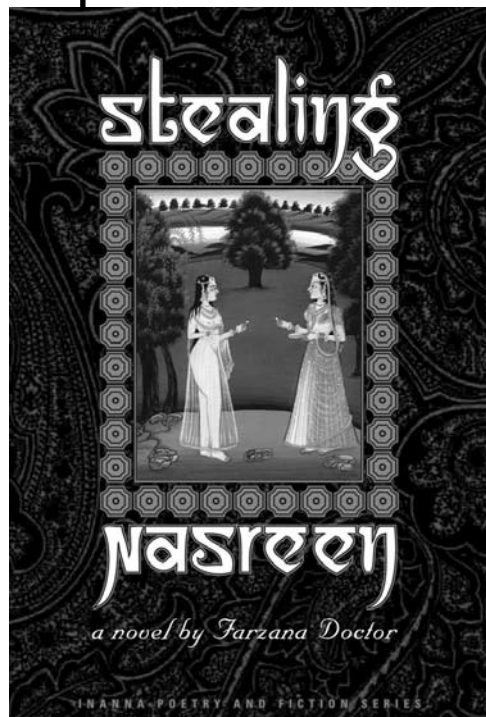




Stealing Nasreen

a novel by **Farzana Doctor**



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Farzana Doctor is a queer South Asian writer in Toronto. Her fiction and poetry has been published in Siren Magazine, Trikone, Sightlines 7 Anthology and Aurat Durbar. She has also had chapters published in edited books, co-written a manual for therapists, co-written plays and co-produced a documentary. She is employed as a social worker, educator and consultant.

She managed to keep her love life a secret from her parents until her third year of university, when Muriam Bandukwala saw her kissing Rita Mirrelli, on Yonge St. Rita and Nasreen didn't date very long, but their short fling had far-reaching consequences for Nasreen. Muriam Bandukwala set the community phone tree into action, telling the news to a third cousin in Idaho, who called Nasreen's aunt in Rhode Island, who then phoned her mother in Mississauga two days later. The result was a serious dining room family meeting where her mother asked embarrassing questions while her father paced in the hallway like an angry lion.

—from *Stealing Nasreen*, by Farzana Doctor

Stealing Nasreen is a novel about the lives of three very different people, all of whom belong to the same small religious community. Set in Toronto with back story in Mumbai, Nasreen Bastawala, an Indo-Canadian lesbian and burnt-out psychologist, becomes enmeshed in the lives of Shaffiq and Salma Paperwala, new immigrants from Mumbai. While working in the same Toronto hospital as Nasreen, Shaffiq develops a persistent and confusing fascination with Nasreen, causing him to bring home and hide things he "finds" in her office. Salma, his wife, discovers some of these hidden treasures and suspects that something is amiss.

Unbeknownst to Shaffiq, Nasreen begins attending weekly Gujarati classes taught by Salma, who finds herself inexplicably attracted to her student. This attraction harkens back memories and regrets Salma holds about a lesbian affair that ended badly years ago.

Nasreen has troubles of her own. She recently broke up with her cheating girlfriend and still has mixed feelings about her, and their relationship. She is also dealing with her father, who has become demanding and clingy ever since the death of her mother a couple of years before.

Salma, Shaffiq and their two daughters are struggling in their own ways as new immigrants. Shaffiq takes on the cheerleading role in his family, espousing their new homeland while privately fearing that Canada will westernize his daughters. Salma tries to make a comfortable home for her family but secretly hopes they will "fail" as immigrants and return to India.

Without knowing that it is happening, Nasreen becomes the centre of Shaffiq and Salma's lives. Each keeps a secret about Nasreen, and in so doing risks their marriage, while Nasreen struggles to come to terms with her mother's death, her recent break-up, and her changing relationship with her father. An impulsive kiss between Salma and Nasreen sets off a surprising course of events.

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