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## *A Warm Welcome*

“Eggs, butter, flour, vanilla . . . ,” Maya repeated, going over and over the ingredients she needed for the cupcakes she wanted to bake. She was trotting down the big staircase in the Castle of Destiny, the school for Melowies.

Maya loved cooking more than anything, and being allowed inside the huge kitchen in the castle would be very exciting. Students



weren't normally allowed in there, but this was a special occasion. So that morning, Maya had jumped out of bed before the others were awake to ask Theodora, the school cook, for permission to bake cupcakes in the kitchen.

When she got to the kitchen door and heard a rattle of pots and pans on the other side, Maya was still going over the recipe: "Blend the butter and sugar, add the eggs . . ." She knocked, poked her head through the door, and smiled a big smile. "Good morning, Theodora! Do-you-think-I-could-use-the-kitchen-to-bake-some-cupcakes-please?"

Busy with a pie, the pegasus with the

cocoa-colored mane looked at her with a puzzled expression.

“I didn’t quite catch that, sweetheart, but good morning to you, too!” Theodora smiled.

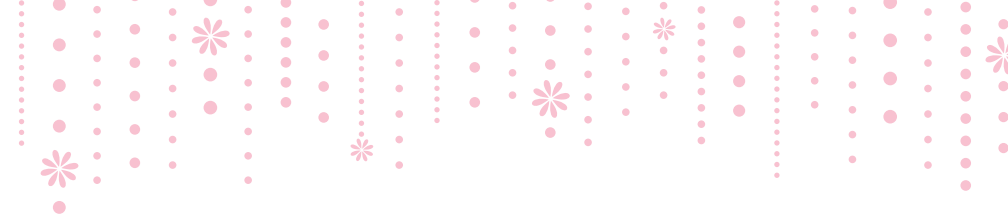


“Sorry, I’m a little nervous!” chuckled Maya. “Let me explain. My mom was a student at the Castle of Destiny a long time ago. Principal Gia has asked her to come back and talk to the students about her career as a healer. I know the kitchen is your place, but my mom is coming today, and I would really love to be able to make her something special!”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, dear!” exclaimed Theodora, squeezing Maya into a vanilla-scented hug. “What type of cupcakes were you thinking of making?”

“I was thinking of making her favorite,” Maya





said. She showed Theodora the recipe in her notebook. “I have a few—”

“Oh, sweetie, no. We do not use recipes in this kitchen. We let our noses be the guide.”

“B-b-but . . . ,” Maya stammered. “I don’t think I know how to do that.”

“Well, my dear, you are about to learn,” Theodora said, handing her a bowl.

Maya loved to cook and bake, but making cupcakes without a recipe to follow was impossible!

“Umm . . . do you think I should add more sugar?” she asked after she had blended a few ingredients together.

“Don’t ask me! Ask the batter!” Theodora answered.

Maya stared into the bowl. It was easy

enough to ask the question—any question, really—but she was pretty sure the batter wasn't going to talk back to her. At least not in a way she could understand.

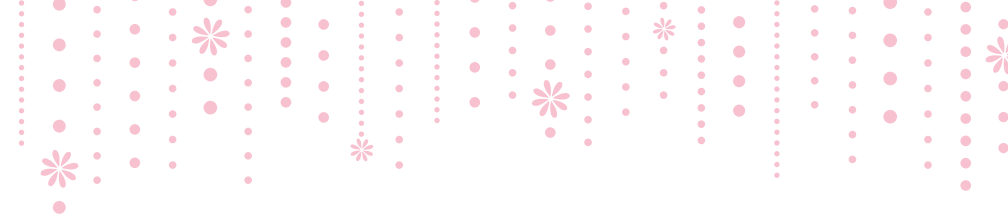
“What is it telling you?” Theodora asked.

“More sugar!” Maya announced, feeling very pleased with herself. She added a spoonful of sugar and stirred it in. Then she added a little more of this and a little bit of

that, smelling and tasting as she went. Soon she thought the mixture was ready to go into the oven.

“Wow, something smells





great!” cried Electra, who had just walked into the kitchen with Cora, Selena, and Cleo.

“What are you guys doing here?” Maya asked, surprised to see her roommates. Theodora ran over to hug Cleo, the Melowy she had raised after Principal Gia found her on the steps of the school.

“We have been looking everywhere for you, Maya,” Cleo said, escaping from Theodora’s sweet hugs. “You have to come with us now! Everything is ready for your mom’s arrival!”

“You go on ahead,” said Theodora, peeking into the oven. “I can finish up here.”

“Thank you so much! Let’s go!” Maya smiled. “I’m so ready to see her.”





