

ANISHA

ACCIDENTAL

DETECTIVE

A detective writing session with

SERENA PATEL

Listen to Serena Patel read the
first chapter of her book here:

<https://youtu.be/-bvCRuDkBTM>

And introduce the task here:

<https://youtu.be/QVwckiFs3Ek>

Chapter one: Anisha, Accidental Detective

“No, No, No, this is terrible! I said pink carnations. If I wanted red ones, I would have asked for RED ones!” yells my Aunty Bindi.

She’s making a right racket. Her fists are clenched and her face is turning a funny purply colour — I’m a bit worried that her head might actually erupt in a big purple slime explosion as she screams at the flower delivery man. This is already the third time she’s sent the poor man back and he looks like he’s going to cry.

I slump in the chair and bury my head in my book, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, to try to shut out the noise. I just wish I could get some peace and quiet around here. Dad says I should be reading “more appropriate books for girls my age”. I’m not sure what kind of books those are, but I like reading about time, space and numbers. Numbers are great, they make sense — unlike people. You’d think this too if you lived with my family.

The delivery man apologizes like his life depends on it. “I’m so sorry, madam. I just deliver the flowers, as I explained before. Perhaps you should ring the shop and tell them exactly what you want.”

“I DID tell them. It’s not rocket science, is it? I want my flowers and I want them pink. Is that too much to ask?” And with that, she slams the front door so hard that it bounces back and hits her in the face.

“Aunty, this is just a suggestion, but maybe you should calm down. Getting stressed isn’t good for your health,” I say, as I watch her rubbing her nose. Mum says these kinds of helpful things to my dad all the time. He gets stressed out too — not by flowers but by his job as a lawyer for Bundi, Bandu and Bhaskar LLP. I’m not sure exactly what he does, but it seems to involve going all red in the face and shouting down the phone a lot. When I grow up, I’m going to work in a lab where it’s clean and quiet and I don’t have to see a lot of people. That would be my number-one dream job.

“This wedding is going to be a disaster, a first-class disaster!” Aunty Bindi wails. She’s been speaking all high-pitched like this ever since she started planning her wedding. THE WEDDING OF THE YEAR! The wedding that is happening TOMORROW. She’s marrying her “sweetie pie”. (That’s what she calls him — uRGh!) His real name is Tarnvir, except only his mum calls him that.

Everyone else calls him by his nickname, Tony.

According to the grown-ups, a wedding is a really big deal: flowers, frilly dresses and a ridiculously large cake with little people on top and expensive crystals round the edges. It all seems totally unnecessary to me. For their honeymoon they’re going to this resort in Spain which has the world’s biggest theme park — is it me or is that a WEIRD place to go on your honeymoon? Uncle Tony loves it though — theme parks are his favourite thing, as well as music by an old rock-and-roll star I’d never heard of, ELVIS PRESLEY. And his favourite person in the whole wide world is, of course, my Aunty Bindi.

She loves what he loves — they are so CRINGE when they’re together.

But the worst thing about this wedding is that Aunty Bindi decided I should be a bridesmaid and I have to wear the most awful lengha, which is made up of a bright orange embroidered top with an itchy gold frill on the sleeves and neckline and a floor-length skirt in the same colour.

Now, I love Aunty Bindi. Out of my whole ridiculously big family she is my favourite aunt and she does make me laugh. She used to look after me a lot when I was little cos she lived with us. And even though she can be a bit much sometimes we’ve always been SO close, even though we’re SO different. Aunty Bindi is really kind hearted and she would do anything for anyone, especially me.

I would do mostly anything for her but when it comes to itchy bridesmaid lenghas, I'd really rather wear a lab coat. Mum said I'd better not suggest that to my aunty though, especially with how crazy all this wedding stuff is making her.

"You know what, I'll ring Tony. He'll calm me down. He always knows what to say," she witters, as she taps on her phone with her sparkly false nails. Aunty Bindi loves things that sparkle. She has sparkly bags, sparkly clothes — she's even been talking about getting a sparkly pink car. I've told her I will not be getting in it with her.

I take a deep breath and try to get back into my book, but the quiet doesn't last very long.

"huMPFh! He's not even answering.

What else could he possibly have to do that's more important than speaking to ME?" she whines, running her sparkly nails through her big hair.

I'm not sure what the right answer is to that question so I keep my mouth firmly shut. Aunty Bindi is not usually this whiney. She can be squawky, for sure, but this is next-level annoying! She has barely stopped for breath. "Do you realize the wedding is tomorrow? I'm having my mehndi*" (see below) "done at lunchtime today and I've got a huge zit on my nose and now probably a big bruise as well, all the relatives are arriving any minute, and the florist can't even get the garlands right!"

** The first time I saw mehndi, I think I was about four or five years old and I thought it was a tube of Mum's fancy hand cream. I squeezed a load onto my hands and was a bit puzzled when they turned a greeny-black colour. So, not wanting to get in trouble for having mucky hands, I wiped them on Mum and Dad's new white cotton bedspread. Mum later explained that mehndi is basically a dye that is used to colour hair or decorate the hands and feet with swirly patterns on special occasions. How was I supposed to know? The writing on the label was in Hindi!*

She pauses dramatically for effect and flops onto our green corduroy sofa with the back of her hand to her head like she's about to faint. Aunty Bindi really likes to be dramatic. I firmly believe that she sometimes thinks she's in a Bollywood movie. This one time she got really upset because she and Uncle Tony had had an argument, so she sat by the window sobbing and singing "TERE BINA ZINDAGI", which is a really old Indian love song, at the top of her voice. She was so loud and out of tune that the neighbours complained — well, mostly Mr Bogof from number 62, he's always complaining about something. I had to admit though, on this occasion, the singing was pretty bad. I put my headphones on with earmuffs over the top and I could still hear her! Having relatives living with you can be hard work.

Right now, I really want to ask Aunty Bindi how the big zit on her nose affects her having her mehndi done on her hands and feet. But maybe it's not the right time for questions. Then I think, maybe she's starting a new trend? NoSE MEhNDI! You know, nose mehndi could really take off. In fact, what's she complaining about? It could actually cover up the planet-sized spot that is emerging on her nose. (It looks a little like Saturn, or maybe Mars, and it's getting redder by the minute.)

Mehndi is a bit swirly twirly for me. I prefer right angles, but I'm guessing that mehndi squares might look a bit odd. I'm sure it will look nice on Aunty Bindi though, as she's a swirly twirly kind of person. Actually, if Aunty Bindi does have mehndi on her nose, it might draw attention away from my horrid orange-and-gold lengha.

I think about telling Aunty Bindi about my analysis of the situation, but instead I say, "I'm sure it will all work out in the end." This is something else my mum says a lot, mostly when everything is going wrong.

Mum likes to see the positive in every situation. She says when she was growing up everyone was much more chilled out.

It all sounds very inefficient. I like things to be organized and neat — it's kind of my thing. My family are so messy and noisy that sometimes I think I must have been adopted or beamed down by aliens.

Just then my earlier wish is granted and Mum comes down the stairs. "What is all the noise about? Is everything okay, Bindi?" she calls out.

"It's fine, Mum," I shout back, rolling my eyes.

"It is NoT fine! It's all a disaster, Didi!*" Aunty Bindi grabs my mum and starts to cry noisily into her shoulder.

** Aunty Bindi calls my mum Didi, which is weird because her name is actually Bhavana, but they tell me Didi is the Hindi word for sister. My Hindi is not great. I only know the bad words that Granny taught me. In our house Mum and Dad speak mainly English and so do most of my relatives, apart from a few Gujarati or Punjabi words thrown in, depending on which side of the family they are on. Granny speaks mainly Hindi because she was brought up in Mumbai in India and when she was growing up she loved all the old Bollywood movies. Dad can speak Hindi, Gujarati and Punjabi, but pretends he can't understand especially when Granny is telling him off. Mum calls it selective hearing. Anyway, some of our family call Granny by a different word — Ba — which is Gujarati for Granny. But I've always just called her Granny.*

Why do Indian weddings have to take so long — they don't just last one day, they go on for a whole week! Yesterday there was a ceremony in the house with a priest and lots of singing. Mum had to paint Aunty Bindi with turmeric on her face and arms and legs — she looked like a big yellow monster. Granny said it's supposed to be a special blessing and also it's good for your skin. Well, they're never doing that to me — not that I'm ever getting married!

Today is the mehndi party so the marquee will be filled with family again. Not just a few relatives either — Mum said we're expecting a hundred guests! I didn't know that we were related to that many people, but Mum said her and Aunty Bindi's side of the family is really big! I look through the patio doors at the end of our living room into the marquee and out to the garden beyond. Right at the bottom behind the hedge is Granny's greenhouse. No matter how packed the house and marquee get, no one will go near it. No one is ever, ever allowed to enter the greenhouse.

"There there, we can't have the bride crying, can we?" Mum says, stroking Bindi's hair while pushing a tissue towards her. She's good at this making-it-better thing. I guess she's had a lot of practice growing up with Aunty Bindi as her little sister. I can't imagine having a little brother or sister. It might have been nice to have someone to share theories and do experiments with, but the probability they would be like me is quite low. Not many people are.

I shuffle in the armchair and slide down as far as I can without falling onto the floor. I am NOT good at this emotional stuff. It makes me feel all itchy and uncomfortable, PLUS no one listens to what I think anyway. Grown-ups like to ruffle your hair and comment on how much you've grown, but they don't really care what you think about important stuff. They just want you to stay quiet and behave — when, actually, I wish THEY would just STAY QUIET and BEHAVE.

Just then the house phone rings on the sideboard behind me. I jump up out of my comfy chair to answer it, glad to have a distraction from Aunty Bindi's sobbing.

"Hello?" I say quickly.

“Who is that?” asks a gruff, heavily-accented voice. I recognize it straight away — its Uncle Tony’s brother Vikram (everyone calls him Ricky for short).

“It’s me,” I answer.

“Who’s me?” Uncle Ricky asks.

“Uncle Ricky, it’s Anisha!” I say, getting annoyed.

“Ah, Anni, it’s me, Uncle Ricky. Can I speak to your mum?” he says.

“Hang on.” I sigh and hold the phone out for Mum to take. I hate being called Anni, though the grown-ups in my family seem to think it’s cute!

YuCk!

Mum reaches for the phone with her free hand while Bindi remains attached to her other arm.

“Yes, hello? Oh, Ricky, how are you? Okay, well that sounds...interesting, but I’m not sure it’s appropriate. Well, I don’t think...but, don’t you think...okay, alright, I’ll speak to you later.”

And with that she hangs up the phone, still frowning from her conversation.

“What did Uncle Ricky want?” I ask suspiciously. Uncle Ricky never calls unless he wants something. I think Uncle Tony gets a bit fed up with him sometimes. But why would he call Mum?

“Nothing to worry about. Just boring wedding stuff.” Mum smiles brightly — a little too brightly — not answering my question at all.

Bindi doesn’t notice any of this and continues sniffing into Mum’s shoulder. I have to get out of here, even if it’s just for a bit. I jump up and say, “I’m just going to Milo’s.”

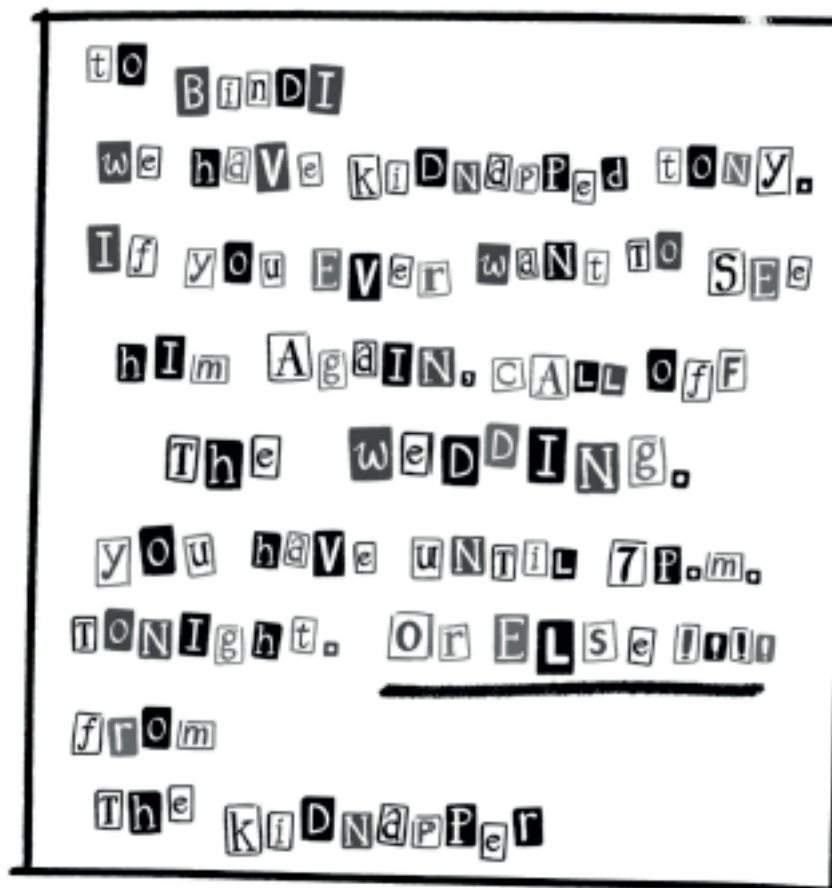
Mum waves with her free hand and says, “Don’t be long, Anni. Remember the mehndi party is starting in a little while, people will be arriving soon.”

“Yes, Mum,” I answer, even though I can’t think of anything worse than a house full of people AND having to talk to them for hours about swirly-twirly mehndi.

I grab my backpack and head for the front door. When I enter the hallway I notice an envelope sticking halfway through the letter box. Did the postman come already? Mum’s always moaning that he’s late; she’ll be pleased he’s been early for once. I bend down and grab the envelope. There’s no stamp on it and on the front someone’s scrawled To the Bride. I turn the envelope over and the flap slides open, revealing part of the letter inside. One word jumps out at me:

Kidnaped

My hands are shaking now. I quickly open the front door and look around. The street outside is empty. I shut the door and look at the half-opened envelope. What do I do? Without really thinking, I pull the note out to read it. The paper is thick and looks expensive. Don’t ask me why, but I smell it. It has a sharp odour — it’s really familiar but I can’t think what it is.



I read it again to make sure I haven't misunderstood. Someone has kidnapped Uncle Tony on the day before the wedding? Is this a joke? Who would joke about something like that?

I peek back into the living room at Auntie Bindi, who is still blowing her nose (how much snot does she have in there?), and Mum, who is still trying to reassure her that the wedding isn't cursed and that her zit doesn't look that bad. I realize that if I go in there now and show them this note, it will be like a volcano erupting. So I decide, there and then, to keep it to myself until I can make sense of it.

It could just be a joke — although it's really not that funny. But it sounds real. kidnAP?! A shiver runs down my spine. I'm not sure what to do. Why would anyone want to kidnap Uncle Tony?

But wait! There's usually a logical reason for most things that happen. There must be a logical explanation for this note. I just need to work out what it is.

I need my best friend. Milo will know what to do. And that's how I end up running like lightning down the road to number 58.

Task

Your task is to solve the mystery and write the story of the kidnapping. To do this, you need to:

1. Read the list of suspects and clues
2. Using the list of suspects and clues, write down your answers to the following questions:
 - a. Who do you think kidnapped Uncle Tony?
 - b. Why do you think they did it?
 - c. When did they kidnap him?
 - d. How did they kidnap him?
 - e. Where did they take him to?
 - f. What did they want to achieve by kidnapping him?
3. Using your answers to the above plot out the story of the kidnapping and try to include all the clues in your plot
4. Write your story!

The suspects:

Mindy and Manny

- Uncle Tony's ten-year-old twins from his first marriage, described by Anisha as "the meanest kids I know".
- Both like wearing all black
- Manny always has his tablet with him
- Mindy always has a notebook and her hairless pet dog with her
- Have told their dad they aren't happy about the wedding
- Spotted outside the house by a neighbour on their phones
- Claim they have only just returned from boarding school but were seen the day before by Anisha's cousin

Mustaf

- Uncle Tony's chauffeur
- Very tall and wears a long black coat
- Has never been heard speaking
- Seen looking for something in the boot of the limo — rustling sounds and movement also heard in the boot.
- Seems to be acting jumpy
- Caught hiding food.

Uncle Ricky

- Uncle Tony's brother and business partner
- Doesn't always get on with Uncle Tony
- Seen making lots of suspicious phone calls
- Leaves the family pre-wedding party early
- Seen dragging a large wheelie bag around

Mr Bogof

- Anisha's neighbour
- Doesn't like his street being disturbed by noise or people

Tony's mum and dad

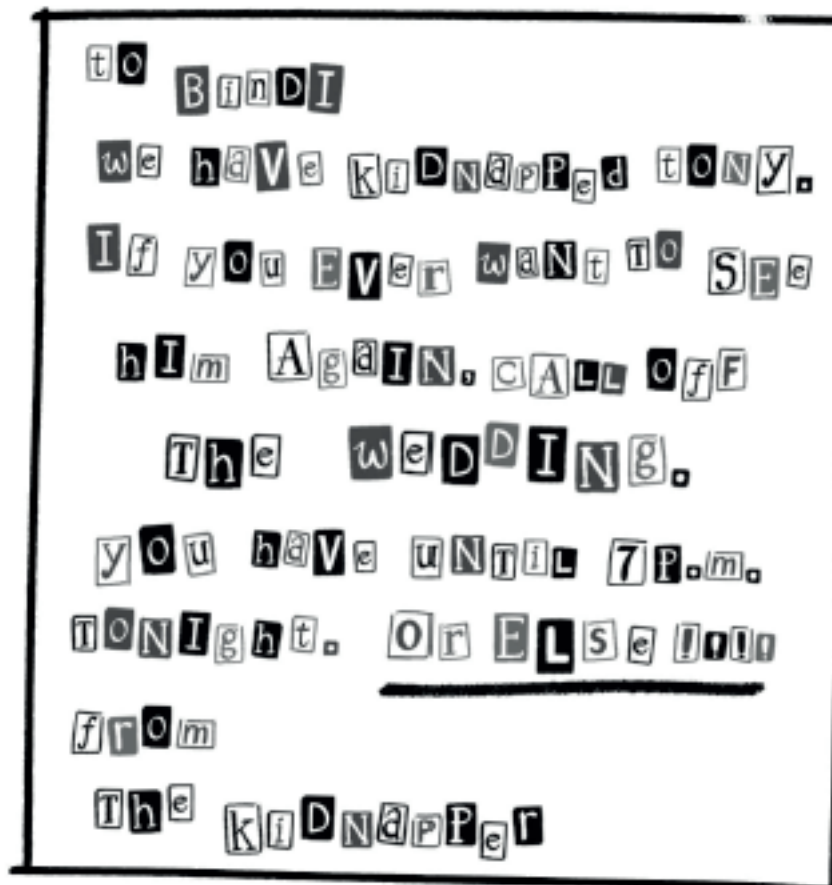
- Don't approve of the wedding
- Overheard saying they thought Auntie Bindi "was like a walking, talking dolly"
- Claim Tony didn't turn up at their house for his wedding preparations as planned

Granny Jas

- Her medicine was mixed into tampered mehndi that was then used on Auntie Bindi ruining her wedding mehndi
- Being secretive about what's in her greenhouse — doesn't want anyone disturbing her work in there

More clues:

1. The note through the door



2. Transcript of the phone call from the kidnapper:

Voice: Why has the wedding not been cancelled as we instructed

Anisha: Who is this?

Voice: You don't need to know that. Just make sure the wedding is cancelled by seven o'clock this evening.

Anisha: Where's Tony? How do I know you haven't thrown him over a cliff or hurt him?

Voice: You don't. CANCEL THE WEDDING OR ELSE.

3. Anisha's bridesmaid lengha top is found ruined
4. A black spiral-bound notebook from Uncle Tony's mobile phone shop is found and is a match for the paper used for the kidnapper's note
5. Manny's tablet — his search history includes:
 - how to be cool in ten short lessons
 - trendy hairstyles for boys
 - plot your way to becoming a super-villain
 - five signs your stepmother is an alien
 - the Birmingham South-West Aspire Junior Middle High Academy School website
6. A receipt for a padlock found in Mustaf's car

Serena Patel's Top 5 Tips for Writing Detective Stories

1. A general tip for all aspiring authors is to write down interesting things you see around you. You never know what might spark the idea of a story!
2. Setting is really important in detective stories, where is the mystery taking place?
3. Suspects – every good mystery story needs more than one suspect. Actually if there are quite a few it makes it even more tricky for the detective to solve the mystery. I try and stick to no more than 3.
4. Clues – you should have lots of clues dotted about in your story. Good ones and bad ones! Red herrings, bad clues will lead your detective off on different paths but make sure you always bring them back to their mission of solving the mystery!
5. Motive – the culprit must have a strong motive for committing the crime. But your detective should also have a good motive for wanting to solve it. Think about why they care so much too.

We'd love to read some of your stories and know that Serena Patel would too. Why not ask your parent or guardian to share them on social media and tag Usborne Books at Home and Serena in them. We'd love to see who solves the mystery!