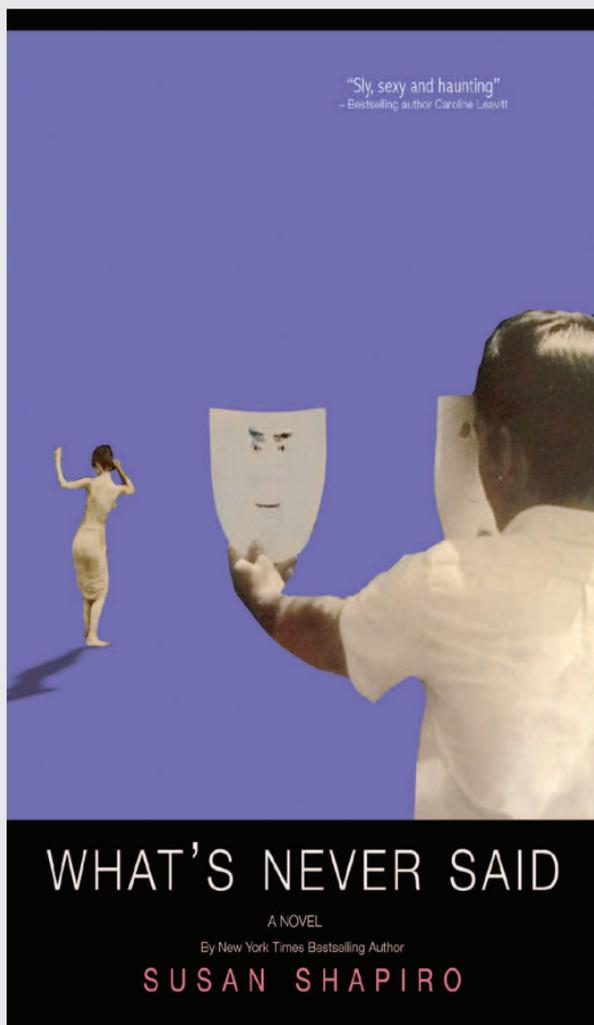


SEXY, JEWISH, VERY NEW YORK,
SUSAN SHAPIRO'S 'WHAT'S NEVER SAID'
IS A NOVEL FOR OUR TIMES



Susan Shapiro comes from a long line of novelists, satirists, essayists and poets who are what they write. Throw Henry Miller in there too (by way of Erica Jong). Hell, why not Isaac Bashevis Singer? (There's certainly plenty of Yiddish words sprinkled throughout *What's Never Said*.) In fact, I'll throw Woody Allen into the mix because Shapiro is funny, really funny. She seems to capture the spaces in-between our thoughts: those moments, oftentimes embarrassing, sometimes revelatory, that might occur just after you say something that, uh, maybe you shouldn't have said to that particular someone. Shapiro's writing can slow down time to its very essence. Those awkward moments. Those can't-take-it-back moments. So maybe you can add Jerry Seinfeld to my list of legends who Shapiro invokes. She's a New Yorker who gets the small tics and contrivances of living in this great city. In fact, she does it as well as Joseph Mitchell who, in both of his 1938 classics—*My Ears Are Bent* and *Up In The Old Hotel*—gave you a whiff of what was, indeed, said, in the backroom bars and seedy establishments that used to make up the heart of New York City.

Of course, when it comes to the characters in this novel, Shapiro is speaking poets, poets who communicate esoterically through the juxtaposition of carefully chosen words...like a jazz saxophonist does when he blows certain notes through his horn. You want to add Kerouac to the list? That may be a stretch but just like Kerouac's joy-driven characters who want to taste it all, feel it all, experience it all, Shapiro's New York characters want more too.

Lila Penn hits the big city running from Wisconsin and promptly falls in love with her college professor, Daniel Wildman. He falls in love with her too but, unlike his competitor Conor Cormick, a prof who insinuates himself between

the sheets with every lissome coed he could, Wildman has morals. Yes, we all know in real life morals are overrated, but still. There's a reason Wildman's the hero and Cormick's the heavy.

The very first chapter has Lila in 2010—20 years after the fact—bravely going to a book signing of the professor she used to and still loves.

He doesn't remember her.

Then the book really starts. You feel the slow simmer of infatuation. They cuddle. They edit each other's poems (probably the most intimate act two people could possibly engage in...other than *The Act*). In the course of editing one of her poems, he tells her that it's what's never said that's important. As it goes in poetry, so it goes in life. They kiss. He drinks. She gets high. They talk of poems, prayers and promises. Then he leaves for Israel. Alone.

But how could he possibly forget her?

The fact that he ignored her at his book signing in the very first chapter gives a hint of mystery to an unraveling, extremely literate

(you should hear the pillow talk of these two) relationship. One has to wonder as the pages start flying by (I couldn't put it down) if, indeed, in 1980, they're going to do it. I found myself asking, "Wait! Have they had sex yet?" Shapiro is coy in answering this question and the answer is no...but that doesn't mean sparks don't fly.

Once you realize why the prof ignored her, the next few chapters back in 1980—told alternately from her point-of-view and then from his—are imbued with a new kind of fascination. Now the reader is reading from a different perspective.

It's all very heady, very sexy, very funny, very Jewish and very New York. Just like Shapiro herself. This is a gal with 10 books out there. She's been one hilarious and oh-so-true memoirist, universal in scope, but special to members of *The Tribe*. *Five Men Who Broke My Heart* looked back at her early dating years, *Lighting Up* looked back at her addictions. *Speed Shrinking* and *Overexposed* were, in a word, delicious. She teaches a course at The New School in Manhattan about how to get published which is subtitled "Instant Gratification Takes Too Long." In other words, she's very special. And she got her start as a poet right here in the pages of the *Aquarian Weekly* some 30 years ago or so when I brought her poetry to the late Jim Rensenbrink and he freaked out at just how good it was. I remember it like it was yesterday.

"Who is this girl," he screamed from behind his massive desk.

"My mom married her mom's brother."

"Get her in here!"

She never came to Montclair but Rensenbrink published her, and published her again, thus unleashing her voice on an unsuspecting public. Way to go, Jim.