

**MUST
LOVE
PETS**

Bunny Bonanza

Saadia Faruqi

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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ISBN 978-1-338-78348-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A. 40

First printing 2023

Book design by Yaffa Jaskoll

CHAPTER 1

“Strawberry and kiwi shouldn’t go together, but they totally do,” I declare.

I’m slouched in a shiny red seat at my favorite café, Tasty, with my favorite people, my besties, London and Olivia. In my hand is the best smoothie known to mankind: Strawberry Kiwi. At Tasty, they’re served in tall glasses with thick paper straws.

Very fancy, right?

It’s not just the smoothies, though. Everything about the inside of this café is dreamy and pastel colored, like you’ve stepped through a magical

portal or something. I could stay here forever.

“I prefer Berry Berry Wild,” London says, wrinkling her nose. She’s not a big fan of kiwi.

Olivia slurps noisily through her straw. “I think I agree.”

I pretend to glare at her. “Traitor!”

Olivia sticks her smoothie-coated tongue out at me.

“Ew, gross!” I cry. “Amir’s rubbing off on you!” Amir is my six-year-old brother and the king of grossness. Olivia adores him, which I kinda get because he’s super adorable when he wants to be.

Still, eating with his mouth wide-open is a signature Amir move. Disgusting.

My disgust makes Olivia even bolder. She leans closer and crosses her eyes. “What’s gross about me, huh, Imaan? Huh?”

“You’re weird,” I tell her, trying not to laugh. She knows I don’t really mean it, even though we haven’t

known each other very long. She and her family moved into the neighborhood just a few weeks ago. Now we're not only best friends, but also business partners in a pet-sitting company called Must Love Pets.

Olivia may be awesome, but she's also weird. A good kind of weird.

She sits back, arms across her chest. "Weird because I like berries?"

"Berries are the strangest!" I insist. "Like blueberries, so tart they shouldn't even be a fruit! And raspberries have those tiny hairs on them. What's up with that?"

Olivia's eyes widen. "Kiwis literally have hairy skin!"

I shrug and sip some more smoothie. "But they're delicious."

London throws a wrapper at me. She hates it when people argue in front of her. "Stop, you children!"

Olivia and I grin at each other. "Sorry, Mom!" I say. Unlike Olivia, I've known London forever. Since we

were babies, to be exact. I don't even remember our first meeting. We were probably in diapers.

Ew, why did I just think of that? I hate anything poop related, which isn't ideal for someone taking care of animals.

Olivia is slurping her smoothie almost like a challenge. I turn to her and whisper, "You know I'm right. Strawberry Kiwi would win all the awards!"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah!"

We stare at each other, fighting our grins. Then we both pick up our glasses and clink them together like we're fancy ladies. "Cheers!" she says.

"Go for the berries—see if I care!" I reply.

"You two should have a competition," London muses. "Take a survey and see how many people like each smoothie. It's called market research."

I put my fist next to my ear, pretending to be on the

phone. “Hey, London, *Shark Tank* called. They said they already have enough actual sharks, thank you very much!”

London glares at me. She’s a huge *Shark Tank* fan and probably the only person who watches the show with pen and notepad in hand. Olivia and I dissolve into giggles at London’s fierce expression.

“I could be a shark one day,” London mutters.

I stop laughing and give her a sideways hug. “Definitely,” I assure her. If anyone can grow up to be an amazing entrepreneur one day, it’s London. She knows so much about business, it’s unreal. Plus, she wears smart suit jackets with the sleeves rolled up like a boss lady.

We start talking about the latest *Shark Tank* episode. We watched it together at London’s house two days ago. It was a lot of fun, even though I only understood about 60 percent. London translated the rest of the 40 percent in easy fifth-grade language.

Olivia finishes her smoothie and starts taking

pictures of Tasty on her fancy camera. The red booths. The wood tables. The plate of cookies we're sharing. *Click-click-click.*

"Show me," I say, leaning over her shoulder to look at the LCD display. Olivia is really shy about her photography, but I want her to be proud of it. Her pictures saved us from a total disaster when some naughty kittens we were pet-sitting destroyed our neighbor Mr. Greene's art. Olivia offered to give him a few of her pictures to sell in his Etsy store in exchange for the ones he lost.

Taking care of animals is no joke. Sometimes it gets downright stressful being co-owners of Must Love Pets. Our goal was to convince Mama that I'm responsible enough for a dog, but somehow every new client is Trouble with a capital T.

Olivia scrolls through the pictures. "Live-action shots are the best."

"Like the kittens," I say, still thinking of the

mischievous trio. Their names were Missy, Clyde, and Bella, and they were hilarious.

Olivia finds a picture of Amir sitting on the floor. The kittens are all over him like he's a jungle gym. "Amir is just as adorable as the kittens." Olivia giggles.

"Not really," I say, rolling my eyes. Amir is a pain in the behind. But I admit that the picture is cute.

"You should frame this one," London says.

Olivia shrugs. "Maybe."

I already know she's never going to do it. London and I exchange looks. I wag my eyebrows. It's my mission to make Olivia proud and excited about her pictures. I just have to think of the perfect way to do it so she doesn't get embarrassed or mad.

Piece of cake.

"Hello," comes a familiar voice behind us. We turn around, already smiling.

It's Angie, the tall, brown-haired owner of Tasty.

She's wearing a pink-and-white-striped apron with the words QUEEN OF THE KITCHEN on it. "What a lovely camera, new girl," she continues.

New girl—ahem, Olivia—smiles shyly. "Thanks. It was a gift from my dad."

"Do you take good pictures?" Angie asks.

Olivia shrugs. "They're okay."

"They're incredible!" I jump in. "She's a great photographer. Some of her pictures are selling on Etsy."

"Really?" Angie looks very impressed. "Well, all the more reason to ask you kids for help."

"Help with what?" Olivia asks.

Angie places a glossy paper flyer on the table. "Silverglen Street Party," I read. "Food tastings, music, and more!"

"That's this Saturday!" Olivia exclaims. "Where will it be?"

"Right here in the parking lot," Angie replies. "I'll

be passing out smoothie samples, plus I have a few food trucks signed up as well. The rest is . . . more difficult.”

“The rest?” I ask.

“Kid-friendly entertainment,” Angie explains. “I have some giant speakers for music, but I’m not sure what else to organize for the neighborhood kids. I’m too busy and not creative like you girls.”

Olivia blushes at being called creative. I wag my eyebrows at London again.

London taps the flyer. “And more!” she reads. “That’s what you need.”

“More what?” I ask.

“That’s the million-dollar question, isn’t it? That’s what I need help with,” Angie says very seriously, like we’re plotting some super-secret spy mission. “Are you in?”

London, of course, is immediately in. “We’ll help you come up with awesome entertainment!” she gushes. “I know lots of people.”

“What people?” I ask suspiciously.

“You’ll see,” London replies with a little smile.

“Don’t worry, Angie, we’ll help.”

Angie smiles too, and her shoulders sag a little like she’s dropped a huge burden. “Oh, thank you, London!”

London holds up a finger. “In return . . .”

Angie’s smile slips. “Yes?”

Olivia and I look at London in alarm. Kids usually don’t point fingers at adults and ask for things in return. I kick her under the table, but she moves away. “We don’t want payment,” I say.

“Not payment,” London agrees. “Maybe free smoothies or something?”

Olivia, Angie, and I all stare at her. Wow, *Shark Tank* has really made my best friend a tough negotiator.

Finally, Angie nods. “You girls do this right and you’ll get free smoothies for life.”