody said the jobs out loud. But every kid had a job again.

Tess counted the apples in her basket. “Eleven,” she said. “Twelve.” She put every apple in with two hands. Tess never dropped an apple.

Sara checked the trees. She had no list now, but she walked around every tree. “Tree one, done,” she said. “Tree two. Wait! One more red apple up there.”

Sam carried the full baskets to the red wagon. He put the apples in the wagon, and then he ran back with the empty baskets.

“I carry!” he said. “I am fast!”

Molly picked very fast. Lift, twist. Lift, twist. Her basket was full first.

“I pick apples every fall,” she said, and she smiled a proud little smile.

And Billy?

Billy picked, too. But Billy was slow.

He looked at every apple. "This one? No, too small. This one? No, too green." He wanted only the big red ones.

Then he looked at Mom. "Mom, can I eat one?"

"You asked," said Mom. "Yes. One."

"Billy tastes first," said Sara. "That is his job."

Billy picked a big red apple and ate it. He ate it all, slowly. "It was a good apple," he said.

Then Sam pulled the red wagon past him. It was full of red apples.

"The wagon is full!" said Sam. He looked in Billy's basket. "Billy, your basket is not full."

Billy looked in his big basket. There were only a few apples at the bottom.

Tess looked in, too. "Seven," she said.

"I know," said Billy. "But I am going to fill it to the top. Wait and see."

He looked up at the first trees. The low apples were gone now. The other kids picked them all. The big red apples hung high up. But the tall ladder was Dad's, and the step ladder was Evie's.

Billy picked up his basket and walked to the end of the row. Nobody went with him.

At the end of the row stood a small, low tree. On one low branch hung a lot of apples. They were big and red. But they hung at the end of the branch, too far for Billy's hands.

Billy put down his basket. He took the low branch in his two hands.

He was in a hurry. He wanted a full basket, and he wanted it now. He did not think of the rules.

And he shook the branch.

Apples fell. Ten apples. Twenty. More.

Thump. Thump, thump, thump.

They fell on the grass and rolled all around his feet. Not one apple fell into his basket.

Then the tree was still.

Billy looked down at the apples in the grass. And then the rule came back into his head. *Do not shake the tree. Not the tree, and not a branch. Never.*

Billy's hands went cold. He was scared.

He looked around.

Evie was on the step ladder, with her back to him. Mom looked up at Evie. Sara counted trees, and Tess counted apples. Sam pulled the red wagon down the row. Molly picked fast, and Dad was high up in the big tree.

Nobody saw it.

Then Molly's dad came up the row.

Chapter 3: “I Did It”



Molly’s dad walked up the row. He had an empty basket in each hand. Then he stopped.

He looked at the small, low tree and at the grass under it. Red apples lay all around Billy’s feet.

Molly’s dad put down the baskets.

“Billy,” he said. “What happened here?”

Billy did not say a word.

Molly’s dad looked up at the tree. Then he looked at the apples again. “A big wind?” he said.

Billy’s face went red.

A big wind. Billy could say yes. Nobody saw it. Only Billy knew.

But Billy liked Molly’s dad. He did not want a lie between them. Not a big lie, and not a small lie.

Billy's hands went cold again. He was scared. He was scared to say it.

But he said it.

"No," said Billy. "There was no wind."

He pointed at the low branch. "I shook it. I took the branch in my two hands, and I shook it. I did it."

Then he looked down at his shoes.

It was very still at the end of the row. Molly's dad looked at Billy for a long time.

Then he went down on one knee in the grass. Now his face was next to Billy's face.

"Billy," he said. "Thank you for telling me."

Billy looked up.

"That was not easy," said Molly's dad. "You were scared. I could see it. But you said it, and you said it to me. Thank you."

Billy's face was still red. But his hands were not so cold now.

Molly's dad picked up an apple from the grass. He turned it in his big hand. On one side was a brown spot. He pressed it with his thumb, and it was soft.

"Look," he said. "A brown spot."

He picked up a second apple. A brown spot. He picked up a third apple. A brown spot, too.

"These apples cannot go to the stand," he said.

Now the others came. Evie came down from the step ladder, and Mom came with her. Dad came down from the tall ladder. Sam came with the red wagon, and Sara, Tess and Molly ran after him.

They all looked at the apples in the grass.

Billy looked at Mom. "I shook the branch," he said.

"Where do they go?" said Billy. His voice was very small.

"To the pigs," said Molly's dad. "We have three pigs behind the barn. Pigs love apples. Brown spot or no brown spot."

"Pigs!" said Sam, and he laughed. Then he looked at Billy, and he stopped.

Billy did not laugh. Big red apples, and all of them for the pigs. And it was his fault. Tears came into his eyes.

Mom put her arm around him. She did not say a word. She only held him.

"I want to fix it," said Billy. "But I cannot put the apples back on the tree."

"No," said Molly's dad. "Nobody can do that."

He stood up and put his hand on Billy's hat. "But first, we eat," he said. "It is time for lunch."

Molly's mom came up the hill with a big basket and a red blanket. She put the blanket on the grass under the trees. In the basket were bread, cheese and cold milk.

They all sat down on the blanket. Molly's dad took his green cap off his head. He held it in his hand.

"Thank you, God, for the apples," he said. "And for good friends."

Then they ate.

Billy sat next to Mom. He ate a little bread, and that was all.

Sam looked at him. "Billy is not hungry?" he said. "Billy is always hungry!"

Billy did not smile.

Evie was not very hungry, either. In her hand she had one of the fallen apples. She turned it around and around.

On one side was the brown spot. It was small and soft. But the rest of the apple was red and hard and good.

"Mom," said Evie. "Is this apple bad now?"

Mom looked at it. "Only the brown spot is bad," she said. "You can cut the brown out. The rest is good for baking."

"For baking?" said Evie. She sat up very straight.

"Apple pie?" said Billy in a small voice.

Evie shook her head. "Not pie." She looked down the hill at the farm stand by the road. "A pie is too big to eat in a car. People in a car want something small."

Then her eyes went big. "Muffins!" she said. "Apple muffins! Little cakes with apple in them."

She turned to Molly's mom. "Apple muffins for your stand!"

"Muffins at my stand?" said Molly's mom. "Next Saturday?" She looked at Mom.

Mom smiled. "We have a bakery," she said. "And we have five good bakers."

Molly's mom laughed. "Then yes! Yes!"

"We cut out the brown," said Evie. "And the rest goes in the muffins."

Molly's dad turned his cap in his hands. "And the pigs get the brown spots," he said.

Billy looked up. "Not the apples?"

"Not these apples," said Molly's dad. "These apples are going to be muffins."

Billy sat up, and he smiled. It was a small smile, but it was a smile.

"I am going to taste first," he said.

"That is your job," said Sara.

Molly put down her bread. "Can I bake, too?" she said. "In your bakery?"

"Yes!" said Evie. "Come!"

"But Maple Falls is far," said Molly. "Twenty minutes in the truck."

Sara had an idea. "My mom sells eggs in her store," she said. "Farm eggs are the best eggs. I am going to ask her."

Molly's dad laughed. "If your mom says yes, I will come on Friday," he said. "With eggs."

"And with me!" said Molly.

After lunch, Molly's dad brought a box from the barn. He gave it to Tess. "For the muffin apples," he said.

Tess went to the small, low tree. She picked up the fallen apples one by one. She put every apple in the box with two hands. And she counted.

"Ten," said Tess. "Eleven. Twelve."

"Twenty," said Tess. "Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three."

The last apple lay in the grass next to Billy's basket. She picked it up.

"Twenty-four," she said, and she pushed up her glasses. "Twenty-four apples."

"How many muffins is that?" said Sam.

Tess opened her mouth. Then she shut it. Tess always knew the number. But not this time.

Nobody knew.

Then Sara looked at Evie. "Evie," she said. "Did you ever bake an apple muffin?"

Evie looked at the box. She looked at the twenty-four apples with their brown spots.

"No," she said. "Not one."

Chapter 4: A Dozen Is Twelve



On Monday morning the bakery kitchen was warm. The box with the twenty-four apples stood on the big table.

Evie put on her yellow apron. Billy put on his small blue apron. Tess and Sam came across the street, and Tess put on her purple apron.

Baby June sat in her baby chair. Crumble lay under the table.

Then the bell on the shop door rang. Sara ran in.

“My mom said yes,” she said. “Farm eggs in our store!”

“Yes!” said Evie.

“My mom called the farm last night,” said Sara. “On Friday Molly’s dad comes with the eggs. And Molly comes with him.”

“Molly is going to bake with us!” said Billy.

Sara put on her white apron. “And Molly’s mom said something,” she said. “For the stand, she wants six dozen muffins. About six dozen.”

"Six dozen?" said Billy. "What is a dozen?"

Mom smiled. "Come and look," she said.

She took a pan down from the shelf. It was flat, with little round cups in it.

"This is my muffin pan," said Mom.

Sam looked at the pan. "But cups are for milk," he said.

Mom laughed. "Not these cups. In these cups, a muffin bakes. One muffin goes in every cup."

Tess counted the cups. "Twelve," she said.

"Twelve cups, twelve muffins," said Mom. "And twelve is a dozen."

"So a dozen is twelve," said Billy.

"Yes," said Mom. "You buy eggs by the dozen, too."

Tess opened a box of eggs. She counted them.

"Twelve eggs," she said. "That is a dozen."

"So one muffin pan is one dozen muffins," said Evie.

Sara counted on her fingers. "Six dozen is six times twelve. That is seventy-two!"

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

"It is," said Mom. "So first we bake one dozen, in one pan. Then we will know."

Sara took out her pencil and wrote it down. "One dozen first."

Mom put some apples in the sink. Evie washed them. Then Mom gave each kid a little peeler.

"What is this?" said Sam.

"It is a peeler," said Mom. "It takes the peel off the apple."

Evie looked at the big knife on the table. "Can I use the knife?" she said.

"No," said Mom. "The knife is my job. You get a peeler."

Mom picked up her knife. She took an apple and cut out the brown spot.

"The bad spot goes out," said Mom. "The good apple goes to you."

Billy picked up an apple and his peeler.

"I am going to make one long peel," he said. "Mr. Lee made one long peel at Thanksgiving. Do you remember?"

"Yes!" said Sam. "My dad! His peel was so long."

Mr. Lee used a little knife, but Billy had a peeler. Could a peeler make one long peel, too? Billy wanted to find out.

He turned the apple slowly. The peeler went round and round. The peel came off in a long, thin piece.

Then the peel broke.

"Oh no," said Billy.

He started again, and the peel broke again. He tried again and again. Every time, the peel broke.

"Five times," said Tess. She counted.

Sam laughed and laughed. "Billy, your long peel is all short peels!"

Billy looked at the short peels on the table. Then he laughed, too.

"Mr. Lee has big hands," he said.

Mom smiled. "Short peels are good peels, too."

Soon all the apples were white. Mom took her knife again. "Now I cut the apples into pieces," she said. "Do you want big pieces or small pieces?"

"Big pieces," said Evie. "Then every bite has a lot of apple."

Mom looked at Evie for a moment. Then she cut the apples into big pieces, and the pieces went in the bowl.

Now every kid had a job again. Sara read Mom's list out loud. "Flour. Sugar. Butter. Two eggs. Milk."

Tess measured the flour. "Not more, and not less," she said.

Sam carried the eggs. He walked very slowly. “I did not break one!” he said.

Evie mixed, and Billy watched.

“Can I taste?” said Billy.

“Billy tastes first,” said Sara. “But at the end.”

Then Evie put in the big apple pieces. She mixed them in.

Mom gave her a stack of white paper cups. Evie put one paper cup in every cup of the muffin pan.

“A cup in a cup!” said Sam.

Evie put the batter in the paper cups. Twelve cups, twelve muffins, one dozen.

Mom put the pan in the oven. “Twenty-five minutes,” she said.

Sam stood by the oven door. “I am the door guard,” he said. “Nobody opens it.”

Billy put his hands in his pockets. “I know,” he said. “Not me.”

Soon the kitchen smelled of apples. June waved her hands. Crumble lifted his nose.

At last Mom took out the pan.

The muffins were high and brown on top. They smelled very good.

“They look good,” said Sara.

Billy put out his hand, but Tess shook her head.

“A warm cake needs time,” she said. “And a warm muffin needs time, too.”

Mom put the muffins on the rack. The kids waited ten minutes. Billy looked at the muffins. Then at the clock. Then at the muffins again.

“Now, Billy,” said Mom.

Billy picked up a muffin. He took a big bite, and he chewed.

Then he made a face.

"Is it bad, Billy?" said Evie.

"It is good," said Billy. "But it is wet."

Evie picked up a muffin and broke it open. The top was soft and brown. But all the apple pieces were at the bottom. And the bottom was wet.

Tess broke open a second muffin. All the apple was at the bottom.

Sara broke open a third muffin. The same.

"The apple is all at the bottom," said Sara.

"And the bottom is very wet," said Billy.

Evie looked at the muffins on the rack. There were twelve good tops and twelve wet bottoms.

"What went wrong?" she said. "We have to find out."

Sara did not know, and Tess did not know.

Then Evie looked at Mom. "Mom, do you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Mom.

"Then tell us, Mom," said Billy.

Mom smiled. "No, I am not going to tell you," she said. "But you can find out."

Chapter 5: Small Pieces



On Tuesday morning the kids came back to the bakery kitchen. They put on their aprons. Baby June sat in her baby chair. Crumble lay under the table.

The apple box stood on the big table. Tess looked into it for a long time.

“Mom,” she said. “Can you cut two pieces of apple for me? One big piece and one small piece.”

Mom cut them with her knife. Tess took one piece in each hand.

“I found out,” she said. “I know why the muffins were wet.”

She held up the big piece. “This piece is big. Big pieces are heavy.” Then she held up the small piece. “This piece is small. Small pieces are not heavy.”

“So?” said Sam.

“The batter is soft,” said Tess. “In the oven, the heavy pieces go down. Down, down, down. Then all the apple is at the bottom.”

“So the bottom was wet because all the apple was there,” said Sara.

Mom smiled at Tess. “Yes, Tess. You found out.”

Tess pushed up her glasses. She did not say a word, but she had a big smile.

“Then today we are going to cut small pieces,” said Evie.

“How small?” said Sam.

Tess held up her little finger and tapped the nail. “This small. Not bigger, and not smaller.”

Mom took three apples from the box. The kids peeled them. Then Mom cut out the brown spots. She cut the apples into small pieces. Tess watched every piece.

“Smaller, Mom,” said Tess.

Mom cut that piece smaller. “The knife is my job,” she said. “But today Tess is the boss of the pieces.”

Soon there was a bowl of small pieces. Each piece was the size of Tess’s fingernail.

“Now I can tell you a trick,” said Mom. “You did the hard part. Here is the easy part.”

She put a big spoon of flour on the apple pieces. “Stir them in the flour,” she said.

Evie stirred. Stir, stir, stir. Soon every piece had a little flour on it.

“Why?” said Billy.

“The flour holds the pieces in the batter,” said Mom. “Then they stay up. They do not all go down.”

Sara wrote it on her list. “Small pieces. A spoon of flour. Stir.”

Then the kids did their jobs again. Soon the pan went in the oven. Sam stood by the oven door. “I am the door guard,” he said.

At last Mom took out the pan. The kids waited ten minutes. Then Billy picked up a muffin. He took a big bite.

“Apple!” he said. He took a second bite. “Apple again! Apple in every bite!”

Evie broke a muffin open. There was apple at the top, in the middle and at the bottom. And the bottom was not wet.

"We did it!" said Sam.

But Evie looked at the tops. They were smooth and plain.

"They are good inside," said Evie. "But on top they are pale."

"Pale?" said Billy. "What is pale?"

"Pale is only a little brown," said Evie. "People at the stand look at the top first. A muffin needs a good top."

"Icing!" said Billy.

"No icing," said Evie. "People eat these muffins in a car. Icing in a car is a big mess."

She looked at the flour, the sugar and the butter. Then she smiled.

"A crumb top!" she said. "I am going to make a crumb top."

"What is a crumb top?" said Sam.

"Little crumbs on top of the muffin," said Evie. "You take butter, sugar and flour. You rub them with your fingers. Then you get crumbs. In the oven they get brown."

Mom took a small jar from the shelf. "And a little cinnamon," she said.

"What is that?" said Billy.

"It is a brown spice," said Mom. "Smell it."

Billy smelled the jar. "Mmm! Apple pie!"

"Yes," said Mom. "It is in apple pie, too."

Evie put butter, sugar and flour in a small bowl. Tess put in one small spoon of the brown spice.

"Now rub," said Evie. "With your fingers."

Billy and Sam put their fingers in the bowl. They rubbed and rubbed. Soon the bowl was full of little crumbs.

Billy held up one crumb. “A crumb,” he said. Then he laughed. “Crumb! Crumble! Crumble is a crumb, too!”

Under the table, Crumble heard his name. “Woof!”

“One crumb for Crumble,” said Billy. He gave Crumble the crumb. Crumble ate it. Then he looked up again.

“No more,” said Billy. “Later you get a cookie.”

The first muffin pan was in the sink. So Mom took a second muffin pan down from the shelf.

“You have two pans?” said Sam.

“Two muffin pans,” said Mom. “In a bakery, one pan is not enough.”

Then they made the batter again. Mom cut three more apples into small pieces. Evie stirred the pieces in a spoon of flour. She put the batter in the paper cups and the crumbs on top.

Then Evie took the jar of red cherries. She pressed one cherry into the middle of every crumb top. Only a little.

“An apple muffin with a cherry?” said Sara.

“It is my mark,” said Evie. “One red cherry on top. Every time.”

Mom put the pan in the oven. Sam stood by the door again. Soon the kitchen smelled of apples and the brown spice.

At last the muffins came out. They were round and brown. The crumbs on top were brown and gold. One red cherry sat in the middle of every muffin.

“Oh!” said Sara. “They are so pretty.”

The kids waited ten minutes again. Then Billy took a bite. Crunch!

“The top goes crunch!” he said. “Inside it is soft. And there is apple in every bite!”

“Now that is an apple muffin,” said Mom.

“Are these for the stand?” said Sam.

"No, these are for us," said Mom. "For the stand, we bake fresh muffins on Friday."

Sara counted the apples in the box. She counted them twice.

"Twelve apples," she said. She counted on her fingers. "Three apples for one pan. Twelve apples is four pans. That is four dozen muffins."

"Four dozen is forty-eight," said Tess.

"But Molly's mom wants six dozen," said Sara. "Seventy-two."

"We do not have enough apples," said Evie.

"Not enough?" said Billy.

"Not enough," said Sara.

It was very still in the kitchen. Billy looked at the twelve apples. They were the apples from his tree. Then he had an idea.

He jumped down from his chair and ran to the phone.

"Mom, what is Molly's number?" he said. "I am going to call Molly!"

Chapter 6: Molly in the Bakery



On Friday morning Billy stood at the shop window. He looked down Main Street. He did not sit down, and he did not eat.

On Tuesday he called Molly. “We need six more apples,” he said.

“I am going to ask my dad,” said Molly.

Now it was Friday. Did Molly’s dad find more apples? Billy did not know.

In the kitchen, the kids put on their aprons. Mom took the two muffin pans down from the shelf. Baby June sat in her baby chair at the end of the big table. Crumble lay under the table.

Then a truck stopped in front of the bakery.

“They are here!” said Billy.

The bell on the door rang. Molly came in first, in her yellow dress. Her dad came in behind her. He was very tall. He had a big box in his arms.

“Hello, Billy!” said Molly. “You called. So here we are!”

Billy looked at the box. "Apples?"

"Apples," said Molly's dad. He put the box down on the floor. It was a box from the barn. It looked the same as the first box. And it was full of red apples.

"But I said six," said Billy.

Molly's dad laughed. "Apples fall every day. In September they fall and fall."

"Now we have enough!" said Billy. "More than enough!"

Sam ran in from the kitchen. "I carry!" he said. He took the box in his two hands. It did not move.

"It is heavy," said Sam. "Very heavy."

"You can carry the eggs, Sam," said Molly's dad. He went back to the truck. He came back with a stack of egg boxes. "Eggs for Sara's store," he said. "And one dozen for the muffins."

Sam took the eggs for the muffins. He walked very slowly. "I never run with eggs," he said.

"My mom is so happy," said Sara. "She wants farm eggs every Friday."

"Then I will come every Friday," said Molly's dad.

"And me!" said Molly.

Molly looked around the shop. "Mmm," she said. "Your shop smells of fresh bread."

Then she saw the wall by the door. "Your red ribbon!"

"From the fair," said Evie. "Mom put it there."

"My white ribbon is on our fridge," said Molly.

Molly's dad carried the apple box into the kitchen. Then he stood by the shop door with his green cap in his hand. "Now I am going to take the eggs to Sara's mom," he said. "Then I go home. The pigs want their apples, too. I will come back for Molly at five."

Then the bell rang again, and he was gone.

Mom opened a drawer. She took out an apron. "A baker needs an apron," she said. "This is my spare apron."

"Spare?" said Molly.

"A spare apron is an extra apron," said Mom. "It waits for a new baker."

Molly put on the spare apron. It was green. "My mom has a green apron, too!" she said. "What is my job?"

"We all have a job," said Sara. "I check the list. You know apples. You check the apples."

Molly smiled. "I can do that."

"Today we are going to bake six dozen," said Sara. She read the list out loud. "Flour. Sugar. Butter. Eggs. Milk. Apples."

Molly took the apples out of the boxes, one by one. She turned each apple in her hand. She was very fast.

"Brown spot here," she said. "And here. And one more here."

She gave the apples to the kids. The kids peeled them. Then Mom cut out the brown spots with her knife. "The knife is my job," said Mom.

Molly picked up the next apple. It was brown all over. "Not this one," she said. "This one goes to the pigs."

Then Mom cut the apples into small pieces. Tess was the boss of the pieces again. Evie put a spoon of flour on the pieces. She stirred them.

"Why flour?" said Molly.

"It is Mom's trick," said Tess. "Big pieces are heavy. They go down to the bottom. So we cut small pieces. And the flour holds them up."

"A good trick," said Molly.

Mom took the butter and the milk out of the fridge. Tess measured. Evie mixed the batter. Sam put white paper cups in the two pans. Billy and Sam made the crumb top. They rubbed and rubbed with their fingers. Molly rubbed, too.

Evie put the batter in the paper cups. The crumbs went on top. Then she pressed one red cherry into every crumb top. Only a little.

"Why a cherry?" said Molly.

"It is Evie's mark," said Sara.

Mom put the two pans in the oven. "Two pans at a time," she said. "The oven is not big enough for more."

"Two pans at a time," said Tess. "That is one round. Six pans is three rounds."

Tess looked at the clock. She timed each round. "Twenty-five minutes," she said.

Sam stood by the oven door. "Nobody opens the door," he said. "Not Billy, and not me."

Billy put his hands in his pockets. "I know," he said. "Not me."

Then round one came out. The muffins were round and brown. The crumbs on top were brown and gold.

"Oh!" said Molly. "They are so pretty."

"On Tuesday the tops were pale," said Evie. "Not now!"

Round two went in. Round two came out. Then round three went in.

Soon the kitchen was a big mess. There was flour on the table and peel in the sink. There was flour on Billy's nose, too. Molly laughed.

The kitchen smelled of apples and the brown spice. Under the table, Crumble looked up at Billy.

Billy asked Mom, and he got a cookie from the shop. "I said later," he told Crumble. "Now it is later."

Crumble ate the cookie. Then he put his head on his paws and closed his eyes.

Mom put the milk back in the fridge. Baby June laughed and waved her hands. Molly waved back.

At last round three came out. Mom put the last muffins on the big table. Now there were long rows of muffins. Each muffin had one red cherry in the middle.

"So many muffins!" said Molly.

"Can I taste first now?" said Billy.

"Not yet," said Sara. "First I count."

Sara counted the muffins on the big table.

"Seventy-one," she said.

"Count again," said Tess.

Sara counted again, very slowly. "Seventy-one."

"Six pans," said Tess. "Twelve muffins in a pan. That is seventy-two."

Evie looked at the long rows. Seventy-two muffins went in the oven. But only seventy-one were on the table.

One muffin was gone.

Chapter 7: Seventy-One



“Seventy-one,” said Sara again. She put down her list. “One muffin is gone.”

The kitchen was very still. The kids looked at the muffins, and then at each other.

“Who took it?” said Sam.

“Wait,” said Evie. “Let us ask. Did anybody take a muffin?”

“Not me!” said Billy. “I taste first. That is my job. And I did not taste yet!”

“That is true,” said Sam. “Billy was with me at the oven door. His hands were in his pockets.”

“And Billy says what is true,” said Molly. “I know that from the farm.”

Billy’s face went a little red, but this time he smiled.

Tess, Molly and Evie shook their heads. “Not me.”

“And not me,” said Sara. “I count muffins. I do not eat them.”

Billy looked at Mom. “Mom? Did you take one?”

Mom laughed. “No, Billy. I watch the oven. That is my job.”

“Then who took it?” said Molly.

Sara looked under the table. Crumble lay there, fast asleep.

“Crumble?” said Billy. “He had a cookie. Maybe he wanted a muffin, too.”

Tess went down on one knee. She looked at Crumble’s nose. Then she looked at the floor by his paws.

“No brown crumbs on his nose,” said Tess. “No red cherry by his paws. Crumble had a cookie. He did not have a muffin.”

Crumble did not even open his eyes.

“And not me!” said Sam. He held up his two hands. They were clean and pink.

“We washed our hands after the crumb top,” said Sam. “With soap!”

“That is right,” said Mom. “I sent you to the sink.”

“A muffin has a crumb top,” said Tess. “Crumbs stay on your fingers. Sam has no crumbs.”

Sam held his fingers up to Billy’s nose, one by one. “No crumbs, no crumbs, no crumbs.”

“We are going to find out,” said Sara. “Look around the kitchen!”

They looked around. Evie looked on the shelf. Molly looked in the sink, but there were only peels in it. Billy looked in the bag of flour. Now he had flour on his nose again.

Sam ran to the oven. “Maybe it is in the oven!” Then he stopped. He stood in front of the oven door with his arms out. “No. Nobody opens the door.”

“Sam, the oven is empty now,” said Mom.

“I know,” said Sam. “But I am the door guard.”

They found no muffin.

Then Evie heard a happy little noise from the end of the big table: "Mmm! Mmm!"

Evie turned around.

Baby June sat in her baby chair. One long row of muffins ended right next to her chair. And June had a muffin in her two hands.

There were crumbs on her face. There were crumbs in her hair. Her little fist was shut tight, and in her fist was the red cherry.

June smiled a big smile. She held up the muffin. Then she made the happy noise again. "Mmm!"

"June took it!" said Billy. "June, did you take it?"

June did not say a word. June had no words yet. But she had crumbs on her face.

Then they all laughed. Sam laughed and laughed, and he sat down on the floor.

"June tasted first!" said Billy. "But that is my job!"

"Today June has your job," said Mom.

Mom opened June's fist and took out the cherry. "Not the cherry, June," she said. "A whole cherry is not for babies."

June did not mind, because she still had the muffin.

Evie got a wet cloth. She wiped the crumbs off June's face. But the crumbs in her hair stayed there.

"Now we know," said Sara. "Seventy-one on the table, and one in June."

"But Molly's mom wants seventy-two," said Tess.

Mom smiled. She pointed at a big bowl by the sink. There was batter in it.

"More batter?" said Evie.

"A baker always bakes extra," said Mom. "There is batter for one more pan."

"Twelve more muffins!" said Billy.

So they made one more pan. Sam put twelve paper cups in the pan. Evie put the batter in the cups. Billy and Sam made a little more crumb top. Then they washed their hands again.

"With soap!" said Sam.

Evie pressed one red cherry into every crumb top. Only a little.

Mom put the pan in the oven. "Tess, can you time it?" she said.

"I always time it," said Tess. She looked at the clock and timed the pan. "Twenty-five minutes."

Sam stood by the oven door. Nobody opened it.

Then the last pan came out. Twelve round, brown muffins, and a red cherry on every one. Mom put them on the big table, but not at June's end.

Sara counted all the muffins on the big table. Then she counted again, very slowly.

"Eighty-three," she said.

"Seventy-two for the stand," said Tess. "And eleven extra."

"Eleven extra!" said Molly. "My mom is going to be so happy."

Then Mom took out big white boxes. Twelve muffins went in each box for the stand.

"A dozen in every box," said Sara.

Six boxes were for the stand. The eleven extra muffins went in one more box. Sam picked up the first box. "Seven boxes!" he said. "I can carry them all."

"One at a time," said Mom.

At five the bell on the door rang. It was Molly's dad, with his green cap in his hand.

"Dad!" said Molly. "June took a muffin! She tasted first!"

"June? The baby?" Molly's dad looked at June. He saw the crumbs in her hair, and he laughed.

Molly took off the green apron. “See you tomorrow!” she said. “At the stand!”

“Bring the muffins,” said her dad.

“All of them!” said Billy. “And the extra ones!”

Molly waved from the truck window. Then the truck went down Main Street.

Soon after that, Dad came home from the mill. He saw the boxes and the crumbs in June’s hair.

“What happened here?” said Dad.

“June tasted first!” said Billy.

Dad laughed. He gave June a kiss on the head. Then he carried the boxes to the shop, one at a time. He put them on the counter in a long row.

“The muffins sleep in the shop tonight,” said Dad. “Tomorrow they go to the farm.”

That night Evie went up to bed early. “Good night, June,” she said. “Tomorrow is the big day.”

On Saturday morning Evie got up and looked out of the window.

The sky was gray. There was no sun and no blue sky. Only gray.

Chapter 8: The Honesty Box



Evie ran down the stairs. Mom stood at the kitchen window. She looked up at the gray sky.

“Is it going to rain?” said Evie.

“Maybe,” said Mom. “Maybe not.”

Then the bell on the shop door rang. Sara, Tess and Sam came in. Sara had a new list.

“Good morning!” said Sara. She read the list out loud. “Seven boxes. The red wagon. Coats.”

“Coats?” said Sam. “But it is not cold.”

“No,” said Sara. “But the sky is gray.”

Dad came down with baby June in his arms.

“June and I are going to stay home today,” said Dad. “I am going to look after her.”

The seven white boxes stood on the shop counter in a long row.

"Can I carry them?" said Sam.

"One at a time," said Mom.

"I know," said Sam. "One at a time."

He picked up the first box. He walked to the truck, very slowly. Then he came back for the next box. And the next. Seven times.

Billy pulled his red wagon to the truck. Dad put it in the back.

"And the boxes?" said Dad. "In the back, too?"

Mom looked up at the sky. "No. The muffins ride with us."

Mom drove. Sara sat in front with her. Two boxes stood on the seat between them. One box was on Sara's lap. Evie, Billy, Tess and Sam sat in the back seat. There was a white box on every lap.

Dad stood at the shop door with June. June waved her little hands.

"Bye, muffins!" said Dad.

They drove out of Maple Falls, past the mill and the river. Sam waved at the mill. "Hello, mill!"

Nobody said, "Hello, Sam." Dad was at home.

After twenty minutes, Mom stopped the truck at the white gate. Molly ran out of the house in her yellow dress.

"You came!" she shouted. "And the muffins came!"

"Is your dad here?" said Billy.

"He is in the barn," said Molly. "The pigs are hungry."

The boxes went into the red wagon. Billy pulled, and Sam pushed. They went down to the road very slowly.

Molly's mom stood at the farm stand in her green apron. On the long table were baskets of red apples and boxes of eggs. But in the middle there was a big space.

"This space is for your muffins," said Molly's mom.

Evie opened six boxes. She put them in the space in a straight row. There were twelve round muffins in every box. And there was one red cherry on every muffin.

"So pretty," said Molly.

The seventh box had the eleven extra muffins in it. Molly's mom put that box under the table. "For later," she said.

Sara looked at the honesty box. "Who takes the money for the muffins?"

"Nobody," said Molly's mom. "People take muffins. Then they put the money in the box. They do that with the apples, too."

"And we do not take the money?" said Billy.

"No," said Molly's mom. "The money goes in the honesty box. Always."

Then Tess held out her hand. "Rain," she said.

A drop fell on her hand. Then another drop. Then a lot of drops.

"Under the roof!" said Mom.

The kids put on their coats. Then they all stood under the small roof. The rain went tap, tap, tap.

"Good list, Sara," said Tess. "Coats!"

Then Tess counted. "Eight people," she said. "And one small roof."

"Then we stand close," said Molly's mom. She laughed.

The road was gray and wet. A car came, but it did not stop.

Then a blue car stopped. A man in a black coat got out. He picked up a basket of apples. He put some money in the honesty box. Then he drove away.

He did not look at the muffins. And Molly's mom did not look at the box. She did not count the money. She only waved at the man.

Billy looked at the honesty box for a long time.

The rain did not stop. Sara looked at the empty road. “Who buys muffins in the rain?” she said. “Nobody.”

“Nobody,” said Sam.

Evie looked at the six boxes. So many muffins, and no cars. Evie was sad.

Mom put her arm around her. “Wait a little,” she said.

So they waited. Then the rain stopped, and the sun came out.

“The sun!” shouted Sam. “The sun came back!”

“Now the cars will come,” said Molly’s mom. “On a sunny day, my eggs sell out. By lunch, not one egg is left.”

“Are the muffins going to sell out, too?” said Sara.

Molly’s mom smiled. “Maybe.”

Then a car stopped. A mom, a dad and two little girls got out.

“We are from the city,” said the dad. “We never saw a farm stand.”

The girls ran to the table. “Look!” said one girl. “A cherry on top!”

Their mom took a basket of apples. Then she picked up a whole box of muffins. “A dozen,” she said. “For the city.”

The dad put the money in the honesty box. The girls waved from the car, and Evie waved back. She was not sad now.

Then they heard a noise on the road. Put, put, put. An old red tractor came down the road. An old farmer sat on it. He had a white beard, and he wore a big straw hat.

“He has the next farm,” said Molly.

The farmer stopped his tractor and got down. He picked up one muffin. “A cherry?” he said. “On an apple muffin?”

“It is my mark,” said Evie.

The farmer took a bite. He did not say a word. He ate the whole muffin.

“He tasted first!” said Billy. “But that is my job!”

They all laughed.

"One muffin is not enough," said the farmer. He took six more, and he put them in his straw hat. Then he put the money in the honesty box.

Put, put, put. Slowly, the tractor went down the road.

Then more cars came, and more. They all stopped. They all took muffins. And they all put money in the box.

Sara counted the muffins on her fingers. "Twelve for the city girls. Seven for the farmer…" She looked at her hands. "I do not have enough fingers!"

Molly laughed. Then they heard a little bell. Ding, ding.

Molly turned around and looked up at the barn.

"Pepper!" she shouted.

The gate of Pepper's pen was open again. The little white goat came down from the barn, fast. She did not stop at the white gate. She did not look at the hens. She ran straight to the muffin table.

Chapter 9: Pepper and the Muffins



Pepper ran to the muffin table. Ding, ding, ding!

“Stop, Pepper!” shouted Molly.

But Pepper did not stop. She put her two front feet up on the table, and her black head was right over the muffins.

“No, Pepper, not the muffins!” said Sara.

One front foot bumped a basket. A red apple rolled off the table and fell on the grass.

Pepper did not look at the apple. She looked at the muffins. Then she took a muffin in her mouth, and she jumped down.

“Pepper, give it back!” said Molly’s mom.

Pepper did not give it back. She ran.

Molly ran after her. Sam ran after Molly. Pepper ran around the farm stand, and they ran around the stand, too.

"Come back!" shouted Molly.

Pepper did not come back. She ran around the stand again, and then again.

Tess counted on her fingers. "One time, two times, three times!"

They all laughed.

Then Molly stopped. Sam stopped, too, and he sat down in the grass.

"She is too fast," said Molly.

"I am fast, too," said Sam. "But Pepper is faster."

Billy did not run. He stood very still by the table.

He looked down and saw the red apple in the grass. He picked it up.

"It fell," he said. "It cannot go back on the table."

"No," said Molly's mom. "Now it is a goat apple."

Billy held out the apple on his flat hand. He did not move.

"Pepper," he said in a small voice. "Look, an apple."

Pepper stopped and looked at Billy. She looked at the apple in his hand. Then she walked to him, very slowly. Ding… ding… ding.

Billy stood still, and Pepper took the apple from his hand. Crunch!

Then Billy took her collar with his other hand. It was a brown collar, and the little bell hung from it.

"I have her!" said Billy.

Molly ran to him. "Billy, you got her! You are a goat guard!"

Sam stood up in the grass. "I am the door guard," he said. "And Billy is the goat guard!"

Billy did not say a word. But he stood very tall. He was very proud.

"Now Billy has two jobs," said Sara. "He tastes first, and he guards goats."

Then Tess went down on one knee and looked at Pepper's black nose. "Brown crumbs," she said. "Pepper had a muffin."

Molly picked up an empty white paper cup from the grass. "But not the paper," she said.

"Where is the muffin now?" said Sam.

"In Pepper," said Sara. "One muffin in June. Now one muffin in Pepper."

Mom smiled. "A baker always bakes extra."

"Oh, yes," said Sara. "Then that was an extra one."

Molly took the collar from Billy. "Come, Pepper," she said. "Back to your pen." She walked the little goat up to the barn.

Molly's mom took the seventh box out from under the table. Sara counted the muffins in it. "Eleven extra muffins."

"We are going to sell them, too," said Molly's mom.

Billy looked at the muffins in the box. Then he looked up at the barn.

"Can I keep one muffin?" he asked Molly's mom. "It is for Molly's dad. He is in the barn. He did not have one yet."

"Yes," said Molly's mom. "That is a good idea, Billy."

She gave him a small box from under the table. Billy put one muffin in it and shut the lid.

"This one is for Molly's dad," he said. "It is not for the stand."

He put it under the table, at the very end.

Then Molly came back from the barn. "I shut the gate," she said. "And I checked it twice."

Billy showed her the small box. "It is for your dad," he said.

Molly looked in it and smiled. "Dad is going to love it."

Molly's mom put the other ten muffins on the table. "Ten more for the stand," said Sara.

At eleven o'clock a small green car came down the road. It stopped at the stand, and Mr. and Mrs. Green got out.

"We heard about your muffins," said Mrs. Green. "Apple muffins on a farm!"

Mr. Green took a big bite of a muffin. "Mmm!" he said. He took two more muffins and put the money in the honesty box.

Then another car stopped, and Sara's mom got out.

"Mom! What about the store?" said Sara.

"The store can wait an hour," said Sara's mom. "I wanted to see the hens."

Then a big gray car came. Mr. Lee got out, and then Mrs. Lee.

"Mom! Dad!" shouted Sam.

The back door opened, and Grandpa got out. Then Mrs. Hill got out, very slowly, with her cane.

"Grandpa! Mrs. Hill!" shouted Billy.

Mr. Lee held Mrs. Hill's arm. Molly saw the cane, and she ran up to the house. She came back with a chair.

"This is for you," said Molly.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Hill. She sat down under the small roof. "Now I can sit, and you can sell."

Billy told her about Pepper. "She put her front feet on the table! She took a muffin! But I held out an apple, and I got her!"

"A goat guard," said Mrs. Hill. "Good. I am too old to run after a goat. So I sit here, and you guard."

Grandpa picked up two muffins, one for himself and one for Mrs. Hill. He put the money in the honesty box.

Mrs. Hill looked at her muffin. "A red cherry," she said. "I know that cherry."

Evie laughed. "It is my mark, Mrs. Hill."

Then more cars came, and more. The muffins went fast.

At twelve o'clock Sara looked at the table. She looked again. Not one muffin was on it.

"We sold out!" shouted Sara. "We sold out!"

"Sold out?" said Sam. "What is sold out?"

"All gone," said Molly. "Nobody can buy more."

Evie looked at the empty boxes. She smiled a big smile.

"Not one?" said Mr. Lee. "But I did not get one!"

Mrs. Lee laughed and gave him half of her muffin.

Sam looked under the table. "There is one more in the small box!"

"No," said Billy. "That one is for Molly's dad."

"The eggs sold out, too," said Molly's mom. "It is twelve o'clock. Not one egg is left, and not one muffin."

Then she picked up the honesty box. "Now we count," she said.

She opened the little lid. She took out the money and counted it. Then she counted it again, very slowly.

Then she looked up at the kids. Her mouth was open, but she did not say a word.

Chapter 10: The Best Muffin on the Farm



Molly’s mom looked at the money in her hands, and then at the kids. Then she laughed.

“So much money!” she said. “Nobody watched. And they all paid.”

Billy looked at the little wooden box, and he smiled.

“But the apple money is in there, too,” said Sara. “And the egg money.”

“Yes,” said Molly’s mom. “But every Saturday the apples and the eggs make about the same money. The rest is muffin money.”

She held out the muffin money to Mom.

“This is for you,” she said. “It was your work. I want to give it all to you.”

Mom did not take it. She only looked at Evie.

“But they were your apples,” said Evie.

Molly’s mom looked at Mom. Mom looked at Molly’s mom. For a moment, nobody said a word.

Then Mom smiled. “Half,” she said.

Molly’s mom smiled, too. “Half.”

They shook hands, and then they both laughed.

“Tess, you always know the number,” said Mom. “Can you count it?”

Tess put the money on the table in two piles. She counted it very slowly. “One half for the farm, and one half for the bakery,” she said. “Not more, and not less.”

She pushed up her glasses. Mrs. Hill laughed and clapped her hands.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Green waved and drove home. “The store can wait an hour,” said Sara’s mom. “But not two!” And she went back to her store.

Then the barn door opened, and Molly’s dad came down to the stand. His green cap was on his head.

“What is so funny down here?” he asked.

“Dad!” shouted Molly. “We sold out! Not one muffin is left!”

“Not one?” said Molly’s dad. He looked at the empty boxes. “And I did not get one.”

“And I only got half,” said Mr. Lee.

Billy ran to the end of the table. He took the small box out from under it.

“Wait!” he said. “I kept one. It is for you.”

Molly’s dad took off his green cap and went down on one knee. He opened the lid. There was the last muffin, round and brown, with one red cherry on top.

“You kept it for me?” he asked.

“You were in the barn,” said Billy. “With the pigs. And you did not have one.”

Molly’s dad looked at the muffin. Then he looked at Billy. “And you? Did you taste one today?”

Billy shook his head. “No. They all went to the stand.”

"Billy did not taste first this time," said Sam. "June tasted first! And Pepper! And the old farmer!"

They all laughed.

Molly's dad broke the muffin in two. He gave one half to Billy.

"Then we taste it now," he said. "You and me."

They both took a big bite. Billy closed his eyes. "Mmm."

Molly's dad did not say a word. He took a second bite, and then he stood up.

"The best muffin in Maple Falls," he said.

Molly put her hands on her hips. "Dad. We are not in Maple Falls."

Molly's dad looked around. He saw the red barn, the white house and the long rows of apple trees.

"Then it is the best muffin on the farm," he said.

Grandpa laughed out loud. "Hey! I always say that!"

Molly's mom looked at the empty boxes. Then she looked up at the apple trees on the hill.

"I have an idea," she said to Molly's dad. "Apples fall every day. And every Friday you take eggs to Sara's store."

"Every Friday," said Molly's dad.

"Then take a box of fallen apples to Rosie's Bakery, too."

Molly's dad smiled. "Eggs for the store, and apples for the bakery. Every Friday."

"And we are going to bake muffins with them," said Mom. "For your stand."

"Every Saturday?" asked Sara.

"Every Saturday in the fall," said Molly's mom.

Molly jumped up and down. "Apples on Friday! Muffins on Saturday!"

Billy looked up at Molly's dad. "And the pigs?" he asked.

Molly's dad laughed. "The pigs get the brown spots. They always do."

Then he put his big hand on Billy's head.

"And it all began with a boy who said, 'I did it.'"

Billy's face went red, and he looked down at his shoes. But he smiled a big smile. He was a little shy, and he was very happy.

Then it was time to go home. Mr. Lee held Mrs. Hill's arm and took her to the big gray car. Mrs. Lee and Grandpa went with them.

"Ding, ding," came from the barn.

"Bye, Pepper!" shouted Billy.

Molly stood at the white gate and waved. "See you on Friday!"

Mom drove the truck. Sara sat in front with her. Evie, Billy, Tess and Sam sat in the back seat. The empty boxes were in the back of the truck, with the red wagon.

Billy put his head on Evie's arm, and soon he was asleep.

At the mill, Sam waved. "Hello, mill," he said in a very small voice. Billy did not wake up.

At home, Dad stood at the shop door with June in his arms. Crumble ran to the truck and barked.

"Well?" said Dad. "How did it go?"

Billy opened his eyes. "We sold out," he said. "And I am a goat guard." Then he closed his eyes again.

That evening, Sara stayed for dinner. They all sat at the kitchen table. Billy told Dad about Pepper, and then he told him again.

Then Tess ran across the street to the bakery, very fast. The bell on the shop door rang.

"Evie! Sara!" shouted Tess. "Big news!"

Evie and Sara ran into the shop. Tess stood by the red ribbon. She was out of breath.

"What news?" asked Evie.

"My grandma called us this evening!" said Tess. "She is coming! In October!"

"Grandma Lee?" said Evie. "But she lives far, far away."

"Yes," said Tess. "Far, far away. But she is coming here."

"Hooray!" shouted Billy from the kitchen. "Does she like muffins?"

Tess laughed, and then she pushed up her glasses.

"There is one more thing," she said. "She does not speak much English."

"How much English does she speak?" asked Sara.

Tess held up three fingers. "Hello. Thank you. Good night."

Sara looked at Evie. Evie looked at Sara.

"A new list," said Sara.

Evie laughed. Across the street, every light in the Lees' house was on.

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