



Scrumptious

Jennie K. Brown

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In Jennie K. Brown's novel *Scrumptious*, a charming, talented middle school student enters a cooking competition.

Petunia loves cooking more than anything. It's a passion that was instilled in her by now-departed Grammy Joanne. So when famous Chef Ramikin shows up, announcing a televised cooking contest, Petunia knows she has to win. Making it through the contest will require more than just culinary skills, however. Petunia navigates her father's new romance, a crush of her own, and a conflict with a mean girl, Bianca.

Petunia narrates, sharing her hopes and fears, many of which are processed in the kitchen. She is a vibrant character who describes her confections in great detail, complementing the plot. And those around her are also well developed: Bianca is petty and selfish, but hides insecurities of her own; Petunia's crush, Luke, is popular but humble, expressing nothing but happiness for Petunia when she advances in the competition.

Adult role models are abundant throughout the book, too, with Petunia often thinking of her grandmother. Petunia's father reminds her to be polite to Bianca, even when it is hard, and Chef Ramikin is honest with the contestants about their food while still encouraging their passion for cooking.

Accepting change is a major theme. Cooking offers Petunia a way to deal with her grandmother's passing while creating delicious new memories to share with her father and friends. When faced with the fact that her father is dating Bianca's mother, cooking becomes an outlet and, eventually, even a way to reconcile her differences with Bianca. Actual recipes throughout the book are an added way to share in Petunia's adventures.

Full of flavor, *Scrumptious* is a sweet novel about a young chef navigating challenges both inside and outside of the kitchen.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (March / April 2022)

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