

Iftar Surprise

It was the last week of Ramadan and I had a plan. My family is always teasing me about my “inability” to cook when I can manage just fine. I have burnt only one meal so far and that’s a pretty good track record! They get surprised when I manage to crack an egg without bits of shell falling into the bowl. My family has always underestimated my culinary prowess, and so I decided to treat them this Ramadan, by making iftar for the entire family. My khandaan (family) includes three aunts, three uncles, three cousins, grandparents, and my mom. I decided to keep my little plan a secret. I have to be honest - the task I had undertaken was no easy feat. The biggest challenge was being able to get the kitchen all to myself. My family spends a lot of time in the kitchen, a trend set by my great grandmother, Maa Jani. Maa Jani is the matriarch of our family. She is tough as nails - rules with an iron fist but is firm and fair. All of our family recipes have been handed down from her ancestors from one generation to the next. I am her favorite great-grandchild.

I went to find my little cousins, and after hours of pestering, moaning, and griping, I finally convinced them to distract the rest of the family and get them out of the house for a few hours by using Eid shopping as a ruse. I stayed back feigning a headache. After everybody had finally left, I set my plan into action. First, I called some of my extended family in different countries to get our favorite recipes. I called Parveen Chachi in America for aloo samosa (potato stuffed, fried dough), Maa Jani in India for Qeema Arvi (mincemeat and taro root curry), and Sadia Auntie right here in Canada for her creamy, delicious Kheer (sweet rice pudding.) I got to work, I rolled, pounded, stuffed, marinated, and cooked till my hands felt like blocks of lead and my knees were about to give out from all the standing. I carefully cleaned up the kitchen and left no trace that I

had ever been there. I quickly brought the food to the dining room and set up the table exactly like Maa Jani had taught me - her embroidered tablecloth, fresh evergreens from our backyard, and finally the prepared dishes with their garnishes. In my hurry to get every detail perfect, I nearly spilled the kheer in the process, but the balancing act I have been practicing in gym class at school came in handy and the kheer and I were saved.

Just as I was completing the finishing touches, I heard the front door unlock and the familiar sound of my family walking in and everyone taking off their shoes. As my family stepped into the kitchen, the Azan for Maghrib sounded - it was time to break our fast. When they saw the display their jaws dropped and after a round of delicious dates, they dug in. I guess going shopping is a workout after all! After a lot of noisy chewing and burps (my two youngest cousins are adorably naughty), everyone asked me where I had ordered the food from. My mom called me over and hugged me tightly. She kissed my forehead and showered me with duas. Everyone was left speechless, as they realized that I had prepared everything myself. From scratch. They all apologized for teasing me all the time and I got lots of hugs, that is until I told them to stop coddling me so I could finally eat! Every smile they gave me was like the greatest eid gift of all time. This day taught me to always give to others because that on its own is a reward.

The End