

If Not 4 U and Some Shoes

Laurie Nenson

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Nenson has created likable and bubbly characters to go along with a great sense of fashion.

What woman doesn't love shoes? Francie Lanoo certainly does. She's the teenage protagonist of Laurie Nenson's new work, *If Not 4 U and Some Shoes*. The effervescent teen shares her love of fashion, especially shoes, and her love of the handsome and charming Berkeley Mills in this upbeat and bouncy first-person narrative.

A high school romance turns into more as Francie and Berkeley venture into their first steps of adulthood. For Francie, this means first studying abroad in Italy at the end of her high school career and then beginning college in New York, and for Berkeley, beginning college thousands of miles away from Francie. On an ever-more-educated quest to design the perfect shoe, Francie continues to progress in her career, even as she and Berkeley struggle to stay connected. Eventually, their struggles grow too difficult, and Francie calls the relationship off even though the couple's love remains strong. Will the young lovers find each other again, proving that true love wins, or will Francie's dreams of a fashionable lifestyle and the perfect shoe design have to fulfill her desires?

The author clearly knows fashion. Her descriptions of shoes, clothing, and fashion labels are remarkable and certainly paint a vivid picture. Descriptions of intrigue while Francie studies abroad and of her work in a high fashion design house seem credible and realistic. Descriptions of teenage relationships are decidedly less so. Francie and Berkeley come across as sophisticated and extremely mature, completely concerned with the well-being of the other person, and not concerned at all about what they, themselves, want. Not exactly typical teenagers in love for the first time.

Francie is by far the most developed character; however, the most interesting things about the girl appear to be that she's obsessed with shoes and madly in love with her high school sweetheart. Berkeley, her love interest, appears almost perfect to the point of impossibility. It's difficult to imagine a real high school boy saying, when asked how his guitar strumming is coming along, "With little progression, unfortunately," and "Keep your expectations low, because I seldom practice." These sorts of statements are peppered throughout the novel, and not just by Berkeley, but by all of the characters. The dialogue comes across as stilted and stiff, but the thoughts behind the words hold promise. The characters' ideas and feelings come through clearly, and it's easy to determine what they think and mean. And Francie remains intensely likable, even with these difficulties.

If Not 4 U and Some Shoes would certainly be an appealing read to those who enjoy chick lit, and perhaps younger adults in particular. Those with an interest or background in fashion would enjoy that aspect of the book as well. Nenson has an ability to create likable and bubbly characters.

TRACY FISCHER (September 23, 2015)

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