



Eleanor Oliphant is completely fine

By Gail Honeyman

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Genre & subject

Chick lit

Friendship

Single women

Synopsis

Eleanor Oliphant has learned how to survive - but not how to live Eleanor Oliphant leads a simple life. She wears the same clothes to work every day, eats the same meal deal for lunch every day and buys the same two bottles of vodka to drink every weekend. Eleanor Oliphant is happy. Nothing is missing from her carefully timetabled life. Except, sometimes, everything. One simple act of kindness is about to shatter the walls Eleanor has built around herself. Now she must learn how to navigate the world that everyone else seems to take for granted - while searching for the courage to face the dark corners she's avoided all her life. Change can be good. Change can be bad. But surely any change is better than... fine?

Author biography

Born and raised in Stirling in central Scotland to a mother who worked as a civil servant and a father in science, Honeyman was a voracious reader in her childhood, visiting the library "a ridiculous number of times a week.

She studied French language and literature at Glasgow University, before continuing her education at the University of Oxford for a postgraduate course in French poetry. However, she decided that an academic career was not for her and started a string of "backroom jobs", first as a civil servant in economic development and then as an administrator at Glasgow University.

While working as an administrator, Honeyman enrolled in a Faber Academy writing course, submitting the first three chapters of what would become Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine to a competition for unpublished fiction by female writers, run by Cambridge's Lucy Cavendish College. The book went on to earn numerous awards and wide critical acclaim and won the Costa First Novel Award in 2017

Discussion starters

- Knowing the truth about Eleanor's family, look back through the book to revisit her exchanges with her mother. Did you see what was ahead? How did Honeyman lay the groundwork for the final plot twist?
- What are the different ways that the novel's title could be interpreted? What do you think happens to Eleanor after the book ends?
- Eleanor says, "These days, loneliness is the new cancer—a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don't want to hear the word spoken aloud for fear that they might too be afflicted" (p. 227). Do you agree?
- What does Raymond find appealing about Eleanor? And why does Eleanor feel comfortable opening up to Raymond?
- Eleanor is one of the most unusual protagonists in recent fiction, and some of her opinions and actions are very funny. What were your favourite moments in the novel?
- "Did men ever look in the mirror, I wondered, and find themselves wanting in deeply fundamental ways? When they opened a newspaper or watched a film, were they presented with nothing but exceptionally handsome young men, and did this make them feel intimidated, inferior, because they were not as young, not as handsome?" (p. 74). Eleanor's question is rhetorical and slightly tongue-in-cheek, but worth answering. What are your thoughts? If men don't have this experience, why not? If they do, why is it not more openly discussed?
- Eleanor is frightened that she may become like her mother. Is this a reasonable fear? What is the balance of nature and nurture?
- Is it possible to emerge from a traumatic childhood unscathed?
- Eleanor says, "If someone asks you how you are, you are meant to say FINE. You are not meant to say that you cried yourself to sleep last night because you hadn't spoken to another person for two consecutive days. FINE is what you say" (p. 226–227). Why is this case?
- What is the difference between loneliness and being alone? Which of these applies to Eleanor and why?
- What do you think the future holds for Eleanor and Raymond? How is their relationship portrayed – is it love? And if so, is it romantic love or platonic love?

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