



Sari Sleepover



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Narinder Dhami

Sari Sleepover

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Join the Sleepover Club: Frankie, Kenny, Felicity, Rosie and Lyndsey, five girls who just want to have fun – but who always end up in mischief. It's a Bonfire Night with a difference when feisty Asha arrives from India to stay with her aunt in Cuddington. Asha helps Frankie and her mates with their project for Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, and there's a crazy Indian sleepover and a whole lot of dressing-up fun thrown in. But trouble follows Asha wherever she goes – and when Asha's aunt loses a priceless necklace, the fireworks aren't the only things to go off with a bang! Light the fuse and run for cover!

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HarperCollinsChildren'sBooks

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CHAPTER ONE



Hey, you!

Hi again, it's me, Frankie. Otherwise known as Francesca Thomas. Remember me? You'd better, or I'll set Kenny on to you! We haven't talked for *ages*, but I've got a really cool story to tell you, all about sleepovers and saris and bindis and bangles and Diwali – well, why don't I just get *on* with it instead of rabbiting about it.

So, there we all were back at school after half-term, and feeling pretty miserable about it too. What do you mean, you don't know who we are? *'Course* you do! There's Kenny (or Laura McKenzie to the teachers), Fliss (she used to be Fliss Sidebotham until her mum got married again – now she's Fliss Proudlove. Fliss hated Sidebotham and now Proudlove makes her want to puke), Lyndz (the Hiccup Queen), Rosie and me. Yep, we're the Sleepover Club, remember? We're famous for sleeping over at each other's houses every weekend (and getting into loads of trouble at the same time, my mum says. What a cheek).

"School stinks!" Kenny moaned as she hurled her bag on to our table, just missing Fliss's nose. "I wish we were still on holiday."

“Oh, it’s not so bad,” Lyndz said. “At least it’s Bonfire Night next week.” Lyndz *always* looks on the bright side.

“Yeah, cool!” Kenny cheered up straight away. “I’m gonna get loads of bangers!”

Fliss groaned. She hates loud noises, spooky happenings and things that go bump in the night. “No, Kenny! I hate bangers!”

“Anyway, you say that every Bonfire Night, Kenny,” I pointed out, “and your dad never buys you any!”

“Is everyone coming to the fireworks display at school this year?” Lyndz asked.

We all nodded enthusiastically.

“My mum said I can bring some sparklers,” Rosie added and Kenny pulled a gruesome face.

“Sparklers are for wimps!” she snorted. But I knew that when it was Bonfire Night next week, Kenny would be there waving her sparkler around, along with the rest of us.

“My mum’s going into Leicester to buy some *really* expensive fireworks this weekend,” said a snooty voice behind us. We all groaned. It was the M&Ms, our total enemies.

“Sick-bag time!” Kenny said loudly, pretending to throw up into Fliss’s bag. “Urrgh!”

“Oh, you’re *so* gross, Laura McKenzie!” Emma Hughes sniffed, and Emily Berryman nodded in agreement.

You remember the M&Ms, don’t you? Emma Hughes is the snobbiest, most stuck-up person in the whole world. We call Emma Hughes the Queen, because if the real Queen came to visit our school and met Emma, Emma would expect *her* to curtsy. And we call Emily Berryman the Goblin because she’s small and weedy with this really deep voice. Put a hat and a long white beard on her and she’d be a dead ringer for a garden gnome!

“We’re having a private conversation *actually!*” the Goblin growled, glaring at us.

“Sure, carry right on,” Kenny said airily.

The Queen and the Goblin swept past us with their noses in the air, and Kenny immediately tiptoed across the classroom after them. The rest of us bit our lips to stop ourselves giggling. The M&Ms didn’t have a clue that Kenny was right behind them, breathing down their necks, until Emma happened to glance round – and nearly jumped right out of her skin.

“What do you think you’re doing!” she snapped, as the rest of us fell about laughing.

“Nothing,” Kenny said innocently, and then scuttled back over to us as our teacher, Mrs Weaver, came into the classroom. Mrs Weaver’s OK, but she doesn’t miss much. That means, if you want to mess about, you’ve got to be careful!

Mrs Weaver got us all sitting down and then took the register. “Now,” she said as she closed it, “I want to talk to you about our fireworks display next week. We’ve decided to do something a bit different this year.” She looked round the classroom. “Do any of you know what other celebrations are happening at this time, apart from Bonfire Night?”

Quite a few hands shot up, including mine, but Kenny’s was first.

“The Hindu festival of Diwali, Miss,” she said.

We all knew a bit about Diwali, the festival of lights, because Cuddington, the village where we live, is near Leicester, and there’s always a big Diwali celebration there every year. It looks wicked. There are always loads of fireworks, and people seem to have a great time.

Mrs Weaver nodded. “That’s right, Kenny,” she said. “Does anyone know some of the ways in which the Hindu community celebrate Diwali?”

This time I got in first. “They have fireworks, Miss.”

“And they send Diwali cards,” Lyndz added. “I’ve seen them in shops in Leicester.”

Kenny was bouncing up and down impatiently in her seat with her hand up again. “They light these little clay lamps called *divas* and put them in their windows,” she said. “And sometimes they draw these really cool coloured patterns on their doorsteps to welcome their visitors, but I’ve forgotten the name for them.”

“Rangoli patterns.” Mrs Weaver raised her eyebrows at Kenny. “You seem to know a lot about Diwali, Laura.”

“Dr Chopra who works with my dad at the surgery is a Hindu,” Kenny explained, “and we went to the Chopras’ house for Diwali last year. The food was excellent!”

I grinned at Fliss, Lyndz and Rosie. Trust Kenny to remember the food!

“We’ll be studying Diwali in more detail over the next few days, including a visit to a Hindu temple next Monday,” Mrs Weaver said, “but you might be interested to know that, as Diwali is coming up too, we thought we’d have a joint Bonfire Night / Diwali celebration at school.”

Everyone started muttering and nudging each other then, and Mrs Weaver had to give us one of her super-special laser stares to shut us up.

“We’ll be having fireworks and a bonfire as usual,” she went on, “but there will also be samosas and curry on sale, as well as the usual baked potatoes and soup, and we’re hoping to get an Indian dance group to perform. Also, if any of you would like to come dressed in Indian clothes—”

This time poor old Mrs Weaver was *really* drowned out as everyone began talking again.

“Oh, cool!” Fliss squealed. “I’ll be able to wear my new bangles and a bindi!”

Fliss has got about a million bindis! Her mum buys them for her from a sari shop in Leicester.

“Do you think Mrs Chopra would lend me one of her saris?” I asked Kenny. “She’d have to put it on for me, though.” I’d met Mrs Chopra before. She was small and plump and really jolly. I reckoned she’d be up for it, no problem.

“Yeah, but one of her saris would go round you about a hundred times, Beanpole!” Kenny grinned, elbowing me in the ribs.

“Maybe Mrs Chopra could lend us some of those nice floaty scarves too,” Lyndz added.

“I could ask my sister Tiff to do us some henna tattoos!” Rosie suggested, and we all nodded eagerly.

“I’m WAITING!” Mrs Weaver called, tapping her foot impatiently. Honestly, teachers! They tell you some really cool news and then expect you to sit there quietly and not make a sound! But we all quietened down a bit, and waited to hear what was coming next.

“We’re also running some competitions,” Mrs Weaver went on. “There’ll be a prize for the best Diwali card, and one for the best rangoli pattern. I’ll bring some examples of both of those to show you tomorrow when we start work on our Diwali topic.”

Everyone started talking again, and this time Mrs Weaver gave up, told us to get our maths stuff out and left us to it.

“Mega-cool!” Kenny exclaimed. “I’ve got a great idea for a Diwali card!”

“You can’t put Leicester City Football Club on the front of it!” I teased her. Kenny is LCFC crazy!

“I don’t even know what a rangoli pattern is!” Fliss moaned.

“What is it, Kenny?” Lyndz asked.

Kenny thought for a bit. “It’s sort of like a *pattern*,” she said at last, and we all groaned.

“What kind of pattern?” I asked, giving her a shove as we went to collect our maths books.

“Don’t worry about it,” came the Queen’s snooty voice from behind us. “None of you lot are going to win the competitions anyway!” And she and Emily grinned smugly at each other.

“Oh yeah?” Kenny eyeballed Emma nose to nose. “You wanna bet on that?”

Mrs Weaver suddenly looked over in our direction. Emma scuttled off immediately (she’s *such* a teacher’s pet), and we were able to grab Kenny and drag her away.

“Don’t make *any* bets with the Queen, Kenny!” Fliss grumbled. “Remember what happened when we were in France!”

Boy, did we remember! The M&Ms had nearly crushed us after Kenny made a stupid bet with Emma on our school trip to Paris, but luckily we’d managed to turn things around and get one over on them. It was a close thing, though.

“OK, it’s cool, no bets.” Kenny winked at us. “But wouldn’t it be excellent if we won all the Diwali competitions and the M&Ms didn’t win any?”

“Maybe Mrs Chopra could help us design our Diwali cards and rangoli patterns,” Kenny suggested. It was the end of the day, and we were all on our way to Kenny’s house to do our homework together. “Then we could really rub the M&Ms’ noses in it!”

“Who do you reckon’s got a good chance of winning?” Rosie asked.

“Lyndz,” I said immediately.

“Frankie,” Lyndz said at exactly the same moment.

“Me!” Fliss said confidently – I dunno why, she’s pretty hopeless at art!

“You lot don’t stand a chance!” Kenny scoffed. “Not when I get Mrs Chopra to draw my rangoli pattern for me!”

“That’s cheating, Kenny!” Fliss said sternly.

“I know,” Kenny grinned, as we got to the McKenzies’ house, “but it’d be worth it to stuff the M&Ms!”

“Can you imagine the Queen’s face if we won the competitions?” Rosie said.

“Yeah, she’d put on that stupid snooty look of hers!” And Kenny pulled a face like she’d sucked a lemon, and stuck her nose in the air. It was *exactly* how the Queen looked when we got on her nerves!

We were still killing ourselves laughing when Kenny’s mum opened the door.

She immediately looked suspicious.

“What have you girls been up to now?”

“Nothing!” we all chorused. Honestly, adults are just so uncool. Anyone would think the Sleepover Club were in trouble all the time!

“Good, I’m glad to hear it.” Mrs McKenzie opened the door wider. “Come and say hello to Mrs Chopra. She’s just popped in to have a word with you all.”

“See?” Kenny whispered as we followed Mrs McKenzie down the hall, “Mrs Chopra’s come round to beg me to let her do my rangoli pattern! I brought her here with the power of my mind!”

“What mind?” I snorted, and we all started giggling again.

Mrs Chopra was sitting at the McKenzies’ kitchen table. I always really liked the clothes she wore, and today she had on a bright turquoise blue sari with this fantastic silver and emerald green embroidery. It looked fab. Even her glasses, which were silver and blue, matched! Maybe Mrs Chopra would let me borrow the sari for the Diwali / Bonfire Night thing next week. I was dying to try it on!

“Oh, hello, girls, how are you?” she said, beaming at us. “I’ve got a big favour to ask.”

Kenny raised her eyebrows at the rest of us, and I had to bite the inside of my mouth to stop myself from laughing. I could see that the others had to do the same.

“My niece Asha is coming over from India at the end of this week to visit us,” Mrs Chopra went on. “She’s going to be staying for a month, so she’ll be attending Cuddington Primary while she’s here.”

“That’s not much of a holiday!” Kenny began, then shut up as her mum glared at her.

“A month is too long to go without school!” Mrs Chopra said with a twinkle in her eyes. “Asha’s the same age as you, so she’ll be in your class, and I was wondering if you’d look after her while she’s here?”

We all nodded eagerly. We’d have said yes even if we hadn’t wanted Mrs Chopra’s help with our Diwali competition, because we liked her.

But if we’d known then what we know now, maybe we wouldn’t have been quite so keen...



CHAPTER TWO



“Hey, look at The Queen and the Goblin!” Lyndz whispered, elbowing me in the ribs. “They think they’re so cool!”

I glanced across the classroom. The M&Ms were working on designing their rangoli patterns and they were determined that no-one else was going to see what they were doing. So they’d carefully stood a whole pile of big books on end, all around their drawing-paper!

It was the end of the week, the day Asha was arriving in England, and we were going round to the Chopras’ house after school to meet her. For the last four days we’d been doing loads of work on Diwali, and Mrs Chopra had promised to help us out any way she could – apart from entering the competition for us, of course.

Mrs Weaver had told us this brilliant Diwali story about Rama and Sita. Rama was an Indian King hundreds of years ago, but he got kicked out of his kingdom so he had to go off and live in the forest with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshman. Anyway, Mrs W said that Rama had to defeat the King of the Demons, Ravana, who had ten heads! Kenny loved that bit, of course, and she’d started making gruesome Ravana-type faces across the classroom at the M&Ms. That *really* wound them up.

Where was I? Oh, yeah, so when Rama had killed the King of the Demons, he went back home to be King again and the people put lights in their windows to welcome him back. And that’s how Diwali started.

“They’re so pathetic!” Fliss sniffed, glaring at the M&Ms. “As if we care what they’re doing!”

“I wouldn’t mind having a look,” Lyndz admitted.

“Me too,” Rosie added. “The Queen’s quite good at art – she might beat us!”

“Yeah, we ought to check out the competition,” Kenny agreed. “Anyway, the M&Ms are really winding me up, hiding behind those stupid books!”

“OK, so we *do* want to see their designs!” I said. “Like they’re really going to show them to us!”

“Whose Diwali card’s the best?” Fliss asked, holding hers up hopefully. Mrs Chopra had given us some proper Diwali cards she’d bought in Leicester to look at, and we all loved the bright colours, glitter and shiny foil. So we’d gone completely over the top with our own designs!

“I love Lyndz’s one,” said Rosie. “That shocking pink is so cool!”

“I like that gold stuff on Fliss’s,” said Lyndz.

“I think Frankie’s is ace with all that blue and silver glitter,” said Kenny.

“Well, I think Lyndz’s rangoli pattern is the best,” I said.

Mrs Chopra had actually shown us how to draw some rangoli patterns. They were pretty complicated, because they were kind of symmetrical, and some of them had interlocking bits like a jigsaw puzzle. Lyndz’s was good and so was Fliss’s, because they were both really neat, but Kenny’s looked like a spider had walked all over the paper with a pen attached to each of its legs!

“So what do you think Asha’s going to be like?” Fliss asked for about the millionth time.

“Quiet and shy,” Rosie suggested.

“She’ll wear Indian clothes,” I said.

“I wonder if she’ll be able to speak English?” Lyndz said.

“I hope she’s got lots of bindis and bangles we can borrow!” Fliss added eagerly.

“You can’t even wear all the bindis you’ve got, Fliss!” I pointed out.

“Yeah, maybe you should wear them all at the same time,” Kenny suggested wickedly. “Put them all over your face and start a new fashion!”

“Shall we invite Asha to our sleepover at Frankie’s house on Saturday night?” Lyndz asked. That was typical of Lyndz, she’s always nice to everybody!

Kenny shrugged. “Yeah, why not?”

“You know,” I said thoughtfully, staring at the M&Ms, “if someone went over to the M&Ms’ table and *accidentally* knocked against the table, I bet all those books would fall down.”

Kenny was already bouncing out of her seat. “I’m up for that!”

“No way, Kenny!” I said firmly. “You’d probably knock the M&Ms *and* their table right over! It was my idea – I’ll do it.”

I got up, keeping a sharp eye on Mrs Weaver who was busy at her desk, and wandered over to the M&Ms’ table. As I went by, I gave it just a slight nudge with my hip. Immediately all the books fell down with a crash, and the Queen and the Goblin screamed.

“You did that on purpose!” the Queen huffed.

“Emma, Emily, put those books away right now and stop being so silly,” Mrs Weaver said crossly.

I had a good nose at the M&Ms’ designs while they were picking the books up, and then I sauntered back to our table.

“Well?” Fliss demanded.

“Emily’s rangoli pattern is as bad as Kenny’s,” I said, and Kenny elbowed me hard in the ribs.

“Flippin’ cheek!” she grumbled.

“But Emma’s is pretty good,” I admitted.

“Come on, we’ve got to do better than them!” Kenny said in a determined voice. “Hey, maybe Asha will be able to help us out! She must know all about Diwali.”

The rest of us nodded. Maybe Asha was going to be our secret weapon in our Diwali war against the M&Ms!

“Maybe we could sabotage the Queen’s Diwali card?” Kenny suggested as she rang the Chopras’ doorbell. School was over for the day, and we’d gone straight round to meet Asha. “My Dad’s got one of those shredding machine things in his study—”

“No, Kenny, we want to win fair and square,” Lyndz said firmly. “Don’t we, girls?”

“Nah, we just want to win!” I joked.

Mrs Chopra opened the door. Today she was wearing a deep purple sari with gold flowers, and she had a purple and gold bindi to match. The sari was so cool, even cooler than the turquoise one. I was *definitely* going to ask her if I could borrow it for the Diwali / Bonfire Night at school next week!

“Come in, girls,” she said with a smile. “Asha’s arrived, and she’s dying to meet you!”

I’d never been in the Chopras’ house before, so I was well interested in nosing around. It wasn’t that different from any other house, though, except that there were Indian paintings on the walls, and these big, carved wooden elephants in the hall which I really loved.

“Oh, that’s funny.” Mrs Chopra stared round the empty living room in surprise. “I thought Asha was in here. She must have gone upstairs, I’ll just go and fetch her.” And she went out.

“What are we going to do if Asha doesn’t speak English?” Fliss asked.

“We’ll just use sign language like this,” Kenny said, waving her arms about and nearly taking Rosie’s eye out in the process. “Hello –” she bowed. “I’m Kenny!” And she pointed at herself.

“Yeah, that’s OK,” Rosie said, “But what if you want to say something complicated like *Can you help us with our rangoli patterns?*”

“Or *Can I borrow your bindis?*” Fliss added.

“Don’t worry,” said a voice from behind us, “I speak English perfectly!”

We all nearly jumped out of our skin! A girl had popped up from behind the sofa. She had short, cropped black hair, and she wore combat pants, a T-shirt and big gold earrings. It was Asha!

“What are you doing behind there?” I gasped when I’d got over the shock. Asha wasn’t a bit like what we were expecting!

Asha shrugged. “Waiting to see if I liked you or not before I met you!” she grinned.

“What a cheek!” Kenny said, but she was grinning too.

“It’s so great to meet you all!” said Asha when I’d finished introducing everyone. “I thought I was going to be stuck here with my Auntie and Uncle, and no friends!”

“Don’t you like your aunt and uncle?” Lyndz asked.

“Oh they’re OK,” Asha admitted. “But they’re not exactly cool.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll look after you!” Kenny said, slapping Asha on the back. “You can even come to our sleepover, if you like. It’s at Frankie’s house tomorrow night.”

Asha’s face lit up. “Oh, I’d love to come! Me and my friends have sleepovers back home all the time.” Then her face dropped again. “But I’m not sure Auntie will let me.”

“Why not?” Fliss wanted to know.

Asha grinned. “Because my mum told her to keep an eye on me! I kind of got into a bit of trouble at school before I left...”

“What sort of trouble?” Lyndz asked.

“I played a joke on the school principal.” Asha winked at us. “I put powdered chilli in his tea – it nearly blew his mouth off!”

“Oh, cool!” Kenny exclaimed.

I could see already that Kenny and Asha were going to get on really well. I liked her too – she seemed like a real laugh!

“That wasn’t the first trick I’ve pulled at school,” Asha admitted. “And Mum says I’ve got to behave myself while I’m staying with Auntie, or it’s boarding school for me when I get home!”

“Oh, gross!” Fliss said sympathetically, and we all nodded.

“So I mustn’t get into any trouble while I’m here,” Asha went on solemnly. “Or I’m dead!”

“Don’t worry,” I grinned. “We’ll look after you and keep you straight!”

The others thought that was hilarious, and roared with laughter.

“Yeah, ’cos we’re *never* in any trouble ourselves!” Kenny spluttered.

“Oh, thanks a lot!” Asha said gratefully, flinging her arm round my shoulders in a friendly way.

Unfortunately, at the same time, she also knocked over an expensive-looking vase which stood on the table next to us. Luckily, though, it teetered a bit before falling over, and Kenny was able to catch it before it hit the floor with a fantastic goalkeeper save.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Asha breathed. “Auntie would have gone *mad* if I’d broken that! By the way, I forgot to warn you – I’m a bit clumsy.”

Just as Kenny was replacing the vase carefully on the table, Mrs Chopra walked in.

“Oh, Asha, there you are,” she said. “And I see you’ve met the girls.”

We all nodded. But I bet I wasn’t the only one of the Sleepover Club who was wondering just how difficult it was going to be to keep Asha out of trouble for the next month!



CHAPTER THREE



“Hey, Izzy, what do you think?”

I bent over my little sister, who was propped up on the sofa, to show her my best bindi. It's kind of tear-drop shaped and purple-coloured round the outside with gold and black in the middle. It was Saturday afternoon, and I was waiting for the rest of the Sleepover Club, plus Asha, to arrive.

Izzy grinned and gurgled and tried to grab the bindi off my forehead. I could still hardly believe I'd got a sister after all this time. I mean, I kept going on and on to my parents about having another baby, and they always said no, then all of a sudden, it happened! Why are parents always so annoying like that? Still, at least the baby was a girl – I wouldn't have liked a whole load of smelly old brothers like Lyndz.

“Be careful, Frankie,” my mum said, coming in from the kitchen. “Keep those bindis away from Izzy, or she might put them in her mouth.”

“Don't worry, I will!” I said. I moved away from Izzy and she immediately began to bawl. My dad says she's got the Thomas lungs all right – my mum and dad are both lawyers, and we can all talk for England.

“So what's Asha like?” my mum asked, picking Izzy up and rocking her.

“She's cool!” I said enthusiastically. “But her mum says she mustn't get into any trouble while she's in England or she'll get sent to boarding school when she gets home.”

My mum rolled her eyes. “So has anyone warned her about the Sleepover Club?”

“Oh, *Mum!*” I said with dignity. “We promised Asha we'd look out for her and keep her out of trouble!”

“This I've got to see!” my mum muttered as the doorbell rang, and I charged down the hall to the front door.

Fliss, Lyndz and Rosie were outside with their sleepover bags.

“Hi!” I said. “Come in.”

“Are Asha and Kenny here yet?” Fliss asked eagerly. She was just dying to get her hands on Asha's collection of bindis and bangles!

“Not yet,” I said. But just as I was about to close the door, Dr McKenzie's car drew up, and Asha and Kenny dived out.

“They're here!” Fliss squealed.

Asha and Kenny got their sleepover bags out of the car. Then another bag appeared. Then another. And another. In fact, there were so many carrier bags stuffed full with something or other, that Dr McKenzie had to help Kenny and Asha carry them up the path!

“What's all this?” I asked, staring at the bags.

Asha shrugged. “I've brought some dressing-up clothes,” she said. “And some Indian jewellery and some bindis – oh, and some henna so I can do some mehndi patterns for you.”

“What?” Rosie asked.

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