



## A Small Fortune

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**A Small Fortune** Rosie Dastgir

**An entertaining debut novel reminiscent of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* that explores the lives of an extended Pakistani family of immigrants in London—all with a gently humorous touch and fond but wry eye**

Harris, the presumed patriarch of his large extended family in both England and Pakistan, has unexpectedly received a “small fortune” from his divorce settlement with an English woman: £53,000. As a devout Muslim, Harris views this sum as a “burden of riches” that he must unload on someone else as quickly as possible. But deciding which relative to give it to proves to be a burden of its own, and soon he has promised it both to his extremely poor cousins in Pakistan and to his Westernized, college-student daughter. Then, in a rash bout of guilt and misunderstanding, Harris signs the entire sum away to the least deserving, most prosperous cousin of all. This solves none of his problems and creates many more, exacerbating a tricky web of familial debt and obligation on two sides of the world, until the younger generation steps in to help.

With insight, affection, and a great gift for character and story, Dastgir immerses us in a rich, beautifully drawn immigrant community and complex extended family. She considers the challenges between relatives of different cultural backgrounds, generations, and experiences—and the things they have to teach one another. *A Small Fortune* offers an affectionate and affecting look at class, culture, and the heartbreak of misinterpretation.

## A Small Fortune Details

Date : Published May 24th 2012 by Riverhead Books (first published February 1st 2012)

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Author : Rosie Dastgir

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## From Reader Review A Small Fortune for online ebook

### Hillary says

After finishing a very heavy-weight piece of non-fiction, I was ready for a pleasant story. This was a good choice. Characters who are just unpredictable enough and just varied enough to be interesting. Themes of immigration, culture shock, the rise of Islam in today's world, parents and children. The plot was fairly low-key, but there was certainly plenty to think about and enjoy.

The book read like a movie or good soap opera, switching from a related cast of characters, advancing the plot (such as it was) through various eyes. There's a lot of English weather, and a lot of food, both English and Pakistani.

Recommended for when you're in the mood for something relatively light, but not fluff.

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### Rita Moura de Oliveira says

Neste livro conheci um dos outros lados de Londres, aquela que não é habitada por gente da moda e da cultura, gente com sucesso e trabalho intenso. É uma Londres grande na mesma, habitada por milhares de paquistaneses e oriundos de outros países do Médio Oriente, gente que imigrou fisicamente para um dos centros do mundo mas que no coração e nas tradições se manteve nas suas terras de origem.

Partindo da história de um paquistanês que acaba de ganhar uma boa quantia de dinheiro graças ao seu divórcio, entramos no mundo de uma cultura dentro de outro país, acompanhada do conflito geracional inevitável quando a primeira geração de imigrantes dá origem à segunda. Ele divide-se entre os primos no Paquistão, que precisam da sua ajuda financeira, entre os primos que vivem nos subúrbios de Londres e que lhe dão o conforto de uma família apesar de com contrapartidas, e entre a filha, uma estudante de medicina que pouco quer ter a ver com a sua história. Mas os conflitos resolvem-se em grande parte das vezes. Depois, só é preciso encontrar um equilíbrio. A leitura deste livro faz-nos bem.

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### Mom2nine says

This story is about a Alia, who has an English mother and Pakistani father. This is also the case for the author so she is writing about something of which she is familiar. There is much more to the book than stated on the back. Alia's father, Harris, is tied to his large, extended family, both in London and in Pakistan, this creates issues, as everyone is expected to look out for each other, sometimes expectations exceed capabilities. Alia is trying to bridge her life, which has been spent in England with her father's expectations and understanding, due to his background. Alia's cousin is asked to watch over her although he has issues himself: holding down a job, although he is college educated and getting a bit too involved with a radical Islam group. A well written first novel, although Dastgir has an understanding of Pakistani life, she is Western educated and her writing flows easily.

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### **Zahra says**

As a Pakistani, it is not hard to recognize the familiar strains of social complexes that the Pakistani society holds in common with its diaspora residing in England that Dastgir so deftly incorporates as part of her characters' personalities – their sense of cultural shame when women from ‘good, Pakistani families’ take on boyfriends, when well-settled relatives fail to help less fortunate cousins, when asking for a return on a loan.

The novel is quite a bird’s eye view on how majority of the émigrés driven there by economic motives, live their life in Britain. Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, they neither belong here nor there.

Given the current global situation regarding Muslims and their sense of being at odds with the West, Dastgir masterfully brings into play how radical elements are capitalizing on those who are in financial distress making them vulnerable targets for “jihad” recruitments.

Despite the gloomy plot, the novel is lined with subtle humor and an expansive vocabulary which, when combined, makes it quite a charming read. All three main characters who are seen as markedly unhappy individuals throughout the story, end the book though may be not on a very definitive note but a promising one nonetheless- with the hint of a better future.

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### **Angela says**

Set in modern day England, this novel is the story of Harris, his relatives, his background and culture, and how his life effects others. Harris is, somewhat, recently divorced and has moved to North England (not being familiar with England, I'm fairly certain this a ways north of London, but don't know for sure).

Haaris (originally from Pakistan) married an English woman when he was fresh out of college. Even though he was betrothed to another, he found her a suitable man to marry, stayed in England, and had a daughter, Alia. Shortly after the book's beginning, Harris receives the settlement from his divorce - a small fortune. He determines that it would be best to send this to his cousin - Khalid - to assist with their family's situation (Khalid is the one who married Harris' betrothed). Things, however, have a way of not happening the way you expect them to - which sets the rest of the book in motion.

Saying I know little of London means I know even less about Pakistani life and culture. However, Ms. Dastgir does an excellent job of explaining in a way that allows me to relish the characters as they are portrayed. In the world's current stance on jihad and Islam, it would have been very easy for her to either vilify or praise those who are (or look) Muslim. Through her writing style, I felt that I gained a better understanding of Pakistani culture - the sense of family and responsibility.

I empathized with Alia, and her sense of not knowing where she belonged, as well as with Harris - who felt redundant in addition to not belonging. I cared about what happened to each character, worried about the turns some took, and relished the glimpse I had into their lives.

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### **Paige Hammersley says**

If your one scatterbrained friend were a book, they'd be Rosie Dastgir's “A Small Fortune”. The story

loosely follows the story of Harris and his relatives (especially his daughter, Alia), who are split between Europe, specifically England, and Pakistan. Harris inherits money from his ex-wife, which causes the fundamental conflict in the story (and is the root of the title), yet it finishes its main arc before the 100th page. The wealth from the inheritance barely impacts the remaining 75% of the book, unless bringing the topic up occasionally in conversation is considered having an impact.

Not only does the rest of the story lack the title focus, but it also seemingly lacks any focus whatsoever. As a reader, it was exceedingly difficult to follow the plotline. I initially thought that perhaps I was the one at fault, having failed to grasp the story accurately, but others commenting on Goodreads agree. Jaclyn Michelle said that the writing “is a bit wonky”, which is a perfect term to describe the book. However, the work is not only “wonky” due to the inability to follow its events, but also because of its strange use of formality. The dialogue is no different from the rest of the text. Characters speak unrealistically incessantly. Rather than saying, “it’s near you, right?”, Harris asks, “I’m right in thinking it’s close to your home, am I not?” A few more professional bits of dialogue in certain scenarios is understandable and appreciated. However, when the characters lack typical savoir-faire and speak as if they’ve been projected from an essay, the novel loses tenderness. That being said, the wide array of vocabulary throughout the story is something I appreciated. I learned quite a few words from “A Small Fortune” (a select few can be seen in my updates on the book).

Most positive reviews of this book are due to its use of Pakistani culture at times during the book. This is merely a matter of the subject, though. Sure, a story similar to this (at least revolving around the same theme) is challenging to come across, but rarity does not immediately make a novel worthy of four stars, let alone five. Something being original does not mean it is good.

At the end (actually, since page one), I did not enjoy this book. Its only redeeming qualities were the small portions where feminism peaked through, though even those moments were scattered haphazardly and failed to make sense more and more as the story continued. Thus, I give the book one lonely star. If I were to recommend this book to somebody... well, I wouldn’t.

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### **Deon Stonehouse says**

A Small Fortune by Rosie Dastigir. Harris was living the good life in Southeast England married to an Englishwoman but his circumstances changed with his divorce. Now he lives near his Pakistani relatives in the north, in a town he dislikes and a house that will never feel like home. His relatives convinced him to buy a small shop, an endeavor that does not suit at all. Harris is a devout Muslim, when he comes into a small fortune from his divorce settlement he feels he must share his wealth. Before he knows quite what to do, he has promised funds to too many relatives then given the lot to the least worthy. Now he has to sort out how to resolve relations with his disappointed family. Harris is impulsive but good hearted. This is a humorous, entertaining exploration of family, obligations, and choices. .

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### **Alexandrea Hills says**

I won this book through goodreads giveaways.

I really enjoyed Rosie style of writing. I felt that it flow perfectly. I think that she tells a beautiful story. I did not think that the main theme was about the money like the back of the book suggests. I think it was more about the family and the different dynamics and personalities. I understand where Rosie wanted to go with

the money but I think it feel short. There are long stretches were the money was not even discussed and I think those were better then when the money was tied into the story.

I enjoyed the characters. Although Harris was very frustrating I think that helped the story a lot. It made me hope that things would turn around and that he would figure everything out. And although it took the whole book for him to do so I think in the end he had the life he was meant to have.

I would definitely read another book by Rosie.

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### **Chris says**

Lucky me! This ARC was sent to me from the publisher. A charming story about a Pakistani Muslim gentleman named Harris, who comes into a little money after a divorce. His "Small Fortune" soon becomes more of a burden as various friends and family have difficulties in their lives. Whom should he choose to help with this financial gift?

We get to meet various characters in this story. Harris's emotionally and culturally distant daughter Alia and her live in boyfriend. A friend/business associate Nawaz and his family who cares for Harris after a recent illness. A cousin Rashid whom Harris values almost as a son. Rashid's family has serious financial and health problems, they could truly benefit from a financial gift.

Harris makes a decision on whom to share his gift, but that choice leads to many complications, and Harris soon regrets his choice. How will he be able to resolve this situation?

I loved the delicate touch the writer uses with the reader, helping us feel the importance of culture and family, the intricacies of religion. The difficulty of living outside your country, seeking an education or job opportunities.

A very enjoyable read!

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### **Carla Ward says**

This book was a very heartwarming, and at times heartbreakin look into assimilating into a culture foreign to your and remaining true to your home.

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### **Stephen says**

This immigrant saga was a big hit for me; I think part of the reason why it rises above some of the others is that Dastgir gives equal footing to the flaws of both the immigrant and the "acculturated" generation. That balance is typically hard to find.

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### **Melissa says**

As an American, the Pakistani culture and British references kept me interested, but also made it difficult for

me to relate or connect with the characters. While there were small glimmers of joy, most of the novel had a dark and tense mood. Most of the characters were completely unlikable; they ranged from despicable to pitiful to secretive and closed off. It's a story of a family, but instead of warmth and love, there is obligation and manipulation. I read to the end in the hope of a resolution, but the ending was not quite satisfactory. I like to feel exhilarated when I finish a book, but with *A Small Fortune*, I felt depressed and gloomy. Rosie Dastgir's writing has promise, and if she developed likable characters and a more interesting story, her next novel may be much better. Perhaps it's my unfamiliarity with the culture that created the obstacle for me, but I felt as detached from the novel as the characters were detached from each other.

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### **Lisa says**

As I began reading this book, I was expecting it to be rather like Major Pettigrew's Last Stand, a Pakistani-infused Pym-esque study of village life. That is not at all what this book is! Yes, there are moments of Pym like humor and examination of relationships, but the anguish of the three major characters is so palpable as to make this a not entirely comfortable reading experience. Harris, his daughter Alia and cousin—"nephew" Rashid are all at crossroads in their lives, and each feels pressure to appease conflicting demands of family, friends and faith. Living in a culture that seems hostile at times, Rashid is drawn in by a fundamentalist iman, but in doing so is unable to meet the very real needs of his family in Pakistan. Alia, a modern Londoner of mixed heritage struggles to free herself from her father's academic expectations for her as well as from his expectations of how she should conduct her romantic life. Harris, the nominal patriarch of the extended family, must find a satisfactory way to dispose of some money from a settlement. Seems everyone feels some entitlement to his help, except Alia who wants to find her own way. An indecisive man who crumples under pressure and is already quite adrift and seeking shelter following his divorce, Harris is skillfully manipulated by one branch of cousins. To top it off he lands in what by his Islamic views is an unsuitable romantic alliance. I found myself keenly engaged in seeing how the three worked out their destinies. Dastigir's characters are sympathetically and well drawn, and as I said earlier, their worries left me wholly engaged, but at times uncomfortable. One aspect of the novel I found remarkable was the author's excellent ear for dialogue from a variety of English regions and social castes. All in all an excellent analysis of very real characters in crisis.

Librarything ARC

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### **Jaclyn Michelle says**

<http://wineandabook.com/2012/07/23/re...>

Real talk: I've been putting off writing this review of Rosie Dastgir's *A Small Fortune* because, honestly, I had a really hard time finishing it. Not because the text was complex or emotionally taxing...just the opposite, actually. The writing itself was a bit wonky and the tone of the piece was fairly static. A lot happens in the story, but due to what came across to me as issues with character development, the narrative didn't seem to progress anywhere that felt realistic.

Premise: (from the back jacket) Harris, the presumed patriarch of his large family--both in England, where he's made his home, and in Pakistan, where he was raised--has unexpectedly received a "small fortune" from

his divorce settlement with an Englishwoman: £53,000. As a devout Muslim, Harris views this sum as a "burden of riches"; all he can think upon receiving it, if of how best to divest himself of it. But deciding which deserving relatives to give it to proves to be a burden of its own.

Here's where I feel Dastgir went astray...

Characterization: Real people can be incredibly complex in terms of personality. Sometimes, you can know someone a lifetime and still be surprised by their decisions and contradictions. It's the very nature of choice that gives humans the leeway to be hypocritical. But in a novel, I don't have the luxury of knowing your characters for a lifetime; I get 373 pages. The central character of Harris was particularly inconsistent, which stood in the way of my being able to empathize with his choices and decisions throughout the story.

Personally, even if I can't fully get behind the choices of a character, as a reader, I want to be able to know enough about them that I can understand where each decision came from. With Harris, I feel like I'd learn one thing about him and then he would do something that seemed to completely contradict what I had just been told. He's supposed to be very traditional when it comes to his Islamic culture, yet he changes his name from Haaris to Harris when he moves to England. He's upset with his daughter having a live-in English boyfriend, yet he engages in a sexual relationship with a widow he meets through family members. He's constantly in need of money, but when he receives a settlement from his ex-wife, he gives it away (!!!) to a cousin who he seems to look down upon, not to his family back in Pakistan. I felt myself asking "where did that come from???" over and over again and not finding that question answered by the text. So my thinking is this: 1) Harris is one of those people who makes whatever decision benefits him or paints him in the best light in the moment, and spends his time thereafter justifying his actions...someone who has an incredibly difficult time seeing the world from any other perspective than his own in the immediate present. But I can't imagine that an author would sit down and create a main character so dense and inconsistent that it renders him this difficult to get behind, so it leads me to think 2) that the problem might be that her writing process was...

Action rather than character driven: The book reads like Dastgir had decided what was going to happen in the story and then made the characters behave as needed to move the plot along, which resulted in the inconsistent characterization. This inconsistency made her characters less believable to me, and the farther I progressed through the narrative, the less and less I bought in to the action. And the way the book was concluded...everything was tied up far too quickly and a bit too neatly...coupled with the disjointed characters, this made it seem less and less real.

Focus: What was this book ABOUT? And WHO was it about? Too many things are touched upon but nothing is really investigated or discussed, if that makes sense. The entirety of the discussion of radical Islam seem fairly surface, when that's such a complex and rich issue to delve into. Most of the chapters focused on Harris, but then we'd get a few that focused on Alia (his daughter) or on Rashid (his nephew)...and their treatment felt very surface. My metaphor for characterization: If characters are plants, mediocre authors only deal with what the sun shines on. Great authors take on the soil and the roots. I want to see some sediment when I read. And I feel like Dastgir only got as far as the grass line and stopped. Whose story was this? I'm still not sure what I'm supposed to walk away thinking or feeling.

Dastgir has the foundation to be a skilled writer (there were absolutely some gorgeous moments, mostly in description of setting), but this absolutely feels like a debut novel. I think with the right mentor or writing group or maybe just with time, she has what it takes to be a successful novelist. I'd be willing to read her again, but I'm going to wait until she's written a few more books.

Rubric rating: 4.5

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**Jenee Rager says**

Won this book March 31, 2012. It is now 2013 and I still haven't received it. I contacted the host of the giveaway last year and they never responded. I guess I'll chalk this one up to my first won but didn't receive book. :(

When the book never arrived I checked with the local library and decided to rent a copy. For a book I was so excited to read I was majorly disappointed. What had appeared to be a fun, whimsical book based on the cover was anything but. I felt the story line, particularly about the "small fortune" got bogged down in WAY too many subplots. I was unable to connect with any characters because each got such a short description and were rushed through their portion of the subplot. The exception to this was Harris, but again I never really got connected to him because he was involved in all the subplots and I never got a sense of what was motivating his actions.

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