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Opening extract from

A Cupcake Conundrum

Written by

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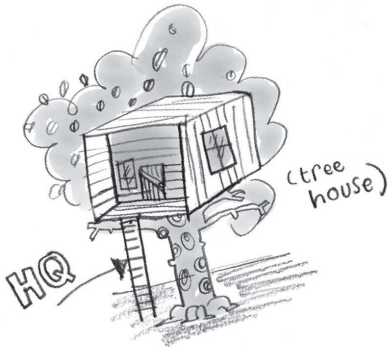
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3:00PM
MYSTERY GIRLS HQ

Even when I'm not solving mysteries I can still use my amazing detective skills to help other people. Today the Mystery Girls completed an important mission. This is my mission report in full:

OPERATION BAKE-A-CAKE

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: To make sure fellow Mystery Girl and BRILLIANT baker, Violet Maple, gets through to the finals of her favourite TV programme – Bake or Break.

Exhibit A – Bake or Break poster

Bake or Break

AUDITION FOR BAKE OR BREAK, THE JUNIOR COMPETITION!

Do you have what it takes to become the nation's best junior baker?

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. If you can, get in it and show us what you and your cakes, pies and pastries are made of!

Bake or Break – the baking competition where you'll bake, or break!

(WARNING: Common side effects of 'breaking' include nervousness, hysteria and uncontrollable sobbing. Contestants enter at their own risk.)



(I haven't seen it before but Violet says it's crazily difficult and if you win you are officially the best young baker in the whole country.)

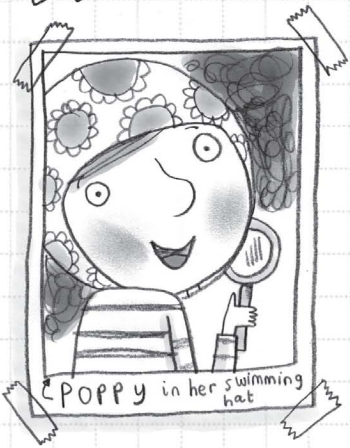
THE TARGET:
Violet Maple

Totally amazing girl detective (like me!) with the ability to bake the tastiest cakes ever. Has been known to have 'Maple Meltdowns' while mystery solving. We don't want that to happen at Bake or Break.





THE TEAM:



Poppy Holmes

Mystery Girl with a passion for finding clues and synchronised swimming.

Mariella Mystery

(Me) Brilliantly talented at detective work. Big fan of cakes baked by Violet, and most other types of cake.



NOTE: Failure is not an option. This has been Violet's ambition since she was five, when she first baked a cake with her Grandma Maple.

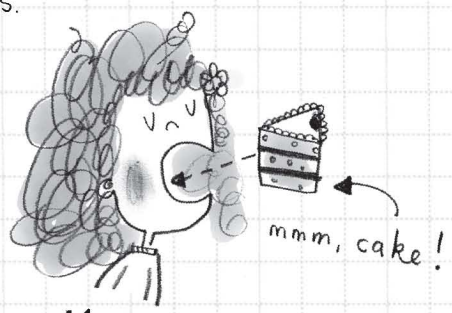
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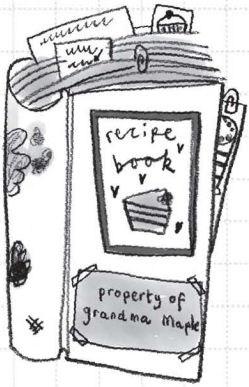
8:45AM: Leaving Mystery Girls HQ, Operation Bake-a-Cake is intercepted by the Prince of Annoyingness, Arthur Mystery (claims to be my little brother). He is waving his Bake or Break Annual and begs us to tell Bake or Break he is seven, not five and a half, so he can enter too. I say no way.

8:55AM: Bake or Break auditions, Puddleford Village Hall. The only way me and Poppy could gain access to the auditions was to enter the competition ourselves.

I don't know much about baking, but I know I like cake.



9:03AM: Violet has laid out her ingredients and is busy reading Grandma Maple's recipe book. It's full of useful baking information and has helped Violet think up loads of brilliant ideas for her own recipes (with a mysterious twist).

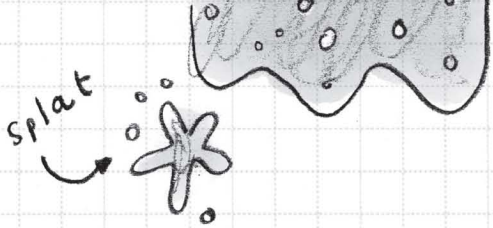


9:05AM: Me and Poppy locate tables next to Violet where we can watch for signs of stress. If we spot them early, hopefully we can avoid a full scale Maple Meltdown.





9:15AM: I get out my recipe for Rainbow Cake. I've never tried baking anything before, but I don't think it will be difficult – not compared to mystery-solving.



9:30AM: The Bake or Break Talent Spotter says we all need to take this really seriously – if we bake some brilliant cakes we could go through to the next audition and even to the finals on TV. She says, "This is Bake or Break, guys. Five ... four ... three ... two ... one ... BAKE!"

9:45AM: Violet is staring into space holding a mixing bowl and a whisk. I alert Poppy using our emergency code word: FLAPJACK. We bang pots and pans. Violet snaps out of her trance and leaps into action. Meltdown averted.

10:30AM: Poppy takes her cake out of the oven. It makes a weird fizzing noise and then explodes. Poppy deduces the twelve bags of popping candy she put in gave her cake too much 'pop'. My cake doesn't look like the picture in the recipe either.

