

Four real girls in a fairy's world.

7

Disney
The *Never Girls*

a
pinch of
magic



NEW YORK TIMES bestselling author **Kiki Thorpe**
illustrated by **Jana Christy**

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A STEPPING STONE BOOK™
RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Thorpe, Kiki.

A pinch of magic / written by Kiki Thorpe ; illustrated by Jana Christy.

pages cm — (The Never girls ; 7)

“A Stepping Stone book.”

Summary: Baking-talent fairy Dulcie helps Mia make treats for a neighborhood bake sale but must return to Never Land before they are done, and Mia may not be able to finish without her help.

ISBN 978-0-7364-3097-5 (trade) — ISBN 978-0-7364-8149-6 (lib. bdg.) —

ISBN 978-0-7364-3222-1 (ebook)

[1. Fairies—Fiction. 2. Magic—Fiction. 3. Baking—Fiction. 4. Contests—Fiction.]

I. Title.

PZ7.T3974Pin 2014

[Fic]—dc23

2014004047

randomhouse.com/kids/disney

v3.1

For Oonagh

—K.T.

For my sister, Angela

—J.C.

Contents

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Map of Never Land

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

About the Author

Never Land

Far away from the world we know, on the distant seas of dreams, lies an island called Never Land. It is a place full of magic, where mermaids sing, fairies play, and children never grow up. Adventures happen every day, and anything is possible.

There are two ways to reach Never Land. One is to find the island yourself. The other is for it to find you. Finding Never Land on your own takes a lot of luck and a pinch of fairy dust. Even then, you will only find the island if it wants to be found.

Every once in a while, Never Land drifts close to our world ... so close a fairy's laugh slips through. And every once in a while, longer while, Never Land opens its doors to a special few. Believing in magic and fairies from the bottom of your heart can make the extraordinary happen. If you suddenly hear tiny bells or feel a sea breeze where there is no sea, pay careful attention. Never Land may be close by. You could find yourself there in the blink of an eye.

One day, four special girls came to Never Land
in just this way. This is their story.

Never Land

Tooth Mountain



Skull Rock

Pixie Hollow

Mermaid Lagoon

Pirate Cove





Chapter 1

“Last one home is a rotten egg!” cried Gabby Vasquez. She started running down the block as fast as she could, the costume fairy wings she always wore flapping behind her.

Gabby’s sister, Mia, and Mia’s two best friends, Kate McCrady and Lainey Winters, looked at each other and laughed. They weren’t going to race anywhere. It was hot and they were tired after a day of swimming. Lainey had recently conquered her fear of the water, so the girls had decided to go to the community pool to celebrate. They’d done cannonballs, stood on their hands underwater, and competed in mermaid races.

“I can’t wait to go back to Never Land tomorrow,” said Mia.

“Me neither,” said Kate and Lainey at the exact same time. They grinned at each other. “Jinx!”

That summer, the girls had discovered that they could travel to Never Land and visit their fairy friends in Pixie Hollow whenever they wanted by walking into Gabby’s closet. But the past couple of days had been packed with summertime activities, and they hadn’t been able to slip away. As much fun as it had been, they were eager to get back to the magical land of the fairies.

Gabby had arrived at the end of the block and was now circling back. “You’re *all* rotten eggs!” she exclaimed.

“I guess we are,” Kate said with a laugh.

As they passed Maple Street, Gabby’s eyes suddenly lit up. “Let’s go home this way instead,” she

said. She grabbed her big sister's hand and pulled her along.

"Past Swensen's Sweets?" Mia asked. "Sounds good to me!"

Swensen's was an old-fashioned ice cream parlor, serving all kinds of frozen treats.

"What do you want, Gabby?" Mia asked as they stood in front of the ice cream case. She searched her pockets for the money her mother had given her that morning.

Gabby studied the menu on the wall. "I'll take the Kitchen Sink," she said.

The other girls laughed. So did the server, a tall, freckled boy with red hair peeking out from under his paper cap. The Kitchen Sink was a gigantic dessert with twenty scoops of ice cream, every sauce you could think of, tons of whipped cream and sprinkles, and a gazillion cherries. Whenever someone ordered it, the server honked a big brass horn.

Mia finally found the ten-dollar bill. "Maybe another time," she told her sister. "Today we only have enough money for one cone each."

After much discussion, the girls placed their orders—rainbow sherbet for Gabby, strawberry shortcake for Mia, peanut butter brickle for Lainey, and chocolate chocolate chip for Kate. When Mia lingered behind to grab some extra napkins, her eyes fell on a flyer with a half-filled volunteer sign-up sheet underneath:

Come join your neighbors for a
SUMMER BLOCK PARTY
Food! Games! Bounce House! Pet Spa!
Face Painting! Music! Raffle!
Crafts Table!
This Saturday starting at noon
(All proceeds to benefit
the Davis family)

Meghan Davis went to their school. There had recently been a fire at her family's house, and they needed help to replace their belongings. Mia shook her head. She couldn't even imagine how hard things were for Meghan and her family and how sad they must feel.





“Hey, everyone, look at this,” she said, pointing to the flyer. “We should sign up.”

Kate scanned the list. “Games, that’s all me,” she decided, writing down her name.

“I’m going to volunteer for the pet spa!” said Lainey, grabbing the sign-up pen from Kate.

Next, Gabby wrote her name on the sheet, under Face Painting.

But Mia just stood there, looking at the list, her ice cream cone forgotten in her hand. She would have joined Kate with Games, but all those slots had been filled. Grooming pets wasn’t really her thing. And none of the remaining choices—Setup, Food, Bake Sale, Raffle, Crafts Table, and Cleanup—jumped out at her, either.

“Hurry up!” said Gabby, dancing around impatiently. She had already finished her ice cream.

Mia grabbed the pen and scribbled her name under the first open space.

Lainey peered at the list. “Bake Sale?” she said. “I didn’t know you liked to bake.”

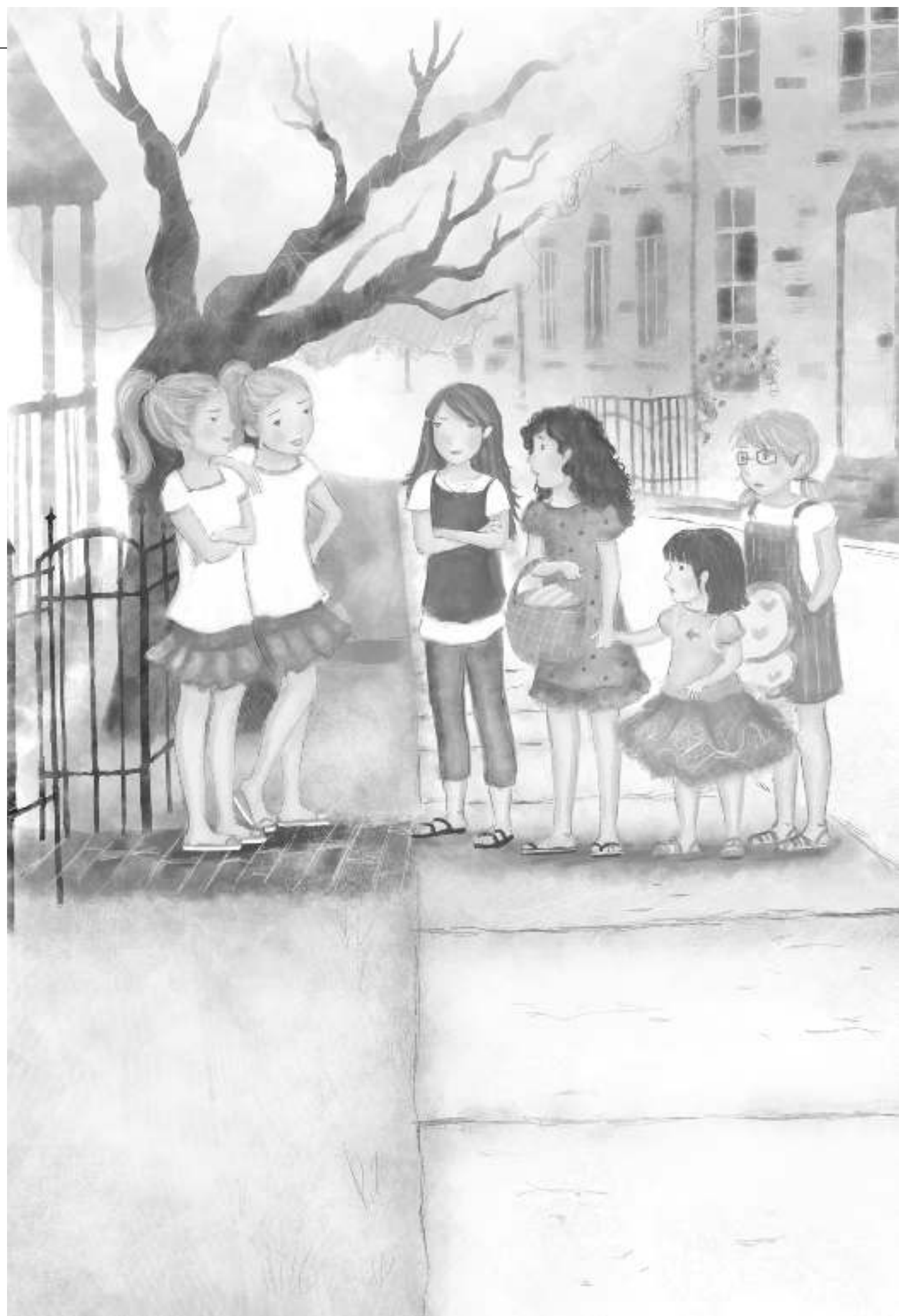
Mia shrugged. “I’ll figure something out,” she said.

But on the walk home, Mia had a sudden stab of doubt. *Maybe I should go back, she thought. I should sign up for the Crafts Table instead.*

She was about to ask the girls to turn around when a voice said, “Hey, guys!”

It was coming from the Taylors’ house. Tina and Tara Taylor were standing at the front gate. The

long, straight blond hair was pulled back into matching ponytails. The girls were a year older than M
and were identical twins. They always dressed exactly alike.



“Whatcha doing?” one of the twins asked.

“We just signed up to volunteer at the block party,” Gabby piped in.

“Us too,” said the other twin. “We’re going to do the Bake Sale.”

“So is Mia!” Gabby exclaimed.

“But I’m not—” Mia started to say.

“We’re making Death by Chocolate Cake,” said one twin, cutting her off.

Her sister elbowed her in the side. “No, Tina! We’re making lemon meringue pie!”

“Wrong!” said Tina. “We decided on chocolate for sure.” She eyed Mia. “What are *you* making?”

“Um ... I don’t know,” Mia said.

“Well, I bet we’ll sell more than you,” said Tara. Mia smiled despite herself. The Taylor twins

weren’t just competitive with each other, they were competitive with everyone else, too.

“Wanna make a bet?” asked Tina.

“Actually, I—” Mia started to say.

“Sure, we’ll make a bet with you,” Kate interrupted.

Mia shook her head at Kate. But Kate ignored her. “Mia’s going to beat you both, no problem,” she added.

The twins whispered back and forth. Then they both nodded.

“Okay, Mia, if you lose you have to wear a T-shirt all week that says TARA AND TINA TAYLOR ARE THE BEST BAKERS ON SPRUCE STREET,” said Tara.

“*Tina* and Tara,” said Tina.

“And if ... I mean, *when* Mia wins,” Kate retorted, “you both have to wear a T-shirt that says MIA VASQUEZ IS THE BEST BAKER ON SPRUCE STREET.”

“Sure,” Tina said with a smirk.

Mia and her friends started to walk away. “May the best baker win!” one of the twins called after them.

“Kate! Why did you do that?” Mia asked when they were out of earshot.

“Well, somebody had to take them down a peg,” said Kate. “I can’t stand how they’re always whispering. They act like they’re better than everyone else.”

“But I can’t win the bet. I don’t know the first thing about baking!” said Mia. She had butterflies in her stomach. How in the world was she going to pull this off?



Chapter 2

“That was delicious,” said a caterpillar-shearing-talent fairy named Nettle, pushing her chair back from the table in the Home Tree tearoom. “You really do make the best poppy puff rolls, Dulcie.”

“Glad you liked them,” the baking-talent fairy Dulcie said absently. She took the last sip of her blackberry tea, then put down her cup. At once, a cleaning-talent fairy plucked it away. Dulcie hardly noticed. She was too busy thinking about the dessert. She had dozens of perfectly ripe raspberries and wanted to use them in something special.

“So what are you making for dessert tonight?” Nettle asked, interrupting her thoughts.

Dulcie was often asked this question, and she usually didn’t answer. She liked her desserts to be a surprise. But she knew Nettle had a huge sweet tooth.

Dulcie smiled. She had it. “White almond layer cakes with raspberry filling and vanilla buttercream frosting,” she said.

Nettle’s eyes lit up. “Wonderful!”

Dulcie went down to the kitchen beneath the Home Tree. She put on her favorite apron and the poufy hat she always wore. Then she got to work.

The kitchen was crowded with cooking-talent fairies preparing for the next meal, but Dulcie was in her own world. She measured out flour in acorn caps. She scooped freshly churned butter from a wooden stone barrel. She sprinkled in a pinch of this and added a handful of that. A feeling of peace came over

her as she worked. A fairy was happiest when she was performing her talent.

At last, Dulcie slid the cakes into the oven, adding twigs to the fire. As the cakes baked, she flew outside for fresh air.

Catching a glimpse of Lily's colorful garden, she had a brilliant idea. She would put a candied flower on top of each of the cakes!

Lily was a garden-talent fairy, and her garden was two frog leaps away from the Home Tree. As Dulcie got closer, she could hear the buzz of bumblebees. The bees were collecting pollen from many different flowers—honeysuckle, wild roses, wisteria.

Lily was busy digging in the dirt when Dulcie approached her. "Dulcie! What a pleasant surprise," she said. "How can I help you?"

Dulcie explained about the candied flowers.

Lily leaned on the handle of her spade. "What a lovely idea!" She thought for a moment. "Here's what's in bloom. I've got tasty nasturtiums, some very pretty pansies, Johnny jump-ups, violets, yellow roses ..."

"Pansies, please," Dulcie said. Their smiling faces would be the perfect topping for her cakes.

"How many do you need?" Lily asked.

Dulcie thought about it. "I'll take ten," she decided.





Lily took her shears out of her pocket and headed over to a patch of purple and yellow pansies. When she was done cutting, she looked at the pile. "I gave my last basket to Dewberry. But I have another one in my house. I'll be right back."

"I'll go with you," said Dulcie.

Lily lived in a hollowed-out mushroom on one of the Home Tree's branches. Just as they reached her door, someone called out, "Yoo-hoo, Dulcie!"

Dulcie turned around. It was Marla, a cooking talent. "There you are! Do you have a moment?" she asked.

"Go ahead. I'll be out in a flash," said Lily, disappearing through her front door.

"We can't find the hazelnuts," Marla said. "Do you know where they are?"

"I'm pretty sure they're behind the barrel of sweet buttercup nectar," said Dulcie. "Otherwise, you can ..."

Her voice trailed off as a shadow passed over them. Dulcie looked up, shading her eyes from the sun.

A hawk was flying overhead. Dulcie shrank back against the side of Lily's house. Her heart skipped a beat. A hungry hawk would snatch up a fairy in an instant.

Then Dulcie saw that the hawk already had something clutched in its talons—a wriggling fish. The hawk was struggling to hold it. With a shriek, the hawk suddenly dropped its prey.

Dulcie gasped. The fish was falling right toward them!

She grabbed Marla's hand and they scrambled out of the way. The fish crashed into Lily's house tail first. Its head stuck out of the mushroom roof. Its mouth opened and closed silently.

"Lily!" Dulcie shouted.

She ran to the house. But just as she reached it, the door opened. Lily stepped out, blinking in confusion. Dulcie hugged her with relief.

"I was closing my closet door when I heard a big crash," the garden fairy said. "I turned around and there was a fish in my bedroom! What happened?"

"A hawk dropped a fish on your house," Marla explained.

Lily bit her lip. "Oh dear, is the fish okay?"

Just then, a team of animal-talent fairies arrived, led by Beck. They began crafting a sling out of blankets and sticks. In moments they had lifted the fish and were taking him directly to Havendish Stream. "He'll be fine!" Beck called back to her friends.



But Lily's house was not fine. Lily and Dulcie watched as the carpenter-talent fairies arrived and studied the damage. At last, they concluded that it was beyond repair. Lily needed a new house.

"How long do you think it will take to build?" Lily asked.

"There's no telling," said a carpenter-talent fairy named Cedar. "It won't be easy to find another mushroom this size. I'll speak to Queen Clarion about where you should live in the meantime."

"Oh, Lily," said Dulcie. "I'd fly backward if I could. You wouldn't have been in your house if I hadn't asked for those flowers. You almost got squashed because of me."

"Don't be silly," said Lily. "I'm fine."

But the very thought of Lily's close call sent shivers down Dulcie's spine. As the crowd drifted away, she headed back into the Home Tree, still shaken.

Marla walked with her. "I can't even imagine how scared—" She broke off and sniffed the air. "Hey, do you smell something burning?"

Oh no! The cakes! Dulcie had completely forgotten about them. She sprinted into the kitchen, opened the oven door, and began coughing as black smoke billowed out. She groaned. Her once-perfect cakes were now smoldering charcoal bricks.



Chapter 3

Mia stood at the kitchen counter flipping through a cookbook. There were so many different recipes. Butterscotch Bars. Black Forest Cake. S'mores Cake. Red Velvet Whoopie Pies. Pineapple Upside Down Cake ... The choices were delicious—and endless! How would she ever pick one?

Mia slammed the cookbook shut. She glanced at the clock. Kate and Lainey would be arriving soon so they could go to Pixie Hollow. But there was still time to try out a recipe, something easy.

Mia looked over at the fishbowl on the kitchen counter. The Vasquezes were fish-sitting for their neighbors, who were on vacation. Bubbles waved his long fins at her. He was remarkably friendly for a fish, Mia thought.

“I’ll make chocolate chip cookies,” she told him. “Easy peasy ... I hope.”

Mia found a bag of chocolate chips in the cupboard. She placed it on the counter and began to read the directions printed on the package. The directions said to measure, mix, and drop spoonfuls of dough onto cookie sheets. How hard could that be?

“‘Preheat oven to 375 degrees,’ ” Mia read aloud, turning the knob on the stove. Then she tied an apron around her waist and began pulling out bowls, a hand mixer, measuring spoons, and cups.

Mia carefully measured the dry ingredients—flour, baking soda, and salt—into a bowl. Then she added butter, eggs, white sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla to another bowl.



She read the next step. “ ‘Beat until creamy.’ ”

Mia plugged in the hand mixer, then realized that something was missing. “Where are those beat thingies?” she muttered. They weren’t in the utensil holder or the cutlery drawer. She finally found them in the dishwasher and tried to stick them into the mixer. But why wouldn’t they fit?

“It must be broken,” Mia groaned. Finally, she realized she was putting them into the wrong hole. There was a left hole and a right one. Mia locked them into place.

Once the sugar, butter, and eggs were blended, Mia added the dry ingredients. She’d meant to do it a little at a time, but she accidentally dumped it in all at once.

She turned the beaters on again, sending a puff of flour into the air. The mixer shook in her hands, but Mia kept at it until the batter started to take on a creamy cookie dough consistency. She was about to dump in the chocolate chips when she thought better of it. She pictured chopped-up pieces of chocolate chips flying everywhere! She shut off the hand mixer and stirred them in by hand instead.

It was hot in the kitchen. By the time she slid the cookie sheets into the oven, she was sweating. “Baking is hard,” she told Bubbles as she set the timer.

Soon the kitchen began to fill with a mouthwatering chocolatey aroma. *It won’t be long now.*

thought Mia.

Ding! Mia put on a pair of oven mitts and pulled out the trays, admiring her creations. The cookies really did look—and smell—delicious.

Gabby wandered into the kitchen. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the treats. “Yum! Cookies! You made them all by yourself?” she asked.

“I did!” said Mia. “But it wasn’t easy. I think they’re cool enough now. Let’s try one.”

She picked up two still-warm cookies and handed one to her sister.

Gabby bit into the cookie. She made a horrible face and raced over to the garbage can to spit out her mouthful.

“What’s the matter?” asked Mia. She took a bite, and her mouth flooded with a salty, metallic taste. Somehow managing to swallow, she put her cookie on the counter.

“Yucky, right?” Gabby said.

Mia was confused. What had gone wrong?

The back door opened.

“Hey, guys,” Kate said as she and Lainey walked into the kitchen. “Are you ready to go to . . .” Kate’s voice trailed off. “Cookies!” She grabbed one.

“Don’t do it!” Gabby warned.

Kate ignored her and took a huge bite. Right away she reached for a napkin to spit into. “Wow, that’s salty,” she said.





Mia sighed. "I don't understand. I followed the directions exactly."

Lainey picked up the empty chocolate chip package. "Did you accidentally put in too much salt?" she asked, studying the recipe on the back. "This recipe calls for one teaspoon."

Mia held up the measuring spoon. "Yeah, see? It has a big *T* on it. For teaspoon."

Lainey grimaced. "That's a tablespoon," she explained.

"I'm a disaster in the kitchen!" Mia wailed. "I'm just going to quit."

"No way!" cried Kate. "You have to beat the Taylor twins! I won't be able to live it down otherwise."

"Well, the cookies *look* amazing," said Lainey. "You're halfway there."

"But they've got to *taste* good, too," said Mia. "Let's face it, the Taylor twins are going to beat me and I won't help raise any money for the Davises."

"Too bad you don't have the baking talent," joked Gabby.

Lainey's eyes lit up. "Mia doesn't. But we know someone who does—Dulcie! We can ask her for advice as soon as we get to Pixie Hollow."

Mia felt a small glimmer of hope. "That's a great idea!" she said. "Come on, let's go!"

The four girls were about to head upstairs when Mia's mother appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Hold it right there!" Mrs. Vasquez said. "You're not going anywhere until this mess is cleaned up."

The girls looked around the kitchen. The counter was littered with eggshells, oily butter wrappers, dirty spoons, and sticky bowls.

With a sigh Mia tossed the cookies into the garbage and rolled up her sleeves. Even with her friends' help, this was going to take a while!



Chapter 4

“There,” said Dulcie as she finished drizzling melted chocolate on the last cream puff. She hoisted the platter of puffs onto her shoulder and made her way outside. Fairies and sparrow men were cleaning up the remains of Lily’s mushroom house. Dulcie walked around, offering cream puffs to everyone. Funny—none of the fairies were rushing up to grab one, like they usually did.

She paused for a moment and forced herself to take a look at Lily’s house. The roof had completely collapsed and the walls had started to sag. Fairies were removing the last of Lily’s belongings—her pollen collection and camellia pillows. They placed them on the grass beside the rest of her things.

Many fairies in Pixie Hollow were pitching in to help. Dulcie was lending a hand by doing what she did best—making tasty desserts. The workers needed to keep up their spirits and energy, she reasoned. And being busy in the kitchen helped her take her mind off the disaster.

“More desserts?” Cedar asked, without enthusiasm.

“Cream puffs,” Dulcie said, holding out the platter.

“Maybe later. You can just put it over there with the rest,” she said, pointing to a nearby table which was covered with platters of cakes, turnovers, cookies, and muffins that Dulcie had baked.

“Do you think there’s enough for everyone?” Dulcie asked.

Cedar chuckled. “Oh, I don’t think you need to worry about that.”

Dulcie scanned the table. Her sharp eyes noticed that a couple of treats had been taken. “Maybe I

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