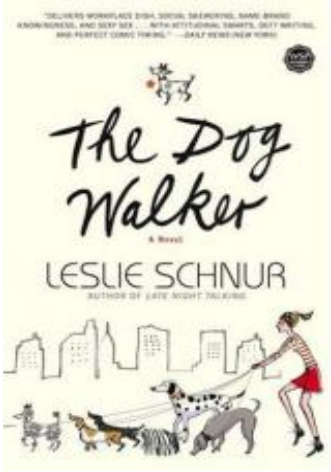
The Dog Walker

by Leslie Schnur



About the Book

Refreshing and insightful, rich with humor and brimming with life, **The Dog Walker** is the story of Nina Shepard, Manhattan dog walker extraordinaire. With the keys to her clients' apartments, Nina has the freedom to cross several foyers and a moral boundary, and enter their lives...where she just might find the things that are missing in her own.

And so she falls in love with Daniel, a man she has never met but whom she thinks she knows from snooping around his apartment when she picks up Sid, his Weimaraner, for walks. But by the time each of them unleashes the truth about who the other really is--after all the mishaps, deception, and lost dogs--it's too late. Nina and Daniel will never be the same again.

The Dog Walker is the hilarious and heartwarming tale of a single woman's quest for fulfillment. It is about city living--any city, all cities--and the struggle to feel at home in the world. Finally, it is about life itself: unpredictable, bursting with love, and not to be missed.

Discussion Guide

1. After the first chapter, what have you learned about Nina? What does she care about? What are her weaknesses? After you'd read a few pages did you feel like you knew her, or that she was someone you'd get along with? Did the end of the chapter surprise you? After you found out she was trespassing, did your opinion of her change?

2. Both Nina and Billy like to snoop. The author describes the urge by saying, "It was like eating one of those See's candies. You know it's bad for you, but the force to do it, to reach, to eat, is so much stronger than the force to stop and think and consider the fat and cholesterol content, or, in this case, weighing the moral issues" (133). Nina and Billy devote a lot of thought to weighing the moral issues after the fact (and sometimes even mid-snoop). What conclusions do they come to? Do their ideas differ significantly? How do their experiences with each other change their snooping habits?

3. Do Billy and Nina learn anything valuable about each other while snooping that they might not have learned by talking to each other? Think about Nina's discovery of Billy's trombone, and Billy's discovery of Nina's sculpture and her obsession with old musicals. Do you think either of them would have revealed these secrets on their own? How does snooping circumvent their natural tendencies to protect themselves? Does it help them develop intimacy?

4. Nina thinks she's in love with Billy because she was in love with what she knew of "his" apartment. Billy is aware of Nina's preconceived notions, and he's afraid that Nina really is in love with his brother. How much does Nina really know about the inhabitant of Daniel's apartment? Is there a difference between her infatuation with Daniel and her love for Billy? Is it reasonable for Billy to be afraid that Nina is really in love with his brother?

5. Claire, Billy and Bono all respond to Nina's sculptures. "And," as Nina says, "every one of them was a critic" (232). Compare Claire's response to Nina's sculptures with Billy's. What does she think Nina ought to do with them (see page 218), and how does her opinion reflect her wishes for Nina in general? How does Daniel respond to the sculpture (see page 211)? How does his relationship with it reflect his desired relationship with Nina?

6. Nina's relationship with her mom seems strained and unsatisfying. What does Nina want from her that's she's not getting? When Nina is in the hospital, do you think anything changes for them during their phone conversation? Later, when Nina tells her mom that she's in love, and her mom tells her not to screw it up, Nina asks herself, "When would she stop asking for it and learn the limits of this relationship? Not all mothers could bear the disappointments of their daughters" (261). By recognizing this, will Nina improve her relationship with her mother? How else might she build on their relationship?

7. Why do both Nina's mom and Claire make it a point to push Nina towards finding another profession? Nina finds this annoying and avoids admitting to either of them that she agrees. Do you think their prodding is useful, or does it encourage Nina to resist change? Is their advice a form of caring, or is it just meddlesome? What is it that finally allows Nina to develop her career?

8. On page 159, Nina says to Claire, "I'm not and have never been a manufacturer of my own destiny." But by the end of the book, Nina is not only mistress of her own fate, she's helping others as well. What changes in her make it possible for her to be so proactive? How does her newfound confidence contribute to her happiness and the happiness of others?

9. Along the same lines, Nina's relationship with Billy almost becomes "the first love affair with no people" (188) because neither wants to be the one to pursue the other and risk being vulnerable. Both have their reasons for being reticent. Are Nina's reasons more valid than Billy's, or vice versa? After Nina's brief entanglement with Daniel, she pursues Billy and tries to heal their rift. What enabled her to be able to do that? Do you think Billy would have gone looking for her if she hadn't beaten him to it? Had he changed as well?

10. Did Billy handle his work with Mrs. Chandler ethically? Professionally? Why was he so upset when she refused to

tell him how she made her money (see page 171), and why didn't he turn her in? To some, Billy's deal with Mrs. Chandler might seem like a reasonable compromise; to others, it might seem like a shake down. How did Billy's arrangement with Mrs. Chandler allow him to reconcile his professional responsibilities with his ethics?

11. What did you make of Daniel's behavior regarding Nina and his brother? Billy described his relationship with his brother by saying, "Since the dawn of mankind, brothers were competitive, jealous, and resentful. Billy and Daniel, walking proudly in the shoes of Cain and Abel" (263). Nina, on the other hand, doesn't regard Daniel's behavior so philosophically: she demands retribution in the form of Daniel's dog, Sid. Were their responses commensurate with his behavior?

12. After her successful matchmaking, Nina decides to start her own business linking up dogs and owners. As Claire says, "[People] choose *each other* for all the wrong reasons. Why would they do any better when it comes to a dog?" (301) How does that observation describe the complications in the relationship between Nina and Billy? Think about Nina's conversation with Mrs. Chandler about sofas. How does it help her to understand why she wants to be with Billy?

Author Bio

Leslie Schnur lives in New York City with her husband, their two children, and their dog, a mutt from a shelter named Milo.

Critical Praise

"A warmhearted, big-city fairy tale about the things that matter most: dogs, friends, music, and falling in love."

The Dog Walker
by Leslie Schnur

Publication Date: May 15, 2007
Genres: Fiction, Literary Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Washington Square Press
ISBN-10: 0743482085
ISBN-13: 9780743482080