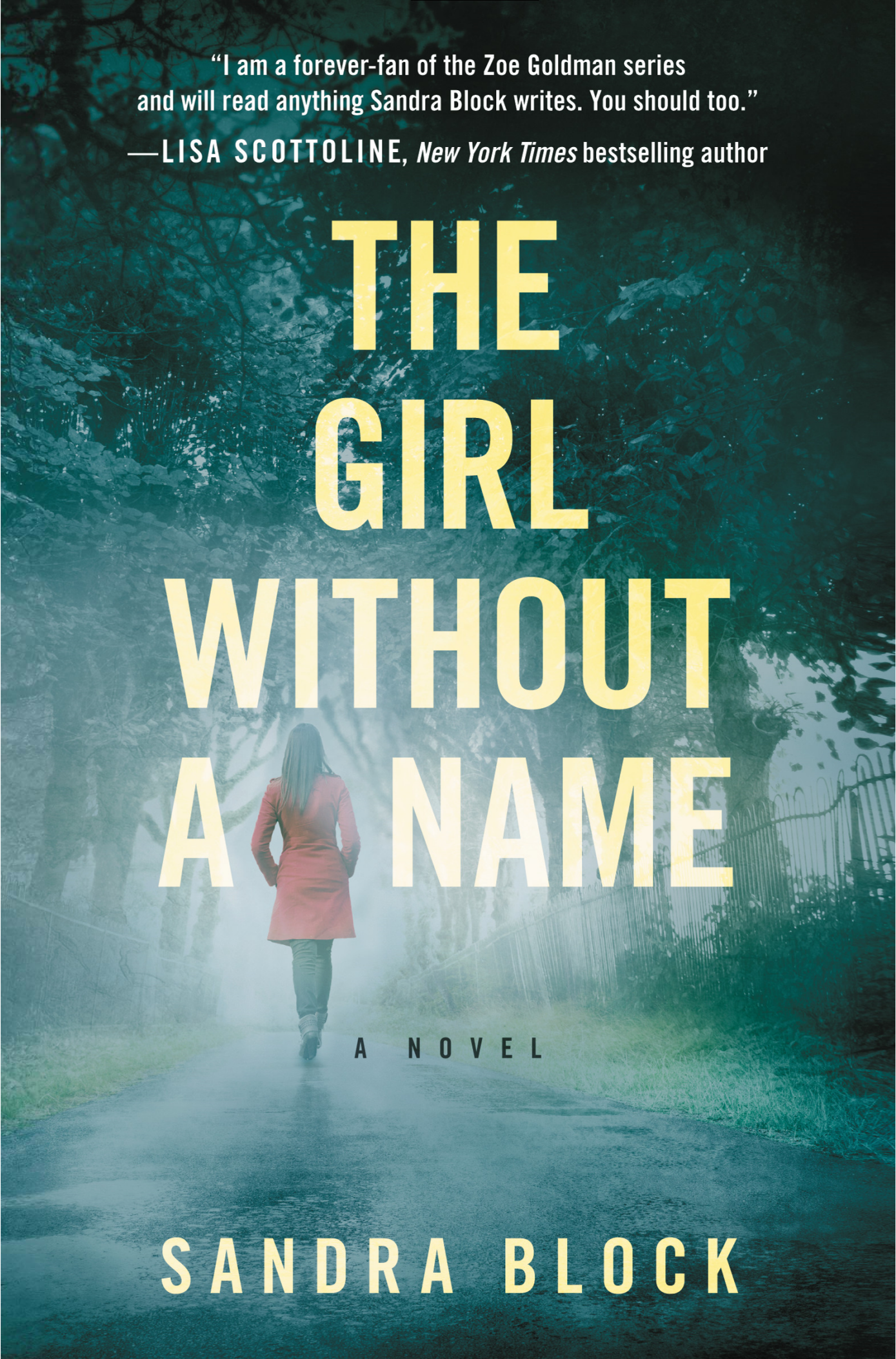


"I am a forever-fan of the Zoe Goldman series  
and will read anything Sandra Block writes. You should too."

—LISA SCOTTOLINE, *New York Times* bestselling author

# THE GIRL WITHOUT A NAME

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red coat and dark pants, is walking away from the viewer down a paved path. The path is flanked by trees and a fence, and the scene is shrouded in a thick mist or fog. The overall color palette is a mix of teal, green, and grey.

A NOVEL

SANDRA BLOCK

THE GIRL  
WITHOUT A NAME



Sandra Block



GRAND CENTRAL  
PUBLISHING

NEW YORK BOSTON

## READING GROUP GUIDE

Dear Reader,

“We call her Jane, because she can’t tell us her name.”

The idea behind *The Girl Without a Name* came to me as a first line. Then Jane Doe sprang to life—a young African American girl, lying in a hospital bed with no idea of who she was or how she got there. She appeared to be a girl no one cared about. A girl someone had thrown away.

This central question looms throughout the book: Who is Jane Doe?

The search for the answer pitches us into a maze of smoke and mirrors. The closer we inch toward her identity, the further away we actually are. She may be a girl named Candy, a girl named Daneesha, or neither. Jane Doe is part and parcel of this topsy-turvy world, riddled with cracks, detours, and dead ends. A world peopled with a drug-dealing priest, a boy who fears the number six, and “clanging” patients. A labyrinth of art projects with hidden meanings, erroneous EEG reports, and the search for imaginary money.

Cracks run through every facade, and no one is exactly as



## Reading Group Guide

they seem. Dr. Berringer appears to be a handsome, happily married wunderkind from New Orleans. But scratch the surface and we see a recovering alcoholic in the throes of divorce. Zoe herself is a psychiatrist and Yale graduate who finds herself suddenly on probation and struggling just to control her own thoughts.

The world is veined with cracks, but these aren't always bad. As Leonard Cohen points out, "That's how the light gets in." These rifts are a natural part of life, like basic plate tectonics from seventh-grade geology. The earth is continually breaking open at fault lines in order to renew itself. But sometimes, the gap can swallow you whole.

In Judaism (Zoe's religion), there is a concept called *tikkun olam*, or literally "repairing the world." Zoe is doing her part by healing her patients and by striving to find out who this lost little girl is, even if she loses her job doing it.

But Zoe ultimately learns that not everyone can be saved. Not all cracks can be mended. And the world remains beautiful despite them, or perhaps because of them.

I hope you enjoy reading the story as much as I enjoyed writing it.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sandra Block". The signature is written in a light, greyish ink.

SANDRA BLOCK

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you relate to Zoe and her sometimes offbeat perspective on life? She often seems to use humor as a defense mechanism. Do you ever do this or know anyone who does?
2. Identity is a central theme of the book, with Daneesha and Candy being an extreme example. In some ways, every person is made up of different personalities. Do you ever feel this way? Do you see this tendency in other characters?
3. “Cracks” are referenced throughout the book. Can you recall some points where these are mentioned and where it resonated with you?
4. Many of the characters in the book are cracked or broken somehow. Which characters do you see in this way?
5. Do you think cracks are always a bad thing? When can cracks be a positive part of life?
6. Did you suspect the ultimate villain in the book? What are the clues that lead us there?
7. How does Judaism play a role in Zoe’s quest to find Jane

## Reading Group Guide

Doe's identity and in her journey to navigate the world after her mother's death?

8. *Tikkun olam*—literally “repairing the world”—is an important concept in Judaism. How do you think Zoe is doing this?
9. Do you empathize with Dr. Berringer at all? Do you understand Zoe's attraction to him?
10. Do you think Zoe belongs with Mike? Do you see him as a stabilizing influence in her life? Does she accept this or fight this?
11. Do you think Zoe and Mike will stay together? Should they get married?
12. Do you know anyone with ADHD? Did Zoe's struggle with this condition seem realistic?
13. Have you lost a parent or someone close to you? Do you understand what Zoe is going through?
14. Scotty has his own way of coping with his mother's death, different from Zoe's. Have you ever experienced this in your own family?
15. What do you think Scotty should do with his windfall of money?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandra Block graduated from college at Harvard, then returned to her native land of Buffalo, New York, for medical training and never left. She is a practicing neurologist and proud Sabres fan and lives at home with her family and Delilah, her impetuous yellow Lab. She has been published in both medical and poetry journals. *The Girl Without a Name* is her second novel.