



# Roopa Farooki: The NHS Junior Doctor Topping the Bestseller Lists

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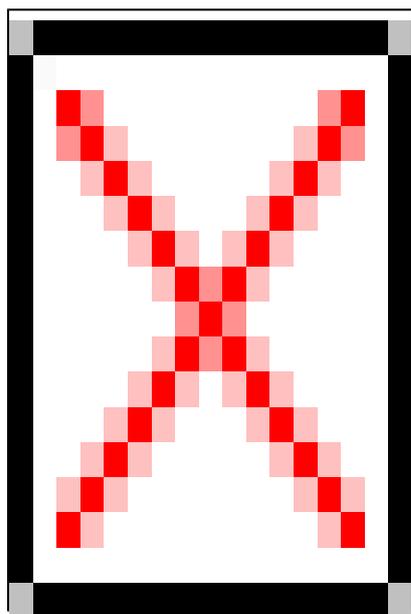
[Michelle Pauli](#) [1]

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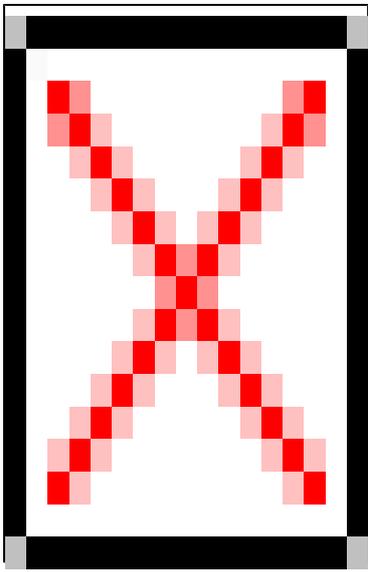
**Roopa Farooki** interviewed by **Michelle Pauli**

What do doctors, detectives and writers have in common? Quite a lot, says **Roopa Farooki**. She should know ? the award-winning author of adult literary fiction is also an NHS junior doctor and has just published the second in her **Double Detectives Medical Mystery** series for middle grade readers, **Diagnosis Danger**.



?Detectives and writers and doctors are all really interested in people and we want to know what makes them tick, what motivates them,? she explains. ?In different ways we're trying to help. As writers our job is to open a window into another person's world so you can see in, and also create a mirror, so you can truly look at yourself. As doctors, it's what we try to do as well.?

All the strands come together in **Diagnosis Danger**, where brave, savvy twins Ali and Tulip, first introduced in **The Cure for a Crime**, are once again at the centre of a madcap medical mystery ? this time involving vicious attacks on friends and family and a very peculiar cattery / care home filled with wonderfully eccentric old people. Fans of the first book will be delighted to know that the twins' fabulous grandmother Nan-Nan reappears in a starring role and the book is, again, infused with age-appropriate medical knowhow and tips.



Ali and Tulip use the medical knowledge picked up from their mother's job as a brain surgeon, and the hours they spend lurking around the hospital she works in, to help solve the mysteries in both books, aided by their 'frenemy' twins, Zac and Jay. Fittingly, it was Farooki's twin daughters who helped her solve her own mystery – in this case a literary one.

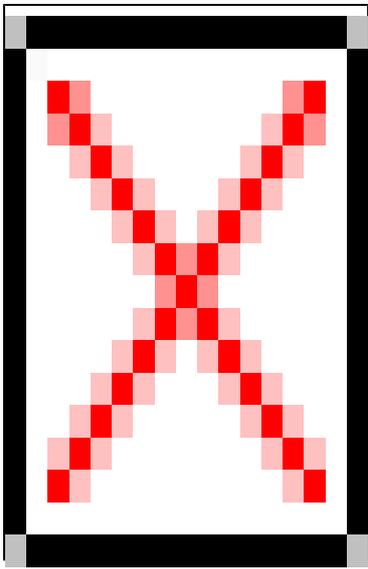
She had decided to write a children's book soon after starting medical school, following a successful career as a writer of adult literary fiction. Reluctant to abandon writing altogether – 'medical school is pretty full-time, but I've been used to being a full-time mum of four children and writing books' – she also felt that, as far as adult novels went, six was quite enough, ('does the world really need another literary adult book from me?!'). Besides which, her children were urging her to write a funny book for them to read. Yet, despite her best efforts, the right story was proving elusive.

'I wrote a book and it wasn't very good and I wrote another book and it wasn't very good. I wrote another book and it wasn't very good. I wrote a whole trilogy of books that weren't very good. And then I wrote another one and it still wasn't very good,' she laughs. (It should be noted here that Farooki's 'not very good' books still made it to the Bologna book fair and were 'tantalisingly close' to getting a deal.)

The breakthrough came when Farooki's daughters were helping her prepare for her fourth year medical exams. As they tested her on lung, abdominal and eye exams they were discovering 'these little signs that we doctors just see, it's a bit like a hidden superpower, where someone mentions something quite casual about themselves and you immediately know lots of things about their life and their background. It's about building up the clues and then making the case and then proving your diagnosis.'

Farooki realised that, for the first time in her children's fiction journey, she had a story that 'no one else could tell'.

'If I said, write about being a young girl who knows all about medicine and the inner workings of what goes on within a hospital, because her mum works in one, and who is going to save the day, another competent children's writer wouldn't have been able to write that story because it was very much my lived reality and my children's lived reality. I knew that only I could write this story.'



She drafted **The Cure for a Crime** in a two-week break from medical school and swiftly had interest from OUP. By the time she was editing the second book in between hospital shifts, the world had got darker. Farooki herself contracted Covid very early on from a patient she was treating. And yet, with its themes of young people trying to protect those around them and stop the manipulation of the vulnerable and elderly, 'editing that book actually felt like a kind of a window back into a better time and a window forward into a slightly better time.'

Even the pace of the book 'which is seriously frenetic' is linked to the hospital environment. 'This is very much what life is like in a hospital. If I get 10 minutes for lunch across the 12-hour shift, I think, oh, that's quite generous. I can toast a whole sandwich in that time. I was trying to capture that kind of pace and activity,' she says. It makes for an intentionally breathless read.

Aside from the fascinating medical insights and tips 'don't miss Tulip's Mini-Medix blog in the back of the book' Farooki's **Medical Mysteries** books are also notable for their normalising of difference and diversity. A wide spectrum of society, from gay teachers to high energy grans and elderly female impersonators to nurses from south east Asia, appear without fanfare.

'When I look around the hospital and I look around schools these days, there are literally people from every single walk of life and what is interesting about them isn't their social demographic 'category' but the quality of the character and how they're living their life, the choices they make and how they care about people,' says Farooki.

When Farooki started medical school, she wondered where she was going to put her 'writing energy'. She needn't have worried. In addition to the two **Medical Mysteries** books (with a third on the way 'to be written'), she also has a memoir about mortality and grief, motherhood and medicine, written during the pandemic and due out with Bloomsbury this year, has a book for teens with her agent and is currently working on a series of non-fiction books about the body for younger children. 'Writing is something I do because I must,' she said, simply. 'It's like having three meals a day.'

**Michelle Pauli** is a freelance writer and editor specialising in books and education. She created and edited the **Guardian** children's books site.

**The Double Detectives Medical Mystery** books, [The Cure for a Crime](#) [3] and **Diagnosis Danger** are published by OUP, £6.99 pbk.

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