



HEATHER GREER



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*To those of us who have struggled trusting that God's dreams for us are
even better than our own.*

*"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for
welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."
Jeremiah 29:11 (NASB)*

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The stainless-steel mixing bowls crashed together like gongs hammered by rhythm-challenged children as Livvy shoved them into the lower cabinet and forced the door shut. She huffed out a hot breath. This wasn't her, not by a long shot. Livvy worked hard to afford quality equipment, and she took care of it. She had to for The Sugar Cube to compete successfully in the fast-paced St. Louis food truck scene. She'd planned everything to the last penny before investing her meager life savings as the down payment on her loan, and now it was all going sideways like that hubcap mishap last year.

Regretting her moment of temper, Livvy opened the cabinet and began rearranging the bowls until they fit perfectly.

"What's wrong? This is an awesome opportunity."

Tabitha sat perched on a stool in the corner, her full lips turned down as she tapped a long envelope against her leg.

Livvy rubbed her hands down the front of her polka-dotted apron and tightened the strings around her waist, then grabbed a bottle of cleaner and a rag. "It seems like a great opportunity, but what if I'm not good enough?"

"Oh, please." Tabitha massaged her temples and groaned. She shook the paper in Livvy's direction, volume rising with her

intensity. “This. This right here says you’re good enough. Your invitation to the big leagues. Do you know how many people didn’t get this? A lot. You’re one of ten, out of probably hundreds.”

With her hand poised above the counter, Livvy stopped, her fingers on the trigger of the spray bottle. Tabitha didn’t get worked up. In all the years they’d known each other, Livvy was the one who got in trouble for talking out of turn. Livvy was the one front and center in their friendship, while Tabitha was content to take everything in. When Livvy’s parents died, Tabitha was the calm in her storm, and now her calm was thundering. Still. She had to think about her business.

“You know it’s not as easy as closing up shop and entering the competition, even if they are taping the show during my slow months of December and January.”

A raised brow. “And why not?”

“Loan payments come due the 15th. Every month. Whether The Sugar Cube is earning anything or not.”

“I know that.”

“Not once have I ever failed to make my loan payments.” Livvy looked up at the ceiling and blinked back tears of frustration before refocusing on Tabitha. She shook her head and swallowed the lump in her throat. “I’ve not even been late. God has blessed this venture so much. But all that time out of commission when the transmission went out, and what it cost to fix! I didn’t have a lot in savings, but now ...”

Livvy had to look away from Tabitha’s sad puppy eyes before tears sprang up again. She squirted the already sparkling wood counter and began scrubbing it mercilessly. “Maybe I’m supposed to take the hint. If I take a chance right now and fail, with no safety net, The Sugar Cube is gone.”

“You can do this.” Tabitha stilled her hand. “*Cake That* is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and risks go both ways. It would put the Sugar Cube on the national stage, and winning one hundred thousand dollars would pay off the twenty-five

thousand you owe the bank. You could lease the storefront you've been drooling over."

Livvy didn't look up. Success in the competition would also be the perfect way to honor her mother's belief in her, to prove Livvy was doing what she was meant to do.

"What if I lose?"

Tabitha swatted the idea from the air with the back of her hand. "Olivia Rae Miller, not going to happen. Cupcakes have been your life almost as long as we've been friends. You're an amazing baker."

"Still ..."

"If you need someone else's opinion, fine." Tabitha cleared her throat as she raised the letter from her lap. "Your submission video was truly one of a kind. Members of our production crew spent time in St. Louis recently to sample your cupcakes and speak with your customers. Your reputation with your clientele is unmatched, and your skill as a baker is evident in each bite. It is our honor to invite you to join us for the second season of *Cake That*."

Nothing else needed to be said for Livvy to hear *I told you so* loud and clear. The show wanted her. In only a few weeks, she could be on a nationally televised baking competition.

Reluctant excitement bubbled up inside Livvy. Whether she participated or not, it was an honor to be chosen. Simply thinking about going to California and proving to herself that she belonged in the baking world she loved was thrilling.

"This is completely unreal! I've read it over and over, and I still can't believe it. It sounds like they really did like what they sampled."

"Why wouldn't they? We know you make the best cupcakes in St. Louis. This is your chance to prove they're the best in the whole United States. You have to do this."

"But I'll have to shut down for weeks while I'm away—"

"Are you going somewhere, Miss Livvy?"

Livvy shot Tabitha a reproving look and glanced at the clock

on the wall. Whether they were finished with the discussion or not, it was time to open for business.

“How lucky am I?” Livvy smiled and turned her attention to the petite ballerina on the other side of her counter. “My first customer of the day is also my favorite. And I’ll guess you did a great job at dance class today and earned yourself a treat. Am I right, Abbie?”

Tight black braids bounced up and down as the little girl nodded. “Yep. Mama said I could pick anything since I did so good at practice. I’m glad you were here today. You weren’t in your spot last week after class. I’ve got a surprise for you. I’m going to be a swan princess in the recital next week. You should come see me. Mama says I dance better than any of the other swans. Did you ever dance, Miss Livvy? I love to dance.”

Livvy fought back the giggle building in her throat, locking eyes with the girl’s mother fighting the same battle. Abbie was completely serious and unaware of how adorable she was.

“No. I never learned to dance, at least not for real like you. I spent most of my time in the kitchen learning to bake cupcakes.”

Suddenly Tabitha stood beside her. “And that is why Miss Livvy just got invited to be a contestant on *Cake That*.”

Livvy glared at her. Why was Tabitha getting out of her self-imposed social bubble to talk to people? Oh yeah, to push an idea Livvy wasn’t sold on.

“*Cake That*?”

“It’s a television show where bakers compete to see who can bake the best cakes and cupcakes.”

“You’re going to be on television Miss Livvy?” Abbie’s dark brown eyes grew large.

A less-than-innocent nod from Tabitha earned her a kick in the foot from Livvy behind the counter. Too bad all Abbie saw was the excitement in Tabitha’s face.

“Wow! I’ve never been on television before. When I’m a

prima ballerina I will be. Everyone will want to interview me and watch me dance. You're so lucky, Miss Livvy. "

"I've been invited, but I haven't decided if I'm going to go. The show takes several weeks to record. That's a lot of time without The Sugar Cube being open for business. Do you think you can go that long without one of my cupcakes?"

"Sure, Miss Livvy. I'll just eat a whole bunch when you get back. Mama says when you've got it, you've got to share it. That's what she tells me about dancing, and you're good at cupcakes like I'm good at dancing. So, you've got to share it, too."

Abbie's mother placed a restraining hand on the little girl's shoulder, though her attention remained trained on Livvy. "As you can see, Abbie doesn't have a problem sharing much of anything. But she's right, you know. Chances like this don't come along very often. I really think you should consider going."

As much as she loved Abbie and her mother after months of having them as regular customers, Livvy couldn't get into her concerns with them.

"You're right. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I plan to consider all pros and cons of going before I make my final decision. Now, I think we owe a little prima ballerina a special treat, and I have the perfect cupcake in mind."

Livvy knew without asking which cupcake to pull from the display case. She'd learned Abbie's favorite flavors in the first month The Sugar Cube was open for business. Today's cupcake would also appeal to her love of all things girly.

"A pretty princess cupcake for the prettiest swan princess in the ballet." She extended the sweet confection across the counter. Topped with a silky swirl of pink strawberry buttercream frosting and dotted with light purple sugar pearls and a fine dusting of iridescent powder, the cupcake was fit for ballet royalty and decorated with Abbie in mind.

The child's lips formed an *o* as she reached out to take the cupcake with something akin to reverence. "Is it strawberry?"

"Of course. Would I give you anything else?"

“How much do I owe you today?” Her mother moved up to the counter.

“For my favorite little dancer? It’s on the house.” She looked at Abbie as her tongue swirled through the sweet frosting. “Just remember to mention me when you grow up to be a famous ballerina.”

“I am going to be famous one day.” She smacked her lips as she chased escaped frosting around with her tongue before smiling brightly. “Just you wait and see.”

Livvy laughed. “I have no doubt about that. You’re already a star in my book, Miss Abbie.”

“What do you say, Abbie?” Her mother nudged the little girl’s shoulder.

“Thank you for my cupcake.”

“Yes, thank you. You are a blessing to our family, dishing out encouragement with your wonderful cupcakes.” She smiled and dropped a bill in Livvy’s brightly decorated tip jar before gently touching Abbie’s dark braids. “We best be getting out of Miss Livvy’s way. She’s going to have customers lined up around the block if we don’t get moving.”

The pair started to move from their place in front of the truck before Abbie’s mom stopped and laid a hand on Livvy’s. “One more thing before we go. I reckon you’ve got some thinking and praying to do about that television show. Just remember to keep the thinking and the praying in the proper order.”

“Thank you.” Livvy nodded and gave Abbie a final wave before the girl went skipping down the sidewalk in front of her mother. She sighed at the empty concrete directly in front of her truck. If only the line around the block was a real problem. As the pair were turning the corner, Livvy spied the bill in her tip jar—more than enough to cover the cupcake. God always provided.

Could she really complain? Each week brought enough customers and special orders to make her payment to the bank

on time and in full. She even had enough to live on. But it would be wonderful to have a little extra each month to tuck away in savings for a rainy day. Maybe *Cake That* was the answer.

A tap on her forehead jolted her back to the present. “Hello? Earth to Livvy.”

She swatted Tabitha’s hand away. “Do you mind? I was thinking.”

“I could tell.” Tabitha rolled her eyes. “So, are you going to do it?”

“Do what?”

“You know what? You’re lucky I’m a pretty laid-back girl. No one else would put up with you.”

“Fine. I want to pray about it tonight, but unless God tells me otherwise, I think I’m going to do it.” She pushed her way past her friend in the tight space. “Now, if you’ll kindly take your seat, I have special orders to complete while I wait for the afternoon rush.”