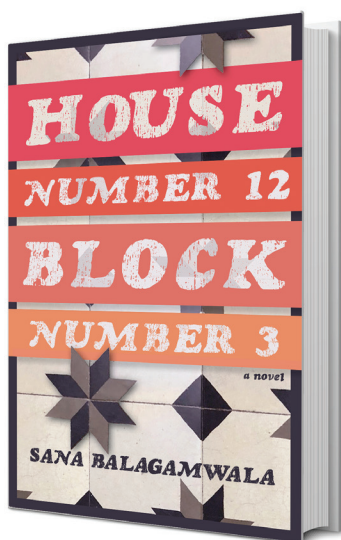


a novel

HOUSE NUMBER 12 BLOCK NUMBER 3

SANA BALAGAMWALA

Pakistani-American debut author, Sana Balagamwala, beautifully chronicles a coming of age story that grapples with trauma, love, & loss.



Karachi, Pakistan (20th century) – Nadia has changed. She has been waking up in the middle of the night in fits of anxiety, avoiding her friends and family, and skipping her university classes. With the recent death of her father, Haji Rahmat, Nadia's condition has further spiraled. There is no acceptable diagnosis for her behavior, and speculations abound: she may have a rare disease, she may be possessed by a jinn, or perhaps she is inclined to madness. Whatever the cause of this mysterious affliction, Zainab, Nadia's mother, is at pains to keep it hidden from the community at large; she is worried Nadia will be labeled as mad, and she knows all too well the taboos that mental illness brings with it.

While the country tethers on political unrest, and Nadia seems to get worse by the day, the family searches desperately for the cause of, and the cure for their daughter's mysterious malady.

House Number 12 Block Number 3, the home that has sheltered the Rahmat family for decades, narrates and recollects past events, trying to absolve itself of the burden it feels of being privy to the real reason for Nadia's turmoil, but not being able to do anything about it.

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Excerpt

Nadia woke the next morning with a start. Her wild eyes and translucent skin made me think a nightmare had crossed the thresholds of sleep and followed her into reality. The woolen blankets across her outstretched legs were twisted and wrung tight. As her pinpoint pupils darted about the room, I remembered the eight-year-old girl who used to wake up often in the same fit of fear.

Nadia made her way to the bathroom, where she pulled open the wooden drawers next to the sink, one by one, searching for something. She tossed items out of the way, the pot of Vaseline, the tin of Nivea cream, the packets of black bobby pins, until she found what she was looking for: a large pair of metal scissors, silver and slightly rusted along one edge. She held her hair up, gathered it into a high ponytail, and began hacking at it. Chunks of dark brown hair fell in waves around her, onto the sink and on the floor. When finally her hair was trimmed close to the nape of her neck in some places and grazed her shoulders in jagged tips in others, she set the scissors on the counter and exhaled.

With her hair cropped thus, she reminded me of the Magnificent Barbie, that she had ravaged so many years ago.

Meanwhile, downstairs the morning progressed. Zainab bustled about in the kitchen and Haji Rahmat enjoyed a cup of tea. When Nadia entered the breakfast room, Haji Rahmat glanced up at his daughter with a smile and then balked. "What happened to your hair?" he asked.

Nadia sat down.

Zainab brought in parathas and eggs, calling back over her shoulder to her son. "Junaid, hurry, you must leave for work."

Then she noticed her daughter. "What happened to your hair?" she gasped, her eyes leaping out of their sockets.

The nineteen-year-old looked down at the sunny side egg on her plate, at the perfect circle of the egg yolk. She took a spoon to it and there was an explosion of saffron lava over the egg white.

"Did you cut your hair?"

"Yes."

Zainab looked impatient, annoyed, and confused. "Why?"

Haji Rahmat took a loud slurp of tea. A teaspoon chimed as it fell onto the floor.

Nadia swirled the runny egg yolk all over the plate shunning her parents' distress. "I like it this way." Zainab slammed the plates on the table, her green, gleaming eyes still on her daughter's hair. "Have you lost your mind?"

"I just needed a change."

"A change?" Zainab shouted. "Wear a different color of nail polish, for God's sake! Buy a new lipstick. Why destroy your hair?"

Nadia stared intensely at the egg yolk on her plate.

"I'm waiting for an answer, Nadia," Zainab ground out through closed teeth.

"Ammi, I can't deal with this now."

"What do you mean, you can't deal with this? What is there to deal with? You shouldn't have cut off your hair! Then there would be nothing to deal with."

"Zainab, let it be," Haji Rahmat said. "That actress on TV, what is her name ... she has a new short haircut. I do believe it's the fashion these days."

Zainab turned her attention from Nadia to her husband. "The big deal is that her wedding is in June! That's in five months. Do you think hair grows overnight? The photos are ruined. God help me."

"I don't want to get married," Nadia said quietly.

"You don't what?" Zainab's face burned crimson; her eyes fierce.

"I don't want to get married."

About the Author: Sana Balagamwala



Sana Balagamwala grew up in Karachi, Pakistan. She has a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Southern California, and a Masters in Education from Loyola Marymount University. She is presently working on a MSt. (masters degree) in Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge.

English is her second language, and she is fluent in Urdu and Hindi.

Her debut novel, *House Number 12 Block Number 3* comes out in the fall of 2021.

Before embarking on her writing career, she taught middle school history and literature. Sana loves old buildings, avoids lizards, and appreciates a good cup of coffee. She lives in Los Angeles, California.

Book Reviews

"*House Number 12 Block Number 3* is an original, heart-wrenching story of life, love, and tragedy in Karachi during times of turmoil and change. Brilliantly told through the eyes of the house that has sheltered the Rahmat family for decades, Sana Balagamwala's language is rich in texture, lyrical and nuanced in scope, as she explores gender roles, social status, and political upheaval against the backdrop of a young girl's pain. *House Number 12 Block Number 3* shines a light on both the personal and political, and reveals how a country at war reflects a young girl's madness, and neither will rest peacefully until both have been redeemed."

- Deborah Reed, author of *Things We Set on Fire*

Author Questionnaire

What inspired you to write *House Number 12 Block Number 3*?

This book began as a way to hold on to some part of my family's history. Both my paternal and maternal grandfathers passed away in Karachi within a few years of each, while I was living in Los Angeles. Not being there amplified the sense of loss I felt for them and, in some way, for the places I grew up in. I dearly missed talking to them. So, I started collecting stories from my grandmother, my parents, my aunts, my uncles; and these stories informed the worlds of *House Number 12 Block Number 3*.

The main character, Nadia, experiences trauma that carries through the story. Why did you choose include that element?

Almost every woman I know has been through some sort of assault on her person. At the very least, its an unwanted touch, but usually its something more. As women we sometimes say something, but many times we don't. But when a child experiences something like that, they don't know what to say, or how to say it. There is guilt and shame associated without understanding what happened or why it happened. It takes courage to speak out – to say something against someone who is older, more powerful, or in authority – and then what? These situations and questions were in the back of my mind as I was writing.

You grew up in Karachi, where this story takes place. What is the city like today?

Karachi is a vibrant, cosmopolitan city, with a mind of its own. It has the best food, and beautiful architecture. However, a lot of the old homes and buildings in the older parts of the city have not been cared for and are unfortunately in very decrepit states.

What are your biggest goals in publishing this book?

I hope to bring awareness about societal taboos on mental illness and sexual assault, especially in children and young adults.

When did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

I spent most of my adult life convincing myself that a career in writing was not very practical, but that I would write one day – when work was not so demanding, when my children were a little older, when I had caught up on sleep. One evening, as I waxed poetic about writing a novel one day, (while pureeing peas and carrots for my toddler's dinner), my husband rather bluntly said. "When will one day come? Why not now?" The inconsiderate timing of his advice annoyed me (I was preparing food for our children after all), but also triggered a realization in me. That night, I took a leap of faith, and enrolled myself in a writing class at UCLA. It was during that class that I realized that I wanted to be an author.



What three words describe you?

Resourceful, creative, passionate

Where did you grow up?

Karachi, Pakistan

What was your favorite book as a child?

The Land of Far Beyond by Enid Blyton

Do you have any hidden talents?

I went to art school briefly and love painting. I am also obsessed with furniture, especially chairs.

What were you like in high school?

I was a very typical teenager. Gloomy, unhappy, full of angst. Sorry is that not typical?

What book is currently on your bedside table?

Burnt Sugar by Avni Doshi and *Going to Meet the Man* by James Baldwin

How do you take your coffee?

In copious amounts with milk, no sugar.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Debut Novel by Pakistani-American Author, Sana Balagamwala

JUNE 1, 2021

Los Angeles, CALIFORNIA– *House Number 12 Block Number 3* by Sana Balagamwala will officially release to the public on October 26, 2021.

House Number 12 Block Number 3 is a coming of age story set in Karachi, Pakistan amidst the political upheaval of the early 20th century. The novel is uniquely narrated by the house where the main character and her family reside. The yellow sandstone neo-classical house tells a story that grapples with trauma, love, and loss.

Sana Balagamwala of Los Angeles, California grew up in Karachi, Pakistan. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Southern California, and a Masters in Education from Loyola Marymount University. In the fall of 2021 she will begin a MSt. (masters degree) in Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge.

English is her second language, and she is fluent in Urdu and Hindi. Before embarking on her writing career, she taught middle school history and literature.

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About Hidden Shelf Publishing House

HIDDEN SHELF PUBLISHING HOUSE

Hidden Shelf Publishing House is an independent publisher based in Idaho. Founded in 2017, we aim to amplify underrepresented voices through our books and illuminate hidden narratives through innovative stories and unique perspectives. Our broad range of titles includes historical accounts, fiction, women's interest, children's literature, and more.

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