

THE CUPCAKE KID

Back of his shack, the little boy hunkers down among whippy green cornstalks. An apple cupcake sits in his hand. A hell-hot wind gusts above him, shaking the cobs like rattlers' tails.

He opens his mouth wide . . .

'Charlie Barleycorn, what you doin' out there?'

His eyelids fly open like they're on springs.

'Nuthin', Ma.'

'Git your skinny ass here, pronto!'

He drops the cupcake, scrambles to his feet. Tears blindly through the cornfield.

His ma is woodpeckering her foot on the stoop, mouth stretched tight as a gator's grin.

'Did you take one of my cupcakes?'

'No, Ma.'

Her finger takes aim, dead centre of his forehead. 'Last time I'm askin'. Did you take it?'

'No, Ma, I swear.'

'Then I guess your pa's sneaked one. That man's stomach is bigger'n a hog's.' Her eyes drill into his. 'Don't you *ever* lie to me, boy. You git me?'

'I gits you, Ma.'

'Good. Now skedaddle.'

He dives back into the stalks, nose twitching.

'Lookin' for this?' His pa pops up like a prairie dog, the cupcake in his huge hand.

'No, Pa.'

'That right? So when Ma asks me if I took it, I'm gonna give her those big eyes and say, "Mary-Lou, I ain't never lied to you in my life". She durn well won't believe me. That's where you come in.'

'*Me*, Pa?'

'*You*, son. That cinnamon, your ma can smell it a mile away.' His pa holds out the cupcake. 'Now eat.'