



Down in Flames

"You know, this dance would be totally great," Marco says as he takes a cupcake from the platter I brought, "if it weren't so much like an execution."

"Tell me about it." The boys are lined up against one wall of the gym; the girls are lined up against the other. The refreshments table and decorations are the only clues that we're not here for a game of dodgeball. "The music here is better than at most executions, though."

"What flavor is this?" Marco asks, taking another bite of cupcake.

"Pistachio-rosewater."

"Weird, but good," he pronounces. Then he pulls a small

video camera from his pocket and trains it on the cupcake. “Pistachio-rosewater cupcakes by Hayley Hicks,” he narrates, then swings the camera to face me. “How did you come up with this flavor, Hayley?”

I’m not sure how to answer this. I mean, I came up with it in my mind. “Through the power of pistachio nuts?”

“Hayley! C’mere!” In a corner, I see Meghan pointing with one hand and waving at me with the other. She’s standing halfway underneath the bleachers.

“You’ll be sorry,” Marco says as he aims his video cam at Meghan.

“I usually am,” I tell him, but I go over to join Meghan, anyway.

“Guess what this is!” Meghan says, pointing to a black metal box-like thing.

“Does it take dental X-rays?” I ask.

“It’s a fog machine!” Meghan crows. She does a goofy little jig. She’s wearing a pink dress with white polka dots and turquoise tights, and her bangs are a matching shade of pink. She looks like a crazy tropical bird doing a peculiar mating dance.

“You brought a fog machine to the Winter Dance?”