



The Stuff That Never Happened

Maddie Dawson

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What if you were married to a wonderful husband for twenty-eight years but in love with another man? What if you were in love with them both?

Annabelle McKay knows she shouldn't have any complaints. She's been in a stable marriage that's lasted almost three decades and has provided her with two wonderful children, thousands of family dinners around a sturdy oak table, and a husband so devoted that he schedules lovemaking into his calendar every Wednesday morning. Other wives envy the fact that Grant is not the type of man who would ever cheat on her or leave her for a younger woman. The trouble is Annabelle isn't sure she wants to be married to Grant anymore. The trouble is she's still in love with someone else.

In the early tumultuous years of her marriage, Annabelle carried on a clandestine affair with the one person whose betrayal would hurt her husband the most. When it ended, she and Grant found their way back together and made a pact that they would never speak of that time again. But now years later, with her children grown and gone, and an ominous distance opening between them, she can't help but remember those glorious, passionate days and wonder if she chose the right man.

Then, when called to New York City to help care for her pregnant daughter, Annabelle bumps into her old lover. Offered a second chance at an unforgettable love, she must decide between the man who possesses her heart and the husband who has stood squarely by her side. A journey into the what-ifs that haunt us all, *The Stuff That Never Happened* is an intricate, heartfelt examination of modern marriage that brims with truths about the nature of romantic love.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Stuff That Never Happened Details

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Laura says

I cant believe how many people rated this book so favorably and said they enjoyed and even liked the characters. I found the main character incredibly self absorbed and selfish. The betrayal of her young husband was just disgusting to me and the fact that she continued to persevere on the other man for so many years while she was still married, seemed so unfair to her husnad. However, I didnt really like Grant or Jeremiah that much either.

The book was an easy read and had some enjoyable parts but I couldnt get past the subject matter. I also found it very predictable and depressing.

Jo Anne B says

I ended up really loving this honest portrayl of a woman torn between two men. I almost put it down in the beginning because I didn't think the characters clicked but I am glad I stuck with it. Turns out the reason I almost stopped reading this was the reason for the story in the first place.

Anabelle, a fifty year old empty nester, takes a look back at her marriage of 28 years to Grant. With the kids gone she is not getting the attention and love she needs from her husband who is a boring, rigid professor and labor historian. He is writing a novel and very busy while she feels ignored and lonely so she wonders "what if"? She fantasizes about Jermiah, Grant's best friend that she cheated on him with when they first got married.

Annabelle feels like her marriage to Grant lacks the passion, sex, and spontaneity that her and Jeremiah had. She recounts the first time she met Grant at a party, which he never usually goes to, and they have completely different personalities. Grant seemed too serious and mature for a college student and Annabelle came off as a wannabe feminist.

And she marries him 6 months later! With the way he proposed, how could she have said no? I was shocked that he felt so deeply about Annabelle because he seemed stoic and not emotional. But when he spoke of his feelings for Annabelle and spilled his heart to her it brought tears to your eyes at how beautiful it was and made your heart melt. But he is old fashioned, well-mannered and wants to be a provider and keep Annabelle safe, so rather than tending to his newlywed, he puts his career first and leaves her in the background. So she cheats on him with his exciting best friend that spends all of his time with her while her new husband never sees her.

Fast forward 26 years and Grant is still Grant, putting his work ahead of Annabelle and she is wondering is she would have been better off with Jeremiah. She ends up seeing him again while tending to her pregnant daughter and she makes some very important discoveries that reassure her of her marriage.

I loved how real this book was. These were situations that people go through all the time and they are heart breaking and life changing. This book was filled with love, passion, family, friendships, and self discoveries.

There are several lessons to be learned from this book and one of them is to not to make the same mistake

Annabelle had once made and misinterpret something as boring when it is really packed with emotion.

Shannon says

This book was full of amazing quotes that will resonate with me for awhile. My favorite parts: "I tell her the thing I truly believe - that sex and love and parenthood and complications can coexist, that you can be happy even when sex is something you steal away for once you've gotten the last of the dishes washed and the kid with the fever to finally go to sleep. But then my throat is suddenly clogged up with so much sadness and longing and regret that I think I will choke. It's because of today, because of all the jumbled stuff Jeremiah stirred up in me - memories of that raw, yearning sexuality that Sophie is talking about, the youth and passion that she has no idea I even know about. I won't have that again. That's the truth of it. It will not come again, not in this lifetime.....I know that restraint was actually the best thing that could have happened, and that I am going to be all right, and that it's okay to still love Jeremiah just a little, or even a lot, and yet not do anything about it."

Some readers may be more than a bit offended by this book, as it deals with the narrator, Annabelle's, extramarital affair and her lifelong conflicting feelings for and between her husband, Grant, and her lover, Jeremiah. For me, it grabbed ahold quickly and never let go.

Meghan says

this book was about 100 pages (i'm guessing because i read it on my kindle) too long!!! not only that, but the narrator was SO annoying! if she was a friend of mine, but i highly doubt that i would be friends with a woman such as annabelle, i would've taken her by the shoulder & shaken her! i definitely would have asked her WTH she was thinking. not for what she did as a young, newly married woman, but for the way she let it affect the rest of her life... as a wife, as a mother, as a person. how could you POSSIBLY allow the mere THOUGHT of someone, that treated you so badly, to alter your appreciation, or lack thereof, for the life you're currently leading?!?!?! and the main problem in her marriage is LACK OF COMMUNICATION!!! how could you go so many years, expecting someone to change, or to treat you differently, but never express your DESIRE for the person to treat you differently? FRUSTRATING!!!!

Allison says

A beautifully written look into the choices we make in our past and the consequences that they carry long into the future. I really enjoyed this one.

Nancy Baker says

Okay – so there are all of the famous sayings, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”; “You always want what you can’t have”, “Distance makes the heart grow fonder”, etc., but what if 26 years ago you crossed the fence without thinking and your world almost blew apart? What if your husband was good enough and strong enough to forgive your past discretions if you promise to walk the straight and

narrow? What happens when the one you've dreamed about for the past 26 years is finally standing right in front of you again? That is a lot of "what ifs", but what if you don't have the guts to say no?

This was an excellent story of what a lack of communication in a marriage can cause. It is hard to say "I'll love you forever" when you are 20 because, let's face it, what 20-year-old really knows who they are yet? Having been in a marriage for 40+ years, this story was a bit unsettling for me given the amount of actions performed on a whim by young and old alike, without thought of repercussions. I would like to think that people are more sensible than that, but I also realize today's world seems to be a bit narcissistic, which explains the "what's in it for me" attitude throughout the story.

All in all, the story shows fallible people in an imperfect world trying to make sense of life. And in the end, isn't that what all of us are doing -- trying to abide? Hoping to find happiness and seeking contentment in a life lived? Maybe the key to a successful life and a successful relationship is not to spend much time thinking about the stuff that never happened.

Sonia says

Credo che a volte, tra le centinaia di letture in cui siamo immersi durante l'anno, sia un bene trovare una storia che non appartiene al nostro genere, che non avremmo preferito se qualcuno ce ne avesse parlato, di fronte a cui forse avremmo storto il naso.

La trama di Facciamo finta che non sia successo niente mi aveva attratta a suo modo, ma ritrovarmi in quella storia mi aveva fatta sentire un'intrusa: non voglio leggere di storie quotidiane di amori che si trascinano, che forse sfociano in tradimenti, o ancora peggio in tentativi di recupero di un matrimonio ormai agli sgoccioli. Non ci vedevo nessuna necessità in una storia del genere, nessuna originalità, dato che non sarebbe stata né la prima né l'ultima a raccontare di matrimoni andati a male e delle loro conseguenze, nessuna particolare gioia nell'assistere a questi racconti.

E allora perché mi è così piaciuto? Perché mi sono affezionata a Annabelle e alla sua pazienza, perché ho detestato Grant e la sua indifferenza e ho tremato di fronte alla possibilità della rinascita dell'amore tra Annabelle e Jeremiah?

Perché a pochi passi da quel che si intuiva sarebbe stato un lieto fine mi sono ritrovata felice, serena, emozionata e quasi commossa per il miracolo che stava accadendo?

Ho provato a darmi varie risposte ma mi sa che solo una è quella giusta. Maddie Dawson ha aggredito la mia di indifferenza ricordandomi, mio malgrado, che la lettrice che è in me ha bisogno anche di romanticismo, di amore, di credere nella felicità della vita, di un amore che può durare per sempre. La Dawson ha risvegliato il mio spirito romantico ormai assuefatto a quelle storie d'amore sensazionali, paranormali, fantastiche ai limiti della realtà, dove lui è bello misterioso tenebroso gentile ironico furbetto affascinante tenero e chi più ne ha più ne metta e lei non può che innamorarsi di uno così: perfetto sotto ogni punto di vista.

Amori finti, costruiti a tavolino, banali e scontati.

Provate ad innamorarvi di uno che dopo anni e anni di matrimonio sembra non guardarvi più negli occhi, annoiarsi delle vostre chiacchiere, evitare le discussioni perché sarebbero solo una distrazione dal proprio lavoro, uno che alla passione improvvisa preferisce programmare il sesso una volta alla settimana, sempre lo stesso giorno alla stessa ora.

Si può provare amore di fronte ad un uomo così? O forse ad un certo punto si deve accettare l'idea che il matrimonio sia un prodotto con una data di scadenza, sapendo che dopo quella data niente sarà mai più come una volta?

Non posso dire che la Dawson si sia distinta per uno stile particolare o una trama originale, ma mi ha tenuta

sveglia e attenta per il corso delle 395 pagine perché mi ha messo di fronte a una storia matura, vera e probabilmente simile a quella di tante donne sposate ormai da più di vent'anni. Una storia che non farei mai leggere a nessuno al di sotto dei 25, perché sono sicura che non capirebbe né accetterebbe la scelta di Annabelle.

Eppure, anche se dall'alto dei miei 35 anni sono ben lontana dall'esperienza della protagonista, mi sono ritrovata a comprenderne difficoltà e scelte, e ad apprezzare ogni pagina e ogni decisione.

In questa estate dedicata alle letture più di ogni altra in passato, questa era davvero necessaria: perché mi ha fatto di nuovo credere, e, soprattutto, amare.

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Karen Skinner says

"I know this feeling: It's a cousin of the mood that made me cry among the pork chops." This book may not resonate for you if you have never wept in the aisles of Whole Foods, but so far I am eagerly picking it up in my spare moments. There's a mother who dabbles in art, and there's a daughter who is going to be a mother. There's a lot more but those are my basic requirements.

Catherine McKenzie says

Really glad I picked this up. Maddie Dawson has a great way with character; the main character here is just as realistic as a slightly lost, a little wild twenty-year old as she is as a down to earth fifty year old. Recommend.

Silvia Devitofrancesco says

Grant e Annabelle sono sposati da molti anni, vivono nel New Hampshire e trascorrono un'esistenza monotona e grigia. I figli, Nick e Sophie, ormai sono grandi, hanno le loro vite e vivono lontano, Grant è ossessionato dal libro che sta scrivendo e ad Annabelle, costantemente in preda a crisi di nervi, non resta che fare la donna di casa, trascurata dal marito col quale fa l'amore ogni mercoledì mattina. Le improvvise complicazioni durante la gravidanza della figlia Sophie, permettono ad Annabelle di recarsi a New York per assisterla, ma Sophie non sa che quella città tanto sfavillante è custode di un grande segreto. Proprio lì, ventisei anni prima, la giovane Annabelle ha tradito il marito ed è proprio lì che, per puro caso, si ritroverà faccia a faccia col suo amante che non ha mai dimenticato. Tra luoghi immensi, lacrime, sorrisi, gioie, dolori, incomprensioni e il grande miracolo della Vita, Annabelle ha la possibilità di riflettere sul suo passato e di raccontare la sua storia.

“Annabelle, voglio che tu sappia che averti perso è stata una cosa da cui non mi sono più ripreso. E' stato il più grande errore che abbia mai commesso. Potrei non avere un'altra occasione per dirtelo.”

L'opera, di genere rosa, si presenta come una celebrazione dell'amore nelle sue diverse forme. I

Il libro è colmo d'amore: l'amore coniugale, il più difficile da vivere, continuamente messo alla prova dalle insidie e dagli imprevisti della vita, l'amore adultero, sessualmente appagante, ma capace di lasciare un vuoto incolmabile, l'amore per i figli, bello, puro, genuino, il più autentico.

La protagonista, giunta al traguardo dei cinquant'anni, mette la sua anima a nudo. Senza esitazione, ripercorre gli avvenimenti che la portarono a innamorarsi dell'uomo che l'ha chiesta in moglie e, successivamente, riprova sulla sua pelle la delusione nel prendere coscienza che quel matrimonio non fosse ciò che aveva sempre sognato, poiché non è facile essere la moglie di un uomo per il quale al primo posto, nella sua vita, ci sarà sempre e solo il lavoro.

Questa delusione di fondo è la scintilla che provoca il grande adulterio. Anche Jeremiah soffre a causa di un matrimonio sbagliato e di una'esistenza all'ombra di sua moglie. E' stato proprio questo a unirli e, successivamente, a separarli.

L'autrice sviluppa tematiche difficili con grande delicatezza. Riesce a fornire un ritratto completo dei personaggi, dando grande importanza al piano psicologico, focalizzandosi sulle reazioni e sui sentimenti.

Lo stile è semplice, lineare e fluido. L'opera è un continuo viaggio nel tempo, tra passato e presente, condotto con magistrale competenza così da non creare confusione nel lettore.

Un romanzo capace di rapire il lettore, di condurlo per mano attraverso le vicende narrate, come qualunque buon libro dovrebbe fare, ma, soprattutto, è in grado di farlo riflettere su quel sentimento meraviglioso e contraddittorio che chiamiamo "Amore".

Girls Gone Reading says

The Stuff that Never Happened took a hold of me early, and it never let me know. I was initially intrigued by the mystery of the plot: What could their big secret be? What could be so bad in your marriage that you would rather just ignore it? But the mystery aspect of the novel was just enough to get me into the plot. Then Annabelle and the fantastic story took over.

Usually, I have a little trouble with narrators. Sometimes I find them frustrating. Sometimes I wish they would turn right when they go left. Usually, I feel like they are friends that I just can't control. Annabelle was not in my control, but Maddie Dawson did such a great job of letting me in her head that I could truly picture her. I could see why she would react the way that she did. Throughout the majority of the novel Annabelle was described so well that her movements were not predictable, but they were relatable. I rooted for Annabelle. I rooted for her whole family. I wanted to see them win and make it all work.

I have not been married as long as Annabelle and Grant, but already I can see how a good marriage could turn out badly. I love my husband, but marriage is hard work (daily) and at every turn you and your partner could lose sight of the prize. Maddie Dawson did such an excellent job with The Stuff that Never Happened because you see deep into another couple's marriage. You understand it. She took marriage apart, and then she let her characters put it back together. I enjoyed this book tremendously, and I hope you do too.

TG says

I think this book was meant to be about love, family, and the consequences of our actions. I think that the author intended that you feel for the main character Annabelle and her inattentive husband who is so involved in his work that he even schedules sex. However, I saw this book as a story of selfishness and infidelity by Annabelle. I didn't feel sorry for her at all. She chose to suddenly marry Grant and follow him to New York City. And as soon as things got difficult, Annabelle had an affair and "fell in love" with Grant's colleague Jeremiah (Annabelle and Grant were living with Jeremiah, his wife Carly and their twin toddlers). Grant was not a very attentive husband. He spent all of his time at work or working while at home. However, this does not excuse Annabelle's behavior. I felt sorry for Grant throughout the entire book. He was mistreated, but was able to find forgiveness in his heart and he ended up building a life with Annabelle even though his wife was secretly still having fantasies about her ex-lover Jeremiah.

The book is written from Annabelle's perspective in the present time and back when she first married Grant. So you know that she ends up with Grant, but the story explains how things progressed and how Annabelle ended up back with Grant building a life for the past 28 years.

Greta says

Vorrei precisare che non l'ho finito, non ci sono riuscita. Arrivi a metà e ti viene spontaneo suicidarti con il tuo Kobo in mano. Troppo palloso e troppo fastidioso, arrivata a metà non ce l'ho più fatta e l'ho persino tolto dal mio Kobo. Sapevo che non dovevo fidarmi di storie di cinquantenni che hanno crisi matrimoniali e blablabla. Ma la parte peggiore era nei flashback di quando si sono conosciuti, palloso il doppio. Grant è uno di quei personaggi che ti viene voglia di dargli quattro schiaffoni e urlargli "DATTI UNA SVEGLIATA COCCO" ma è un libro e purtroppo non si può. Non dovrei dare una valutazione ma do 1 stellina giusto perchè sono arrivata a metà.

Beth says

I really enjoyed this entire book. It was sweet and charming and the situations and characters and dialogue all felt real to me.

This book goes back and forth between the late 1970s and 2005. Annabelle impulsively marries a nice guy who she barely knows when she is 21 years old and then ends up having a very serious love affair with a married man. 28 years later, Annabelle is still married to her husband Grant and as the book unfolds we find out all the stuff that happened...and all the stuff that didn't.

Literature is like looking at paintings - some things you like, some things you don't. There was something about this book that just appealed to me - perhaps it was the humor which kept even the heavy moments light.

Pam says

This was an excellent book, I feel like I could go on reading about Grant and Annabelle forever. I want to read about them growing old together. The story is told in alternating chapters between the beginning of Grant and Annabelle's marriage in the 1970's and currently, 2005 as they face the trials of being married 20+ years.

What makes this book work so successfully is the characterization. I really feel that Grant and Annabelle are fully fleshed characters. I understand why they do what they do. When they are falling in love and struggling with the beginnings of their marriage, it makes sense, it feels real. When Annabelle falls in love with another man, it's believable and it doesn't present her as an evil person. You completely understand why she does what she does.

Since she is also telling the story in 2005, you know that her and Grant stay together. So, while reading the part of the affair, you are constantly trying to figure out what happens, how will the affair end, how does she keep Grant?

Above all else, this is a love story. Not a flashy, whirlwind love story, but a solid, real life love story. It would make an excellent movie.
