

... laugh-out-loud dialogue with touching characters.
-Laura Blount, Award-Winning Author of *Lost and Found Faith*

Sweet Rivalry



AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR
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By Terri Gillespie

Chapter 1

No.

It can't be.

Sarah switched off the blow-dryer and let it drop to the floor. Trembling fingers increased the volume on her iPad. The acoustics of her bathroom boosted the person speaking. The person with her voice.

Sarah's *own* voice.

But she wasn't speaking. This person—her, but not her—explained how to incorporate fresh strawberries into cupcake batter without making the cake soggy.

Sarah's shaking hands fumbled the iPad. She grabbed it, squatted on the cold tile, and watched again.

Yes. That was *her* face smiling. But not.

This Not-Her had the same half-moon shaped, crystal blue eyes. Same rosebud lips. The petite Sweeting family gumdrop nose ...

The hair was different. Black and chopped short. And she dressed different. All in black, except for the flour and batter splattered on her apron and clothing.

Sarah looked at the door. *Her* white uniform hung there. Soon, it too would be covered with spatters.

The Not-Her stood before the judges' panel on Sarah's favorite baking program, *Cupcake Rivalry*, sinewy arms tattooed—another difference—moved a mile-a-millisecond as she explained her cupcakes.

The Not-Her was a ... baker? How ... ?

Sarah rubbed her forehead and shook her head. Could it ... ?

It must be her. It must be Rachel.

“Granny.” Her voice faltered. She couldn't gather enough oxygen to push through the word. Her heart beat its way up her throat.

My sister. My twin sister.

Sarah inhaled, then shoved out, “Granny!”

A commercial appeared, she tried fast-forwarding it.

Sluggish, heavy footfalls on the stairs heralded Granny's approach. Sarah stood, then looked down. Right. She needed the iPad. She bent to retrieve it as Granny appeared at the doorway.

Dressed in her Sweet's Bakery uniform, she held onto the doorjamb panting. “For goodness' sake, child. What is all the hollering about?” She dipped an eyebrow. “You're not ready. It's 3:30 and—”

Sarah handed the iPad to her. “Is it—is it her?”

“Who?” Granny gazed at the screen, then narrowed her eyes. “I need my cheaters.” She checked her pockets.

“On your head.” Sarah untangled Granny’s spectacles from her fine silver hair and handed them to her. Trying her best to slow down her breathing—and her hopes.

Granny fumbled her attempts to put on her glasses with one hand. Sarah gnawed her lower lip as she freed her grandmother of the iPad. The readers finally in place, Sarah passed the tablet back and leaned over Granny’s shoulder.

“And who am I looking for, sweetie?”

“Hold on. She’s a finalist. They’re about to announce who is moving to the next round.”

The wait was excruciating.

A close-up finally materialized on the screen. “There! Is it Rachel? Is it my sister?”

“Wha—?” Granny covered her mouth with a shaky hand. She squeezed her lids, then opened them. Her eyes fixed on the face. She gasped. “Oh, dear Father in heaven. It’s our Rachel.”

Sarah’s knees went rubbery. After twenty-one years of prayers, searching, hoping, could God be finally answering? She wrapped her arms around herself squeezing the joy out of her pores.

“Granny, we have to find them—”

Her grandmother dropped the iPad and fell back against the wall, clutching her left arm.

Sarah froze. “Granny!”

Sweat covered her grandmother’s forehead, her face contorted. “Sarah, c-call 911.”



Sarah turned toward the echo of a doctor’s purposeful stride in the emergency room hallway. Her boyfriend, Drew stood beside her. She grabbed his arm.

“Geez! You’ve got me in a death grip, babe.”

She released her fingers and fisted them by her side. “Sorry.”

The doctor joined them. “Hope Sweeting’s family?”

“Yes, I’m her granddaughter, Sarah Sweeting.” Sarah gestured toward Drew. “This is my boyfriend, Drew Collar. How is she, doctor?”

“I’m Dr. Simpson. Your grandmother had a myocardial infarction. We need to examine—”

“Isn’t an infarction a heart attack? She—examine?” Sarah grasped Drew’s arm again.

“Surgery? Open-heart surgery?” Her breath came in spurts and an odd ringing pressed against her ears.

“Take a breath.” The doctor led her to one of the brown pleather sofas and sat beside her.

“Okay, exhale.”

Sarah jittered more than sat.

The doctor continued his instructions. As her breaths deepened, the ear ringing stopped.

“Better now?” He lifted his bushy brows.

She nodded, her cheeks warming as she noticed people—including Drew—watching her. *Go about your business, please.*

“It’s too early to tell if surgery is necessary. We’re prepping her for a heart catheterization. Once I look inside, we’ll better know if we need to perform a bypass, install stents, or if no other measures are needed.”

He smiled. “She’s stable. We’re monitoring her. Those are all good things.”

How are those good things? Sarah nodded, then leaned against Drew’s shoulder.

Dr. Simpson stood. “Say, is your grandmother the owner of the bakery?”

“Sweet’s? Yes.”

He smiled. “I love that place.” He straightened his posture and cleared his throat. “As soon as I finish the cath, I’ll let you know the results.”

He looked at his watch. “It’s not yet five. The cafeteria isn’t open, but there is a vending machine down the hall with a selection of protein bars. Coffee is in the visitors’ lounge. You’ll need to keep your energy up. It’s going to be a long day.”

Long day?

“Five? The bakery!” Sarah pulled her phone from her denim jacket. “Asher.”

She glanced up long enough to say a hasty thanks to the doctor, then strode to the lounge. The sound of Drew’s squeaky sneakers followed her.

Normally Granny, Asher, and she began work at four a.m. She turned toward Drew. “Do you think Asher is already there?”

Drew opened his mouth, then shrugged, and shifted his attention to the vending machine.

Of course, he was at the bakery. Asher West was like a brother to Sarah and grandson to Granny. She pressed speed dial three.

The first ring hadn’t finished when he answered. “Where are you? I’ve left messages for you and Granny.”

Sarah filled him in on Granny’s condition—such as they knew.

“I’ll call the Prayer Team.” Asher sniffed. “As much as I want to be with you and Granny, I’m needed here.” He cleared his throat. “Right. I’m needed here.” He sighed. “I’ll call in Mabel and see if I can get any of the afternoon part-timers. We’ll keep things rolling. Don’t worry.”

He blew his nose. “Could Drew deliver the orders to the restaurants? I can’t leave with both you and Granny out.”

“I’ll ask.” Sarah bent toward Drew, who sat looking at his cell and eating a protein bar.

“Honey, could you deliver the orders to the—”

Drew shook his head. “I have class. I need to leave.”

You’re abandoning me?

“You have a class at five in the morning?”

His freckled face reddened. “Right. I suppose I can deliver some.” Drew shoved the rest of the bar into his mouth, slipped on his jacket, then gave her a brush of his lips on her cheek.

Watching Drew stroll down the hallway, she chewed her thumbnail. “Drew is leaving now.”

Once he disappeared into the elevator, Sarah walked toward the windows at the end of the hall. “Ash, you’ll never believe what happened.”

“There’s more?” He grunted. Probably lifting one of the fifty-pound sacks of flour or sugar.

“This morning, I was watching *Cupcake Rivalry*—”

“Right, the new season began last night.”

Sarah leaned against the wall and stared at the dark sky. Stars still twinkled before the dawn chased them away. “Ash, I found Rachel.”

“Rachel? Wait. Your *sister*, Rachel?”

Tears coated her face—sobs worked their way up her throat. All the emotions she hadn’t begun to process heaved their way now.

Granny.

Her sister was alive.

And finally, the hope of finding her mother.

“Yes.” It came out as a whisper. Sarah drew an intake of breath. “It was her. I know it all the way to my toes. We found my sister!”

Hi there!

How was the sneak peek? I am so excited about *Sweet Rivalry*.

You know those reality TV shows where long-lost family members are reunited? I love those shows, don't you? Apparently, many folks do because millions and millions of viewers are watching around the world.

I wondered, "What happens when all the televised drama ends? What happens after the producers pack up the cameras and crew?" What then?

Sweet Rivalry explores the story of two sisters separated by a troubled mother. One sister stays with her grandmother in a loving environment and is raised in her grandmother's bakery surrounded by love.

The other sister is raised in crack houses by an addict mother yet manages to overcome to become a professionally trained pastry chef.

What then?

The reuniting of these twins is only the beginning ...

Thanks for reading this first chapter, I hope you'll read the whole story of Sarah and Raven!

God Blessing and keep reading!

Terri Gillespie