



The Manicurist

Phyllis Schieber

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""Schieber has painted a fine portrait of the struggles and challenges of being different in an unforgiving world. Her characters are authentic and touching. Using language that is at once both straightforward and evocative, Schieber writes a story that you will recognize and remember long after you read the last page."" - Karen Chase, award-winning author of *Kazimierz Square*

Tessa and Walter have, by all appearances, the perfect marriage. And they seem to be ideal parents for their somewhat rebellious teenage daughter, Regina. Without warning, however, their comfortable lives are thrown into turmoil when a disturbing customer comes into the salon where Tessa works as a manicurist. Suddenly, Tessa's world is turned upside down as revelations come to light about the mother she thought had abandoned her in childhood and the second sight that she so guardedly seeks to keep from others. A magical novel of secrets revealed and a family in turmoil, searching together for new beginnings.

Phyllis Schieber's first novel, *Strictly Personal*, for young adults, was published by Fawcett-Juniper. *Willing Spirits* was published by William Morrow. *The Sinner's Guide to Confession* was published by Berkley Putnam in 2008. Her short story, *The Stocking Store*, appears in Bell Bridge Books' 2011 anthology, *The Firefly Dance*.

Married and a mother, Phyllis Schieber lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. www.phyllisschieber.com

The Manicurist Details

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Author : Phyllis Schieber

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From Reader Review The Manicurist for online ebook

Judy says

I thought that the plot was sort of strange (implausible?). I liked some of the peripheral characters better than the "heroine." The many typos interrupted a free flow of reading. I do not know if publishers have stopped hiring proofreaders but this book needed one.

Cheryl says

Nicely drawn characters and an intimate portrait of a dysfunctional family, with a daughter nurturing the mother and wondering, after her parents die when she's young, if she wished for her mother's death.

Turns out maybe her mother didn't die. Maybe she learned to cope on her own. Maybe she disappeared so her daughter could live a normal life...whatever normal means.

Some paranormal/magic realism involved when the heroine reads characters through the hands she manicures, but overall a nice read.

Karen says

This was a good enough book, which dealt with the effects of mental illness on a family. However, I did not "connect" with any of the characters, and their relationships and conversations often felt contrived.

Lindsay (Everyday Is An Adventure) says

I am thrilled to share with you a review from a book I recently featured in a blog tour. While that was just a spotlight, this is where I can show you how the novel really shined! The Manicurist by Phyllis Schieber really is a unique book and one that I highly recommend to add to your "to be read" list.

My Thoughts:

First of all, check out that cover! Upon receipt of this book that was the first thing I noticed...it is striking!

There were a number of things that struck me about this book, one being the meticulously woven story of

Tessa. When I started reading the novel, I immediately thought of another book I read recently called Ghellow Road by T.H. Waters. Both that novel and The Manicurist are stunning portrayals of life with someone who is mentally ill. I don't know if either of these writers have firsthand experience with this, but it definitely is something that they have mastered in writing about.

Another high note was how the author conveyed Tessa's character to the reader. I felt a lot of empathy towards her and I spent the majority of the novel really rooting for her to find peace with her past, present, and future and I think that is exactly what the author was striving for. I would even branch out and say that all of the characters in this novel were colorful and vividly painted and worth each turn of the page. I think this is the strongest point of the novel, and I wish all characters were painted this way - every book would be a treasure.

I did have reservations at first because it has been labeled as paranormal but the author did a great job keeping that to a minimum yet still encompassing some aspects that would fall into the paranormal realm. I don't have to have a huge paranormal element to be happy and this book was peppered with just enough to taunt the imagination but not too much that it was over the top.

There are so many REAL and RAW elements to this story, it is truly one-of-a-kind. You won't be disappointed with this read, and it comes highly recommended. This is the type of book that you find yourself thinking about days after you finish...that is how I would describe a successful piece of literature!

Maureen says

A very enjoyable, sweet book. It wasn't exactly the story I was expecting but I found it to be a good story of what it must be like to grow up with a mother suffering from mental illness. Very thought-provoking.

Heavensent1 says

The Manicurist is a Literary Fiction novel.

On the night that Tessa's parents died in a horrific car crash, her life became a puzzle of thoughts and emotions. There are many unanswered questions surrounding her parents death, like whatever happened to the body of her mother, Ursula.

As Tessa ages, her life is filled with longing, indecision and soul-searching. She chants mantras to push herself forward, a trait taught to her by her mother as well, she reads palms. Her job as a manicurist gives her plenty of time to interpret the lives of those she meets on a daily basis.

On the day that Fran enters her shop, demanding a manicure while plying her with kindness and homemade soup, Tessa's life is about to irrevocably change forever. Who is Fran and what answers does she have and will they be the answers that Fran seeks?

I would give this book a three out of five stars. It had potential but felt it had serious editorial issues, there were mention of things that didn't correlate with anything I read, I know, I searched for the piece in the book that had confused me. The setting described was mentioned in such a way that we, the reader, already knew

of it's happenstance, however, we are left in the dark. As well, the numerous typos were too frequent not to bring mention, it is very distracting to some readers. I also found the print to be abnormally small and it hindered my read somewhat (it has been brought to my attention that the font is small due to it being an ARC copy, if that is true, then my apologies.)

I thought Tessa was a believable character, with her own mental illness issues, such as her distant relationship with her daughter, Regina, her infidelities and her lack of concern in her relationship with her husband. I enjoyed the intrigue surrounding her mother but didn't find the depiction of her mental illness to be understandable, perhaps a bit more research into the actual condition would have been beneficial to share with the reader.

I enjoyed Fran and thought her place in the story was a great tie-in to the events that were occurring. I liked the back story she shared and she helped give definition to Tessa's plight. When she was first introduced I thought the story has such promising attributes but it just went downhill from there. The middle section of the story was written in a very uninteresting light and the ending was a flop, it seemed just when I wanted something dramatic occur, I was let down with a fizzle.

This story does have some positive aspects about it and with some serious editorial tightening and mental illness research, I think *The Manicurist* could be a great story.

Amanda says

I borrowed this book from Amazon for free since I am a Prime member. It is actually quite different from what I thought it would be. I thought there would be a strong supernatural/ mystical element, but it was a very real story with believable characters and believable interactions/dialogue.

Marcia says

I really wanted to love this book. Really. Phyllis Schieber's short story in *The Firefly Dance* touched me, and I immediately downloaded *The Manicurist* in order to enjoy more of her work. The sad part is, I didn't actually enjoy the book at all. It is a very dark, disturbing, and yet somehow rather boring, account of a wife and mother struggling to overcome (or at least make sense of) her past. As the child of a woman with severe bi-polar disorder, she was often caught up in a role reversal situation where she took care of her mother more than her mother took care of her. And then her mother disappears, and she's left to be raised by her grandmother. All of this sets the stage for her own emotionally stunted and often cruel behavior as a mother and wife.

Let me make it clear that I usually enjoy character-driven, introspective books that study the Human Condition. Usually. But not so much this time.

To me, the strongest parts of the book were the very vivid descriptions of her mother's erratic, manic-depressive behavior. The weakest parts were just about everything else. The characters mostly lacked any real substance, and what substance they did have wasn't pleasant. I wanted to smack Tessa right over the head and tell her to quit her moaning and groaning, grow up, and learn to love and appreciate her own husband and daughter. She never seemed to see she had been given a chance to have a good life, in spite of

her rocky beginnings. And she spent inordinate amounts of time reliving every miserable second of her past life, but learning nothing from it.

It could be just me . . . the book received more than just a few 4 and 5 star reviews . . . but when I turned the last page, it was with a sense of relief that the whole thing was finally over. Would I read another Schieber book? Probably. I liked her writing style enough to be interested in seeing what else she can do. But it would definitely depend on the subject matter. I have no desire to read anything else quite this dark, especially since I didn't get any feeling of overall redemption at the end. Mostly, I just wanted to grab the funniest book in my To Be Read basket and throw myself into it, feet first. Maybe a re-read of Terry Pratchett's *The Wee, Free Men*. I could use a few Nac Mac Feegles right about now.

Bookin' It

Michelle Ogden says

I actually struggled with the rating on this book... almost went with 4 stars but I didn't care for the ending. It might have been a realistic ending but I didn't find it too emotionatly satisfying. I really enjoyed the writing though... not a light read.

Dianne says

Just finished *The Manicurist* what an amazing story. I really wondered why it was getting 5 stars by so many people but as I kept reading and decided that it's not a fantasy or paranormal book at all I started having second thoughts. Phyllis Schieber has done a outstanding job on what it is like to live with or know someone who is bipolar. From the rollarcoaster rides, to them not wanting to take the medication to them taking it and feeling better so they think that they don't need it anymore, to having to put them in the hospital for their own safety as well as everyone else after they you find out they stopped taking it. The manic ups and the depressing lows If you know someone who loves someone who is bipolar and want to know what that family MAY be dealing with read the book.

Kathleen Kelly says

The Manicurist by Phyllis Schieber tells the story of Tessa and her mother Ursula and how the both come to terms with mental illness. It also tells the side story about her husband Walter and his family. A very poignant and endearing story of two women who are the same but oh so different. The story is told in the viewpoint of Tessa. As a result of a surprise visit to the salon she works as a manicurist, of an elderly woman, Fran, who tells Tessa that she knows something about her mother. Told with Tessa's memories that encompass 25+ years we come to know Tessa, Ursula, Fran and Regina, Tessa's daughter intimately. Ursula disappeared and was presumed dead after a deadly car accident killed Dennis, Tessa's father and Ursula's husband, and all Tessa has of her mother is memories. Tessa also has the ability to sense things that are going to happen, thus her love of being a manicurist as a palmist. This story is at times funny and sad and I enjoyed it very much, although the review copy I had had such tiny print (footnote print as my husband said) that I had a hard time reading it. But read it I did as I wanted to see what happened with this family and if they could reconcile their differences. I assume the finished copy will be more legible.

Arielle says

This book had so much potential! However, none of what I thought could have been a great story transpired. Instead, it was a long, drawn-out process of Tessa giving herself grief over nothing, trying to second guess herself, and letting the choices of others influence her direction. To me, she could have been a great character, and she turned into a mousey one. She said she didn't like her "gift" and didn't like using it....yet she is a manicurist? What kind of hogwash is that? What a shame this story took the turns it did.

Leigh says

Had a bit too much of the implied supernatural for my taste. Palmistry and things like that. It was interesting to see the relationships develop throughout the book, especially related to the mother's mental illness. I just didn't like the tone of the book for some reason.

Donna says

Great read for those of us into fortune telling, metaphysics, palm-reading! Magical with a family-drama edge, investigating husband-wife; mother-daughter; new-found relative relationships. Kept me engaged! (New author for me—"met" in the short story collection, *THE FIREFLY DANCE*.)

Deborah says

Occasionally, a book comes across my apple green leather reclining chair that merits a beautiful, professionally tempered cover and a hard back that will draw in lots of readers swayed by that glitz. I'm one of those who buy by cover art, so I know the pull it has. "The Manicurist" would be on the best seller list today, and in every one of your hands if it had a cover like "The Lantern." It is a quality novel with a fantastic story!

Phyllis Schieber isn't your typical author in her 20-30's with an awesome story to tell in this genre. She's a seasoned writer with a gripping story. Her writing has been compared to Alice Hoffman and Sue Miller...I would add that she writes like herself. I'm a fan. I'm anxious to read the book she's now writing.

Here's an excerpt of her short story being featured in "The Firefly Dance Anthology" published by Bell Bridge Books:

"I was seventeen the last time I went with my mother to the Stocking Store. I have more important concerns now than the simple errands of childhood. I am busy protesting the war in Vietnam and listening to rock music. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy have both been murdered within a few months of each other. I am devastated by these losses, but I am also in love for the very first time. When I tie my hair back with a scarf, he says I look like a gypsy. Still, I say yes when my mother asks me to accompany her to the Stocking Store. I think she is even more surprised than I am.

I still call it the Stocking Store because I do not know it by any other name. We call the store where we buy our buttons the Button Store, and the small cave-like shop that both repairs and sells umbrellas the Umbrella Store. I still long for the red umbrella with the pink ruffle and the appliqued poodle with it's rhinestone collar. I often dream about that umbrella. I can see myself twirling it before a crowd of admirers.

These small shops are part of our daily lives. The Cheese Shop, the Pocketbook Store, the Hat Store, and the Toy Store are places that need no other identification. But it is the Stocking Store that I love best. It is in the Stocking Store that I first come to know exactly what it is that makes me different from others.

"The Manicurist" deals with the complexities of being a "good" mother, daughter and wife who loves the other more than she loves herself. It draws one in with a realistic peppering of the paranormal. Tessa and her mother's abilities to divine the future and cast spells are realistically a part of them. For better or for worse, the use of these gifts mark their lives in extraordinary ways, causing them to question themselves, to cloud their choices, and to mark those they love.

I identified with Tessa very much. Her losses and her abilities to see the future collide in her life, repeatedly leaving her in isolation from real friendships and intimacy. Tessa's with her husband, Walter, leaves her insecure; she wonders if it was her spell on him that made him choose to love her, or his actual love for her that is the bond. I felt for her...it felt like that old question some women used to (maybe still do) have: Did he marry me because I got pregnant? Or because he really wants me and loves me? It's a merry-go-round that Tessa lives with. And, while the tension between Tessa and Walter is rife with this dilemma, she balances it with the relationship she forges with their daughter, Regina, a teenager who wants her larger/estranged family desperately, and is anxious to bring everyone together.

I would love to put this book on your reading table. It will be such a pleasant surprise for you. You may want to rush to Amazon or B&N to get a copy for yourself, instead. You'll love it.

5 stars for a very unexpected read!

Deborah/TheBookishDame
