



**Tehzeeb's heart danced. As he stared at his palm, he could almost feel the design come to life! He had to try mehndi for himself.**



If Tehzeeb wants to be the best mehndi artist in town, he needs practice. Luckily, his friends and family can't get enough of the dazzling daisies and pretty peacocks he draws on their hands. Tehzeeb can't wait to show off his henna skills at his cousin Rahima's wedding . . . until his favorite uncle tells him mehndi isn't for boys. Rahima needs Tehzeeb's help—and his talents. Can he find the courage to be his true creative self?

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 Mehndi Boy 

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# Mehndi Boy



written by  
**Zain Bandali**

illustrated by  
**Jani Balakumar**





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By Zain Bandali

Illustrated by Jani Balakumar



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press**

toronto • berkeley

To all the boys who never got to try on mehndi.  
—Z.B.

To my supportive family, whose words of  
encouragement helped me along the way.  
—J.B.

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# Chapter 1

**C***hickadee-dee-dee-dee . . .*

“I am *not* ready to wake up!” Tehzeeb groaned as he pulled a pillow over his head. But he could still hear the chickadees merrily singing from the birdhouse outside his window.

Tehzeeb tried to go back to his dream. He’d been





dreaming about weddings for the past few nights—of all the celebrations he'd been to, he loved weddings the most. In this one, he was wearing a royal blue kurta with a white shawl and pearls around his neck. All the guests were staring at him in awe. The special outfit made him feel like the most dazzling version of himself.

*Chickadee-dee-dee-dee . . .*

*Chickadee-dee-dee-dee . . .*

He pictured the fancy decorations, the glittering gold jewelry, the fresh marigolds and roses, the delicious buffet food, and the bride's mehndi . . .

*Chickadee-dee-dee-dee . . .*

*Chickadee-dee—*

“Tez!” came a loud screech from downstairs.

Tehzeeb opened his eyes.

“Wakey wakey! I hope you remembered what today is,” his mother called from the kitchen. “Tehzeeb!”

Tehzeeb leapt out of bed—how could he forget? He couldn’t sleep in this weekend, dreaming about weddings. Today was Navroz, the very first day of spring.

When Tehzeeb marched into the kitchen, he found his mom cooking up a storm.

He smelled the spicy scent of cardamom and the sugary sweetness of doughnuts. Bollywood tunes were blasting through the room. His mom swayed to the beat while stirring the batter.



“Ya Ali Madad, Mommy. Oh, and Navroz Mubarak!”  
said Tehzeeb with a giant smile.

“Mawla Ali Madad and Navroz Mubarak, Tehzeeb  
beta,” she said. “Help yourself, sleepyhead.” He grabbed  
a freshly fried doughnut shaped like a triangle off the  
cooling rack.



“Mmmm, mandazi—my favorite!”

“Yes, beta, I am making mandazi and channa bateta for the party this afternoon.” She beamed as she dropped more mandazi into the frying oil.

Each Navroz, Tehzeeb’s family would head over to Ayaz Uncle’s house to celebrate the beginning of the new year. Since his family moved from India to Tanzania a few generations ago, his relatives would cook all the tastiest Swahili, Gujarati and Kutchi delicacies to share.

Ayaz Uncle was his favorite relative since he always brought Tehzeeb the most unique souvenirs and trinkets from his travels around the world. He loved making art as much as Tehzeeb, too. His daughter, Rahima, was like a big sister to Tehzeeb even though

they were first cousins. She wore the prettiest outfits and always shared her old scarves, belts, and jewelry with him when she got tired of them. Tehzeeb didn't mind—he loved Rahima's hand-me-downs.

“Make sure to wear something special and *don't forget to do your brush,*” his mom said, pretending to brush her teeth with a spatula.

Tehzeeb couldn't contain his excitement. He popped another mandazi in his mouth then galloped upstairs to get ready. He already knew just what he wanted to wear—the kanzu Ayaz Uncle brought him from Zanzibar last month. The kanzu was gold like the Serengeti grasslands and made Tehzeeb feel like royalty.

Once he'd put on the kanzu and matching topi, he was almost ready. He just needed to pack his bag for the hour-long drive. He grabbed his sketchbook, pencil crayons, and, last but certainly not least, his stuffie, Mr. Unicorn.



He was so excited that he almost forgot his mom's reminder. With just two minutes to spare, Tehzeeb ran to the washroom to brush quickly and make sure he had no mandazi crumbs stuck between his teeth. Royal princes needed to have a sparkling smile, after all!