Steamed Buns with Grandma Lee



Contents

About This Book 2
About the Story 3
Chapter 1: More Than Twelve Hours 4
Chapter 2: Too Sweet 9
Chapter 3: We Do Not Bake. We Steam. 14
Chapter 4: Hands, Not Cups 19
Chapter 5: Nobody Opens the Lid 24
Chapter 6: Two Grandmas 29
Chapter 7: Fifty Buns 34
Chapter 8: Maple Falls Has Pots 39
Chapter 9: Dinner at the Lees' 44
Chapter 10: The Red Dot 49
Copyright & License 54

About This Book

At a Glance

- **Reading level:** English level A1+ (CEFR)
- **Age:** 7+
- **Length:** 10 chapters · ±10,800 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 October, and Tess's grandma is coming to Maple Falls! Grandma Lee lives far, far away. She knows only a few English words, so she writes new ones in her little red book.

Evie bakes a pink welcome cake with red cherries on top. Grandma Lee eats every bite. "Very pretty," she says. But is it good? Evie wants to know, so she asks…

Grandma Lee shows the kids something new: buns that are not baked, but steamed! Before she flies home, she wants a dinner for all her new friends. Fifty buns! But she has only one steamer.

How can you steam fifty buns with one steamer?

Chapter 1: More Than Twelve Hours



It was a cold Monday in October. After lunch, Tess sat at the big table in the bakery kitchen. She had a pencil and a piece of paper, and she wrote very slowly.

Sara looked at the paper. “A list?” she said. “But lists are my job.”

“This is not a bakery list,” said Tess. “It is about my grandma.”

Evie and Billy came to the table, and Sam ran in after them.

“Read it!” said Billy.

Tess pushed up her glasses and read it out loud.

“Grandma Lee. She is my dad’s mom. She wakes up early. She drinks tea. She likes long walks. And she cooks.”

“How early?” asked Billy.

“Very early,” said Tess. “She wakes up before the sun. She never sleeps late.”

“I wake up before the sun, too,” said Billy.

Evie laughed. “Billy! You never wake up before the sun.”

“One time I did,” said Billy.

“How long is she going to stay?” asked Sara.

“Three weeks,” said Tess.

Evie read the list again. “Tea, long walks, cooking,” she said. “And what does she like to eat?”

Tess looked at the paper for a long time.

“I do not know,” she said at last. “The last time I saw her, I was nine.”

She did not smile. Tess was a little nervous. She wanted it all to be right for her grandma.

Sam ran around the table with his arms out wide. “Grandma comes on a plane!” he shouted. “More than twelve hours!”

“Twelve hours on a plane?” said Billy. “That is from morning to night!”

“More than twelve,” said Sam. “And then a long drive in the car.”

Mom looked up from the oven. “That is a long flight,” she said. “She is going to be very tired.”

Sara held up three fingers. “And she only knows three things in English. Hello. Thank you. Good night.”

“Yes,” said Tess. “But she is learning. Every day she writes new English words in her little red book.”

“On the phone she said ‘plane’!” said Sam. “In English!”

Evie looked at the oven. Then she looked at Tess, and she had an idea.

“In your first week in Maple Falls, we brought you welcome bread,” she said. “Now we can bake for your grandma. A welcome cake!”

Tess smiled a little. “There were cherry rolls, too. Two for me. Two for Sam.”

“A big cake,” said Evie. “With pink icing. And red cherries on top!”

Sara took out her pencil. “A new list,” she said. “A cake list.”

"Pink!" said Billy. "Pink icing is the best."

"And I carry it," said Sam. "That is my job."

Tess looked down at her list. "Maybe," she said.

"Maybe?" said Billy. "All grandmas like cake!"

Tess laughed a little. But Evie was already at the shelf with the big cake pans.

The days went by. Every day Tess came to the bakery with her list, and every day the list was longer. On Tuesday she wrote one more line: She laughs a lot. The next day she wrote: She is small. Not much bigger than me.

Across the street, the Lees were very busy. Mrs. Lee cleaned every room. Mr. Lee came home with a big box of tea.

"Tea for three weeks," he said, and he laughed.

Every morning Tess and Sam came across the street to the bakery. "How many more days?" he asked.

And every morning Tess held up her fingers. Four. Three. Two. One.

On Friday, Molly and her dad came with the eggs for Sara's store and the box of apples.

"Is your grandma here yet?" asked Molly.

Tess held up one finger. "Tomorrow."

On Saturday morning the kids baked apple muffins with Molly's apples. Every Saturday in the fall, the muffins went to the farm stand.

At noon, Mr. and Mrs. Lee drove away in their big gray car. They went to get Grandma Lee. It was a long drive, so Tess and Sam stayed at the bakery.

"Can we take her the cake tonight?" asked Evie.

"No," said Mom. "After a long flight, people need sleep. Take it on Sunday."

After lunch, Evie made the welcome cake. Tess measured the flour and the sugar. Sara checked the list. Then Evie made a big bowl of pink icing, and Billy tasted it first.

"Mmm!" he said. "More icing!"

So Evie put on more icing, thick and smooth. On top she put a ring of red cherries.

"There," she said. "A welcome cake."

The cake stood on the kitchen table, big and pink. Sam looked at it with big eyes.

"I carry it," he said. "Very, very slowly."

In the evening it was dark. The kids sat at the shop window and looked out at Main Street. Crumble sat with them. He put his nose on the glass.

Across the street, the Lees' house was dark. Not one light was on.

A car came down Main Street. Sam waved. The car did not stop. Then a second car came. Sam waved again. It did not stop.

"Is she here now?" asked Billy.

"No," said Tess.

A few minutes went by.

"Now?" asked Billy.

"No, Billy."

Tess held her list in her hands. She read it again and again.

"What if she does not like it here?" she said very quietly.

Evie put her arm around her. "She is your grandma," she said. "She is going to love it here."

"And she is going to love the cake," said Billy.

Tess looked back at the big pink cake in the kitchen. "Maybe," she said.

Mom came to the window. "It is late," she said. "Are you tired, Sam?"

"No!" said Sam. "I am never tired."

Then he put his head against the glass and closed his eyes.

Evie looked out at the dark street. Two lights came down Main Street, very slowly.

A big gray car stopped across the street.

Tess jumped up. “That is our car!”

Sam jumped up, too. The back door of the car opened, and a small woman got out. Then she pulled a bag out of the car.

It was a very big bag. It was bigger than Sam.

Chapter 2: Too Sweet



On Sunday, after lunch, Tess and Sam ran across the street to the bakery.

“How is your grandma?” asked Evie.

“She is up!” said Sam. “She was up before the sun. Before all of us!”

Tess smiled. “My list was right,” she said. “She is small. And she laughs a lot.”

Evie put the welcome cake in a big white box and put on the lid. Sam held out his arms.

“I carry it,” he said. “Very, very slowly.”

And he did. Sara went first and opened the door. Sam walked across Main Street with the big box in his arms. Billy walked next to him.

“Slowly, Sam,” said Billy. “Slowly.”

“I am slow!” said Sam.

Mom waved from the shop window. Crumble put his nose on the glass.

Mr. Lee opened the door of the Lees’ house. “Come in, come in!” he said.

The kids went in. And there she was.

Grandma Lee stood by the big wooden table. She was small, only a little bigger than Tess. Her hair was black and gray, in a small bun at the back of her head. She wore a long dark-blue skirt and a soft pink cardigan. Her face was round and kind.

Tess took her hand. "Grandma, these are my friends," she said. "Evie, Sara and Billy."

Grandma Lee smiled at each of them. "Hello," she said. "Hello. Hello."

Then she saw the box. Sam put it on the table, and Evie took off the lid. There was the cake, big and round and pink, with a ring of red cherries on top.

Grandma Lee put her hands on her cheeks. Then she laughed a big laugh.

"Thank you!" she said. "Thank you!"

"She knows 'thank you'!" said Billy.

"And more," said Tess. "Grandma, show them your book."

Grandma Lee took a little red book out of her pocket and opened it. On many pages there were English words in small, neat letters. There was one word on every line.

Sam pointed at one word. "Look, Billy! There is 'plane'!"

Then he pointed at the cake. "Grandma," he said. "Cake. Cake!"

Grandma Lee looked at the cake. "Cake," she said.

She took out a pencil and wrote the new word in her little red book. Sam jumped up and down.

"I am teaching Grandma English!" he said.

Mrs. Lee came in with plates, forks and a knife. She cut the cake. The first piece was for Grandma Lee. It was a big piece, with thick pink icing and two red cherries.

Billy and Sam did not want chairs, so they sat on the floor. The big bag from last night stood in the corner. It was still closed.

"What is in the bag?" asked Billy.

"Her clothes," said Tess. "She was too tired to open it."

All the kids watched Grandma Lee. She took a small bite. She ate slowly. Then she took a second bite, and a third. She ate the whole piece, to the last crumb.

Then she put down her fork. She smiled at Evie.

"Very pretty," she said.

"Pretty!" said Billy. "She likes it!"

Sam smiled a big smile. Sara smiled, too.

But Evie did not smile. She heard the word. Grandma Lee said "pretty." She did not say "good."

Evie looked at the cake. It was easy to say nothing. But Evie was a baker. She wanted to know.

She looked at Grandma Lee. "Pretty," she said. "But is it good? Please tell me."

It was very quiet at the table. Grandma Lee looked at Evie for a long time. Then she looked at the cake. She thought about it.

Then she put her hand on Evie's hand.

"A little too sweet for me," she said kindly. "But very well done."

Nobody said anything. Billy put down his fork.

Evie's cheeks got hot. She looked down at her plate. She was a little sad. She wanted the cake to be good for Grandma Lee.

Then Tess looked up. "Now I remember," she said quietly. "When I was little, Grandma always said, 'Not too sweet.' In our family, 'not too sweet' is the best thing you can say about a cake."

Sara put her hand on Evie's arm. "Breathe, Evie," she said.

Evie breathed in and out. Then she looked up at Grandma Lee.

"Thank you for saying it," she said. "Next time, less sugar."

"Less?" said Grandma Lee.

Evie held her hands far apart. "Sugar," she said. Then she moved her hands closer. "Less sugar."

Grandma Lee laughed. Her round cheeks went pink. She took her pencil and wrote a new word in her little red book: less.

"Less," she said. "Less sugar. Good."

Billy looked at the cake on his plate. It had a lot of pink icing.

"Too sweet?" he said. "Cake can be too sweet?"

"Yes," said Grandma Lee. "For me."

Billy looked at her with big eyes. He could not believe it.

Grandma Lee laughed. Then she showed him with her hands. She held one hand low, over the table.

"Sweet," she said.

She held it up a little higher. "Very sweet."

Then she held it up high, over her head. "Too sweet."

Sam jumped up and held his hand up high, too. "Up here is too sweet!"

"Not for me," said Billy. He put his hand up over his head, up and up. "For me, up here is good!"

They all laughed. Evie laughed, too.

"Very sweet is a lot of sugar, Billy," said Sara. "Too sweet is more sugar than you want."

"I always want more sugar," said Billy.

Then he looked at the cake again. "More icing is sweeter," he said slowly. "And I said, 'More icing!'"

"And I put it on," said Evie. "Next time, less icing, too."

Grandma Lee pointed at the ring of red cherries on the cake. "Very pretty," she said again.

This time Evie smiled. Now she knew. Grandma Lee only said true things. And "very well done" was true, too.

Then Grandma Lee stood up. "Wait," she said.

She went to the corner and pulled out her big bag. The kids came to look. Sam sat right next to the bag, and Billy sat next to Sam.

Grandma Lee opened her big bag on the floor. Among her clothes was a round wooden box with a lid.

Chapter 3: We Do Not Bake. We Steam.



On Monday, at four in the morning, Grandma Lee was wide awake.

The Lees' house was dark and quiet. Tess and Sam were asleep. Mr. and Mrs. Lee were asleep, too. But Grandma Lee lay in bed with her eyes open. She was not tired at all.

It was the flight from far away. In her country, it was day now. Her body did not know the time.

At last she got up. She made a cup of tea and drank it at the window. Main Street was dark.

At five o'clock, a light came on across the street. It was in the bakery, at the back, in the kitchen.

Grandma Lee looked at the light. Then she smiled.

She drew a little loaf of bread on a piece of paper. It was a note for her family. She left it on the kitchen table.

It was cold outside, so she put on her coat. She took the round wooden box from her big bag. Then she went out and crossed the street.

In the bakery kitchen, Mom stood at the big table. Every morning she made the bread for the shop. A big bowl of dough stood on the table.

Mom took the dough out of the bowl. She pushed it with her hands. She folded it and pushed it again.

Then she heard a sound. Knock, knock, knock.

Mom looked up. Who was at the door at five in the morning?

She went into the dark shop. Crumble ran after her. A small woman stood outside the shop door. She had a round box under her arm.

Mom opened the door. The bell rang. Ding!

"Hello," said the small woman.

"Grandma Lee!" said Mom. "Come in, come in. It is cold."

Grandma Lee came in. Crumble smelled her shoes and wagged his tail.

Mom smiled. "Good morning," she said.

Grandma Lee looked out at the dark street. "Morning?" she said.

Mom laughed. "Yes. Five o'clock is morning. For bakers."

Grandma Lee laughed, too. She took out her little red book and wrote a new word: morning.

Mom took her to the kitchen. Grandma Lee put the round box on a chair. Then she saw the dough. Her eyes got big.

She took off her coat and pushed up her sleeves. She washed her hands at the sink. Then she pointed at the dough, and at herself.

"Do you want to help?" asked Mom.

Grandma Lee nodded.

"Good!" said Mom.

Grandma Lee put her hands in the dough. Her hands were small, but they were strong and quick. Push, fold, turn. Push, fold, turn.

"You know dough," said Mom.

Grandma Lee smiled and nodded.

Then the two bakers worked side by side. They did not need many words. Mom showed something with her hands, and Grandma Lee nodded. Then Grandma Lee showed her something, and Mom nodded.

Mom made a round loaf. Grandma Lee made a round loaf, too. She was faster.

Mom laughed. She made the next loaf faster. But Grandma Lee made her next one even faster.

At six o'clock, Evie woke up. She heard two people laugh in the kitchen, so she ran down the stairs.

There was flour on the big table. There was flour on the floor. There was flour on Mom's nose. A long row of round loaves stood on the table. Next to Mom stood Grandma Lee. She had flour on her hands and arms.

"Grandma Lee!" said Evie. "It is six o'clock in the morning!"

"Good morning," said Grandma Lee slowly. She looked at Mom. Mom nodded, and Grandma Lee laughed.

"She came at five," said Mom. "She is wide awake."

"At five?" said Evie. "Grandma Lee, are you not tired?"

Grandma Lee shook her head and laughed.

"After a flight from far away, your body does not know the time," said Mom. "In her country, it is evening now."

Evie looked out the kitchen window. It was still dark. "Evening?" she said. "But here it is morning!"

Then Grandma Lee went to the chair and picked up the round box. She put it on the big table, next to the loaves.

Evie came closer. The box was light brown and as wide as a big plate.

"Is it wood?" asked Evie.

"Bamboo," said Grandma Lee. She knocked on the side with one finger. Tock, tock.

"Bamboo is a tall plant," said Mom. "It is light and strong."

Grandma Lee took off the lid. Under the lid was a round layer. The bottom of the layer had many small holes. Under it was a second layer. It had small holes, too.

"Two layers," said Mom. "And a lid."

"But what is it for?" asked Evie. "Is it a box for bread?"

Grandma Lee shook her head. She made a big circle with her hands.

"A pot?" said Mom. She bent down and took out the big pot. She put it on the table.

Grandma Lee put the bamboo box on top of the pot. She pointed into the pot. "Water," she said. She put her hands under the pot. "Hot."

Then she moved her fingers up from the pot. Up, up, up, into the box.

Evie thought of Grandpa and his maple syrup. In March, the hot sap made lots of white steam.

"Steam!" said Evie. "Hot water makes steam!"

"Steam?" said Grandma Lee. She took out her little red book. She wrote another word: steam.

"The water gets very hot," said Mom slowly. "The steam goes up through the small holes. And the hot steam cooks the food."

"Cook," said Grandma Lee. "Yes."

"It is a bamboo steamer," said Mom.

Evie looked at the steamer. Then she looked at the big oven. "So you do not bake?" she asked. "You steam?"

Grandma Lee thought about it. Then she pointed at the oven. “We do not bake,” she said. She put her hand on the bamboo lid. “We steam.”

“But what do you steam?” asked Evie.

Grandma Lee took a small piece of dough. She made it into a little round ball. She put it in the steamer and pointed at it. “Soft,” she said. “White.”

“A bun,” said Mom. “A steamed bun.”

“Bun?” said Grandma Lee.

Evie laughed and pointed at Grandma Lee’s hair. “That is a bun, too!”

Grandma Lee touched the small bun at the back of her head. Then she laughed her big laugh. She wrote one more word in her red book: bun.

Then she put the lid back on the steamer. She looked at Evie for a long time. She pointed at Evie. Then she pointed at the steamer.

“Tomorrow,” she said. “I will show you.”

Chapter 4: Hands, Not Cups



On Tuesday morning, at eight o'clock, Evie, Sara and Billy ran across Main Street. It was a cold, gray October morning.

Tess opened the door. "Grandma is in the kitchen," she said. "She is ready."

Tess had a cup in her hand. It was the measuring cup from the bakery, with lines on the side. Tess never baked without it.

In the Lees' kitchen there was a little gray smoke. Mr. Lee stood by the toaster with a black piece of toast.

"I made my toast too dark," he said. He laughed and opened the kitchen window. "Too dark is not good!"

He waved the smoke out. Cold air came in.

Then he saw the kids. "Six bakers!" he said. "A bakery in my kitchen again!"

"My mother was at your bakery yesterday," he said. "At five in the morning! She left us a note. She drew a little loaf of bread on it! So we knew where she was."

Grandma Lee laughed. Mr. Lee took his coat and his bag and went to work. Mrs. Lee was at work already.

Grandma Lee stood at the kitchen table in her pink cardigan. Her sleeves were rolled up. On the table were flour, milk, yeast, sugar, oil and a big bowl. The bamboo steamer stood by the sink.

Grandma Lee washed her hands. She did not take a cup. She did not take a spoon. She put her hand in the flour and took a big handful. She put it in the bowl. Then she took another handful. And another.

"Wait!" said Tess. "How much is that?"

Grandma Lee held up her hand. It was full of flour. She smiled.

"That is a handful," said Evie. "She does not use a cup."

Tess did not like that at all. A handful was not a number. In the bakery, Tess measured it all with her cup. Not more, and not less. That was her job.

Tess looked at the cup in her hand. Grandma Lee was busy. She did not look at Tess. Tess could hold the cup under Grandma Lee's hand, very fast.

But Tess did not want to measure in secret. It was Grandma Lee's recipe. She wanted to ask first.

"Grandma," said Tess. "Can I measure your hands?"

Grandma Lee did not know all the words, so Tess showed her. She held up the cup. She pointed at the flour in Grandma Lee's hand. Then she pointed at the cup again.

Grandma Lee looked at the cup and at her hand. Then she laughed her big laugh. "Yes!"

She took a new handful of flour and held it over the cup. She opened her hand, and the flour went in. Tess looked at the lines on the side.

"One handful is half a cup," said Tess.

Grandma Lee took the next handful. Into the cup it went. Half a cup again.

"The same!" said Tess.

The next handful was the same, too. Tess's eyes got big. "Grandma, your hand is the same every time!"

"Mrs. Hill does that, too," said Evie. "She says, 'I know it in my hands.'"

Tess nodded slowly. "Grandma knows it in her hands, too. And now I know it in numbers."

"I can take a handful!" said Sam. He took a handful of flour and put it in the cup. Only a little flour went in.

"Your handful is smaller, Sam," said Tess. "A lot smaller."

"My hand is smaller," said Sam. He held up his little hand. They all laughed. Grandma Lee laughed the most.

"Handful?" she said.

"Handful," said Tess. She closed her hand. "This is a handful."

Grandma Lee took out her little red book and wrote a new word: handful.

Sara gave Tess a piece of paper and a pencil. "Write it down," she said. "A recipe is a list, too. And this list is yours."

"Six handfuls of flour," said Tess. "That is three cups." She wrote it down.

Then Grandma Lee picked up the milk. She wanted to pour it right into the bowl.

"Wait!" said Tess. She held out her cup.

Grandma Lee laughed and poured the milk into the cup first. She stopped at the top line.

"One cup of milk," said Tess. She wrote it down.

Then the yeast. Grandma Lee took a little yeast with three fingers. Tess held out a small spoon, and the yeast filled it. "One small spoon of yeast."

Then the sugar. Billy held up the sugar. "A big handful?" he asked.

Grandma Lee shook her head. She held her hand low over the table. "Sweet," she said. "Not too sweet."

Billy sighed. “I know. Not too sweet.”

Grandma Lee put two spoons of sugar in the bowl. Then a little oil. Tess measured it. One spoon of oil.

Tess wrote it all down and read it out loud. “Grandma Lee’s buns. Six handfuls of flour. One cup of milk. One small spoon of yeast. Two spoons of sugar. One spoon of oil.”

“The first recipe for Grandma Lee’s buns,” said Sara. “In your writing.”

Tess did not say anything. But she smiled.

Grandma Lee could not read all the English words. But she pointed at the numbers and nodded. “Good.”

Then she mixed it all with her hands and kneaded the dough. Push, fold, turn. She pointed at Evie. “You.”

Evie kneaded the dough. Then Sara. Then Billy. Billy pushed very hard. “I am hot!” he said. Now there was flour on his nose.

Sara rubbed her arms. “I am cold,” she said.

Grandma Lee made the dough into a big round ball and put it back in the bowl. Then she put a clean cloth over the bowl.

“Now the dough has to rise,” said Evie. “The yeast makes it rise.”

Grandma Lee held up one finger. “One hour.”

Tess looked at the clock. “It is nine o’clock. At ten, we look.”

Grandma Lee made tea and sat down at the table. Soon her eyes closed.

“She was awake at four again,” said Tess quietly.

The kids waited. At half past nine Billy lifted the cloth. “Is it big now?”

“Not yet, Billy,” said Tess. “One hour.”

At a quarter to ten Billy lifted the cloth again. “Now?”

“Billy!” said four kids.

At ten o'clock Grandma Lee opened her eyes. Tess took the cloth off the bowl. They all looked in.

The dough was the same. It was the same round ball. Not one bit bigger.

"It did not rise," said Tess.

Grandma Lee looked at the bowl. Then she looked at the open window.

Chapter 5: Nobody Opens the Lid



Grandma Lee went to the open window and closed it. Then she rubbed her arms.

“Cold,” she said.

Tess looked at the window. Then she looked at the bowl. “The kitchen was cold, so the dough was slow,” she said.

“Yeast needs a warm place,” said Evie.

Grandma Lee filled a big pot with water. She put it on the stove and turned on the heat. Only a little. Soon the stove was warm. She put the bowl by the warm stove, next to the pot.

Then she held up one finger. “One hour.”

Billy looked at the clock. “One more hour?”

“Hands off the cloth, Billy,” said Sara.

Billy put his hands in his pockets.

At eleven o'clock Tess took the cloth off the bowl. They all looked in.

The dough was soft and round. It came up to the top of the bowl.

"It is twice as big!" said Evie.

"Twice?" said Sam. "What is twice?"

"Two times," said Tess. "Two times as big."

Grandma Lee pushed her hand into the dough. Puff! The air went out. Then she cut the dough into pieces. Tess counted them. "Sixteen."

Grandma Lee took one piece. She showed them how to shape a bun. She folded the sides under and turned the dough in her hands. Round and round. Now it was round and smooth on top.

"Now you," she said.

Every kid took a piece of dough and shaped a bun. Sam's bun was not round at all. It had four corners.

"Sam, your bun is a square!" said Billy.

"It is a square bun," said Sam. "A new kind."

Grandma Lee laughed her big laugh. She put her hands around Sam's hands. Fold, turn, round and round. Now his bun was round, too.

Then Sara cut paper into small squares, all the same. Every bun sat on its own small square of paper.

"Now the cherries!" said Evie. "A red cherry on top is my mark."

Grandma Lee shook her head and smiled. She took a very small bottle out of her pocket. In it was red food color. Then she took a chopstick from the drawer. She put the thin end in the red color. She touched the top of one bun, very lightly.

Now there was one small red dot on the white bun.

"For a happy day," said Grandma Lee.

Evie laughed. "That is your cherry!" she said. "Your mark is a red dot."

Then Grandma Lee gave Evie the stick. Evie put a red dot on every bun. One small dot, right in the middle.

Then Grandma Lee turned up the heat. Soon the water was very hot, and steam came up.

She put four buns on each layer of the bamboo steamer. Eight buns. She put the steamer on top of the pot, and she put on the lid.

Tess looked at the clock. "Fifteen minutes."

White steam came out around the lid. The kitchen smelled of warm bread.

Billy stood right next to the stove. He looked at the lid. Then at the clock. Then at the lid again.

After fifteen minutes, Grandma Lee turned off the heat.

"Just one look!" said Billy. He wanted to see the buns, so he lifted the lid at once.

Lots of white steam came out. Then cold air went in. They all saw it. The buns got wrinkly. They fell a little.

"Oh no!" said Evie.

Sam jumped in front of the stove. "Nobody opens the lid!" he said. "I am the door guard!"

"But it is a lid," said Billy. "Not a door."

"I am the lid guard, too," said Sam.

Billy looked at the buns. They were small and wrinkly now. His face got red. He felt bad. "Sorry, Grandma Lee," he said.

Grandma Lee did not get angry. She laughed her big laugh.

"They are all wrinkly," said Tess.

"Wrinkly?" asked Grandma Lee.

Tess pointed at the little lines on the buns. Grandma Lee put one finger by her own eye, on her little lines. "Wrinkly," she said. "Me too."

They all laughed. Billy laughed the most.

Grandma Lee took out her little red book and wrote a new word: wrinkly.

Then she held up five fingers. “Wait. Five minutes.”

“After the steam, we wait five minutes,” said Evie slowly. “With the lid on.”

“The buns fell because the cold air came in,” said Tess. She took out her recipe and wrote: Wait five minutes. Lid on.

“And nobody opens the lid,” said Sam.

Tess wrote that down, too.

Grandma Lee put the wrinkly buns on a plate. Then she put the next eight buns in the steamer. The lid went on. The heat went on. Fifteen minutes.

This time Billy did not stand by the stove. He sat on a chair by the door.

“I am not going to open it,” he said. “I am going to sit on my hands.”

And he did.

Sam stood by the stove with his arms out wide.

After fifteen minutes, Grandma Lee turned off the heat. Nobody moved. Tess looked at the clock. One minute. Two. Three. Billy’s feet went up and down, but his hands stayed under him. Four. Five.

“Now,” said Grandma Lee.

She took off the lid. White steam went up. And there were the buns.

They were round, white and smooth. Every bun had one small red dot on top. They were not wrinkly at all. They were bigger now, too.

“Billy, you first,” said Evie. “Tasting is your job.”

Billy took a bun and took a bite. “Soft,” he said. “And a little sweet.”

Grandma Lee nodded. “Good. Not too sweet.”

Then they all took a bun. The buns were warm and very soft.

“They are softer than bread,” said Evie. “And no crust!”

"Can I taste twice?" asked Billy.

Grandma Lee laughed and gave him a wrinkly bun. It was good, too.

That afternoon, Tess came into the bakery alone. She did not smile.

"Where is your grandma?" asked Evie.

"At the window," said Tess. "Yesterday she sat there all afternoon. Today she is sitting there again."

Mr. and Mrs. Lee were at work.

"My list says she likes long walks," said Tess quietly. "But here she only sits."

Tess was worried. Evie could see it.

Evie looked out of the shop window, across Main Street. A small woman sat at the front window of the Lees' house. She looked out at the street. She did not move.

Chapter 6: Two Grandmas



On Wednesday morning, Tess came into the bakery kitchen again. She still did not smile. Sara was there, too, and Tess told her about Grandma Lee at the window.

“Your list says she likes long walks,” said Sara. “We can take her on a walk. To my mom’s store! She can meet people there.”

Tess smiled a little. “Yes.”

Evie looked at Mom. “Can we go after lunch? With Grandma Lee?”

“Yes,” said Mom. “And take Billy and Sam.”

After lunch, the five kids ran across Main Street. Grandma Lee sat at the front window again. Tess opened the door. “Grandma, do you want to come for a walk?”

Grandma Lee did not know all the words, so Tess walked two fingers across her own hand. Grandma Lee laughed and put on her coat at once.

It was a cold, sunny October day. Grandma Lee walked fast down Main Street, and the kids walked fast, too.

They came to the big maple tree by the town square. Its leaves were red and yellow now, and some leaves fell down on the grass. Under the tree there was a bench.

"That is the town square," said Evie.

"Square?" asked Grandma Lee. She made a small square with her fingers.

"My bun was a square!" said Sam.

Tess laughed. "A town square is a big open place, Sam. People meet there."

They walked on to Sara's store. Sara's mom stood by the door. "Hello, kids," she said. Then she saw Grandma Lee. "And you are Tess's grandma! Welcome to our store."

"Thank you," said Grandma Lee.

The store was warmer than the street. It smelled of apples. On the shelves were bags, jars and boxes. Every bag and box had a label. A label is a small piece of paper with words on it.

Grandma Lee picked up a box and looked at the label for a long time. Then she shook her head and put it back.

"She cannot read the labels," said Tess quietly. "They are all in English."

"Then I can help," said Sara. "It is my store. I know it all."

She took a bag from the shelf and pointed at the label. "Rice."

"Rice!" said Grandma Lee. She took out her little red book and wrote a new word: rice. Then she looked at the word in her book and at the word on the label. It was the same word.

"Rice," she read slowly.

Then Sara gave her a box of tea. Grandma Lee wrote the word in her book and read the label. "Tea!"

Sara held up an apple, and Grandma Lee wrote: apple. Then she held up three fingers. "Three words!"

Then the door opened. Mrs. Hill came in with her cane. She had her round glasses on, and she wore her long green skirt.

"Five kids in one store," said Mrs. Hill. "Is this a party?"

"No," said Billy. "It is a walk."

Tess took Grandma Lee's hand. "Mrs. Hill, this is my grandma."

"Hello," said Mrs. Hill, slowly and kindly.

"Hello," said Grandma Lee.

The two women looked at each other. Then Mrs. Hill took a box of tea from the shelf. Grandma Lee laughed and held up her box of tea. It was the same box.

"Tea," said Grandma Lee.

"Tea," said Mrs. Hill. And they both laughed.

"That box is for you, Grandma Lee," said Sara's mom. "A welcome present."

"Thank you!" said Grandma Lee.

Mrs. Hill pointed out of the window, at the bench under the big maple tree. "I sit on that bench a lot. My legs like it. Do you want to come?"

Grandma Lee did not understand all the words. But she looked at the bench and at Mrs. Hill. She nodded.

Tess looked worried again. "But my grandma does not speak much English."

Mrs. Hill smiled. "We do not need much English. You will see."

The two women went out. Mrs. Hill was slow with her cane, so Grandma Lee walked slowly, too.

Under the big maple tree, they sat down on the bench. Red and yellow leaves came down around them, one by one.

Mrs. Hill looked up at the tree for a long time. Then she said, "My children live far away."

Grandma Lee knew two of those words: far away. They were on the first page of her little red book.

She pointed at herself. "My son," she said. "Far away." Then she pointed up Main Street, at the Lees' house, and smiled. "Now — here."

Mrs. Hill understood. Grandma Lee's son lived far away from her. But now Grandma Lee was here, with her son.

Mrs. Hill laughed softly. "Now you are here. That is good."

"Yes," said Grandma Lee. "Good."

Then the two grandmas sat and watched the leaves. They did not need many words.

In the store, the five kids stood at the window.

"They are not talking," said Billy. "Is that fun?"

"Look at them," said Evie.

On the bench, Grandma Lee laughed her big laugh. Mrs. Hill laughed, too.

Tess put her hands on the glass. She was not worried now. She was happy. "My list was right," she said. "She laughs a lot."

Later, the two women came back to the store. Grandma Lee's cheeks were pink from the cold.

She looked at the kids. "Dinner," she said.

"Dinner?" asked Evie.

Grandma Lee pointed at Tess and Sam, at the other kids, at Mrs. Hill and at Sara's mom. Then she made a big circle with her arms.

"A big dinner," said Sara. "For lots of people!"

Grandma Lee nodded. Then she held out her hand flat and moved it up, up, up, over her head.

"A plane!" said Sam.

Tess understood. "She wants a dinner before she flies home," she said. "For all the friends of our family."

"When does she fly home?" asked Billy.

"In more than two weeks," said Tess.

Grandma Lee pointed at herself. "I cook," she said. She pointed at Evie. "You bake." Then she moved her hand in a circle around all of them. Her fingers went up, up, up. "We steam."

Evie laughed. "Steamed buns at the dinner!"

Sara took out her pencil. "A new list. A dinner list."

"Am I on the list?" asked Mrs. Hill.

Grandma Lee took Mrs. Hill's hand. "Yes."

Then Tess counted the friends on her fingers. Ten fingers were not enough. She took Sam's hands, too. Then she took one of Billy's hands.

"Twenty-five people," she said at last.

"And two buns for every person," said Billy. "I want two."

"Two buns each," said Tess. She looked at Evie. "Fifty buns."

Chapter 7: Fifty Buns



The days went by, and each day Grandma Lee went for a slow walk with Mrs. Hill. On some mornings, the kids steamed buns with Grandma Lee.

Then it was the third week.

On Monday, the five kids sat in the Lees' kitchen. Grandma Lee sat with them. She had a cup of tea. Sara had her dinner list.

"The dinner is on Friday evening," said Sara. "For twenty-five friends."

"And on Saturday morning, Grandma flies home," said Tess quietly.

Sam put his hand on Grandma Lee's arm. She held his hand.

Sara read her list out loud. "Grandma Lee cooks. We steam the buns. Fifty buns."

Grandma Lee nodded. Then she took out her little red book. "My list," she said.

She wrote one word: rice. She knew that word from Sara's store. Then she made a bowl with her hands. She drank from it.

"Soup!" said Sam. "That is soup, Grandma."

"Soup," said Grandma Lee. She wrote it down.

Sam sat up very straight. "I help with the words. That is my job, too."

Then Tess took out her pencil and a piece of paper. "Now the numbers," she said.

She put the bamboo steamer in the middle of the table. "We have one steamer. It has two layers. Four buns go on a layer."

"That is eight buns at a time," said Evie.

"Yes. Eight at a time." Tess wrote it down. "Then fifteen minutes of steam."

"And then five minutes with the lid on!" said Sam. "Nobody opens the lid. I am the lid guard."

"Fifteen and five is twenty," said Tess. "One round is twenty minutes. For eight buns."

Billy counted on his fingers. But he did not have fifty fingers, so he gave up. "And for fifty buns?"

Tess wrote more numbers. Her pencil went fast. "Six rounds are not enough. We need seven rounds."

"Seven rounds of twenty minutes," said Sara slowly. "That is a long time."

"More than two hours," said Tess. She put down her pencil. "And then the first buns will be cold."

Grandma Lee looked at her one steamer. She shook her head. "Cold buns," she said. "Not good."

"That is a problem," said Evie. "A big problem. We need more steamers."

"Where do you buy a steamer in Maple Falls?" asked Billy.

Sara shook her head. "Not in my mom's store. And I know it all."

No one had an answer. Grandma Lee held up one finger. "One," she said. She smiled, but just a little.

On Tuesday morning, the kids steamed buns in the Lees' kitchen again. After the steam, they waited five minutes with the lid on. Then the buns came out, round and white and soft.

Grandma Lee took one bun and broke it open. She pointed at the middle of it. Then she looked at the kids. She did not know the word.

"Inside!" said Sam. "That is inside, Grandma."

"Inside," said Grandma Lee. She wrote it in her red book.

She held up the bun again. Then she pointed out of the window. "From here," she said.

Evie looked at Tess. "What does she mean?"

Tess thought about it. "She wants a filling," she said. "A filling from Maple Falls."

"A filling is food inside the bun," Evie told Billy. "A pie has a filling, too."

"Maple syrup!" said Billy. "That is from here!"

"Grandpa's syrup is all gone, Billy," said Sara. "The new syrup comes in March."

Billy sighed.

Then Evie jumped up. "Apples! Molly's apples!"

"From Molly's farm," said Tess. "That is from here, too."

"And there are still some apples in the box from Friday," said Evie.

She ran across the street to the bakery. She came back with three red apples. Grandma Lee took one and smiled. "Apple," she said. That word was in her red book, too.

Each apple had a small brown spot, so Grandma Lee cut off the spots first. Then she cut the apples into small pieces. Grandma Lee put them in a small pot, with a little water.

Then she took the sugar. Tess held out a spoon first.

"One spoon," said Tess. She wrote it down.

"Only a little sugar," said Evie. "Less than in my cake!"

Grandma Lee laughed her big laugh.

The pot went on the stove. Grandma Lee stirred the apples with a spoon. Soon the kitchen smelled of warm apples. The small pieces cooked and got soft.

"The apples are cooked," said Tess.

Billy stood by the stove with a spoon. "Tasting is my job," he said. He tasted. "Mmm. It is sweet. But can I put in more sugar?"

"No, Billy!" said four kids.

Then Grandma Lee tasted. She thought about it for a long time. The kids waited.

"Good," she said. "Not too sweet."

Evie laughed. "'Not too sweet' again! Those are her best words."

"In our family, they are the best words," said Tess. She smiled.

"On Friday, the filling goes inside the buns," said Evie. "And on Friday, Molly's dad brings a new box of apples. Just in time!"

But the big problem was still there. There was only one steamer.

On Wednesday, Sara asked her mom. The store had no steamer. Evie asked Mom. The bakery had cake pans and big bowls. But it had no steamer. In all of Maple Falls, there was no steamer to buy.

On Thursday afternoon, Evie and Tess walked with Grandma Lee to the bench. Mrs. Hill was there, with her cane.

Tess told her about the problem. "One steamer. Fifty buns. And the dinner is tomorrow."

Grandma Lee held up one finger. "One," she said.

Mrs. Hill looked at the one finger. Then she looked up at the tree for a long time.

"Hmm," she said. That was all. But she smiled a little.

On Thursday evening, Evie and Billy ran across the street. Evie had fifty small paper squares from Sara, all the same.

In the Lees' kitchen, the one steamer stood on the table. Grandma Lee looked at it. Tess looked at it, too.

"Tomorrow is the dinner," said Tess. "And we still have only one steamer."

No one said a word.

Then somebody knocked on the Lees' door. Knock, knock, knock.

Tess opened it. Mrs. Hill stood there, with her cane — and a big metal pot.

Chapter 8: Maple Falls Has Pots



“Good evening,” said Mrs. Hill. “Can I come in?”

She had her cane in one hand and the pot in the other, so Tess took the pot from her. It was big, but it was lighter than it looked.

Mrs. Hill came in and sat down. She wore her long green skirt. Her round glasses shone in the light.

“Open it,” she said.

Tess put the pot on the table and took off the lid. Evie, Billy and Sam looked in.

In the pot was an old metal basket. It was round, with many small holes, and it stood on three short legs.

“The water goes in the pot, under the basket,” said Mrs. Hill. “The steam comes up through the holes, and the food sits on top.”

“What food?” asked Billy.

“Carrots and beans,” said Mrs. Hill. “For forty years.”

"Is the pot that old?" asked Sam.

"It is older than your mom," said Mrs. Hill. "But not as old as me."

Grandma Lee looked at the metal basket, and then at her bamboo steamer. Her eyes got big.

"A pot, a lid and a basket," said Tess slowly. "That is a steamer, too!"

Grandma Lee laughed her big laugh and held up two fingers. "Two," she said.

"Mrs. Hill, can we borrow it?" asked Evie. "For the dinner?"

"That is why I came," said Mrs. Hill. "I will lend it to you."

"Borrow? Lend?" said Sam. "What are those words?"

"We borrow the pot," said Tess. "We use it, and then we give it back."

"And I lend it," said Mrs. Hill. "It is still my pot. After the dinner, I get it back."

Grandma Lee took out her little red book and wrote a new word: borrow.

"Two is better than one," said Billy. "But it is still not enough."

Mrs. Hill smiled and stood up. "Maple Falls has more pots. You will see."

Later, Mr. Lee walked her home to Pine Lane.

On Friday morning, all five kids were in the Lees' kitchen. Then there was a knock on the door.

Grandpa stood there with the biggest pot of all. It had a lid, and in it was a round metal rack on short legs.

"Mrs. Hill called me last night," said Grandpa. "She says you need pots. I can lend you this one. It was my mother's."

"Thank you, Grandpa!" said Evie. "We will give it back after the dinner."

Grandma Lee held up three fingers. "Three!"

Then Mrs. Green came up the steps with a pot and a lid. She had round glasses and silver hair in a neat bun, and she wore a dress with small flowers.

"Your grandpa called me," she said to Evie.

Sam pointed at her hair. "You have a bun! My grandma has a bun, too!"

Grandma Lee touched the bun at the back of her head, and Mrs. Green touched her bun, too. Then the two women laughed.

Grandma Lee pointed at the pot. "Borrow?" she asked.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Green. "You borrow, and I lend." She lifted the lid. In the pot was a small round rack.

Grandma Lee held up four fingers. "Four!"

Across the street, the bakery bell rang. Mom came out with the big pot. It was full of red apples.

"Molly's apples came this morning," said Mom. "And here is my big pot. It has a lid and a round rack."

Grandma Lee held up her whole hand. "Five!"

"Five pots!" said Sam. "That is a whole hand!"

Maple Falls had no bamboo steamers. But Maple Falls had pots.

"Every pot has a rack or a basket," said Tess. "The buns sit up there, over the water. Not in it."

She put paper squares in every pot. Then she counted.

"The bamboo steamer on our big pot has two layers, so it takes eight buns. Mrs. Hill's basket takes four. The big pot from Grandpa takes eight. Mrs. Green's pot takes four. The bakery pot takes six."

She wrote the numbers on her paper. "That is thirty buns at a time!"

"And fifty buns?" asked Billy.

"Thirty in the first round. Twenty in the second round," said Tess. "Two rounds. Forty minutes."

"Not more than two hours?" asked Billy.

"No, Billy. Forty minutes. And the buns will be warm."

Grandma Lee nodded. "Warm buns. Good."

Evie looked at the stove. “But do five pots fit on it?”

The Lees’ stove was big. Tess counted the places for pots. “Five,” she said, and she smiled.

That day, Grandma Lee was the boss of the kitchen. Even Mom did what she said.

Grandma Lee pointed at Tess. “Measure.” Then she took the flour by the handful. Every handful went into Tess’s cup first.

“Twenty handfuls,” said Tess at last. “That is ten cups of flour. Enough for fifty buns.”

Then Grandma Lee pointed at Sara and at the list. Sara checked her dinner list: rice, soup and fifty buns.

Grandma Lee pointed at Mom and at the apples. Mom cut the apples into small pieces. Grandma Lee cooked them with a little sugar.

Then she pointed at Billy. “Taste.”

“Yes, boss!” said Billy.

“Boss?” Grandma Lee pointed at herself. Then she laughed her big laugh.

Billy tasted the apples. “Not too sweet!” he said, before Grandma Lee could say it. They all laughed.

The window stayed closed. The dough rose by the warm stove. Then every kid shaped buns, with a spoon of apples inside each one.

Grandma Lee pointed at Evie. Evie put the thin end of the chopstick in the red color. She put one small red dot on every bun. On one bun, she put a red cherry, not a dot.

“That one is for the middle of the plate,” said Evie.

Grandma Lee nodded. “One cherry. Good.”

Sam carried the buns to the stove, very slowly. That was his job.

In the evening, the water in the five pots got hot. The first thirty buns went in. Five lids went on.

Sam stood in front of the stove with his arms out wide. “Nobody opens a lid! I am the lid guard. Five lids at once!”

He looked from pot to pot. Billy sat on his hands.

Fifteen minutes of steam. Then five minutes with the lids on. After that, the first thirty buns came out round, white and soft. Then the last twenty buns went in. The lids went on again.

At seven o’clock, Grandma Lee turned off the heat. Then somebody knocked on the front door. The first friend was here!

And all five lids were still on — with five minutes to wait.

Chapter 9: Dinner at the Lees'



Knock, knock, knock.

"The first friend!" said Billy. "And the lids are still on!"

Grandma Lee looked at the five lids on the stove. Then she looked at the clock and held up five fingers.

"Five minutes," she said.

Sam stood in front of the stove with his arms out wide. "Five!" he called. "Nobody opens a lid!"

Mr. Lee went to the front door and opened it. Grandpa stood outside, with Mrs. Hill on his arm.

"Good evening!" said Grandpa. "Are we early?"

"Just in time," said Mr. Lee. "Come in, come in!"

Tess looked at the clock. "One minute is over."

"Four!" called Sam.

Grandpa came to the kitchen door. "Four what?"

"Four more minutes," said Billy. "Then the lids come off. Sam is the lid guard."

Grandpa laughed. "Then I can wait, too."

More friends came up the steps. Mr. and Mrs. Green came in, and Dad came across the street with June in his arms.

"Three!" called Sam.

Sara's mom came in. Then Molly came, with her mom and dad. After them came some friends from Mr. and Mrs. Lee's work.

"Two!" called Sam. He was very loud now.

In the front room, the friends began to count with him.

"One!"

The kitchen was very quiet. Nobody moved, and Billy sat on his hands. His feet went up and down.

Grandma Lee looked at the clock. "Now," she said.

Then the five lids came off, and lots of white steam went up. Evie looked into the bamboo steamer, and then into every pot.

The buns were round, white and smooth. Every bun had one small red dot on top. Not one bun was wrinkly.

"Not one wrinkly bun!" said Billy.

Grandma Lee put one finger by her eye, on her little lines. "Only me," she said. Then she laughed her big laugh.

The first thirty buns were under a clean cloth on the table. Tess put her hand on them.

"Still warm," she said, and she smiled.

Evie put all the buns on three big plates. The bun with the red cherry went in the middle of the biggest plate.

"There," said Evie. "That is my mark."

Sara looked at her dinner list. "Rice, soup and fifty buns," she said. "All done!"

The biggest plate was heavy, so Sam carried it to the front room very slowly. That was his job. Tess and Sara carried the other two plates.

In the front room, two tables stood in a long row. Mrs. Lee put chairs from every room around them. On the tables were rice and soup in big bowls. There were many small bowls of good food, too. Grandma Lee cooked it all.

Sam put his plate down in the middle of the row. The buns were white and round, with a red dot on each. In the middle of the biggest plate sat one bun with a red cherry, not a dot.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Green. "How pretty!"

Grandma Lee looked at Evie. "Very pretty," she said. Then she smiled. "And good."

Evie laughed. This time, Grandma Lee said "good," too.

Before they ate, Grandma Lee stood up, and the room got quiet. She looked down the long row of friends. Her cheeks were pink.

She looked at Sam, and Sam nodded.

"Thank you," said Grandma Lee. She put her hand on her heart. "You are my friends."

For a moment, nobody said a word. Then Grandpa began to clap. Mrs. Hill clapped, and the Greens clapped. Soon they all clapped. Sam clapped the loudest.

"We said those words again and again," he told Billy. "All week!"

"Now we eat," said Grandma Lee, and she sat down.

Billy took two buns at once.

"Two buns each, Billy," said Tess.

"I know," said Billy. "One for each hand."

Molly bit into her bun. "Apples!" she said. "Our apples!"

Grandma Lee pointed at the bun, and then at Molly. "Apple," she said. "From here."

Molly's dad laughed. "The fallen apples. They are good for buns, too!"

Grandpa took a bun and ate it very slowly. Then he looked across the table at Grandma Lee.

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

Grandma Lee looked at him. "Best … bun?"

She did not know that word, so she looked at Sam.

"Sam, can you explain?" asked Tess.

"I can explain!" said Sam. He jumped up and held his hand low over the table.

"Good," he said. He held his hand a little higher. "Better." Then he held it up high over his head. "Best!"

Evie laughed. It was Grandma Lee's own hand game, from the welcome cake.

Grandma Lee held her hand up high, too. "Best," she said. She took out her little red book and wrote a new word: best.

Then she looked at Grandpa. "Best bun," she said. "Not too sweet."

They all laughed. Grandpa laughed the most.

Evie took the bun with the red cherry from the biggest plate and gave it to Grandma Lee.

"This one is for you," she said.

Grandma Lee looked at the cherry, and then at Evie. "For a happy day," she said.

She broke the bun in two and gave one half to Mrs. Hill. The two grandmas ate their halves side by side. They did not need many words.

After dinner, the friends sat and talked for a long time, and the kids washed the five pots in the kitchen.

Evie gave the old metal pot back to Mrs. Hill, with the basket inside.

"Thank you for lending it to us," said Evie.

"And now I get it back," said Mrs. Hill. "Carrots and beans again."

Grandpa took his big pot. Mrs. Green took her pot, and Mom took the bakery pot.

"We borrow a pot, we use it, and then we give it back," said Sam. "That is 'borrow'!"

Mr. Lee carried Mrs. Hill's pot and walked her home to Pine Lane. Dad took June home to bed. Then the other friends stood up and went home, one by one.

Grandma Lee stood at the door. "Thank you," she said to each one.

The front room was quiet now. The plates were empty.

Tess sat down next to her grandma. "Tomorrow morning, you fly home," she said quietly.

Grandma Lee put her arm around Tess. She did not say a word, but she held Tess for a long time.

Mom put on her coat. Evie and Billy put on their coats, too.

Then Grandma Lee took Evie's hand. Grandma Lee's hand was small and warm.

"Tomorrow, early," said Grandma Lee. "Please come."

Chapter 10: The Red Dot



On Saturday, Evie woke up very early. It was still dark. Only the kitchen light was on. Mom was down there with the bread.

It was cold outside, so Evie put on her coat. Then she went down the stairs. Billy came down behind her, in his coat, too.

“Billy!” said Evie. “You are up before the sun!”

“Two times now,” said Billy.

Mom looked up from the dough. “Go,” she said. “I will come in a minute.”

Across the street, every light in the Lees’ house was on. The big gray car stood at the door. Mr. Lee put Grandma Lee’s big bag in the trunk. It was still bigger than Sam.

Sara came up Main Street, fast. Her coat was open.

“Am I too late?” she asked.

“No,” said Evie. “Just in time.”

Grandma Lee stood at the front door in her coat. Tess and Sam stood next to her. Grandma Lee had the bamboo steamer in her hands.

"Good morning," she said.

Then she held out the steamer to Evie.

"For your bakery," she said. "Steam is good, too."

Evie looked at the steamer. Then she looked at Grandma Lee. "For me? But it is your steamer!"

Grandma Lee shook her head. She pointed across the street, at the bakery. Then she put the steamer in Evie's hands.

Evie lifted the lid. In the top layer was the very small bottle of red food color.

"For a happy day," said Grandma Lee.

Evie held the steamer with both hands. For a moment, she could not say a word.

"Thank you," she said at last. "We will steam buns in the bakery. With a red dot on every bun."

"And one cherry," said Billy.

Grandma Lee laughed her big laugh. "One cherry. Good."

Mom came across the street, with flour on her hands. She took Grandma Lee's hands in her own. Now there was flour on Grandma Lee's hands, too. The two bakers looked at their hands and laughed.

Then they heard a sound down the street. Tap, tap, tap. Mrs. Hill came up Main Street with her cane, very slowly. She came to say goodbye.

"Mrs. Hill!" said Tess. "It is so early!"

"Two old women," said Mrs. Hill. "We both wake up before the sun."

Grandma Lee laughed and took her hand. Mrs. Hill looked at her for a long time.

"I will write to you," she said. "Short words."

Grandma Lee smiled. “Short words. Yes.”

“I can help you with the words, Mrs. Hill,” said Tess.

“Good,” said Mrs. Hill. “And she has her little red book. She can read my short words with it.”

Then Grandma Lee took out her little red book and her pencil. She wrote one more word, slowly. She gave the book to Sam.

Sam looked at the small, neat letters. He read them one by one. “F … r … i … e … n … d.” He looked up. “Friend!”

Grandma Lee pointed at Mrs. Hill. “Friend,” she said.

Mrs. Hill did not say a word. She only took Grandma Lee’s hand again and held it a little tighter.

It was the last word in the little red book. Under it, the page was empty.

Mr. Lee looked at his watch. “It is time,” he said. “It is a long drive to the airport.”

“A long drive to the airport,” said Sam. “And then more than twelve hours on the plane.”

Grandma Lee held Evie, Sara and Billy, one by one. Then she held Mom. Mrs. Hill was the last.

“Goodbye, Grandma Lee,” said Evie.

“Goodbye,” said Grandma Lee.

She got into the back of the car. Sam got in next to her, and Mrs. Lee got in the front.

Tess stood by the open car door. She did not get in yet. She looked at the bakery, at Mrs. Hill, and at her friends.

“Are you sad?” asked Evie quietly.

“Yes,” said Tess. Then she smiled a little. “And glad, too. She came. And now she has friends here.”

Tess was sad and glad at the same time. Evie could see both on her face.

Then Tess got in, and Mr. Lee closed the door.

The big gray car went slowly down Main Street. Sam waved from the back window. Grandma Lee waved, too. Mrs. Hill held Mom's arm and waved her cane.

They waved and waved. Then the car was gone.

For a moment, nobody said a word. Then Mrs. Hill said, "Now I need a cup of tea."

"Come to the bakery," said Mom. "The bread is still warm."

That night, Grandma Lee was still on the plane, high up in the sky. In bed, Evie said a short prayer. "Please keep Grandma Lee safe on her long flight."

On Sunday afternoon, the five kids sat at the big table in the bakery kitchen. The bamboo steamer stood on the shelf now, next to the cake pans.

"Grandma called this morning," said Tess. "She is home."

"Is she tired?" asked Billy.

"No," said Sam. "She is never tired."

Mom came in with June in her arms. "I have news, too," she said. "From now on, the bakery has steamed buns. On the first Saturday of every month."

"Only one Saturday a month?" asked Billy.

"A month has four or five Saturdays," said Tess. "One is for buns."

Sara took out her pencil. "A new line on the bakery list," she said. She wrote it down: Steamed buns with a red dot. The first Saturday of every month.

"And I have the recipe," said Tess. "In my writing." She was glad again. Evie could see it.

On Monday evening, Dad came home from the mill. There was white flour on his coat, and he had a big smile.

"I talked to Mrs. Reed today," he said. "She is the boss at the mill. And I have news."

They all sat down at the table for dinner. Dad looked at Mom, and then at Evie.

"In January the mill will be a hundred years old. Mrs. Reed wants a cake. From Rosie's Bakery."

Mom put down her fork. Evie sat up very straight.

"How big?" asked Evie.

Dad smiled. "For a hundred people."

"We baked a hundred cupcakes one time," said Evie.

"Yes," said Mom. "And now one cake for a hundred people."

"And the mill will be a hundred years old," said Billy. "That is older than Mrs. Hill's pot!"

They all laughed. June laughed, too. She did not know why, but she laughed the loudest.

Evie smiled. January was still far away. But she knew one thing already.

"Sara needs a new list," she said.

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