





# Chapter One

I stood outside Mr. Imari's social studies class, an electric excitement humming beneath my skin. I was wearing my Ruth Bader Ginsburg T-shirt that read **WOMEN BELONG IN ALL PLACES WHERE DECISIONS ARE BEING MADE**. It was my favorite out of the many "power tees" I owned. I had some with phrases like **ACTIONS, NOT WORDS** or **TRY ME**, but I wore this particular one on days when I felt like I could conquer the world.

"Mina, how are you not more nervous?" my best friend, Kalliah Edmiston, asked me, pressing a quivering palm against her forehead. "Ugh, I feel nauseous."

I glanced down at the image of RBG on my shirt. “Come on, Kalli. Just think . . . what would Ruth do?”

Kalli grimaced. “Not stress, I know. But I can’t help it.”

I gave her a smile, hoping my positive energy might boost hers. Her crinkled brow and puckered lips told me that didn’t seem likely.

Kalli and I both had big brown eyes and thick black hair, although she wore hers down to her waist, and I kept mine shorter, to my shoulders. Kalli’s olive skin was several shades lighter than my dark brown skin. And personality-wise, we were nothing alike; I often joked that Kalli was the Eeyore to my Pooh. A member of the Oyster Cove Middle School Honor Society, student council, and half a dozen community service organizations, Kalli was a straight-A student and massive over-achiever, but she was also a chronic worrier. If she could only get more comfortable with extroverting, she could totally be president of the United States someday.

“Remember how excited we were to do this?” I reminded Kalli. She nodded weakly.

I thought back to two weeks ago, when Mr. Imari had first told our class about the new seventh-grade mentorship program. A few local business owners had each agreed to take on a youth mentee for the month of October to help them learn the ins and outs of some of our town's independently owned businesses. Kalli and I had skimmed the list of participating businesses together, and she'd instantly homed in on the docent's apprentice job at the Oyster Cove History Museum.

"I'd love to work on their exhibit on the Native American tribes of Washington State," she'd said determinedly. Kalli is descended from the Chinookan people on her mother's side. Her family moved to Oyster Cove years ago, but most of her mom's relatives still lived along the Columbia River. "It'd be so great for the museum to have more information about the Chinook and the Samish, especially since this region is home to the Samish Indian Nation."

"That would be awesome," I'd said.

Then I'd looked back at the list and nearly shrieked when I saw *A Batch Made in Heaven*, with *Baker's Apprentice* written

beside it. Specializing in inventive and delicious cookies, A Batch Made in Heaven was my favorite “foodie” spot in all of Oyster Cove. Baking was my passion and something that I’d grown up doing with my dad. He’d owned a restaurant in Delhi, India, before my mom had gotten her scholarship to study molecular biology at Washington State University. When he and my mom immigrated to America and had me, Dad had had to leave his restaurant behind. Maybe to distract himself from the loss of the restaurant, he’d decided to learn a new skill: baking. Even better, he’d shared it with me. And now I had the chance to be an official baker’s apprentice.

“Omigod!” I’d latched on to Kalli’s arm. “That’s it! That one’s mine!”

“No surprise there, Bakerella.” Kalli had laughed. “That job was made for you and your spatula. I can’t believe Batch is actually participating. Aren’t Mr. Winston’s recipes top secret?”

“Yeah, that’s the story, but that doesn’t mean he can’t have an apprentice.” I imagined working alongside Mr. Winston, the

idiosyncratic owner of A Batch Made in Heaven. “How amazing would it be if he confided all of his baking tips to me? That would be like striking culinary gold. Maybe he’s ready to share his recipes?”

A Batch Made in Heaven was steeped in local lore. People had been known to make the two-hour drive north from Seattle to our small, picturesque harbor town just to pick up a dozen freshly baked Batch cookies. Sometimes, visitors came from farther afield, stopping into Batch during road trips or vacations so that they could brag on social media about tasting the famous cookies.

Mr. Winston had achieved near-celeb status himself. Rumor had it that he was notoriously demanding with the bakery’s hand-selected employees, making them sign confidentiality agreements so that none of them would ever reveal any of his baking secrets. Sometimes he was known to yell in Gordon Ramsay fashion at his employees.

But I wasn’t worried about working for someone moody. Every

genius has their quirks, and what he lacked in good temper his cookies made up for in taste. Mr. Winston invented the best cookie recipes *ever*, and learning from him would make me a better baker.

So when Mr. Imari told us to submit our top three choices for mentor positions, the baking job was at the top of my list, highlighted and underlined (twice for extra emphasis). Even so, writing down alternate choices made me uneasy. The whole process felt a little bit like pulling a random Career card in the board game *Life*. That was my least favorite part of the *Life* game—not having the power to choose my own path.

This morning, awaiting our mentorship assignments, I refused to even consider the possibility that I might not get the job of my dreams.

“I’d be calmer,” Kalli was telling me now as we stood outside the classroom, “if I knew for sure I was getting the job at the museum. But what if I don’t? What if I have to be an apprentice . . . on the Oyster Cove Ferry?”

She shivered, and I stifled a laugh as her cheeks took on a

green cast. Being out on the water of Puget Sound ranked among Kalli's top nightmare scenarios.

Back in the third grade, when Kalli and I had first become friends, my dad and I had taken her out on our sailing skiff, the *Akshiti*. Within fifteen minutes, Kalli was so seasick we had to turn the skiff back toward shore. She'd sworn never to set foot on a boat again.

"Hey, you'd be the picture of fashion in your life jacket, even hanging over the side of the ferry the whole time," I teased playfully. She didn't crack a smile. "But you're *going* to get the job at the museum, and I'm *going* to get the job at A Batch Made in Heaven. And it will be amazing." I tried to hold back a yawn, but it was unstoppable. "*If* I can stay awake."

Kalli offered me a sympathetic glance. "The twins were up all night again?"

I nodded with a sigh. My new brother and sister, Amul and Banita, were only twelve weeks old, but it felt like they'd been crying for centuries. Their nursery shared a wall with my

bedroom, which made it impossible for me to sleep through their nightly outbursts.

“I remember how happy you were when you found out your mom was pregnant,” Kalli said. “You couldn’t wait to be a big sister. You hated being an only child.”

“True.” I’d resigned myself to being an only child years ago, mostly because whenever I’d asked for a little brother or sister, Mom and Dad had responded with an adamant no. Then my parents found out they were having the twins, who were, as Mom put it, “double the surprise for double the fun.”

“And I do love the twins,” I said to Kalli now. “*So* much.” I thought of their warm, sleepy cuddliness when I gave them bottles, the downy-soft black curls sprouting in tiny tufts on the crowns of their heads. A pang of missing them hit me. “But they cry *all* the time. I’m too tired to try out any new recipes. Last night, I tried to make a batch of nankhatais . . .”

“Yuummmm.” Kalli closed her eyes dreamily. She loved my nankhatais because I used extra ghee and cardamom for a slightly more citrusy, softer cookie. “Did you bring some for me?”