

Phoebe Unfired

Amalie Jahn

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Amalie Jahn's touching novel *Phoebe Unfired* pays tribute to all those who struggle with mental health through its strong heroine.

Though it seems that everyone else has moved on from the Covid-19 pandemic, it left Phoebe with paralyzing germaphobia after she put her immunocompromised younger brother, Toby, in the hospital. Now, she avoids physical contact. Isolation seems the surest way to keep her fears at bay. But when Phoebe meets an intriguing musician, JP, and his eclectic group of friends, she is reminded of the world she once was a part of. She can either face her fears, or continue blocking everyone out.

Phoebe's friends and family are supportive, though unable to relate to her struggles. JP goes out of his way to make special arrangements for Phoebe at his concert, and he encourages his friends to welcome her, differences and all. And Phoebe's boss and mentor, who struggles with anxiety, is always willing to listen to her, while still holding her accountable for her hurtful behavior.

Instead of presenting mental health struggles as personal failures, the novel acknowledges the hardships of conditions like OCD and anxiety. Its characters work through them in different ways, utilizing support groups and personal mantras. Though Phoebe is ashamed of her condition at first, she comes to realize that her worth is not contingent on her recovery.

Though Phoebe makes progress, the book does not end with an unrealistic, fully transformed Phoebe, but rather with one who is still limited by her germaphobia, and yet is hopeful that she can continue to work through it—and confident that she is not any less deserving of love if she cannot. Poignant, raw, and hopeful, *Phoebe Unfired* is a novel about a girl who refuses to let her fears define her.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (July / August 2021)

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