



## The Phoenix Dance

*Dia Calhoun*

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## **The Phoenix Dance** Dia Calhoun

A journey through madness and mania.

On the island of Faranor in the kingdom of Windward, twelve princesses dance their shoes to shreds each night. No one knows why. Not the king or queen. Not the knights, lords, or ladies-in-waiting. When the queen blames the royal shoemaker, his apprentice, Phoenix Dance, puts her life at risk to solve the mystery. She braves magic spells, dragons, evil wizards, and the treachery of the princesses themselves. As Phoenix faces these dangers, she finds herself caught in the dangerous dance inside herself - a dance of darkness and light, a dance that presents her with the greatest challenge of her life. This captivating companion to "Aria of the Sea" weaves a retelling of Grimm's fairy tale of the Twelve Dancing Princesses with the story of a young woman's inward journey toward an understanding of a scary, unpredictable part of her own nature.

## **The Phoenix Dance Details**

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## From Reader Review The Phoenix Dance for online ebook

### Faith Chin says

Phoenix Dance loves to make shoes. She dreams of becoming an apprentice to the royal shoemaker. And soon, she does! Her dreams finally came true. She can design shoes in a heartbeat. The 12 princess in the castle kept wearing out their shoes each night. No one knows how and why. The queen blames the royal shoemaker for this. The queen proposes that if anyone can solve the mystery of the worn out shoes, she'll give a reward. Phoenix Dance goes up for the challenge. She noticed that the princess used to be lively and they loved both arts and performing arts. But now, they seem gloomy and tired. She then goes through a hard battle, through magic spells and an evil wizard. It's going to be a tough adventure, cause she also has her own battle, the Kingdom of Two Illnesses. The Kingdom of Darkness (madness), and the Kingdom of Brilliance (mania). In our world, this is known as bipolar disorder. But soon she has to face her sickness and control it, and solve the treacherous mystery of the tattered shoes, and also defeat the evil wizard.

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### Mel says

A retelling of the 12 Dancing Princesses. The main character is bipolar and a shoemaker. The story and characters were engaging but the world needed some fleshing out. It always felt like the history/religion/culture of the Windward was seen through a dirty window. I would read key sections but it seemed like a brief blurry glimpse into something significant but you never get to see the connections.

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### Jennifer Lynn says

When I started this book and realized where it was heading I thought for sure I was not going to like it. The reason being is I have found most junior books that try to tackle mental illness and explain it to a younger audience do a horrible job, but "Phoenix Dance" was a pleasant surprise. This retake on the fairytale of the Twelve Princesses and the Dancing Shoes is told from the eyes of a young girl named Phoenix who wants to be a shoemaker. She is a wonderful character who is pleasant and realistic enough so that a reader can relate to her and appreciate her actions and thoughts. While she has these grand dreams of being the greatest shoemaker in the world she also has these ups and downs where sometimes she feels on top of the world where everything is great the smells and colors stand out to her, and her thoughts flow like water and along with her mouth. Unfortunately, after these periods she goes down in a spiral where suddenly things are too loud and too much. She feels like she can't get out of bed and that she just wants to close her eyes to the world. The author take bipolar. manic-depressive' disorder and shows youth and anyone who reads this book how it can effect someone who has it. I felt as though the author did an amazing job in incorporating the illness in the story and showing how a girl can go through it and use medicine get help herself with it and that it is an illness not a curse. SPOILER SPOILER

Instead of sugar coating it as a lot of authors do when putting mental illness into books, bipolar disorder was the showcase of this book- even being the reason why the princesses were suffering so badly during the day. I really enjoyed the story and would recommend it for anyone

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### Linnae says

Phoenix dreams of making shoes, so it seems like a dream come true when the shoemaker's shop she lives close to advertises for an apprentice. Somehow, she gets the job. The shoemaker must have seen her passion underneath all that dirt.

So she begins as an apprentice, but it is nothing like what she hoped. She mostly does all the menial chores that no-one else wants to do. Then a Royal commission comes in, to make shoes for the 12 princesses who dance their shoes to tatters every night. Phoenix has proven herself enough that she is allowed to draw up some designs. But soon she and the rest of the kingdom will find that the problem with the princesses goes beyond shoes. It is a matter of the mind and soul.

Overlaid on this retelling of the classic fairy tale, is the story of Phoenix's struggle with being bipolar. She experiences the glorious manic episodes, where every sense is more vivid and shoe designs practically draw themselves. She also experiences the devastating blackness of depression. Her aunts (whom she lives with) seek treatment for her through an herbalist, and as the medicine comes with undesirable side effects, she has to decide whether it's worth it to give up the highs to avoid the lows. As she comes closer to the princesses, she discovers certain similarities between their conditions, which allow her to succeed where others have failed in figuring out their secret.

I thought the dual storyline was woven together well. This would be a good one to discuss with the teens in your life.

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### **Miriam says**

Young Phoenix Dance has ambitions of being a great shoe designer. Some days her talent is immense, other days... it isn't. Phoenix suffers from what is essentially bipolar disorder by a more fantastic name. Medication is available, but is being "normal" worth losing her periods of intense energy and creativity?

The mental health aspect of this book is well-developed and sensitively treated. Unfortunately, I was really expected to get a more fairy-tale-ish fantasy, what with the blurb and being based on the 12 Dancing Princesses story. I wouldn't say the world-building was poorly done, exactly, but it definitely seemed secondary to the coming-of-age and dealing-with-mental-illness stories. I felt as if that's what Calhoun really wanted to write about and was surprised to see that all her publications seem to be in the fantasy genre.

Recommended for shoe fashionistas who think Lisa, Bright and Dark would be better rewritten by Shannon Hale.

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### **Allison says**

Phoenix Dance wants more than anything to be a shoe apprentice to the greatest shoemaker in the city. When she gets her wish, she ends up in the middle of a royal mystery- the 12 royal princesses received new pairs of shoes, but overnight they wore them out with dancing, when all witnesses say they were actually asleep in their beds! Can Phoenix solve the royal mystery, as well as the one that seems to be affecting her?

What is with these OBVIOUS BOOKS, Dia Calhoun???? This book was less about the original fairy tale that she claimed the book was about, and more about being manic depressive. Which, I mean, was fine. But

AGAIN I felt like she was shoving things from our world into a fantasy world just to make a point(see Avielle). All through the book I was like, "I bet she wrote this for some relative who is manic depressive to make them feel better." And sure enough, at the end she "clues her audience in" to the fact that the book was about her struggle with manic depressive behavior. Psh, as if any of her readers REALLY needed to be told. I'm all for her writing about issues, especially serious ones like manic depression, hoping it will help people. But seriously, don't lie to me and try to tell me it's a fairy tale.

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### **Meridyforgot says**

I just read *The Phoenix Dance* It is about a girl, named Phoenix, with bipolar set in the fairytale of The Twelve Dancing Princesses. It feels contrived in places (because of some therapy sessions with a healer explaining her condition), but it was really interesting to get inside this girl's head. The author has bipolar and so it feels authentic that way. The language that she uses to describe how Phoenix sees the world is beautiful in places.

\*\*\*\*\*Spoiler: If you are very romantically inclined, this book may not be for you! The romance basically fails. It's a little bit important to the story, but.....I was kind of sad about it.

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### **Hannah says**

The best part of this story is it's portrayal of the main character's illness of two kingdoms (involving a high bright energetic mood phase and an extreme dark low mood phase, it has another name here of course) which meshes with the 12 dancing princess story very well.

I can't give it 4 stars because the societal anachronism jarred me out of the story. Repeatedly. Yes it's a fantasy setting. But certain issues arise in certain societies for a reason. You can't just put in your favorite or most sympathetic cause for dissent and tack it onto a society structure that has different problems, power structure, reactions, and concerns. The main character's 'best friend' didn't stand up as any sort of friend or even as a person. She was a composite caricature at best. It would have been a much stronger story without that side plot line. And although it was supposed to yield insight to the true situation and the eventual solution of the problem, it wasn't necessary. The information could have come other ways.

Though, other than that one friend, the other characters were convincing. Maybe not hugely dynamic, but this isn't their plot line.

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### **Theresa says**

My daughter recommended this book, and what drew me to it was its imaginative retelling of the fairy tale "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," and also its incorporation of a mental disorder, bipolar disorder, and in engaging and believable way. I believe we need more visibility on what it's like to live with a disorder or disability, and this book was a refreshing take on that. As a young adult novel, it holds up pretty well; I found myself skimming much of the book because it didn't really hold my interest, although for a younger age audience it might be fine. Vivid details of the fantasy world inhabited by the main character, although my taste for the final battle with the villain wasn't as good; I thought the bloody and violent action went on too long. One thing I especially appreciated was the ending didn't "wrap things up" tidily in a happily-ever-

after ending quite as you might expect. Courage on the part of the author! Definitely worth reading for the treatment of a mental disorder, if nothing else!

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## Lydia says

I love the Twelve Dancing Princesses. I've read different adaptations of this fairy tale and have always been intrigued. However, this particular book did not impress me.

Its a quick read, focussing on Phoenix Dance, a 13 year old girl who longs to be a shoemaker. She's also bipolar, which is the focal point of the story. In the midst of her struggles (which were handled gently, even if they did take up the entire story) she tries to find a way to rescue the 12 princesses from the spell which is draining them of all their life. Phoenix is not my favorite character ever, but she didn't drive me crazy.

As others have pointed out, Phoenix's struggle with bipolar is compellingly portrayed, and it drove the story well. I suppose it just didn't jive with what I expected of an adaptation of the fairy tale.

My main issues with the book were the weak supporting characters, the predictable plot twist, a few anachronisms, and heavy handed social commentary.

The book centers around Phoenix, which is fine, but everyone else fades into the background. The 3 aunts, (whose names I can't remember even though I JUST finished the book) are indistinguishable except that one is not a Royalist. \*GASP\* Similarly, the love interest is not that interesting--perhaps if we ever got to see inside his head he would be. The shoemaker, who is supposed to be a father figure, seems to be OOC quite often. The twelve dancing princesses fair a little better, since Phoenix empathizes with them, giving them more screen time. Finally, Rosa, the obligatory revolutionary best friend receives so little screen time that I don't understand her--apart from what Phoenix TELLS me.

My main problem here is that the author TELLS us almost everything, rather than SHOWING us. UGH.

The plot twist is incredibly predictable (seriously, I saw it coming the first time the twistee was mentioned,) but I will refrain from spoiling. :)

Anachronisms troubled me too. First, Rosa, (the obligatory revolutionary bestie) is labeled as a "bomb about to explode," <---Excuse me, did they HAVE bombs in the equivalent of 17th century Europe? Cannons and gunpowder, yes, but not BOMBS.

Also, the social commentary is so heavyhanded! Rosa is a young revolutionary, and is trying to pull Phoenix into it as well. I'm all for democracy, but either the author did not give enough time to the "revolutionaries" or she spent the time the wrong way.

In short, the book made for an entertaining read at the time, but when I finished I felt unsatisfied and a little disgusted with the obvious, and rather random social commentary. If you want a better story based on the Twelve Dancing Princesses, try Jessica Day George's *Princess of the Midnight Ball*. I wanted to like it, but the author never really showed me why I should. /rantover

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## Margaret says

*The Phoenix Dance* takes place in the same city as *Aria of the Sea*, years later; several of the characters from the first book appear, but not as main characters. Here, Calhoun takes on a challenging subject: bipolar disorder (which she says in the book's afterword that she has herself). Phoenix is a young apprentice shoemaker who suffers from what the healers call the Illness of Two Kingdoms: the Kingdom of Brilliance, and the Kingdom of Darkness. When she is drawn into a mystery surrounding the twelve princesses of the kingdom, whose shoes are mysteriously in tatters each morning, she must confront her illness and learn to handle it.

I didn't like this quite so much as *Aria of the Sea*; I thought Calhoun was maybe trying to shoehorn a little too much into the book and didn't quite do justice to the "Twelve Dancing Princesses" part of the plot. I admired her portrayal of Phoenix, though, and her courage in taking on what must have been a difficult thing to write about.

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### **Eskana says**

[ Cerinthe, Elliana, and the Princess-now Queen- Zandara (hide spoiler)]

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### **Cora Lee says**

This book does an amazing job of introducing all the issues and challenges of having a bipolar disorder. At the same time, it is an engaging story. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to understand more about this disorder or who wants to start a discussion about it.

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### **Katy says**

I love the 12 Dancing Princesses and so wanted to love this book. The introduction of a bipolar shoemaker takes a bit from the retelling actually and none of the characters are really very likable. A nice story for the YA group, but not so much for adults.

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### **Mariah says**

Phoenix Dance becomes an apprentice to the royal shoemaker. When the 12 princesses keep wearing out their shoes each night, the shoemaker is blamed for making lousy shoes. The queen declares that anyone who can solve the mystery of the shoes will get a handsome reward. Phoenix takes on this challenge, while also facing her own internal problems- the Illness of Two Kingdoms, or as we call it in our world- bipolar disorder.

I found this book quite enjoyable- the story was exciting and drew me in and Phoenix is a believable, sympathetic character. Windward is an original, well-realized world with a nautical culture- it does not really have any fantasy cliches. The author is very good at writing beautiful, evocative depictions of scenery without falling prey to having them be too long.

P.D. is a companion to Calhoun's earlier novel, *Aria of the Sea*- it is set in the same place, the archipelago

kingdom of Windward probably about a decade later, and features a few of the same characters in the story like Cerinthe Gale and Elliana Nautilus. I read that one several years ago, and will probably have to read or look over it again in order to give it a proper review here, but it's also a very good read- it isn't necessary to read it before Phoenix Dance, but I would recommend it as you will get more out of it that way

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