

The Strongest Heart

Bound galley letter

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to review this galley of *The Strongest Heart*. You may already know of me through my previous middle grade novels like *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* and *The Partition Project*. My work contains themes of my own personal Muslim, South Asian, immigrant, and first-generation American experience. At the same time, I make sure the stories are relatable to all kid—and adult—readers.

The Strongest Heart is my most personal story yet. It's about a boy whose father has severe paranoid schizophrenia, whose mother has temporarily left the country, and whose life has been uprooted by a move to Houston, Texas. I, too, grew up under the care of a schizophrenic father, and a mother who was emotionally, if not physically, absent. It took a deep toll not only on me as a child, but affected the adult I became, and the relationships I formed, including with my own parents and siblings.

Like me, millions of kids grow up with a mentally ill parent, struggling to create their own self-worth and protect their physical and emotional safety. With so many challenges, these kids often feel isolated, scared, and alone. They need to know they're not alone, that their worries and fears are similar to those of so many others. That there's a path forward if they're brave enough to speak out and ask for help. They need books that showcase their tough experiences.

The Strongest Heart is a true-to-my-life depiction of mental illness, but the main character, Mo, is far cooler than I was as a child! He's got jokes, snark, and tons of South Asian folktales to take comfort in. He understands that “the strongest heart is the one that keeps beating,” despite everything.

I hope you enjoy this story. It's sad, powerful, and thought provoking.

Saadia Faruqi