# *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman

## Synopsis

As the novel begins, Eleanor is an opinionated young woman who makes sweeping and often laugh-out-loud pronouncements on everything from duffle coats to bikini waxes. But what first appears to be the narrative of a prudish and harmless loner soon gives way to reveal darker undercurrents, from Eleanor’s childhood in foster homes to an adulthood punctuated by abusive phone calls from her absent mother.

Two events, however, begin to coax Eleanor out of her shell. First, she develops an unexpected crush on a local musician, Johnnie, and, despite never having met him, she embarks on an imaginary love affair—convinced they have a future together. Second, Eleanor and her colleague Raymond rescue an injured elderly man, Sammy, and this act of kindness sets off a ripple effect in which she both builds a relationship with Sammy and his family and forges a friendship with Raymond.

But just when Eleanor begins to feel truly happy, she discovers the crushing truth about her beloved singer, and her broken fantasy sends her into a spiral of depression and self-harm. Thankfully, Raymond’s friendship saves Eleanor from herself, in ways large and small, and at his urging, she agrees to see a counselor. As she begins to heal, her past is revealed to her in its entirety—and a stunning twist casts the events of the novel in a brand new light.

## Discussion questions

1. What are the different ways that the novel’s title could be interpreted? What do you think happens to Eleanor after the book ends?
2. 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?
3. What does Raymond find appealing about Eleanor? And why does Eleanor feel comfortable opening up to Raymond?
4. 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?
5. Eleanor is frightened that she may become like her mother. Is this a reasonable fear? What is the balance of nature and nurture?
6. 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?

*Synopsis/Discussion question from https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/540586/eleanor-oliphant-is-completely-fine-by-gail-honeyman/*