



An Actual Life

Abigail Thomas

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In this delightful novel, Abigail Thomas takes readers back to the summer of 1960 and into the heart of a young woman embarking on a marriage not exactly made in heaven.

An Actual Life Details

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Author : Abigail Thomas

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Amanda Bynum says

I think that Abigail Thomas had just finished *Where The Heart Is* and *Diary of a Mad Housewife* when she started writing *An Actual Life*. It just didn't have that spark of originality, that newness that makes me think "wow, I've never read anything like this before." *An Actual Life* tells the story of Virginia, a young married woman completely unprepared for marriage and motherhood. Her husband is still in love with his high school girlfriend and her parents are soulless and uncaring. So no, not a feel-good tale, but that would be forgivable if it were a compelling read. It's not.

An Actual Life - C-

Kelly says

The story was interesting but the ending was predictable. It's a fast read although sometimes you want to smack on of the characters for being stupid.

Jane says

I read this book because I really liked "A Three Dog Life." and I've read essays by Abigail Thomas as well. I think she got into the mind of this young wife and mother. Not exactly a pleasant place to be, but I felt I was there. The characters were complicated. And the ending felt utterly true to the story. Not sure how to rate these books. I feel as though I "really like" everything.

Gwen Owen says

Loved every page of this book except the final one. I can forgive an ending that is a little too convenient and predictable though, because the writing was so lovely throughout.

Rebecca says

I read the first 46 pages. Thomas writes terrific memoirs-in-essays, so I was intrigued to try her fiction. Nineteen-year-old Virginia got pregnant the first time she slept with Buddy, and now she's married to him and a stay-at-home mother to Madeline. Buddy gets to go out to attend summer school and paint houses for some extra cash, and he also seems to see plenty of his high school girlfriend, Irene, who's now married to Chick.

This reads like a cheap knockoff of Anne Tyler, and the shortage of punctuation is maddening. With its quirky, matter-of-fact characters in dysfunctional situations, it's what I've always expected Anne Lamott's novels would be like – and indeed, she gives a cover blurb. I've been wary of trying Lamott's fiction because I doubt it can live up to her memoirs, and unfortunately that is true of Thomas's.

Favorite line: “I am sure if I look in the freezer I will find the piece of wedding cake I wrapped in tinfoil to eat on our first anniversary when I thought we were going to have a different kind of marriage.”

Natalie Seaton says

I absolutely loved this book. The way the author captured every character's personality and quirks was amazing.

I also enjoyed the way the book was written, in a way that made you feel like you were right there with Virginia.

There were many times that I wanted to smack her husband for being so horribly rude.

Virginia is very likable and friendly.

:) Easy summer read!

Shiloh says

This is a story of a young mother who completely hates her husband. I was completely caught up in the hatred with her and considered her someone who's next in line to speak to Dr. Laura. But her narration is funny! She's just soooo irriatated! Is she crazy? Is she creating the scandal in her life? It was hard to root for her, but I think you'd like this read.

Keri says

I liked that this book continued characters from several of her short stories in *Getting Over Tom*. Since those were some of my favorite stories, I liked getting to know more of their story. It's a sad story and doesn't go the way you might hope, but it's very real and honest in ways that make you feel like someone is finally capturing something you've always believed you were the only one to think that way.

Amber says

I hadn't read a novel in a while, so I took my Mom's recommendation to get into this one. It's light and a quick read, but it had some of those great moments where an author says something you've always known, but didn't know that you knew until you read it. It also made me laugh a lot in recognition.

Kendra says

I just loved this little book!! Such a quirky mix of characters and testament to what the heart wants.

Christi says

This book was a quick read. I read it in 3 days and I'm a slow reader!

It was sort of dissappointing and predictable, but I did like the writer's language usage to describe things and feelings. The main character annoyed me a little though. It could be that I didn't like the book as much because I didnt' like the main character much!

Mal says

The protagonist of this book drives me insane. Part of me can relate to her, and part of me thinks she's an idiot. Part of me thought the book was incredibly simplistic, and part of me thinks there is poignant, hidden meaning on every page. I hate Buddy, and I want to strangle Virginia for staying with him. However, I'm not buying the end.

Mary says

After reading Abigail Thomas' moving memoir "A Three Dog Life", I was curious to read her fictionalized semi-autobiographical "An Actual Life." In the early 60's, Virginia, a minister's daughter from the Northeast, is plunged into a shotgun marriage and early motherhood (and expelled from her college) due to an unplanned pregnancy. She is struggling to maintain her identity and this leads to marital strife as she yearns to regain the approval of cold and distant parents and to maintain the familiar customs, accents, and superstitions of her childhood which was really not long past. Meanwhile, Buddy, her husband, is chafing at losing his freedom and his first love. It was a good reminder of mores and expectations in middle America before the sexual revolution of the late 60's. This is when many of our parents came of age and it was clearly a different time. The story is told in the first person from Virginia's point of view and, though spare, the writing perfectly evokes the psychology of the know-it-all late teen thrown into waters too deep.

Krista says

I didn't like this book much. It was like half a book, or a third. You don't know why Virginia is the way she is. I wanted to know more about her, her family, her mom (bi-polar?), if she's gorgeous, not very smart, what? I think if it had had multiple points of view it could have been a much richer novel.

S.leeds says

An Actual Life is about a nineteen year old girl in the 60s, Virginia, who had gotten pregnant byt her boyfriend, Buddy. She was kicked out of school and her parents arranged for her to get married Buddy. The story is set to the summer after their baby girl was born. The couple moved in with Buddy's favorite aunt, Dot. Virginia and Buddy have problems with their marrige due to the fact that Buddy still loves his ex girlfriend. This book may not sound as good as described but they narrator has a very funny point of view about things and fun word choice. Even if you've never been in that situation, you can't help but symphysis Virgina. She also mentions things you always knew but you never had thought of. It was a bit suprising how it ended, like dancer in the dark suprising, but inevidable.

