

Cupcake Conundrum



By Heather E. Schwartz
Illustrated by Shiane Salabie

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Chapter One



A GREAT IDEA

Jazmine could hardly wait to see Mrs. Gupta and explain her idea. But a stranger was blocking her classroom doorway.

“I am Miss Parks,” she explained. “I’ll be your substitute teacher this week.”

“All week?” Jazmine asked. “But we’re supposed to share our newspaper articles today!”

“Don’t worry, we will,” Miss Parks said.

After math, it was time for current events. Jazmine waved her arm wildly.

“All right, you may go first,” Miss Parks said.

Kx Yy Zz

READING



Jazmine walked to the front of the room. Before she started reading, she turned to Miss Parks.

“Last week, my article was about how a tree fell on the roof of the homeless shelter,” she explained. “This article is about a fundraising event they’re having on Saturday to fix the roof.”



Jazmine read her article to the class. The last sentence said they still needed people to help. That was the part that had her so excited.

“Could our class help?” she asked. “I bet we could raise a lot of money!”

Miss Parks shook her head. “I’m afraid we have to stick to the schedule that Mrs. Gupta left for me,” she said.

While the other students read their articles, Jazmine couldn’t even listen. All she could think about was the shelter. She really wanted to help. Mrs. Gupta would have understood.

During recess, Jazmine’s friends tried to cheer her up.

“I’m sure the shelter will raise enough money without us,” Mia said.

“Other people will help,” Isabella agreed.

Jazmine wished she could easily explain why this cause meant so much to her. It was complicated. But, they were good friends. Maybe she should try.

“Last year, my family stayed at that shelter,” she said, looking at the ground. “This was before my mom found a job and we moved into our apartment.”

Her friends were quiet for a moment.

“I had no idea,” Mia said. “I can’t imagine what that was like for you. I can see why this means so much to you. If they helped you, we *have* to help them!” She and Isabella gave Jazmine a big hug.

“Come over after school,” said Isabella. “We’ll think of a way to raise money.”

“Thank you for understanding,” Jazmine said as she wiped away some tears. “I was nervous to tell you because it was a really hard thing to go through.”

“It sounds like it,” Isabella said. “I’m sorry you went through that!”

“Thanks,” Jazmine said. “I can’t come over today, though. My sister is taking me to the grocery store to buy cupcake ingredients for my mom’s birthday.”

“That’s it!” Mia said excitedly. “We can make and sell cupcakes at the shelter’s fundraising event!”



Chapter Two



MONEY TROUBLE

As they lined up after recess, Jazmine said, “That’s a great idea! A box of mix makes 24 cupcakes. My family only needs 12. So if we get 2 boxes, we can make 48 and sell 36 of them.”

“OK, perfect. What should we charge? One dollar each?” Mia asked.

“That seems fair. So \$1 times 36 cupcakes would make \$36,” Isabella said.

“That’s a lot of money,” Jazmine said. “And we’ll give it all to the shelter!”

When Jazmine got home from school, her sister, Raquel, was waiting.





“Ready to go?” Raquel asked.

“Um, I need a few minutes to get ready,” Jazmine said. Truthfully, she was waiting for her friends to arrive. And she needed to convince Raquel to bring them along. Then, someone rang the doorbell.

“What are you two doing here?” Raquel asked after opening the door. “Jazmine, aren’t you coming to the store with me?”

“We all want to go!” Mia said.

“We’re going to sell 36 cupcakes!” Isabella added.

Jazmine quickly explained their idea, and Raquel loved it.

“Sure, I’ll take everyone,” she agreed. “Do you have your cash with you?”

When she saw the girls’ faces, Raquel laughed. “I’m guessing you forgot that detail,” she said.

“I’ll lend some money to the cause. But you have to pay me back from the sales.”

“No problem!” Jazmine said, relieved. Her friends nodded.

At the store, Raquel took a cart for groceries. “Meet me at the registers in 20 minutes,” she said, pushing the cart with one hand. In her other hand, she had her phone open to a calculator app to add up her costs.



Jazmine and her friends headed to the baking aisle.

“Ooh, chocolate!” Mia said, grabbing two boxes of mix.

“Fudge marble,” Isabella said, reaching for another two boxes. “And orange frosting!”

“We can’t forget baking cups,” Jazmine added. As she chose a pack of 50 fancy cups in rainbow colors, she saw a shiny cupcake pan nearby. “We might need this, too.”



They chose a large, blue tray to display the treats.

“What about sprinkles and candy flowers?” Mia asked.

“Let’s get them!” Isabella said joyfully. “We want these cupcakes to look good enough to—”

“To eat?” Mia finished.

“No, to buy!” Jazmine said, laughing.

At the register, Raquel gaped at what they added to the cart. She frowned as she read the price stickers and added up the cost on her phone’s calculator app.

“It’s about \$65 worth of stuff,” she said. “I can’t lend you that much money.”

Jazmine could see her friends were upset. For a second, she thought they were disappointed her sister didn’t have more money to lend. But that wasn’t it.





Isabella was calculating in her head. “If we spend \$65 but only make \$36, there will be no money left for the shelter,” she said.

Mia nodded. “It costs too much to make cupcakes,” she agreed. “We would be in debt.”

Jazmine handed her sister the mix and frosting for their mother’s birthday cupcakes. While Raquel paid, the girls put everything else back on the shelves. Mia sighed.

Jazmine blinked back tears. “Well, at least we tried,” she said, attempting to sound upbeat.

Chapter Three



CALCULATING COSTS

After dinner, Jazmine and her sister needed to find a way to get their mother out of the kitchen. That way, they could bake her birthday cupcakes.

“You girls certainly are eager to clean the dishes,” their mother said, laughing. “I won’t complain about that.”

As soon as she left, Jazmine reached for the cupcake mix they’d hidden in the cabinet. She read the price sticker.

“This costs 1 dollar and 50 cents,” she said. She started a list of the costs.



The recipe needed three eggs. While Raquel added them to the bowl, Jazmine checked the total cost of a dozen eggs. It was \$3. She divided \$3 by 12 to find the cost of each egg. They cost 25 cents each. She multiplied 25 cents by 3 to find the cost of three eggs. The total was 75 cents. She added that to \$1.50.

“Put the baking cups in the pan, and I’ll scoop,” Raquel said.



Jazmine reached for the baking cups. Her family had a huge stack of them. They couldn't cost more than a few cents each. They had plenty left for their batch of 24 cupcakes. She placed one in each spot in their old cupcake pans. Raquel poured in the batter, filling the cups halfway. Then, she slid the pan into the oven.

Jazmine added the cost of the frosting—\$2.00—and read her total aloud. “The ingredients for these 24 cupcakes only cost \$4.25. If we sold them for \$1 each, we'd earn \$24. We could pay for the ingredients and still give almost \$20 to the shelter,” she said.

She looked up at her sister. “Why did the math work out so differently at the store?” she wondered.

“Think about all that stuff you added to the cart,” Raquel said. “You didn't even need to buy baking cups since we already had some!”



Jazmine thought about the filled cart from earlier that afternoon. She imagined the shiny cupcake pan and the fancy baking cups.

“I guess it doesn’t make sense to buy new things if we already have them at home,” she said. “But I did really want those sprinkles and candy flowers.”

“We can try to find some that are cheaper,” Raquel suggested.

Jazmine jumped up from her seat. “We can make this work!” she said. “We can still help the shelter!”



Chapter Four



PROBLEM SOLVED!

After celebrating her mother's birthday, Jazmine took two cupcakes off the plate.

“Is it all right if I take these to Mia and Isabella?” she asked. Her mother said that was fine.

Jazmine went to Mia's apartment first. “Would you like a cupcake?” she asked when Mia opened the door.

Mia nodded eagerly. Then, Jazmine added, “That'll be \$2.80, please!”

“For one cupcake? I thought we agreed \$1 was a good price,” Mia protested.



Jazmine laughed. “I was just joking,” she explained. “But I did the math. If we had bought everything we found at the store, we would have had to charge that much to get close to giving \$36 to the shelter.”

“Interesting,” Mia said. “But didn’t we already decide making cupcakes is too expensive?”

“It’s not!” Jazmine told her excitedly. “Come on. I’ll explain on the way.”

Jazmine told Mia how she’d figured out all sorts of ways to save money. By the time they got to Isabella’s house, Mia was excited, too. The plan was back on!

At Isabella’s, Jazmine held out the cupcake. Mia announced the price.

“That’s too much!” Isabella said. “We’re friends. Can’t I get a discount?”

Jazmine and Mia giggled and began to explain.

“There are so many ways to save,” Isabella agreed when they were through. “If we do this right, we could make even more than \$36 for the shelter. We just have to spend less and make more cupcakes!”

On Saturday morning, the girls stood behind a table on the lawn of the shelter. Colorful cupcakes took up nearly every inch of the tabletop. There was a line of customers in front of them. Best of all, if they sold them all, they could give \$76 to the shelter.





“How many do you have here?” a woman asked as she handed Mia one dollar for a cupcake.

“We made 96 cupcakes,” Jazmine said happily. “And we only spent \$20!”

“You girls must have worked very hard,” the woman said before taking a bite.

“Delicious!”

Jazmine thought of the fun they’d had baking in her kitchen together. “It was no problem,” she answered.

But her friends disagreed.

“Sure it was,” Mia said with a sly smile on her face. Isabella nodded.

Jazmine quickly caught on. She smiled back at her friends.

“Actually, it *was* a problem,” she said, “a math problem. And we solved it!”

About Us

The Author

Heather E. Schwartz lives and writes in upstate New York. She likes to ski, act, and sing. Her favorite cupcakes are yellow cake with chocolate frosting.

The Illustrator

Shiane Salabie was born in Jamaica and grew up in South Jersey. Other than drawing, she likes to dance, play video games, and bake. Her favorite cupcake has champagne-flavored cake with sea salt caramel frosting.

Book Club Questions

1. Why does Jazmine want to help the shelter?
2. How does Jazmine solve the problem?
3. What lesson do the three girls learn?
4. How does the author help you learn about careful spending?

Cupcake Conundrum

Jazmine and her friends want to bake and sell cupcakes to earn money for a good cause. But they run into problems when they learn their plan will cost money, too.

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