



**THE DOS AND  
DONUTS OF LOVE**



ONE

## *This Cookie Won't Crumble*

I KNOW THINGS ARE BAD WHEN EVEN DONUTS BETRAY ME. BECAUSE there I am, sitting on my bed, rewatching every episode of *The Great British Bake Off* on Netflix, a box of six donuts from You Drive Me Glazy on my bedside table. Six donuts that I helped Ammu and Abbu create. And the moment I bite into the first, hazelnut filling gushes out all over the front of my shirt.

I can only groan and pull myself off the bed where I had finally found a comfortable position. The judges of *GBBO* are on my laptop screen explaining the challenge to the contestants, but I'm a little too busy slipping out of my gross chocolate-stained shirt to pay attention.

My phone buzzes by the box of donuts, and my heart almost leaps out of my chest. Tossing my shirt on the floor, I lunge toward the phone, hoping—

But it's just a text from Fatima.

Fatima: can I call?

I don't reply. Instead, I slip on a new shirt—one without any hazelnut filling on it—close the lid of my laptop, and hit VIDEO CALL.

Fatima picks up almost immediately. There's a grin on her

face but she says, “You look terrible” as a greeting. There’s something almost delirious about that being accompanied by Fatima’s delighted expression.

I pull a face and tug at the strands of my hair, trying to shift them into something that doesn’t make it obvious that I’ve spent the past few days barely moving from under my duvet cover.

“Thanks, Fatima.”

“Sorry.” But she doesn’t sound particularly sorry as she flicks away a strand of her long, ink black hair out of her eyes. “Are you still in bed?” There’s an accusatory note to her voice, so I try to fill the whole screen with my face so she can’t see that not only am I in bed but that my bed is also a mess. Plus, the half a dozen donuts still by my bedside.

“No . . .”

I obviously don’t sound very believable because Fatima lets out a frustrated puff of air. “Shireen, I know things haven’t been easy but you can’t just, you know—” She waves her hands around her like that’s supposed to indicate something. But somehow I know exactly what she means.

“Why did you call?” I ask, instead of addressing Fatima’s pretty valid points.

“Because I read your blog post,” Fatima says.

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” She leans forward so I can almost see up her nostril. Not a pleasant sight by any means but considering I’ve known Fatima pretty much since I came out of the womb not an unfamiliar sight either. “First of all, I hope you saved me some cookie dough, brownie ice-cream sandwiches because it’s so bloody hot

here that just the thought of them made me seriously consider buying a plane ticket and fleeing this country.”

“Fati—”

She holds up a finger to silence me. “But secondly, and most importantly, you can’t tell people in your blog that you’re not going to crumble because of your breakup but then spend all of your time in your bed, watching what? Episodes of *The Great British Bake Off*?” She raises an eyebrow, and I’m annoyed that she’s guessed exactly how I’ve spent the past few weeks. Ever since . . .

But that’s the last thing I want to think about, even though it’s difficult to not think about it. And it’s definitely the last thing I want to talk about.

“*The Great British Bake Off* makes me feel better!” I say defensively. In fact, with Fatima gone to Bangladesh for the summer and my ex suddenly out of the picture, it’s the only thing that makes me feel better. Well, that and donuts, when they’re not leaking out all over my shirt.

“You know what else makes people feel better?” Fatima asks. “Getting out of bed, going outside, taking in the sun, hanging out with real-life people not people inside your computer screen.”

“First of all, you know living in Ireland means taking in the sun is not an option, and secondly, Nadiya Hussain, the only successful Bangladeshi person in the food industry, is a real-life person, even if she is inside my computer screen, and she’s way more inspiring and motivating than any real-life person can be.”

“Even me?” Fatima asks, though I know from the almost inhuman screech in her voice that she’s not being serious.

I roll my eyes. “Okay, not counting you.”

She smiles, though there’s still a little bit of worry in her eyes. “You can’t spend the whole summer like this, Shireen,” she says after a moment. Softer, this time, so I know she’s really worried about me. When there’s really nothing to worry about. Because I’m okay—or I’m going to be. Like I declared in my blog post—this cookie (and I’m the cookie) won’t crumble. Even if it might get a bit disheveled.

“I’m definitely not going to spend the whole summer like this,” I say, but Fatima doesn’t exactly look reassured. “Tell me about Bangladesh.”

Fatima sighs and leans back. “Did I tell you about the heat?”

“I have a thousand texts ever since you got off the plane.”

“And the noise. Even at night!”

“Literally a thousand texts since you—”

“And everyone tells me that I speak Bengali with an accent. My cousins literally called me a bideshi. Me, a bideshi!” she says, like the idea of it is preposterous even though Fatima had never even stepped foot inside Bangladesh until a few days ago. It is a little funny that so many of us South Asians call ourselves desi, but the people in our homelands are quick to call us bideshi, just because we don’t live in South Asia anymore. Because we have a different kind of culture, a different kind of life.

“You know, even Ammu says she gets called bideshi in Bangladesh,” I say, hoping it’ll make Fatima feel a little better. “And she was born there, went to school there, spent pretty much her entire life there.”

“Until she decided to move to Ireland. And we shouldn’t be punished because our parents wanted that life for us!”

I let out a chuckle, but even I know it sounds hollower than usual. Before Fatima can jump in her worry wagon once more, I launch into the only thing (other than *GBBO*) that has been keeping me occupied this summer. “I should be hearing about the *Junior Irish Baking Show* soon.”

“Shireen, don’t get your hopes up,” Fatima says. I know she means well. She doesn’t want me to face crushing disappointment. But I know there’s no way I’ll face crushing disappointment. There’s nobody more qualified to be on the show. They *have* to accept me as one of their contestants.

“I know it’s your dream to open up your own dessert shop,” Fatima keeps going. “And to have your own cookbook and your own baking show, but reality TV is . . . complex.” She says it like she knows a lot about reality TV, when Fatima has never even watched a single episode of *GBBO* or *Cake Wars* or *Nailed It!* Not even *Love Island*.

“I’m not getting my hopes up,” I say. “My hopes are exactly where they should be.”

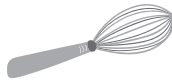
Fatima sighs like I’m a lost cause and begins to tell me all about her annoying cousins and all of the ways in which she’s made to feel like a bideshi in her own family. From not understanding all of the Bengali words that her cousins use to all of their in-jokes and references that she doesn’t have a hope of getting. “And Ammu gets annoyed if I’m not always hanging out with them, even though they’re horrible to me.”

I'm about to point out that having in-jokes and references aren't exactly targeted harassment against Fatima, but then my phone pings loudly. This time, it's not a text. It's an email notification.

"Hello? Shireen?" Fatima asks, a little too close to her camera once more. "You still there? Did the screen freeze?"

"I got an email," I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "I'll call you back, okay?" I can tell Fatima's about to say something else from the way she parts her lips, but I hang up the call before she has the chance. Instead, I stare at the notification bar on my phone. Because it's not just *an* email. It's *the* email.

From the *Junior Irish Baking Show*.



*From: Clare Farrin <junioririshbakingshow@ietv.ie>  
To: Shireen Malik <shireenbakescakes@gmail.com>*

Dear Shireen,

Thank you so much for submitting your audition video and application form to participate in the Junior Irish Baking Show. We loved your audition and would be delighted to offer you a place in the competition.

Though we won't be filming the first segment of the competition until the last week of June, we are inviting all participants to the IETV studio at Donnybrook

for a chance to meet the hosts and judges, along with their fellow participants, and for a chance to get to know the format of the show.

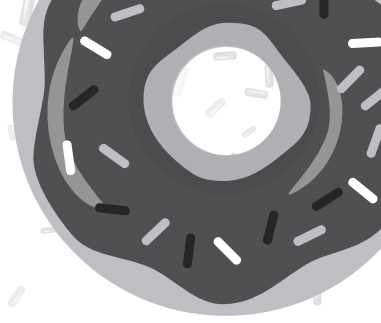
As it is the first year the show will be aired, we are very excited to get started.

Please, let us know if you can be in attendance on Thursday, the fifteenth of June at 5:30 p.m. Refreshments and finger food will be served.

Kind regards,  
Clare Farrin

TWO

## Sweet Dreams



I'M IN.

I'm in!

*I'm in!*

I don't think I've known true happiness until this exact moment. Until I opened my email and read the words *loved* and *delighted* and *offer*. I do a little happy jig right in my bedroom, and it's all I can do to contain myself for long enough to shoot out a text to Fatima.

I GOT IN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

She texts back with even more exclamation marks: OH MY GOD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I put down my phone and fling myself onto my bed, and I'm not even sure why. But as I lay there staring up at my ceiling and smiling so hard that my muscles feel sore, I think it's because there's too much adrenaline pulsing through my body. And lying here makes my heart rate slowly return to normal. I definitely can't tell Ammu and Abbu the news while I'm grinning like a total lunatic. So I try to stop smiling, and as hard as it is I do achieve it!

I can hear the buzz of the TV downstairs as I pull open my

door. Ammu and Abbu are watching a Bollywood movie if the upbeat song is anything to go by. Ammu and Abbu don't have a lot of time to relax. They both give so much to our donut shop in town, You Drive Me Glazy. So, I feel a little bad about the idea of interrupting their only few hours hanging out together, away from donuts and customers and finances. Away from *me*.

But . . .

This is a pretty special occasion, so I don't feel that bad as I skip into the sitting room and flash my parents a bright—but not too bright—smile.

“Guess what?” I ask, waving my arms around as they both try to squint past me at the TV screen I'm blocking.

“Shireen, move!” Ammu says, motioning for me to get out of the way.

“The fighting scene is about to start!” Abbu exclaims, like we don't all know his favorite scenes from Bollywood movies are the romantic ones. He even sheds a few secret tears when he watches them. And when he watches *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, well, his tears are not so secret.

“This is important!” I say. “Pause the movie.”

“Ish, Shireen,” Ammu groans. Still, she grabs hold of the remote control and presses the PAUSE button.

“Is it an emergency? Are you okay? Are you hurt?” Abbu asks.

“I'm fine, Abbu. I said *important* not *emergency*. I have good news!”

Ammu and Abbu exchange a worried glance between them.

“Okay?,” they mumble in unison.

“Can’t you guess what it is?” I urge.

“Ish, Shireen, just tell us. We want to go back to the movie,” says Ammu, glancing longingly at the TV screen behind me where Katrina Kaif is frozen mid-dance, wearing a sparkly midriff-baring dress.

“I got an email from the *Junior Irish Baking Show*,” I say slowly, trying to rile up the anticipation. But my parents just look at me with blank expressions. “I got in! I’m going to be a participant!”

They share another look between them. This one is less confusion and more completely unreadable to me. They’ve been married for so long that I’m pretty sure they have their own secret language, one that only needs short glances exchanged.

“Congratulations,” Ammu says, though it doesn’t sound very congratulatory at all.

“We’re very proud of you,” Abbu says, his voice a little too flat.

“You can do better than that. This is an amazing opportunity and not just for me,” I say. “For You Drive Me Glazy too. Imagine!” I throw my hands in front of me, hoping my parents can see the future I’m envisioning for us. “We can put a sign at the front: YOU DRIVE ME GLAZY, WHERE THE WINNER OF THE FIRST-EVER JUNIOR IRISH BAKING SHOW MAKES DONUTS. WHERE SHE LEARNED EVERYTHING SHE KNOWS. And we’ll have customers from all over Dublin. No, all over Ireland. No, all over the *world* flocking into the shop, buying up every donut they can just because I—”

“Shireen,” Abbu interrupts. “It’s an amazing opportunity but are you sure you’re ready for this?”

Some of my excitement dissipates. I feel like a balloon that Abbu has just let the air out of with those words.

“Why wouldn’t I be ready? If I wasn’t ready, I wouldn’t have applied. I’m a good baker.” I can’t have Ammu and Abbu, the two people who have always supported me through everything, not believe in me.

“You’ve just been so down lately,” Ammu adds, like that’s an explanation. “You skipped work last week because, you said, ‘I can’t be around donuts right now.’”

“And when you’re not at work, you’re up in your room in your bed. Doing nothing,” Abbu points out.

“I’m doing something,” I say. I can’t believe they would suggest rewatching *GBBO* for the millionth time is nothing.

“It’s just . . . everything started after you applied to the baking show and we don’t want you to stress yourself out. Being on TV, on a reality show, we know it’ll be difficult. Stressful. We don’t want you to feel bad about yourself if things don’t work out the way you think they will.”

“You don’t think I’ll win?” I ask. Just minutes ago, Fatima was asking me not to get my hopes up about even getting in, and now Ammu and Abbu are doubting my baking abilities. I know they all mean well, but somehow it feels like a personal affront. Like they’re telling me I’m not good enough when I know that I am.

“We know you can win,” Ammu says. “But it’s not just about winning. What was the thing with the donuts?”

I obviously can’t tell Ammu why that particular day I had become completely donut averse, so I just shrug my shoulders.

“Shireen, you’re perfect the way you are. We don’t want you to think you have to be different to be on some TV show. Or that you *have* to be on a TV show or that—”

I groan, realization finally dawning on me. It’s funny that Ammu and Abbu can never say the word *fat* or that they talk circles around weight with me. Especially because for the most part, Bangladeshi people love talking about people losing weight or gaining weight. People being too fat or too thin. Sometimes, I’ll go to a Bangladeshi dawat, and an aunty that I’ve spoken to only once before will comment about how pretty I would be if I just lost a few kilos. Like prettiness and weight are all tied up together. In Bangladeshi culture, I guess they are.

But Ammu and Abbu, they’ve come around to the fact that I’m happy with who I am. I love it, even. Though other people always criticize them for “letting me get fat,” they try their best to not let me hear that kind of stuff anymore.

And now, they think I was avoiding donuts because the possibility of going on TV is making me think I need to lose weight. When that’s the last thing on my mind.

“I don’t want to change or lose weight,” I say to my parents now, not sure how to make them believe me when I can’t really explain to them why I’ve spent the past few weeks with an on-again, off-again relationship with donuts and with baking shows and my bed as my only company. “It’s just been . . . I’ve just . . . I miss Fatima.” I nod, because that seems kind of believable I think, even though my parents are looking more confused than ever. “If she were here, we would be spending our summer together. We would be going to the park and the movies and

doing all kinds of things. So, without her I guess I've just been a little . . . sad."

Ammu and Abbu exchange another glance. If I'm not mistaken, they almost look like they believe me.

"But this show is going to make things better, see?" I say, pasting a grin on my face again. "I'm already feeling better. Excited! Now I have something to do with my summer. Something to look forward to every day."

"And you won't let this stress you out too much?" Ammu asks.

"Psh," I say, waving my hand like I have never been stressed out a day in my life.

"And you'll talk to us if this show isn't what you expected or doesn't go as you hoped or stresses you out?" asks Abbu with a raised eyebrow.

"Obviously!" I exclaim, as if I haven't been hiding a massive secret from them for the past year.

"Good, then congratulations, Shireen. We know you're going to be amazing on the *Junior Irish Baking Show*." And this time, they say it like they really mean it.



THREE

## All Zest Up

IN ALL MY EXCITEMENT, I HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN THAT BEING ON the *Junior Irish Baking Show* poses a pretty huge problem: I have absolutely nothing to wear!

“You have a wardrobe full of clothes!” Fatima cries out through the phone when I tell her about my dilemma.

“But nothing worthy of being on TV, to be viewed nationally.”

“Hey, I’m going to be watching from Bangladesh. So, you’ll be viewed internationally.”

“That makes it so much worse!” I cry, throwing open my wardrobe doors and seeing the chaos inside. Once upon a time, my ex would have reprimanded me for how much of a mess everything here was. Nothing is folded properly, just tossed onto different cupboards. Almost everything inside needs an ironing. And it’s all so disorganized I can’t make out my shirts from my dresses from my trousers. But I know that nothing here is good enough to be nationally—internationally—televised.

“You need to figure out who you want to be on TV and dress accordingly,” says Fatima from where I’ve left my phone on the bed as I rifle through my mountain of clothes.

“What do you mean?” I call back.

“I mean think about it. Reality TV is not real. There’s always that person who’s painted as the villain, the one who’s talking shit about other people, but they’re probably not that judgy in real life. Or at least not any more judgy than anyone else around them. And there’s always that one angelic person who you immediately want to root for. But you know that they’ve talked some shit, that they’ve manipulated it to make you sympathize with them.”

I turn around and make my way back to my bed on my hands and knees, just because I have to see Fatima’s expression when I say, “You know a lot about reality TV for someone who doesn’t watch reality TV.” And I know because it’s often been a point of contention for us. When I want to watch reruns of *America’s Next Top Model*, Fatima insists that I can absolutely do way better things with my time. When I sit down to watch the newest episode of *Love Island*, she grumbles about how too many people are obsessed with that show.

“I may have watched a few episodes here and there,” Fatima mumbles, not looking at me. Which is a really difficult and obvious thing when you’re in the middle of a video chat. Plus, with her hijab on, there’s no long inky-black hair to distract or hide from her very obvious facial expressions. Like now, when she’s obviously trying to appear innocent and not judgmental at all.

“Wow, I can’t believe after how much you judge other people for watching reality TV shows—”

“I don’t judge.”

“—that you’ve finally succumbed too and didn’t even tell me!”

“I kind of watched a bunch of different shows just the last

couple of weeks,” Fatima says finally. “Right after you told me about applying to the *Junior Irish Baking Show*. I wanted to make sure you were prepared. I wanted to do something to help, especially because I’m not there.” She does look me in the eye now, and from the way her face softens I know she’s being sincere. My best friend put aside her hatred of reality TV just for me.

“Thanks, Fatima,” I say. “I still don’t have anything to wear though.”

I turn toward the pile of clothes I’ve just tossed onto the floor, but nothing jumps out at me. I wish I were the kind of person who could head off for a shopping spree whenever the desire struck. Or on the very rare occasion when I found myself about to appear on reality TV, but realize I don’t have a reality TV kind of wardrobe.

There are two issues. One, my parents own a donut shop in town and they often like to remind me that there are too many donut shops in Dublin. It’s difficult to make ours stand out, though I think *You Drive Me Glazy* does a pretty great job. Still, we’re not exactly rolling in riches. My parents came here when they were still young, with only the clothes on their back and bright hope in their eyes. This shop—and me—is what they’re staking all their dreams on.

Then, there’s the fact that I’m not exactly your average-sized Irish girl. I don’t know how many times I’ve gone shopping, spent hours strolling from shop to shop only to come home empty-handed. Not just because so many shops have nothing in my size but also because so many of the clothes they have for plus-sized people are just not flattering. It’s like people make

clothing for us that are supposed to cover us up, hide us. I don't want to wear anything that hides me. But those kinds of clothes are pretty difficult to come by. And most of the time they're expensive.

"You can borrow some of my stuff if you wanted," Fatima says when I've been sitting in silence staring at my pile of clothes for way too long to be considered normal.

"Because you're going to send them over from Bangladesh?" I ask.

"No, there's still a ton of stuff in my wardrobe. Your ammu and abbu have the key to our house."

"We're not even the same size, Fatima." I sigh, burying my head in my hands. I crawl toward my pile and with closed eyes reach over and grab hold of the first thing I touch. I only open my eyes when I'm holding it up in the light. It's a bright yellow dress with lemons printed across the skirt. Seeing it sends a jolt of pain through me, and I toss it back into the pile almost as soon as I lay eyes on it.

"Maybe I can figure out my dress choices some other day," I say. "I mean, I only have to dress for the meeting at IETV studios, which won't be filmed. I have time."

"Shireen," Fatima says. "That's your favorite dress. You can't just never look at it again because of who—"

"I don't want to talk about it," I cut Fatima off and begin to shove everything back into my wardrobe. I push the doors closed with some effort, though I know I'll regret this tomorrow morning when I have to open it up again and face an avalanche of wrinkled clothes.

“You’re going to have to deal with it at some point. She might be at the show.”

I know Fatima is right. I know that with my luck she’ll definitely be at the show. But there are going to be tons of contestants, and I know I can avoid her. I think I can avoid her. I want to avoid her.

“Look, even if she’s on the show, it doesn’t matter,” I say, though the way my stomach has dropped tells me that it matters to me a lot. But I can’t say that to Fatima. I’ve spent way too long feeling sad about a girl who didn’t even care about me enough to help me realize my dreams. A girl who wants to sabotage my dreams. I’m not going to let her take away the little spark of happiness I have this summer.

“Shireen . . .” I can tell Fatima wants to talk about it. Like, really talk about it, because we haven’t since everything happened. Since I began my new life of *GBBO*, my bed, and the occasional box of donuts.

“I can deal with her. If I have to,” I say. “Don’t you have faith in me?”

Fatima sighs, like she doesn’t want to be having this conversation any more than I do. “Yes, I have faith in you. I know that no matter what, you’re going to do amazing in this.”

“Good. Because I’m not letting her ruin this.”