Grandma June and the Map of Little Things

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CHAPTER 1

The Blue Tin Behind the Flour Jar

Grandma June kept her flour in a tall white jar with a chip on the rim and her recipe cards in a blue biscuit tin that had once held shortbread shaped like stars. The tin lived behind the flour jar, which meant it was either in a very sensible place or a very secret one, depending on who was reaching for it.

"Not too much milk," Grandma June said, peering into the mixing bowl. "Last time we made cinnamon soup."

"It was not soup," said Maya. "It was just... softer than expected."

"It ran off the tray," Noah said helpfully.

"That was one tray," Maya said.

Grandma June's reading glasses sat on top of her head like a second pair of eyebrows. She peered into the bowl without them. She was pretending not to notice how much milk Maya was tipping in.

The kitchen was warm from the oven. A pan of butter sat by the stove, growing glossy at the edges. Sugar crystals glittered on the table where Noah had spilled some and then made the excellent decision to draw a tiny face in it with one

finger before brushing it away. The room smelled of yeast and cinnamon and the sort of Saturday that made people stay in their socks.

Noah was wearing striped socks, one blue and one green because he had dressed in a hurry. Maya said that did not count as a pair. Noah said they both went on feet, so they were close enough.

"Hand me the card for cinnamon buns, would you?" Grandma June asked.

"It's the one with the butter stain that looks like Australia," said Maya at once.

Grandma June smiled. "Exactly that one."

Maya went to the counter and reached behind the flour jar for the blue tin. The lid gave its usual small metal pop when she opened it. Inside were recipe cards tied with faded ribbon, each one crowded with Grandma June's neat writing. Some had notes in the corners. More raisins for your father, one said. Another had a penciled warning: do not let it boil while talking on the telephone.

Maya liked the cards. They made baking feel like a puzzle someone had already solved and then left clues for later.

She lifted the stack and frowned.

"There's paper under these."

"Is there?" Grandma June said, in a voice so even it might have fooled someone who had not known her for all nine years of her life.

Noah slid off his chair and came to look. "A shopping list?"

"It's not lined," said Maya.

She pulled the paper free. It was folded in thirds and softer at the creases, as if it had been opened and closed many times. The front had no writing, only a brownish smudge near one corner. Flour, maybe. Or cinnamon.

Maya unfolded it on the table.

Noah leaned in until his nose was almost on the paper. "Oh."

It was not a shopping list.

It was a map.

Not the sort printed in books or on signs. This one had been drawn by hand in dark ink that had gone a little gray with age. The lines wobbled here and there. A lane bent around a square of little houses. There was a curl for the shoreline. Tiny marks suggested steps, a wall, a bench. In one corner, someone had drawn a compass that was not quite straight. Across the top, in the same neat writing as the recipe cards, were the words: For a fine day and good company.

Maya put both hands flat on either side of it as if it might otherwise float away.

"Grandma," she said slowly, "why is there a map in the biscuit tin?"

"At a guess," said Grandma June, "because I put it there."

Noah looked from the map to the tin. "Under the recipes?"

"Well, I knew where to find it."

Maya narrowed her eyes. "What is it for?"

Grandma June picked up the wooden spoon and scraped dough from its sides with one practical thumb. “That, I expect, is what maps are for finding out.”

That was a very Grandma June answer. It was also the kind of answer that meant she knew perfectly well and had decided not to say.

Maya bent over the page again. Lantern Cove spread across it in familiar bits and pieces, but not all at once. It was like seeing the village after somebody had taken out all the dull parts and kept only the interesting ones. Here was the church lane with its crooked gate. Here, a line of little waves for the harbor. Here was the old stone bridge, drawn with three arches though everybody knew one of them was too choked with reeds to count properly.

And in the middle of the map, near a boxy drawing that had to be Grandma June’s kitchen, there was a clue written in rhyme.

Warm hands, sweet swirls, begin where the sugar falls.

Noah read it aloud, carefully sounding out swirls. “That sounds like now.”

Maya was already looking around the kitchen. Sugar fell everywhere in this kitchen. Sugar had just fallen on the table three minutes ago.

“It says begin,” she said. “So the first clue is here.”

Grandma June made a thoughtful sound that could have meant yes or could have meant she had remembered the tea towels were still on the line. “Could be.”

Maya looked at her. “You know.”

“I can read, yes.”

Before Maya could reply, there came the patter of claws in the hall. Biscuit trotted in with the springy confidence of a dog who had done something forbidden and had not yet decided whether to be proud or sneaky about it. He was a small scruffy terrier of uncertain color, mostly tan with wiry bits sticking out in determined directions. One ear stood up, the other leaned sideways as if unconvinced.

From his mouth dangled a left sock.

Noah gasped. “Mine!”

Biscuit paused just inside the door, tail ticking.

“How do you always know?” Maya asked the dog.

Biscuit knew many things: where crumbs landed, which floorboard complained if you stepped on it after dark, and that all the best stealing involved looking cheerful.

“It was on the radiator,” Noah said, offended. “I put it there to dry.”

Grandma June glanced down. “Did you put the right one there as well?”

Noah looked at his feet. He was wearing only the green sock.

“Oh,” he said.

Biscuit darted backward as Noah lunged. Noah grabbed air. Biscuit whipped around the table, nails clicking, sock fluttering from his mouth like a little flag.

“Don’t run,” said Grandma June, which was the sort of advice that works best on people and almost never on terriers.

Maya put out both arms to block one side of the table. "Corner him!"

"I'm not a sheep," Noah protested, but he tried anyway, skidding a little on the rug.

Biscuit shot between Grandma June's ankles. Grandma June stepped aside with the ease of long practice, still holding the spoon. "Left sock only," she said. "Very consistent, our Biscuit."

"That is not a good thing," said Noah.

Biscuit looped past the dresser, considered the back door, thought better of it, and then, perhaps because he enjoyed an audience, stopped under the kitchen chair and began to settle down for a chew.

Noah dropped to his knees. "Biscuit. Give."

Biscuit watched him with bright black eyes and tightened his jaw by half an inch.

Grandma June wiped her hands on her apron, reached into the pocket, and produced the answer to many family difficulties: a dog biscuit. "Trade," she said.

Biscuit came out at once, because for all his principles regarding socks, he was not a fool.

Noah rescued the damp left sock with two fingers. "Ugh."

"Could be worse," said Grandma June.

"How?"

"It could be your only school sock."

Noah considered this and had to agree.

Maya had not moved from the table. The map pulled at her eyes in that strong, itchy way only a really good puzzle could. Biscuit hopped against her leg once, hoping she might drop something edible. Instead she pointed to the clue.

"Warm hands, sweet swirls, begin where the sugar falls," she read again. "Sweet swirls means the buns. Warm hands is us making them. So where the sugar falls..." She looked at the table, the floor, the counter. "That's too easy."

Noah wrinkled his nose at his sock and laid it on the sink. "Maybe it means the sugar tin."

"There isn't a sugar tin," Maya said. "There's the sugar jar."

"That still counts."

Grandma June had gone very busy all of a sudden with the dough. "Perhaps one of you might sprinkle the flour on the board."

Maya turned. "Grandma."

"Yes?"

"Did you make this map?"

Grandma June lifted her brows, or rather would have if her glasses had not already lifted them for her. "My handwriting seems to suggest I had something to do with it."

"Why?"

"Because sometimes," said Grandma June, "a person draws a map."

That was an even more Grandma June answer than the first one.

Noah snorted. “That doesn’t explain anything.”

“It explains at least one person drawing at least one map,” she said.

Maya knew when she was being managed. She did not like it. She also did not dislike it very much when the thing doing the managing was interesting.

She studied the paper again. There were small drawings tucked in odd places. A spoon near the kitchen. Three pebbles near a lane. A bench with one slat darker than the rest. The lines did not connect in a tidy route, not exactly, but there were arrows—tiny ones, easy to miss—pointing from one drawing to another.

Noah, now one sock on and one sock off, leaned over the table from the other side. “There’s a doodle in the corner.”

“That’s the compass,” Maya said.

“No, next to it.”

He was right. At the bottom edge, half hidden by a crease, sat a little sketch of something square with a loop on top.

“A lantern?” Noah guessed.

Maya squinted. “Maybe.”

Lantern Cove liked naming things after lanterns. There was Lantern Bakery, Lantern View Cottages, Lantern News and Post. There were no actual lanterns except the old one outside the lifeboat shed and the paper ones at the summer fair, but the village had committed itself years ago.

Grandma June set the dough on the board. “Maya, flour. Noah, wash that sock hand. Biscuit, stop looking innocent. It doesn’t suit you.”

Biscuit, who had sat down with a face of perfect honesty, wagged once.

Maya dusted the board. The flour puffed up over her fingers and settled on the old wood in a fine white sheet. Noah stood on a stool to wash his hands and made the tap gush too hard, which was his usual setting. Grandma June cut the dough in two with a quick sure movement and rolled one piece out.

“Come on, detectives,” she said. “Cinnamon doesn’t spread itself.”

Maya opened her mouth to say they were not detectives, they were solvers, but Grandma June had already handed her the little bowl of brown sugar and spice. The smell rose warm and deep. Noah came back, dripping only slightly, and took the raisins.

“I thought raisins were for fruit buns,” he said.

“They are for people who like raisins,” Grandma June said.

“That means you,” Maya told him.

Noah grinned. “But not Biscuit.”

“Raisins aren’t for dogs,” said Grandma June. “His treats are in my pocket.”

“He can if a left sock is involved,” said Noah.

They worked side by side. Maya spread the filling almost to the edges because neatness mattered. Noah dropped raisins in winding lines and then added extra in one corner “for luck.” Grandma June rolled the dough into a long log and

cut it into thick rounds with a piece of thread she kept in the drawer for exactly this purpose, which Maya had always found clever.

All the while the map lay at the far end of the table, open beside the blue tin.

Maya kept glancing at it. Once, she was sure she saw Grandma June glance too, with a small private smile that she put away the moment Maya looked up.

When the buns were arranged in the tin and covered to rise, the kitchen felt full of waiting. Waiting dough, waiting questions.

Noah climbed back on his chair and pulled the map toward him by one corner. “If the clue starts here, maybe there’s something in the kitchen we’re supposed to find.”

“There is,” said Maya. “The next clue.”

“That narrows it down wonderfully,” Noah said.

Grandma June laughed under her breath and reached for the kettle. “Tea for me, milk for you two.”

Maya traced a finger just above the paper, careful not to smudge it. The drawing of the kitchen was simple: table, stove, sink, back door. Beside the stove was a tiny mark like a star. Or maybe a splat.

“Did you ever do this when Mum was little?” she asked.

Grandma June did not answer at once. She filled the kettle at the sink. “Once or twice,” she said, looking at the water rather than at Maya. “A map improves a day.”

Noah had found the next line, written so small it tucked under the drawing of the table.

Turn me right and dust will fly. Look behind the place where cakes grow high.

Maya sat up straight. “That means something in here.”

Noah looked around. “Cakes grow high in the oven.”

“Or on the cake stand,” said Maya.

Grandma June turned from the sink, kettle in hand. Her glasses were still on top of her head. “Could be either. Could be neither.”

“Grandma.”

“Yes?”

“You are enjoying this,” Maya said.

“A little,” Grandma June admitted.

Biscuit, bored by clues that did not taste of meat, wandered to the dresser. He sniffed at the bottom shelf, sneezed, then scratched once at the cupboard door with brisk purpose.

Noah pointed. “He’s found something.”

Maya was already there, kneeling by the dresser. The cupboard smelled faintly of onions and shoe polish because Grandma June kept odd things in it when the proper cupboards were full. Biscuit pushed his nose at the gap again, snuffling hard.

“Wait,” said Noah. “The clue says turn me right.”

He looked around, then reached for the blue tin lid still sitting upside down on the table. On its rim, in tiny painted

letters Maya had never noticed before, were the words June's Best Biscuits. Noah turned the lid to the right with one finger as if it were a wheel. Nothing happened, of course, but his face changed.

"Dust will fly," he said. "Flour."

Maya's head snapped toward the tall white flour jar behind the empty space where the tin had been.

And Grandma June, setting down the kettle with a click, said, "Well now," in a voice so careful it was almost a giveaway.

Maya reached for the flour jar.

Behind it, where the blue tin had hidden it for who knew how long, something pale was tucked against the wall. Not a recipe card. Not a shopping list. A folded scrap of paper, held in place by the wooden rolling pin.

Noah drew in a breath.

Biscuit gave one short bark at the cupboard as if to say honestly, he had nearly had it first.

Maya slid the paper free and looked at Grandma June.

Grandma June folded her arms. "Are you going to open it," she said, "or stare holes through it?"

CHAPTER 2

Cinnamon Buns and a Crooked Map

Maya opened it at once.

The scrap was smaller than the map and cut unevenly, as if someone had torn it from the edge of a larger sheet. On one side was a sketch in the same dark, tidy hand: three curved humps over a line of water, with reeds drawn on one side and a little swirl beneath. Underneath it, in blocky writing, were the words:

Where old feet cross and young feet run,

Count the arches, then look for one.

Noah leaned so far over the table that Grandma June put out a hand to steady the milk glass before his sleeve could catch it.

“It’s a bridge,” he said.

Maya had already reached the same answer, but she did not say so. She narrowed her eyes at the drawing. “The old stone bridge.”

"Could be any bridge," Noah said, though he sounded doubtful.

"In Lantern Cove?" Maya said. "There's the little plank one by the allotments, but that doesn't have arches. This has arches."

Noah nodded slowly. "And the reeds. The old stone bridge has reeds under the side bit no one counts properly."

"That's what I said yesterday," Grandma June remarked.

"You did not," said Maya.

"No," said Grandma June, calm as ever. "But I might have, if I'd been talking about bridges."

Maya looked at her hard. Grandma June looked back with the innocent face of a person who was very pleased with herself and intended to deny it to the end.

Noah took the scrap and held it beside the map. "The drawing matches this bit." He tapped the place where the bridge sat on the larger page, near a bend in the lane and a cluster of little dots that must have been stones. "See? Three bumps."

Maya took both papers from him before he could crease them. "Yes, I see."

The clue felt good in her hands. Solid. Proper. She liked things that led to other things. The world made more sense when it had a trail through it.

Grandma June poured tea into her mug and milk into two chipped yellow cups. "If anyone is going anywhere, shoes would be sensible."

"We're not leaving yet," Maya said. "There might be another clue in here."

"There might," said Grandma June, sipping her tea.

Noah sat back down, milk moustache already beginning though he had not had a sip. "The clue says count the arches and look for one. One what?"

"One arch?" Maya guessed.

"That would be silly. If you count the arches, you'd know there was more than one."

"That's the point of counting," said Maya.

Noah thought about this. "Maybe look for the number one scratched somewhere."

"Or one mark," said Maya. "Or one stone that looks different."

Grandma June blew across the top of her tea. "Excellent bridge-thinking, both of you."

Maya ignored that. She spread the map flat again and smoothed the crease with the side of her hand. The kitchen was quiet except for the tick of the clock over the dresser and the soft shifting noise from the buns under their cloth. Biscuit had given up on cupboards and was now stationed beside Noah, in case someone offered a dog biscuit.

"There's more on the map," Noah said.

Maya glanced over. "Yes, obviously."

"No." He touched the lower edge with one finger. "There."

At first Maya saw only the same wavering line of lane and fence posts. Then she bent closer. Tucked beside the little drawing of the bridge was a mark so faint it almost

disappeared into the fold: a tiny circle hanging from a crooked post.

"A ring?" she said.

"Noah," said Grandma June, and there was real approval in her voice. "Good eyes."

Maya sat up. "You knew it was there."

"I know many things," Grandma June said.

"That is not helpful."

"It is if you need to be reminded I'm not as old as all that."

Noah grinned. "It's not a ring. It's a lamp."

Maya looked again. He was right. Not a ring. A hanging lamp, the kind fixed on an iron bracket.

"The bridge lamp," Noah said, warming to it. "The old one at the near end. It leans a bit."

"It does lean a bit," said Grandma June.

"And there's only one," Noah went on. "Count the arches, then look for one. One lamp."

Maya pressed her lips together. She had been thinking arches, stones, numbers. Noah had seen the tiny sketch she had passed over twice now. She did not like being wrong. She liked it even less when Noah was right in that mild little voice of his, because then she could not even accuse him of showing off.

Still, a clue solved was a clue solved.

She gave a short nod. "Fine. The lamp."

Noah brightened. “And the bridge.”

“Yes,” Maya said. “And the bridge.”

Grandma June hid her smile by drinking more tea.

Biscuit, perhaps offended that no one had praised his own detective work, put both front paws on Noah’s knee and snuffled hopefully at the milk.

“You’ve had your biscuit,” Noah told him.

Biscuit sneezed on his sock.

“That,” said Maya, “is what comes of living a life of crime.”

Grandma June set down her mug and lifted the cloth from the baking tin. The buns had swelled into soft spirals pressed close together, their edges touching. She nodded once, satisfied. “Another ten minutes before they go in.”

Maya blinked. “Ten minutes? We should go now.”

“We should not,” said Grandma June. “We have sticky dough on the board, flour on the floor, and a dog one sniff away from stealing someone’s lunch by instinct alone. Also, no one goes clue-hunting in stocking feet.”

Noah looked down at his feet. He had managed to forget the rescued sock on the sink. One foot was striped. The other was bare.

“That’s because Biscuit is a menace,” he said.

Biscuit thumped his tail against the chair as if this might be praise.

Maya bounced once on her toes, unable quite to stand still. The bridge was not far. From Grandma June’s house it was a walk down the lane, past the post box and Mr. Duffy’s gate

with the squeak, then over the rise where you could smell the sea before you saw it. She could be there quickly. She could count the arches quickly. She could find the lamp, find the next clue, and be first again.

Except Noah had found the lamp already.

That thought stung enough to make her sharper.

She bent over the map once more. “If it’s the lamp, then maybe the next clue is hidden near it. Or under it.”

“Or behind it,” Noah said.

“Or on the bridge rail.”

“Or by the reeds.”

Grandma June buttered the inside of another tin for no reason Maya could see, which was exactly how Grandma June behaved when she wanted to appear busy and not interested in the thing everyone else was interested in.

Maya caught sight of her glasses still perched on top of her head. “You haven’t even put your reading glasses on.”

“I can see enough,” said Grandma June.

“You always put them on for clues.”

“For crosswords,” said Grandma June. “Clues in kitchens may be read at a distance.”

Noah took a sip of milk and left a white crescent on the rim of the cup. “Did you make this map for Mum?”

Grandma June paused, the butter knife in her hand. “Long ago,” she said.

“For her birthday?” Noah asked.

Grandma June wiped the knife on the paper wrapper. "Perhaps."

Maya noticed the way she said it. Not no. Not yes either. Just perhaps, tucked neatly into the middle where it could not be pinned down.

"Is it someone's birthday now?" Noah asked.

Grandma June turned to the cupboard for cinnamon as if the question had come from there instead of from him. "Lantern Cove has birthdays all year round. People are forever having them."

"That is not an answer," Maya said.

Grandma June faced them again. "No," she said pleasantly. "It isn't."

Noah laughed into his milk. Maya tried not to, but some of the annoyance went out of her. It was difficult to stay cross when Grandma June was being so obvious about not being obvious.

Biscuit wandered to the back door and scratched once. Grandma June opened it with her elbow. He shot into the yard like a hairy arrow.

"Watch him," Noah said, twisting in his chair. "He'll take the washing."

"He never takes washing," said Grandma June. "Only left socks."

"Washing includes left socks," Noah pointed out.

This was hard to argue with.

From the open door came the smell of salt and the clink of the loose latch on the garden gate. Somewhere farther off, gulls complained to one another in rude voices. Maya went to the doorway and peered out. Biscuit was not stealing laundry. He was nose-deep in the rosemary bush, making urgent detective sounds at a beetle.

"The world remains safe," she reported.

"Excellent," said Grandma June. "In that case, fetch your shoes."

Maya spun round. "So we are going."

"After the buns are baked," said Grandma June. "We're not leaving the oven on."

"Why can't they wait?"

"Because dough rises whether or not mysteries do."

Noah slid off his chair and padded to the sink for his damp sock. "I bet the bridge clue is under the lamp bracket," he said.

"I bet it isn't," Maya said, reaching for her cardigan from the peg by the door. "That's too easy."

"It wasn't too easy for you to spot the lamp," Noah said, not unkindly.

Maya stopped with one arm in a sleeve. Noah was looking at the map, not at her, and had said it as simply as if he were commenting on the number of raisins in the buns. Which was worse, in a way.

Then he glanced up. "But you got the flour-jar clue first."

That took some of the sting out.

"I did," Maya agreed.

"Then we're even."

"We are not keeping score," said Grandma June.

Maya and Noah looked at each other.

"We are absolutely keeping score," Noah said.

Grandma June made a sound halfway between a sigh and a laugh. "Fine. Keep score if you must. But no racing across roads and no one climbing on the bridge wall to prove intelligence. Sensible feet. Sensible eyes."

Biscuit came back in with a dry leaf stuck to his whiskers. Grandma June plucked it off and shut the door behind him.

While the buns baked, Maya fetched her canvas shoes from the hall. Noah wrestled with his laces and got one loop stuck inside the other, then declared the knot had become "structural." Grandma June untied it in three brisk tugs without looking down. Biscuit danced around all of them, because putting on shoes was one of the clearest signs humans were about to become interesting.

At last the timer rang. Grandma June lifted the golden buns onto a cooling rack and switched off the oven.

Maya folded the little bridge clue carefully and tucked it into the pocket of her cardigan. Noah carried the map with both hands, solemn now, like someone in charge of treasure. Grandma June took one last look around the kitchen, checked the oven, and lifted her glasses from the top of her head onto her nose at last.

"There," she said. "I can now read all suspiciously tiny drawings."

Maya reached for the door before Grandma June could. “We know where to go.”

“Do you?” Grandma June said, taking the map from Noah just long enough to tap the bridge sketch. “Then lead on.”

They stepped out into the lane together, Biscuit first, all wiry legs and purpose. The village afternoon lay ahead in bits they knew by heart: the low wall with moss in the cracks, the red post box with peeling paint, the path bending down toward the rise. Beyond the houses, just visible between two chimneys, stood the top of the old lamp by the stone bridge, leaning exactly as Noah had said.

And from this distance, with the sea beyond it and the clue in Maya’s pocket, it looked less like part of the village and more like it was waiting.

CHAPTER 3

The Bridge with the Missing Corner

The old stone bridge sat at the edge of the village as if it had been there before anyone thought to build the rest.

Its back rose in a low curve over the narrow stream that ran down to the sea. The stones were patched with lichen the color of old pennies. Grass grew in the cracks along the side wall, and one clump had gone to seed and stuck up like a grey brush. At the near end, the iron lamp leaned very slightly over the path, just as Noah had said, like a person listening in.

"There," said Maya, quickening her steps. "We found it."

"We found the bridge," Noah said. "That isn't the same as finding the clue."

Biscuit, who considered all walking to be a triumph, charged ahead until his lead went taut. Grandma June held fast with one hand and adjusted her glasses with the other.

"Sensible feet," she reminded them, though neither of them was doing anything except hurrying.

Maya stopped at the start of the bridge and looked down. “Count the arches.”

“That’s my line,” Noah said.

“You can still say it.”

Noah planted himself beside her and counted with proper seriousness. “One. Two. Three.”

The bridge had three arches if a person was generous, which Noah was. The middle one was largest, open and clear over the stream. The arch nearest the bank was half full of reeds and mud. The third was small and squat at the far end, where the water squeezed under and went dark for a moment before showing itself again beyond the stone.

Grandma June looked over the wall. “Three if we’re feeling hopeful.”

“Three,” Maya said firmly.

Biscuit stood on his hind legs with his front paws against the bridge wall and peered over too, though he could not see much except his own reflection in the shallows.

Noah unfolded the map on the flat top of the wall, careful of the breeze. “Count the arches, then look for one.”

“The lamp,” said Maya.

They all looked up at it. The iron bracket curled out from the stone in a graceful hook. The glass panes had gone foggy with age, and one had a crack running from top to bottom. At the base of the bracket was a round metal plate fixed into the wall with thick old screws.

Maya stepped close. “Maybe there’s something tucked behind it.”

Grandma June put a hand lightly on the back of her cardigan. “Eyes first. Fingers second.”

Maya gave her a look. “I know.”

“Good,” said Grandma June.

Noah had crouched already, not by the lamp but lower down, looking where the stones met. “There are lots of marks.”

There were. Names scratched long ago. A heart. A wobbly fish. The number 12, or maybe 21, depending how you stood. The bridge had been a useful place for people who wanted to leave proof they had once been there.

Maya bent by the lamp and ran one finger through the air over the stone without touching. “Nothing looks like the map.”

“What are we looking for?” Noah asked.

Maya opened her mouth, then shut it again. That was the trouble. They did not know.

Grandma June rested her elbows on the wall and looked as if she had all afternoon, which was suspicious in itself. “Perhaps not by the lamp,” she said. “Perhaps because of the lamp.”

“That makes no sense,” said Maya.

“It might,” said Noah.

Maya turned. “How?”

Noah pointed to the map, to the tiny bridge drawing with its little hanging lamp. “It could be showing us which side to check.”

Maya stared at the paper. On the bridge sketch, the lamp did hang on the left side.

She looked at the real bridge. The lamp was on the left if you stood facing across, toward the village side. The same side they were on now.

Noah had gone farther along the wall, studying each stone as if he expected one of them to wink.

“Here’s a carved N,” he called.

Maya joined him. “That’s not an N. That’s just a crack.”

“It could be an N with poor manners.”

“It could be, but it isn’t.”

Biscuit lost interest in architecture and shoved his nose into a tuft of grass growing between two stones. He snorted, sneezed, backed up, then tried again.

“Maybe the clue smells exciting,” Noah said.

“Maybe there’s a mouse,” said Grandma June.

“Maybe there’s a left sock,” said Maya.

At once all three of them looked at Biscuit.

He had stiffened in that ordinary dog way that meant he had found something important by his standards. His tail stuck out level. His nose worked hard against the wall near the base of the lamp.

Noah crouched beside him. “What is it?”

Biscuit pawed once at the grass, then nosed under it.

A scrap of cloth showed.

Noah made a sound of triumph. “It is a sock!”

It was. A child’s sock, blue with a yellow heel, caught under the weeds and gone stiff from being out in the air. It looked as if it had escaped from a washing line weeks ago and washed up nowhere useful since.

Grandma June put one hand over her mouth.

“Are you laughing?” Maya asked.

“Never at a clue,” said Grandma June, though her eyes had gone bright.

Noah held up the sock by one corner. “It’s left.”

“How can you tell?” Maya said.

“It’s got a little L stitched inside.” He peered. “Actually, that might be the washing brand.”

Biscuit jumped up for it at once, delighted to meet a sock in the wild. Noah lifted it out of reach.

“No,” he said. “This is evidence.”

Maya looked from the sock to the map. “A left sock.”

Noah looked too. His face changed. “Left.”

They both turned the map sideways.

Near the bridge sketch, almost hidden in the same faded ink, was a tiny arrow that bent sharply one way.

“Left turn,” Maya said.

Grandma June lowered her hand from her mouth. “Well now.”

“It’s not just because Biscuit likes socks,” Noah said, excited. “It’s telling us to turn left at the bridge.”

Maya felt the pieces click together. Not magic. Not nonsense. A proper clue, tucked into ordinary things. Of course Grandma June would do it like that. A leaning lamp, a hidden arrow, and Biscuit nearly chewing the answer.

She looked down the roads from the bridge. One lane led back toward the houses. The other went left, sloping gently downward between a row of cottages and the cooper’s yard.

“To the harbor,” she said.

Noah straightened so fast he nearly bumped heads with her. “You think?”

Maya pointed beyond the roofs. Between them, in a wedge of open light, they could see a strip of water and the tops of masts rocking.

“The harbor’s that way. Downhill. Left from the bridge.”

Grandma June still said nothing. She had taken off her glasses and was polishing them on the corner of her cardigan, which was something she always did when buying time.

“That’s not proof,” Maya said, though she was mostly arguing with her own excitement. “There could be another left.”

Noah was no longer looking at the road. He was looking at the stone itself, right where Biscuit had been sniffing. “Wait.”

He knelt and pushed the grass aside with gentle fingers. “Maya. Look.”

At first she saw only rough stone, pale dust in the cracks, a beetle hurrying away from the disturbance. Then she saw the mark.

Someone had carved it small and neat into the edge of one block, where most people would never think to look. It was the same shape as the little bent arrow on the map: a short line, a turn, a point.

Left.

Noah sat back on his heels, pleased but quiet about it. “It matches.”

Maya felt a hot quick mix of admiration and annoyance, because he was right again and because it was a very good find. “You found the carved mark.”

Noah shrugged, though his grin gave him away. “Biscuit found the grass first.”

Biscuit, hearing his own name and seeing the sock still in Noah’s hand, leapt up in fresh hope.

“You are not eating the clue,” Noah told him.

Grandma June took the map and held it close now that her glasses were back on. “There it is,” she said, tapping the tiny arrow. “And there.”

She looked at the carved mark on the bridge, then at the road sloping down.

Maya crossed her arms. “You knew it led to the harbor.”

Grandma June folded the map again, not too quickly. “I suspected the clue might continue in that direction.”

“That means yes,” said Noah.

Grandma June smiled. “That means I have faith in bridges.”

Maya laughed despite herself. “That doesn’t mean anything.”

“It means just enough.”

Biscuit made another grab for the sock. This time he nearly got it. Noah swung it behind his back.

“Why would there be a dropped sock on the bridge?” Maya asked.

Grandma June looked innocent in a way that should have fooled no one. “Lantern Cove contains many feet.”

“You planted it,” Maya said.

“Did I?” said Grandma June.

“It was under the grass.”

“The wind is very active.”

“There isn’t any wind.”

“There was some earlier.”

Noah stared at the sock, then up at Grandma June. “Is it mine?”

Grandma June blinked. “Certainly not.”

“That was quick,” said Maya.

“It is much too small,” Grandma June said.

That part was true. Even Noah had to agree.

He tucked the blue sock into his pocket like treasure. “I’m keeping it from Biscuit.”

“That seems fair,” said Grandma June.

Maya was still studying the lanes. “If the clue is left from the bridge, then what exactly are we looking for at the harbor?”

Noah spread his hands. “The next clue.”

“Yes, but where?”

“The map has a bench,” Noah said.

Maya looked at him. “There are lots of benches.”

“In the village, yes. But only one on the map near the water.” He opened the paper again and pointed. A tiny bench had been drawn in red pencil, faded now to pinkish rust. One slat darker than the others.

“The red bench,” Maya said slowly.

By the harbor.

Everything in her seemed to lean downhill at once.

She could picture it already: the bench facing the boats, paint peeling on one arm, gulls marching nearby as if they owned the stones. The bench where people waited for cousins, ate chips, tied shoelaces, and watched the tide make up its mind.

Grandma June clipped Biscuit’s lead a little shorter. “What do we say about running?”

“That we won’t,” Maya and Noah said together.

“And climbing?”

“That we won’t.”

"And chasing gulls?" Grandma June asked, looking at Biscuit.

Biscuit gave her his nicest baffled expression.

Noah laughed. "He says he won't understand the question until he sees one."

They moved off the bridge and took the left-hand lane. It dipped between a whitewashed cottage with shells stuck around the doorframe and a low stone wall warm from the sun. Somewhere below came the clank of rigging against a mast. The smell of salt grew stronger. So did fish, tar, and chips.

Maya walked fast, though not quite running. She kept seeing the carved arrow in her mind. Somebody had stood at that bridge once with a plan and a pocketknife and enough patience to scratch a secret into stone. Now here they were, following it.

Noah lagged for a moment and then caught up. "Do you think there'll be another mark on the bench?"

"Maybe," said Maya.

"Maybe under it."

"Maybe tied to it."

"Maybe in it."

"How would a clue be in a bench?"

Noah considered. "Folded very small."

Grandma June, behind them, made the sort of sound adults make when children are saying things they enjoy hearing and will not admit it.

Halfway down the lane Biscuit stopped dead, four paws planted. He had spotted a gull on a chimney pot. His whole body tightened with impossible hope.

"No," said Grandma June.

Biscuit looked back over his shoulder, weighing loyalty against bird.

"No," said Grandma June again.

He sighed in the way only a terrier can, which sounded less like sorrow and more like complaint, and chose the family.

"Very brave," said Noah.

"Very supervised," said Maya.

The lane opened at last, and there below them spread the harbor, bright and busy. Boats bumped softly against the quay. Nets hung to dry. A man in orange waterproofs was stacking crates outside the fish shop. Children with paper cones of chips sat on the wall swinging their legs. And near the bend where the path widened and looked out over the water stood the red bench.

Even from here Maya could see one slat was darker than the others.

She stopped without meaning to.

Noah stopped too. "It's the bench."

Grandma June came up beside them, Biscuit circling her ankles. "So it is."

Maya put a hand over the pocket where the bridge clue rested. The lane sloped down the last stretch toward the

harbor, toward the bench, toward whatever Grandma June had arranged and was trying very hard not to look arranged.

"Come on," she said.

And they started down, with Biscuit pulling for all he was worth, straight toward the red bench waiting by the water.

CHAPTER 4

The Red Bench at High Tide

The path down to the harbor always seemed shorter when there was something at the bottom of it.

Maya took the slope in quick, neat steps. Noah came beside her and then fell behind and then hurried up again because he had stopped to look at a lobster pot leaning against a wall. Biscuit pulled so hard on the lead that Grandma June had to brace her arm and tell him, "You are a dog, not a tugboat."

The red bench stood where it always stood, by the bend in the harbor path, facing the water as if it had paid for the view. Its paint was bright in some places and worn thin in others. One slat across the back was darker than the rest, exactly as the map had shown. A gull strutted near one leg of the bench with the superior air gulls had about everything.

"There," said Noah, pointing though no one could possibly miss it.

"I can see it," said Maya.

"Yes, but I pointed first."

Maya did not answer that because the bench was now very close, and she had the odd feeling that if she looked away for too long the clue might vanish out from under her nose.

The harbor was busy in ordinary ways. A woman in a yellow coat was buying crab from the fish stall. Someone laughed from a boat tied near the steps. Ropes knocked softly against painted hulls. From the bakery van parked by the quay came the warm smell of bread. The sea itself made little slapping sounds against the wall below.

Nothing about the bench looked mysterious.

That did not mean it wasn't.

Maya went straight to it and stopped with both hands on her hips.

Noah circled around the back. "Should I look under?"

"Obviously."

"That was my idea."

"It was everybody's idea."

Grandma June arrived at a slower pace, with Biscuit zigzagging around her knees, nose down. "If anyone is going under a public bench," she said, "do try not to come back covered in old chewing gum."

Noah dropped to a crouch at once. "I can be careful."

"That has not always been your method," Maya said.

"It is today."

He bent to peer underneath. Biscuit shoved his own head in beside Noah's shoulder, then sneezed from the dust.

“What do you see?” Maya asked.

“A stone. A bottle cap. Something fuzzy that I hope is string.”

“Anything else?”

Noah shifted farther along. “Wait.”

Maya knelt too, ignoring the grit against her tights. Under the bench, tucked up behind the middle leg where someone would miss it unless they got down low, was a narrow strip of paper tied around with red wool.

“There,” Noah said, pleased.

Maya reached first, but Noah had found it, and after one brief glance at him she moved her hand back. “You take it.”

Noah looked surprised, then careful. He untied the wool and held up the paper as if it might tear if he breathed too hard.

Grandma June sat down on the bench with a small sound of satisfaction. “Good. I prefer clues that do not require me to kneel on harbor stones.”

Maya stood. “You put that there.”

Grandma June rested both hands on the top of her walking stick, though she did not actually need one and mostly used it for poking suspicious hedges. “Did I?”

“Yes.”

“Then it was a wise choice, because you found it.”

Noah unfolded the paper. “It’s short.”

“Read it,” said Maya.

He cleared his throat in a very serious way and read aloud.

"When the bench looks out and the boats look in, find what's wrapped beside the rope and tin."

Maya turned at once and scanned the harbor.

"Beside the rope and tin," Noah repeated.

"What tin?" said Maya. "There are hundreds of things made of tin."

"Not hundreds," said Noah. "Some of those are wood."

Grandma June's mouth twitched. "A useful reduction."

Maya looked right, then left. Harbor things crowded every view. Coils of rope sat by bollards. Buckets and boxes and a rusty wheelbarrow leaned against the fish shed. Near the wall stood an old metal container of some sort, but it was not especially close to rope. Then there was another one by the steps. And another by the stall.

"This is too wide," she said. "It could mean anything."

Noah turned the clue over. "Nothing on the back."

Biscuit was no help at all. He had found an extremely interesting patch of ground by the bench and was studying it as if an entire roast chicken might come up if he looked hard enough.

Maya sat on the bench for one second, then stood up again because sitting was impossible. "Boats look in," she said. "What does that mean?"

"They're facing the shore," Noah said.

"Some are."

"Maybe not the boats," Grandma June said.

Maya looked at her. “You are not allowed to say things like that and then stop.”

“Allowed by whom?”

“By me.”

Grandma June folded her hands. “Then I shall proceed with great caution.”

Noah turned in a slow circle, studying the harbor the way he studied the map, with his head slightly tilted. “When the bench looks out,” he said, “that means this direction.” He pointed from the bench toward the water.

“Yes.”

“And the boats look in.”

He pointed from the boats toward the shore.

“Yes.”

“So maybe stand on the bench and look where both are looking.”

“You are not standing on a public bench in muddy shoes,” said Grandma June at once.

“I can stand beside it.”

“That,” said Grandma June, “is much more civilized.”

Noah went to one end of the bench and lined his body up with the direction it faced. He squinted out over the harbor, then followed the row of moored boats facing toward land.

Maya watched him, impatient and interested at the same time. He did things slowly, Noah. This was annoying until it was useful.

His gaze stopped near a stack of lobster pots at the far side of the bench, close to the harbor wall. A thick coil of rope lay on the ground there, and next to it sat a dented silver tin with a lid. It might once have held paint or nails. Someone had turned it upside down to keep it dry.

“Rope and tin,” Noah said.

Maya had already started toward it.

“Walk,” said Grandma June behind her.

Maya changed her run into a very fast walk.

The lobster pots were piled shoulder-high, their nets patched and their frames flaking blue paint. The rope beside them was thick as Noah’s wrist. The silver tin looked too plain to matter. Maya crouched and checked behind it. Nothing. She lifted one edge. Empty underneath except for gravel and a crab shell.

Noah arrived, breathing a bit harder. “Maybe beside, not under.”

They both looked to the narrow gap between the rope coil and the tin.

Something brown showed there. Paper? Cloth?

Biscuit arrived just in time to jam his nose in first.

“No,” said Maya and Noah together.

Grandma June came more slowly, one hand keeping her glasses from sliding. “Has our friend become helpful or merely early?”

Biscuit snuffled deeper, tail wagging with concentrated purpose.

Noah reached past him and pulled.

Out came a basket.

Not a huge one, but not tiny either. It was wrapped in checked cloth and tied with blue ribbon that had gone slightly crooked, as if whoever tied it had been in a hurry or had one hand occupied with a dog trying to inspect it.

Maya stared.

Noah stared too, then looked at Grandma June.

Grandma June, who had tried very hard all afternoon to look as if none of this had anything to do with her, gave up.

"Well," she said.

Maya stood up so quickly she nearly knocked the tin over. "Grandma."

Grandma June pressed her lips together the way she did when she was trying not to smile before a surprise had landed properly.

"You did," said Noah.

"I may have," said Grandma June.

"This is a picnic basket," Maya said.

"It is difficult to picnic without one," Grandma June replied.

Noah's face opened into such a broad grin that even the gull nearby seemed briefly less rude. "It's a birthday."

Grandma June looked at him, and then at Maya, and then down at Biscuit, who was sniffing the ribbon with dangerous enthusiasm. "Yes," she said at last. "It is."

Maya felt the answer settle over all the little oddnesses from the day: the map in the blue tin, the clues written in Grandma June's hand, the pretending, the almost-smiles, the way she had kept glancing at the oven and the door and the sky as if checking pieces of a plan.

"Whose?" Maya asked, though she already thought she knew.

Grandma June touched the top of the basket with one finger. "Mine," she said. "Tomorrow, officially. But I thought today would suit us better."

Noah made a noise halfway between a gasp and a laugh. "You made your own treasure hunt for your own birthday."

"When you say it like that," said Grandma June, "it sounds perfectly sensible."

"It sounds very you," said Maya.

Grandma June accepted this with a small nod.

Biscuit had begun licking the corner of the cloth.

"No," said Grandma June. "That is not your present."

Maya bent and picked up the basket. It had a good weight to it. She could feel plates shifting softly inside. A spoon knocked against something glass.

"You arranged all of it?" she asked.

"The route, yes." Grandma June glanced toward the bridge as if she could see it from here. "I wanted you two to solve it yourselves."

"We did," said Noah quickly.

"You did," Grandma June agreed.

Maya looked at the ribbon. “Even the sock?”

Grandma June looked offended. “Do you think I carry spare socks to scatter around the village?”

“Yes,” said Maya.

Grandma June considered. “Fair point. But no. The sock was a happy accident. I had tucked a little arrow mark into the bridge stone years ago and thought that would do. Then your dog discovered hosiery and improved matters.”

Noah laughed so hard he had to put a hand on the lobster pots.

Biscuit, hearing himself praised by tone if not by words, pranced in a small circle and tried once more to nose the basket.

“So the bridge really was from before?” Maya asked.

Grandma June nodded. “Long before. I made this map for your mother when she was about your age.”

Maya turned toward her. “Really?”

“She was determined to solve everything first,” Grandma June said. “You remind me of somebody.”

Noah looked at Maya with great interest.

Maya ignored him. “Did she find the clues?”

“Most of them. Your uncle Sam found one before she did and dined out on the story for twenty years.”

“Dined out?” Noah said.

“He talked about it constantly,” said Grandma June.

"Oh."

Maya imagined her mother as a girl crossing the bridge, looking under things, arguing over clues. It made the map feel older and warmer at the same time, like a hand-me-down game that still fit.

"Why didn't you just tell us it was your birthday picnic?" she asked.

Grandma June reached out and straightened the blue ribbon where Biscuit's nose had disturbed it. "Because being told is one sort of pleasure," she said. "And finding out is another. I thought we might have both."

Noah touched the edge of the cloth-wrapped basket. "What's in it?"

"A shocking amount of food," said Grandma June.

"Cinnamon buns?" Maya asked.

"For later. Those are cooling at home, and I'm sure they'll be splendid."

Noah looked impressed. "So there's more."

"There is always more," said Grandma June. "That is one of the better things about picnics."

Maya glanced from the bench to the water and back to the basket. "So this was the end."

"Not quite," said Grandma June.

Maya narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean, not quite?"

Grandma June tapped the folded map peeping from Noah's hand. "A route may end in one place and continue in another."

"That sounds like a clue voice," said Noah.

"It is a clue voice," said Maya. "She's doing it again."

Grandma June did not deny it. Instead she stood and dusted the back of her skirt. "I arranged a birthday picnic," she said. "I wanted the pair of you to solve the route yourselves. And now that you have, I believe there is still one important task left before we eat anything."

Maya felt a fresh little jolt of curiosity. "What task?"

Grandma June looked at the map, not at the basket. "The sort that belongs on paper."

Noah's fingers tightened on the folded sheet. "For after?"

"For during," Grandma June said.

The gull hopped closer, eyeing the basket with professional interest. Biscuit saw it and went rigid with a new idea.

"No," said everyone.

Biscuit made a tiny frustrated sound in his throat but remained where he was, shivering with self-control.

Grandma June laughed, then softened. "Come on," she said. "Let's get away from the fish stall before our picnic turns into a negotiation with birds."

She nodded toward a grassy patch farther along the harbor, beyond the red bench and above the little strip of shore where children liked to throw pebbles. It was a good spot.

Sheltered by a low wall on one side, open to the water on the other.

Maya shifted the basket to both hands. Noah tucked the clue paper into his pocket and held the map against his chest. Biscuit danced at the end of the lead, torn between the gull, the basket, and the general excitement of adults making plans with food in them.

They had found the final clue. They had found the basket. Grandma had admitted everything.

And still Maya looked at the map.

There, near the harbor sketch, under the faded red pencil of the bench, she could see empty space left on purpose, as if the page had been waiting all along for one more mark.

"Grandma," she said.

Grandma June turned.

"Did you always mean for us to add something?"

Grandma June's expression changed, just a little. Pleased, but also something else. Hopeful, maybe.

"I did," she said.

Noah looked from the map to the basket and back again. "What are we adding?"

Grandma June glanced toward the grassy patch, toward the water, toward the folded cloth and plates hidden under the ribbon. "That," she said, "depends on what happens next."

And with the gull still stalking them and Biscuit straining forward as if he alone could drag the whole afternoon into

place, they headed for the picnic spot with the unfinished map between them.

CHAPTER 5

Birthday Picnic, Drawn Twice

The grassy patch above the harbor was not grand, which was one reason Grandma June liked it.

It had a low stone wall warm from the sun, a view of the boats, and enough flat ground for a picnic blanket without anybody sliding downhill into the path. A few daisies had pushed up through the grass. Someone long ago had worn a faint track through the middle, but the edges were still soft and green.

"This is a proper spot," Grandma June said.

"That means you planned it," said Maya.

Grandma June gave her a look. "I should hope so."

Noah dropped to his knees at once. "Can I open the basket?"

"In one moment," Grandma June said.

Biscuit, hearing basket and smelling at least six different hopeful things, planted himself beside it with his whole scruffy body trembling. His nose worked so fast it seemed nearly separate from the rest of him.

"He looks like a kettle about to boil," said Noah.

“He looks like trouble,” said Maya.

“He can be both,” said Grandma June.

She spread the blanket with two brisk snaps. It was the blue-and-cream one from the hall cupboard, the one with a frayed corner and a faint jam stain that had survived three washings and one very determined scrubbing. Maya put the basket in the middle. Noah sat cross-legged so close to it he was practically part of the handle. Biscuit tried to sit that close too and ended up half on Noah’s shoe.

“Back,” Grandma June told the dog.

Biscuit backed up one inch.

“Not symbolic back. Real back.”

He shuffled three more inches, which Grandma June accepted as a working compromise.

Then she untied the blue ribbon and folded back the checked cloth.

Inside the basket lay picnic things packed so neatly it was almost a lesson. Plates wrapped in a tea towel. Napkins. A jar of lemonade with slices of lemon floating inside. Egg-and-cress sandwiches cut into triangles. Cheese ones cut into squares. Cherry tomatoes in a paper bag. Little sausage rolls. Apple slices with their skins still on. A round seed cake in a tin. And in the corner, under a napkin, three paper crowns in bright colors.

Noah put both hands over his mouth. “Crowns.”

Maya laughed. “You put crowns in a clue picnic?”

“A birthday without a paper crown is only half dressed,” Grandma June said.

“That’s not true,” said Maya.

“It is in this family.”

Noah had already chosen the green crown and set it on his head crookedly. “Can Biscuit have one?”

“No,” said Maya at once.

“He’ll eat it.”

Grandma June considered the terrier, who was trying to smell every layer of the basket at once. “He may have dignity instead.”

Biscuit sneezed into the napkins.

“Or not,” said Grandma June.

Maya took the blue crown. Grandma June wore the red one after pretending she would not. Noah leaned across the blanket and peered into the basket again.

“You really did all this yourself.”

“Not the cress,” said Grandma June. “That was the garden. And Mrs. Larkin at the bakery made the seed cake because mine always sinks in the middle when I am distracted.”

“Were you distracted by maps?” Maya asked.

“By children asking excellent questions,” said Grandma June.

Maya smiled despite herself and reached for a sandwich.

They ate with the harbor moving quietly below them. Boats rocked against their ropes. Gulls shouted from the posts.

Now and then footsteps passed on the path, and someone called hello to Grandma June and she called hello back without giving away a single secret. Biscuit received one small piece of sausage roll and then sat staring with the grave expression of a dog who feels generosity ought to continue.

Noah bit into a sandwich and said through a mouthful, “This is the best clue.”

“Do not talk with food,” said Grandma June.

Noah chewed quickly and swallowed. “I said this is the best clue.”

“That is better.”

Maya had taken a square cheese sandwich and half a tomato. She ate, but part of her mind was still on the map folded beside Grandma June’s plate.

Grandma June saw her looking. She always saw too much.

“Go on, then,” she said.

Maya wiped her fingers on a napkin. “Go on with what?”

“What you’ve been trying not to ask for seven whole minutes.”

Noah brightened. “The map.”

Grandma June reached into the basket again and brought out not food this time but a small envelope and a stubby tin of pencils, the sort used for golf scorecards or tiny notes. The envelope was creased. Across the front Grandma June had written, In case of discoveries.

“You packed pencils,” Maya said.

“I know my grandchildren.”

Noah took the envelope and opened it. Inside were scraps of blank paper and one square of thicker card. “What are these for?”

Grandma June unfolded the old map and laid it flat on the blanket, weighing the corners with the seed-cake tin, the lemonade jar, and two smooth pebbles she picked from the grass. The page looked different outdoors. The lines of the village sat under real sky now, with the harbor itself just beyond the edge of the paper.

“When I made this for your mother,” Grandma June said, “we added to it after. Not much. Just enough to remember what sort of day it had been.”

Maya leaned closer. “Where?”

Grandma June pointed. Near the old stone bridge, in faded green pencil, someone had drawn a lopsided duck. By the kitchen there was a tiny spiral bun with steam rising from it. Down near the harbor edge, almost hidden in the crease, stood three stick people wearing very square hats.

Noah laughed. “Those hats are terrible.”

“Those,” said Grandma June, “are supposed to be crowns.”

Maya looked at her mother’s duck again. “Who drew these?”

“Your mother drew the duck because one marched after your uncle Sam all the way from the bridge to the grocer’s lane. Your uncle drew the buns, though he made them too fancy. And I drew us in crowns because the other two refused to stand still.”

Noah held the map as carefully as if it were a moth. “So now we add ours.”

“That is the idea,” said Grandma June.

Maya felt a little thrill at that. Not solving this time. Keeping. Making sure it stayed.

Noah had already chosen a brown pencil and was looking around for a flat place to draw. “Can I do the bridge arrow?”

“You may,” said Grandma June, “if you leave room for someone else not to improve it.”

“I improve everything,” Noah said.

“Deeply worrying,” said Grandma June.

Maya selected the red pencil and tested the point on the edge of the blank card. “What should we draw?”

“What happened,” Grandma June said.

“That is too many things.”

“Then choose.”

Noah bent over the map and began, tongue just visible at one corner of his mouth. He drew slowly but with confidence, making a neat little lamp by the bridge and then the bent arrow carved in the stone below it. He added a blue sock floating beside the bridge wall.

“That wasn’t floating at the bridge,” Maya said.

“It is on the map.”

“That isn’t how facts work.”

“It is how drawing works.”

Grandma June, cutting the seed cake, said, “The court finds in Noah’s favor.”

Noah grinned and kept drawing.

Maya studied the harbor part of the map. The red bench was already there in faded pencil from long ago, but there was space beside it. She thought of the basket hidden near the rope and silver tin, of Grandma June trying not to smile, of Biscuit nearly pushing his whole head into the gap.

“I’m drawing the picnic basket,” she said.

“Make the ribbon crooked,” Noah told her.

“It was not that crooked.”

“It was if you looked from the dog side.”

Maya ignored him and began to draw. She liked getting things right. She gave the basket its square shape and the checked cloth and the blue ribbon looped across the top. Then, after a moment, she added Grandma June’s crown peeping up behind it, because that had been funny and because it made the picture feel true.

Grandma June noticed and laughed. “Do I look like that?”

“Yes,” said Maya.

“No,” said Noah. “Your ears are smaller.”

“My ears are exactly the right size,” said Grandma June.

Biscuit, who had been watching all this with rising suspicion, decided too much attention was going to paper and not enough to him. He stepped onto the edge of the blanket, put one paw squarely on Noah’s napkin, and leaned toward the map.

“Careful,” said Maya.

Noah shifted the pencil tin out of reach.

Biscuit leaned farther. His paw landed on the map itself, right near the harbor sketch, on top of a little doodled sock Noah had just added by the bench for balance.

They all froze.

Biscuit froze too, mostly because everybody had said nothing at once.

When Noah lifted the paw gently, a dusty print remained on the paper. Not muddy. Just the soft smudge of a dog who had spent the day on village paths and under benches.

For one second Maya thought, Oh no.

Then Noah burst out laughing.

“It’s him,” he said. “He signed it.”

Grandma June bent close. There beside the bench and basket and doodled sock sat Biscuit’s paw print, perfect enough to count the toes.

“Well,” she said. “That settles that.”

Maya looked at the mark. It was not tidy. It was not planned. It was absolutely Biscuit.

“We have to keep it,” Noah said.

“Obviously,” said Maya.

Biscuit wagged, pleased by the tone if not the meaning, and sat down hard beside the blanket. His tail brushed Grandma June’s shoe.

Noah took the black pencil and wrote carefully under the print, BISCuit, then rubbed out the too-large middle letters and tried again on the blank card instead.

“You’d better not write on the old bit if you’re rubbing holes in it,” Maya said.

“I was testing.”

“You were spelling.”

“I can spell Biscuit.”

“Can you?”

“Both of you,” said Grandma June, though she was smiling. “Use the card for labels. The map has survived enough family opinions.”

So they did. On the square card they wrote in turns:

Birthday picnic for Grandma June. Found by the red bench. Biscuit helped. Sort of.

Noah wanted to add, Stole no socks during lunch, but Grandma June said that was tempting fate. Maya drew a small arrow from the card to the harbor sketch. Then, because the card looked too plain, she and Noah filled its corners with tiny drawings: a crown, a bun, a lamp, a tomato, and one left sock with a terribly proud expression.

“That sock looks smug,” said Grandma June.

“It earned it,” said Noah.

The seed cake was excellent, as Mrs. Larkin’s always was. They drank lemonade from paper cups. Grandma June let Noah have a second sausage roll after he promised not to tell the gulls. Maya leaned on one elbow and looked from the

map to the real places beyond it. The bridge up the slope. The bench near the path. The harbor water folding and unfolding against the wall.

"It's funny," she said.

"What is?" Grandma June asked.

"It started as your old map. But now it's ours as well."

Grandma June was quiet for a moment. She took off her glasses, polished them on the corner of the blanket this time, and put them back on.

"That," she said, "was rather the point."

Noah lay on his stomach and drew one more thing in the corner near the kitchen: a tiny flour jar with a paper peeping from behind it.

"You missed the dough," said Maya.

"There wasn't room."

"There's room if you make the jar smaller."

"I like the jar."

Grandma June held out a hand for the pencil. "Let me have one line."

Maya passed her the dark blue. Grandma June thought for a second, then wrote in her neat old hand across the bottom edge, below the harbor and above the page crease:

For another fine day and good company.

Noah read it aloud. "You changed it."

"I did," said Grandma June.

“Because there’ll be another map,” Maya said.

Grandma June looked over the top of her glasses. “If certain people can keep from telling everyone where clues are hidden.”

“I wouldn’t tell,” said Noah.

“You told me the bridge lamp first,” said Maya.

“That isn’t the same.”

“It is if I wanted to find it.”

Grandma June packed the plates while they argued gently. Biscuit nosed the paper cups for missed drops of lemonade and found none. The harbor had gone a little quieter now, though the fish stall still clattered and the gull by the bench had not given up on its profession.

When the last crumbs were shaken from the blanket, Grandma June folded the map carefully along its old creases, then stopped.

“No,” she said. “Not like that.”

She opened it again and slipped the label card inside first, so it would sit protected between the folds. Noah added one clean napkin around the outside because he said important maps deserved jackets. Maya tied the blue picnic ribbon around the folded paper in a cross.

“There,” she said.

Grandma June nodded. “Very proper.”

They packed everything back into the basket, except the map. Grandma June handed that to Maya.

“You carry it,” she said.

Maya took it with both hands. The paper was warm from the sun and from all of them touching it.

The walk back through Lantern Cove felt different from the walk out. Not slower, exactly. Just fuller. They passed the red bench, then the lane, then the old stone bridge where Noah insisted on waving the rescued blue sock at the carved arrow one final time. Biscuit tried three separate times to steal the sock and failed three separate times, which did nothing to improve his opinion of justice.

By the time they reached Grandma June’s gate, the cinnamon buns had cooled enough to smell even from the path.

“The buns!” Noah cried.

“In the kitchen,” said Grandma June, “where sensible people left them.”

Inside, the house held the sweet deep smell of cinnamon and baked sugar. The blue biscuit tin still sat on the table where the day had started, its lid propped nearby. Flour dust clung to the boards. A dusting of flour still lay under a chair. It looked as if the morning had paused and was waiting to hear the end of the story.

Maya set the folded map beside the tin.

Noah fetched the lid and turned it in his hands. “Under the recipe cards again?”

“Of course,” said Grandma June. “Where else would a family keep a perfectly good adventure?”

She lifted the stack of cards with their faded ribbon. Maya tucked the map beneath them, this time not hidden by accident but placed there on purpose. Noah slipped the little label card on top so they would remember to look. Grandma June settled the recipe cards back over everything and pressed the lid down until it gave its familiar small metal pop.

For a moment all three of them looked at the tin.

Biscuit trotted in carrying, with terrible confidence, a left sock.

Noah threw up his hands. "Not again."

"It's yours," said Maya at once.

"It is not."

Grandma June took one look at the striped sock in Biscuit's mouth and Noah's bare left foot and started laughing. "Some traditions," she said, "begin immediately."

Noah lunged. Biscuit danced away. The sock flapped from his mouth like a flag of cheerful nonsense.

Maya laughed so hard she had to catch the edge of the table. Grandma June leaned against the counter, glasses sliding halfway down her nose at last.

On the table, between the flour jar and the cooling buns, the blue tin sat closed and ordinary-looking, which was exactly what made it such a good place for a map.

And as Biscuit shot out of the kitchen with Noah after him and Grandma June reaching for the dog biscuit tin with the calm of long experience, Maya put one hand on the blue lid

and thought, not about the adventure they had finished, but about the blank bits still waiting inside it.