

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman

5 Stars

Funny, moving, powerful and unique – a great read

29-year-old Eleanor Oliphant spends her days working in an office and avoiding social interaction, and her evenings reading or watching television alone. Her weekends consist of a bottle of vodka and a frozen pizza, and on Wednesdays she has her weekly phone call with Mummy. She doesn't have any friends and has lived in this routine for almost 10 years, but as she sees it, she is completely fine. Then one day she meets Raymond, the IT support worker from her office and together the two of them end up saving Sammy, an elderly man who they see fall on the pavement. This experience brings the three of them together and for the first time in her life, Eleanor starts to feel that she has a chance to have friends and to be 'normal'. As she begins attempting a series of processes to integrate herself into society, she may end up discovering that being 'fine' is more than just existing, and that what she needs to be happy is not exactly what she had expected all along.

This book took me completely by surprise as I wasn't really sure what to expect from either the title or the first few pages. I certainly wasn't expecting a cleverly written and truly moving book about loneliness and what it means to be 'completely fine'. The tale is told from Eleanor's point of view and it quickly becomes apparent from her own attitudes and recollections that she has suffered from some horrifying events in her past - whilst she is physically well, it is evident almost straight away that Eleanor is not doing so great psychologically. The author deals with some pretty dark subject matter in a way that is quite upsetting and moving but she handles it sensitively and also manages to keep it light-hearted – the story never gets bogged down by trauma and sadness. There are plenty of genuinely funny moments scattered throughout to lighten the tone and whilst the subject matter is serious, this is definitely an uplifting story with a positive message.

Eleanor is an extremely unique character who is quirky, awkward, humorous and endearing. As a reader, I cringed at her bizarre social interactions and strikingly literal interpretation of the world but also felt deep sympathy for her as I discovered more about her traumatic childhood and the lonely and pain-filled life she has lived. I was rooting for her throughout the whole book and found that her character developed well as more was revealed about her past. Even when she started to open up and let her guard down with her new friends, she remained consistent and believable. Raymond, Sammy and the other major players in Eleanor's life were also colourfully rendered and I felt as if I really got to know their personalities as I was reading.

In summary, I would definitely recommend this book to anyone – it is a heart-warming read about the healing power of friendship and the importance of other people in our lives. Eleanor Oliphant has had a lasting impression on me - I am extremely impressed that this is the author's debut and would definitely be keen to read more of her work.

Daenerys

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review