



The Shiniest Jewel: A Family Love Story

Marian Henley

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At 49, cartoonist Marian Henley hasn't committed to marrying the man with whom she has been dating for seven years. But as the Big 5-0 looms, she realizes that above all else she wants a child. Her story follows the heartbreakin ups and downs of going through the international adoption process; deciding when it's time to grow up and maybe even get married; and in the end, it's the story of a daughter's relationship with her father, and how becoming a mother finally led her to understand him. THE SHINIEST JEWEL is a touching narrative, accompanied by Marian's winsome drawings, that beautifully weaves together her realizations about the joy, and sometimes heartbreak, of building a family.

The Shiniest Jewel: A Family Love Story Details

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From Reader Review The Shiniest Jewel: A Family Love Story for online ebook

Maritza "Books y Booty" Valle says

A sweet, easy, unexpected read about adoption, love, and family transitions. Not my favorite but a really great experiment in how to tell these stories, and I loved seeing the author/illustrator's personal take on how to describe the situations. Also, I read this while getting a tattoo.

Raina says

I have a thing about adoption*. Specifically, I'm interested in international adoption. So I really appreciated this inside scoop on how one adoption went down for one family.

And the story really brought me around to the art style. Henley draws with what looks like a ball-point pen. Just superthin navy lines on a stark white background. Although she explains why she hasn't married her partner of the last longtime, and more or less why she wants a baby, she doesn't focus on the particulars, such as why that country, why a boy. She tells very little about the process to be approved to adopt in the first place. This focuses on the waiting. What happens after she's set to do this thing and then has to think about her child sitting in an orphanage in another country.

I also appreciated the way she told the story by including the contexts of her father's illness and her partnering situation. Yay single women over 30! Yay professional artists! Yay subverting the partner stereotypes! I kind of wanted her to go more Katsa, but she's totally allowed to live her own life, obv.

It's a tight story. She tells it well. She doesn't go into the larger societal/global implications. She's just living her own life. And I can respect that.

It was especially creepy to read this in one evening, and then wake up the next day to news that Russia was no longer allowing americans to adopt their children. I even write a FB status update about it. It was that creepy.

*So much so that I feel like I've opened with that line before.

Jessica says

I didn't adopt from Russia, but I still went through the same emotions author Marian Henley does in this lovely graphic novel. She adopted her son when he was the same age I adopted mine. Having weeks (as in one or two) to prepare for mothering is no small task and what is amazing is how well she portrays the enormity of it in this simple and loving story.

Alea says

The Shiniest Jewel is the true story of Marian Henley's journey through adoption, love, and loss, told in the graphic novel format.

Marian has a serious boyfriend, that she isn't ready to marry. She is about to turn 50 and decides she wants more than anything a child so she turns to adoption. We go along on her journey through disappointment and also happiness. At the same time she's trying to adopt a child her father is slowly dying. She fears she will be out of the country during her father's last days. This is a beautiful story of life and death and everything in between.

What a great story that is only complimented by the graphic novel format. Seeing the author's work right there in front of your eyes instead of just reading about it is wonderful. Henley has a very simple illustration style, basically line drawings yet the emotion is there. A person has to be very brave to tell such a personal story such as this.

Like the Heartbreak Diet, The Shiniest Jewel would be a great place to start for someone hesitant about graphic novels. It's a very approachable story!

Amy Large says

This is the first graphic novel I've ever read. Most of them do not appeal to me, plot-wise, but this was about Marian Henley's adventures in adopting a Russian boy (a toddler) at age 50 during the same time she was witnessing the end of her father's life. She is a professional cartoonist, I learned, and obviously has a real gift for illustrations. I really enjoyed looking at the pictures as well as reading the text. In fact, I read it twice. The second time I focused more on the illustrations.

Alison (Ali of Worducopia) says

At age 49, comic strip artist Marian Henley wasn't inclined to marry her longtime boyfriend or buy her own home, but she felt driven to adopt a child from Russia. To tell the story of her journey to adoption and its impact on the rest of her life, Henley turned to her medium of choice, and *The Shiniest Jewel*, a graphic memoir, is the result.

Readers who have been through international adoption will likely enjoy Henley's take on it, though the details of her experience are hardly unique. But it's on a deeper level that this book shines: reconciling society's views of what makes a fit parent with Henley's image of herself as a person; grappling with her fear of marital commitment to her partner, while watching her parents confront the obstacles of ill health and aging together; struggling to connect with her ailing and distant father.

As the book nears its conclusion, Henley delves into a sidestory that at first seems tangential: a letter her father wrote to his parents after a terrible battle during World War II. The letter shows her father in a different light than Henley has seen (and portrayed) him, and, by showing his trust in his parents as a young man fresh from trauma, brings the story full circle. As Henley's relationship with her aging father nears its end, her relationship with her young son is newly forming. It's the highlight of the book; an ending that

sticks.

Mimi says

Really wonderfully told story about adopting from Russia with a wry sense of humor and an excellent appreciation of the cycle and story of life.

Thank you, Raina, for the review which caused me to put it on my list.

Margaret says

A lovely book written by the comic strip author Marian Henley. It's an accounting of her story of adopting a boy from Russia, starting the process just short of her 50th birthday. As with pretty much all comic strip (illustrated) books, IMO, it's way too quick a read, frustrating when the topic is so interesting and, in this case, the author is so observant and has such interesting things to say, so that's my quibble. Yes, there's a happy ending, but not without its sad and bittersweet moments along the way. Being an Older Mother myself, I completely related to the prickliness she describes at being told so often that she's TOO OLD to be the mother of a young child. OK, it's not the usual way things are done, but, geez, even us old farts, if we preserve ourselves well, have a good shot at making it to a nice 3-figure age. I admire her for putting this all down on paper and for capturing the "betwixt and between" of going through the adoption process on the one hand while watching a beloved parent dying on the other. This is a brave book and well worth reading.

Dov Zeller says

This graphic memoir was okay. Nothing spectacular in terms of introspection, content or form, but I imagine it's really meaningful to people who have gone through or are going through similar experiences. It's about a 49-year-old white woman who decides to go through the international adoption process and adopt a baby from Russia. She finds out her father is terminally ill around the same time and has to deal with both emotionally taxing situations (two conflicting kinds of being present and 'on call', and also dealing with loss...) The line drawings are simple and I like her minimalist style.

Emilia P says

Ah, i was wondering why I decided to read this. It was Aurora! Well, another womens magazine cartoonist (The Impostor, somebody else)... paid their dues and finally got to write their comic memoir. I have some weird thing about it that, I'm like aww wait to go and also uhh you do sort of vapid work usually. But yeah, this was good, personal, honest, a little tough, a story about loving your parents and waiting for your child... I didn't like the way she drew her own nose, but other than that it was pleasantly flowy. Yep. Just fine.

Amanda says

The subtitle of "A Family Love Story" really does describe this book perfectly.

It is simply a beautiful story about family love, loss, growth, change--the cycles that define our lives. The adoption of her son from Russia is the main tale, but it is perfectly interwoven with the story of her marriage, growing older, overwhelming change, and an elderly parent's serious illness.

Recounting the adoption, the author is honest without being overbearing or harsh. The path of her adoption was not always smooth, but her experience is not uncommon. She relays all aspects of it wonderfully, without bitterness for the times of emotional turmoil and loss. But her entire story, good and bad, is gracefully told. There were many spots I was in tears, particularly when she recounts a letter from her father to his parents, written while he served in the Navy during WWII.

The graphic novel format may seem strange at first, but by the end I felt it was the best way she could have presented her story. She was able to fill simple black and white line illustrations with a world of emotion. I am so glad I found this book.

Kathy (Bermudaonion) says

I received a copy of *The Shiniest Jewel: A Family Love Story* from Springboard Press today. It was written and illustrated by Marian Henley, who is best known for her *Maxine!* comics. This book is a graphic memoir and I have to admit that it was not what I was expecting. It intrigued me, though, so I started on it right away.

At 49, Marian had been in a relationship with a younger man for 7 years. He talked about making things permanent, but she had cold feet. At the same time, she decided to adopt a child from Russia. This turned out to be more complicated and expensive than she was told it would be. As if that wasn't enough, her father became seriously ill. Witnessing her parents in the hospital, Marian realized why people commit to marriage. At 50 years old, Marian found herself coping with a new marriage, a new baby and the death of her father.

This book is a wonderful story of love. At 169 pages, it's a quick, feel-good read. It brought tears to my eyes a few times. Marian's descriptions and illustrations are delightful - through them, you experience the roller-coaster of emotions she went through. I loved this book and think it would make a great gift to anyone who has gone through or is contemplating a foreign adoption.

Arminzerella says

I'm not about to turn fifty, nor am I considering adoption (or motherhood, for that matter), nor am I familiar with *Maxine*, Marian Henley's comic strip. Nevertheless, I really enjoyed her newest project - the graphic novel, *The Shiniest Jewel*. She writes (and draws) about adopting her son, William Igor, from Russia and all of the ensuing drama that she welcomed into her life as a result. Although Henley's adoption application was approved, she was not able to adopt the first child she was promised, and during a subsequent interview with her agency she was told that she was not an ideal "family" for a young child as she was older, single, and worked full-time. Henley managed to traverse these disappointments and setbacks with grace (for the most part) as well as frustration, and her perseverance eventually brought William Igor into her life.

Marian Henley's simplistic black and white drawings really lend themselves well to her story. Her self-portraits are spot on (check out her website for a comparison!) and she manages to convey a lot of emotion (as well as humor) with her well-chosen words and images. Henley's story should resonate with a lot of people – regardless of whether or not they share her situation or experience – as it is primarily about welcoming love and life into one's home and heart.

Katelyn says

A sweet graphic novel about Henley's decision at age 49 to adopt a boy from Russia.

Erik says

This delicately told memoir about Henley's mid-life adoption of her son from Russia, by way of Vladivostock in fact, initially caught me off-guard as I'm admittedly unacquainted with her work in the realm of comic strips. Deciding on becoming a mother at the ripe old age of fifty is not a decision to take lightly, and Henley certainly didn't. As she neared middle-age, Henley juggled the demands of getting married – long something she abhorred – moving into her first piece of real estate with her new husband, and -- yes I'm spoiling it a bit here -- losing one of her parents to cancer.

In less nimble hands, this could have been a trite bore full of tired cliches. Yet Henley's sparse pen-and-inks help to deliver -- despite her simple and unadorned lines – the full impact of her emotional mid-life journey. Which made me come away thinking: Life just gets better and more satisfying the older we get. And that's not something people talk about much in this day and age of our youth-obsessed culture. Kudos, Ms. Henley.
