

*SISTERS*  
of the  
*LAST STRAW*

**The Case of the Easter Egg Escapades**



Karen Kelly Boyce

SISTERS  
of the  
LAST  
STRAW

The Case of the  
Christmas Tree Capers

TAN Books  
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Dedicated to a fan  
Peter Gallagher



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# Chapter 1

## Money Leaks

Mother Mercy stood at the window in her office. Clasping her hands behind her back, she tried to steady the shaking. A bright flash from the neighbor's window caught her attention, and she watched Mr. Lemon snap the blinds shut. He's probably busy counting all his money. Money was the last thing she wanted to think about.

Mother looked the other way and saw Sister Krumbles holding wood for Farmer Murphy. The happy Sister hadn't a care in the world. The kind farmer was helping Krumbles build a pen for her new little bunny, Cotton. *If only I could find something to take my mind off my troubles,* Mother Mercy thought as she glanced at the papers on

her desk. Walking over, she knew that she had to face facts. She couldn't avoid the troubles ahead.

On her desk lay two letters, one from the township and one from the contractor. The letters weren't threatening or dangerous looking—just plain white papers. However, each time Mother picked up either letter, she could feel her tummy roll and feel queasy. The contractor's bid to repair the leaking roof was over a thousand dollars. The most expensive part was the cost of removing the mold that the leaking rain had caused over the years.

The other letter was from the township. It stated that the mold must be removed, or the township would condemn the house. Unfortunately, the cost to repair the roof and remove the mold was three thousand dollars, and all the money the Sisters had in the bank was five hundred dollars. To make matters worse, the Sisters had to start the mold removal process within thirty days. If they didn't, they wouldn't have a

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home. That would be the end of the Sisters of the Last Straw.

Mother Mercy looked up from the desk to the ornate trim around the high ceilings and then to the sturdy wooden door. Her elderly aunt had given her the large home and land that went with it before she moved to Europe. For a year, the Sisters of the Last Straw had made the mansion their home as they worked to help the poor of Spring Creek Township. The bishop was proud of them. Father McNulty was grateful to them. The Sisters had worked hard building a relationship with the community. Mother Mercy propped her elbows on the desk and rested her head in her hands. I can't tell the Sisters that we might lose everything. I must figure this out for myself.



Mr. Lemon didn't just close the blinds, he slammed the window shut and locked it too. *I see that snoopy Sister looking over here.* He grimaced.

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*She's probably wondering what's in the package that was just delivered.* Now, with the door and windows locked and all the curtains and blinds shut, Mr. Lemon felt safe in the dark. He re-opened the package. It seemed to glow as he held it up.

Mr. Lemon smiled. Unaccustomed to the movement, the muscles in his mouth ached. Few could say that they had ever seen the grumpy Mr. Lemon smile. But smile he did. He smiled at the birthday gift his Uncle Harry had mailed to him. It was an ancient Roman coin, one he had wanted since he was a small boy. And it was worth thousands of dollars.

Mr. Lemon could sit all day and just admire the coin. He had such a love for the shiny silver. It was so valuable, rare, and special. He knew he had to hide it from prying eyes and thieves who might try to steal his wonderful possession. *I'll order a safe to be installed, he decided, a strong safe to guard my precious coin!* Until then, he was determined to keep the coin right with him. He slipped

it deep down in his pocket.



Sister Krumbles clapped her hands. The main frame of the new rabbit hutch was elevated on legs. It had a room in the back to protect Cotton from the weather and an open front platform that allowed the white bunny to enjoy the sun. Knowing all about rabbits, Farmer Murphy put a hinged door on the back of the pen so Krumbles would be able to see into Cotton's room and take her in and out.

Krumbles bounced up and down as the farmer latched the back door.

“Now what?” she asked.

He picked up the staple gun. “Now I have to staple the wire around the open area. That will keep Cotton in and anything else out.”

Krumbles unwound the wire as Farmer Murphy stapled it to the frame and added a piece to the top.

“There! Let’s see how Cotton likes her new home.” Farmer Murphy said.

Krumbles lifted Cotton out of the laundry basket she had been living in. Hugging the little rabbit close to her heart, she kissed the soft head and gently stroked her.

“Look, Cotton. Look at your new home!” Krumbles whispered, “I just know you’ll be happy here.”

Farmer Murphy smiled as he opened the back hatch and Krumbles placed the little rabbit inside. Cotton looked around and hopped right to the open area where food and water were waiting.

“Oh look! She knows her way around already!”

“Yes, and she looks happy.” Farmer Murphy’s face lit up. “I see the chickens I gave you are also happy in their pen.”

“They give us delicious eggs—white ones and brown ones. I like them both.” Krumbles smiled.

“You know, I have chickens called Easter

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chickens. They lay eggs of all different colors! Every morning, their nests look like Easter baskets filled with colorful dyed eggs. Still, I think they taste the same as the brown and white eggs. Would you like some Easter chickens? It will be my gift. Easter is not far away.”

Krumbles couldn't believe her ears. “YES! I'D LOVE SOME EASTER CHICKENS!” She clapped her hands and jumped up and down.

“I'll swing by with them tomorrow.” Farmer Murphy walked away. “Now I have to hurry home to milk the cows.”

Sister Krumbles waved goodbye and off she went to feed the other animals. She gave grain to the goats and scattered seed for the chickens. Then she sat on the back porch and watched the farm animals enjoy their dinner. The chickens tossed the seed in the air as they flocked around the pen. They seem to have so much fun together. The goats ran from feeding bin to feeding bin, frolicking in the early spring evening. The goats

love to play together too.

Turning her attention to the newest farm member, Krumbles watched the little bunny in her new home. She finished her meal and hopped around the pen as if she were looking for something. *Or someone*, Krumbles frowned. *I think she is looking for a friend.* It made Sister Krumbles' heart sink to think that Cotton might be lonely. "I'm never lonely," she whispered out loud. "I have my Sister friends to keep me company."

She sat and thought about how blessed she was to be part of this community. The Sisters of the Last Straw was a new order. All the Sisters tried other orders but had been dismissed for having troubling behavior. Even with their faults, Sister Krumbles loved each and every one of them. *I love Mother Mercy even though she gets so angry at times! And I love Sister Shiny, who always cleans up my messes.* Krumbles smiled just thinking about it. *And I love Sister Lacey even though she sometimes uses the wrong words. I think she is so funny. And who*



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*wouldn't love kind Sister Lovely, who struggles so hard to quit smoking.*

It must be hard to be alone and have no friends to talk to, and even worse when there's no one to share fun with. Sister Krumbles remembered all the times she and Sister Wanda had shared being lost together.

Looking at Cotton the rabbit made her sad. Suddenly, she smiled! Tomorrow, after Farmer Murphy delivers the new chickens, I'll buy Cotton a little friend. What harm could one more rabbit do? The new pen has room for two! Why! There's even room for more than two! With that happy plan, Krumbles flung open the back door and ran into the house. It was her turn to make dinner.