

Double
Trouble!

Written and illustrated by

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Check out my *Character Profiles* blog posts to see summaries of the characters' personalities etc.

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The enemy in India

Zaytunah Akmal settled down on the couch and opened the book in her hand. Her sister, Amna Akmal, was sitting on the lower bunk of the bunk bed with one of their five cats in her lap. She had a book in her hand too.

All of a sudden, the door flew open with a loud BANG. Zaytunah and Amna's cousin, Maryam Salman, burst in. The cat in Amna's lap jumped and hid under the bed.

"GUYS! LOOK AT THIS!!!"

"What happened?" Zaytunah looked around, breathless.

"I said, look at this!" cried Maryam waving a large piece of paper and jumping up and down.

Amna went over to her and took the paper. "Ooh! A gymkhana!"

As Zaytunah got to know for herself, the paper was an advertisement for a local gymkhana¹ coming up in a week. It read:

GYMKHANA DAY!

**A FABULOUS EVENT FOR EXPERIENCED
RIDERS AND HORSES TO HAVE FUN!**

19th August, Saturday 10 AM to 3 PM

Islamabad Horse Riding Club

INCLUDES

Steeplechasing (includes jumps and bending poles)
Egg-and-spoon race
Flag race
Prizes
Refreshments for horses, riders and audience

DON'T DELAY, REGISTER TODAY!

Call: 0342 674490

¹ See Glossary

"Wow!" said Amna. "I haven't participated in a show or gymkhana for *ages*."

"Yeah, I went down and Baba had gotten back with the groceries and this poster. You want to register? Go tell him."

"Great!" Amna said, getting up from her chair.

Next week....

Amna slipped a bridle over her horse Blaze's head and grabbed the lead rope.

She led Blaze out of the stable. Just outside the paddock, Maryam and Zaytunah were standing ready with the hose on the stone part of ground next to the tack room. They were giving Blaze a bath.

"Ready?" Maryam called.

"Ready," Amna called back. "Blaze loves a bath in spring, you know."

"Yeah," Zaytunah agreed. "He's really calm ma sha Allah!"

Blaze stood quietly while the girls hosed him down, scrubbing out all the dirt from his brown coat until not a speck remained.

Just then, the telephone rang from inside the house.

"I'll get it," Maryam said, handing the hose to Zaytunah. She ran across the grass, up the porch steps, banged open the door and bounded over to the telephone.

Jillson Jac Hammer hated cows.

And Aiswarya had one in the house. It had its own bedroom and the nearby rooms stank. Aiswarya was their Hindu host in Mumbai. Hindus worshipped cows and thought they were sacred.

Personally, Jillson thought that was stupid.

Right now, she and The Pallies' Club—Millyania Phosmalli, Martina Gur Ump, Ramona Vijpayee, Dora Exx Plowrer, Mallaphoss Jingaling and Aiswarya Mayank – were at the mall.

The Pallies' Club was a mischievous group of teen girls who loved two things: money and irritating people. And they would go any lengths to get the former. Fifteen-year-old eccentric Millyania Phosmalli their leader, they had raced off from Pakistan to their Indian branch (consisting of only Aiswarya at the moment) because Maryam had played a prank on them...and they were also huge scaredy-cats. They were quick to do things



they wanted to but slower than anything at something they didn't want to.

Thankfully, the cows which were allowed everywhere could only possibly come on the first floor. Which was the section for boys' clothes. Boring.

They passed by an ice cream stall. Jillson stopped and reached into the freezer.

"Get five for me," Martina said.

"Four for me," Milly said.

"I want six," Dora said.

The freezer was half-full. Jillson plunged her massive jack-hammer arms in, pulled all the ice creams out and was about to pass them around when suddenly, another pair of jack-hammer arms yanked them all out of hers. The startled stall keeper rose, glancing between the two enormous figures in front of him.

"HEY!" Jillson yelled. She spun around and her huge square jaw dropped.

An orange haired, eighteen year old young man—a year older than Jillson, and with the same stocky, huge build—was standing there, his arms full of those ice creams. He popped a ice cream cone, wrapper and all, into his mouth.

"Yo dere, Jilly," he said casually.

"I hate you, Jefferson!" Jillson yelled. She bowled him over and started gathering up the ice creams.

Jefferson Jac Hammer, Jillson's brother, had last seen her a little less than a year ago in America, when he had been sixteen and Jillson fifteen. They had gotten into a huge fight (also over ice creams) and had vowed never to talk to each other again. Eventually, Jillson found the Pallies' Club, moved to Pakistan and never got in touch with her family again.

Jefferson hadn't really cared. He still didn't.....or did he? He wasn't sure. But he had been here and saw the Pallies', cooked up a prank and pulled it off.

Jillson reached out for the last ice cream on the ground when Jefferson bowled her over and started grabbing them himself.

Meanwhile, the Pallies' were busy gathering the other ice creams which were spilled everywhere. The outraged ice cream seller found Martina's purple jeweled purse in his hand and nearly fell off his chair when he opened it and found bundles of one thousand American dollar notes in it. He quickly hid it in his pocket, smiling inwardly at his incredible luck. He could be an instant millionaire and not have to run the stall.

"Thanks to that orange-haired lad," he said to himself, walking off.

Jillson and Jefferson had forgotten the ice creams and had started a physical fight now (because Jefferson's elbow had hit Jillson's arm and she had hit him back. Now they got into a never-ending cycle.)

They started running all over the mall, upturning furniture, tossing clothesstands, breaking doors and tearing clothes—their incredible strength only added to the destruction. Angry shopkeepers rose from their seats and started running after them.

The rest of the Pallies', meanwhile, were sprawled on the floor in front of the ice cream stall and cramming as much ice cream in their mouths as they could. Like the stall keeper, they had found their golden opportunity and Martina was way too busy snatching Dora's ice creams to notice that her wallet containing one million dollars cash was missing. Millyania was sitting on a pile of fifteen ice lollies and yelling between mouthfuls, "Idiot, eat your own!" even though no one was even looking at her ice creams. With the exception of passerbys.

A couple of kids grabbed some ice creams while passing. Some stared at the crazy teens. Others shook their heads in disapproval.

At Jillson and Jefferson's end, everything was going crazy. A line of a good twenty shopkeepers was trailing behind the two teens, yelling in angry Hindi. Jillson was racing behind Jefferson, hitting him with a steel pot she had picked up from a stall. Jefferson was hitting her back with a steel frying pan he had picked up from the same stall.

They turned a corner and bumped into a bunch of policemen coming around from the other side. Terrified, they both threw their utensils to the side, wheeled around and escaped.

Allmost.

The same day, brother and sister were sitting in a police office, glaring at each other.

"Explain yourself!" the officer behind the desk growled.

"He snatched my ice creams from me and hit me with his elbow," Jillson said through gritted teeth.

"Soz, yo. Hey, you want this, Officer?" Jefferson said.

He pulled out ten one hundred-dollar bills.

"One thousand American dollars for letting me go. You can keep her."

"Oh, yeah?" Jillson shot back. "How 'bout I give you five thousand American dollars in exchange for letting *me* go and keeping *him*?"

The officer's mouth began to water at the prospect of earning six thousand dollars—equal to about forty-thousand Indian rupees!!!—just by telling a lie to a couple of people. "You both give me and I'll let you both go."

Jillson produced a huge money bag from her frock. "Here's a deal. You let me go and tell the police that me and my friends aren't guilty. Say the same to the Pae-kaistan police if they ask. And I give you—five hundred American dollars."

The policeman held out his hand. "Deal done! You can count on me!"

"Wait a sec, Jill—" Jefferson tried to say.

"And don't tell!" Jillson said and raced out the room.

"We still have four million!" she thought gleefully. "We're not wanted anymore!"

Jefferson stared at the open door in dismay. He had actually begun to miss his little sister.

He felt rather unwell. Now after they had gotten into such a big fight when they met after a whole year, he couldn't admit he was sorry to Jillson. He would look like a loser who wasn't sure about anything. And yet, he *did* feel sorry. Now what? And there wasn't the culture in his family of saying 'I'm sorry.' Well, no one could know from across the world, right?

Jefferson gave the officer the money and lumbered out the door. He knew what to do. He would travel to Pakistan.

Around 8 o'clock in the evening, Amna stood back and looked Blaze up and down.

"Real shiny," she said. "I think we're done for the day."

Blaze was groomed and fed and put to bed.

Tomorrow was the gymkhana, and Amna had been busy doing last-minute practice. Then the three girls had groomed Blaze, picked out his hooves and laid out the tack and plaiting supplies for tomorrow.

Morning came quicker when you slept early. Amna went to bed at nine, Zaytunah at around the same time and Maryam stayed up till ten, doing math in bed calculating the speed of the helicopters that the Pallies' were liable to use and how long it would take if they set out at x time from y place to get to Islamabad by z o'clock, replacing the variables with new numbers every time.

Eight hours later, Maryam woke to the buzzing of her alarm clock. It was six o'clock. "*Hmm, if the Pallies' use a normal copter and $x=11.30$ PM, $y=$ New Delhi and $z=10$, they'll be here by seven-thirty A.M.*" was the first thing she thought.

She jumped down, narrowly missing Zaytunah's head, and walked over to the window. In the early morning light, she could see Blaze was standing by the fence and looking at the door expectantly. He was as clean and shiny as he had been yesterday night. Ladley, Maryam's horse, was rolling around in the dusty corner of the paddock like the naughty horse she was and Midnight, Zaytunah's horse, was grazing.

Ten minutes later, Maryam - changed and refreshed - emerged from the bathroom, her face dripping. She pulled the curtains back and started yelling at Amna and Zaytunah to wake up. Unlike Maryam, her cousins were very heavy sleepers.

A little while later, they slid down the stairs railing and went out. After feeding the horses and skipping out their stables, they went in for breakfast. The rest of the family was coming into the kitchen.

"Today's the hooorse shooow," Maryam sang.

"Yeaah," Zaytunah said.

"You know, I've been wondering if the Pallies' actually forgot it," Amna said.

"They're bean-brains," Maryam said.

"Yup," Zaytunah said.

"There's a chance that they haven't forgotten," Amna replied. "But it's slim."

"We can check their house out," Maryam suggested. "It's six-thirty. We can be back by nine if we leave at seven, don't you think? Also I calculated using variables z , y and x – I mean if y equals—"

"Cut it short. If the Pallies' left at eleven-thirty last night—assuming they want to be stealthy—what time would they reach, using a normal copter?" Amna asked, without knowing that was exactly what Maryam had calculated.

"By seven-thirty this morning," Maryam answered

"Okay, can we still check their house?" Zaytunah asked.

"Yeah yeah!" Amna exclaimed. "Can we, Mama?"

Their father spoke up. "I think it isn't a bad idea."

"OK, but you've read your Adhkaar, right?" Amna's mother and aunt said together.

"Yes," Zaytunah and Amna said.

"Yay!!" Maryam yelled.

Sure enough, the three cousins arrived at the Pallies' at exactly seven o' clock. After snooping around a bit, they decided that Maryam's calculation was either right or too early. The Pallies' weren't at home. No music emanated from the windows. The limo wasn't there. And the house looked exactly like they had seen it a week ago. No curtain had been moved and even the fake phone Amna had dropped was in the exact same place.

But they did see a seven-foot-tall, orange-haired boy hanging around.

"That guy reminds me of Jillson," Zaytunah said.

"Yeah," Amna said. "Same jackhammer arms, same huge muscles, same tall build."

"Maybe he's related to Jillson!" Maryam suggested.

"He looks like he's looking for something," Amna commented. "Let's ask him if he's seen the Pallies'."

"Maryam'll have to do that," Zaytunah said.

"Sure," Maryam answered. She started walking towards the teen who was now by the gate.

Jefferson Jac Hammer looked at the paper in his hand. This was definitely Jillson's club's house—what was it again? Ah, yes. The Pallys Club—but Jillson or any of the other girls weren't around. Personally, Jefferson wished Jillson hadn't joined such a *girly* club. Before, she used to wear boys' clothes and do everything Jefferson did—boxing, fighting, martial arts and basketball. The two used to have earphones playing rock music in their ears all the time. Now she wore those ridiculous frocks, too much stupid makeup and listened to pop music instead. That "tony tooony tooo!" instead of that good old "thum thum THUMP"!

Jefferson jumped when a voice came from behind him. "Good morning, mister," it said.

He turned around. A rather tall-for-her-age—which was about 12--blonde-headed girl stood there. She was wearing a riding helmet, boots, gloves and a blue jacket and jeans.²

"Uh, yeah, good morning, yo," he said nervously.

"Have you seen these girls anywhere 'round here?" the girl asked. She held out a picture.

² This is Maryam, in case you couldn't see.

It was of the Pallies'. Jefferson stared at it.

"Is this Jillson?" he asked, pointing to his sister in the picture.

Now it was the girl's turn to stare. "You *are* related to that buffoon?"

"Don't call Jill a buffoon," Jefferson growled.

"Well then, she's a big-headed, idiotic, stupid, unintelligent, fat buffoon," the girl said.

"Did you leave any insult? What're you doing with a pic of Jill?"

"What do you have to do with her? First tell me that," the girl countered. "Then I'll tell you. Info trade."

"She's my sister. Fine? Now tell me."

"We want to know where she is," the girl said with a giggle.

"She's in New Delhi," Jefferson exploded.

"Ooh! That means the value I assigned to the variable *y* was correct! Well, at least we have those cows off our minds," the girl said with satisfaction. "Thanks. What's your name? Jackson?"

"Jefferson."

The girl snorted. "Okay, Mr President Thomas Jefferson, I'll leave now. Bye."

She walked back to a house further down the street, where two more girls were standing with three horses.

"Weird kid," Jefferson thought.

Aiswarya's house in Delhi, India. The Pallies' are about to leave for Pakistan.

"Bye, and remember I hate cows!" Jillson screamed in Aiswarya's face.

"COW IS SACRED!" Aiswarya screamed back.

Jillson reached out and hit Aiswarya's cow who was in front of her with her heelshoe.

"YOU DARE DO THAT!" Aiswarya shrieked. She started hitting Jillson, who shrugged her off easily, ran out of the room and called the others. They came running, Milly with her poodle Sweetie Pie in her arms.

"And I hate not just cows, but you too!" Jillson yelled. "I'm going home in your private helicopter. Now!"

The Pallies' Club ran over to Aiswarya's private helicopter where the pilot, Diego, was waiting. They jumped in and Milly yelled: "TO PAE-KAISTAN!"

The helicopter's blades began to turn. Aiswarya was bowing to the cow, massaging the place Jillson had hit.

"They worship cows," Martina grumbled.

"They do," Ramona said.

"Exactly."

Millyania switched Dora the Explorer on on the TV.

"I want to watch Snow White," Mallaphoss whined.

"After this," Milly said.

"Humph."

Eight hours later, the copter touched down just outside Islamabad International Airport.

The pilot's voice came over the PA system. "We've landed. Where is your limousine?"

"It's right there." Millyania could see the pink limo standing only yards away from the helicopter pad.

They jumped out, careful not to soil their frocks or heelshoes, and hurried over to the limo.

"You called CC?" Dora asked, tilting her pink hand mirror to make sure her lipstick wasn't smeared.

"Yup. We'll pick up the order and head home, then to the horse show," Milly said.

"I do hope the prize is money," Dora said wistfully.

"What's the time?" Ramona asked.

"Malla has the watch," Jillson replied.

"It's seven thirty o' clock," Mallaphoss informed them.

"We have two and a half hours," Martina said grimly.

The gymkhana

6.30 AM, India.

Aiswarya Mayank stepped aside to let a bus pass and turned to a tall, frizzy-haired teen on her right. Her eyes almost popped out.

"Dimesia!" she exclaimed. "You? Here? When did your friendship with the Pallies' finish?!"

Dimesia Macroni started. "Aiswarya!"

"Wow! You? Here? Now? How did you get here?"

"I'm here for studying in The Phosas Great Awesome Wonderful Very Amazing University or TPGAWVAU for short. It's the best university here. How 'bout you?"

"I'm here on a tourist trip," Dimesia informed her proudly.

"When did you get enough money?" Aiswarya asked.

Dimesia flicked her hair back. "Oh, I got money from the Pallies'," she said smugly.

Aiswarya gave her a disgusted look. "The *Pallies'*? But I thought they gave you nine hundred ninety-nine dollars."

"Oh, but you can get money very easily from those frightened fools. I told them that I would report them to the police, if they didn't give me another thousand dollars. They readily did, and now I'm staying in seven-star luxury hotels for as long as I want." Dimesia's pride was obviously boosted with this incident.

Aiswarya eyed the teen enviously. "Yeah."

"And I'll still have money left over—it's really valuable in Indian rupees. 71 rs in one dollar!"

"Well, listen here, Dimesia. I've been thinking about something recently." Aiswarya beckoned her acquaintance to a nearby bench.

"What is it?" Dimesia asked as they sat down.

"Do you think it's a good idea to form a team against the Pallies'?"

The older girl looked uncertain. "Well....I don't know....we *do* have money....and I have rich friends who can give.....and some who might join.....well.....difficult to decide...."

"We have all the resources," Aiswarya persuaded. "And we can also work against those girls--- Zaytunaeh, Meryom, Aaemnae, and that Ra-eedaeh. I've booked tickets for five o' clock.. And, er, actually, my classes are starting next week."

Dimesia's eyes lit up.

"I'm in. Let's go!"

Amna opened the front door and walked over to the car. Zaytunah was leading Blaze into the trailer behind it, and Maryam was coming out of the tack room with Blaze's polished saddle and bridle. Amna had already put the boots on Blaze's legs before getting ready herself.

Maryam and Zaytunah were wearing their normal blue jackets and jeans but Amna was wearing the show uniform: black jacket, white jeans and boots. The way to the horse show took only twenty minutes, and it was nine-fifteen right now. Maryam insisted that the way took twenty-one minutes and thirty-two-point-fifteen seconds, though, and that if they got out from the house at nine-sixteen they would arrive at 9:37:32.15. Amna never understood why Maryam went through all the trouble to do such complex calculation for no reason at all.

After putting everything into the trailer and car, the whole family piled into the blue Prado: Amna, Zaytunah, their parents, their little sister, Maryam, her older brother Danyal and her mother. Whew!

Twenty minutes later, they were pulling up at the entrance of the show grounds. The grounds covered about half a sector, because a part of it was also a riding club. The entrance was a large break in the fence, which was lined with colorful bunting. A large banner above the entrance proclaimed:

Horse show today!

10 am to 3 pm

"Here we a—" Amna stopped with a gasp.

"What is it?" Zaytunah asked.

"It's Mr President Thomas Jefferson – AND THE PALLIES!" Maryam shouted.

Only a few minutes earlier, a tall man was sitting down behind the registration counter by the horse show entrance. A weird orange-haired, muscle-y, tall lad was hanging around. The man (his name was Umar) had already asked him if he was audience or a rider; he replied he was "a audience".

"You mean, 'I'm in the audience,' not 'I'm a audience,'" Umar had corrected.

The teenager had shrugged nervously. "Whatever."

Umar then saw a huge, shiny pink limo cruise up to the entrance. The front door opened. A six-foot tall teenager – Umar guessed she was about twenty or something, judging by her height – got out. Her bright red hair was pulled into a bun and tucked into her purple velvet

hat. He felt a sudden jolt of realization: she looked a lot like the orange-haired lad! Same jackhammer arms, tall build and muscles. Weird.

She wore an absurd bright orange knee-length frock with a huge J printed on the front and heelshoes way too high for horse riding. They made her six and a half feet tall. On her carefully positioned arm, there was an elegant pearly white purse which looked totally out of place in this entire ridiculous outfit.

Then she opened the back doors. Another five teenagers got out. They were dressed similarly to the six-foot-tall girl. The golden-curly-haired one wore black school shoes and a tiny riding hat. Her gloved fingers looked way too long to be *fingers*! Then this bizarre trio started marching to the counter.

"HUP 2-3-4 **MARCH!**" Even from a distance Umar saw the blondehead's huge lipstick mouth open as wide as a crocodile's.

Meanwhile, a shining, sleek blue Prado pulled up with a trailer at the back. Three girls leapt out. One of them wore the gymkhana uniform, and the other two wore blue jackets and jeans. When they saw the other six ridiculous teens, they gasped and looked at each other; obviously they found them absurd as well. Five other people got out.

Then those six models reached the counter. The red haired one opened her lipstick bright red mouth.

"Sir, my friend, the honorable Millyania Phosmalli Nutt.E, will like to participate in this contest," she announced in a loud, high-pitched voice. Millyania, the blond head, smiled sweetly. One of the other ones, Martina, made a face.

Umar goggled at them. They looked far from honorable, he thought. Their fashion sense was clearly terrible. He cleared his throat. "Err, madam, have you forgotten that you are not wearing the uniform? And have you left your horse back home, by any chance?" Judging by their outfits and attitude, that was very likely. "You cannot participate without one..."

The teen's hands went to her mouth. He recoiled at her horrifyingly long bright red nails – they were half as long as her finger. They made her look like a witch; red lips, red nails, red hair, red shoes.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, in an effort to talk in a British accent (and in turn sounding rather like a frog.) "We totally forgot to bring her from our limo!! Poor thing, she might suffocate! I'll be right back, sir!" Then the six rushed off back to their shiny pink limo, remembering halfway to march. "But madam, the uniform—" Umar was too late. They were too far off to hear him.

The other family had reached the corner, one leading a horse. One of the girls with brown hair stepped forward.

"Assalaamu Alaikum, Uncle," she greeted him.

"Wa alaikum Assalam," Umar replied. Some sane people, phew, he thought.

"I'm participating in the contest. Here's the registration paper I got." She handed Umar a sheet of smooth white paper.

"Yes, alright. Go ahead." The man pointed to the left.

A large crowd was gathered there. All of the other competitors had arrived, distinguished from the others by their black-and-white uniforms.

"Baba, do you think the Pallies' are all participating?" Zaytunah asked her father.

"I don't know, beta. We'll see," he replied.

"I hope not," Maryam grumbled.

Behind them, Umar was gawking at the 'horse' that had emerged from the pink limo. It was chestnut colored with obviously dyed PINK mane and tail, pink lips and slightly large hooves under big brush boots. And it wore a jeweled *green* saddle and bridle. Millyania Phosmalli, grinning and chattering, leapt on and banged her legs on the horse's sides. It rocketed off, nearly crashing into the registration counter. Umar stepped back. "Madam, if you cannot control your horse, you can't participate! And where's your uniform?"

"Oh no, sir! I can control Lipstick totally well! She's just a bit, er, *fired up* after the long ride, you see, so she just got a bit *excited*, that's all," Millyania said sweetly. "And—I'll change in a bit."

"Very well," Umar muttered. "Number?"

"123456789," Milly said. "I know till one hundred! I got 0/10 marks in my Nursery test last year!"

"The number is between one and ten," Umar said irritably.

"5," Milly said.

"This number has been taken. Yours is written on your registration slip. Where is it?"

Milly dug around in her frock, then stuck her hand in her shoe. When it came out empty, she looked worriedly at Jillson, who at the moment was gobbling a candy bar. (It takes a lot of candy to be the strong-woman of the Pallies'.)

"Wit's wight where," she said, spewing crumbs and digging around in her elegant purse. "Ah.." She pulled out a crumpled, stained, and dog spit-ey piece of paper and handed it to Umar. He couldn't find a place which was bearable enough to touch, so he used a nearby extra set of riding gloves. But dog-spitty though it was, it was the genuine registration slip.

"Er, yes, you can go...over there. By the way, your number was 3." He pointed.

"Catchya la'er, alliga'er!" yelled Milly as Lipstick rocketed off.

I hope not, Umar thought. I'd rather not meet you again!

Zaytunah leapt to the side as Lipstick plowed through the riders, nearly hitting them. Jillson was running effortlessly ahead, yelling "MAKE WAY, MAKE WAY! MAKE WAY FOR THE STARS OF THE DAY!" and Martina was hanging onto the horse's tail, swinging like a piece of paper and smacking riders with her spike heels unless they jumped away. The other three Pallies' were running behind, puffing and panting. Some of the riders started shouting, "Rowdy contestants should be controlled!"

Another staff member whose name tag read 'Amin' pushed through the crowd. "Mel-ya-naya Fos malai please come gate now!!" he shouted. He was a Phatan, so he had a really loud voice.

Milly spun Lipstick around and rocketed off to the gate. Martina's heels hit a number of riding helmets and Jillson was now running behind Lipstick. The other horses shied at the commotion. Amin rushed after them.

"Baji!" he yelled. "Baji, slow! Baji slow!" (Remember he's Phatan, he doesn't speak English well!) Milly was right on going but Jillson tugged on her frock. This wasn't a good time for naughtiness.

Martina sneered at him. "Saw my amazing circus show, guy?"

Of course, Amin didn't understand. He only handed Milly a piece of paper and gestured to the registration counter. Another stern looking man with a big black beard was standing there, obviously displeased at the Pallies'.

The trio came slowly over. Jillson opened her mouth to start lecturing, but the man cut her off rather crossly.

"Young ladies, I wish to address you sternly on your pranks! Since your appearance is not that of a Muslim, I shall not say Salam. Anyway, what kind of behavior is this?? Why are you torturing the poor horse? Why are you hitting the other riders? You're lucky no one got hurt. You could be fined or kicked out of the race! And, if you keep it up you *will* be kicked out. Also, what kind of attire is this for riding? Heels – easy slip, easy fall! Inflexible gloves – bad grip on the reins! You'll have to change your clothes, and be quick at it – you can't delay the race! You should be in your uniform because you can't participate without it on!" He glared at them, then

pointed to a change of the gymkhana uniform, with proper leather riding gloves and boots on the counter. "And you other five, too. Go to the changing rooms and Umar will give you more clothes. However, six-feet-tall young woman, I wish you'd gotten your own clothes. We won't be able to find any to accommodate *you*."

Jillson rolled her eyes and Martina stuck out her bottom lip. Milly said grumpily: "Huh! I am fine, thank you, mister! I don't need any of your unfashionable clothes! This is a specially made flexible frock, made just for riding, and I even got my sleeves *below my elbows* because I knew how fussy you bearded people are! Heels are tiny, not even three inches—I compromised so much. Gloves are silk and I don't need to flex my hands." She dismounted and mounted, then made a terrible face by rolling her eyes to the back of her head, scrunching up her nose and almost disfiguring her face by twisting her lips.

The man glowered at her. "Flexible or not, it is not acceptable for participation! Either listen or quit!" He was clearly infuriated.

Milly hissed something to Jillson. They started arguing in whispers while the man talked to Umar, ranting about the new generation's rudeness.

Jillson did the talking. "Oh-*kay*, mister. We'll do it, but grudgingly. Hand over the clothes." She shot out a hand. The man stared at her witchy fingernails, then gave her the clothes. Whooping and cheering, the Pallies' quickly shot off to the changing rooms – but not quite as fast as before.

A distance away at the race course, Maryam could just see the Pallies' by standing up in Blaze's saddle's stirrups and craning her neck. Other riders were doing that too, wondering what was happening to those mean teenagers. Amna and Zaytunah couldn't see because Blaze was the only horse and Maryam was taller, but she kept them filled in about the scene.

"Oh, yeah! The really stern uncle is giving them a scolding! Serves them right! Great, he's giving Milly *human* clothes...Oh no, she's refusing! Now they're whispering. What're they plotting NOW? Yes! They took it! Oh no, again. They're happy. But they're going to change.... I guess that's good enough." Maryam sat down in the saddle again and grinned at her cousins. "Just twenty minutes till the start."

Their family had gone into the audience. Amna went ahead to the starting line, while Zaytunah and Maryam walked into the audience.

"Hey, look at that," Maryam said. "I can see Mr President. And look at the water in cross country! It seems really deep."

Jefferson had been watching the Pallies' Club and had heard the whole conversation. Luckily, he had an extra change of his own clothes in his backpack. Maybe Jillson would be friendlier to him if he gave her his own clothes. He started moving toward his sister.

Jillson's smile disappeared when she heard an all-too-familiar voice.

"Er, yo, Jill," Jefferson said.

"Get *lost*, Jeff!" she spat.

"Uh, I just, er, wanted to, um, help you out," he stuttered.

"Oh, yes," Milly growled. "What 'help,' fatso?"

Jefferson bit his lip. "I have a change of clothes in my backpack. Jill might find them useful."

Jillson snatched the backpack and ran off.

"Well, at least she got help," Jefferson thought.

Then Ramona started running back to Jefferson. "Hey! Watch Lipstick for us while we go change. That Mayrem gang might steal her."

"Oh, okay, yo," Jefferson said. He walked over to the weird horse. He had taken riding lessons just this year in America. He patted Lipstick and stroked her muzzle.

He couldn't feel air coming from the horse's nostrils...

"Not possible," he muttered. "If you're dead you can't be standing." He reached down and felt Lipstick's chest. No heart was beating, but there was a faint buzzing sound emanating from within.

Jefferson pushed his thick hand into the horses' skin and nearly fainted when something small fell into his hand.

Fifteen minutes later, Maryam saw Jefferson talking to Jillson in the row of chairs in front of her in the audience. Maryam, Danyal, Ra'idah, and Zaytunah had found seats here. Zaytunah's parents and little sister were a few seats away. Jillson looked like a complete fool. She was wearing male clothes which were obviously too big, and the shirt hung till her knees, but it did not look as indecent as before.

One of the lady staff came over and requested everyone to be silent.

On one side, there was a small raised platform. The two judges for the show were sitting there behind a large table, along with some staff members. A loudspeaker was on the table. Outside

the fence, there was another elevated platform for the audience, from where you could see the whole track.

The field for egg-and-spoon and flag race was a part of the steeplechasing³ track. It was about as large as a football field, and there were proper fences only on two sides. Chains marked the other two ends. The field had grass which came halfway up to the horses' knees.

The five members of the Pallies' and Jefferson were in front of Maryam and her friends. Jillson kept pinching Jefferson until he went to the other side and sat next to Martina, who kept pinching him as well. But he couldn't feel her scrawny fingers through all that buff and muscle.

Infuriated, Martina gave up the pinching and opened Twitter on her iPhone X instead.

The race was about to start. Maryam and her family were sitting in the third row after the ground's fence. She sat back and whispered to Rai'dah: "That's Mr President next to Martina."

Ra'idah giggled and whispered back: "Thomas Jefferson?"

Maryam nodded.

Amna looked around dejectedly. There were four riders other than her in the group. Milly was on her left. Another frizzy-haired rider was on her right. There were ten riders in total, and they were racing in groups. Amna's was the first one. They were lined up for the egg-and-spoon race⁴. The riders had eggs given by the gymkhana staff, not ones riders brought themselves, so Milly couldn't possibly cheat.

Amna would've been completely happy if it hadn't been for Milly's constant teasing.

"Oh, *wow*, girlie. Wha' a derty bron hoss." "Ya the Dirt rider, gurlie?" "Ahoy, dumbo. Wassup with yer friendys? Git last?" "Yo, dimwit. Where dat dumb blonde?" "Wha' *terrible* fashion sense ya 'ave! No' even a colored sa'ddle." "If I lose dis round to ya, gurl, ma name ain't Milly." Milly was a total fail at trying to talk in a 'wild west' style.

Amna just ignored her, but now it was getting a little infuriating. She waited impatiently for the words '1,2,3 GO!' to come over the loudspeaker.

At last Amin yelled into the speaker. "Wan, too, tree, GO!"

The horses began to trot. It was against the rule (and impossible) to canter in egg-and-spoon race, but Blaze could trot as fast as a horse cantered. Milly was only a step behind Amna.

³

⁴ See glossary

The other horses weren't slow at trotting, though. Two riders were ahead of Amna. She urged Blaze to go faster. They passed the second rider...then the first... they were in the lead! Just then, a horse passed by Blaze. Amna nearly fell off when she saw long curly blonde hair. Milly was ahead!

The frizzy-haired rider was gaining as well. A few minutes later, the finish line came in sight. Milly was still in the lead.

Blaze was trotting as fast as he could, but Lipstick's legs were a blur. The frizzy-haired rider's horse seemed to be an official trotter.

Amna slapped the reins on Blaze's neck. "Faster!"

Blaze managed to overtake the frizzy-haired rider, but Amna nearly burst in shock when Lipstick's hooves landed on the finish line seconds before Blaze's.

"The winner is Mel-ya-naya Fos maalai!" Amin yelled.

"WHAT?" Zaytunah, Maryam, Ra'idah and Amna all yelled in outrage.

"YAH YAH YAH YAH YAH!!!" the Pallies' shrieked. "*WE DID IT! WE DID IT! WE DID IT!* **HOORAY!**"

A nearby lady made a loud shushing sound.

"It isn't over yet, stupids!" Maryam spat.

"Second place: Amna Akmal!" Amin yelled.

"Told ya!" Maryam smirked.

"Ten minutes till the next event: Flag race⁵!" Umar said into the loudspeaker. "The horses may rest. Flag holders are being placed in the egg-and-spoon race ground."

Sure enough, Amin and another staff member were bringing flags and holders into the ground. This time, it would be done in two groups of five as well. Amna was in the second group. Milly was in the first one.

Maryam, Zaytunah and Ra'idah got up. "Watch our seats," Maryam told Danyal. They hurried over to Amna who was riding Blaze out of the ground.

"It's impossible!" Amna exclaimed when they came over.

"Milly doesn't know how to control a horse!" Ra'idah complained.

"She must've cheated somehow," Zaytunah said.

⁵ See glossary

"Hey, there's an empty seat next to Danyal," Maryam said. "Amna, wanna sit there while waiting for your turn?"

"I have to stand with Blaze. It's okay."

"Oh, okay. Well, we're going back to the audience and eavesdropping a bit on the Pallies', alright? Jefferson is saying something to Danyal. He looks ready to pummel him," Ra'idah said. Amna nodded, so the three friends went back quickly to their seats.

"Morning, Mr President," Maryam said sarcastically when they sat down.

"Who's president?" Jillson growled.

"And you're the first lady," Martina grumbled.

"What did he say?" Maryam asked her brother.

Danyal rolled his eyes. "Just this: You're stupid. I'll hit you. I'll take the seats. You're a nerd. Blah, blah, blah. The name President is befitting for him; he's worse than Donald Trump."

"I don't blame him," Maryam said teasingly. "Your glasses *do* make you look like a nerd."

Danyal rolled his eyes again, even though he felt a bit intimidated by Jefferson.

The loudspeaker crackled to life. "Competitors from Group 1, line up!"

Millyania rode forward with a smirk on her face, but it disappeared when she saw the flag holders.

"Er, what am I supposed to do?" Milly asked nervously.

"Why did you come if you don't know?" Another rider, who was next to Milly, spoke. "You're supposed to run to that flag-holder, pick up the flag, run back and put it in this holder. Us other four will do the same. You can't touch the holder, knock it over or drop the flag. Then we'll see who comes back first."

Milly nodded. Then Amin took up the loudspeaker.

"Wan, too, tree, GO!"

Millyania kicked Lipstick. The horse stopped, then came forward slowly. Milly kicked again. She shot forward.

The other riders were already at their flag holders and leaning out of the saddle to pick up their flag. Lipstick barreled into her holder and knocked it over—but not before Milly grabbed the flag.

"Foul!" Amin yelled.

Milly turned Lipstick around and kicked again. Again, Lipstick shot forward. This time Millyania fell over the horse's neck and accidentally got her head inside her holder. Two riders came in a tie in second place: they dropped their flags in the holders at the same time. The rider who had talked to Milly came first. The fourth rider came third, of course. Milly, who was hanging by her ankles in the stirrups, lost.

"Tripple foul!" Amin yelled. "Mel-ya-naya looses!"

"Loser!" Maryam said. "Hah!"

"We came fourth place!" Ramona shot back.

"She lost!" Ra'idah snapped.

Umar grabbed the loudspeaker. "Group 2, come forward." He leaned toward Amin and whispered something to him. Amin nodded and hurried off the stage.

Amna and the other four riders rode into the ground, and on Umar's request Ra'idah and Maryam came too. They pulled on Millyania's legs but her head wasn't coming out.

Amin arrived and grabbed the holder. Ra'idah and Maryam each took one of Milly's legs. They pulled and pulled—then with a loud *pop*! Milly's head came out.

"Oooooooooowwww," she moaned.

Ra'idah checked her over. "No injuries, just your head might be a little sore. Be careful next time. You're lucky."

Millyania just grumbled something about a "noodleheaded Red Cross nurse".

The five riders from the next group lined up next to their flag holders and waited for the signal.

"One, two, three, GO!"

Amna was the third one to reach the holders on the other side of the field. As Blaze cantered around, she grabbed the flag and raced back to her holder. The frizzy-haired rider reached there first. Amna nearly fell off in disbelief when another rider dropped a flag into her holder before the frizzy-haired rider could.

"Winner is Diana Ding Dong!" Umar yelled. "Second place: Sadia Mubeen! Third place: Amna Akmal!"

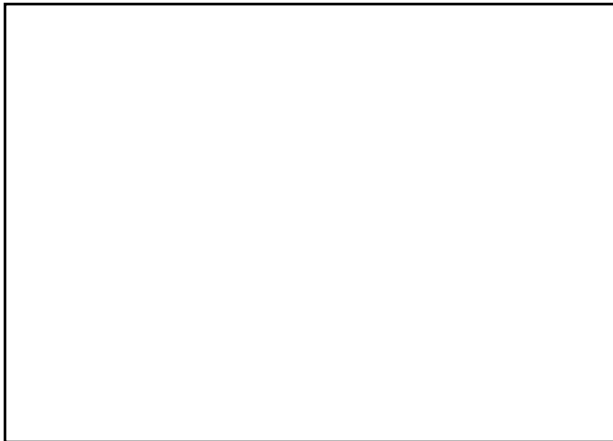
Amna stared suspiciously at the rider Diana Ding Dong. Then she turned and looked at the holders at the other side of the field. But she had won fairly.

"Okay, now we'll open the barriers for the steeplechasing." Umar moved to the chains stretching across the end of the ground.

"Steeplechasing! Yes!" Maryam jumped up and down.

Zaytunah and Maryam shifted eagerly in wait for Amin to shout into the loudspeaker.

Instead, Umar took it up. "Okay. Attention, all ten riders! Here is an overview of the track: First, there is the ground. You can do only walk and trot, to conserve the horses' energy. Then there are hedges and jumps. If your horse refuses to jump, or if it touches the jump, it's a foul and you're out of the race. Then, there is a series of bending poles and barrels, and if you touch them, it's a foul and out-of-the-race as well. Finally, there is a steep slope, deep water, and the finish line, which is a thin string stretching across the track. The first horse to tear through it wins. This race is not on the usual pattern—usually if a rider knocks down anything they don't get kicked out of the race. But we thought it would be good to have something different for once. And the riders will be racing all at once, not in groups. Now, get set..."



The riders rode up to the starting line.

"Ready..."

The riders tensed.

"GO!"

The horses broke into trot. Milly's horse was going as fast as it had been in the egg-and-spoon race. The other horses were almost cantering.

When they reached the jumps, the first one was very high and difficult. The horses started cantering, but one horse took one look at the jump and skidded to a stop. That horse was out of the race.

Blaze cleared the first jump. So did all the other horses, including Lipstick. Then there was a hedge which wasn't very high. The horses cleared that too.

Off the horses went, over cross-pole jumps, high jumps, low jumps, thorny hedges, bounce fences and brick walls. When they reached the end of the jumps, six of the original ten riders (at the beginning of the whole gymkhana) were left. Milly, Amna and Sadia were still in the race. Three horses had either knocked down a jump or refused to jump at all.

The bending poles stretched into the distance. Only one rider, the last one in the line, knocked down a pole and got out of the race. This race was the hardest anyone had competed in yet. It really tested the horses' skill and the riders' control--no wonder so many riders failed.

Then there was the steep slope, with water at the end. The five riders leaned forward in their saddles. The horses were almost galloping.

They cantered down. Amna could have reached out and grabbed Sadia's shoulder, they were so close. Blaze and her horse's strides matched. The two were in the lead. This was the most difficult rider Amna had ever competed against. Sadia seemed really experienced.

Then the horses hopped over a ten-inch barrier (that was there to stop the water) and into the water. This tested the riders' control and nerve again--the water nearly came up to the horses' knees.

Millyania, behind the others, urged Lipstick to go faster. As she reached the start of the slope, she lost control. Lipstick shuddered to a stop. Then suddenly two very huge things were hanging onto Lipstick's legs, which made her suddenly go down faster than a Thoroughbred galloping. The sky went past in a blur; while the four riders had taken five minutes to race down because it was dangerous to go too fast, Lipstick reached down in sixty seconds.

The horse's hooves hit the barrier. The momentum sent the two flying....

And then down, down, down into the water.

Jillson had seen Millyania slow down at the middle of the bending poles. Worried about her not being able to get down quickly, she rose quickly and growled: "You, Jeffy! Come with me!"

Jefferson almost burst with joy. Jillson was making up with him! He got up and followed Jillson like an obedient puppy, who was going at no slow pace.

"Why're you taking him?" Ramona called.

"So he doesn't kill you all!" Jillson called back. "And I need his help."

Jefferson's face fell. Jillson was just using him, after all. The two began running as fast as Olympic gold medalists.

The two arrived at the exact same time as Millyania at the slope and grabbed Lipstick's legs and pushed at Jillson's command. (Milly was too busy worrying about Lipstick not moving to notice.) Suddenly, Jillson's foot hit a small pebble. She slipped and hit Jefferson. Together they shot forward, the Jac Hammers hanging onto Lipstick's legs.



Blaze and Sadia's horse tore through the string at the same time just as there was a colossal *splash* in the water behind them. Blaze skidded to a stop.

"Sadia Mubeen and Amna Akmal come in a tie!" Umar shouted excitedly. "Diana Ding Dong comes second!—" He stopped abruptly when he saw the thing that had splashed into the water.

Recovering, Amna dismounted and led her horse to the massive thing. Sadia followed.

Millyania rose out of the water, dripping and spluttering. Jefferson and Jillson rose up next to Blaze. Jillson, off balance, reached out and ripped five deep and long scratches in Blaze's best saddle. Amna nearly screeched in anger.

In the audience, Maryam laughed so loudly that Danyal glared at her. (She hadn't seen what Jillson did to Blaze's saddle).

"Ahahaahahah!" she cried. "Here comes a new nursery rhyme!"

Ra'idah started singing in a low voice and Maryam joined in:

"Jeff and Jill went up to Mill

To get her out of the water!

Jeff fell down and broke his crown

And Jill came tumbling after!"

Then Amna realized that Lipstick, the largest thing, lay still. Abruptly, a deathly silence fell over the whole ground.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?" Amna cried. She rushed over to the horse.

A group comprising of Amin, Maryam, Zaytunah, her father, Danyal, the riders that had gotten out of the race and the rest of the Pallies' arrived at the scene. Amna was distraught. Was the horse *dead*? It was a miracle that Milly hadn't broken any bones.

Maryam knelt down to look at Lipstick.

"We-eird horse."

Sadia leaned over. "Yeah."

"Wait!" cried Maryam, tugging on the horse's mane. "The mane isn't even real!"

"There aren't any hooves under the boots!" Zaytunah called.

Everyone started shouting.

"What do you mean?" said one of the riders.

"Of course the mane can't be FAKE!" protested Jillson.

"Synthetic material is common these days!" Maryam pulled on Lipstick's forelock. The hair refused to come up off the horse's forehead.

"You can't be serious!" Martina snapped. "We'd never cheat!"

Maryam laughed so much she sat down in the water. "BWAHAHAA! WHAT A JOKE!"

"No! Look! The bridle is attached firmly! The horse's mouth isn't opening!" Zaytunah tugged at the straps.

"I'd guess you guys'd cheat!" Danyal muttered.

"Right you are," Ra'idah said. Strangely, the Pallies' other than Jillson and Martina never spoke, and Jefferson also remained quiet. The crowd was silent, waiting for the people in the ground to clear everything up.

Milly shrunk back.

Amin picked up one of the legs. "This not even bon! Light as feder!" (OK, the leg wasn't even *that* light, but as a full-grown Phatan, Amin was pretty strong.)

Maryam tried lifting the horses' back. "Amin uncle? Amna? A little help?"

Together the three lifted the horse. It rose easily.

"Hey!" another rider yelled. "Three people can't lift a horse, especially if two are just KIDS!"

"It's impossible!" someone else called.

"Stop yelling, you're spooking the horses," Amna's father said. "If it's impossible, then here is the impossible, being shown possible before your very eyes."

Zaytunah, Amna, Maryam and Amin carried Lipstick out of the water to the grass. Of course, the Pallies' had disappeared. By now, some more people from the audience were getting up and coming down into the steeplechasing track.

Maryam saw something sticking out from the fake mane. She tugged it out.

"HO-HO, LADDES AND GENNEMEN! LOOK HERE!"

Amin handed her a small loudspeaker. "This with, every wun is hear you...how do you say? Ah, yes. Every wun is hear you LOD AND CLEER."

Maryam grabbed it and started yelling into the back.

"HO – HO, EVERYONE! LISTEN HERE! THIS THING HAPPENS TO BE A PAPER. IT READS: 'Made exclusively for MISS MILLYANIA PHOSSMALLI by Crazy Contraptions™. Any part of this work may be copied, distorted or stolen without permission of the owner or producer. Thank you for not cooperating, bye bye, from Crazy Contraptions™. P.S I hate Millyania.'" Maryam and her cousins started laughing.

"WHAT?" Danyal yelled.

"You mean...you mean it's a fake horse?!" Sadia asked disbelievingly.

"Can I have it?" asked Amna's little sister excitedly. "Everyone has horses except me."

"No way that's possible!" said somebody else.

"Hey!" Zaytunah called. "If you think the paper is fake, look at this." She tugged off a brush boot and held up the "leg" for everyone to see.

"Wheels!" Amna exclaimed. "No wonder she went sooo fast! You can't slow wheels down. Especially when you're going too fast. Although CC could add brakes. I think they might have malfunctioned." Now mechanics was one thing Amna could talk about for hours.

"So what do we do with it now?" Danyal asked.

The manager (he's the strict-looking person who told Milly off) arrived at the scene. Amin quickly explained everything to him. He raised his eyebrows and laughed when he heard Milly got soaked.

"Serves that rude girl right," he said. "As for the fake horse, I will take care of it."

The crowd began to disperse, talking excitedly between themselves. The riders remounted their horses. But Maryam leapt over the fence and dashed toward the direction of the exit of the show.

"Raaaaidaaaaaah!" she yelled over her shoulder. "Come on!"

Ra'idah ducked under the fence and sprinted after Maryam. Ra'idah had a special interest in the athletic field and was physically very fit. And it was this interest which came in handy for a lot of things, such as catching up with Maryam now.

Amna thrust Blaze's reins into Danyal's hand—who backed away, holding the reins at arm's length—and Amna ran after Maryam and Ra'idah. Zaytunah followed her.

Maryam skidded to a stop and pointed. "JUST LOOK AT THAT, WILL YOU!" she yelled.

The Pallies' were piling into their limo.

"They gotta be arrested for cheating! We gotta tell Crazy Contraptions to stop doing stuff for them! We need their contact!" Maryam shot over to the car, Rai'dah at her heels. "STOP, CHEATERS!!" Maryam yelled.

Amna and Zaytunah arrived at the exit, doubled over and panting. "What's the matter?" Zaytunah called.

"They'll escaaaaaape!" Maryam yanked one of the limo doors open. Ra'idah did the same on the other side—when suddenly, they were yanked in themselves.

"HEEEEEEEY!" Maryam yelled. "Let me GO, you stupid buffoon!"

"I am *not* a BUFFOON!"

Amna recognized Jefferson's voice with a start.

"You, Mr Buffoon President?! Silly bonehead, you think you can grab *me*? Here you go.." Maryam's voice faded as Jefferson slammed the door closed. The limo sped away.

For a moment Amna and Zaytunah were too shocked to move, think, or speak. Then Zaytunah yelled, "I'm going back to tell Baba!! You find Danyal!" She spun around.

Whisked away!

They hadn't run much when they found their dad and Danyal. "The Pallies' yanked Maryam and Ra'idah into their car and sped away!!" Zaytunah cried. "What are we gonna do?!"

Danyal's face drained of color. Their father gave a visible start. "*What?*"

"Let's go after them!" Amna was still trying to catch her breath.

"Danyal, go call the others!!" Their father began running to the Prado. "We'll go after them!"

Amna and Zaytunah ran after him. They jumped in as their father started the car.

"Where did they go?" he asked.

"To the left!" Amna yelled.

Her father rammed the car forward. Already he was driving at sixty.

"Faster, Baba! Jillson drives at ninety!" Zaytunah shouted.

"Calm down!" he said, slamming his foot down on the accelerator. "Calm down, in sha Allah, we'll catch them. You're panicking. The Pallies' aren't going to torture them or anything. Maryam will torture them with her jokes."

As it turned out, Maryam *was* torturing the Pallies'.

But not with her jokes. Although Jefferson was keeping a tight grip on her wrists, she took advantage of Martina wagging her fingers and kept biting them. And Maryam's bites weren't good. She also kept complaining about the music playing.

During that time, Maryam also examined everything carefully with her eyes. There were two seats at the front, behind the wheel, as they are in a normal car. There was space enough for Jillson to walk through between them, though. The limo was spacious, and the sides were lined with a row of plush sofas. Above them were long, narrow containers made of steel and labeled "FRIDGE FOR CHOCOLATES." (Maryam recognized Ramona's writing.) Above *them* were similar long, narrow windows. There were two doors—one on each side.

Ra'idah, on the other hand, kept using the locks she'd learned in ninja to free her hands and grab Mallaphoss's, who was holding her. Mallaphoss freed herself, grabbed Ra'idah's hands, Ra'idah twisted away, grabbed Mallaphoss, Mallaphoss freed herself....they were in an endless cycle.

At last Maryam's jaw started aching so she began to tease instead.

"Look at your nails. Mallaphoss's are waaaay better." At this Mallaphoss smirked at Ramona. "Ooooooh, Dora! Your eyebrow is mussed." At this Dora immediately took her eyes off Ra'idah and looked at her mirror. "MILLLYY! Jillson says you're stupid!" At that, Milly slapped Jillson. Jillson left the steering wheel and whacked Millyania, who clean blacked out (almost—she was lost in a daze for a few minutes). "Oh, *no*, Martina! The Boss is DEAD!" The Pallies' screamed at that.

"AAAH! FIRE ALERT! MR PRESIDENT'S HEAD'S ON FIRE!" Maryam yelled. Jefferson automatically grabbed his hair. Maryam jumped up and sat on his head. "STOMP OUT THE FIRE!" She kicked his head, causing a loud *thock*. "No wonder. Your brain's loose!"

Just then, Milly screamed: "Shut up, everyone! The blue Prado's at our tail!"

"On our tail," Ra'idah corrected from her perch on Mallaphoss's shoulder.

"Rat's tail," Maryam said, pulling Jefferson's hair. "You're rats and we're the cats!"

"I am *not* a rat!" Dora growled. "My makeup's the best!"

"Nobel Prize for the ugliest rat ever goes to....DORA EXX PLOWRER!"

"Shut *up*, Mery am!" Millyania snapped. "Why aren't you keeping her quiet, Jeffersony?!"

"I'm trying, but I can't if she's sitting on my head," Jefferson shot back.

"Mr. Buff President is too weak to get a twelve-year-old off his head," Ra'idah mocked.

"Oh, yeah?" Jefferson snarled. "Here..." He shook his head so violently Maryam went flying and landed on Jillson instead.

"Oops," Jefferson muttered.

"YOU TINY LITTLE SQUIRT, GET OFF ME!" Jillson yelled.

"Thanks, Mr President!" Maryam yelled. She made sure Jillson's seatbelt was secure and that her meaty hands were tight between her hips and the seatbelt. Then, sitting down on them, she recalled which pedal was which....

Maryam didn't really know how to drive, but she had sat in a car enough to know that the steering wheel and pedals are the tools.

So with one foot on the wheel and one foot on the accelerator, and her hands pushing away the rest of the Pallies', Maryam began driving. First of all, she shut off the stupid pop music that had been playing up till now.

The limo careened crazily across the lanes, narrowly missing cars and almost crashing into signposts. Maryam and Mallaphoss were fighting over the wheel. Ra'idah was blocking the others from gaining control of the car.

In the rearview mirror, Maryam saw the blue car behind them. She could make out her father hunched over the wheel and Amna and Zaytunah tumbling around because he was matching the limo's every twist and turn at an amazing speed. "Huh, now what?" she thought.

Ra'idah pulled Mallaphoss away from the wheel. Maryam was now driving with her feet and pushing the accelerator with her hands, thanks to her head shoved downwards. Jillson was lying on the floor, dazed, because Ramona's nails and Jefferson's fist had hit her on the jaw at the same time. Dora hunkered to the back of the limo and whimpered. Ramona took advantage of the situation and downed a few packets of Kit Kats. Martina joined Mallaphoss in the fight for the wheel.

Maryam gained control of her position and the car and looked for a place to park. She spotted a flat steel beam lying on the ground in a clearing between two houses, in a construction site (which was empty of workers) and aimed for that.

Unfortunately, when Maryam was about to stop the car, Martina's spike heel rammed onto the accelerator. The limo shot forward.

The beam acted as a takeoff ramp. Maryam's foot slipped and hit the accelerator again.

The Pallies' car flew into the air.

Amna spotted the pink limo careening across the road.

"There they are!" Zaytunah shouted. "And they lost control!"

"WHAT IS HAPPENING?" their father yelled.

The car was flying into the air.

"*WHAT?!?!?*" All three of them let out a huge yell of disbelief.

They saw Maryam's hair flying out of the window and a shout: "This is better than an airplane—and Crazy Contraptions™ has added a flying control!!"

"Don't tell me CC made *that*, too!" Amna exclaimed.

But it seemed like CC *had* made it. Because two wings began protruding from the limousine's sides. And the car began to soar through the air.

The Pallies' and Jefferson all fainted from shock, fear and airsickness. Except for Martina. Who was, of course, screaming.

"Close your great big lipsticky mouth!" Ra'idah snapped.

"Yeah!" Maryam said. "Don't disturb the pilots!!"

You might be thinking how this flying business occurred in the first place. Here's how:

The Pallies' had bought the limo from Crazy Contraptions™. They had never bothered to look at the manual with it (know-it-alls!) which said that there was a flying function in it, too.

The car was especially lightweight and had cost the Pallies' 100,000 dollars—way more than the price of a normal limo. The Pallies' still hadn't gone below the \$4m limit Milly had set, though, thanks to their recent online bank loot. The doors were bulletproof and were unusually thick. Little had they known that the doors contained wings.

The Pallies' had seen a button labeled "F CB." In the manual, "F CB" had been explained, but the Pallies' hadn't read it and hadn't cared to find out what the button was for. All they cared about was *having* the limo. "F CB" stood for "Flying ControlBoard."

Millyania's hand had hit "F CB" when the limo had launched into the air. Ramona had jabbed the button "Fly" without realizing, and Maryam had seen it when they were in the air. She took some time to figure it out along with Ra'idah, but she had got it in the end.

Ra'idah shoved all the Pallies' in a pile behind the two seats at the front. Martina came at the bottom of it. Then Ra'idah began turning knobs and pushing levers while Maryam steered the car.

"You know, I wonder how to land!" Maryam said.

"We'll crash into the Pallies' house and race away!" Ra'idah suggested.

"Umm, we kind of have a low chance at surviving that."

"Really, I was joking! There must be some way to land this thingy. Crazy Contraptions™ wouldn't want to kill all its customers, you know."

"You're right, I guess. Let me study the panel better while you steer."

"Alright." Ra'idah got up and switched places with Maryam.

"Hmm, this is quite complicated. Rows of buttons: nine by two, equaling eighteen, three levers with four different settings, making twelve total. Four knobs with five settings, equals twenty settings. Totaled, there are fifty settings!"

"Quick math," Ra'idah said approvingly. "Why so many settings, though?"

"And I did it in exactly five-point-three seconds," Maryam boasted. "Half of them control stuff like AC, music, radio, temperature-in-the-fridge. Though I don't know why they needed to put it in the *flight* control! Maybe because the flight control panel covers the buttons on the normal control panel, which will make them impossible to press."

"Yeah," Ra'idah said, who hadn't understood the last sentence at all. "Look out the window, will you? So we can see if the Prado is following us or not."

"THIS IS OUR LIMO!" a voice screeched.

Both the girls twisted around and looked. The Pallies' were scattered around, still knocked out, because Martina had wriggled out of the bottom of the pile. And it was her who was advancing to the front.

"Hold onto the wheel," Rai'dah hissed. She climbed out of her seat and landed in a fighting stance.

"Oh, dear, here comes Alex Rider⁶," Martina sneered.

"No, because I don't know how to ski, snowboard, surf, tight-rope walk, sky-dive, die-and-somehow-not-die, SAS train, pickpocket, shoot, drive, swim or anything," Ra'idah shot back. "I play football, run lots—after *you*, may I add—and do ninja. That's it."

"Still Alex Rider," Martina spat.

"Thank you, Snow White," Ra'idah snapped.

"I like Dora better," Martina said.

"Thank you, Martina!" Maryam called. "I *always* wanted to know your role model."

"Oh, don't mention it," Martina answered sarcastically. "I'm going to get control of this car, then find out who is YOUR role model." She began walking again.

Ra'idah gave her a punch in the stomach and scared her into backing away—and staying there--by making gagging sounds and kicking the air.

"That's taken care of," she said, satisfied.

"And I'm figuring out how to land!" Maryam exclaimed. "There's your house, Ra'idah!"

A voice emanated from the back.

"You spoke too soon, squirt."

⁶ An extremely famous character (created by Anthony Horowitz) which I hate from the depths of my heart.

Amna looked down from the top of the Pallies' roof.

"I see them!" she called.

"Are they stopping?" her father yelled back.

Amna and Zaytunah had climbed up to this roof to watch the pink limo which was coming near the Pallies' house. Danyal was on the ground.

"Jillson ruined Blaze's best saddle," Amna said with a good amount of resentment.

"Too bad. So what are we going to do now?" Zaytunah said.

"I wish we could fly up there and get Maryam and Ra'idah out," Amna said wistfully.

"I wish one of our friends had a helicopter," Zaytunah reflected. "We could do that then."

"DON'T THEY?!" Amna cried, almost falling over. "I heard Jillson say they came here on a helicopter! She said the pilot's number was 0302-56239! Let's rent it! Let's get it! Let's steal it! Let's—"

"Whatever!" Zaytunah cried. "Let's run after the limo!"

Amna began running down the stairs. Zaytunah followed. When they arrived at the ground floor, their father had reached after dropping the others back home with Blaze.

"Baba! BABA! Call this number: 0302-56239! Call it! Tell him to come to street 18 house 123! HURRY!"

A minute later her father was talking to Diego the pilot.

"Yes. So, can you come here? Yes, please? Yes? Ten ice-lollies? What? Sure, but after you fly us there. With ten ice creams? Fine! Just hurry! Okay, bye."

"What did he say? What did he say?" all the three kids chanted as soon as their father closed the phone.

"He said the copter will be here in minutes! "

"Count down starting now!" Danyal announced, pointing to his watch.

Just then, the limo began to descend. A massive parachute blossomed above it.

"They figured out how to land!" Danyal yelled.

Maryam poked her head out of the window, cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted down: "Yes, we did! We're about to land in the Pallies' lawn!!"

"Alhamdulillah! Yaaaay!" All of them—including Amna's father—yelled.

But their happiness was short-lived. Just when the tires were inches away from the ground and Maryam was about to throw open the door, the limo was wrenched up and away.

"PUNY LITTLE SQUIRT, THIS IS **MY** LIMO!" a voice yelled.

"That's Jillson's voice!" Zaytunah and Amna exclaimed in unison.

"Oh, no!" Danyal cried, as the limo rocked and spun. "She's gaining control!"

And Jillson *was* gaining control.

The Pallies' came to around the same time, and Jillson ordered Jefferson to get Ra'idah out of the front seat while she did the same to Maryam. Milly and Mallaphoss took the wheel, and Dora and Ramona cowered in a corner. Martina stumbled around, dazed.

"'Allo, 'allo, Mrs. Buffoon," Maryam said casually. "I see you regained your mind."

They fought for a few minutes over the wheel, causing the limo to spin around in the same place. This went on for a good ten minutes, because the spinning kept them off balance and Ra'idah was constantly kicking, messing hair and clothes and cracking nails.

"I have always had my mind, thank you very much," Jillson snarled.

"You're muchly welcom—" Maryam was interrupted when Jillson yanked her out of the seat (Maryam didn't care for seatbelts, which might have provided some protection if she had one on) and flung her to the back. Jefferson was a bit more gentle, yanking Ra'idah in the same way but lowering her down to the floor instead of flinging her.

Maryam flew to the end of the limo and crashed into the last seat. Luckily, this was Milly's seat, so it was extra-cushioned and Maryam wasn't hurt. Ra'idah crashed into it next to her.

"Who flung you?" Maryam asked.

"Miss Buff," Ra'idah grumbled. "Mr President is a little gentler."

"Now what're we going to do?" Maryam asked. "Mr & Miss Buffoon won't let us regain control again. The others will know the Pallies're at the wheel."

"Let's wait a minute. I bet they have nowhere to go except their own house."

"The Pallies' or Amna and Zaytunah?"

"The Pallies', of course."

"Hey! Hold on a sec!" Maryam hissed. "I hear something!"

"I hear it too!" Ra'idah whispered.

It was a faint, faraway *chop chop chop* sound of a helicopter's rotors. The two girls' eyes met. The Pallies' mustn't know about this helicopter.....

Maryam glanced at the Pallies', who were all engrossed in figuring out the flying controls. She turned her head and looked out the back window.

A helicopter was flying toward them. Maryam could just make out a person hunched over the controls.

"Hey! Look at that!" she whispered.

On the ground, Amna had spotted the helicopter. It hovered above them, and then the door opened. A rope ladder was being lowered down.

"Uh, that looks scary," Danyal said. "I don't like heights."

"Even though your sister would think it's the best thing in the world," Amna scoffed.

"Learn something from your sibling," Zaytunah said.

Danyal went red. "*Zameen asmaan ka farq hai hum dono ka?*"

"Oh, yes! I thought boys were supposed to LIKE helicopters!" Amna taunted.

"Beta, he's older than you," their father scolded. He was already climbing the twenty-rung ladder. "Danyal, hurry up."

"What if my glasses fall off?" Danyal asked.

"They won't, In sha Allah."

Amna and Zaytunah both leapt for the ladder and began scurrying up. "Race ya!" Zaytunah called over her shoulder.

Amna's head nearly hit her dad's foot. "Ba-baaa! Hurry *up*!"

"I'm going as fast as I can!" her father replied. "And look at that limo!"

⁷ Urdu expression.

The limo was cruising away, faster by the second. Now it was nearly a speck in the sky.

Zaytunah glanced down. Danyal was slowly ascending, because his shaking feet found holds with difficulty. He was ten rungs below them, and Amna's dad was ten rungs away from the door.

Amna and Zaytunah were both clinging to one side of the ladder and going up step for step together. After a few seconds, their father reached the open door. The two girls jumped in right after him. And Danyal was still fifteen rungs away. So his cousins grabbed one side of the ladder each and hauled him up, causing a short squeal.

"YOU!" Danyal stepped toward them menacingly when he regained his balance.

Now, it was just that Amna and Zaytunah had a bad habit. When Danyal showed some weakness somewhere, they tended to tease him. Most times, like right now, they did it partly to hurry him up and without any really bad intention, but it was a bad habit nevertheless—and Danyal was twelve, older than both of them.

The two girls put on innocent looks. "Baba said we could," Zaytunah said, feigning surprise.

Their father stepped between Danyal and his cousins. "Quit the quarreling, beta, and now let's plan what we're going to do."

"The limo is about five miles away," Amna complained. "Tell the pilot to hurry!"

Their father started talking to the pilot in Urdu. After a minute, a phone rang.

"You have a phone?"

The pilot reached into his pocket and with one hand on the controls, started talking. Of course, his passengers couldn't hear the other side of the conversation. But they heard the pilot saying this:

"Yes.....yes.....sure.....okay.....got it. Bye."

"Who was it?" Amna asked sharply.

"Oh, nothing....just my friend," the pilot said quickly.

The kids exchanged suspicious looks. But this was just a pilot, anyway. So he was probably just nervous, taking strangers on a ride chasing a pink flying limousine.

After a few minutes, the limo was close enough to see Maryam and Ra'idah peeking out from the back. It was going pretty slow (although they didn't know it, Milly was driving instead of Jillson-who was arguing with Jefferson.)

"So now, you will lower me to the car and wait while I come up with Maryam and Ra'idah, and you're going to keep hovering here," the girls' father was instructing the pilot, who nodded along.

As planned, the copter hovered over the limousine, he climbed down the rope ladder and started opening the door. He had let go of the ladder now, and was holding onto a small handle on the top of the car.

Suddenly, in a blur of pushing buttons and pulling levers, the pilot pulled up the ladder, swung the helicopter around and began flying away.

"HEY!" Amna and Zaytunah yelled. "What're you up to? This isn't part of the plan!"

The pilot didn't reply.

Danyal hurried over and yanked his hands from the controls. "You! Turn back! Are you going to leave my uncle hanging on a limousine 500 feet from the ground?!"

The pilot grunted, pulling away from Danyal's grip. "Stupid kid! Leave my hand!"

Danyal found himself thrown at the back, with his cousins under him. The pilot was steering the helicopter further away from the limousine, picking up speed as he went.

For a moment the three kids lay there, dazed. Then Danyal hissed: "I think he's teamed up with the Pallies'!"

"Of course he is. Why else would he just fly away?" Amna grumbled.

"So stop lying around! We need to gain control. I bet we can figure it out." Zaytunah pulled herself up and began running across the helicopter.

For quite a while, the pilot fended them off, keeping the aircraft under control. Then Amna managed to get hold of the cyclic lever (she didn't know what it was at the time) and pushed it to the side. The helicopter swung around.

The pilot pulled it back. Amna pushed it again. The helicopter went careening, neither under the kids' control nor under the pilot's. Zaytunah tumbled forward and pushed the throttle to full speed. Danyal hit the collective lever⁸, and the copter began to ascend.

⁸ See glossary.

The helicopter was zigzagging in the air just as the Pallies' pink limo had been going across the roads about twenty minutes earlier. Amna yelled: "Time for us to take control!"

She and Zaytunah grabbed one of the pilot's arms each and pulled him out of the seat with the help of Danyal. The pilot kicked and grunted (he seemed very fond of grunting) but the three kids held on. They put him down a distance away from the pilot seat and while Danyal and Zaytunah held him down, Amna looked around for something to keep him under control. Luckily, someone had hit the "Hover" button on the control panel and the helicopter was staying in one place. (Planes can't do that, helicopters can.)

After a minute, Amna found two frayed lengths of rope near the back. They were old but sturdy, and after tying up the pilot's hands and feet, she and Danyal hurried to the control panel. Both of them had an interest in mechanics, and now it came in handy.

Most of the buttons were labeled, and the two figured most of it out quickly. Danyal took the pilot seat. Amna stood next to it. And Zaytunah stood guard by the pilot, with one foot on his leg.

In the limousine, things were going crazy. Milly, at the wheel, was yelling at Dora: "WHY DID YOU MOVE MY HAIR?!" Ramona was smirking and tilting her nails, showing Mallaphoss that her nails were better. Martina was giggling and watching Jillson and Jefferson argue. Maryam and Ra'idah were staring in surprise at the door being yanked open.

The whole limo fell silent as a graveyard when an imposing figure of a man, with a very large, blown-up beard stepped in. The Pallies' all screamed "A **GHOST**!! EEEEEK!" And Jefferson yelled: "No, it's a terrorist!"

Millyania kept a tight grip on the wheel. This was not a time to lose control. Jillson commanded Jefferson to leap on the intruder. He complied. Maryam noted that Jefferson was obeying his sister like a trained puppy. *And he is one*, she thought.

Maryam's uncle was kept at bay by the two buffy siblings. Millyania was saying happily: "Hey, look! The helicopter has turned back—the pilot listened to us!"

The Pallies' began doing DVD, the crazy Dora Victory Dance. As they yelled "We did it! We did it! Hooray!" the very helicopter they were celebrating about turned back and began shooting toward the limousine.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!" Dora screeched. Her squeaky voice echoed through the vehicle's interior, causing all of the passengers to cover their ears (except for Jillson and Jefferson). "Milly, SWERVE TO THE RIGHT!"

"NO, TO THE WRONG!" Mallaphoss screamed. The Pallies' English got mixed up now.

"NO, NO! IT'S THE LEFT!" Ramona shouted.

"Thank you, Professor!" Martina cried. "This isn't time for a English hammar lecture!"

"A English *grammar* lecture," Ramona corrected.

"I don't *care*, Rammo!" Millyania yelled from behind the wheel. "We need to escape, not learn!"

So Ramona shut her mouth. Whenever Milly scolded a member, she got sullen.

The helicopter was coming toward the flying car so quickly that although it had been only a speck in the sky, during this conversation it had come so close that Maryam could see Danyal and Amna at the controls through the polished glass (of the limo's rearshield *and* the helicopter's windshield). Millyania yanked the wheel to the right, causing Mallaphoss to swear. Their captives covered their ears and growled. The copter shot past, almost hitting the car.

"Time for us to take control!" Maryam whispered excitedly to Ra'idah, who nodded eagerly. "But Mamoo can't get out from Mr President and Miss Buff's grip."

"Never mind, we'll shock them to a faint," Ra'idah whispered back.

"They can't get shocked too easily again. We'll have to somehow cooperate with Danyal and Amna in such a way that both of us can get in control and overthrow the Pallies' reign!"

Ra'idah giggled. "You're talking military."

"Action is needed, not talk!" Maryam rose from the seat and began moving towards the front. Ra'idah followed.

Amna tapped Danyal's head sharply. "What're you *thinking* about, bro?! We missed them by miles!"

"Sorry! It's my first time in a helicopter, and anyway, I dislike heights, too!" Danyal protested.

"We missed them by about ten centimeters, Amna. And Danyal, I think you should have overcome that fear by now," Zaytunah said from the back.

"Let me," Amna said, pushing Danyal off the pilot's seat. "I bet I can do a better job."

"Humph," Danyal grumbled.

"Hey, you and the pilot didn't wear these headphones under the panel. I wonder what they're for," Amna said, putting them on. "There's a radar screen which I didn't spot before—hey, you can see the ground with all the buildings, in color!"

"Forget all that and start!" Zaytunah said exasperatedly. "Remember, we're trying to lower the ladder, climb down and get the door open."

So Amna started. She steered the helicopter quite well, then instructed Zaytunah to open the door. Zaytunah left the pilot and complied. Just when she was about to lower the ladder, disaster struck.

There was a loud *SNAP* sound and when Zaytunah turned around, the pilot had tossed Danyal and Amna to the back and had taken control. With a yell of shock, she jumped toward him.

"Little kiddas, dan't ya *see*?" the pilot growled. "I'm tryina' keep ya SAFE!"

"Thank you!" Zaytunah snarled. Amna started—she had never heard her sister yell so angrily like that. "I don't need any of your stupid security! If you were trying to keep us safe, you'd never leave my dad hanging onto a limo in midair!"

The pilot turned and glared at her in the eyes. "Yah! Shore! Tiny kiddas ain't staend up tae dis Maly Workar!"

The three children felt like they had been struck by lightning. The pilot was *related to Millyania?!?!?*

"You are related to Milly??" Amna said in a strangled voice.

"Maly?" Phossmalli, the pilot, barked. "I ain't no Maly. Dat Maly says I work for 'er an' get 'bout half milyan dolla, I agre, dat ain't no bad, rite! An' I work far 'er, I be Maly worker. Rite?"

"Your name is Maly Worker?" Danyal goggled at him.

"Aii, ma name Dieygo. Maly says jus' do vork fer her, I says shore, an' now ya kids shut up an' let me drive, me just do ma job!"

"So, you hijacked this plane?" Zaytunah shouted, stamping her foot on Diego's.

"Attack!" Amna yelled, lunging forward. The three kids were fended off again. This Diego seemed to be a ninja master. Once again, the helicopter went out of control. Levers were pulled, buttons pushed, knobs turned.

In the limousine, there was a similar problem.

Maryam and Ra'idah, taking advantage of the Pallies' properness, did not exactly attack. They only had to wrinkle some frocks and tangle some hair, hence cause chaos.

Jillson gave her brother strict instructions not to leave "the terrorist intruder, or TTI" and hurried to assist the other club members.

"TTI" began a conversation with his captor.

"Why're you holding me down?" he asked innocently. "I haven't done anything wrong."

Jefferson shifted uncomfortably. "Er, yo, because Jill said to."

"But that's wrong. Doesn't the American law say everyone is free?"

"Well.....actually, yo, I'm trying to make up with Jill. Maybe if I do what she says, yo, she'll be happy with me again, yo, and we can go back to America, yo, and be like we were before! I hate this stupid bunch of girls she's ganged up with against me, yo."

"She's still telling you to do the wrong thing," TTI said. "Doesn't that feel incorrect?"

Jefferson looked uncertain. "Well.....yo.....But, after I do this I won't do it again. It's...it's just a one-time thing, yo. Won't be really wrong, yo."

"Still," TTI insisted. "It's *wrong*. And it's against the American law!" (TTI did not know much about the American Law, but he supposed Jefferson didn't either).

"Yo, yo, yo, yo, I can't let you go, yo. Jill's gonna get mad. She might even throw me off the car, yo!!"

"She wouldn't do that if she didn't know you did. And anyway, you're helping her so much."

"No, she'll know, yo. She knows everything, yo."

TTI suppressed a chuckle. "Oh, no. If you just do what I say, Jillson will never know, and she won't get mad. In fact, she'll probably team up with you, just like you want! All you have to do is leave me."

Jefferson's icy blue eyes lit up at the suggestion and he immediately let go of TTI's hands. In a flash, he had pinned Jefferson between two seats, shoving a nearby shelf of candy on top, and had jumped ahead. "Yo, yo, yo, yo! Whatcha doing, yo?!" Jefferson cried.

"JEFF!!" Jillson roared. "YOU WERE *NOT* ALLOWED TO LEAVE—" She spun around and her lipstick mouth fell open in shock.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEKKKKKKK!" Millyania let out a long, high-pitched yowl. "JILLSON, *HELP!*"

"The Terrorist!" the other members screamed.

"It's Mamoo, he got free!" Maryam hissed to Ra'idah. "Let's give him room!" She moved over, nearly pushing Dora out of the open limo door.

TTI, aka The Terrorist, aka Mamoo, catapulted over Ramona and landed right in the driver's seat. Millyania screamed again. Mamoo quickly slammed his foot down on the accelerator and turned the car sharply to the right. Dora, standing next to the door, flew out with a long shriek trailing behind her.

"Oops," Mamoo muttered.

Dora bounced back in—she had grabbed the door—and nearly fainted.

"*Not* oops," Maryam muttered.

"Just great," Ra'idah said.

"Look, the ladder's down!!" Maryam exclaimed, pointing to the helicopter. "Let's get out of here!"

Just as she and Ra'idah leapt up to get out, they saw the ladder was yanked back up and the helicopter swung back. Ra'idah groaned. "Is that pilot teamed up with the Pallies' or what?"

"He *is* teamed up with the Pallies," Maryam reminded her as they quickly sat back down.

Millyania's foot hit Mamoo in the face. Temporarily blinded, he fell back, squishing Martina under him.

With a loud grunt, Jillson reached over and wrenched the steering wheel from Millyania, thinking her to be Maryam. Milly yelled in anger, causing Jillson to cower in fear. The Pallies' leader's desires were imposing on the members, and they always tried to please her (in order to get more money) and dreaded her wrath. And now Milly's wrath was exactly what Jillson faced.

"S-s-s-sor-ry, B-b-b-o-bos-s!" she spluttered, backing away. "I t-thought y-y-ou w-were M-m-er-y-am-m! Y-y-you b-both h-have blon-nd h-hair, t-that's w-why!!"

Millyania stomped forward. "Did you not see my hand? She does not have nails larger than one centimetre—less than a fifth of my nail length, which is two inches! (I had to cut them for the horse show!) And yet your thick head still couldn't tell the difference?! You shall be fined one hundred dollars!"

"N-no!" Jillson squeaked.

"No one says 'no' to a Phosmalli!" Milly snarled.

Maryam and Ra'idah took advantage of the situation. Dora and Ramona were frozen, staring at Milly and Jillson. Mallaphoss and Martina were moving mechanically, unsure whether to look at the intruders, or at the two fighting members, or the flying controls. Mamoo pushed Martina away and exchanged places with Maryam. Ra'idah was in the front passenger seat (the front of the limo is like that of a normal car, and recall that the back has two seats on each side) while Mallaphoss was backing away as well.

Danyal felt himself being thrown backward. Flailing wildly, he fell through open air for a minute, then crashed into something very soft and comfy. Startled, he opened his previously tightly shut eyes. What he saw almost sent him into shock.

He had landed in the limo, through the open door after falling off the helicopter which had been right above the car—and the car had turned over just in time to catch Danyal. It was a miracle.

"YooooooooOoo!!" Danyal recognized his sister's voice through his daze. "Look who's hEEErE!!"

In the copter, Amna almost panicked until she saw Danyal fall into the limo just before it righted itself. Shouting the incident to Zaytunah, who was throwing the door shut, she tried again to pull Diego off the seat. With Danyal fallen into the limo, it was just her and her sister versus the fully grown man of a pilot.

All of a sudden, the helicopter tilted. The two girls fell onto the pilot (they were both standing on the right) and the pilot fell out off the seat. Quickly, Amna grabbed the cyclic lever with one hand and the throttle with the other, and the copter straightened up.

Diego slid across the floor and hit his head on the back of the helicopter. That was enough to keep him there for a few minutes. The two kids took control.

As Amna quickly pointed out the controls to Zaytunah and told her their functions, she spotted the limo door slam close. Then she began maneuvering the helicopter to get beside the car.

"Any ideas how to keep Diego out of commission for a while?" Zaytunah said, turning a knob to adjust the radar screen quality.

"I guess we should tie him up with something *strong*," Amna grunted, pushing the collective lever.

"Like what?"

"Maybe we could use our jackets. But I'm still in my gymkhana uniform, which I don't want to ruin."

"Well, my jacket will be fine." With that, Zaytunah pulled it off and knelt to bind the Diego's hands. When she was done, there was a large lump of knots on his wrists.

"There," she said in a satisfied tone. "That's good. Amna, are you done with getting next to the limo door?"

Amna's eyes were riveted ahead. "Neeearly theere!"

"Look! Danyal and Baba saw us—they're heading to the door, with Maryam and Ra'idah right behind them!" Zaytunah exclaimed.

"Yes!" Amna quickly pushed the 'Hover' button on the panel. "Tuna, open the door!!"

Zaytunah quickly obliged. The limo door was flung open just then, scratching the helicopter terribly. From the limo, the hostages began jumping into the helicopter. Ra'idah leapt in first, then Maryam, and Danyal was just about to jump in when two meaty hands shot out and pulled him back in.

"Heeeeeeeey!" Danyal's yell faded as the door slammed close and the limo shot away.

"Oh no!" Maryam groaned. "Now Mamoo and Danyal are gonna be stuck with those idiots."

"In sha Allah, we'll capture them," Amna said.

"I know we will," Maryam said. "You thought I didn't?"

"I had an awesome ideaaa!!" Ra'idah said excitedly. "Listen to this!"

Zaytunah jumped up and down. "What is it?"

Ra'idah grinned and leaned forward.

Ra'idah's great idea

Amna started when a deep voice came over the headset she was wearing.

"Diego, report your status. You are driving dangerously. Reply immediately. Over and out."

Amna relayed the message to her four passengers—Zaytunah, Maryam, Ra'idah and Diego.

"Tell him what happened," Maryam said. "Like this: 'Assalaamu Alaikum. Amna Akmal speaking. The pilot Diego was found to be teamed up with the enemy. We have taken control. Our father and cousin are captured. We are working to release them and will need this aircraft for a while. Please grant permission. Allah Hafiz, over and out.'"

"That's a bit long," Zaytunah said.

"It's open to being shortened," Maryam said.

"Okay, here goes." Amna pressed a button and repeated the message into the mike.

"And now we're hovering over my house," Ra'idah said happily.

"How are we going to land?" Zaytunah asked.

"I think you can land a helicopter on grass. The Pallies' lawn has very well manicured grass, it's maximum two centimeters long, I'd say. And the ground is straight," Maryam said.

An answer came over the headset. "OK, you are granted permission. We are making du'a. Over and out."

Amna leaned forward to get a better view. "Okay, hold on—I'm about to laaaaaaaaand!"

The others were quite unprepared for this. Of course, Amna had never driven or flown any vehicle other than a bicycle in her life, and she had no experience. Yet the landing was very good for a first-time. The helicopter plummeted downwards extremely fast, then at the last moment when the landing skids were inches away from the ground, jerked upwards a few meters—then Amna made a very slow descent. At last the skids landed with an audible *thump*. Amna hadn't switched the rotors closed by the time Maryam was running up the porch steps—she has opened the door before landing.

"Maaaaryammm!!" Ra'idah and Zaytunah called. "Slow down, wait for us!"

Amna removed her headphones, closed the helicopter down completely, then looked at Diego who was lying there, gasping for breath. He had banged his head several times in attempts to get up. "We'll have to make sure he doesn't escape first."

"I'll go across the street and call my dad," Ra'idah suggested. "I'll be just a minute." With that, she jumped out of the copter, raced across the lawn, threw the gate open and sped off.

"Yes, Jazakallah," Maryam said. "Okay, come on!" She grabbed the doorhandle and tried it. Locked.

"Oops," Amna muttered.

"Here's a window right next to it. Maryam, can you reach that little latch at the top? I think it might open the pane," Zaytunah said.

Maryam could just touch it by standing on tiptoe. She jumped and pulled it down. The window fell open toward the inside. She hopped in, and a few moments later the door unlocked and the rest of the girls came in.

"Okay, now we're going to find Sweetie Pie, a phone, and then we're gonna call Milly," Zaytunah said.

"Yup," Maryam said with a nod.

It wasn't very difficult to find Sweetie Pie. Ra'idah found her in Milly's bedroom just a minute later. The poodle was sitting in a large jumping-castle surrounded by large plush pillows, with a pink dog-haired iPhone X next to her.

"Yuck," Amna said. "There's the phone we need. It must have Milly's number!"

"No way I'm touching anything near that dog," Ra'idah said.

"Me neither," the others chorused.

"One Fiqh says only dog *spit* is unclean, while another one says the whole dog is unclean," Zaytunah reasoned.

"Let's just be on the safe side," Maryam said. "I do not want to do wudu for Maghrib in a Pallies' bathroom."

"My house is across the road," Ra'idah reminded her.

"Oh."

"We just need the phone, don't we?" Amna asked. "Maybe we can find a makeup accessory which will help us. We can lift the phone out, clean it with a makeup wipe and use it."

"Still yucky," Zaytunah said. "But fine."

The girls went into Dora's room. Maryam crushed the makeup happily under her boots. After a few minutes, Zaytunah bent down and picked up a large pair of tweezers. "I bet this will work!"

They went back and tried picking up the phone. It was no good. All the dog spit made the screen too slippery.

"Maybe we should use something from the kitchen," Maryam suggested.

A while later, the girls came back with an armload of things, consisting of a pair of tongs, an assortment of spoons and forks, a large stack of makeup wipes and a pair of rubber gloves.

Ra'idah waved the gloves in the air. "Who's gonna have the dubious honor of picking up the phone? Not me."

"Not me," Amna said.

"Me neither," Zaytunah said. "That leaves you, Maryam."

"*Me?!?*" Maryam cried in dismay. "Why do I have to do it just because I'm older than you two?? Besides, Ra'idah is the oldest. *She* should do it!!"

"I am not doing it," Ra'idah insisted.

"Just get it over with, Maryam," Amna said.

"Yeah," Zaytunah said.

"Oh, all *right*," Maryam said sullenly. "Hand over the gloves."

Maryam gingerly picked up the iPhone and held it out. Ra'idah cleaned it the best she could with five wipes. Amna, criticizing it, scrubbed it using three wipes. And Zaytunah made it shine with six.

Zaytunah opened the contact list and hovered her finger over the 'Call' button on Milly's contact. "Who's gonna talk?"

"Let's all do it," Amna said. "Yeah," Ra'idah agreed. Maryam nodded.

Zaytunah called Millyania.

After a few rings, the call was picked. Milly's voice came over the line.

"Hullo, dear," she said. "How are you doing?"

She nearly fainted when, instead of a "WOOF", a rather mean voice replied.

"Very well, thank you! We'd like to tell you something!!" the voice (belonging to Amna) snapped.

"W-w-her-e-'s S-ss-sweetie p-p-pi-pie?" Millyania asked.

Maryam joined in. "We're holding her hostage."

"We won't give her back," Zaytunah said.

"Until you hand over *our* people," Ra'idah finished.

The video was switched on. Zaytunah ducked her head in order not to be seen, and Milly was even more terrified when she saw a large lump of black hair.

"Sh-sh-sh-shh-show S-s-s-s-weety P-p-pie," Milliyanian quivered defiantly.

Quickly, Maryam, Ra'idah and Amna tossed Sweetie Pie out of her huge castle, pulled off her crown and dumped her rather unceremoniously on the floor—luckily, Amna and Maryam were wearing gloves, and Ra'idah had wipes on her hands. So technically, they still didn't touch Sweetie Pie with their bare fingers.

"WOOOOF," the dog protested. Zaytunah turned the camera towards it. Milly let out a high-pitched screech.

"Where's her castle and crown and phone and makeup and pillows and food?" she shrieked.

"As for the castle, crown, makeup and pillows—" Amna began.

Maryam cut her off. "--we're holding her hostage, so—"

"—we won't give her those things until—" Ra'idah, in turn, was cut off by Zaytunah:

"—you pay the ransom."

"That was some unified talking!" Danyal's yell came from the background.

"We're not done!" Maryam called.

"As for the phone—" Ra'idah and Zaytunah chorused.

"—we just called you from it," Amna chortled.

"And you'll have to pay the ransom in time to feed her! We aren't going to give your rotten dog *food*. We've done enough," Maryam said maliciously.

The call was dropped.

In the limousine, Danyal and Mamoo were tied up securely and, in addition, were held down by Jefferson. The Pallies' were all at the front, in formation: Milly at the wheel, Jillson and Martina behind and Mallaphoss, Dora and Ramona at the end. Millyania was barking orders.

"Look, I need *help* flying this stupid thing." Jillson obediently sat down in the seat next to her, squeezing in with some difficulty, and began helping. "Is my lipstick smeared?" Dora reassuringly put her mirror in front of Milly and showed her that it wasn't. "Get me some Bounty." Martina hurried to the large candy containers on the sides and pulled out ten Bounty chocolates.

Bleck, thought Danyal. All of his cousins and sisters hated Bounty wholeheartedly – not to mention that he did, too.

Millyania gulped down six and looked across at Jillson. "I got it," she grinned, revealing disgusting, black, chocolate-smeared stumps at the back that were supposed to be teeth. The teeth in front were smeared with chocolate as well, but they were pearly white underneath—fake teeth.

"What?"

"We'll leave the hostages, alright..."

"NOOOOOO—" the Pallies' began.

"WHAT?" Milly roared. "Sweety Pie, my heart and life and soul, so much more precious than ANYTHING – she needs her castle! Her iPhone! Her pillows! Her makeup! Her crown! Her..." she burst into tears. "How can you?!" she shrieked.

Danyal and his Mamoo exchanged a silent look.

"Hey!" Martina protested. "But, we can save Sweety Pie *and* keep t—"

"SHUT UP!!!" Millyania bawled. "The Boss is the Boss; nothing can stand ahead of my orders!!"

"Sorry, sorry," Martina grumbled.

Dora flicked her hair back. "Oh, okay, sure."

"The limo fuel!" Ramona shrieked. "Look, there's a warning, LOW FUEL!!"

"EEEEEEEEK!" Mallaphoss screamed.

"LAND, LAND, LAND!" Jillson yelled. The Pallies' all began screaming. The effect was deafening. Jefferson glanced around nervously.

Millyania had no idea what to do. She left the wheel and the accelerator and started jabbing random buttons on the flying control board, hoping to get lucky. The limo bounced up and down, sending the screaming Pallies' everywhere. Danyal and his Mamoo were almost squished under Jefferson and the door was thrown open by a collision between Ramona and Mallaphoss.

"CLOSE THE DOOR!" Jillson shouted.

Nobody listened. They were plummeting downwards at a great speed, and birds were flashing by. Then tops of trees began to flash by.

Somehow, Danyal found himself sitting in the pilot seat. He quickly slowed the limo down, narrowly missing a building. The people on the ground below craned their necks and stared. Danyal frantically looked for the Parachute button.

It took him a minute to find it—and promptly push it. The parachute opened up, and the limousine began a slow descent.

Then Danyal felt himself suddenly yanked out and tossed away—by Jillson.

The door was closed. His Mamoo was standing right next to it, his hand on the handle, ready to throw it open and get away. Danyal stumbled over and stood next to him. They had been captured for about half an hour by now, and were already on the brink of escape.

Jillson was at the wheel, her eyes glued to the scene outside. The other members of the Pallies' were lying in a corner and screaming—in lower volumes, thankfully, but it was still earsplitting—and Jefferson was clutching the open candy box to keep from falling down, which would have almost certainly caused the limo to descend too fast.

By standing on tiptoe, Danyal was able to see outside. The ground was rapidly coming nearer, and it seemed to be some kind of park or something. It seemed strangely familiar, but he didn't know why. The grass, though seemingly trimmed and well-kept, was trampled over.

His Mamoo leaned forward. "When I tell you, jump out. I'll be behind you."

"But—"

Then Mamoo deemed it safe enough. He yanked the door open and gave Danyal a light push. "Go!"

And Danyal went.

A successful escape

When Danyal leapt out, a wave of sudden realization hit him.

They were back at the gymkhana, where it had all started!

He heard a loud ripping sound and turned to see Martina's witchy nails tear through Mamoo's sleeve, narrowly missing him. "No!" he thought.

Suddenly something extremely large fell onto Martina. Mamoo jumped up, almost being grabbed by Ramona, and turned around.

Jefferson was rising slowly. He gave Mamoo an almost unnoticeable nod.

Mamoo was mystified, but he wasted no time in jumping out and running ahead. He grabbed Danyal's arm and pulled him along.

"Was that *Jefferson*?" Danyal exclaimed. "He fell on Martina! He *helped* you!"

"I know," said Mamoo. Even he sounded a little confused. "It's funny that he did though, especially since I deceived him on the limousine... I still don't trust him, but well, may Allah guide him if he deserves it!"

Danyal was just thinking about that when he looked up and saw the last of the people, mostly staff, beginning to disperse at the site. "Hey! Do you think the staff will still be here??" Danyal said as he and his Mamoo ran towards them.

"I don't think so. You told them what happened, right?"

"Yeah. We've been gone for how long?"

"A little more than an hour."

"Wow!" Danyal exclaimed as they drew up to the fence of the steeplechasing track. "So less? I thought it was five o' clock."

"It's four-thirty."

"But how would the others have gone back? We took the car. Oh, what happened to *that*?"

"We parked it in Ra'idah's house, don't you remember? And her mom and brother were here. And we dropped everybody back home with Blaze."

"How are we going to go back?"

"We can walk. It's not too far." Mamoo started towards the registration counter, where Umar and the manager were talking. Amin and a couple of other staff members were there as well. "I wonder about the prizes."

When Amin saw them, he shouted, addressing the manager: "Sar jee, dey aar her!"

After Mamoo talked with the manager and Umar for a while, they found out that the prize had been put aside since Amna hadn't been present. All of the competitors that had made it to the end of the steeple chasing track had gotten a ribbon and a book. Sadia had been in a tie with Amna, so she received the same prize as her. Winners in the other races had gone home after having been given prizes.

After bidding farewell to the men at the counter, Danyal and his Mamoo started walking to the exit with Amin, whom the manager had instructed to give them a lift. They would go first to the Pallies', take their car from Ra'idah's house and go home with Maryam, Zaytunah and Amna.

Maryam stared at Sweetie Pie. "Can't this dog stop following me?!"

"She's hungry." Ra'idah looked up from Sweetie Pie's iPhone X, which she and Amna were meticulously examining. Amna had a piece of paper and a pen, to note down all of the numbers in the contact list.

Zaytunah, meanwhile, was standing at the window and looking out after inspecting the room thoroughly. "Let's give her some food, then."

"No way am I doing that!" Maryam exclaimed. "I told the Pallies' we wouldn't."

"You'd keep a promise to *Millyania*?" Ra'idah scoffed.

"It's a promise, that's what matters," Maryam said. "I wouldn't break it if I could! You can feed her, since you care so much for a filthy poodle."

"Stop getting so mad," Amna reprimanded. "She's just an animal. It's not her fault that the Pallies' are her owners!"

"Oh, all right. Sorry," Maryam shook her head. "I get a bit snappy when I'm hungry, yaar."

"I can fetch a snack from my house," Ra'idah suggested. "Or maybe let's go there instead."

"Okay," Maryam said. "Let's go."

They were about to open the Pallies' private lift doors when the door opened. Maryam and Ra'idah ran down the stairs.

It was Mamoo and Danyal.

"OOOOOH!" Maryam yelled. "The plan worked! The Pallies' love their dog so much they'd die for it!"

"How did you escape?" Amna asked, breathless from running down the stairs.

"The fuel was finishing," her father told her.

"Yeah!" Danyal said. "Seriously, you should've seen Milly wh—"

He was interrupted when the door flew open with a bang again. Everyone stared at the two intruders.

One was a slightly short, flabby teenager with long black hair tied in two massive ponies and dark skin. She still didn't look as ridiculous as the Pallies', though, because her clothes were a long shirt and jeans, and she didn't have any makeup on. The girls recognized the second teen, dressed similarly and with the same Indian look: Dimesia Macroni.

Last week, there had been an art competition in which Dimesia had been a judge, and Zaytunah and the Pallies' had been some of the competitors. Dimesia'd been teamed up with the Pallies', but had disappeared after the competition—she had gotten mad at the Pallies' who had bribed her, then invited her to their club with a fee of all the money they gave her. But Dimesia wasn't as stupid as she sounded. She had taken the dosh and fled.

Now Dimesia and the other girl looked totally flabbergasted. Obviously, they hadn't expected to barge into the Pallies' house only to find a bunch of kids and a man with an enormous, blown-up beard.

"Hey!" The flabby one spoke. She had a strange, loud, high-pitched voice. "Where are the Pallies'?"

"Up in the clouds," Maryam said proudly. "Thanks to us."

"Not exactly," Danyal said. "They landed because—"

Aiswarya, the fat one, grabbed her friend's arm and pulled her out. "Dimesia, I think these are *THE* girls! Run!"

"What?" Dimesia protested. "That isn't possible—the *Pallies'* are supposed to be here!"

Aiswarya dragged her to the front gate and stopped, breathing heavily. "Didn't you hear that?! They're in the clouds. They're dead!"

"AHAHAHAHA!" Maryam cried, falling over with laughter. "WHAT A JOKE!"

Everybody else was doubled over laughing. Even Amna's father giggled a little.

"They're—haha—not—hahahaha—DEAD—haahaha—you nitwits!" Ra'idah called.

"See?" Dimesia said irritably.

Aiswarya looked uncertain. "Well....where *are* they, then?"

"Why do you want to know?" Amna challenged.

"We just..." Aiswarya hesitated and looked at Dimesia.

"We wanted to meet them," Dimesia said quickly. "We're best friends."

"Why don't you join their club, then?" Zaytunah asked.

Dimesia turned red. "Uh, we were meeting to discuss that."

"Anyway, where ARE they???" Aiswarya insisted.

"In the riding club," Danyal said.

"Really?" Amna exclaimed.

"Yup! And we have the prize for you!"

"C'mon, Aish!" Dimesia yelled. "Tell the GPS--straight to the riding club!"

The group inside the house stared confusedly after them.

* * *

Jillson jumped out of the limo. "Now let's GO! Jeffy, guard the car! We'll be back in a while!"

Before poor Jefferson could reply, Jillson was off.

"Sweeeeety Pieeeeeeeee!" Millyania called, running toward the steeplechasing track. "And Lipstick!"

"Shaddap!" Martina growled. "Do you want the police chasing us, while we don't have fuel?!"

Millyania didn't slow her pace. With the other five teens trailing behind her, they shot off. They were going at such a tremendous speed that when they finally reached the exit, they crashed into two other girls and sent them flying—they hit the registration counter, where Umar was walking off from.

Umar's eyes almost popped out when he saw eight crazy-looking girls sprawled over the remains of the temporary counter.

"Hey! Here—again! What do you think you're doing?!" he demanded. The manager, who had been only a few paces ahead, turned and walked back briskly.

"So! We meet again!" he snapped. "Please, Umar, see if any lady staff is available to sweep them into a van. I will not tolerate further rudeness!"

Obediently, Umar hurried toward a small block of three rooms on the right, the same place where the Pallies' had changed earlier that day.

Meanwhile, the Pallies' and the other two girls were busily untangling themselves, smoothing their hair and straightening their clothes, and constantly glaring at each other. The manager instructed them—in a very strict tone—to not budge from their current place until he permitted them. The Pallies', not wanting his wrath again, obeyed. Ten minutes later a car pulled up. The group—consisting of Amna, Zaytunah, Maryam, Danyal, Mamoo and Amin--got out.

"Assalaamu Alaikum," they all said at once.

"Wa Alaikum Assalaam," the manager and Umar said at once as well.

"Well, everybody's decided to reach here, eh?" Maryam sneered at the Pallies.

"Nobody invited *you*," Martina shot back.

"Thank you for ruining my best saddle, Jillson," Amna thought, then felt surprised at how suddenly it had popped into her head.

"Please ignore them and put them into the van over there," the manager snapped, pointing to where a white, seemingly-mini Hius stood in the parking lot. "Amin, you drive. Take them to their house. I will see with the King if they should be put under house arrest for a few days! Citizens causing havoc and disturbance shall not be tolerated. In fact, wasn't a law passed about it just recently? Hmm. . ." He pulled out his phone and began tapping away with a frown.

Maryam, Amna and Zaytunah lost no time in herding the Pallies' and the other two girls into the van. Aiswarya protested vehemently, arguing that *they* had only come to visit the Pallies', nothing else. "Anyway, I was their Indian branch!"

"You're going where you can stay with them a while, then," Amna said with a giggle.

"Oh!" Aiswarya yelled. "Let me get my suitcase!" She spun around and narrowly missed Maryam and Zaytunah's outstretched hands, then ran to a small car in the corner of the parking lot. She opened the back door and came back with a large suitcase in her arms.

"What's in there?" Danyal said.

"If it's an atom bomb, all the better," Maryam said and giggled. Mamoo gave her a reprimanding look.

Aiswarya overheard and looked extremely offended. "It's my *candles*."

"Hindu system of worship includes candles," Amna's father commented.

"But how about when the candles burn out?" Amna asked.

"They *never* do," Aiswarya said, looking even more offended. "It's a special type of candle, called *Ejubufeduiqsnber*. Or maybe it was *Oojejajojijuja*--no! Ah, yes. Now I remember! There are ten. Together they're called *Afoolswayofworship*. I got them from an amazing candle-seller; he laughed when he gave them to me and told me, 'these candles are called *Afoolswayofworship*'. What a glorious name!"

The three girls couldn't help laughing so much that they fell down. "Do you have any idea what you're saying, you silly?" Maryam cried.

"Please! Into the van!" the manager called.

Amna threw the suitcase in along with Aiswarya. All of the Pallies' were crowded in the back.

Amin started the van and pulled it out on to the road.

Nobody had noticed that Umar had gone back into the building. Now he returned; in his arms were three shining things.

"The trophy for first place, a book," he announced, "and a new saddle."



Glossary

Pg 5: A gymkhana is a horse show for kids which consists of several horseback games.

Pg 20: Steeplechasing: An obstacle race which several riders compete in at once.

Egg-and-spoon race: Just an egg-and-spoon race on horseback (obvs).

Pg 21: Flag race: Each rider has two flag-holders. The holders on the starting line are empty, and the holders on the other side have flags in them. Each rider's flag and holder have different colors to avoid confusion. The riders race to their flag-holding-holders, pick up their flags and race back to put them in the empty holders. The first one to put his/her flag in wins.

Pg 39: **Throttle:** controls the speed of the helicopter.

Collective lever: makes the helicopter descend or ascend.

Cyclic lever/joystick: controls the direction of the helicopter.

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I would like to thank:

My family for getting me to try out writing; my sisters, for making the characters who became the foundation of this book, and all the authors whose styles of writing played a major part in authoring this book, for I based my style on whose I liked best.

By the way, I wrote this ages ago and while proofreading it over a year later I found it really cheesy at some points (especially the ending). I didn't change those bits though. I think it's nice to have a souvenir of my old writing ventures.

Note: the events mentioned in the gymkhana are all real things. The names of the helicopter controls are the real ones as well.

It all started with a flyer...

Amna Akmal wasn't expecting a **BIG ADVENTURE** when her cousin Maryam Salman came home with a flyer advertising a **horse show**.

Yet it turns out that their adversaries, the members of the **Pallies' Club**, are coming as well. The horse show comes before a **kidnapping** which leads to a chase involving a private helicopter and a **flying limousine**. It's up to the kids to **escape** and put the Pallies' to justice.

