



Cheese
and
Onion

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THE MISADVENTURES OF MINA MAHMOOD

SCHOOL TRIP!

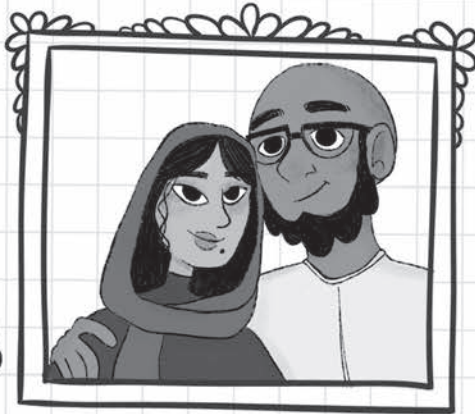


FARHANA ISLAM

Illustrated by Simran Diamond Singh



Me (Mina)



Ammu & Abbu

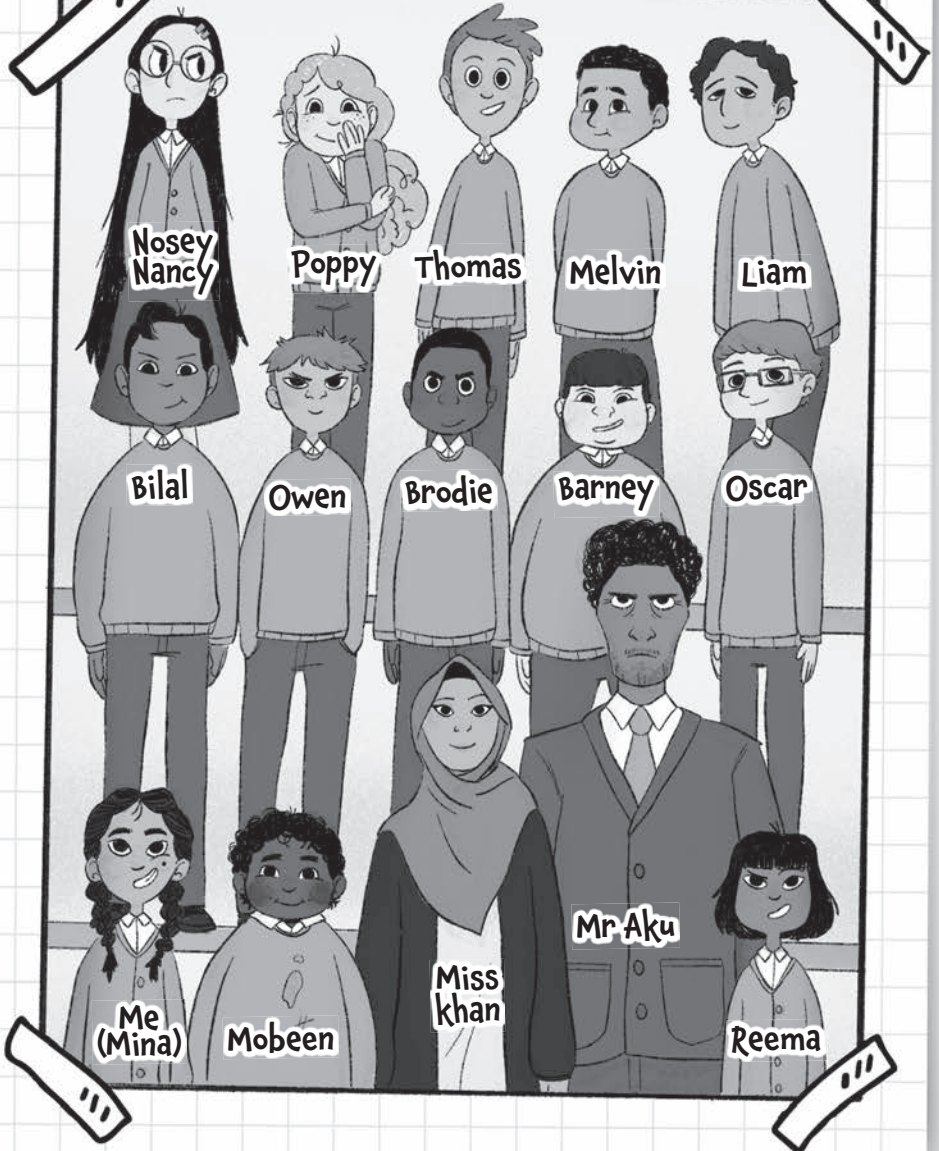


Affa



Nana

My Class





Reasons why Mobeen and Reema are my best friends:

1. We're practically related. Reema's Abbu is my Ammu's, auntie's, next-door neighbour's, cousin. And Mobeen and I share the responsibility of being NUMBER ONE Chicken Wing Champions at Uddin's Fried Chicken.



2. We survived a plane crash together. When we were eight, Mobeen lost control of his remote-controlled Boeing 787 Dreamliner at the park. He sat on me and Reema to protect us.
3. I actually can't get rid of them because Ammu feeds them ALL of the time and now they won't leave me alone.

They know too much.





There was a buzz in the air on the walk home from school. **EVERYONE** was excited.

Tomorrow was **THE DAY**, our school camping trip in the wilderness. We'd waited our whole entire lives for this very moment: camping in Shiremoor Oaks. The **ULTIMATE** Outdoor Adventure Camp.

And finally, our time had come. And the best part?

NO GROWN-UPS ALLOWED.

*(Teachers don't count. They're not real grown-ups
... they're just ... just ... teachers.)*



For one night only, there would be no,
'Because I said so, Mina.' (My Ammu)

No, 'Duro, beti!' – (my Ammu again) – which
I'm pretty sure means, '**YOU SILLY GOOSE
LADY!**' in Bengali.

And no, 'Tu manush na goru?' which almost
sounds like a compliment, and then you find out
it means 'Are you a human or a cow?' (I hear this
one a lot from my big sister, Sairah AKA Affa.)

'I really hope we get to share a room,
Mina.' Reema smiled at me as she slurped her
Cherry Ice-Blast Explosion. 'I wrote your name
right next to mine in **BIG BLACK CAPITAL
LETTERS** so Miss Khan takes us **EXTRA**
seriously. Obviously, I told her that if she doesn't
put us together, well . . . she'd, you know . . .
regret it.'



2



'You didn't say that,' Mobeen
scuffed as he balanced one foot in
front of the other and continued his
(eighth) attempt to
tightrope-walk the kerb.

'Yes, I did!' Reema spluttered,
shooting Cherry Ice-Blast at
Mobeen.





Mobeen sniggered, glancing quickly at me, 'Yeah . . . she definitely didn't say that.'

'Maybe if we both pray **EXTRA** hard for a room together instead of a popcorn machine, just for tonight, it might be enough.'

I **REALLY** wanted a popcorn machine.

Reema agreed and nudged me just enough to knock Mobeen off his tightrope. 'Okay, so wmaybe I didn't say that exactly, but I swear I was thinking it!' A slow smirk spread across her face as she watched Mobeen tumble onto the road and burst into a fit of giggles.

'I don't even care who I'm with as long as I don't have to share a room with Bilal the Bully . . . or his minions,' shuddered Mobeen as he got back up.

'What if he shaves off my eyebrows?' Mobeen

wobbled as he clutched at his eyebrows. 'My eyebrows are my identity!'

They really are his identity. Mobeen without his eyebrows is just a naked Mobeen.

And nobody needs to see a naked Mobeen.

I couldn't help myself.

'What if he puts ants in your sleeping bag?'

I gasped at my own suggestion.

'Stop scaring him, Mina,' Reema jumped in, 'you'd look absolutely fine without your eyeb—'

'-Oh no . . .' Mobeen gasped. 'Wh-Wh-What if the ants he puts in my sleeping bag lay eggs in my eyebrows?!' He spluttered, his face flushed a bubble-gum pink.

'Ammu's going to kill me – I'm too young to have babies!'



I giggled, and Reema did too, but neither of us expected Cherry Ice-Blast particles to shoot out of her nose like torpedoes.

In less than twenty-four hours, we would be on the trip of a lifetime. I **SERIOUSLY** had to BEG Ammu and Baba to let me go, because, if they didn't, my life would definitely be over. **EVERYBODY** who was **ANYBODY** was going. It took some major work to convince them. A whole, entire month of being on my best behaviour in fact.

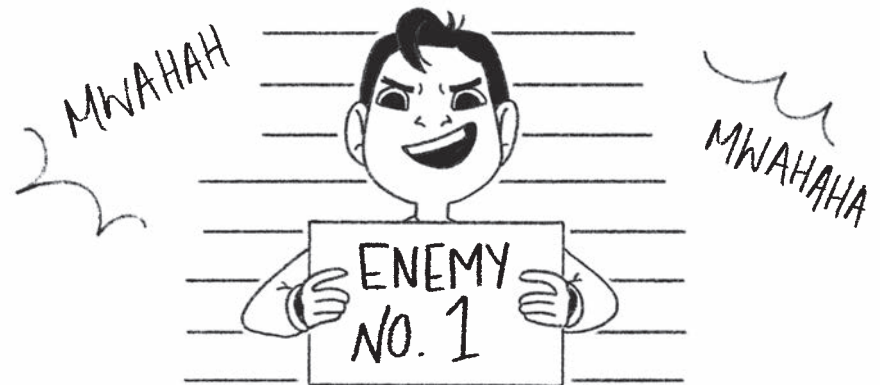
Things I had to do:

- Clean my bed
- Help Ammu plant her exotic plants
- Stop my little brother Yusuf from eating paper
- Cut Abbu's toenails

- Speak to my cousins in Bangladesh for more than three minutes (I lasted thirteen seconds, but Ammu said at least I tried)
Find Nana whenever he got lost

It would all be worth it because we would get to do the most awesome activities like rock climbing, archery, kayaking and laser tag. The kind of activities Ammu would NEVER let me do, unless I wore some kind of bubble suit.

Not even Bilal the Bully could ruin this. I think.



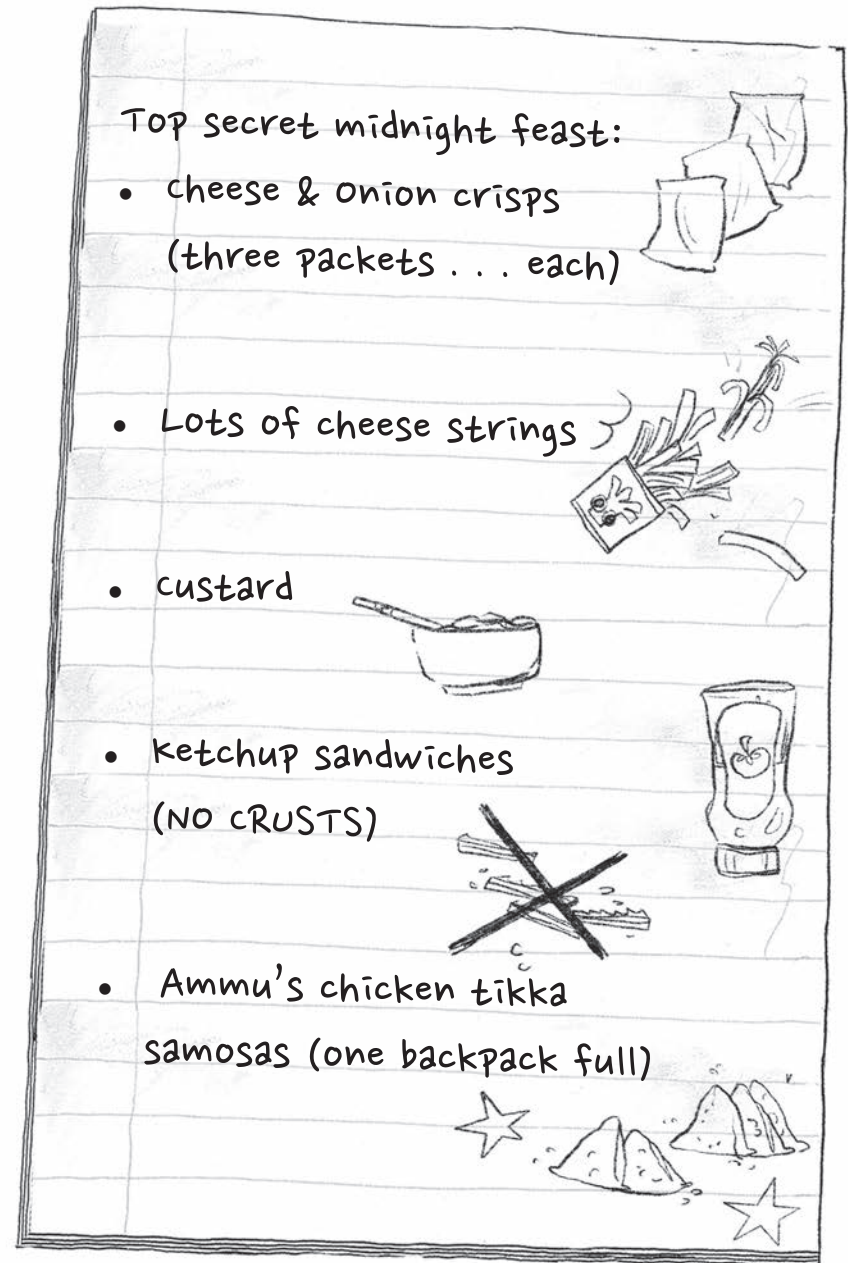
But if I was Mobeen, I would be scared too. Who knows what Bilal the Bully would do to him with no grown-ups around. I don't like to make it public knowledge, but my Ammu was friends with Bilal's Ammu once. That was until my Ammu accidentally said out loud that Bilal the Bully was a shaitaan (an actual DEVIL).

We spent the rest of the walk home finalising our essentials for our



**TOP SECRET
MIDNIGHT
FEAST
EXTRAVAGANZA**

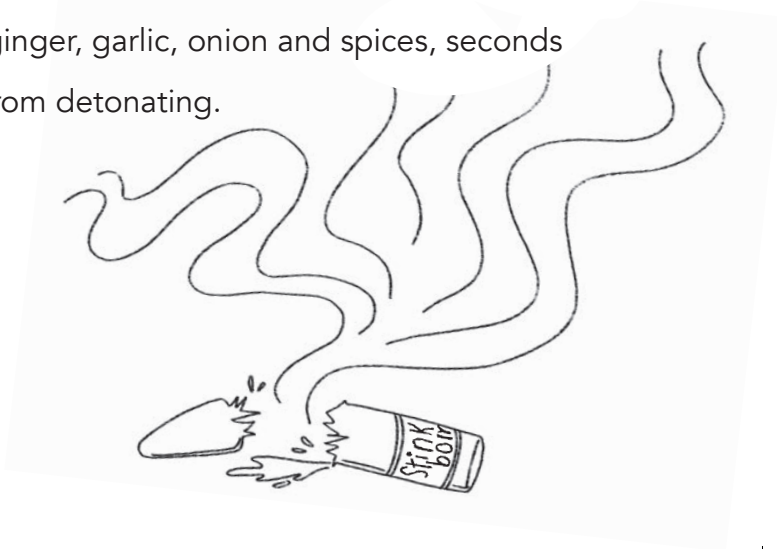
and trying to convince Mobeen that ringing 999 and demanding a SWAT team to take down the biggest bully in the universe wasn't one of his best ideas.



We finally came to a stop at the top of my street, and at first, we didn't notice the extra car parked in front of my driveway. It was only because of the nose tingling curry smell radiating from my house. It's the kind of smell that makes your bogeys run away.

'GROSS!' laughed Mobeen as he buried his head inside his school jumper to avoid curry contamination. 'I didn't want to have a shower for at least another week!'

I pinched the bridge of my nose just as Mobeen's giggle turned into a gag. Although, I'm pretty sure his **SMELLY** armpits were the culprit, and **NOT** the stink bomb hovering over us, made up of ginger, garlic, onion and spices, seconds away from detonating.



'What's your Ammu making today, Mina?' Reema asked as she licked her lips.

My tummy started to sound like a small purring cat. Obviously, it would be Ammu's cooking. It was always Ammu's cooking, we were the only brown people on the street. I breathed it all in and my nose tickled. A little bit of drool even escaped my lips. Ammu was making the food of our people.

Chicken biryani.

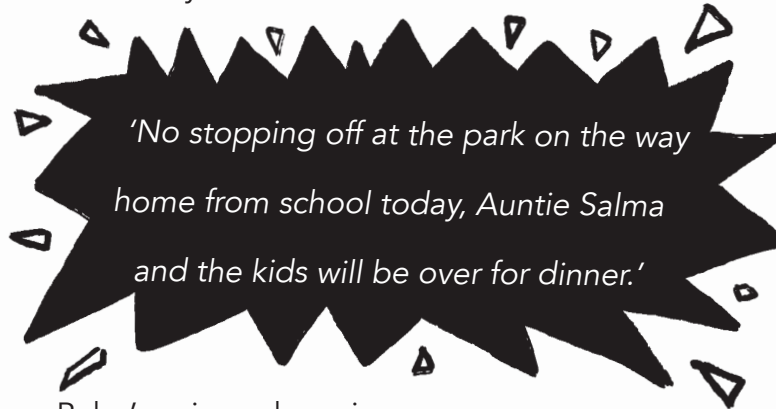
On a scale of 1 to 10, Ammu's biryani is 10,000. I love the food of our people, but I just don't like smelling like Ammu cooked me in the biryani too. Baba thinks that Ammu secretly gets it delivered from our local takeaway, *Modern Tandoori*, and pretends she made it. It's **THAT** good. But we rarely have it, she only makes it when we have guests ov—



Uh oh.

I freeze.

My eyes land on the fly-splattered Toyota on the driveway.

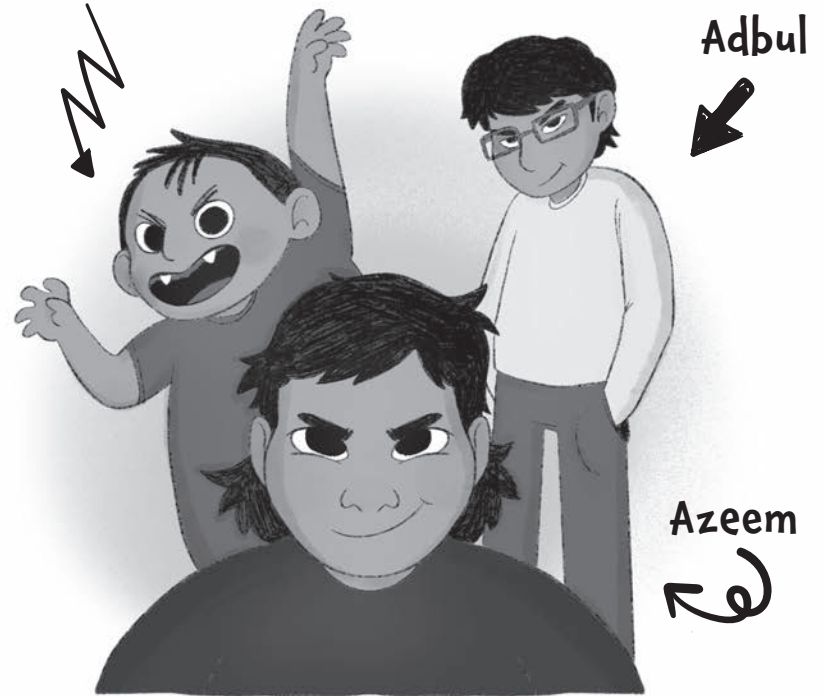


Baba's voice echoes in my ears.

Shiremoor Oaks had taken up **ALL** of my brain power and I'd completely forgotten who was waiting for me at home.

Abbas, Azeem and Abdul. My cousins, though that's still debatable. I'm yet to see proof that we're actually related. Abbas alone makes Bilal the Bully look like a cuddly teddy bear.

Abbas



But maybe, packing for Shiremoor Oaks was the perfect excuse to disappear upstairs until they left.

'I'll see you tomorrow at the bus station!' I spun around to say goodbye to Mobeen and Reema, but they had already run ahead

to the top of the street to avoid any more
curry contamination. I flung the door open . . .

I could almost taste the freedom.

Almost.

A big waft of fermented fish crawled into
my nose as I threw my school bag in the air
and lunged towards the stairs.

OH NO!

