

The Baking Team

Blueberry Lane Herb Farm

Chapter One

Ding Dong, Ding Dong

Rasmus's tall ears turned like two antennas; first to the right and then to the left. Pedro sheepishly peeked out from under the sofa. Guinevere dropped her fur brush and ran down the hallway, nearly tripping over her dress. Tilly flew into the hallway with lightning speed.

The front door creaked when Coral Bell answered it, "Thank you Mr. Postman, I have been waiting for this to arrive!" Isn't it exciting to have a visitor when the doorbell rings? When the postman rings the door bell and has a package, that's even more exciting! Coral Bell turned to call everyone in, except she found them already in the foyer staring at her with a glint of curious wonder.

Outside on the porch, the sweet aroma of honeysuckle drifted through the June air. Rasmus, Pedro, and Guinevere hopped up on the porch swing. Coral Bell joined them while Tilly settled in the hanging petunia basket. "Hurry up, open the package," Guinevere exclaimed. "Hmm, it's an interesting size," Rasmus observed. "It's smaller than a Small Pet Select delivery box. It's bigger than a package of garden seeds."

Coral Bell's eyes twinkled as she unwrapped the mystery package, "This surprise involves our family project. Since we decided to have a bake sale to help support the animals at the shelter who need extra care, I got something to help with our project. Who can guess what it is?"

They put on their thinking caps. Pedro scratched his head. Rasmus rubbed his tall ears with his front paws. Guinevere twirled her long fur around her paw. She popped up with the idea that it was a new baking pan. Tilly suggested it was a box of gourmet nuts. Finally, Pedro chimed in, "I think it is a new book. The kind of book that has directions how to cook something." Coral Bell exclaimed, "Bingo! You are very clever to figure that out Pedro! It is a new recipe book just for baking. You can look through the pages and decide what recipes you want to bake for the fund raiser."

Coral Bell continued, "There is one rule, though. We must be practical. Therefore, you must choose recipes that can be made with ingredients that we grow here at Blueberry Lane Herb Farm. This book has four chapters: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Just look through the summer chapter and pick out what looks yummy. The strawberries are ready to pick. Plus, it's time for the first harvest of mint, thyme, lavender, and oregano. Be organized. Write a list of recipes with those ingredients, and then we can vote on which recipes to make."

Thump Thump Thump

That was the familiar call to attention. Rasmus sat up on his hind legs. His ears were tall and straight in serious fashion. He declared, "Coral Bell said be organized. As usual, I have a plan. Tilly, you and I can read the recipes out loud. We will read page by page from the summer chapter. Guinevere and Pedro, you take notes. Write down the page number and recipe names of the ones that sound extra good. Pedro, no nibbling on the paper either. This takes team work, so let's get started."

Guinevere raised her paw, "Wait a minute. How am I supposed to take notes without getting my fur twisted?" Tilly mumbled, "Guin, you must stop twirling your fur while trying to concentrate. Now please pay attention!" Guin continued, "I'm confused. Summer starts on June 21. Today is June 3. That means we should pick out recipes in the spring chapter." Tilly argued, "Guin, the berries and herbs are ready to pick. I know they are ripe because I was flying around the garden looking for a snack. Oh boy, those blueberries are so juicy! So, we must find summer recipes."

They argued back and forth until Rasmus put his big rear paw down again and bellowed, "Girls, stop your silly bickering. Summer recipes it is. This is a fat book, so there must be a lot to choose from in each chapter."

They settled down on the porch and poured over the recipes. Page by page, they debated the merits of treats such as crumpets and cookies, pastries and popovers. They imagined impressive and irresistible cakes and crepes and turnovers and tarts. From the very long list they made, they had to agree on which recipes they thought they could make. Their list was neat and organized, just like Rasmus instructed.

Coral Bell finished weeding the garden and joined them on the porch. She brought a basket of dandelions for snacking. Tilly perched in the basket of petunias where she could catch any sunflower seeds Coral Bell might toss to her. Guinevere insisted on reciting the recipe list to Coral Bell, "Rhubarb pies, strawberry tartlets, blueberry muffins, rosemary scones, and lavender lemonade. Plus, we found a special bonus recipe; it's peanut butter biscuits for dogs. Isn't that just perfect? Homemade doggie treats! Plus, Tilly got Matilda to promise to lay extra eggs for the baking, even though she doesn't like dogs. I don't know why she doesn't like dogs, that's poppycock if you ask me!"

Thump Thump Thump

That familiar sound was followed by Rasmus's voice of reason. "Guin, some dogs are very nice and friendly. Some dogs can be scary because they like to chase us. It's natural for them to chase small animals. They can't help it, it's called instinct, and it means they do it without thinking about it. It's natural to their behavior. Matilda is afraid of being chased around by a dog, probably because she must protect her brood of chicks."

This news alarmed Pedro. It set off his nerves. From her bird's eye view in the hanging basket, Tilly saw Pedro start to shake. He began to chew the corners of the new recipe book. She quickly plucked dandelion leaves and dropped a bunch right on top of his little head to distract him. Pedro whined, "Señor Rasmus, no sé de perros. Tengo miedo de ellos. No voy a la venta de pasteles, no, no no. (*Senor Rasmus, I don't know about dogs. I'm afraid of them. I am not going to the bake sale, no, no no.*) Guinevere puffed up her chest and hollered, "Coral Bell will protect us. She would never put us in danger, and she knows how to handle the situation. She will keep us safe. Trust her!"

Chapter Two

The next morning, Coral Bell harvested fresh ingredients from the garden. The tasks were assigned. Rasmus chopped rhubarb and strawberries. Pedro sifted and measured flour. Guinevere cracked eggs and measured peanut butter. Tilly expertly used her beak to separate rosemary and lavender leaves from the stems. The kitchen was a buzz, and the air clouded with poofs of flour from sifting, sifting, and more sifting. While they worked, they had the fun of taste testing the fruit. They made kissy noises with their bright pink and blue fruit stained lips. They worked in a synchronized rhythm until.....

SPLAT

Uh oh.....some of Matilda's eggs rolled off the counter. The egg shells shattered. The eggs splattered.

Guinevere rushed over and.....kaboom! Just like that she slipped on the eggs and fell on the floor. Pedro laughed so hard his belly jiggled. He lost his balance and knocked the bowl of flour over. It landed right on top of Guinevere!

It was so quiet, you could hear a pin drop. Everyone was still for a minute. Guinevere's cry pierced the silence, "My fur, my gorgeous fur!" Matilda peered through the back door and clucked, "My eggs, my beautiful eggs!" Pedro hollered, "The flour, all my fluffy sifted flour is on the floor!" Tilly chirped in with "My patience! It will take forever to wash Guin's fur!"

"Matilda, where have you been all afternoon," asked Tilly. Matilda grumpily clucked back, "Perching on my fence gate. I expected Guinevere to stroll by my gate. She walks by every morning for her daily exercise. Not today though, no m'am, she didn't stroll by today. I wanted to find out where each one of my eggs went. So I came to see for myself. You tell that nosey Guinevere I want a full report of the whereabouts of my eggs." Oh dear, this was dreaded news, even worse since Guinevere didn't make a good first impression with Miss Matilda when they first met.

The commotion caught Coral Bell's attention. Although she found her kitchen in a state of disaster, she laughed at the scene. She saw a mopsy headed long haired guinea pig dripping in egg yolks and coated with flour, a nervous little chinchilla chewing on a dish towel, a parrot fluttering in a fit, and a mad hatter hen wobbling in circles by the door. Rasmus, ever the wise one, got out of the way and hid under the kitchen table.

Coral Bell recommended everyone take a well-deserved break. To help, she cleaned up the kitchen and rolled out the pie dough. Guinevere soaked in a bubble bath while Tilly combed out her sticky long white fur. By evening, all the goodies were baked and packaged for the sale.

Chapter Three

Clippity Clop Clippity Clop Clippity Clop

Boulder Hill roamed over to the kitchen window to see what all the hubbub was about. Tilly screeched to her friend, "Boulder, we are going to bring all these treats to the shelter tomorrow. There's a bake sale for animals with special medical needs. Would you like to help?" Boulder shook his mane and lifted his head high to whinny,

***"I most certainly will take part.
You can ride in my pony cart.
Early, early we should start,
I will be proud to do my part."***

The next day, everyone got with the sunrise. They were eager to sell all the fresh baked goodies. The more they sold, the more money the shelter would have for animals that need special medicine and extra care and attention.

They dressed up for the occasion. Rasmus put on his bow tie, and Pedro sported his hat from Peru. Tilly wore her party hat, and Guinevere fashioned herself a chef's hat and apron. Boulder Hill's mane was braided with blue ribbons. Coral Bell donned her riding boots, plaid jacket, and velvet cap.

Many of their friends were also selling things at the bake sale, like lemon cookies and snickerdoodles. Aunt Pinkie and Daisy brought baskets of Small Pet Select treats to raffle, such as Meadow Loops, Belinda's Blend, and Flower Power Berry Boost.

Coral Bell hosted a tour of the shelter for visitors. Rasmus, Tilly, and Guinevere followed along. Fearful Pedro hid under a blanket in the pony cart. They were saddened to see how many animals needed help and how many were waiting for a forever home. They spent time visiting each animal. They gave friendship and love to each of the homeless animals. They renewed their commitment to always help those in need in any little way they could.

A flyer on the bulletin board caught Tilly's attention. A special needs animal sanctuary was seeking volunteers for summer camp. There were jobs to be filled and camp was to start in just one month. Tilly told Rasmus about it. Rasmus told Guinevere. Guinevere told Pedro. They huddled up and talked about what skills they had and how they could help. Rasmus decided, "We can organize games, read stories, and help prepare food." Guinevere replied, "I think the most important thing we can do is to make friends with them, so they don't feel alone." Tilly chirped in, "I can teach them how to sing opera!" Rasmus and Guinevere rolled their eyes and yelled, "NO! No one wants to hear your silly opera singing." With Coral Bell's permission, they signed up to volunteer.

The community event was a success. They went home feeling very grateful for their blessings. They had a loving home, they belonged to a family, they were healthy, and they were able to give back to their community. Coral Bell instilled the value of giving to those who are in need and giving with a joyful heart.

The End

Peggy Macasay