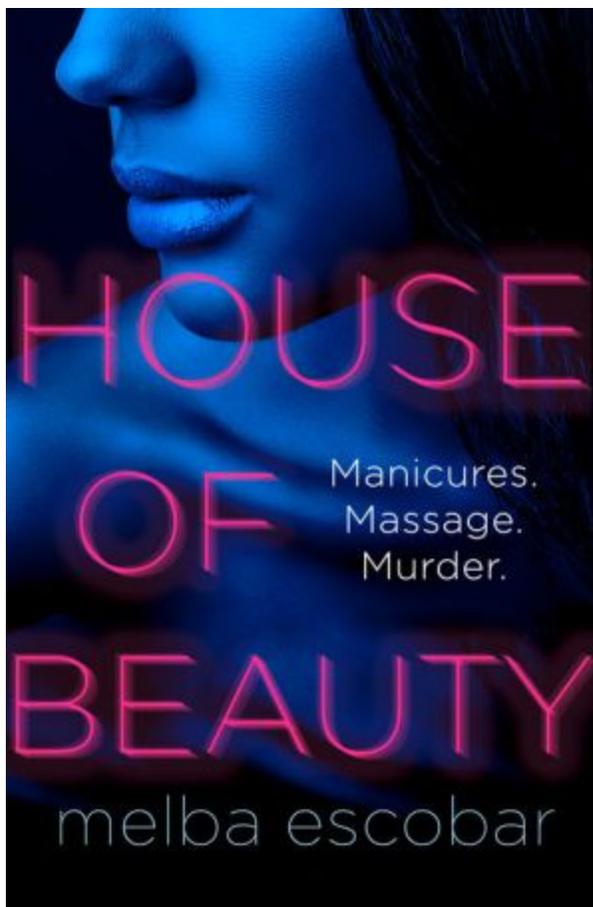


LoveReading Reader reviews of House of Beauty

By Melba Escobar

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Christine Woolfenden

A slow burning but very absorbing tale of innocence in a corrupt city. A welcome change from the usual crime fiction, definitely worth a read.

I found this book utterly absorbing and couldn't put it down. Claire tells the story of Karen a poor single mother, working as a beautician trying to earn enough money to bring her son to live with her. But in the heartless and corrupt city of Bogota, she doesn't stand a chance. She is at the mercy of the rich and powerful people she deals with everyday. When a young client of Karen's turns up dead, nobody makes much effort to find out what happened to her. Slowly the story

unfolds, and we see the connections between the people and events. This is not an uplifting read, some of it is shocking, some of it unbearably sad, but it always keeps you reading. The author portrays a bleak picture of everyday life in Bogota, from the privileged to the downtrodden. The story has good pace with some very believable characters, and the twist at the end is inevitable but plausible.

Nicola Jones

Don't let the light hearted title fool you, House Of Beauty is a heady tale of insecurities leading to desperate measures, murder and corruption. Thought provoking and original.

I initially struggled to get into this book as i wasn't sure who's viewpoint the book was written from. However i was fascinated by Karen's story and could relate to her insecurities and feeling of inferiority. Karen works in the House Of Beauty, a high class beauty salon where she is treated somewhat badly (or so she perceives) by some of the rich clients. Karen knows she is beautiful but only feels so if she has expensive clothes and has her hair relaxed, because society, and more importantly her mother, has told her this all her life.

One day in the salon Karen gives a school girl a full body wax, assuming the girl is going on a date. The girl ends up dead, suspected suicide, which her mother refuses to believe and seeks information from Karen, leading to a shocking tale of murder and corruption and Karen falls deeper into a murky world to make ends meet.

We hear the story mostly through the voices of 3 different women, different classes and races but i really felt this was Karen's story.

Overall i enjoyed this book, it was a lot darker than i expected it to be and thought provoking. Perfect for a travelling read as i read it over two days.

Gillian Wilmott

A crime novel with a difference, set in the lawless corrupt city of Bogota. Told from the viewpoint of two heroines it takes some concentration to read ,but it's compelling and I would recommend it.

This is a crime novel with a difference by any standards ! It is set in modern day Bogotá in Colombia and as such the general levels of crime and corruption seem exceedingly high compared to the UK. A frightening place to live ! The story is told from the point of view of two heroines; Karen, a young top beautician and Claire, an older psychoanalyst, who is one of her clients. This makes it a little disjointed at times and creates the sort of book you need to concentrate on. Both heroines not only tell their parts of the story but also go into lengthy reveries about their circumstances and how these make them feel. The main, but certainly not the only, murder is of a young teenage schoolgirl

who is found dead the day after she has an appointment with Karen for an intimate beauty treatment to go on a “special” date. The plot, especially as to who told what to who, gets rather complicated but it does all come together in the end , if a little sadly.

Despite not being an easy read this book is thought provoking and compelling in it's own way. I would recommend it !

Belle Woodward

An unusual thriller. There is more than one victim here, and more than one person responsible for the most heinous of crimes.

Set in Bogota, Colombia, this is an unusual thriller. Yes, there is a murder: yes, there are suspects and yes, someone goes to jail. But that is where any resemblance to other thrillers I have read ends.

Women dominate this book. Theirs is the voice which tells the story, mainly through Claire Dalvard, a psychoanalyst. Through her, we learn of Karen, beauty therapist who is the keeper of her client's secrets; of Lucia, ex-wife of a fraudster and of Sabrina, the victim at the heart of this tale.

Karen is used to being discreet: when a teenage girl arrives for a treatment in her school uniform and smelling of alcohol, she says nothing. She still says nothing when the girl dies, supposedly through an overdose.

It is here that the story begins to weave the rest of the characters into the plot, none of them particularly very nice. The men are egotistical and culturally used to abusing and taking women for granted, the women themselves so used to being subservient that they are all victims.

*Undeniably well written, House of Beauty tells the story of a city that is violent and a ruling organisation that is corrupt. **There is no happy ending here.***

Charlotte Walker

A great crime story... but not necessarily as you know it.

This is quite a good book. House of Beauty tells the tale of Karen, a beautician and the eponymous House of Beauty, told by Claire and Lucia. I feel that knowing this as you start to read helps to make the opening chapters a little easier to understand. The novel is set in Columbia and covers the events that

follow the violent death of one of Karen's teenage clients, Sabrina. Sabrina's parents try to search for answers, which isn't easy when everyone else seems to want the truth to stay hidden, and they turn to Karen for some answers.

House of Beauty is a tragic crime fiction story that features violence, poverty, corruption and the consistent and institutionalised degradation of women. The eponymous luxury salon is where Karen works and the wealthy women of the area visit, sometimes on a daily basis to have treatment. The salon supports the plot by imposing the restrictive societal expectations and sets the tone for female objectification throughout.

*The true tragedy and crime in this novel is not the murder and rape that takes place, but the political and legal corruption that seems institutionalised and helps the criminals of such horrid crimes to walk free without reprimand. **It is a tragic, gripping read and I would definitely recommend it.***

Britteny Sutcliffe

House of Beauty is a high end beauty salon set in Bogota. Where we meet Claire, who tells the story of Karen a main beautician at the salon. This book is not just based on Karen.

It was quite hard for me to get into as there is a lot going on with all different characters, but the more that i read the more I understood.

Karen seems to be the main character in this book and her story definitely pulled at my heartstrings. We are told why she is in Bogota and why she chooses this job and her life around this. Unfortunately things take a turn as one of Karen's Clients (Sabrina) ends up being murdered not long after her appointment. The story goes on to show you how Sabrina's mom is taking the news and how she also meets Karen. Unfortunately more murders take place as the story goes on, I was totally engrossed!

I literally could not put this book down. The ending definitely brings a twist that i did not expect.

I would advise to read this book, It only took me two days to read!

Dee Jessup

House of Beauty was not what I was expecting, but isn't that what

you want from a good book?

House of Beauty was not what I was expecting, it begins with some very strong opinions that I connected with from the start and made me smile and even chuckle a little. The story then delves into a blend of peoples lives that all seem connected to the House of Beauty. This book takes you to some dark places and gives you a great empathy for the characters within. I felt that it was written in a way that you would see it on screen, fleeting from one part of the story to another and in different time frames. Although in the beginning I found this a little confusing it all becomes clear as you read on. On a personal level I would have preferred a little more to the ending as I was left wondering what would happen next and if justice would eventually prevail. All in all, it was a good read and I would be interested to see what is next for Melba Escobar.

Cara Templeman

A hard going beginning, but be sure to keep at it, It's definitely worth it!!

An attention grabbing plot, which had me gripped, once i managed to get my head round it!

House of Beauty is a crime, thriller based in the city of Bogota, Colombia. The Story is told through the voice of Claire, a therapist who has recently returned to Bogota, but also through through the voice of Karen, a beauty therapist that Claire visits at The House of Beauty. The jumping between voices can make the story hard to follow, but once you become used to the characters and their stories, all becomes much clearer!

The story explores the culture, race and class within the city of Bogota, through the workers and clients of the salon 'House of Beauty'. It highlights the clear differences between those in the city, and how through the salon their stories and worlds intertwine.

The main murder within the story is that of a young schoolgirl, who, just after her visit to Karen at the salon, is found dead, presumably through an overdose, taken on a date with a man. The story investigates how this affects different characters and also leads to other murders within the city.

Once I got my head around the characters I could not put the book down, and the twist at the end made it worth it!

Jan Kirkcaldy

*This was a fascinating but somewhat disturbing story based around an upmarket beauty salon in Bogota and its clients and workers. It was very enlightening and unfortunately made unpleasant reading to realise that modern day Colombia still exists in the way it does. Whilst known for its drug cartels and violent culture, the corruption did not come as a surprise but the difference between ethnic groups, and male and female was horrifying. The fact that a woman dressed expensively was less likely to be attacked (even if she was a prostitute) than an obviously poorer one said it all. As a journalist in the country, the author obviously knows what goes on and it is what should be told to the world. Related in the first person by two women – Claire (a client) and Karen (a worker) who met at The House of Beauty – it is both intriguing and upsetting. The murder of a young girl is relevant and works in with many characters who epitomise life in Colombia yet it did not take over the story. **It's a book that you can't put down for all the wrong reasons. It is not enjoyable but it tells you things you need to know. I'd say read it and learn...***

Ceri Edwards

***This had the potential to be an interesting little book.** A masseuse in a beauty parlour is the last person to see a young girl alive - murder mystery combined with the struggles of the beautician's life in Colombia.*

However, I found it quite dull. Very little had happened by about halfway and when there was action, it felt quite flat and detached in the telling. I found it very difficult to care about any of the characters, or the murder mystery aspect, and actually found it difficult to distinguish who was who.

The book was originally written in Spanish, and perhaps something has been lost in translation. It definitely didn't read as smoothly as it could have, and I had the sense that a layer of finesse to the writing was missing. Some aspects of the way it was written were just plain confusing, such as the way it jumped from an omniscient point of view, directly into the voice of one of the characters who wasn't previously present in the scene. Who was telling the story? And was it being told in retrospect or not? This book really wasn't my cup of tea.

Alison Greenacre

***A gritty novel, set in a beauty parlour in modern day Colombia.
Warning; it's a pretty bleak read.***

I felt the premise of the book did not quite live up to the story that unfolds. I did enjoy this dip into a dark and gritty modern day Colombia but felt the ending was rushed and left me a little disappointed. I felt some of the messages within the book were perhaps diluted through the translate, others beautifully written.

Jocelyn F Garvey

This is a multi-stranded story of women trying to survive in a world where men are all powerful.

Very different because the women who tell the story have their own battles to fight.

This is an unusual murder story. Set in a beauty salon in Bogota.

Karen is one of their beauticians. She is privy to the innermost secrets of those she attends. A schoolgirl comes in one day wanting a full wax. She is excited and tells her she is going to meet someone special.

A few days later her dead body turns up.

*The story is told by the women this affects. Their different strands all come together in *The House of Beauty*. Different because it comes from their differing angles.*

Karen is just trying to survive as best she can and afford bring her son to live with her.

Should she tell all she knows?

Philippa Newman

Sorry, this book wasn't for me.

I can't help but think that a lot of the intended nuances and depth of prose from this new author were lost in translation. I found the prose very clunky, especially at the beginning of the story. Each description of Bogota which should have been evocative of that vibrant capital just fell a bit flat. As the author (or translator) got into the story and the pace picked up this wasn't as

noticeable but I still felt the writing was lacking any real depth. I felt that the local references could have been given a little more detail and background for those of us not familiar with Columbia or Bogota. Maybe given a little more context?

Again, this is just my opinion but most of the characters felt lacking which was a shame as the overall concept was a good one and could have worked so well. In particular I quickly became very confused about the relationship between Karen and Claire and then the third main female character. As the story progressed it became very confusing if the story was in the first person or not and if it was, who was that first person.

I'm sorry but this novel just didn't resonate with me at all. If I hadn't said I would review it I wouldn't have finished it. I think a lot of my criticisms come down to what appears to be poor translation. I hadn't appreciated how important it is to get that bit absolutely spot on.

Diana Mason

This book was not for me. I feel this book should be read by someone from Columbia.

I could not get into this book, but continued to read it until the conclusion. I felt very confused by the end of the book. There were too many characters. I had to go back and reread parts to try to understand where the characters fit into the plot of the story, which is a murder!!

The plot of this book is very poor. It starts out with a murder in a house of beauty. It then starts to go away from the murder. There is no explanation as to what is happening with each new character. A novel needs to flow all the way through to the conclusion. Unfortunately, this book jumps from one topic to a completely different topic. The author should use words that people can read easily (such as towns, Streets and places) and if other words are used to describe their Columbian lifestyle, please let the reader know by adding a footnote to tell us what it means.