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Ann M. Martin

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Claudia is determined to find out who is sabotaging the entries in the baking contest.

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Author : Ann M. Martin

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Ciara says

mrs. goode's cookware is sponsoring a baking contest. there is an under-16 division & a 16-&-up division. people can enter individually or as teams. claudia's sweet tooth inspires her to enter the contest. she forms a team with mary anne (who is generally portrayed as a big fan of the domestic arts in all books except for that one where she almost failed home ec until she invented jello jigglers) & shea rodowsky (who is dyslexic, but good with numbers). claudia isn't necessarily much of a baker (& i call bullshit on that--as someone with a formidable sweet tooth, i can attest to the importance of being able to make your own snacks), but the baked goods in the contest will be judged on their beauty as well, & claudia is very interested in creating a beautiful cake.

other teams include logan, kerry, & some other random tertiary character; cokie mason, grace blume, & their secret weapon mari drabek (her dad owns maurice's, & mari has been baking since she was a little kid--which is actually a pretty cool back story); pete black & some other rando's; mr. johanssen; & a bunch of people from out of town. because so many out-of-towners, including parents, are coming in to compete, the baking contest has decided to offer child care. they call the babysitters club to provide this child care, & they ask that one of the sitters volunteer for the position of "cake cop," to help patrol the contest & make sure no one is cheating or sabotaging anyone. naturally, kristy is all over that job.

you may recall that when kristy worked as a security guard at the washington mall, she totally sucked at it & the mall kept getting robbed left & right. (yeah, i'm just gonna blame kristy.) well, kristy also sucks at being a cake cop. she only has to keep an eye on ten baking stations, & yet, all kinds of shenanigans ensue. someone fiddles with the oven controls in logan's statue, & his cake burns. someone swaps baking soda for baking powder at mari's station & her recipe boils out its pan & starts a small flour. someone swaps out claudia's bag of sugar for a bag of salt, almost wrecking her recipe. such forth & so on. claudia knows a mystery is afoot & starts keeping tabs on suspects.

meanwhile, in the child care area, a little girl named megan is wreaking all kinds of havoc. she breaks a terrarium & tries to stash the evidence. she steals something (i forget what). she does some other bad stuff. her little brother, kyle, rats her out every time, but is always like, "don't get mad. she's having a hard time since our parents split up." the babysitters notice that megan is completely blank & expressionless every time she admits to one of these crimes, & always accepts whatever punishments they dole out. i'm just going to cut to the chase because this subplot is weird: kyle is the one that was doing all the bad stuff. he's the one who has been acting out since their parents split up, & megan has been accepting the blame in some weird effort to protect him. at the end of the book, the babysitters make some comment about how kyle is a basically good kid who made some well-intentioned mistakes. um...what? how about he's a potentially good kid who is struggling a lot with the psychological impact of his parents splitting up, & he could really use some professional help? how about also there was nothing well-intentioned about anything he did, & none of it was a "mistake"? he knew that everything he was doing was wrong, but he did it anyway because he wanted to do bad things? what the fuck?

anyway, back to the baking contest sabotage story. claudia keeps inventing her own recipes (why she can't just find something that looks intriguing in a cookbook, i do not know) & of course they always look gorgeous & taste terrible. mary anne is all, "if only i knew my dead mother's top secret cheery chocolate cake recipe, we'd win the shit out of this contest." yuck. cherries? i guess some people like them. claudia helps

mary anne dig through the attic in pursuit of the recipe, & there's this long extended scene of exposition in which they recap the plot points of mary anne & the secret in the attic. talking about how mary anne's dad gave her away when she was a baby inspires mary anne to call her grandmother & see if she knows the recipe. but she is worried that her grandma won't call back in time for the contest semi-finals. are you on the edge of your seat? do you really think they would spend thirteen chapters hyping up this recipe, only to have mary anne fail to access it & therefore lose the contest? then you, my friend, don't know much about clunky foreshadowing!

the babysitters make a list of suspects that may be involved in the sabotage. at first, they think it's grace, just because grace is friends with cokie & cokie sucks. but then grace confronts claudia & accuses HER of the sabotage. so they rule each other out as suspects & instead join forces to find the real culprit. the book makes grace seem really likeable, actually. it also continues the myth that grace is a potentially decent person with a crappy friend in cokie, & that cokie has always wanted logan for herself. am i the only one that remembers that cokie tried to embarrass mary anne in mary anne & the bad luck mystery because GRACE had a crush on a logan? sheesh.

anyway, they also suspect some of the helicopter parents of other contestants. one contestant, julie, seems to have especially overbearing parents. apparently they own a bakery & will be shamed if julie doesn't win the contest. on the day of the finals, the babysitters happen to be standing around in the parking lot when julie drives up with marty, the contest emcee, in her passenger seat. they emerge from the car & share a romantic kiss before going their separate ways. the babysitters wonder if maybe marty is behind the sabotage, trying to ensure that julie wins the contest.

they arrange an elaborate trap. mary anne's grandma does indeed come through with the cherry chocolate cake recipe. they whip it up & bake it in grace & mari's oven. they then cover their own station in a fine coating of flour & arrange to leave the station at the same time, leaving themselves open to potential sabotage. they balance a mirror on top of grace's oven so they can watch their own station with their backs turned to it. sure enough, they see marty creeping into their station & messing with the controls on their oven. he then looks down & sees that he is covered in flour. claudia has arranged for a contest judge to join her in the stake-out, so marty is swiftly confronted & fesses up to all the sabotage. he explains that he is dating julie (who is actually older than 16--marty is like college-aged) & wanted her to win so her parents would back off & let her spend more time with him. which makes pretty much no sense as a motive, but...whatever.

once marty is escorted from the premises, the judges try all the baked goods & declare claudia's team the winners.

i think the only reason i gave this book three stars is because i like claudia so much. her narration always cracks me up. while she is explaining the first instance of sabotage against her team, she details why everyone was away from the work station. she's like, "mary anne was washing a bowl, shea was getting some water, & i...was flirting with these cute boys at the next station." hilarious.

Amie says

I distinctly remember learning the word 'sabotage' from this book. I loved it as a kid, and I appreciated it even more now, what with all my baking show judging experience. A light, fun, fast read.

Maria Elmvang says

I know the BSC books are as tacky as anything, but still my main reaction to a book shouldn't be an incredulous "Oh, come ON!" Claudia, the non-cook, trying to come up with her own recipes for a contest, rather than using something tried and tested by Mary Anne? Really? Riiiiight...

Shira says

in this great british bake off themed mystery (I kid cause I love) by mystery ghostwriter extraordinaire Ellen Miles, there is a local baking competition for adults (aka people age 16+...not sure why that counts as adults) and because they needed to make it more relevant to the bsc story there is one for kids too. the bsc are hired to run a daycare for the kids of the competitors (and subsequently help the kids run a mini-restaurant), plus some of the members participate in the contest (claudia, mary anne, and shea rodowsky are the team we are expected to root for -- they're ~~freinds~~ friends after all) and kristy is a "cake cop" because kristy is really good at getting people to put her in positions of authority. someone starts sabotaging people's bakes in the kids' competition, and it turns out that it's the intern helping out with the contest who is also the boyfriend of someone who was competing (who by the way was way older than 16 in the first place and therefore disqualified to begin with) -- it's honestly a really dumb resolution. meanwhile claudia thinks that baking is about making things look pretty, but she doesn't know how to make them taste good, but their team ends up winning with mary anne's mom's recipe for chocolate cherry cake that mary anne's grandmother alma comes through with in the last possible second.

highlights

-I have fond memories of a bsc plotline where jamie newton is looking at claudia's charm anklet (she doesn't wear it as a bracelet because that's too normal for claud) and claudia describes herself using the charms, and then subsequently describes the bsc members using charms. I was beginning to think I'd made the whole thing up, but sure enough, it happened in this book! see the charms claud came up with for the bsc members below

-oh it's not actually like the great british bake off. you can just make the same thing every day and perfect your recipe, or you can try new things. I would think the judges would get bored of the same thing, but I like this baking contest format -- does this really happen?

-grace blume (cookie's best friend) is actually pretty cool and is down to help solve the mystery -- she even likes nancy drew books!

-there are twins in the daycare named tyler and taylor. ah, the 1990s.

lowlights

-seriously kristy, get over yourself. you're not good at being a cop -- remember when you worked for the security office at the mall (Stacey and the Mystery at the Mall) and it took you forever to solve the mystery of the shoplifting? also cops suck, politicians suck...I want a better future for you, my type a friend kristy.

-megan and kyle plotline: a mini-mystery involves bad things happening in the daycare (an aquarium is smashed, etc) and a girl named megan getting blamed. she never seems to care that she's getting blamed and casually agrees that she did these things. turns out it was her brother who is reeling from his parents' divorce (yes, the divorce of your parents is enough to cause you to develop antisocial personality disorder...) and kept blaming his sister. this is a tough plotline handled SO POORLY. see more examples below!

-megan says about taking the blame for kyle's bad behavior: "I was afraid that if I didn't, he'd get in trouble, and then maybe he'd try to run away again. he did that once already." woof. WOOF.

-the resolution to the kyle plotline: "he's going to be just fine...once he recovers from eating four peanut butter sandwiches!" double woof. TRIPLE WOOF.

-mary anne and claudia and shea did NOT come up with this cake recipe. they act like it's theirs, but really it's mary anne's mom's recipe. sure, they execute it well, but it still seems weird.

-IT'S A CLAUDIA BOOK. WHY IN THE WORLD AREN'T THERE OUTFIT DESCRIPTIONS? there are a handful of accessory descriptions (the aforementioned charm bracelet, a chef's hat claud hand-painted, etc) but no full outfits. AUURRRGGHHHHH!

claudia's charms:

- crayon (for art)
- crane (for japanese heritage)
- hersheys kiss (for junk food)
- book (for nancy drew/mysteries)
- credit card (for shopping)

charms for bsc members:

- kristy: baseball
- mary anne: kitten
- dawn: sunglasses
- stacey: empire state building
- jessi: toe shoe
- mal: pencil
- logan: soccer ball
- shannon: comedy/drama masks

kid restaurant menu:

- peanut butter sandwiches w/ additions (honey, fluff, fruit, etc) that can be cut into the shape of a star, heart, or gingerbread man
- bug salad (pear with carrot curls for legs and raisins for eyes)
- jello jigglers in assorted shapes
- popcorn w/ parmesan or cinnamon sugar
- drinks: kool-aid, lemonade, or juice

snacks in claudia's room:

- strawberry fruit leather under her bed
- twizzlers under her pillow
- smartfood in her night table drawer
- fritos under her bed
- m&ms in her sock drawer
- twizzlers behind the dictionary on her desk

no outfit descriptions.

Alex says

For some reason this was always a favorite mystery of mine, and I still highly enjoyed reading it now. I loved the baking contest and I loved seeing a new (awesome) side to Grace Blume, but I will admit that the subplot with Kyle and Megan is handled extremely poorly. Sorry, but a hug and a chat with their mom isn't the solution, those kids need real professional help.

Oh, and I just love Claudia's reaction to having a cordless phone. "I could pick something up from the fridge, then WALK OUTSIDE and grill it, all while talking to you!" Haha. Just wait until she discovers cell phones!

Samantha says

I actually liked this one! It's a Claudia book though, and they're always a little bit funny and quirky and that makes them a lot more enjoyable. The plot of this one isn't totally silly either, because I really could see some dippy high school boy doing something this stupid because of some girl he likes.

Also because once at a high school art show someone stole my sisters entry right off the table. It was a huge, gorgeous wreath that she had worked really hard on. So I have first hand experience with high school kids being douchebag dream destroyers.

Kathy says

the babysitters club was my favorite series growing up.

Ds says

ITA-ENG

Carino questo mystery, ho apprezzato molto il tema della cucina. Complimenti a Claudia, meno rompiscatole del solito. Inconcludente la vicenda di Tyler e sua sorella, liquidata senza mostrare la parte più importante. Il ricordo della mamma di Mary Anne ritorna sottoforma di ricetta speciale e addirittura si stringono alleanze inaspettate durante la competizione. Cosa è mancato? La consueta descrizione degli abiti pazzi di Claudia. Ma me ne farò una ragione.

Cute mystery, I loved the cooking competition setting. Congrats to Claudia, who was less annoying than usual. Tyler's story with his sister was inconclusive, it was settled without even showing the most important part. The memory of Mary Anne's mom comes back through a special recipe and the girls enter into an unexpected alliance during the competition. What did the book miss? The usual description of Claudia's crazy outfits. But I suppose I'll get over it.

Lisa says

Claudia is determined to find out who is sabotaging the entries in the baking contest.

