



Thin Skin

Emma Forrest

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From the author dubbed "a literary Lolita" by *Vanity Fair* comes the perfect portrait of a young actress caught in a downward spiral of self-destruction. Edgy and funny at the same time, *Thin Skin* provides a realistic glimpse into the dark and inviting world of fame from the writer who penned *Namedropper* when she was just twenty-one.

Everyone thinks Ruby is beautiful except for Ruby, who is so hell-bent on being ugly that she's driven away the man who loves her, the agent who swears he could have made her a star, and the delectable male costar of her latest project, *Mean People Suck*. After all, Ruby believes that what's going on outside should reflect what's on the inside -- and inside she's a mess. Burned-out at the age of twenty, she's living alone in a world of hotels and fast food -- none of which she keeps down -- haunted by the memory of her childhood love, cutting herself, and tempted to repeat her mother's tragic fate. She needs to find a new way of being....and fast.

Thin Skin Details

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From Reader Review Thin Skin for online ebook

Blair says

AWFUL. Has the unique distinction of being the worst book I've ever managed to *finish* reading.

Below is the review I wrote at the time (circa 2002). It's a bit pretentious, but basically sums my feelings up well enough:

This is a strange, alarmingly self-indulgent book; filled with angst and shock for the sake of angst and shock, it seems intent on dragging a gullible audience further into believing that self-pitying 'unhappiness' is something to be applauded. The central character, Ruby, a vain, self-centred actress (or, as the 'cast of characters' would have it, 'a fuck-up') appears, from the very beginning, to hate and harm herself because there is nothing better to do. For this reason I found it impossible to sympathise with her, and a book with a protagonist the reader couldn't care less about is immediately in trouble.

The author never quite glamorises the main character's self-harm and bulimia, but she does have a vaguely romanticised view of such behaviour which suggests that her knowledge of it is gleaned from autobiographies and teen films, as opposed to real life. It almost seems that she expects us to revel in Ruby's self-abuse in the same manner the character herself does; one wonders if Forrest realises exactly how obnoxious her protagonist is, or if she is as blindly in love with Ruby as Ruby is with herself. The blurb paints Ruby as 'a seductive blend of heroine and whore', but she is neither seductive, nor as triumphant as 'heroine' suggests, nor anything as dramatic as a whore. She is simply an unpleasant mess through nobody's fault but her own. Forrest is a pseudo-Plath, desperate to emulate the anguish of true pain but quite clearly lacking in any experience of it whatsoever.

Elements of the story are simply unbelievable. We are asked to accept that Ruby is a Hollywood star, yet no satisfactory explanation is given as to how she attained this position. The juxtaposition of Ruby's 'fame' with a plethora of pop-culture references means that fiction rests very uncomfortably against fact. Forrest makes a show of the fact that her main character is sexually aware at the age of twelve, but rather than being frightening, or an explanation of why Ruby has become what she is, the fashion in which this is presented is so laughable it's just boring. Even the dialogue is often poor, and the device of telling the story from a number of points of view falls somewhat flat because Forrest's style varies little between characters.

In spite of all this, bizarrely enough, the book picks up once Ruby has attempted suicide and found herself in hospital. Forrest is at her strongest when writing surreal, dreamlike scenes which may or may not be happening. The conclusion, too, is more impressive than much that precedes it; surprisingly, when our 'heroine' has come to her senses and recognised that the world does not revolve around her, she is likeable. This is the only element of the novel that gives a glimmer of hope that Forrest is not a one-trick pony, that she is wiser and more aware than we might have previously assumed. However, Thin Skin undoubtedly ends as it started; self-indulgently. Is it pointless? I suspect so; it isn't written to argue a case, but nor is it an enjoyable piece of throwaway chick-lit. Ultimately, it's hard to shake the feeling that perhaps Forrest would have been better off leaving this particular tale in her imagination.

Laurel Beth says

Changed the rating from 2010 - what was once an lean 3 Stars is now a swole 5. The footpath to fairyland hasn't changed, but the witch's shack wasn't the destination after all. There are more demons in our forest, not telegraphed in fucked-up-girl literature. In the past week I've called all the females I see "woman" and all the men "girl". Men are the bearers of the thin skin. We women have overcome the threat from wolves in our beds. We have cut down brambles and licked our own wounds. We have split the earth to make the third path. We deserve our names. In victory, you may call us women.

Sarah Britt says

As harsh as it may sound, I have never felt such an intense dislike for a character as I feel for Ruby. I find absolutely nothing about her to be redeemable. She is basically the very definition of the infamous "Manic-pixie-dream-girl" and if feel like the author is trying wayyy too hard to make her into this weird, fucked up, attention seeking young girl, to the point that she becomes a terrible cliche. The only women I can see possibly finding Ruby relatable are the ones that also try way too hard to come off as weird and fucked up because they think it'll get them the attention they so desperately seek. The ones that insist they're just not like other girls. It all reeks of teenage girl angst which has become a cliche in and of itself.

At first, I thought maybe I had missed something important so I read it again. And again. And again. Only to discover each time that my strong dislike for her was just as pronounced as it was all the previous times I read it. If anything, I disliked her character even MORE. I can't honestly see myself recommending this book to anyone. I would actually be too embarrassed to recommend it to anyone. I would despise anyone connecting me with this book in their mind if I was the one to recommend it. I couldn't bear it. So it's safe to say it would never happen.

Brooke Caroline says

This was a quite eccentric book. To enjoy it, you had to be familiar with Emma Forrest and her writing style, like myself. I, who have read many books about suicide, depression, and eating disorders, felt that this was by far the best in that topic, perhaps because Miss Emma struggled with bulimia herself. You have to be willing to read this book for awhile and really try to understand and hear Ruby's voice. I loved this novel and feel that you must be open minded when reading it. It was quite spectacular!

Dolores says

This is an unusual book to recommend, because it is not the story or characters that kept me intrigued, but the writing style of the young Emma Forrest. Her style is quirky, intriguing, and out of nowhere. She could describe baking a cake, and you'd be interested. The observations made through her characters are written in a style that stays in your head, even if the characters do not.

Although I recommend this book, the plot is not much to recommend. The story centers around Ruby, a Christina Ricci-esque actress who is described as narcissistic, bulimic, and selfish, and has absolutely no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Although we get a peek into her past, the death of her mother, and her emancipation from her father, it is difficult to feel any real connection to her as a character. There is no real cohesiveness to her relationships with any of the other thinly-drawn characters in the book, including the painter she has pined for since the age of twelve. Ruby has no conscience, and I found it impossible to feel

connected to her or her story.

Still, Emma Forrest is very young, and has a tremendous amount of potential. I would like to read other things she has written, since she simply writes in a style that reels you in, regardless of the vapidness of the plot or characters.

Margaret says

While I preferred her recent memoir "Your Voice in My Head," this was an interesting read. Parts were difficult to relate to, and the character of Ruby is far less sympathetic than Forrest herself. The ending was also somewhat unclear and unsatisfying, but I do enjoy her sort of manic, whirling style of writing about psychologically damaged people careening around like pinballs in a machine and the mad, passionate infatuation they can invoke in others before their self-destructive tendencies turn on them.

Angela says

A girl I hung round with for about 6 months at university bought me this as a present. I can only assume that this girl hated me if she thought I would enjoy this self-indulgent piece of crap masquerading as literature.

Elizabeth says

There were times when the writing was a little cliche or tried to hard to be poetic, but it was a quick and fairly interesting read. The main character is messed up and there were times I wanted someone to punch her... But ultimately things "worked out". Not great, but it would probably make a decent movie.

Cari says

I think I would have absolutely hated *Thin Skin* if I hadn't read Emma Forrest's memoir, *Your Voice in my Head*, first. It helped put the ugliness and self-destructiveness of the protagonist of this book into perspective, as Ruby is a bit of an extension of Emma herself. As she goes through a string of unhealthy relationships and goes from a "semi-movie star" to a "pseudo-movie star", Ruby's eccentricities morph further and further into bulimia, drug abuse, and self-mutilation. This could definitely only be written by someone who experienced the same illness. In that, this book is definitely unique and I do enjoy Emma's writing style, but it is definitely not for everyone.

Kati says

Maybe it's because I have grown up with depression, or because I know what it's like to sometimes feel

exactly the way Ruby does, but I read this book several years ago and it spoke to me in ways that no other book ever has. It has been in my top five for years now, and I re-read it every once in a while and am always unbelievably impressed with how relatable and interesting Emma Forrest's writing is. I have read all of her books, but this is my favorite. I encourage anyone thinking about reading this book to have an open mind, and especially if you struggle with depression, this is an awesome story.

Sarah says

On certain levels I get it. On others I do not.

Maxine says

this is the first book I ever read by Emma Forrest, and the first time I read it was about 3 years ago, and it has been my favorite book ever since. I read it over and over. I love it because of how self-indulgent it is. That's Ruby. She is self-centered and self-hating. she is eccentric and moody. She was not made to be likable, because in so many ways she isn't. She is flawed beyond the point of repair. Broken. and that's why I love her. She is real. I also love Emma's style of writing. the free-flow of thought. I think it takes a creative and open minded person to read this book and get it, and enjoy it. which I thoroughly did. Long live Ruby.

Lee says

I still have a thing for buying books that have vibrant colorful covers. I always will. I wanted to hug Ruby and tell her, dude you are so messed up right now. And then hug her again. So I re-read this a bunch of times. The writing wasn't too fantastical and it wasn't about being drawn in with the authors words, but I got heavily attached to Ruby's antics.

Smurf says

Something better

A bit chaotic in the writing (maybe that was the purpose). Was hoping for something better or at least something I could clearly visualize.

Julia Putnam says

I didn't like this book. It didn't make sense to me and I don't understand why it was written. There doesn't seem to be a point and I have no idea what, if anything, the author was trying to express. It didn't seem like just telling a story. I wish that the main character had something to make me like her but I just didn't, so I didn't care about her or her story or what happened to her.

