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Melanie Landon and her half-sister share a unique bond. For her entire life, Melanie has hidden the fact that Ann is a shape-shifter. The never-ending deception is a heavy weight to bear, but Melanie is determined to keep Ann's secret and protect her from a world that simply wouldn't understand.

For months, Melanie hasn't seen or heard from Ann, in either of her forms. When a man shows up saying he's there about her sister, Melanie fears the worst. But Brody Westbrook doesn't have information about Ann—he's in search of it.

A freelance writer, Brody intends to include Ann in a book he's writing about the existence of shape-shifters. While Melanie is immediately drawn to the stranger on her doorstep, she denies his claims, knowing that trusting him isn't an option.

But when Ann finally appears looking thin and sick, Melanie realizes exposure is the least of their worries. Protecting her sister has always been such an enormous part of Melanie's life, but as Ann's health rapidly deteriorates, Melanie must come to grips with the fact that saving her may mean letting go...

Still Life with Shape-Shifter Details

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From Reader Review Still Life with Shape-Shifter for online ebook

Angie says

Originally reviewed here @ Angieville

As you know, Sharon Shinn is an auto-buy author for me. Ever since the unparalleled experience that was me reading Archangel, I have been an unabashed fangirl. I have my favorites, but I read everything she writes because I love her ways with words and her way with worlds. Which was why I was so intrigued and excited to hear she was working on an urban fantasy series. She's done sci-fi, she's done high fantasy, she's done YA. It only makes sense she should find her way to one of my very favorite fantasy sub-genres and make her mark there. I read *The Shape of Desire*, the first book in her Shifting Circle series, right when it came out last year, and I've essentially been mulling it over ever since. And while my feelings for it were complicated and many, I knew I would be reading the companion novel either way. Because, as is always the case, the world she has created *won't leave me alone*. But before we go on, a word on the covers for this series. I love them. They are dark and still, frozen moments captured between shifters and their humans. And they seem to strike a particularly chilling note once you've read their stories.

Melanie Landon exists in survival mode. She just wants to get up, go to work, come home, check in with her sister Ann, and *get through the day*. And any day in which no one asks too many questions is a good one. Which is why she has a full-blown panic attack when she finds Brody Westbrook on her doorstep full to bursting with questions. Formerly a local television reporter of some note, Brody recently quit his job to write a rather unusual book. And he's pretty sure Melanie can help him with the subject matter. You see, Brody wants to write a book on shapeshifters and he appears absolutely convinced Mel's sister Ann is one. Without thinking twice, Melanie does what she has done her entire life and shuts this persistent intruder out. Ever since she was ten years old and the adults in her life virtually checked out, she has known it was her job and her job alone to protect Ann. And up to this point, she's been successful. No one has been able to get behind that shield. But when Brody refuses to give up and Ann refuses to hide, Melanie's life takes on another level of complexity. Faced with the possible annihilation of the world as she knows it, she is torn between reaching out for the human contact she's always been deprived and clutching the one person she loves to her with every ounce of strength she has.

All of Shinn's worlds stick with me, but this one--this eerie version of our own--*haunts* me. This is not urban fantasy as you've come to expect it. It is not sassy. It is not swashbuckling. And it is not a non-stop, action-packed thrill ride. What it is, is quiet. Quiet and intelligent and disconcertingly *real*. So real that when it is grim, it is almost incapacitating in its grimness. So real that when the characters' emotions spill over, I feel precariously close to losing control of my own. In other words, Shinn's skill and subtlety do not make for what you might call comfortable reading here. Though they do wash over you with an almost surreal grace.

"Sit down, sit down," Ann says, still acting as hostess. "Brody, would you like some cookies? They're just store-bought, but they're pretty good."

"No, no dessert, thanks. Unless you have pie," Brody says, sinking to a seat. The rest of us arrange ourselves around the table though no one actually relaxes. I have the notion that William has gone into some kind of feral high alert, like a hare trying to outsmart a wolf. Brody, who is leaning casually against his chair back, is clearly still sorting through his memories, looking for a match. Ann is bouncing around like a child who's eaten too much candy, and I'm as tense as a violin string. If you ran a finger across my forearm, you'd wake a

low G.

I appreciate that with these books Ms. Shinn chose to make her protagonists ordinary in every way but one: they are (in one way or another) intimately connected with someone who is a shapeshifter. And that small, unsettling detail reshapes the way they lead their lives in every particular. And yet, by virtue of the nature of the shapeshifters in their lives, these women spend unimaginable amounts of time alone. And my but how Shinn doesn't shy away from those interminable hours. Those days and weeks of loneliness, of wondering, of fear that are a direct result of this basic fact of their lives. There is nothing glossy about Melanie Landon or her monotonous life. Like Maria Devane before her, Melanie revolves around her shapeshifter. In this case, her much younger half sister. And like Maria, I really liked Melanie. More than that, I worried about her, about what would happen to her should she lose her purpose. I desperately wanted some small outside channel of happiness to find its way past her tall walls. Together, Brody and Ann (both as filled with humor and whimsy as Melanie is sober) make inroads in that direction. But for every step toward happiness, there is a separate but equal step toward loss. Sometimes the degree to which Melanie devoted herself to Ann felt unhealthy. Sometimes the stifling quality of her small world made me long for some sassy swashbuckling to bound in and save the day. But the thing is, that single minded devotion also felt natural. If I didn't necessarily feel as though it was how I would react, it certainly felt like a more-than-plausible reaction for Melanie. And if I step back and put myself in her shoes, in the suffocating situation in which she lives, I really don't know how differently I would operate. So while the books in this series are not easy ones to read (they are, in fact, exhausting at times), they are riveting and raw. And I find that sometimes it's good to read a book that doesn't conform to expectations, that discomfits even as it entertains. Don't you?

Nicole says

update: i just re-read and i have to reiterate how much i love this book. quiet, emotional. i have since read the first one and liked (but not as much as this one). the concept really defines love and commitment.

Really enjoyed this book. As the book's blurb says, Melanie Landon is a human with a half-sister who is a shapeshifter. I loved their relationship, and how much both rely on each other. Mel was great....like many fantasy heroines, she's smart, feisty and loyal. but unlike most, she's a worrywart and cranky. I related :). Shinn is an excellent story-teller and I am really glad I read this book (warning: be ready to have an emotional response to the story).

I haven't read the first book (now on my too-read list), but I don't think I missed out on any of the world-building (I'll update the review if that changes). Recommended read.

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: I really had mixed emotions about this story about a woman who is willing to ruin all her own personal happiness to keep an eye on her younger sister, while another woman is willing to ruin her life just to be with the one she loves. I enjoyed this story in the end, I just had a hard time with the morality of the characters and the life decisions that they choose for themselves.

Opening Sentence: I'm sitting at one of the three stoplights in Dagmar on Monday morning when Kurt Markham strolls down the crosswalk in front of me so slowly that he's only halfway across the street before the light turns green.

The Review:

Still Life with Shape-Shifter is the follow up to The Shape of Desire in the Shifting Circles series. This series is about shape-shifters with their incredibly short life span and the lengths that people will go to in order to keep them a secret. Still Life with Shape-Shifter could be read as a standalone in the series but it does tie in with characters from the first book in the series and some clues from the first book are also revealed that tie them together.

Melanie Landon lives every day for her sister. She waits impatiently for her sister, Ann, to appear at the end of the day. If Ann doesn't appear Melanie collapses in a fit of despair and loneliness. You see, Ann is a shape-shifter and she often spends weeks at a time away from home. Melanie often worries that Ann is hurt or dead and she would never know because Ann is out in the world all alone. Melanie is ten years older than Ann and has been Ann's surrogate mother after Ann's own mother disappeared in her own world of being a shape-shifter and their father lost his memory. Melanie has completely thrown her own happiness out the window. She is only happy when her sister shows back up at home. So she is horribly devastated when Ann shows back up at home and declares that she is in love. The last thing Melanie wants is to share Ann with someone else.

Melanie's life is forever changed when Brody Westerbrook enters her life in a whirl of happiness and smiles. Brody informs Melanie that he knows her sister is a shape-shifter and he wants to write a book about her. Melanie will not confirm that her sister is a shape-shifter but after breaking down in Brody's arms he invited her on a date in order to make her feel better. He even agrees to not talk about shape-shifters if she will go on said date. Melanie just believes he is trying to ingratiate himself into her life so she will eventually slip up and tell him that her sister is actually a dog in her other form.

After Melanie's sister is revealed to be sick, Melanie just doesn't know what she will do to continue on. Brody is an outlet but she still thinks he's after her knowledge of shape-shifting. Ann wants to make sure her sister is happy in life and I loved what Ann does for her sister. I do think Melanie's decision is a tough one but one that had to be made. It was kind of obvious though with how that story was going. This story was very heart-wrenching.

Still Life with Shape-Shifter also follows another story. Janet is a girl who learned about shape-shifters when she was sixteen and met a wolf that also changes the course of her life for good. Cooper reveals himself to Janet after she helps him with a wound and gives him some food. After that point, Janet and Cooper are pretty much inseparable, even when Cooper is in wolf form. Janet sleeps on the back porch of her home. Everything that Janet does in her life is decided upon by how Cooper can follow and how he can get by with both sides of his life. Janet makes the boldest decision that I don't entirely agree with. I think she was quite selfish. Janet was the one person who was trying to help the shape-shifters and her decision just kind of infuriated me when I would think about it after reading the book.

The two stories do tie together in a heart-wrenching way. Shinn does set up a bleak and weary world with the shape-shifters. I will say this is not my favorite world at all just because of the fact that they have incredibly short and terrible lives. This does seem to be a realistic version if shape-shifters were currently hiding out in our society today.

Overall, I'm just mixed about this series. I want to like it but it is kind of too world weary and depressing after the fact. I didn't like the choices made and I just felt entirely sad for everyone involved. There are some really touching moments and I do feel like I came away with a message after reading it. I'm still not entirely sure I want to read the third book if it is still as depressing as this one was. I want a happy ending not a 'this is just how life is' ending.

Notable Scene:

"And you're a reporter for a TV station?"

"Used to be," he says around a mouthful of food. "Now I mostly do freelance writing and editing."

Ann's gaze is absolutely limpid, her voice innocent as a child's. "And I understand you're writing a book? What's it about?"

For a moment, the silence at the table is absolute. My stomach has clenched so hard and so fast that I've momentarily lost in the ability to breathe. I can't even summon the will to glare at Ann as she deserves. God, for a girl as fresh-faced, as happy as she is, to be so bent on self-destruction. She would run headlong to disaster and be laughing the entire way.

Brody swallows, sets down his fork, and takes a drink of water. Then he smiles at both of us. "Ah, let's not talk about boring work stuff," he says. "Tell me some more fun stories about when you were kids."

It's a moment before I realize that, given Ann's wayward sense of humor, this topic could be just as dangerous. That's because all my brain cells are coping with my sense of shock that he would so kindly and deftly turn the subject away from the one I dread above all others. It's deliberate, too; he's made me a promise, and by this action, he is demonstrating that he'll keep it. He is trying, without much fuss or flourish, to prove to me his is someone I can trust.

FTC Advisory: Ace/Penguin provided me with a copy of Still Life with Shape-Shifter. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

willaful says

3 1/2 stars. I stayed up late finishing this, and it made me cry a few times, but I still finished it feeling -- as with the first book -- ultimately unsatisfied. I just can't seem to get the point of these stories, which all seem to be about obsessive love for shapeshifters who lead very sad, difficult lives. This story adds a twist in that the main character's love is for her shape-shifter sister -- her actual romance with a nice, normal guy seems totally anticlimactic. There's also a secondary romance, also featuring an obsessive lover.

I searched for a metaphor. Does these scenarios represent caring for a special needs child? Do they represent caring for someone with a serious illness? Both readings are possible but not necessarily plausible.

I guess I'll keep reading this series, if there are more books... but I hope at some point I can figure out what the hell they're suppose to be *about*.

Olga Godim says

This is a sad, sad book, beautiful and absorbing but melancholy, emotionally intense, almost heart-rending. I cried in the end.

I hesitate to pigeonhole this tale to a genre – it transcends genres. As a love story, it might be categorized as romance, but it's so much more. Published by Shinn's lifelong publisher Ace Books, a traditional fantasy publisher, it's a fantasy on the surface. After all, it deals with shape-shifters, but when I look deeper, inside the allegory of shape-shifters, this novel tells an utterly human story of being different.

Melanie's beloved half-sister Ann is a shape-shifter. To protect Ann from the world's unfriendly scrutiny, Melanie has been keeping Ann's secret for all 20 years of Ann's life. Now, a charming reporter Brody shows on Melanie's doorstep. He is going to write a book about shape-shifters and he suspects Ann is one. What is Melanie to do? Her dilemma deepens, when Ann is afflicted by a mysterious sickness. Could Melanie take the risk to expose Ann's true nature by consulting a doctor? Or should she keep the secret and risk Ann dying? Could Melanie trust Brody to help them? Could she trust her own heart, which is falling in love with Brody? Twisted with uncertainties and assaulted by guilt, Melanie tries to maintain as regular a facade as she can, but life puts her through the grinder of impossible choices.

By telling Melanie's story, Shinn explores the theme of being different from various angles. How hard it's to be different. How hard it is to love someone who is different. What sacrifices we are willing to endure, what difficult decisions we are willing to make for those we love. What does it mean to accept your difference and live with it without losing your dignity? Or your humanity? (An apt question for shape-shifters)

The novel also touches on a connected theme: the devastation of secrets. Secrets take over people's lives; sometimes they destroy families, but no matter how hard one tries, secrets have the tendency to come out eventually. Secrets are poisonous, but what if there is no choice?

The characters of the novel are alive, real, living among us and grappling with the same problems we do. Although not always sympathetic, they are inevitably true to their backgrounds and situations in life.

The plot is seemingly slow; it's definitely not an adventure flick, despite its shape-shifters mystique. It's a novel of contemplation and inner growth, where most of the action takes place inside the characters' minds and hearts. And inside the reader's mind and heart as well. I read it and I couldn't stop thinking, putting myself in the heroes' shoes. What would I do if I had to struggle with such adversity? Would I be good enough? Could I cope?

My reflections, as I read the book, also took a form of musing on a tangent. Some people, especially teenagers, often want to be different, to stand out. Or they think they do. They pretend in any case by wearing unconventional clothes, or talking nonsense, or joining some outrageous clubs, or dyeing their hair pink, or what not. But all those attempts to impress their peers are just posing, for show. These poor misguided youngsters don't have a clue how hard it is to be different.

Many of those who really are different – because of their ethnicity or religion, illness or talent – have been trying the opposite throughout human history and fiction: to camouflage themselves as normal, to blend in. Their attitude is best described by this snippet of conversation from the novel. One of the characters in the book asks her lover, a werewolf:

"If you could control it [the change] completely, would you ever choose to be a wolf again?"

"No," he said.

"You'd be ordinary? Instead of extraordinary, which is what you are?"

"I think anyone who isn't ordinary wishes he was," he said quietly. "No matter what makes him different, he wants to be the same as everyone else."

Nobody wants to be a freak, when it's for real. Unfortunately, some of us don't have a choice. The only choice we do have is how we handle our abnormality: with gentle elegance or with self-pitying spite. The

former – I bow to them with deep admiration for their courage. The latter – they are those who pick up a gun and shoot innocents.

A sad association for a simple fantasy novel, isn't it?

Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

Still Life with Shape Shifter is the second book in the Shifting Circle Series. Even though it features shape-shifters it is really a story about love, love in all of its forms. I always call Sharon Shinn's stories gently stories. Don't look for non-stop action, a lot of sex, or over the top stories. She writes in a very down to earth style with a lot of character development that builds the story.

Several of the characters for A Shape of Desire are in Still Life. Dante and Maria are side characters here but William is one of the main characters. Still Life follows two women,, Janet and Melanie. Both love a shape-shifter but in very different ways. For the most part their lives are separate but both face loving and losing the person they love. This is the story of how they face that impending loss.

There are other characters that play a major part in the novel. Brody is almost too good to be true. He meets Melanie and has to work hard to win her trust. Melanie's best friend, Debbie is just the kind of best friend everyone wants to have. Janet also has friends that supply a support for her.

Each woman's story is separate and unique but in the end they meet in a sad but true way. There is room for future stories in this universe and I hope more are written.

Susan says

Still Life with Shapeshifter was much better than the first book in Shinn's Shifting Circle series, **The Shape of Desire**, but it still pales in comparison with her Samaria or Twelve Houses books. I give Shinn props for showing the downside of being a shapeshifter - unlike many paranormal romance novels, the shapeshifters aren't all-powerful sex gods, but beings whose animal lives are fraught with danger and whose lifespans are shortened by the strain of the constant changes. The terrible downside of this life is poignantly portrayed in the relationship between primary narrator Melanie and her shape-shifter half-sister Ann. She also creates a nice romance between Melanie and journalist Brody.

But when I read a sentence like "At times it seems to me that I didn't start to live until I met him," spoken by secondary narrator Janet about Connor, the shapeshifter she met and loved from the age of 16, I have to wonder what is going through Shinn's mind. From the author who gave us such strong, independent female characters as Senneth in the Twelve Houses series, reading something that could have come from the mouth of **Twilight's** Bella is a complete letdown. Fortunately, the relationship between Janet and Connor is much more interesting than the one between Maria and Dante in **The Shape of Desire** because it has a forward progression, and Janet has some goals in life other than being with Connor, but her utter dependence is depressing.

Setting this series in modern day reality allows Shinn to juxtapose the magic with the mundane but I still miss the magic settings of her previous novels. Shinn has built up so much respect and goodwill in my mind over the past 15 years that I will likely continue to read future novels in this series (if there are any), but I won't approach them with the same level of excited anticipation as I did when faced with the prospect of a new Samaria or Twelve Houses novel.

Barb in Maryland says

4 1/2 stars for me. I loved it.

The follow-on to *The Shape of Desire* is not as claustrophobic as the first book. And I think that's because the major storyline focuses on a young woman trying to protect her shifter sister, not a lover. Melanie seems a bit more mentally balanced than Maria, the heroine of the first book. And young Ann, the shifter sister, is a down-right *bon vivant*.

There are plenty of cross-over characters; we get to see Maria, Dante and baby Lizzie. Ann's lover is Dante's brother William. And reporter Brody Westbrook returns. One of the joys of the book is watching Brody grow. As he comes to fall for Melanie (and she for him) and to know Ann better, he loses that obnoxious edge that he had in the first book.

There is also a third storyline that focuses on another young girl, Janet, and her love for a young shifter, Cooper. Janet and Cooper's story at first seems to have no connection with Melanie and Ann's. But Shinn manages to tie everything together nicely by the end of the book.

Keep the tissues handy.

I really enjoyed Shinn's take on shapeshifters; they have a genetic quirk, not super-powers. And it can never be said that she glamorizes their lives--rather the opposite. As for the totally human people who come to love shapeshifters, she paints a vivid picture of the joys and terrors that come with loving someone who is 'other'.

Jeffrey says

According to Wikipedia, the first story of men turning into wolves were written hundreds of years ago. In the *Satyricon*, written about 60 C.E. by Gaius Petronius Arbiter, a character transformed into a wolf.

Europe has many legends of the were-wolf while North American Indians had tales of shape-shifters. The fear of werewolves and the evil they do is a fairly well known part of the legend. It is commonly thought that were-wolves have super human strength and speed, being only harmed by special "silver" bullets, and were able to heal themselves of injury. The were-wolf is thought to be most vulnerable as a human than as a wolf.

Sharon Shinn's *Still Life with Shape-Shifter* comes at the story of were-wolf's from a completely different angle. Her shape-shifters, are almost all old before their time, scrawny, malnourished and die by 50 if they are lucky. Although some are cute little dogs when children, they eventually are almost uniformly abandoned

by their families, who either cannot accept a werewolf or cannot live with one. They cannot control their transformation and so live troubled lives. Cannot go to school if you turn into a wolf every two weeks. How do you hold down a job. Its hard to meet others of their kind. But most importantly, Shinn imagines that the process of becoming a werewolf puts tremendous stress on the body. Although the actual transformation is magical and glowing, the were-wolves's organs are affected by the sheer fact that the body is transformed from small to large size. And if this story was more about were-wolves and the problems they face it might have held more interest.

But that's just a subtext.

Instead this is really a story about the power of love and fear-both the love of a woman for a man and the love of a woman for her child, and how the fear of dealing with our love's lives can transform all of us -- sometimes in good ways, and sometimes in bad ways.

Melanie Landon is hiding from life in a small town called Dagmar. She lives in an old beat up house with a huge lot right in the middle of two big housing projects. She refuses to sell her house for big bucks because she is afraid for her half sister Ann, a shapeshifter -- who is "her whole life". Melanie raised Ann and cares for her like a parent, but lives in perpetual fear that Ann will be hurt or killed in her other shape or that the secret will come out. Melanie is paralyzed. But when Ann returns to Melanie its like the dawn of a new day. Grumpy Melanie's life is transformed into happy unscared Melanie.

Then Brody Westbrook appears. An ex-reporter, who witnessed the transformation of a wolf into a man, he wants to write a book about shape-shifters and believes that Ann is a shifter. Handsome, articulate and smart, Brody starts to win over Melanie's heart, while her brain and her fear for her sister try to keep him away. Its a battle for Melanie's soul. Melanie and Brody are good characters and have their moments, and Brody promises to stay away from the story of Ann. Meanwhile Ann has found a fellow shape-shifter who has noticed that Ann seems to be ill.

But before we can explore these issues, boom, Shinn shifts to another story set in the novel -- a story we learn that runs parallel temporarily to this story. Its the story of Janet and Cooper. Janet, who lives with trying parents befriends Cooper, a young shape-shifter artist and learns to love him. Cooper would like to be human all the time, but cannot, and soon also feels the affects of his shape shifting process.

Meanwhile in the Brody, Melanie, Ann triangle, Melanie must learn to let go of her Ann and live.

I found myself skipping pages. The Janet - Cooper story was boring in parts, and so was the Ann, Melanie, Brody story. If Brody was so gung ho to write a story - why did his life seize up and stop as well. Besides the exploration of what it means to be a werewolf the story was really about what it means to be in a relationship with one. In Melanie's case her life was a still life. Her sister was her whole world, and in Janet's case, she was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice merely to spend a few short months with her lover.

I wanted a grittier urban fantasy. I got something else. And it was disappointing.

Misti says

I loved this book. I've said it before but I'll say it again. Sharon Shinn has a way with words. I swear I could believe this is real and not fantasy because it feels so real. Like *The Shape of Desire*, this book is quiet and you hardly know what is happening or where it is supposed to end, or how you even know when you get there. It pulled me in completely. I'm dying to get the next one right away because I know the library has it but I think I need my emotions to settle back down before I destroy them again. This is a great series if you are looking for something a little different in the urban fantasy genre. Nothing flashy here. Just a fantastic story about people whose lives revolve around the shapeshifters they love.

Merrin says

HERE'S THE THING. I love Sharon Shinn. I've read every single book she's ever written, and there really aren't that many authors I can say that about. I love her brand of fantasy/sci fi, I love the characters she creates and writes about, I love the way she tells stories.

AND HERE'S THE THING ABOUT THAT. I liked this book? But I do not like this series. Everything that I love about her just does not work for me when placed in a modern contemporary setting.

THAT SAID, I really liked Melanie, Brody is a fantastic character, Ann made me weep, and I liked the way she connected this story to the first book. Janet's storyline made me weep harder than Ann's did.

So I liked this, but I really hope that she goes back to her fantastical settings soon.

Anna says

Ouch. So much sadness. This is a beautiful, well-written novel and though it is not as oppressively sad as the first in the Shifting Circle series it is still ultimately a pretty bleak read. I love Sharon Shinn, but this much loneliness is a bit much for me right now. Her books set in worlds she created herself are often full of connection, friendship, love and adventure, but this series set in our world, dealing with shapeshifters and the people who love them is an altogether less hopeful place, one where love and grief walk hand in hand. Shapeshifters live on the edges of society, in homeless shelters and state parks and the people who love them have to make enormous sacrifices to keep their secrets hidden. All our POV characters are human, people who have given up everything to love shapeshifters, to raise them, to marry them, to look after them, the shifters themselves are alien and unknowable, no matter how beloved they might be. The support people are our main characters, and in this book they start to form a community, to help each other out, to claim some life and love for themselves, but still their role seems to be that of endless suffering and it was all a bit much. I need to find something happy to read now!

Darlene says

A lovely, bittersweet story about ordinary people with ordinary lives--they work at middle class jobs, they worry about paying their bills, they love their families. The difference in their lives is, some of them are

shape-shifters.

There aren't any villains in this novel. No vampire councils, no wolf packs, just people like Melanie and Brody. Melanie's spent her life protecting her half-sister Ann, a shape-shifter who turns into a white husky. Brody's a free-lance writer (introduced in *The Shape of Desire*) working on a book about shifters, and he wants information from Melanie about Ann.

Melanie and Brody's relationship grows in a slow, thoughtful fashion that seems quite real, and as Melanie realizes Ann is changing in a way where Melanie won't be able to protect her anymore, Brody and her friends are there for her.

I thought I was burned out by paranormal books, but Shinn gives us something more with the characters, a depth and maturity missing from many other novels. They're reminiscent of Maggie Stiefvater's books and will be appreciated by readers who enjoyed her *Shiver* series.

Lisa says

I was one of the people who really, really disliked the first book in Shinn's shape-shifting series. I feel that Shinn's particular brand of romance doesn't work in a modern/real-world setting the way it does in fantasy or science fiction; reading about women or men who will die if they can't be together makes me roll my eyes. So I went into this book expecting little to nothing, after the dissatisfying tale of Maria and Dante and a relationship I thought bordered on the emotionally abusive.

I'm delighted to say how wrong I was.

The story of Melanie and Ann, sisters who are equally devoted to each other, was wonderful. Yes, there was romance that went a bit too far for my liking, and a plot point (leftover from the first novel) that made me shake my head and wonder if Shinn had forgotten where she'd taken us the first time around. But the book was touching, and I adored the protagonists. And in this book, I feel like she's branching out and finally touching the wider world of shifters. The first book didn't feel like a set-up to a series, but this one does. I almost wish this one had come first.

new_user says

Best Sharon Shinn ever. Coming from a Twelve Houses fan. *Still Life with Shapeshifter* was unexpectedly moving and bittersweet and human. This is magical realism more than urban fantasy because *Shapeshifter* hinges on a visceral event located in every person's life: letting go of a loved one. That's *Shapeshifter's* theme. No adventure. So I'd relate this to something like *My Sister's Keeper* more than, say, *Moon Called*. I waffled between four or five stars because this could have been even stronger, perhaps without the supernatural. Five stars, though, ultimately for wringing so much sorrow from me, enough that I was dying to finish the book just so that I wouldn't have to come back to the sadness, for the understanding of human nature and the insights that inspired a "Yes! That's exactly what it's like!" response, and for the beautiful prose:

"You would not have believed there could be so many variations on the same basic color, from the regal emerald of the firs to the shy lime of the willows. And when the flowering trees are in bloom, as they are now, it's like a Seurat painting, pointillist clusters of brilliant color stretching across the woven canvas of branch and sky."

An insight:

"I learned to not care if I made people mad or hurt their feelings when I did something didn't want me to do. I learned that I *could* ignore what they said, and the world wouldn't end, as long as I didn't mind if they were upset. My sisters call this my stubborn streak. I call it a survival skill."

Oh, yes, and a nice romance as well. Brody's a lovely man, and it's nice to see some wooing in romance, some patience and healthiness rather than brooding, tortured souls in antagonistic relationships all the time, not that those don't have their place, LOL. But if anyone's talented enough to write the "ordinary," it's Shinn.

PS. Points for portraying the reality of babies, which is mostly fussing most of the time. Unlike Hollywood's convenience babies, available at your local Walmart, LOL.
