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Was She Pretty?



Synopsis

A dreamy exploration of relationships and jealousy . . . pithy and deadpan . . . It's no self-help book." --Salon
What's left when a relationship ends? Where does jealousy come from? Delicately and sensitively, Leanne Shapton (Swimming Studies) ruminates on ex-lovers, and our lovers' ex-lovers. A few expressive pencil lines outline a long-abandoned winter coat here, an ineffably alluring Mona Lisa smile there. Each double page describes the way all exes are captured: as impossible to live up to as a Polaroid taken at a flattering angle. This new paperback edition of *Was She Pretty?* brings the reader deep into a circle of phantoms: its intimate liaisons, embarrassing secrets, and sardonic anecdotes. Shapton introduces the obsessives and the dilettantes, the poets and the actresses, the people with great hair and the people with idiosyncratic clothes. As funny as it is insightful, *Was She Pretty?* speaks to a central human concern: How do we compare? Elegantly drawn and perfectly narrated, the pages of *Was She Pretty?* are a testimonial to the power of observation and misapprehension.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Illustrator Leanne Shapton's debut reads like a graphic-novel-cum-children's-book: each spread includes one or more scratchy, b&w line drawings plus short, facing-page, poetryesque texts. Its content, though, leans much more toward *Sex In the City* than *Shel Silverstein*, exploring conflicting feelings aroused in women by their boyfriends' ex-lovers. It's narrated (and drawn) by a sharp but weary onlooker who is very intimate with all the principles, who seem to form a loose circle of friends. A picture depicting "one of the women Len used to know" shows a dour, hot,

tight-sweater-wearing woman who is summed-up with deadpan wit: in one sentence, she's "an opinionated academic," in the next, it's revealed, with barely concealed jealousy, that "She wore braces and they looked fantastic." Shapton also captures a complex brew of nostalgia, lingering attachment, relief, rage and intoxication harbored by the men: they keep letters, hairclips, phone numbers and are occasionally also honest with themselves. In a serial description of Margaret's adventures reading her boyfriend Scott's journals, which detail his past relationships, "Scott described seeing Diane on the subway with another man, and feeling jealous, but sorry for the man." Diane looks very mean, and the book is pitch perfect from start to finish. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Shapton's *Was She Pretty?* explores that painful behavior that we just can't seem to quit with thoughtful sketches that cut right to the heart of how we love." XO Jane "Deceptively complex and uncommonly elegant, *Was She Pretty?* is a series of gorgeous line drawings, most of men and women... Together, these brief encounters with the other tell a story about the difficulty of accepting that those we love have loved before and of recognizing the ugly truth that they may love again." Jacob Brogan, *Washington Post* "It is exactly as devastating as when it was originally published. In as little as three sentences, Shapton can tell us everything a current lover thinks they know about the former." Haley Mlotek, *National Post* "In just a handful of words or a flick of the pen, Shapton stabs you in the gut, bleeding out the pettiness that pulses below the surface of the skin typically hidden behind a thin membrane of decorum." - *Fashion* "... timeless, cosmopolitan art and elegant ... prose" Jonathon Sturgeon, *Flavorwire* "Was She Pretty? is a great read if you want a voyeuristic tour of other people's exes, and it may even help you through your own jealousy." Madeline Raynor, *Bust* "Shapton quietly plumbs all the familiar trappings of the guilty fascinations we develop with those who came before." Lauren Oyler, *Broadly*

This book was recommended by a friend during one of those futile times at the end of a relationship. It was funny and insightful and I loved it from beginning to end.

Very interesting and would actually make a good gift to a friend in my opinion. This isn't for you if you are looking for a novel.

Great, subtle, with dark undertones.

This is definitely a great book. I wish each of the relationship stories were a little longer though.

This is not a plot book. This is a picture book. It appears to be one of those books that you leave on the coffee table to appear cultured, but never actually do anything with.

This is such a charming read. Perfect conversation starter to leave out on your coffee table, etc.

Pretty little book!

Picked this up at the library on a whim when I spotted it nestled in the comic book section. It's a series of largely single page illustrations accompanied by short pieces of texts, usually a sentence or two and occasionally a full paragraph. The text and images are the links in the chain that connect us all together, the invisible ties we form in our relationships. Person A's current significant other once dated Person B who in turn dated Person C, and the impressions of those people linger either in carefully chosen, defining facts or objects they may have left behind. Shapton chooses either to draw those people or the pertinent objects in question, sometimes even a string of those items, flowing one to another. The drawing is a bit crude and unfinished looking, but there is a blunt swiftness to it that goes with the spartan nature of her prose. If you remember that song "88 Lines About 44 Women," WAS SHE PRETTY? is a bit like the literary equivalent of that, but instead of one man's celebration of his conquests, this is the anxiety and doubt he left in his wake. Though you'll read it in a blink, the effect is of having lived through all those break-ups, make-ups, and shake-ups, and you'll feel like you have to catch your breath.

Have you ever been out with the person you're seeing when you run into someone who they know, but seem not to want to introduce you to? When you ask later, they'll say, "Oh, that was just a friend." In your mind you'll conjure up all manner of sordid details about their past association because, obviously, it was an ex. The jealousy will be overwhelming even though your partner came home with you and seems to have completely forgotten about the encounter. That's what this book is like. Was She Pretty? deals with the insecurities all current boy/girlfriends feel about the ones who came before them. Even if the relationship is long gone, there's something about the fact that the person you're with has a past that was separate from you that's somehow intriguing, and most of us are more than a little curious about who came first. The book is an illustrated story with short

vignettes about couples, their exes, and the details that remain to plague the current flame. One woman has an emergency at her boyfriend's house and finds (to both her horror and delight) a half-empty box of tampons. There is the man who will never let his current girlfriend answer the phone in his apartment, and you can just tell she thinks it's because of the ex. These tales are all short, a few lines at the most, but tell a story in just a few sentences. They are further illustrated with the author's drawings to develop the point. I recently read, and enjoyed, Audrey Niffenegger's illustrated novel *The Adventuress*. It's the closest thing I could liken to *Was She Pretty?*, though even that comparison is a stretch. *Was She Pretty?* is an interesting book and will take no time at all to read. If you've been that guy or girl, the distrustful or openly curious one who can't just let the past be the past (and I think we all have at some point or another), it's worth it to see someone put those feelings into words and then illustrate them so candidly.

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