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Sweethearts



Synopsis

As children, Jennifer Harris and Cameron Quick were both social outcasts. They were also one another's only friend. So when Cameron disappears without warning, Jennifer thinks she's lost the only person who will ever understand her. Now in high school, Jennifer has been transformed. Known as Jenna, she's popular, happy, and dating, everything "Jennifer" couldn't be---but she still can't shake the memory of her long-lost friend. When Cameron suddenly reappears, they are both confronted with memories of their shared past and the drastically different paths their lives have taken. From the National Book Award nominated author of *Story of a Girl*, *Sweethearts* is a story about the power of memory, the bond of friendship, and the quiet resilience of our childhood hearts.

Book Information

Paperback: 217 pages

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (January 1, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316014567

ASIN: B005IUJ23S

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 114 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,080,453 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #54 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Health > Weight](#) #1215 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Parents](#) #3100 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > United States](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

"Zarr's writing is remarkable." ((starred review) Booklist)"[Zarr is a] master of show-not-tell....[a] subtle, beautifully-written novel." ((starred review) VOYA)"Haunting and ultimately hopeful....A convincing, fire person narrative voice....Zarr transfixes teen readers with enticing explorations of identity and enduring love." (Kirkus Reviews)"Engrossing." ((starred review) Publishers Weekly)

Sara Zarr was raised in San Francisco, went to high school in Pacifica, California, and now lives with her husband in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is the author of *Story of a Girl* and can be found on

the web at www.sarazarr.com.

An unexpected story. You'd imagine, from the title, that *Sweethearts* is a romance. And you'd be right, but you'd also be wrong. Because while Jennifer is romantically involved with her boyfriend Ethan, there's a deeper love that permeates the story, between her and Cameron. It's not about romantic love, it's about true love. I think this is why some people didn't like the ending, since Jenna doesn't even end up with Cameron, or Ethan for that matter. But I loved the ending, especially the last 5 pages. It rang very true and real with me, having an experience like this in my own life, having a friend who, as Sara Zarr brilliantly puts it, "is as much a part of you as your own soul". What I loved most about this book is that it broke a social norm. Society tells you that as a girl, you can't love a boy in any other way than romantically, and when romantic love is gone, all other love goes too. And you can see that with Jenna and Ethan, that once they break up, things fall apart. And yet, with Jenna and Cameron, they love each other despite there being nothing romantic about it. Their love is so complex and layered, with elements of loyalty and trust, taking care of one another, friendship, devotion. And it's lasting. Take it from me, it's been known to happen. You get the impression, at the end of the book, that Jenna holds on to this love, which has been so important to her, for all her life. She holds on to the memories, repeats them often. Because the "mark they left on each other is the color and shape of love. That's the unfinished business between us". Which begs the question, does love as unfinished business ever need to become finished business? And Sara Zarr answers that, no, "love, love is never finished".

Sweethearts is a title that's been on my wishlist since I started book blogging in 2010 but it was just a book I never really got around to picking up until last week when it went on sale on the Kindle. Jennifer had a rough childhood, her mom was never home trying to provide them since her dad took off and being bullied in school endlessly for being fat and having a lisp. The only friend she ever had was Cameron, who also had a lisp and a hard upbringing. The two were best friends for the majority of their childhood, enduring bullying together and the tough stuff going on at home. Until one day Cameron left. Just out of the blue was gone. And Jennifer was alone. Completely alone. Years later, Jennifer is now Jenna who lives with her mother and her step father who takes very good care of them both. Everyone loves her, she has an amazing group of friends and a boyfriend. She buried Jennifer. Until one day Cameron comes back. Let's start with the things I didn't like about this book --- I didn't like Jenna's boyfriend Ethan. He was clingy and demanding and he was a bit of a brat. About everything. The typical, "why didn't you call me last night" crap. Not only that but he

says something rude to Jenna without even asking what's bothering her or if someone's going on that she needs to talk about --- you know, being supportive and has the nerve to totally blow her off even though he was the one being a jerk. Unbelievable! The guy seriously needed a reality check. Or a swift kick to the head. While the tension was high when Cameron came back, I felt like there was no outcome. How would you feel if your only friend growing up vanished and one day came back but wasn't anything at all like who you remembered. Didn't have any answers for you and played life by his own terms? Seriously, why the heck was he there if it wasn't to answer Jenna's questions? You can't just up and leave, come back and expect that person to drop everything to drive you around. It just doesn't work that way. And when he did answer her questions it didn't really feel like he was answering them, if that makes sense. It just annoyed me. And I didn't like how Jenna's mom was more overprotective over Cameron than she ever was with Jenna. Though I can relate that to my own mom being overprotective over my husband, but still. What I did like about the book was the concept of it all. A friend of mine once said that different people know different versions of you. We're always changing and growing and the person who knows you last year doesn't know the you three years ago, you get what I'm saying? And this applies to Jenna and Cameron. Jenna did change, she "has it all" but Cameron wasn't there to see the struggle in the transformation. And while Jenna got what she wanted, she wasn't who she wanted to be. She was a mirror of who everyone wanted her to be, though it isn't her fault. What else would you do in her situation? I did really like Jenna's friend Steph, she was a little pushy but she gave great advice and I liked her step-dad, he was really supportive over everything. Sweethearts isn't a heartwarming tale of two people who haven't seen each other in years reuniting; it's about losing someone, realizing who you are and dealing with losing that person again but on different terms. It's about self discovery and the people who can change or help you. And while I wasn't crazy about this read, I'm really glad I finally got to read it!

"Because love, love is never finished. It circles and circles, the memories out of order and not always complete" This one line basically sums up this book, the story about a teenage girl dealing with the loss in grade school and reemergence during her senior year of high school of her childhood best and onetime, only, friend. After his departure, she reinvented herself to avoid getting lost in herself, and when he returns she must come to terms with who she is, was, and will become while also trying to understand the abuse and hardship that led to his leaving in the first place. All at once, they are grappling with having grown apart, yet still in some ways being exactly where they left off, and also trying to discover what they mean to each and the roles they will or will not

ultimately play in each others lives. This touching story evokes memories of friends found, friends lost and friends rediscovered. It touches on a kind of love that many don't understand, or choose to acknowledge, as it is about as far from black/white as you can get. As much as many of us do not like to admit, some love is so firmly rooted in the gray areas that it will never be fully understood. This can be a torment, but can also be a blessing and a lesson, which is what this novel wants to say. And while teenagers of course do not know it all (as many of surely thought we did back then!) the world as seen through the naive eyes of young adults can sometimes be the most thought provoking, and Sara Zarr does a wonderful job of channeling this innocence. This is a easy read without much challenge or overly exciting writing to it, but where it lacks in those areas it definitely makes up in substance and thought provoking ideas.[...]

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