

WAS SHE PRETTY? BY LEANNE SHAPTON



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From Publishers Weekly

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Review

"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

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About the Author

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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.

- Sales Rank: #675719 in Books
- Published on: 2016-02-02
- Released on: 2016-02-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.28" h x .75" w x 5.53" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 208 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Everybody wonders, it's just no one talks about it

By K. Hinton

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.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Chain, chain, chain, chain of...?

By Jamie S. Rich

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.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Intriguing back ex-stories thrust to the fore

By Scott Woods

The simplistic art will no doubt throw most people off. The art is not the sell here. It is the collection of brief, mostly one-line descriptions given the author by real people about former relationships. Taken in context, the book is an engaging - albeit quick - read. You wonder about what the exes of someone you've met might be like. This book takes that wonder a step further and treats the reader to a buffet of possibilities.

Probably too short for many, but a nice jaunt through a prickly subject.

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