



# Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

by Gail Honeyman

## summary

"Smart, warm, uplifting, the story of an out-of-the-ordinary heroine whose deadpan weirdness and unconscious wit make for an irresistible journey as she realizes the only way to survive is to open her heart. Meet Eleanor Oliphant: she struggles with appropriate social skills and tends to say exactly what she's thinking. That, combined with her unusual appearance (scarred cheek, tendency to wear the same clothes year in, year out), means that Eleanor has become a creature of habit (to say the least) and a bit of a loner. Nothing is missing in her carefully timetabled life of avoiding social interactions, where weekends are punctuated by frozen pizza, vodka, and phone chats with Mummy. But everything changes when Eleanor meets Raymond, the bumbling and deeply unhygienic IT guy from her office. When she and Raymond together save Sammy, an elderly gentleman who has fallen on the sidewalk, the three become the kind of friends who rescue each other from the lives of isolation they have each been living. And it is Raymond's big heart that will ultimately help Eleanor find the way to repair her own profoundly damaged one"

## author

Gail Honeyman wrote her debut novel, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, while working a full time job, and it was shortlisted for the Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize as a work in progress. She has also been awarded the Scottish Book Trust's Next Chapter Award 2014, and was longlisted for BBC Radio 4's Opening Lines, and shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. Gail lives in Glasgow.



## reviews

The central character of Eleanor feels instantly and insistently real, as if she had been patiently waiting in the wings for her cue all along.

-The Guardian

Satisfyingly quirky

-NYTimes

Honeyman's endearing debut is part comic novel, part emotional thriller, and part love story.

-Kirkus Reviews

What I did after finishing *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*:

1. Looked for more books by Gail Honeyman.
2. Discovered that they're aren't any (yet).
3. Immediately started reading it again.

- a DCL Librarian



## discussion questions

*Question #1 is a bit of a spoiler, so we are putting it at the end.*

*Save it till after you've finished the book!*

2. What are the different ways that the novel's title could be interpreted? What do you think happens to Eleanor after the book ends?

3. 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?

4. What does Raymond find appealing about Eleanor? And why does Eleanor feel comfortable opening up to Raymond?

5. Eleanor is one of the most unusual protagonists in recent fiction, and some of her opinions and actions are very funny. What were your favorite moments in the novel?

6. "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?

7. Eleanor is frightened that she may become like her mother. Is this a reasonable fear? What is the balance of nature and nurture?

8. Is it possible to emerge from a traumatic childhood unscathed?

9. 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 the case?

### SPOILER ALERT!

1. 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?

Questions provided by the publisher.

# Loved the book and want more like it? Try out these read-alikes recommended by NoveList.

## read-alikes

### 1. **The Seven Rules of Elvira Carr** by Frances Maynard

Though Eleanor Oliphant is recovering from a difficult upbringing, and Elvira Carr has simply been sheltered, both young women must learn to navigate society on their own, carefully constructing ways to engage with the world in these heartwarming, engaging novels. -- Shauna Griffin

### 2. **The Helpline** by Katherine Collette

Socially awkward women with unrealistic expectations for romance star in these engaging novels about navigating work, family and love. Both books are quirky and witty, but *The Helpline* is lighter and more upbeat in tone. -- Catherine Coles

### 3. **A Man Called Ove** by Fredrik Backman

Lonely, awkward, regimented, maybe a little bit lacking in the social skills department, the sympathetic main characters in these charming, touching novels find their lives changing and expanding when they make unexpected friendships. -- Shauna Griffin

### 4. **The Story of Arthur Truluv** by Elizabeth Berg

Quirky, but likeable, protagonists who lead highly predictable and solitary lives find themselves drawn into unexpected and surprising friendships that open them up to entirely new experiences in these heartwarming and humorous novels. -- Halle Eisenman

### 5. **The Lost for Words Bookshop** by Stephanie Butland

Bristly protagonists overcome childhood trauma and learn to stop keeping people at arm's length in these moving tales that combine humor and heart with a fair dose of angst. -- Halle Eisenman

6. **The Rosie Project** by Graeme C. Simsion

The protagonists of these sweetly heartwarming novels are literal thinkers, used to rules, emotionally a bit inept, and a little naive. A search for romance (*The Rosie Project*) and an unexpected friendship (*Eleanor Oliphant*) changes the way they interact with the world. -- Shauna Griffin

7. **Courting Greta** by Ramsey Hootman

The characters in these moving, often quite funny novels have overcome obstacles that have nevertheless left them closed off to meaningful relationships. New connections help them to accept their pasts and move on to brighter futures. -- Shauna Griffin

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