Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GAIL HONEYMAN

Gail Honeyman was born in 1972. Her mother was a civil servant and her father worked in science. She attended college at Glasgow University, where she studied French language and literature. She attended the University of Oxford for postgraduate studies in French poetry but decided against pursuing a career in academia and worked "backroom jobs" at Glasgow University instead. While working in administration, Honeyman enrolled in a writing course where she composed short stories and began work on *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* was published in 2017 and earned Honeyman numerous awards, including the 2017 Costa First Novel Award and the "Debut Book of the Year" and "Overall Winner" awards in the 2018 British Book Awards. Currently, Honeyman is at work on her second novel. She lives in Glasgow.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the doctor diagnoses Eleanor with depression and not posttraumatic stress disorder, trauma and abuse are thematically important to the novel, so it's relevant to understand the historical development of trauma as a mental health condition. Today's accepted understanding of psychological trauma is that it is caused by stress that results from an exposure to a triggering stimulus. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder that can occur after an individual is exposed to an act of trauma, for example, sexual assault, war, and child abuse, among other acts of violence. Not all individuals exposed to trauma will develop PTSD, but those who do may suffer from disturbing thoughts or feelings when exposed to trauma-related cues or triggers. *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* was published in 2017, by which time PTSD had been an official psychiatric diagnosis for nearly 40 years. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder as a term came into common usage in the 1970s, resulting from the diagnoses of U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War. The disorder first appeared in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a publication used by medical and legal professionals to classify mental disorders, in 1980, the DSM-III in 1980. The diagnostic category of the disorder has changed over time—for example, the DSM-IV (published in 1994) classified PTSD as an anxiety disorder, whereas the DSM-5 (published in 2013) classifies PTSD under a new category, "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine explores Eleanor's journey toward understanding and accepting her repressed childhood traumas. Other literary works that feature protagonists coming to terms with personal or inherited traumas are *Jazz* by Toni Morrison (1992), the memoir *Educated* by Tara Westover (2018), and Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006). Honeyman tempers this seriousness of Eleanor's trauma with the comic relief Eleanor provides through her frequent social faux pas. Other examples of works with a protagonist who has difficulty navigating social situations or views the world through an unconventional lens include *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathon Safran Foer (2005) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (2003). Eleanor references a number of books she reads throughout *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847) is particularly relevant to *Eleanor Oliphant*, as it, too, features a lonely, orphaned protagonist who remains strong despite her harrowing past. Eleanor explicitly states that she relates to Jane Eyre.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*
- **When Written:** 2017
- **Where Written:** Scotland
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary Fiction, Psychological Fiction
- **Setting:** Glasgow, Scotland
- **Climax:** While attending one of Johnnie Lomond's concerts, Eleanor realizes that Johnnie is not the ideal man she thought he was. Soon after this, a fog machine on stage triggers flashbacks to Eleanor's traumatic childhood fire, and she undergoes a mental breakdown that forces her to confront her past.
- **Antagonist:** Mummy
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

On Film. Reese Witherspoon's media company Hello Sunshine acquired the film rights to *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely* Fine in 2017.

In Real Life. Honeyman was inspired to create the character Eleanor Oliphant after reading an article about loneliness that featured an interview with young woman who lived in a city and admitted that she would regularly not speak to another person

all weekend from the time she left work on Friday until the time she returned on Monday.

PLOT SUMMARY

Eleanor Oliphant, a finance clerk nearing her 30s, has worked for the same graphic design company since she graduated from college. She's a quirky loner who struggles to navigate social situations, often making everyone around her uncomfortable with her tendency to say whatever is on her mind.

Eleanor lives her life according to a strict routine that accommodates and perpetuates her loneliness: the only people who visit her apartment are social workers and utility companies sent to read the meter, her weekends most often consist of frozen pizza and vodka, and weekly chats with Mummy are her only regular social outlet. Phone calls with Mummy are always painful and leave Eleanor feeling defeated and unworthy of love and respect.

Eleanor had a troubled childhood, but she refers to it indirectly and in vague terms because she has an imperfect, incomplete understanding of both the trauma she incurred and the impact it has on her adult life. The most visible indictor of Eleanor's childhood trauma is a scar that stretches down the right side of her face. Eleanor states that the scar is the result of a **fire**, but she never goes into detail about who set the fire, and why.

One fateful day, Eleanor wins tickets to a local concert through an office raffle. While at the show, Eleanor sees and immediately falls in love with local musician Johnnie Lomond. Before she has a chance to actually meet Johnnie, Eleanor begins a series of physical self-improvements in an effort to win him over and secure a future for herself defined by romance and devoid of loneliness. The biggest supporter of Eleanor's "project" of pursuing Johnnie is Mummy, who believes that finding a suitable husband is the only way her embarrassing disappointment of a daughter can improve her life. Eleanor transforms her physical appearance to make herself more attractive, and she purchases her first smartphone and laptop to research Johnnie's social media presence and become better acquainted with her supposed soulmate.

After work one day, Eleanor and the new and friendly—albeit somewhat scruffy—IT guy at her office, Raymond, see an old man collapse in the middle of the street. They call an ambulance for him and later visit him at the hospital. The man, Sammy Thom, is eternally grateful to Eleanor and Raymond for saving his life, and he embraces them as family and introduces them to his children. Sammy's daughter, Laura, a glamorous beautician and business owner, invites Eleanor and Raymond to a homecoming party for her father and, before Eleanor knows it, her life is transformed from one of routine loneliness to one of friends, parties, and unpredictability.

Eleanor grows closer to Raymond, exchanging emails and meeting up for regular lunches at a café near their office. They attend the 40th birthday party of Sammy's son, Keith. As they drink wine together at the party, Eleanor opens up to Raymond about her abusive ex-boyfriend, Declan.

Soon, Sammy dies of a heart attack. Eleanor and Raymond attend his funeral, which makes them feel emotional and raw. After, Raymond tells Eleanor about his father's death. Eleanor reciprocates by telling Raymond how she got her scar.

Eleanor enjoys her busy new life, but she continues her obsessive project of pursuing the musician, anxiously preparing for the day when she will finally introduce herself to him, allowing them to officially fall in love. Eventually, the big day arrives when the musician plays another gig at a local venue. Eleanor dresses up, applies makeup, and eagerly grabs a seat near the stage. As the musician performs and interacts with the crowd, Eleanor suddenly realizes he is not the perfect, sophisticated man she imagined him to be: in reality, he is an untalented, arrogant "arse." Overcome by shame, Eleanor becomes extremely drunk. A fog machine that generates stage **smoke** causes Eleanor to suffer a nervous breakdown in which she has flashbacks to the fire, and she runs outside to escape.

The next thing Eleanor knows, she's lying naked in her apartment, surrounded by empty vodka bottles. She continues to drink and make plans to kill herself. Before Eleanor can go through with her plans, Raymond appears at her door, concerned after she fails to show up at work for three days.

With Raymond's help, Eleanor overcomes her alcohol dependence and starts seeing a therapist. At first, Eleanor is skeptical of therapy's ability to fix her problems, but her therapist, Dr. Temple, eventually helps Eleanor come to terms with her past. Over the course of her therapy sessions, Eleanor talks to Dr. Temple about her experiences in foster care, her abusive mother, and her younger sister, Marianne, who perished in the fire that Mummy started to kill both Marianne and Eleanor. Dr. Temple helps Eleanor understand and overcome the shame and guilt she carries with her as a result of her traumatic childhood and gives her the strength to sever contact with her cruel mother.

Eleanor returns to work after taking a medical leave of absence, and her coworkers greet her warmly. For much of the novel, Eleanor insists on not knowing about her past, preferring to ignore the things that are too painful for her to confront. By the end, though, Eleanor decides she is ready to discuss and know the whole truth about what happened to her. With Raymond's help, Eleanor finds two newspaper articles about the incident. She reads the articles and discovers that Marianne *and* Mummy perished in the fire, and that her years of weekly chats with Mummy never really happened.

Raymond asks Eleanor how she's feeling. For once in her life, Eleanor says she's "fine," and she means it. Still, Eleanor knows that she has a lot of things to unpack, and she decides to

continue seeing Dr. Temple. She and Raymond part ways, and he tells her he'll see her soon.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Eleanor Oliphant – Eleanor is the novel's protagonist and narrator. She's nearly 30, lives in Glasgow, and has worked at the same graphic design company for nearly a decade. She has difficulty understanding social dynamics and makes others uncomfortable with her propensity to say exactly what's on her mind. Eleanor is lonely and socially isolated. The only regular social outlet she has are her weekly chats with Mummy, though these chats do little to alleviate Eleanor's loneliness: Mummy is emotionally abusive and berates Eleanor for being pathetic, and chats with her leave Eleanor feeling dejected and unworthy of love. Eleanor's childhood was traumatic, though for much of the novel she remains unwilling to think about her traumas, choosing to numb her pain with alcohol. The most obvious sign of Eleanor's trauma is a scar on the right side of her face, which she incurred in a **fire** her mother set to kill her and her younger sister, Marianne, when Eleanor was 10 years old. Eleanor's life changes when she and Raymond Gibbons, the graceless but friendly IT guy from her office, help an elderly man who has collapsed in the middle of the road. Grateful for their help, the man, Sammy Thom, embraces Eleanor and Raymond as his friends and invites them into his life. Sammy's and Raymond's friendliness is contagious, presenting Eleanor with more opportunities to make friends and socialize. One key feature of Eleanor's personality is her tendency to project her feelings onto external objects and people. This is especially evident in Eleanor's fantasy romance with Johnnie Lomond, a local musician. Despite never meeting Johnnie, Eleanor believes that he is her soulmate and that a relationship with him will fix all of her problems. Eleanor uses the idea of Johnnie to fantasize about an escape from her traumas because it is too painful for her to take the psychological steps necessary to overcome these traumas on her own. Ultimately, Eleanor's coping mechanisms of projection and denial fail her, and she must make the decision to sink deeper into her depression or to seek help and confront her traumas directly. With the help of Raymond and her new therapist, Dr. Maria Temple, Eleanor finds confidence in her own voice and accepts the reality of her traumatic past.

Raymond Gibbons – Raymond Gibbons is the inelegant but friendly new IT guy at Eleanor's office. Raymond meets Eleanor when she calls him to fix her work computer when it becomes infected with a virus. After Raymond and Eleanor help an old man named Sammy Thom when he collapses in the middle of an intersection, their mutual act of kindness brings them together, and they strike up an email correspondence and begin to meet regularly for lunch. Eleanor is initially disgusted by Raymond's sloppy appearance, "illiterate" style of communication, and **cigarette** habit, but as they open up to each other about the intimate details of their lives, Eleanor learns to accept and love Raymond for who he is. Likewise, Raymond is initially turned off by Eleanor's offbeat sense of humor, but as he gets to know her better, he learns to adore Eleanor's eccentric personality. Eleanor's friendship with Raymond shows her that meaningful relationships don't happen instinctively or all at once: on the contrary, it takes time and effort to become close enough to someone that interacting with them feels comfortable and effortless. Eleanor and Raymond's relationship never transcends the boundary of a friendship, but Raymond is repeatedly caught off guard when Eleanor makes references to having a new man in her life, believing that she is talking about him, when in reality, she is referring to Johnnie Lomond, the musician. Eleanor doesn't seem to be interested in Raymond as anything other than a friend, though she appears somewhat threatened and hurt by the attention Raymond gives Laura, Sammy's gorgeous daughter.

Mummy / Sharon Smyth – Eleanor's mother. Mummy isn't alive during the novel's present action, existing only as a voice in Eleanor's head through which Eleanor articulates and dwells on her guilt, shame, and various insecurities. During Eleanor and Mummy's weekly chats, Mummy insults Eleanor, belittling her attempts to socialize and open up to the world. Mummy repeatedly tries to convince Eleanor that everything good she does is inevitably overshadowed by the reality that she is too stupid and too damaged to be worthy of love and redemption. Eleanor's adopts her "Mummy" voice from her actual mother, Sharon Smyth, who was abusive and negligent to her children. Smyth saw her two children, Eleanor and Marianne, as inconveniences that prevented her from having the fun, cosmopolitan life that she desired. When Eleanor was 10 years old, Smyth started a **fire** to kill her daughters and relieve herself of the burdens of motherhood. While Eleanor survived the fire, Smyth and Marianne both perished in it. Eleanor feels guilty about surviving the fire that killed Marianne and shameful about her inability to protect her from Mummy's abuse. In the present action of the novel, "Mummy" symbolizes Eleanor's enduring, stifling connection to her traumatic childhood; she exists as a manifestation of the doubts, guilts, and insecurities that keep Eleanor depressed, in denial, and unable to move forward with her life.

Marianne – Eleanor's younger sister. When she was four, she died in the house **fire** that Mummy started in an attempt to kill her two children. Eleanor reentered the burning house to try to save Marianne, but she was unsuccessful and feels guilty for surviving the fire that killed her sister. Eleanor's inability to protect Marianne from harm instills Eleanor with cynical ideas about love and her own capacity to care for and protect others. Eleanor's houseplant **Polly** is an unconscious surrogate for Marianne; Eleanor seems to believe that if she can keep Polly

alive, it's proof that she is capable of protecting another living being. For most of the novel, memories of Marianne are too painful for Eleanor to contemplate or mention out loud, so she denies her existence and forgets she ever had a sister. Through therapy sessions with Dr. Maria Temple, Eleanor eventually recovers her memories of Marianne and realizes that she is not to blame for Mummy's cruelty or for Marianne's death.

Johnnie Lomond / The Musician – A local pop singer with whom Eleanor falls in love. In the beginning of the novel, Johnnie is the singer for the band Johnnie Lomond and the Pilgrim Pioneers, though he eventually leaves the band to pursue what is implied to be an unsuccessful solo career. Eleanor idealizes Johnnie despite never actually meeting him and despite all indications that he is an untalented, unremarkable jerk. She fantasizes about a romantic future with Johnnie to escape the lonely, depressing reality of her life and to avoid diving into the rigorous introspection that overcoming her traumatic past will require of her. Eleanor's obsession with Johnnie reflects her larger tendency to externalize her hopes and insecurities, projecting them onto other people or objects.

Sammy Thom – An elderly man whom Eleanor and Raymond help when he collapses in the middle of a crosswalk. Eleanor talks to Sammy to comfort him while Raymond waits for the ambulance to arrive. Eleanor feels concern for Sammy's wellbeing, which is a relatively new emotion for her—ever since the **fire**, Eleanor doesn't let herself get close to anyone, as her past has taught her that the cost of love is deep and painful grief. When Sammy dies later in the novel, Eleanor is again presented with the question of whether love is worth the pain that inevitably comes with it. Sammy is so grateful to Eleanor and Raymond for saving his life that he embraces them as members of his family, and the two of them attend Sammy's homecoming party and Sammy's son Keith's birthday party. Along with Raymond, Sammy serves as a sort of a catalyst for Eleanor's social life, presenting her with new possibilities for human connection and showing her that comfort and intimacy with others isn't instantaneous but develops over time. After Sammy dies, Keith brings Eleanor the red sweater that Sammy was wearing the day Eleanor and Raymond first met him.

Mrs. Gibbons – Raymond's mother. Mrs. Gibbons is a widower—Raymond's father passed away shortly after Raymond started college—and, like Eleanor, she is acutely lonely. Mrs. Gibbons has arthritis, and Raymond visits her regularly to keep her company and to help out with chores around the house. Raymond invites Eleanor to accompany him on one of these visits, and Mrs. Gibbons becomes one of the first new people to enter Eleanor's life. At first, Eleanor feels unwilling to accept affection and attention from Mrs. Gibbons. After realizing that she is worthy of love, however, Eleanor becomes more comfortable accepting Mrs. Gibbons's kindness and is grateful for her friendship.

Laura – Sammy's daughter. She is 35 years old, gorgeous, and runs a beauty salon. Laura is turned off by Eleanor's strangeness at first, though she eventually takes a liking to her offbeat sense of humor and gives Eleanor a transformative haircut that covers her scars from the **fire** and makes her feel beautiful. Laura has a flirtatious but ultimately unsuccessful relationship with Raymond, who finds her to be too "high maintenance" for his liking.

Bob – Eleanor's boss. Eleanor thinks he hired her because he felt bad for her—she arrived at the interview after with a black eye, missing teeth, and a broken arm—and for much of the book he maintains a stable but impersonal relationship with her, as Eleanor's offbeat humor has a distancing effect on others. Bob offers Eleanor a promotion midway through the novel, but her depression requires her to take a leave of absence before she can assume her new responsibilities. Bob's genuine, understanding response to Eleanor's depression convinces Eleanor that her coworkers truly care about her.

Dr. Maria Temple – Eleanor's therapist. Dr. Temple helps Eleanor unpack her traumatic past and understand the consequences it has on her adult life. Under Dr. Temple's guidance, Eleanor recovers repressed memories of the **fire** and of her dead sister, Marianne. Sessions with Dr. Temple teach Eleanor to take ownership of her emotions—even strong ones, like anger—rather than project them onto other people and objects.

Billy – One of Eleanor's coworkers. Eleanor invites Billy to attend the concert where she first sees and falls in love with the the musician. Billy reports back to Eleanor's other coworkers the next day, ridiculing of how awkwardly and embarrassingly Eleanor acted at the show. Billy and the other coworkers come around to Eleanor by the end of the novel, expressing genuine concern for her wellbeing and welcoming her return to the office.

Loretta – The office manager at Eleanor's office. She and her colleagues make fun of Eleanor behind her back. According to Eleanor, Loretta has an inflated sense of self-importance and makes ugly jewelry in her spare time. Eleanor takes over Loretta's position when Loretta goes on leave to take care of her sick husband.

Glen – Eleanor's **cat**, whom she names after Glen's vodka, "an old friend" of hers. Glen is a gift from Raymond. Raymond's roommate rescued Glen, who had been set on **fire** and left for dead. Eleanor relates to Glen for this reason, as they are both survivors. Glen helps Eleanor through her depression, providing her with a new reason to get out of bed in the morning. In this way, Glen replaces Marianne and **Polly the Plant** as the primary means through which Eleanor proves that she is capable of protecting others.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Janey – The secretary at Eleanor's office. She and the others

mock Eleanor behind her back.

Bernadette – One of Eleanor's coworkers. Bernadette's brother went to school with local musician Johnnie Lomond, which motivates Eleanor to make a rare attempt at office small talk in an effort to further her "project" of pursuing Lomond.

Declan – Eleanor's abusive ex-boyfriend from college. Eleanor stayed with Declan because her traumatic childhood instilled within her a capacity to expect cruelty and abuse from the people who love her.

Mr. Dewan – The Bangladeshi man who owns the local shop from which Eleanor frequently buys Glen's vodka. Mr. Dewan and Eleanor have a friendly rapport, though he grows concerned when Eleanor's drinking spirals out of control.

June Mullen – A social worker sent by the state to perform a checkup on Eleanor. Eleanor rejects Mullen's attempts to tell her more about her case, reasoning that Mummy wouldn't want her to talk about it with anyone.

Keith – Sammy's oldest son. Eleanor and Raymond attend Keith's 40th birthday party. After Sammy dies, Keith brings Eleanor Sammy's red sweater as a memento.

Gary – Sammy's younger son.

Michelle – Gary's girlfriend.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF TRAUMA

As *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* unfolds, the reader gradually learns the full extent of Eleanor's traumatic past: that her mother, burdened by the responsibility of having children, intentionally set **fire** to her house when Eleanor and her younger sister, Marianne, were children, killing herself and Marianne, and forcing Eleanor—the sole survivor—to endure physical and psychological scars from her traumatic childhood. As the reader learns more about Eleanor, it becomes obvious how heavily the lingering psychological effects of this childhood trauma affect her grasp on reality, her sense of self-worth, and her ability to make positive, healthy decisions about how she lives her life and the type of people she allows into it. Repeatedly, Eleanor acts on the warped belief that her trauma makes her a damaged person who is unworthy of love, respect, and happiness, and that she has no means to separate herself from her past. Honeyman uses Eleanor's unstable grasp on reality and contorted sense of self-worth to illustrate the lasting impact of trauma and abuse.

The persistent condescension Eleanor received in childhood from her mother causes her to expect disrespect and small acts of cruelty in her daily life from other people. Honeyman demonstrates this in the way Eleanor allows her coworkers to make fun of her. In the beginning of the novel, Eleanor walks in on her coworker Billy entertaining a group of others at the graphic design company where she works, telling them about how Eleanor had invited him to attend a concert, and what an uncomfortable experience the night was for him. "She's mental," he says, relating to them how freakishly Eleanor had behaved at the gig: "she just sat there frozen; didn't move, didn't clap, anything." After behaving so strangely, Billy continues, Eleanor had abruptly abandoned him, leaving before the intermission could begin. Billy's audience laughs at this story, agreeing that Eleanor is, indeed, crazy. Eleanor's coworkers fail to notice Eleanor enter the room and remain unaware that she overhears their cruel remarks, but she refrains from correcting them, even managing to laugh internally at their jokes about her questionable mental state. Although Eleanor knows her coworkers are cruel and that Billy's recollection isn't fully true—Eleanor hadn't been frozen because she hated the band, but because she was fixated on band's lead singer, Johnnie Lomond, whom she decides is her soulmate from the moment she first lays eyes on him that night—Eleanor's past experience with her cruel mother have instilled within her heightened capacity to expect abuse and meanness from other people. Because she doesn't believe that she deserves to be treated with respect at work, she allows her coworkers to make jokes at her expense. Eleanor's silence in the office mirrors her silence in phone calls with Mummy. When Mummy screams at Eleanor for lying to her about having friends, Eleanor's initial response is to flinch and drop a book. Even afterward when she tries to defend herself to Mummy, she does so timidly and desperately rather than assertively. The inaction Eleanor demonstrates in the office and on the phone with Mummy shows how pervasively Mummy has conditioned Eleanor to accept cruelty in her life.

Growing up with an abusive mother normalized physical and verbal abuse for Eleanor. As a result, Eleanor has a higher tolerance for abusive romantic partners in her adult life, which she validates with the belief that the abuse is her fault. Eleanor tells Raymond Gibbons, an IT worker from the office, about her ex-boyfriend Declan, whom she dated while she was still in college. Declan had been physically and mentally abusive to Eleanor, "fractur[ing] twelve bones, all in all" and openly cheating on Eleanor. Eleanor admits that she hadn't responded to Declan's violence and abuse with rage: "it was my fault, all my fault," she remembers thinking. Although Eleanor tells Raymond she knows now that she hadn't brought Declan's abuse upon herself, it was difficult for her to see otherwise at the time. When Declan broke Eleanor's arm for a second time, sending her to the hospital, medical staff suspected the truth about her injury. Eleanor recalls how a nurse had explained to

her "that people who truly love you don't hurt you, and that it wasn't right to stay with someone who did." The nurse's words were revolutionary to Eleanor, who had learned from experience to expect abuse and mistreatment in her relationships, even from people who supposedly loved her. In a session with her therapist, Dr. Temple, Eleanor remembers how her mother pulled her and her sister Marianne out of school after a teacher "had been asking about [her] bruises." Eleanor believes that she brought this misfortune upon herself by talking to Mrs. Rose, despite the fact that it was Mummy who both chose to drag the girls out of school and inflict the bruises in the first place. Eleanor's memory demonstrates an early instance of Eleanor misdirecting blame at herself when it should have been directed at her abuser.

Eleanor's imaginary phone calls with "Mummy" further emphasize the lasting impact her mother's abuse has on her self-esteem and capacity to maintain abusive relationships. In one such phone call, her mother states: "the bond between a mother and child, it's [...] unbreakable. The two of us are linked forever, you see—same blood in my veins that's running through yours." At the end of *Eleanor Oliphant*, the reader learns that these phone calls never actually happened—that in reality, Eleanor's mother had died long before the events of the novel take place, and that the conversations were merely a projection of Eleanor's negative self-worth and a manifestation of her fear that she would become as abusive to others as her mother had been to her. Eleanor's conversations with Mummy show how severely Eleanor's trauma continues to haunt her into her adult life. Eleanor hears the abusive "voice" of her mother so intensely that she imagines it to be an actual, existing voice on the other end of the telephone line. The "bond between a mother and child" of which "Mummy" speaks also signifies the bond Eleanor still holds between her abusive past and her present life, highlighting how trauma doesn't just disappear overnight.

SHAME AND THE STIGMATIZATION OF PAIN

Shame figures prominently in *Eleanor Oliphant*, presenting itself most readily in the embarrassment with which Eleanor ultimately regards loneliness. Throughout the novel, Eleanor repeatedly hides how lonely and isolated she feels, fearing the repercussions of publicly flaunting a feeling that society deems unacceptable to express outside one's private life. Honeyman emphasizes the shame Eleanor feels toward her loneliness to shed light on society's tendency to regard pain and sadness—and one's inability to address and work through these feelings successfully—as personal shortcomings. People are uncomfortable witnessing other people's sadness, and as a result, individuals in pain are often shamed into silence and secrecy and, subsequently, forced to cope with their sadness in isolation, thereby exacerbating their pain and loneliness. The relief and recovery Eleanor feels once she makes her hurt public through talk therapy and by opening up to new friends like Raymond is evidence of the transformative power of decoupling shame from loneliness and removing the stigma attached to public displays of pain and sadness.

Eleanor's disillusionment with Johnnie Lomond, a local musician she has a crush on, proves to her how desperately she craves human contact, how infrequently such contact occurs, and how repulsive it is to admit to such things out loud. Eleanor reflects on the shameful connotations attached to loneliness after she returns home from another concert of Johnnie's and realizes how significantly shame and embarrassment fueled her fantasy romance. For the majority of the novel, Eleanor maintains the position that she is comfortable with her loneliness, but she reaches a breaking point when she goes to see the musician perform at a second concert and realizes that she never really knew him and that her infatuation with him was merely a fantasy she created to imagine a hypothetical way out of her loneliness. After she returns home from the concert, Eleanor undergoes a mental breakdown and becomes suicidal as she finally comes to terms with how *not* "fine" she is with being lonely and alienated from others.

As Eleanor lies in her apartment in a drunken stupor, she considers how she "ache[s]" for physical contact, observing that "the only time I experience touch is from people whom I am paying, and they are almost always wearing disposable gloves at the time. I'm merely stating the facts." Eleanor's observation that the only people who touch her do so while "wearing disposable gloves" refers to the gloves worn by workers in the service industry—hairdressers and nail technicians, for example—but it has a metaphorical dimension, as well. Wearing disposable gloves allows people who touch Eleanor and come into contact with her misery to mimic the act of human connection while still maintaining a protective distance. To Eleanor, disposable gloves represent a barrier that people enact to avoid feeling the hurt, discomfort, and vulnerability that can result from opening oneself up to others. Eleanor seems to suggest that society grooms people to reject and dismiss honesty and vulnerability out of fear that the emotional responses they elicit may be too difficult or too uncomfortable to carry. Eleanor reinforces this point, stating: "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." Eleanor's observation alludes to the title of Honeyman's novel and underscores its central theme: that it is preferable to hide one's hurt and pretend everything is "fine" rather than admit to weakness and personal shortcoming and run the risk of making others feel uncomfortable or feeling uncomfortable by the reaction one's pain prompts in others.

Eleanor continues to speculate on the shame associated with

loneliness, comparing it to physical illness to illustrate how repelled society is by pain and suffering. She recalls an older woman she knew at the office when she first started working there. The woman would often be absent from work because she had to care for her sister, who had ovarian cancer. Although caring for her sister consumed much of the woman's life, she would never mention the cancer explicitly, choosing to speak of this disease "only in the most oblique terms."

Eleanor remembers the shame this old coworker felt and observes: "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, or that it might tempt fate into visiting a similar horror upon them."

By comparing loneliness to cancer, Eleanor sheds light on an extra layer of suffering shame puts on those afflicted with either "illness." In addition to the psychological pain of loneliness or the physical pain of terminal illness, society forces an additional pain on sufferers when it stigmatizes public, visible expressions of pain. Framing pain as "a shameful, embarrassing thing" implies that individuals are somehow at fault for their suffering and, therefore, should feel guilty and responsible for feeling unhappy or unwell, and for alleviating the burden of their pain onto others by being open about their suffering. Eleanor's connection between cancer and loneliness also presents the idea that, just as somebody shouldn't be held responsible for catching a physical illness, so too is mental illness not something for which sufferers are at fault.

Shame stands in the way of recovery because it compels those who suffer to keep their emotions hidden—from others, and from themselves— for fear of upsetting and embarrassing others. Eleanor suffers in the first half of the book because she shuts herself off from others, relying solely on her weekly phone calls with "Mummy" to work through her pain. When Eleanor eventually opens up to others through therapy sessions with Dr. Temple and regular lunch dates with Raymond, however, she begins to regard herself and her past with a new sense of clarity and a perspective she was incapable of gaining on her own.

PROJECTION AND DENIAL

The true extent of Eleanor's horrific, traumatizing past is unknown to the reader for much of the novel, as Eleanor perpetually represses its reality, choosing instead to deny that she feels any pain—as the title suggests, she is "completely fine." Eleanor rejects ownership of her past in two primary ways: through denying it by assuming a skewed sense of reality, and through externalizing the feelings she associates with her past, projecting them onto other people or objects in order to distance these painful feelings from herself. By denying her past and disassociating herself from her feelings, Eleanor avoids the difficult work of having to confront her past and her pain directly. But rejecting her past only keeps the trauma at bay—it doesn't erase it entirely—and reality eventually comes crashing down on Eleanor. This results in a climactic moment of mental collapse after a fog machine at one of the musician's gigs triggers the memory of the house **fire** that killed her mother and sister and Eleanor's constructed world of denial converges with reality. Ultimately, Eleanor learns that separating herself from her past provides only temporary relief, and that she must take ownership of her pain, internalize it, and work through it if she wants to recover.

Eleanor denies her mother's death because she is uncomfortable accepting who she is and what she must deal with in the aftermath of her traumatic childhood. Perhaps the most shocking instance of Eleanor's denial is her failure to realize that her mother is dead. In the final pages of the novel, the reader discovers that Eleanor's weekly phone calls with "Mummy" are merely a figment of her imagination: in reality, Eleanor's mother—along with Eleanor's younger sister, Marianne—perished in the fire Eleanor's mother set in an attempt to kill her two daughters and relieve herself of her parenting responsibilities. Eleanor engages in weekly phone calls with "Mummy" which consist, mostly, of her mother mocking and berating her for being pathetic and lonely.

In reality, however, these phone calls don't actually take place, and the attacks on Eleanor's character are Eleanor's own. By framing her criticisms as coming from "Mummy" and not from herself, Eleanor denies the impact her past traumas have on her current life and avoids coming to term with the fact that she is critical of how pathetic and lonely she has become.

Another way Eleanor practices denial is by forcing her mind to go blank rather than confronting painful memories directly. While undergoing an unpleasant bikini wax, Eleanor reflects more generally on the subject of pain: "pain is easy; pain is something with which I am familiar. I went into the little white room inside my head, the one that's the color of clouds. It smells of clean cotton and baby rabbits. The air inside the room is the palest sugar almond pink, and the loveliest music plays. Today, it was 'Top of the World' by the Carpenters. That beautiful voice…she sounds so blissful, so full of love. Lovely. Lucky Karen Carpenter." "Pain is easy" for Eleanor, but only because she avoids it. Venturing "into the little white room insider [her] head" allows Eleanor to pretend that her past traumas don't exist. She invents a fantasyland of "clean cotton and baby rabbits" because it is easier to do this than to recount the memories of her childhood and feel the visceral pain that would come about as a result of reliving these past traumas.

Eleanor's relationship to **Polly the Plant**, a "parrot plant" that she has kept since her childhood, demonstrates an instance of Eleanor projecting her past onto an external object in order to lessen the impact of its pain. Eleanor sees Polly as a link to her past and a means by which she may symbolically forgive herself

for not being able to save her sister Marianne's life. Eleanor regards Polly as "the only living link with my childhood, the only constant between life before and after the fire, the only thing, apart from me, that had survived." Polly is important to Eleanor because, if she can keep the plant alive, she can symbolically redeem herself for failing to protect her sister from the fire. As Eleanor's life becomes increasingly more complicated with social obligations, however, she fails to care for Polly properly, and the plant dies: "I'd neglected my duties these last few weeks, too busy with hospitals and funerals and Facebook to water her regularly. Yet another living thing I'd failed to look after. I wasn't fit to care for anyone, anything." When Eleanor insists she isn't "fit to care for anyone, anything," it is proof that she regards Polly as a surrogate for Marianne. Subconsciously, Eleanor seems to believe that, if she can keep Polly alive and well, she can forgive herself for her inability to save Marianne.

When Polly "dies," Eleanor takes it as proof that she is incapable of adequately loving, protecting, and caring for others. Symbolically, Polly's death also shows how inadequate projection is for Eleanor in the long run: she can't project her feelings of failure onto inanimate objects like Polly because, ultimately, they are beyond her ability to control. If Eleanor wants to truly come to terms with her sister's death, she has to internalize and assume ownership of the feelings of hurt and guilt she associates with her inability to save Marianne and, more generally, to accept the things over which she has no control.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF ISOLATION AND SOCIAL AWKWARDNESS

Much of *Eleanor Oliphant*'s humor arises from Eleanor's tendency to act in ways that make others feel uncomfortable. Honeyman's exploration of Eleanor's social awkwardness is unique because it frames social awkwardness as the product of specific circumstances or life events rather than as an innate character flaw or essential facet of a person's personality. By framing Eleanor's difficulty to relate to others as the result of a lack of practice rather than a lack of capability, Honeyman presents a more nuanced and compassionate perspective on social awkwardness, inviting the reader to be more considerate of the unknown struggles that might lead someone to behave unconventionally.

Eleanor's traumatic childhood causes her to avoid contact with other humans. When June Mullen, a social worker, comes to perform a checkup on Eleanor, she readily admits that this is "the first visitor [she'd] had since November last year." Besides social workers, the only others who Eleanor invites into her apartment are utility workers assigned to read the meter. Until Raymond enters Eleanor's life, she entertains no social guests. It's most often the case that Eleanor will spend the entire weekend without seeing another human after she stops at the supermarket on her way home from work on Fridays for a frozen pizza, wine, and vodka. The extent of Eleanor's loneliness is such that she doesn't even allow herself to sit with herself, using alcohol to numb the pain she feels from her residual trauma.

As a result of this extreme isolation, Eleanor becomes unpracticed and unfamiliar with social etiquette, presenting herself in a way that makes others feel so uncomfortable that they distance themselves from her. Because people avoid Eleanor, it becomes harder for her to engage with others, further perpetuating her loneliness and isolation. Eleanor responds bluntly in situations that require more social nuance. For example, as she waits in line for the restroom, another woman in line comments spitefully that there's never any wait for the "Gents," as men "just come in, piss everywhere and then waltz off, leaving someone else to clean up after them." Eleanor acknowledges that the woman's remark is figurative: a scathing critique of men messing things up and made "with a specific individual in mind." Rather than respond sympathetically to the woman, however, Eleanor comments on how "dreadful" and disgusting the men's room must be: "just think how odd it would be if we had to display our genitals to one another when we finally reached the front of this queue!?" she offers.

Eleanor's remark is eccentric and provides comic relief to the reader, but it wasn't the sympathetic response the lovelorn woman had in mind, and, as a result, she calls Eleanor "a bit mental," and they remain silent for the remainder of their wait. Situations like these are all too common for Eleanor: repeatedly, her unpracticed social skills and propensity to say exactly what she's thinking cut off human interactions before they can develop into anything meaningful. In this way, Eleanor's social awkwardness perpetuates her loneliness while, simultaneously, her loneliness perpetuates her social awkwardness.

If isolation and social awkwardness are a vicious circle, however, the reverse is also true: the more Eleanor ventures outside her comfort zone and engages with others, the more capable she becomes of relating to other people and feeling comfortable in social situations. At the beginning of their email correspondence, Eleanor is thoroughly dismissive of Raymond's habit of abbreviating his writing and using emojis to convey emotion. When Eleanor agrees to accompany Raymond to Sammy's son Keith's birthday party and he responds with a smiley face, Eleanor laments the state of contemporary communication: "I fear for our nation's standard of literacy." Over time, however, she becomes more familiar with Raymond and learns to accept the conventions he adheres to to communicate. After sending a few brief messages back and forth later in the book, she states: "I had become almost inured to his illiterate way of communicating by the end of his exchange. It's both good and bad, how humans can learn to tolerate pretty much anything, if they have it." Eleanor won't commit fully to embracing what she sees as Raymond's

practically "illiterate" style of writing, but she still acknowledges that, by making a habit of taking Raymond at face value, she has learned how to interact with and grow closer to him. Just as humans can "learn to tolerate" loneliness and grow accustomed to committing social faux pas, they can also learn how to communicate more effectively with others, making "good" compromises—such as eschewing full, elaborate sentences in lieu of shortened, text-speak—in order to speak with people in a way that resonates with their preferred methods of self-expression.

Along these lines, Eleanor and Raymond's initial act of kindness toward Sammy invites a series of opportunities for Eleanor to socialize and connect with others. When Eleanor and Raymond help an old man, Sammy, who stumbles and falls unconscious while crossing the street, they become friends with Sammy and his family. Soon, Eleanor's life is filled with visits to Sammy at the hospital, invitations to parties from Sammy's grateful relatives, and a budding friendship with Raymond as a result of their shared act of compassion.

Through this sudden influx of opportunities to practice socializing, Eleanor gains a nuanced understanding of social practices she hadn't felt since becoming so lonely and isolated. For example, when Eleanor and Raymond walk to Keith's birthday party from the train station, Eleanor struggles to keep up with Raymond in her heeled boots. She observes: "I noticed him glance at me, and then he slowed his steps to match mine. I realized that such small gestures [...] could mean so much." Raymond's gesture might be a small one, but it means a lot to Eleanor, who hasn't had the energy or opportunity to behave thoughtfully toward others since becoming so lonely and isolated. Eleanor's appreciation for Raymond's keen observation demonstrates that she is catching on to the little gestures people make to connect with others, as well as the comparatively profound impact of these gestures. As Eleanor continues to notice and understand the intricacies of socialization, the implication is that she will be able to more seamlessly incorporate them into her own actions, thereby setting the groundwork for developing more successful, meaningful relationships in her own life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

POLLY THE PLANT

To Eleanor, Polly the Plant symbolizes her dead younger sister, Marianne, who died in the house fire that Mummy started in an attempt to kill her two daughters. Caring for Polly is Eleanor's way of proving to herself that she is capable of protecting another living thing. Eleanor's failure to protect her sister from the fire and from Mummy's abuse induces feelings of shame and guilt within Eleanor, who sees Marianne's death as proof that she is cannot be trusted to love other people because she will only harm and disappoint them. Keeping Polly alive enables Eleanor to maintain some semblance of self-worth in the face of her other lingering insecurities.

But Polly also symbolizes Eleanor's tendency to project her insecurities onto external objects as a means of *denying* her traumatic past. Marianne is too painful a subject for Eleanor to acknowledge on a conscious level, so Eleanor denies her existence, projecting Marianne and her own guilt onto Polly as a way of lessening her pain. As Eleanor becomes increasingly consumed by social obligations, she neglects to take care of Polly, and Polly dies. Polly's absence leaves Eleanor *without* an external object onto which to project her grief and guilt, and she realizes that she is woefully ill-equipped to internalize and take ownership of her pain. Having Polly to project onto falsely convinces Eleanor that denying the past is the same as erasing it, but Polly's absence teaches Eleanor that the opposite is true. Eleanor uses Polly *not* to think about Marianne, but once Polly is gone, Eleanor realizes that Marianne and the painful feelings she induces within her were there all along at the periphery of her consciousness.

FIRE

Fire symbolizes Eleanor's past. At the literal level, fire reminds Eleanor of her mother's final act of violence against Eleanor and her sister, Marianne. When Eleanor was 10 years old, Mummy set fire to their house in an effort to kill Eleanor and Marianne, whom she considered inconveniences to her preferred, carefree lifestyle. Eleanor survived this act of violence, but Mummy and Marianne perished in the fire. Years later, Eleanor is wracked by guilt because she wasn't able to protect her sister from Mummy or save her from the fire. Whenever Eleanor thinks about fire, she is thinking about this traumatic, definitive moment of her childhood. For this reason, Eleanor regards all things associated with fire—such as the smoke machine at Johnnie Lomond's second gig, or Raymond's cigarette smoking—with disgust and disdain.

Fire also symbolizes Eleanor's inability to think about her past in direct, concrete terms. It's too painful for Eleanor to confront her mother's cruelty, her sister's death, or her own grief directly, so she uses vague or opaque referents to think about her past and discuss it with others. When Eleanor tells Raymond how she got her scar, for example, she simply tells him she got it in a fire. This explanation spares Eleanor the harder work of admitting to Raymond—and to herself—the painful details connected to the fire, such as Mummy's abuse, Marianne's death, and her own grief.

ANIMALS

Animals symbolize the antithesis of social norms and expectations—areas in which Eleanor feels unnatural and incompetent. Animals are a recurring presence in Eleanor's offkey thoughts and observations. When Eleanor evokes animals in these types of thoughts, she establishes a divide between the mannerly realm of social norms and her own, unique way of thinking about the world. For example, as she and Raymond walk from the crematorium to the hotel for Sammy's funeral reception, Eleanor thinks to herself that she'd rather be fed to zoo animals than cremated when she dies. This odd, situationally inappropriate aside is characteristic of Eleanor and her offbeat sense of humor. Here, the presence of animals emphasizes Eleanor's oddness, but it also directs the reader's attention to a moment where Eleanor embraces her eccentric personality. Eleanor's trauma and mental suffering repeatedly obliterate her self-confidence and sense of identity. When she mentions or compares herself to animals, it seems to be a way for her to indirectly assert her strength or presence. For example, Eleanor looks in the mirror, examining her scar, and compares herself to a phoenix, "emerged from the flames." Usually, Eleanor associates her survival with guilt; in this case, however, she associates survival with the positive possibility of her rebirth.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* published in 2018.

Good Days: Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ I do exist, don't I? It often feels as if I'm not here, that I'm a figment of my own imagination. There are days when I feel so lightly connected to the earth that the threads that tether me to the planet are gossamer thin, spun sugar. A strong gust of wind could dislodge me completely, and I'd lift off and blow away, like one of those seeds in a dandelion clock.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor Oliphant has just described the extent to which loneliness defines her life: nobody visits her at her apartment, her phone rarely rings, and weekly phone calls with Mummy are her only regular social interaction.

Despite the fact that Eleanor has voluntarily submitted herself this extreme alienation by purposely avoiding social contact, she's not completely satisfied with the state of her life. This is evidenced by the frequency with which she doubts her own existence: "It often feels as if I'm not here, that I'm a figment of my own imagination," she admits. When Eleanor wonders whether she's "a figment of [her] own imagination," she alludes to the extreme toll loneliness takes on her self-confidence. Because Eleanor so rarely interacts with others, it becomes harder for her to receive feedback by which to ascertain the affect she has on others—this, in turn, makes it nearly impossible for her determine what kind of person she is and what her role or purpose in the world is. More generally, the fact that Eleanor cannot discern whether or not she really exists clues the reader in to her loose grip on reality, mental instability, and unreliability as a narrator.

Eleanor's fear that "a strong gust of wind could dislodge [her] completely" emphasizes how haphazard of her current methods of coping with loneliness and depression are. Throughout the novel, Eleanor repeatedly insists that she is fine with her self-sufficiency, but the reader gradually learns that Eleanor is only using self-sufficiency to avoid confronting the more painful aspects of her life. The pain Eleanor incurred after the loss of her sister, Marianne—a pain so great that she effectively removed Marianne from her conscious memory—makes Eleanor believe that relationships with others aren't worth the pain of losing them, so she resolves to isolate herself to avoid incurring future pain. Thus, Eleanor's social isolation is not truly voluntary, but rather a psychological coping mechanism—and a largely subconscious one, at that.

❝ I have always taken great pride in managing my life alone. I'm a sole survivor—I'm Eleanor Oliphant. I don't need anyone else—there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle. I am a self-contained entity. That's what I've always told myself, at any rate.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor lauds her solitude, "tak[ing] great pride" in her self-sufficiency. This quote is important because it establishes two ideas that are vital to the novel: that Eleanor is extremely socially isolated and that she makes repeated statements defending her loneliness, maintaining that she doesn't need anyone else. Both of these ideas underscore the novel's larger theme of shame and the stigmatization of pain: the reason Eleanor boasts about and defends her loneliness is because she feels pressured to maintain the illusion of happiness and contentment in a society that's uncomfortable with visible displays of pain and mental suffering.

Another important component of this passage is Eleanor's insistence that she knows all there is to know about her life. "I'm Eleanor Oliphant," she proclaims boldly. "I don't need anyone else—there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle. I am a self-contained entity." As the novel unfolds, each of these statements will prove to be false. Despite Eleanor's insistence that she doesn't need anyone else, she responds positively to every new human connection she forms over the course of the novel, ultimately realizing how much she needs close relationships to live a fulfilling, psychologically balanced life.

Eleanor's bold claim that "there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle" is perhaps the biggest fallacy of all, as the reader—and Eleanor—eventually learn that there *are* significant "holes" in Eleanor's memory. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that Eleanor has blocked from her conscious memory the deaths of her young sister Marianne and of Mummy, as well as the extent of Mummy's abuse. The boldness of Eleanor's proclamation that she has "no big hole" or "missing part" in the "puzzle" of her life emphasizes Eleanor's reliance on repression and denial to cope with her traumatic past.

Good Days: Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Should I make myself over from the inside out, or work from the outside in? […] Eventually, I decided to start from the outside and work my way in—that's what often happens in nature, after all. The shedding of skin, rebirth. Animal, birds and insects can provide such useful insights.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor decides that she must undergo a series of self-improvements if she wants to win over the musician, and she wonders how best to initiate the process: "from the inside out," prioritizing an improved personality over an improved physical appearance, or "from the outside in," making herself more beautiful in the hopes that a new look will inspire her to develop a new, more alluring personality. Eleanor's decision to improve herself "from the outside in" reflects her refusal to confront and unpack the inner, psychological issues that are the root cause of her unhappiness. The abuse Eleanor incurred as a child is so painful for her that she avoids thinking about it at all costs, going so far as to block all memories of her mother's and sister's deaths from her conscious mind.

Because Eleanor won't let herself think about her traumatic childhood, she remains unable to unpack and let go of the psychological baggage that fuels her depression and holds her back in life—in other words, she is unable to work "from the inside out" because her repression and psychological rejection of the past renders "the inside" inaccessible to her. Lacking the ability to improve herself "from the inside out," Eleanor believes that the perfect relationship with the perfect man is the alternative course of action that will set everything right. For Eleanor, pursuing the musician is "work[ing] from the outside in," only on a grander scale: Eleanor is so desperate for change and unwilling to implement it herself that she lets herself believe that an external relationship with musician can make her internal issues fade away; this is wishful, delusional thinking on Eleanor's part, of course, but it's all she has to work with, given her refusal to work on her psychological problem areas.

This passage is also important because it introduces Eleanor's tendency to glean "useful insights" from animals. Eleanor is an awkward and socially unpracticed character; lacking the knowledge and experience necessary to relate to other humans, she often turns to animals and nature to figure out how to act in unclear situations. In this instance, Eleanor evokes the animalistic "shedding of skin" as a metaphor for "rebirth" to validate her rather dubious position that improving her outer appearance will inspire her to address the problems that plague her internally, such as her unresolved childhood trauma or her social awkwardness.

Good Days: Chapter 4 Quotes

"You wouldn't understand, of course, but the bond between a mother and child, it's…how best to describe it…*unbreakable*. The two of us are linked forever, you see—same blood in my veins that's running through yours. […] However hard you try to walk away from that fact, you can't, darling, you simply can't. It isn't possible to destroy a bond that strong."

Related Characters: Mummy / Sharon Smyth (speaker), Johnnie Lomond / The Musician, Eleanor Oliphant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is taken from one of Eleanor's weekly phone calls with Mummy, who Eleanor has revealed is institutionalized, though she doesn't specify where. Eleanor tells Mummy about pursuing the musician, a project with which Mummy is very much on board, but the conversation remains tense, stilted, and dominated by Mummy's callous remarks toward Eleanor.

This phone call is important because it is the reader's first exposure to Mummy, which allows them to see the kind of person Mummy is and to gain a deeper insight into her relationship with Eleanor. Being able to identify what role Mummy plays in Eleanor's life is especially important given the novel's final twist—that "Mummy" has been dead for years, and that Eleanor has only imagined their phone calls taking place. If the reader understands Mummy and Eleanor's relationship, they can better deduce Eleanor's subconscious reasons for imagining their phone calls, as well as what psychological purpose these phone calls fulfill.

This particular passage showcases how heavily Mummy plays on Eleanor's insecurities, specifically the fear that she will become as evil and abusive as Mummy and, more broadly, that her past—represented here by Mummy—will haunt her present life for eternity. When Mummy tells Eleanor that she can't "walk away from" the fact that they share the "same blood," she means that Eleanor cannot distance herself from her past. No matter what new friendships and accomplishments Eleanor experiences in her life, nothing will be enough to overshadow her traumatic childhood: Eleanor is tied to both Mummy and to her past by a "bond" that is "unbreakable."

Good Days: Chapter 6 Quotes

[Polly's] the only constant from my childhood, the only living thing that survived. She was a birthday present, but I can't remember who gave her to me, which is strange. I was not, after all, a girl who was overwhelmed with gifts.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mummy / Sharon Smyth, June Mullen, Marianne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

After the social worker June Mullen leaves Eleanor's apartment, Eleanor is surprised that Mullen didn't comment on Polly, her beautiful houseplant. Eleanor takes great pride in Polly, not only because the plant has been "the only constant from [Eleanor's] childhood," but because it was "the only living thing that survived." Implicit in this latter point of pride is that Polly survived *because* Eleanor was able to protect and care for her.

This vague statement—that Polly is "the only living thing that survived"—also alludes to the fact that Polly survived Eleanor's childhood in a way that Eleanor's younger sister, Marianne, did not. Polly will become an important symbol throughout *Eleanor Oliphant* because Eleanor subconsciously views the plant as a surrogate for Marianne, whose death traumatized Eleanor so greatly that she wiped all memory of her sister from her conscious memory. Eleanor cares for Polly to redeem herself for her inability to care for Marianne and protect her from their mother's abuse.

Eleanor's admittance that she "can't remember who gave her" Polly is further evidence of Eleanor's repressed childhood. Given the fact that Polly is so important to Eleanor and the only link she has to her past, it's indeed "strange" that she apparently can't remember who gifted her the plant. As the novel unfolds, the reader sees that Eleanor is repeatedly unable to recall details about her distant past. The memory lapse that Eleanor suffers in this passage reflects her tendency to repress and reject the elements of her past that are too painful for her to confront directly.

Good Days: Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Jane Eyre. A strange child, difficult to love. A lonely only child. She's left to deal with so much pain at such a young age—the aftermath of death, the absence of love. It's Mr. Rochester who gets burned in the end. I know how *that* feels. All of it.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor returns home after snooping around outside Johnnie Lomond's house. Still too exhilarated to sleep, she opens one of her favorite books, *Jane Eyre*, to read before bed. Eleanor aligns her life with Jane Eyre's in order to avoid direct confrontation with her childhood, a subject that remains too painful for her to think about consciously. Comparing her childhood to Jane Eyre's allows Eleanor to detach herself from her abusive past and pretend as though it happened to someone else rather than to herself. Like Eleanor, Jane Eyre lost her parents at a young age and spent her childhood a series of lonely, unloving environments. Fire also figures prominently in both novels: Eleanor experienced a traumatic house fire during her childhood, and in *Jane Eyre*, a fire leaves the titular character's love interest, Mr. Rochester, burned and disfigured.

Eleanor calls Jane "a lonely only child" who is "left to deal with so much pain at such a young age," before explicitly revealing that she, like Jane, is familiar with pain and loneliness: "I know how that feels. All of it." Aligning herself with Jane Eyre allows Eleanor to admit that she is not fine—that her past has harmed her and continues to do so—without explicitly admitting that she is still lonely, still damaged and, undeniably, not fine. Because Eleanor is still ashamed of and in denial about her mental health struggles, oblique references and literary allusions are the only ways she's able to talk about her past.

❝ Even the circus freak side of my face—my damaged half—was better than the alternative, which would have meant death by fire. I didn't burn to ashes. I emerged from the flames like a little phoenix. I ran my fingers over the scar tissue, caressing the contours. I didn't burn, Mummy, I thought. I walked through the fire and I lived. There are scars on my heart, just as thick, as disfiguring as those on my face. I know they're there. I hope some undamaged tissue remains, a patch through which love can come in and flow out. I hope.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor examines her scarred face in the mirror and wonders if she will ever not be lonely and damaged. One key feature of this passage is its animal symbolism. Eleanor compares herself to "a little phoenix," the mythological bird that regenerates itself in a burst of flames from the ashes of its predecessor. By comparing herself to a phoenix, Eleanor entertains the notion that she can have a future beyond and separate of her past. In addition to animal symbolism, this passage also contains clues that provide insight into Eleanor's past. When Eleanor proclaims, "I didn't burn, Mummy […]. I walked through the fire and I lived," she forges a connection between her scarring, the fire that occurred during her childhood, and Mummy.

Despite Eleanor's desire for rebirth, she fears that she will never be capable of abandoning her past as completely as she would like. Unlike the phoenix, Eleanor cannot simply shed her skin and be born anew: the "thick" and "disfiguring" scar that cascades down the right side of her face serves as a constant reminder of this grim reality. Eleanor considers the physical scarring on her face to be visible, exterior proof of her psychologically damaged interior, or the "scars on [her] heart." Despite Eleanor's repeated insistence that she is fine with and even proud of her loneliness, vulnerable moments like this one provide the reader with insight into Eleanor's hidden struggle with trauma, shame, and depression. Eleanor's dream for "a patch through which love an come in and flow out" speaks to her desire to overcome her struggle and move forward in life.

Good Days: Chapter 10 Quotes

I smiled at her. Twice in one day, to be the recipient of thanks and warm regard! I would never have suspected that small deeds could elicit such genuine, generous responses. I felt a little glow inside—not a blaze, more like a small, steady candle.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mrs. Gibbons, Raymond Gibbons

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 97-8

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor has spent the past few hours with Raymond at his mother, Mrs. Gibbons's house. Eleanor never socializes, and she is surprised by how well the afternoon went and by what a pleasant time she had. She reflects on this as she says goodbye to Mrs. Gibbons, who thanks her for visiting and helping out around the house.

Eleanor typically associates fire and smoke with the deadly fire that Mummy set in an attempt to kill Eleanor and her sister when they were children. Gut in this instance, she associates it with positivity: the "little glow inside" that Elanor feels after spending the afternoon with Raymond and his mother is evidence that Eleanor can reclaim ownership of her trauma, reframing elements she associates with her past so that she is in control of her memories and not beholden to them. If Eleanor can generate new, positive associations with fire, then she can learn to reframe the other aspects of her life—such as shame and loneliness—that also cause her to suffer.

Another key theme that Honeyman develops in this passage is the problem of shame and the stigmatization of pain. Society has groomed Eleanor to regard pain and mental suffering as a shameful thing and, as a result, she spends a lot of time defending or denying that she is lonely. The "glow" that Eleanor feels when she is "the recipient of [Mrs. Gibbons's] thanks and warm regard" is proof that Eleanor is only pretending to accept her loneliness; in reality, she wants nothing more than to connect with people and develop meaningful relationships. Trauma and shame might have driven Eleanor into isolation, but moments like these inspire Eleanor to reinvest herself in others and to seek out future opportunities for emotional connection.

Good Days: Chapter 12 Quotes

"But you're not smart, Eleanor. You're someone who lets people down. Someone who can't be trusted. Someone who failed. Oh yes, I know exactly what you are. And I know how you'll end up. Listen, the past isn't over. The past is a living thing. Those lovely scars of yours—they're from the past, aren't they? And yet they still live on your plain little face. Do they still hurt?"

Related Characters: Mummy / Sharon Smyth (speaker), Raymond Gibbons, Sammy Thom, Johnnie Lomond / The Musician, Eleanor Oliphant

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor talks on the phone with Mummy, who is in a bad mood because Eleanor missed their last scheduled phone call to visit Sammy in the hospital with Raymond. Importantly, Mummy has been dead for many years—the person Eleanor is talking to is actually the alternate persona that Eleanor's subconscious creates as a response to trauma. This persona is threatened by Eleanor's growing social life, which she views as Eleanor's path to recovery. If Eleanor continues down this path of recovery, she will no longer be beholden to the insecurities that weigh on her as a result of her traumatic childhood—nor will she be beholden to Mummy by extension.

Mummy plays on Eleanor's insecurities to ground Eleanor in her past and halt her psychological recovery, implicitly reminding Eleanor that because she was unable to save Marianne from the fire, she is and always will be "someone who failed." Mummy cites the permanence of Eleanor's scars as evidence that "the past isn't over" and "is a living thing." In Mummy's analysis, as long as Eleanor's scars remain her face, Eleanor remains tied to her past with no hope for transformation or recovery. The purpose of Mummy's cruel remarks is to convince Eleanor that, because "the past is a living thing," personal growth and a life after trauma is not possible: one cannot move on from their past, because the past will always be a part of them.

Good Days: Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Some people, weak people, fear solitude. What they fail to understand is that there's something very liberating about it; once you realize you don't need anyone, you can take care of yourself. That's the thing: it's *best* just to take care of yourself. You can't protect other people, however hard you try."

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Marianne, Sammy Thom, Raymond Gibbons

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor realizes that Raymond must have invited her to accompany him to Sammy's homecoming party because he is anxious about arriving alone, and Eleanor disparages Raymond, contrasting his "fear" of loneliness with her acceptance of solitude. Eleanor suggests that she enjoys solitude because it has made her self-sufficient: "once you realize you don't need anyone, you can take care of yourself," she states. Eleanor doubles down on this position, insisting that "it's best just to take care of yourself." Eleanor makes these bold claims about solitude to cast her loneliness as a *choice* rather than a personal defect. Framing loneliness as a choice lets Eleanor delude herself into thinking that she is fulfilled *because of*—rather than despite—her solitude.

But championing solitude is only Eleanor's attempt to make the best of her lonely, unfulfilling life. In reality, Eleanor is in denial about the negative impact solitude has on her mental health. She recasts her solitude as a "liberating" choice in order to maintain some semblance of control over her a life. The origin of Eleanor's desire for solitude is unsettling, as well. Eleanor chooses solitude over the company of others because she doesn't want to risk letting other people down: "you can't protect other people, however hard you try," she laments. The oblique phrase "other people," relates to her dead sister, Marianne. After Eleanor failed to protect Marianne from Mummy during childhood, Eleanor subconsciously decided not to pursue future relationships, not wanting to risk the pain of failing and losing another loved one; as such, Eleanor's stance on solitude is not the brave declaration of self-sufficiency she purports it to be, but rather a desperate, ineffective method of coping with her guilt and unresolved psychological issues.

Good Days: Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ I realized that such small gestures—the way his mother had made me a cup of tea after our meal without asking, remembering that I didn't take sugar, the way Laura had placed two biscuits on the saucer when she brought me coffee in the salon—such things could mean so much. I wondered how it would feel to perform such simple deeds for other people. I couldn't remember. I *had* done such things in the past, tried to be kind, tried to take care, I knew that I had, but that was *before*. I tried, and I had failed, and all was lost to me afterward. I had no one to blame but myself.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Laura, Keith, Sammy Thom, Mrs. Gibbons, Raymond Gibbons

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161-2

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor and Raymond are walking to Sammy's son Keith's birthday party, and Eleanor struggles to keep up with Raymond because she can't walk very quickly in her new, heeled boots. Raymond notices Eleanor's predicament and slows down to match her pace. Eleanor is grateful for Raymond's gesture and reflects on the little things people do for other people to show that they care.

In the beginning of *Eleanor Oliphant*, Eleanor is both blind to and unable to reciprocate the acts of kindness she receives from people like Laura, Raymond, and Mrs. Gibbons, but not because she is innately uncaring or unsympathetic toward others. When Eleanor reveals that she "*had* done such things in the past," she implies that there was once a time when she was sociable and considerate of others' emotional needs. The fact that Eleanor was once more attuned to other people suggests that her present social ineptitude is less the result of a personal shortcoming than it is the side effect of unresolved trauma and extreme social isolation. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that Eleanor shut herself off from others after she failed to protect her sister Marianne from Mummy, reasoning that having people in one's life isn't worth the cost of losing or disappointing them.

This passage also explores the presence of misplaced blame that perpetuates Eleanor's mental struggle. Just as Eleanor wrongfully blames herself for Marianne's death, she also frames her social ineptitude as a personal shortcoming that she brought on herself: "I tried, and I had failed, and all was lost to me afterward. I had no one to blame but myself." Eleanor's language is intentionally vague and may be

interpreted as referring to her inability to save Marianne, or to her gradual, self-inflicted social isolation. In either case, Eleanor blames herself for an initial failure, for her inadequate response to that failure, and finally for the negative consequences of this inadequate response to failure. The misplaced blame Eleanor directs at herself for Marianne's death and for her social awkwardness places Eleanor in a shame spiral in which she attributes all negative aspects of her life to personal failure rather than to circumstances that are beyond her ability to control.

Good Days: Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ I suppose one of the reasons we're all able to continue to exist for our allotted span in this green and blue vale of tears is that there is always, however remote it might seem, the possibility of change.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor has just had a predictably cruel phone conversation with Mummy. When Eleanor mentioned her recent work promotion, Mummy responded to the news with indifference and condescension. Mummy's indifference disheartens Eleanor, and she pontificates on the things that get her through the day in the face of sadness and disappointment.

Despite her unceasingly insistence that she is okay, Eleanor's admission that the primary reason that she is "able to continue to exist" is "the possibility of change" shows how dissatisfied she is with the current state of her life. Eleanor is somewhat of an unreliable narrator in the sense that she rarely reflects honestly about her loneliness and depression. In the rare moments that Eleanor tries to unpack her trauma and depression, she delivers her admissions using vague, indirect language in order to distance herself from her trauma.

Eleanor remains too traumatized to talk about her life in direct, self-referencing terms, so she uses the pronoun "we" to universalize her desire for change in order to downplay her depression and redirect her problems away from herself. By framing her depressing outlook on life—that it is bad, tearful, and only worth living so long as one has even the slightest hope that things will one day change—as a universal truth, Eleanor convinces herself, wrongfully, that she is okay, and that the way she is coping (and not coping) with her childhood trauma is adequate. In reality, Eleanor has some serious psychological issues, and her history of abuse makes her past and current life circumstances considerably harder than the average person's. But because Eleanor is ashamed for her mental struggle and her loneliness, she must deny and redirect these negative emotions in an effort to convince herself and those around her that she is normal and completely fine.

Good Days: Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ Grief is the price we pay for love, so they say. The price is far too high.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Marianne, Raymond Gibbons, Sammy Thom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor reflects on the relationship between love and loss as she attends Sammy's funeral reception. Where there is love, there is always the possibility of loss. Eleanor knows this from direct experience: the last person who loved her unconditionally was her younger sister Marianne. As a child, Eleanor allowed herself to love Marianne back, but this love was taken away from her when Marianne died in the fire that Mummy intentionally started. Marianne's death proved to Eleanor that love is not worth the cost of grief, and it is for this reason that she initially decided to alienate herself after Marianne's death and that she continues to do so as an adult.

Of course, the connection Eleanor forges between love and grief isn't a false one: human life is fragile, and there is always the chance that loved ones will be taken away without notice. But Eleanor's decision to write off love completely is ultimately an imperfect one, because just as "grief is the price we pay for love," so, too, is loneliness the price one pays for emotional invulnerability—the only reason that Eleanor has lost no friends before now is because she has *had* no friends before Raymond, Sammy, and Sammy's family entered her life.

Bad Days: Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ Polly the plant had died that morning. I'm fully aware of how ridiculous that sounds. That plant, though, was the only living link with my childhood, the only constant between life before and after the fire, the only thing, apart from me, that had survived. I'd thought it was indestructible, assumed it would just go on and on, leaves falling off, new ones growing to replace them. I'd neglected my duties these last few weeks, too busy with hospitals and funerals and Facebook to water her regularly. Yet another living thing I'd failed to look after. I wasn't fit to care for anyone, anything. Too numb to cry, I dropped the plant into the bin, pot, soil and all, and saw that, throughout all these years, it had been clinging on to life only by the slenderest, frailest of roots.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

When Eleanor attends another one of Johnnie Lomond's concerts, a dry ice stage effect triggers a traumatic flashback to the fire she experienced during childhood. Afterward, Eleanor rushes back to her apartment and becomes suicidal. In the midst of this, she laments how she should have taken Polly the Plant's death that morning as a sign that things would go awry.

This passage expands on Polly's literal and metaphorical value to Eleanor, emphasizing how the plant was "the only living link with [her] childhood, [and] the only constant between life before and after the fire." Eleanor's younger sister Marianne died in this fire after Eleanor tried and failed to retrieve her from their burning house. Eleanor blamed herself for Marianne's death and has since repressed all memories of both Marianne and her inability to save her life. Eleanor treats Polly as a substitute for Marianne, subconsciously reasoning that, if she can keep Polly alive, she can manage to forgive herself for Marianne's death. Eleanor's precarious coping mechanism worked when she had nothing besides work to distract her from taking care of Polly; but after her life becomes bogged down with "hospitals and funerals and Facebook," she fails to take care of Polly, the plant dies, and Eleanor takes this death to be evidence that she isn't "fit to care for anyone, anything."

The passage also isolates another important idea at play throughout the novel, which is Eleanor's denial. Of course, it's sad that the plant died, but Eleanor is wrong to be resentful of going out and socializing. Eleanor acts as though the plant died because she was being reckless, but in fact, she was simply participating in activities that are positive for her mental health.

❝ If someone asks 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.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226-7

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor reflects on loneliness as she sits in her apartment, drunk and alone, after attending another of Johnnie Lomond's concerts. This passage references the novel's title, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, which is to be taken ironically. The notion that Eleanor is "fine" refers not to her actual mental health, but to the lies she tells herself, bolstered by society's critical stance toward loneliness and mental suffering as a whole.

Eleanor criticizes the expectation that one is to maintain an illusion of mental wellbeing and fineness for the benefit of others: "you are meant to say FINE. You are not meant to say that you cried yourself to sleep last night […]. FINE is what you say." Ultimately, Eleanor argues, others are uncomfortable and burdened by hearing about other people's suffering, so people in pain are strongly encouraged to insist that they are fine, even when they are not.

Despite her criticism of society's stance toward public displays of suffering, Eleanor isn't quite comfortable accepting her own pain. In this passage, she redirects attention away from herself by using the pronoun "you" in place of "I." The reader clearly knows Eleanor is talking about herself when she says "you," but the effect of using "you" in place of "I" is that Eleanor presents the predicament of being pressured into saying one is fine when one is not as a *universal* problem rather than a personal one, thereby normalizing and downplaying the seriousness of her struggle.

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, or that it might tempt fate into visiting a similar horror upon them.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor returns to her apartment after attending Johnnie Lomond's concert at The Cuttings, where a dry ice stage effect caused Eleanor to have a traumatic flashback to the fire that happened during Eleanor's childhood. The flashback—coupled with Eleanor's sudden revelation that her fantasy of romance with the musician was pathetic, unlikely, and delusional—causes her to finally admit how lonely and miserable she is. On a broader scale, Eleanor recognizes her prior insistence that she was fine with being lonely as the product of society's stance that loneliness is "a shameful, embarrassing thing." In her newly emotional vulnerable state, Eleanor realizes that the reason she repeatedly tried to convince herself that she was fine was that she was too ashamed to admit that she was not.

Eleanor compares a physical ailment (cancer) to a mental struggle (loneliness) to consider loneliness from a new perspective and criticize what she sees as society's tendency to discredit mental illness and blame those who suffer from it for their unhappiness. Just as one likely wouldn't blame a cancer sufferer for their diagnosis, one shouldn't blame someone who is lonely for their loneliness. More generally, Eleanor's point here is that everyone should be more open-minded and accepting of others. Shaming people into keeping struggles bottled up only exacerbates their level of disconnect, increasing the likelihood that those in pain will stay in pain.

Bad Days: Chapter 28 Quotes

All the doctor needed to understand was that I was very unhappy, so that she could advise me how best to go about changing that. We didn't need to start digging around in the past, talking about things that couldn't be changed.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Johnnie Lomond / The Musician, Raymond Gibbons, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor suffers a nervous breakdown after attending another one of Johnnie Lomond's gigs, and Raymond convinces her to try therapy. Eleanor agrees to give therapy a try but decides that she doesn't want to discuss her childhood with a therapist.

Eleanor's claim that "we [don't] need to start digging around in the past, talking about things that [can't] be changed" affirms her position that her childhood trauma is a permanent, innate part of her personality. Eleanor has internalized her mother's abuse to the point that the past has become a permanent, unchangeable feature of her identity, as evidenced by the "Mummy" persona she assumes subconsciously. From a literary perspective, Eleanor's imaginary phone calls with Mummy (who's actually dead) are a metaphorical representation of her inability to separate herself from the terrible things that happened to her as a child.

The explicit reason Eleanor gives for not wanting to discuss her childhood in therapy is that the past can't be altered, and therefore rehashing it into a mess of hypotheticals is a useless endeavor. But Eleanor's claim illustrates her reluctance to talk about the past in a broader sense, as well. Throughout the novel, Eleanor goes out of her way to avoid thinking about her childhood—she consumes (or is tempted to consume) excessive amounts of alcohol the moment she begins to recall something unpleasant, for example. Given Eleanor's tendency to repress and deny the thoughts and memories that pain her, her bold insistence on the supposed uselessness of "digging around in the past" should be taken with a grain of salt.

Bad Days: Chapter 30 Quotes

As always, Mummy was scary. But the thing was, this time—for the first time ever—she'd actually sounded scared too.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

On one of their routine phone calls, Eleanor tells Mummy that she has been diagnosed with clinical depression and is seeing a therapist. Mummy responds angrily, threatening Eleanor and warning her not to tell the therapist anything about her childhood.

After Eleanor hangs up, she realizes that, "for the first time ever," she detects a hint of fear in Mummy's voice. Mummy is afraid because she knows that if Eleanor talks about her troubled upbringing with Dr. Temple in their therapy sessions, Dr. Temple will help Eleanor to retrieve and unpack the memories she has repressed since childhood. If Eleanor can unpack these painful memories, she will be on the path to recovery and become less reliant on the inadequate coping mechanisms—such as drinking, repression, and phone calls with Mummy—that she has come to rely on in place of more productive methods of treating her mental illness.

In reality, these phone calls with Mummy are only figments of Eleanor's imagination—Mummy has been dead for nearly 20 years, and phone calls with "Mummy" are merely a subconscious manifestation of Eleanor's insecurities and self-doubt. From this perspective, Mummy's fear may be interpreted as Eleanor's subconscious reluctance to unearth all the painful feelings she knows will arise if she opens up about her childhood to Dr. Temple.

Bad Days: Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ Anger was good, she'd said, while I was putting my coat on. If I was finally getting in touch with my anger, then I was starting to do some important work, unpicking and addressing things that I'd buried too deep. I hadn't thought about it before, but I suppose I'd never really been angry before now. Irritated, bored, sad, yes, but not actually angry.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple

Related Themes:

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor reflects on swearing at Dr. Temple at their last therapy session—Eleanor was crying at the end of the hour, and Dr. Temple gently told her their time was up and Eleanor had to go. Eleanor swore at Dr. Temple because she was upset the doctor kicked her out while she was in such an emotionally vulnerable state.

Dr. Temple tells Eleanor that "anger [is] good" because it means Eleanor is finally allowing herself access her emotions directly and honestly, no longer using projection and denial to avoid doing the "important work" of "unpicking and addressing the things that [she'd] buried too deep." The reason Eleanor "buried" her past in the first place was because there were too many strong, painful emotions attached to it. Because of this, the more direct, unfiltered emotions like anger that Eleanor lets herself feel, the more successfully she'll be able to "unpack" her repressed past.

When Eleanor observes that she'd been "irritated, bored, sad, […] but not actually angry," she implicitly acknowledges how she had held back her emotions. Irritation, boredom, and sadness are all rather tepid in comparison to anger, which is a more severe, direct emotion. When Eleanor recognizes the difference between her earlier, more cautious set of emotions and the sudden burst of anger she felt toward Dr. Temple in their last session, she realizes how much of herself she's been holding back over the years.

❝ The singer wasn't ever the point, really; Maria Temple had helped me see that. In my eagerness to change, to connect with someone, I'd focused on the wrong thing, the wrong person. On the charge of being a catastrophic disaster, a failed human being, I was starting to find myself, with Maria's help, not guilty.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple, Johnnie Lomond / The Musician

Related Themes:

Page Number: 277

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor accepts therapy sessions with Dr. Temple as a part of her routine and is starting to witness real progress in her journey toward recovery. One day, she sees a newspaper article about the success the Pilgrim Pioneers, Johnnie Lomond's former band, have experienced since Johnnie's departure. Hearing this news makes Eleanor realize that she feels only indifference toward the musician—she finally sees that Johnnie "wasn't ever the point" of the fantasy she created around his image.

In her sessions with Dr. Temple, Eleanor learns that Johnnie was merely a projection of Eleanor's desire "to change, to

connect with someone" and to escape from the misery of her lonely, alienated existence. The prospect of a romantic future with an ideal man wasn't ever a feasible reality for Eleanor, but merely an escapist fantasy she could summon forth to get her through the days. Eleanor relied so heavily on this fantasy because, deep down, she thought she lacked the ability to change her life; in light of this grim reality, an escapist fantasy was the best she could do.

When Eleanor finally sees her infatuation with Johnnie for what it was—a coping mechanism to help her survive her otherwise lonely existence—she's able to forgive herself for what she viewed previously as a shameful, "catastrophic disaster." Dr. Temple helps Eleanor see that her mental struggle is not something of which she should feel ashamed.

Bad Days: Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ It isn't annoying, her need—it isn't a burden. It's a privilege. I'm responsible. I chose to put myself in a situation where I'm responsible. Wanting to look after her, a small, dependent, vulnerable creature, is innate, and I don't even have to think about it.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Raymond Gibbons, Mummy / Sharon Smyth, Glen, Marianne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor thinks about how lucky she is to have Glen, her new cat, who was a present from Raymond. This passage creates a binary between the "burden" and the "privilege" of caring for another living being. For much of the novel, Eleanor considers it a "burden" to care for others because she believes that love is always accompanied by the risk of grief and loss. The last person Eleanor truly loved was her younger sister Marianne. When Marianne died in the fire Mummy set to kill Marianne and Eleanor, Eleanor realized that it is impossible to fully protect others from harm's way and, as result, came to see love and emotional responsibility as a "burden" rather than a "privilege." The responsibility Eleanor chooses to take on when she agrees to care for Glen allows her to reconfigure the "need" of "a small, dependent, vulnerable creature" as a worthwhile "privilege," rather than the doomed endeavor that Marianne's death taught her it was.

The "innate" pleasure Eleanor takes in being responsible for Glen's wellbeing shows her that the task of caring for something so "small, dependent, [and] vulnerable" is a "privilege," and therefore worth the possibility of emotional vulnerability and pain that comes with it. In the beginning of the novel, Eleanor alienated herself from others so that she wouldn't have to deal with the pain and guilt of failing another person; ultimately, this coping mechanism left her lonely and depressed, and she now sees that love and affection are worth the possible risks of grief and failure.

Bad Days: Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ The voice in my head—my own voice—was actually quite sensible, and rational, I'd begun to realize. It was Mummy's voice that had done all the judging, and encouraged me to do so too. I was getting to quite like my own voice, my own thoughts. I wanted more of them. They made me feel good, calm even. They made me feel like *me*.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Eleanor is on a bus, anxious and paranoid because nobody seems to want to sit next to her. A fellow passenger who Eleanor had initially thought was mentally unstable because he wasn't wearing any socks notices her anxiety, asks if she is alright, and reminds her that it's good to take a minute for oneself. Eleanor is grateful for the man's kindness and immediately ashamed to have been so judgmental of a nice, considerate person. She reflects on the root of her propensity to be so critical of others.

Eleanor's moment of reflection is important because it is evidence of the positive effect therapy has had on her confidence and sense of self. Before meeting with Dr. Maria Temple, Eleanor was so reliant on repression and denial as methods of coping with her unresolved trauma that she purposefully avoided self-reflection, effectively muting out "the voice in [her] head" in order to silence her own painful memories. In place of her own voice, Eleanor listened to the cruel, judgmental voice of Mummy, which, by virtue of many years of Mummy's relentless emotional abuse, had become more resonant to Eleanor than her own voice.

Now that Eleanor has the confidence to hear to her own

voice, however, she sees that it is "quite sensible, and rational," and very much the opposite of Mummy's hypercritical one. Eleanor's decision to listen to her own voice and thoughts over Mummy's shows that she is strong enough to assume control over her life and make decisions on her own, and, in time, will be better able to recover from her traumatic past.

This scene occurs shortly before Eleanor finds out that Mummy has been dead for nearly two decades; Eleanor's new ability to separate Mummy's voice from her own foreshadows this development and establishes the psychological improvements Eleanor has undergone that make it possible to internalize and accept this shocking twist.

Bad Days: Chapter 37 Quotes

"People inherit all sorts of things from their parents, don't they—varicose veins, heart disease. Can you inherit *badness*?"

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

As Eleanor makes progress in therapy, she starts to see herself as separate from Mummy. She learns to discern which internal judgments are the product of Mummy's lingering influence and which are her own.

In one particular therapy session with Dr. Temple, Eleanor doubts the extent of her separation from Mummy, fearing that she may genetically "inherit" Mummy's abusive personality. Eleanor's concern speaks to the novels' larger theme of trauma and the lingering impact it has on survivors. Throughout the novel, the mental suffering Eleanor carries with her as a result of her lonely, abusive childhood directly affects the quality of her adult life, causing her to act in ways that are motivated by her constant need to dull and repress her pain. It thus makes sense that Eleanor would be afraid that her mother's abuse would affect her life in other ways, as well—in this case, by showing up as an inherited "badness" or personality defect.

Eleanor's decision to align psychological "badness" with physical ailments like "varicose veins" and "heart disease" also reinforces the parallel between physical illness and mental suffering that Honeyman explores throughout the novel. In these previous parallels, Eleanor observes the problematic cultural trend of shaming and stigmatizing mental and physical suffering, framing pain as a sort of personality defect for which individuals are blamed. Eleanor points to another similarity between physical and mental suffering when she wonders whether abusive parents like Mummy pass down their abusive personalities to their children.

Bad Days: Chapter 40 Quotes

"Good- bye, Mummy," I said. The last word. My voice was firm, measured, certain. I wasn't sad. I was sure. And, underneath it all, like an embryo forming—tiny, so tiny, barely a cluster of cells, the heartbeat as small as the head of a pin, there I was. Eleanor Oliphant. And, just like that, Mummy was gone.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Dr. Maria Temple, Marianne, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor learns most of the truth about the fire that Mummy intentionally started during Eleanor's childhood, and she's able to remember her younger sister Marianne, who perished in the fire. As a result, with the guidance of Dr. Maria Temple, Eleanor decides to cut off communication with Mummy. During their final phone call, Eleanor tells Mummy that she knows she is a bad person, doesn't need her in her life any longer, and tells her good-bye once and for all.

This passage evokes the motif of rebirth that Eleanor employs throughout the novel. In comparison to the other times Eleanor has expressed a desire to be reborn, however, this final instance is more concrete and rooted in reality. In its previous iterations, Eleanor's rebirth imagery has involved the mythical and the fantastic—it is escapist, wishful thinking, and not based in Eleanor's reality. In these instances, Eleanor describes rebirth as akin to a phoenix rising from the ashes. Because she believes that she is uncapable of recovering and moving on from her trauma, however, the idea of rebirth or a fresh start is as real to Eleanor as the mythological phoenix she evokes to represent it.

Eleanor's final evocation of rebirth is different because it presents a more literal, tangible hope for the future in lieu

of an escapist fantasy. Eleanor demonstrates this point by employing imagery of the literal process of birth, conveying her newly confident, clear, and strong sense of self as "like an embryo forming—tiny, so tiny, barely a cluster of cells, the heartbeat as small as the head of a pin, there I was. Eleanor Oliphant." By depicting the reemergence of her voice with imagery that evokes the growth of a human fetus, Eleanor places her rebirth within the confines of reality, implying that rebirth is no longer just a fantasy to her, but a real possibility for her future.

Better Days: Chapter 41 Quotes

❝ "In the end, what matters is this: I survived." I gave him a very small smile. "I survived, Raymond!" I said, knowing I was both lucky and unlucky, and grateful for it.

Related Characters: Eleanor Oliphant (speaker), Marianne, Raymond Gibbons, Mummy / Sharon Smyth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from the final scene of the novel. Eleanor brings two newspaper articles about the fire that happened during her childhood to lunch with Raymond. Together, they open them, and Eleanor finally learns that Mummy has been dead for nearly two decades, having died in the fire she intentionally set to kill Eleanor and Marianne.

This scene is significant because it shows how Eleanor's relationship to her trauma has changed. For the bulk of the novel, Eleanor feels guilty for surviving the fire. On a subconscious level, she blames herself for her inability to protect Marianne from Mummy and, as a result, is too overwhelmed by guilt and shame to take any solace in the fact that she survived the fire and has her whole life ahead of her. Once Eleanor learns that she is more than her guilt and that her self-blame is misplaced, she's able to see things from a different perspective. When she tells Raymond that "in the end, what matters is this: I survived," she places emphasis not on the past, but on the possibilities that her future holds.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 1

When people ask the narrator what she does for a living, she tells them she works in an office, preferring not to bore her audience with the mundane reality of her work: she works for a graphic design agency as a finance clerk. She is nearly 30 years old and has been at her current job since she was 21. She believes the owner, Bob, hired her because he felt sorry for her: she'd shown up to her interview with a black eye, missing teeth, and a broken arm. He also might have assumed that someone like her would never have to request time off work for a honeymoon or maternity leave.

The fact that the narrator doesn't want to bore or burden others with the details of her mundane job alerts the reader to her insecurities and hints at her unwillingness to open up to other people. The injuries that the narrator had at her interview are serious and jarring given that she seems to lead a rather boring, ordinary life—it remains to be seen what (or who) hurt her.

The narrator runs through her weekly schedule: Monday through Friday, she arrives at the office at 8:30 a.m. She takes an hour for lunch every day, eating a sandwich in the staff room as she reads the newspaper and completing the crossword puzzle in the *Daily Telegraph*. She works until 5:30 p.m. and takes the bus home. Dinner consists of a simple pasta with pesto and a salad. After dinner, she reads or watches television. Friday evenings, she stops by the Tesco Metro by the office and buys a frozen pizza, wine, and two bottles of Glen's vodka, which she drinks over the weekend.

The precision and regularity of the narrator's schedule shows that she substitutes routine for human interaction. The predictability of the narrator's schedule provides her with a sense of comfort that she isn't getting elsewhere due to her lack of social interaction. It's rather excessive for one person to drink three bottles of alcohol over the course of a weekend—the narrator seems to has a drinking problem that she isn't (directly) admitting to the reader or to herself. This introduces the reader to the narrator's habit of repressing the things she doesn't want to, or isn't able to, acknowledge.

The narrator's phone hardly ever rings, and the only people who visit her apartment are service workers. This lack of human interactions leads the narrator to sometimes wonder whether she's "a figment of [her] own imagination," and she occasionally loses touch with reality. These feelings are somewhat alleviated during the work week, when she must send emails and interact with her coworkers, Janey, Loretta, Bernadette, and Billy. She wonders if any of these people would notice if she died and stopped showing up to work one day.

The narrator's lack of guests is further proof of her social isolation. The fact that the narrator wonders whether she's "a figment of [her] imagination" foreshadows the significant role her imagination plays in the novel, and it potentially calls her sanity and thus her reliability as a narrator into question. She also has a rather disturbingly low sense of self-esteem, as evidenced by her uncertainty that it would bother her coworkers if she passed away.

The narrator recalls going to the doctor yesterday for back pain. She humorously suggests to the doctor that her breasts are likely the cause of the pain: she weighed them with a kitchen scale, and the two of them weighed half a stone combined. These comments make the doctor uncomfortable, and he responds to them stiffly. He writes her a prescription for more painkillers and a refill on her eczema medication. The narrator leaves and reflects on the doctor's "terrible bedside manner."

The narrator freely says whatever is on her mind, often at the expense of other people's comfort, and this awkward interaction with the doctor is an example of this habit. It's humorous that the narrator laments the doctor's "terrible bedside manner," given that the narrator is herself so terrible at making people feel at ease. The cavalier way in which the narrator treats her pain, as well as the ease with which the doctor prescribes her painkillers, perhaps implies that the narrator abuses medication in the same way she seems to abuse alcohol.

But her doctor's appointment was yesterday, "in a different life." Today, life is different, because the narrator—who introduces herself as Eleanor Oliphant—has met her soul mate. Eleanor is normally proud of her self-sufficiency, but she's forced to question it after seeing the love of her life "onstage." Eleanor says that she knew that this man was the man for her upon seeing that he was wearing his three-piece suit with the bottom button unbuttoned, which "Mummy" believes is the sign of a true gentleman. Eleanor knows Mummy will be thrilled to hear about this new, handsome man.

Eleanor's belief that yesterday was "in a different life" is a bold statement—it shows the confidence she has in other people's and things' ability to enact meaningful changes in her life. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Eleanor chooses to believe in the transformative power of external forces (like a potential relationship with this performer). At this point, it seems that Eleanor seeks escapism through alcohol, painkillers, and fantasies of romance. This, combined with the mysterious wounds Eleanor sustained at age 21, suggests that she's likely experienced some sort of past trauma. Further, the fact that she's an unreliable narrator means that she could be intentionally hiding this from the reader—or perhaps even repressing it in her own mind.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 2

Eleanor is at the office on Friday, daydreaming about "the one." She walks into the staff room and overhears Billy complaining about her to the other coworkers. Eleanor invited Billy to attend a concert last night with tickets she'd won at a work raffle, and Billy cruelly recalls the awkwardness of the evening, calling Eleanor "mental" and describing how she stood motionless during the first band's performance, clearly hadn't enjoyed their music, and left before the other groups took the stage. The other coworkers sympathize with Billy, agreeing that Eleanor is very strange.

Eleanor's daydreaming foreshadows the extent to which pursuing "the one" will consume Eleanor's life. The reader now knows that the soul mate she alluded to in the previous chapter is just a man she saw performing in a band, which suggests that Eleanor has a rather deluded, obsessive perspective when it comes to romance—after all, this performer is seemingly a complete stranger. Meanwhile, Eleanor hears her coworkers make fun of her but doesn't say anything, suggesting that she's accepted their cruelty and even thinks that she deserves to be mocked and disrespected.

But Eleanor *hadn't* disliked the band's music—she'd simply been entranced by the local musician performing onstage, whom she believes she was destined to meet. Eleanor decides to invest in a personal computer so that she can use the internet to find out more about the musician.

Eleanor's investment in the musician—to the point that's she's willing to spend a great deal of money on a computer—illustrates her decision to prioritize unattainable ideals over reality and self-awareness. She represses her real problems (loneliness, shame, depression, social isolation) and uses the fantasy project of pursuing the musician as a distraction.

Eleanor starts up her work computer, but it freezes when she enters her password, so she calls the new IT guy, Raymond Gibbons, to address the problem. Raymond's voicemail message is snarky and clever, and Eleanor scoffs and leaves a clear, professional message in response to it. Eleanor decides to take an early lunch break while she waits for Raymond's response.

The tonal discrepancy between Raymond's informal voicemail and Eleanor's formal, professional message reinforces Eleanor's social alienation: she finds it hard to connect to most people because she can't get on board with the language they use to communicate.

Eleanor often turns to nature and **animals** to provide insight into life. Thinking about how some animals shed their skin in an act of "rebirth," Eleanor decides that must improve her outside appearance if she wants to musician to fall in love with her and heads to a beauty parlor to get a bikini wax. The therapist asks her which kind she'd like, but Eleanor doesn't know the difference, so she ignorantly requests "the Hollywood." The procedure of getting hot wax repeatedly poured and yanked from her skin is immensely painful, but Eleanor is used to separating herself from pain, imagining herself to be in a "little white room inside [her] head that smells comforting and is filled with happy music."

Eleanor decides to undergo a series of outward self-improvements because she thinks that doing so will win over the musician and allow her to experience her own "rebirth." It's unclear at this point why, exactly, Eleanor feels the need to transform herself and her future by being reborn rather than just fixing her present life. However, Eleanor's admission that she retreats to a "little white room inside her head" speaks to her tendency to repress and deny the existence of painful thoughts and memories, which perhaps suggests that she focuses on the future because her past is too traumatic.

When the procedure is finished, Eleanor discovers that she is completely bare down there. The therapist assures her that this is what she asked for, and Eleanor leaves in a huff. Eleanor returns to the office to find that Raymond has yet to call back. Just as she is about to head to the IT department to find him, a laidback man with a belly, scruffy beard, and wearing sneakers, a T-shirt approaches her. He introduces himself as "Raymond, IT." He tells her that her computer had a virus, but that he was able to fix it. Raymond tries to initiate small talk with Eleanor, but she responds with cold, awkward professionalism.

Eleanor sees the undesirable outcome of "the Hollywood" wax as the therapist's error rather than the result of her own misunderstanding, which reflects her habit of projecting her thoughts, feelings, and insecurities onto others. Additionally, because Eleanor is unaccustomed to socialization, she doesn't know how to respond to Raymond's friendliness.

After work, Eleanor rushes to the mall to buy a laptop. She engages awkwardly with the sales representative, explaining that she's never owned a computer before. Her language is stilted and strange, and she is impatient with the young sales rep. Eventually, she make a purchase and heads home.

Eleanor's awkward interaction with the sales rep is another example of how her inadequate social skills make most social interactions unpleasant for her. Honeyman includes a lot of these awkward exchanges early in the novel to emphasize how unpracticed Eleanor is at interacting with others.

Friday is usually margherita pizza night, but since Eleanor's normal routine has already been interrupted by buying the laptop, she decides to be spontaneous and order a delivery pizza instead. When the pizza arrives, Eleanor finds that it is tasteless and greasy. She undertips the delivery man, who responds with annoyance—or, to Eleanor's mind, rudeness. Eleanor cheers herself up by daydreaming about pizzas the musician will cook for her once they are a couple.

Even though Eleanor's experience buying the laptop is awkward and somewhat stressful, deviating from her rigid schedule in even this small way creates a domino effect: Eleanor's first irregular action results in a second irregular action when she chooses to order a pizza instead of picking up a frozen one from the supermarket, as she usually does. This suggests that simply branching out and switching up her habits could have a radical impact on Eleanor's life—if only she's willing to step outside her comfort zone.

Eleanor didn't have time to pick up wine or vodka because she had to wait for the pizza, but she remembers she has a backup bottle of brandy in the bathroom cabinet. She drinks the brandy, sets up her new laptop, and begins to investigate the musician online. She looks at his website and social media accounts, fawning over his good looks and internet presence. She passes out and wakes up at three a.m. to find the backs of her hands covered in his name written in black pen. Eleanor finishes the brandy and goes to bed.

The musician's internet presence really only proves that he is good-looking—it doesn't present any evidence that he is the ideal man Eleanor imagines him to be. Still, her desperate need to escape her current life blinds her to this reality. Eleanor idealizes the musician because she wants to believe he can be the answer to her problems.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 3

On Monday morning, Eleanor contemplates her love some more, ultimately deciding that she can't explain "fate." She's happy she's found love because it will please Mummy, though she's concerned that the musician won't be interested in her because she is less attractive than him. The right side of Eleanor's face is covered in scar tissue, which frequently causes people to stare at her.

"Fate" is a convenient concept for Eleanor because it is the absence of free will: the presence of fate means that everything that happens to Eleanor is merely accidental, rather than the consequence of her own personal failings. Fate allows good things to happen to Eleanor, such as meeting her soul mate; on the other hand, it allows her to deny ownership of the negative parts of her life, such as her loneliness or the way people make fun of her. The fact that Eleanor's face is covered in scars further alludes to some kind of trauma in her past—it's unclear who or what caused this injury, but it was clearly severe enough to permanently disfigure Eleanor.

Today, Eleanor buys women's magazines instead of the *Telegraph* to learn how to dress herself and style her hair to attract the musician. Eleanor knows she needs to improve her appearance because Mummy has always told her that she is an ugly freak.

Eleanor continues to focus on superficial self-improvements because they distract her from thinking about the psychological changes that will actually improve her life. Meanwhile, Mummy's cruelty toward Eleanor is telling, as it shows that Eleanor has sustained emotional injuries as well as physical. It also potentially gives the reader insight as to why Eleanor isolates herself and assumes the worst of others.

At home that night, Eleanor looks in the mirror, observing her long, straight brown hair, damaged hands, pale skin, and scarred face. Her nose is too small, and her eyes are too big. She is of average height and weight. Eleanor rarely looks in the mirror because she hates seeing her mother's features in her face. She can't tell which are her father's features, because she's never met him. When Eleanor was a child, Mummy insinuated that Eleanor was either an accident or the result of a sexual assault. Mummy promises Eleanor that Eleanor's father was a horrible person.

Eleanor hates seeing Mummy's features because she views them as a symbol of Mummy's character traits. Eleanor's disgust toward her mother's physical traits mirrors her disgust toward her mother's abusive personality. One of Eleanor's greatest fears, then, seems to be that she has inherited her mother's cruelty. The fact that Mummy decries Eleanor's absent father as a terrible person is ironic, since Mummy herself blatantly mistreats Eleanor. While Eleanor has been established as an unreliable narrator, it's clear that the reader can't trust Mummy's character judgment either.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 4

It's Wednesday night, and Eleanor reluctantly initiates her weekly chat with Mummy, who is institutionalized. Eleanor tells Mummy about the concert and the musician, to which Mummy responds enthusiastically and requests regular updates. Mummy tells Eleanor she's missing out by not having a partner, though Eleanor insists that she's not lonely. Cruelly, Mummy reminds Eleanor that she hasn't *always* been alone but tells Eleanor to believe whatever she needs to believe.

Eleanor is vague about where Mummy is institutionalized; given that Honeyman has already established Eleanor as an unreliable narrator, Eleanor's vagueness suggests that—consciously or unconsciously—she is potentially hiding something about Mummy by not disclosing her whereabouts. Mummy's enthusiasm for Eleanor pursuing the musician is rooted in the fact that she believes Eleanor is missing out by being so socially isolated, but beyond this, her motivations remain unclear. Her cruel reaction to Eleanor's insistence that being alone doesn't make her lonely suggests that Mummy likes to manipulate her daughter, playing on her insecurities. Mummy's following comment about Eleanor having not always *been alone raises the question of how whether Eleanor is actually content with social isolation; if one is to take Mummy's words literally, they insinuate that there was a time when Eleanor had more people in her life, and that her insistence that she has always been alone is merely a coping mechanism she enacts to deal with her social isolation. Finally, given that Honeyman has established that Eleanor and Mummy's relationship is strained by Mummy's unremitting emotional abuse, it's notably odd that Eleanor would willingly agree to having weekly chats with her.*

Mummy reminds Eleanor that she can always tell her about anything and anyone, and she gushes over the "unbreakable" connection between mothers and their children. Eleanor will never be able to destroy this bond, says Mummy. Eleanor wonders whether this is true. After Mummy hangs up, Eleanor realizes she's been crying.

Mummy's comments about the "unbreakable" connection between mothers and their children suggest that she is an overbearing parent. Eleanor's emotional response to Mummy's comment implies that her relationship with Mummy is far more complicated and painful than she has let on.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 5

It's finally Friday. Eleanor's coworkers are socializing, but Eleanor hasn't tried to initiate conversation with any of them in quite some time. She hasn't slept well since her phone call with Mummy. Eleanor hears giggling as she walks past the others to make a cup of tea. Billy teases Eleanor about the white gloves she's wearing, and Eleanor bluntly tells him that they are for her eczema, which makes everyone feel uncomfortable.

Mummy's phone calls—the only socialization Eleanor regularly engages in—make Eleanor feel insecure. Her insecurity causes her to isolate herself, which makes it difficult to initiate social interactions with others. Again, Honeyman reinforces how Eleanor's insecurity leads to her social isolation, how isolation perpetuates her loneliness, and how loneliness reinforces her insecurities—Eleanor's social awkwardness is part of a vicious cycle. Billy's choice to make fun of Eleanor because of the gloves she wears for her eczema shows that people can be socially ostracized for elements that are beyond their ability to control. In this case, Eleanor's eczema—a medical condition that can give the skin a red, inflamed appearance—exacerbates her inability to connect to her coworkers.

Eleanor mentions the concert to Billy to try to learn more about the musician. Bernadette chimes in that her brother knows the singer, Johnnie Lomond, from school. To Eleanor's immense delight, Bernadette also reveals that Johnnie is single.

Eleanor's rare attempt at workplace socialization isn't motivated by a longing to connect with others, but by her delusional "project" of pursuing the musician. Additionally, Mummy's support of Eleanor's "project" seems to fuel the zeal with which Eleanor pursues it, which suggests that Mummy's approval is a significant factor in whether Eleanor socializes, and with whom.

The office collects money to present to Janey, the secretary, as an engagement gift. Eleanor contributes very little to the gift fund, as she hardly knows Janey and rarely gets anything in return for contributions like these. Eleanor scoffs inwardly about the formality of engagements and wedding registries. She remembers going to Loretta's reception and finding the event boring and the food and drink unremarkable.

Eleanor's stingy contribution to the engagement gift fund reflects her ignorance and rejection of social niceties. Her remarks on engagement presents and wedding receptions are meant to be funny: as strange and blunt as Eleanor can be, her observations are honest and likely relatable to the reader. Honeyman makes Eleanor relatable to encourage the reader not to pass judgment on people who are stereotypically quirky or awkward—one might have more in common with these seemingly odd people than one initially thinks.

After the office gives Janey her gift, Eleanor leaves work. Although she tries her best to avoid talking to anyone on her way out, she runs into Raymond in the elevator and they exit the office building together. With horror, Eleanor realizes that they are heading the same direction. Raymond lights a **cigarette**, which Eleanor finds repulsive. She tells him so.

Eleanor's disgusted response to Raymond's cigarette smoke goes beyond what one would consider to be a normal disapproval of smoking. This implies that her dislike of smoking could be rooted in a traumatic event related to smoking, or to fire more generally.

Eleanor lies about needing to go to a doctor's appointment to cut her walk with Raymond short, as she needs to back to her apartment for a meeting with a social worker. As they wait to cross the street, they see an old, overweight man wearing a red sweater and carrying shopping bags wobble, shake, and fall to the ground. Eleanor makes a crass remark about the man being a drunk, which disgusts Raymond, who insists that they should help the man. Eleanor and Raymond approach the man, who is now unconscious. Eleanor doesn't smell alcohol on the man's breath and she realizes that he isn't actually drunk.

Eleanor frequently says whatever is on her mind because she doesn't consider how her thoughts will affect others. In this instance, Raymond finds her remark about the old man being a drunk rude and insensitive. However, this incident shows that once Eleanor starts reaching out to others, she becomes better able to understand them. Eleanor's cruel remark about the old man is hypocritical because she herself has a drinking problem, and her disgust with him might be seen as a projection of her disgust toward herself. Lastly, Eleanor's cruel, judgmental attitude mirrors Mummy's treatment of Eleanor, illustrating the "unbreakable" bond that Mummy spoke about on the phone earlier: Eleanor demonstrates how connected she is to Mummy when she unwittingly embodies Mummy's cruelty toward others.

Raymond calls for an ambulance and tells Eleanor to talk to the man. Eleanor realizes that she is genuinely concerned for the man, which surprises her because she rarely feels sympathy for others. The ambulance arrives, and Raymond decides to accompany the man to the hospital. He gives Eleanor his phone number so that she can drop by after her doctor's appointment to bring the man his shopping bags.

Eleanor's concern for the man shows that she is capable of kindness and understanding, despite supposedly rarely feeling sympathy toward others and insisting that she is "fine" being alone. Eleanor seems committed to regarding herself as a loner despite clearly caring about others, which raises the question of whether something happened to her in the past that caused her to cut herself off. Given Eleanor's status as an unreliable narrator, it's plausible that she is hiding something beneath her façade of self-sufficiency.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 6

Shortly after Eleanor arrives home with the old man's shopping bags, a social worker knocks on the door to perform a biannual checkup. Eleanor tells the woman, June Mullen, that she doesn't look like a social worker. June responds with silence, causing Eleanor to inwardly disparage the woman's "underdeveloped social skills." June Mullen is Eleanor's first visitor since last November.

By criticizing June's social skills, Eleanor projects her own awkwardness onto others. Eleanor's judgmental comment may also be interpreted as another example of her unknowingly adopting Mummy's critical perspective of others. June's visit sheds additional light on Eleanor's mysterious past, implying that whatever happened to her was significant enough to necessitate regular checkups with a social worker.

June and Eleanor sit down in the living room, and June thumbs through Eleanor's case file, mumbling to herself about "biannual visits…continuity of community integration…early identification of any additional support needs." Suddenly, June's face grows dark and she looks up at Eleanor, who assumes that June must have gotten to the section about Mummy. June asks Eleanor if she misses Mummy, and Eleanor says she doesn't. June becomes uncomfortable and changes the subject, questioning Eleanor about how she's doing. Eleanor insists that she's fine.

June's discomfort with Eleanor's response to her question about Mummy is evidence that Eleanor's traumatic past involves Mummy, which suggests that the trauma likely occurred during childhood. Eleanor clearly doesn't want to talk about Mummy, her past, or her current emotional state. This interaction with June should make the reader question whether Eleanor is truly fine or if she is merely saying so redirect others'—and her own—attention away from painful, hidden truths about her past.

June asks Eleanor whether she has changed her mind about wanting find out more about "the incident." Eleanor insists that she's fine not knowing and that Mummy would prefer that she not discuss the matter with anyone. June is astonished to hear that Eleanor doesn't want to know more about her past and finds it strange that Eleanor still talks to Mummy. Eleanor watches as June scrutinizes the scars on her face, speculating that June is probably fascinated to be "*this close*" to "*the pretty face of evil.*"

The reader now knows that Eleanor's residual trauma is tied to an "incident" that is seemingly so painful for her to think about that she actively chooses to remain ignorant of its details. June's amazement that Eleanor still keeps in touch with Mummy is further evidence that Mummy is connected to this mysterious incident; by extension, June's subsequent fixation on Eleanor's scars suggests that Mummy was somehow involved in the injury. The italicization of "the pretty face of evil" *implies that Eleanor is quoting a phrase uttered elsewhere. Given the evidence the reader now has to suggest that Mummy was somehow involved in Eleanor's traumatic incident, it's reasonable to surmise that* "the pretty face of evil" *refers to Mummy. Further, Eleanor's suspicion that June looks in her face and sees Mummy recalls Eleanor's earlier admission that she hates seeing Mummy's features in her face, as well as Mummy's earlier comments about the close bond between mothers and their children.*

As June prepares to leave, she asks Eleanor about her plans for the weekend. Eleanor mentions visiting someone in the hospital. June says it's nice to be visited in the hospital, which is something that Eleanor should know from being hospitalized as a child. Bluntly, Eleanor responds that she was only allowed visits with police and legal authorities. June tells Eleanor she'll see her again in six months and exits the apartment.

The fact that Eleanor was hospitalized as a child is additional evidence that Eleanor incurred her facial scarring during her mysterious childhood incident. The fact that Eleanor was only allowed visits with police and legal authorities also sheds light on the seriousness of the incident. Despite gaining additional insight into Eleanor's past, however, the reader remains very much in the dark about what happened to her because she avoids thinking about the incident in clear, direct terms. As a result, the reader must piece together Eleanor's past from the scattered, often vague details she provides.

Eleanor thinks it's strange that June hadn't noticed **Polly**, her Congo cockatoo plant. Polly was a birthday present and is the only thing that Eleanor has left from her childhood. Eleanor talks to Polly when her loneliness becomes so bad that she needs to hear her own voice out loud.

Eleanor's comment that Polly is the only thing left from her childhood implies that Eleanor misses people or things from her past, perhaps because she lost them to the "incident" that causes her to have biannual checkups with social workers. Polly's status as the only remaining thing from Eleanor's childhood also suggests that the Plant holds some symbolic value to her. The fact that Eleanor talks to Polly to alleviate loneliness contradicts Eleanor's insistence that she's "fine" with her lonely life, suggesting that Eleanor is too ashamed of her pain and loneliness to admit to it.

Suddenly, the phone rings: it's Raymond. He's at the hospital with the old man, whose name is Sammy Thom. Sammy is "stable, but serious," and Eleanor wonders aloud whether Sammy will have any need for his groceries if he's in such a dire condition. Impatiently, Raymond tells Eleanor it's up to her whether she visits and brings the groceries, and that, yes, Sammy "isn't going to be making a fry-up anytime soon." Eleanor says it's likely fry-ups that got him into this situation in the first place. Raymond is annoyed by Eleanor's glib attitude and hangs up, which she finds rude.

Raymond tries to engage in small talk with Eleanor, but Eleanor's unpracticed social skills render her incapable of responding with anything but bluntness. The tension that arises between Eleanor and Raymond when Eleanor makes a glib remark about Sammy's weight mirrors the tension that resulted from Eleanor's earlier remark that Sammy fell over because he was drunk. Eleanor's eagerness to pass judgment on Sammy mirrors the way Mummy cruelly criticizes Eleanor; despite Eleanor's anxieties about appearing or acting similarly to Mummy, Eleanor is seemingly unaware of this particular inherited behavior.

Eleanor notices that June Mullen accidentally dropped a page from Eleanor's case file under the table before she left. The paper is a case meeting note from 1999 concerning Eleanor's behavior toward her then-foster family, the Reeds. According to the note, the Reeds requested the meeting because Eleanor was constantly rude, stubborn, and withdrawn. The Reeds also noted that Eleanor refused to help with chores like "lighting the **fire** or clearing out the ashes." Legal authorities rejected the Reed's requests to access more information about Eleanor's past. Ultimately, the Children's Panel decided that Eleanor should be placed in a "residential care home," as foster care had proven to be an unsuitable fit. Eleanor thinks that this document is full of lies.

This paper from Eleanor's casefile reveals that Eleanor grew up in foster care, which implies that Mummy was unable or unwilling to raise Eleanor herself. This detail is further evidence that Mummy is potentially to blame for traumatic event happened to Eleanor as a child. Honeyman provides another piece to the puzzle of Eleanor's past when she includes the casefile detail that Eleanor refused to "light[] the fire or clear[] out the ashes" at the Reeds' house. This detail, along with Eleanor's apparent hatred of cigarettes and smoking, suggests that something in Eleanor's past has given her an aversion to fire. Eleanor's stance that the document is full of lies shows how vehemently she denies the reality of her past.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 7

The next day, Eleanor is on the bus, headed to the hospital to see Sammy. She threw out Sammy's perishable grocery items, as he wouldn't be able to use them while he's in the hospital and they would just go bad. Eleanor's thoughts turn to the foods of her childhood. Mummy believed they should indulge themselves, so meals were always "epicurean feast[s]." Eleanor remembers her mother telling her stories of eating chili-fried tofu in Kowloon, sushi in Sao Paulo, and grilled octopus in Naxos. Eleanor makes a note to ask Mummy about the food where she is now.

Mummy's sophisticated palette can be seen as an extension of her generally judgmental demeanor: just as she has high standards for other people, she has high standards for the food she consumes, and Eleanor's recollection of childhood "epicurean feast[s]" reveals that Mummy groomed Eleanor to adopt a similarly discerning attitude toward food. Eleanor's offhand comment that she should ask Mummy how the food is where she's at now is vague; the reader knows that Mummy is institutionalized somewhere, but Eleanor refuses to say where. While Eleanor is willing to acknowledge inconsequential details about Mummy, she remains unwilling to reveal anything that would give the reader clarity on the bigger issues at play, such as where Mummy is, what actions led to her living there, and how these actions are connected to Eleanor's traumatic incident.

Eleanor arrives at the hospital and notices a shop on the first floor. She remembers that it's a custom to bring gifts for hospital patients, which causes her to reminisce on the underwhelming gifts she's received throughout her life. She recalls how her only boyfriend, Declan, accused her of withholding her birth date from him and, as punishment, "gave [her] a black eye" for her 21st birthday. The only other birthday she remembers is her 11th, when one of her foster families gave her a silver charm bracelet. Eleanor wonders what gifts the musician might give her and imagines him writing her a romantic song for Valentine's Day. Eleanor stops daydreaming and settles on a *Playboy* magazine from the hospital store to bring to Sammy.

The play on words Eleanor uses to describe Declan's beating (he "gives" her a black eye, like one would "give" an actual birthday present) reflects the complicated relationship she has with her abuser. Eleanor knows now that Declan's abuse was serious, and that she shouldn't blame herself for his actions—but her decision to use clever language to talk about Declan's abuse suggests that she has to use humor because it's still too painful for her to seriously confront the memory. Eleanor provides more insight into her childhood when she says that she hasn't received many gifts in her life, which suggests that her loneliness has its origins in childhood. Further, Eleanor's shift in focus to daydreams about the musician is evidence that she is eager to avoid thinking about the past.

Eleanor enters Sammy's ward and finds him asleep in his bed. Raymond appears shortly after. He sits down beside Sammy's bed and tells Eleanor that Sammy woke from his coma a few hours ago. Despite having a concussion and a broken hip, the doctors are confident he'll recover. Raymond and Eleanor leave the hospital together. It's nice out, so Raymond suggests they grab a drink. Eleanor reasons that going to a public house with another person will be good practice for when she and Johnnie Lomond finally go on a date, so she accepts Raymond's invitation.

Eleanor is so absorbed in her fantasy romance with Johnnie that she loses touch with reality. She's too delusional to see Raymond's invitation as an opportunity to make new friends and build a real social circle, viewing it as a mere means to the end of securing Johnnie's love.

Eleanor and Raymond arrive at the bar and grab seats outside. Eleanor doesn't know what to order and insists on getting their drinks herself. She goes inside and, per the bartender's recommendation, orders a Magners with ice. Eleanor is offended when the bartender doesn't pour the bottle of Magners into a glass for her. The bartender finds Eleanor's expectations over the top, and he rudely slams the empty bottle back on the counter when he's finished pouring the drink. Eleanor collects her change and carries the drinks outside, scowling to herself over the supposed "paucity of good manners" she just witnessed.

Eleanor's misunderstanding with the bartender is another example of her unpracticed social skills causing her to behave rudely, and subsequently, to project her own rudeness onto another person. It mirrors her earlier interactions with June Mullen and with the therapist who gave her the bikini wax.

Raymond tells Eleanor that he's going to visit his mother tomorrow, which is something he does every Sunday. His father died years ago, Raymond explains, and his mother is unwell and lives alone. Eleanor listens to Raymond "drone[] on" before interrupting to ask for advice on purchasing a smartphone. Raymond is surprised at Eleanor's unrelated question but answers, explaining the costs and benefits of various devices.

Eleanor is lonely, but her unpracticed social skills give her little patience to listen to others "drone[] on," which prevents her from being invested in conversations with others. This is an example of how Eleanor's unpracticed social skills are both the cause and effect of her loneliness. Eleanor doesn't know how to develop meaningful conversations, so she keeps her talk with Raymond superficial and unintimate by interrupting him to talk about cell phones.

Raymond has plans to hang out with friends later that evening and has to go to pick up beer. Before he leaves, Eleanor asks him for money for the Guinness she ordered him. He counts out the money and tells her to keep the change, which elates Eleanor. "Emboldened" by her drink, Eleanor decides to take a detour home.

When Eleanor offered to get the drinks from the bar, Raymond probably assumed that Eleanor meant she would buy him his drink. That Eleanor now asks Raymond for money for the Guinness speaks to her inadequate grasp on social etiquette.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 8

Eleanor was able to discover where the musician lived when he posted a photo to Twitter with a visible street sign in it, and she heads to his apartment after leaving the pub. Eleanor reaches the apartment and sees Johnnie Lomond's name listed beside the buzzer. She buzzes his apartment, pretending to be delivering a pizza to his neighbors. He answers, unenthusiastically directs her to the top floor, and buzzes her in. Eleanor enters the building and finds Johnnie's front door. She takes a piece of paper and pencil out of her purse and makes a brass rubbing of Johnnie's nameplate.

Eleanor could knock on Johnnie's door and introduce herself, but she chooses not to interact with him. This suggests that, at least on a subconscious level, she acknowledges that her infatuation with him is unattainable and merely a projection of her longing to improve her life and become less lonely.

Eleanor investigates Johnnie's apartment through the opaque glass of his exterior door. Standing as still and as quietly as she can, she watches as he composes a song on his guitar. Eleanor presses her face against the glass and swoons as she listens to his voice.

The opaque glass of Johnnie's door symbolizes Eleanor's delusion: she might think she's seeing Johnnie clearly, but the glass through which she views him is clouded by her misguided idealization of his character.

Eleanor returns home and realizes she won't be able to sleep after her daring adventure. She changes into one of her two nightgowns, both of which are lemon-yellow. The color of these nightgowns reminds Eleanor of old-fashioned candies, which she finds to be a comforting image despite not indulging in many sweet treats as a child. To Mummy and her sophisticated palette, the only acceptable sweet treats were Belgian truffles or Medjool dates. Eleanor recalls "a time shortly before…the incident…when she shopped only at Fortnum's."

Eleanor repeats June Mullen's language from earlier when she references "the incident." Eleanor's memory of Mummy's refined tastes is similar to many of the other concrete memories Eleanor has of her mother in that they all focus on trite details—in this case, Mummy's culinary preferences—to avoid thinking about the more complicated and painful memories Eleanor has of her mother. Honeyman reinforces Mummy's highbrow tastes to show how Eleanor has internalized her mother's unreasonably high standards and propensity to see herself as different from others.

Eleanor still feels too wide awake to sleep, so she picks up *Jane Eyre*, which she's read so many times that she can open to any random page and know exactly where she is in the plot. Eleanor relates to the novel's "strange" protagonist: like Eleanor, Jane is a "lonely only child" and has known pain from an early age. Eleanor closes her eyes, remembers something that she'd rather forget, and grows frustrated that shutting one's eyes doesn't stop one from seeing. She tries to distract herself with nice thoughts to lull herself to sleep.

Jane Eyre is a novel by British author Charlotte Brontë, published in 1847. Eleanor's comparison of herself to the orphan Jane confirms what she has already alluded to: that her life in the foster system—and perhaps before it—was lonely, chaotic, and devoid of love. Eleanor's declaration that she, like Jane, is a "lonely only child" triggers an unpleasant memory—given Eleanor's proven unreliability as a narrator, it's logical to interpret the triggered memory as a sign that Eleanor is repressing something from herself and from the reader that is related to not having a sibling.

Eleanor wakes up and feels unrested. On Sundays, she tries to sleep as much as possible to pass the time—a "prison trick" she learned from Mummy—but it's difficult for her to do so on summer mornings. Eleanor has been awake for hours when Raymond calls at 10 a.m. to ask if she would like to accompany him to the hospital—Sammy is feeling better, and Raymond wants to visit with him. Eleanor agrees to meet Raymond at the hospital that afternoon.

Eleanor stresses how fine she is throughout the novel, yet she admits that she regularly sleeps as much as possible on Sundays to pass the time. Given that excessive sleep is a symptom of clinical depression, Eleanor's admission is further evidence that she isn't *fine and that the reader should see her as an unreliable narrator. Eleanor's revelation that sleeping all day is a "prison trick" she learned from Mummy implies that Mummy is in prison, so it's a possibility that Mummy was jailed for her involvement in Eleanor's incident. However, this remains uncertain and the reader is still in the dark about Mummy's whereabouts.*

Eleanor takes her time getting ready, looking in the mirror and wondering if she could ever be a "muse" to the musician. All things considered, she feels fine about her appearance. She's an average-looking woman, and even the scars on the right side of her face are nothing to be upset about, as the alternative would've been death. Eleanor compares herself to a **phoenix** rising out of the ashes. She touches her scars and thinks: "I didn't burn, Mummy […]. I walked through the **fire** and I lived." Eleanor knows she has "scars on her heart," too, and she hopes that she isn't too damaged to love and be loved.

In folklore, the phoenix is a bird that is reborn from the ashes of its predecessor. In some variants of the phoenix myth, the bird is reborn from flames. In comparing herself to a phoenix, Eleanor expresses her desire to be reborn: to move on with her life and to persevere in the face of trauma. The phoenix's connection to fire, as well as Eleanor's direct comment about having "walked through the fire" is further evidence that the mysterious incident to which Eleanor has alluded was, in fact, a childhood fire. Eleanor addresses Mummy when she makes this statement, which builds a case for Mummy's involvement in the incident. Eleanor's fear that she has "scars on her heart" speaks to her uncertainty that she can open herself up to people after experiencing so much trauma physical and psychological trauma.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 9

When Eleanor arrives at the hospital, Raymond is standing outside, smoking **cigarettes** with a woman in a wheelchair hooked up to an IV drip. Eleanor notes the irony of the woman smoking and thus ruining the health that tax payers' money had been allotted to restore. Raymond tries to hug Eleanor, but she steps away from him because she doesn't want to smell his smoky clothing. Raymond and Eleanor go inside to visit with Sammy in his ward.

Eleanor's aversion to all things fire-related outweighs her innate desire for intimacy and human connection, which metaphorically suggests that Eleanor's past holds her back and represses her ability to form new friendships.

When they arrive at Ward 7, Sammy is sitting up in bed reading the *Sunday Post*. He glares at them before pausing to insert his hearing aid. Raymond introduces himself, and Eleanor and tells him they were the ones who called the ambulance for him; Sammy's demeanor softens instantly. He smiles, thanks them for saving his life, and insists that they meet his family, mistakenly believing that Eleanor and Raymond are a couple. Eleanor clarifies matter-of-factly that it was not they, but the Ambulance Service and hospital staff, that saved Sammy's life. She then sternly informs him that she and Raymond are only coworkers, and an awkward silence follows.

Eleanor demonstrates her difficulty picking up on social cues with her blunt responses to Sammy. Still, the reader starts to see how the more Eleanor engages—albeit somewhat clumsily—in new social situations, the more opportunities she gains to socialize and learn how to communicate and become close to people.

Raymond engages Sammy in small talk, and Eleanor struggles to offer anything but blunt, literal answers when she tries to participate. Raymond asks Sammy where he's from, while Eleanor asks him how long he'll be in the hospital, as his chances of contracting an infection go up exponentially the longer he stays. Despite her social awkwardness, Eleanor feels good to be helping someone.

Eleanor continues to be her awkward, socially unpolished self—but the fact that she feels good about helping Sammy shows that she is growing more comfortable with unfamiliar people and becoming more open to accepting new people into her life.

Sammy tells them that his family has things covered: he's a widower, but he has a two sons, Keith and Gary, and a daughter, Laura, who will help him. Laura is twice-divorced, Sammy explains, and just can't seem to find the right man. Thinking about the musician, Eleanor tells Sammy that Laura shouldn't worry, as in her experience, the right man appears when you are least expecting him. Eleanor's comment catches Raymond off-guard, and he makes a weird noise.

The man Eleanor is talking about is the musician, but Raymond has no way of knowing this and thinks Eleanor is talking about him. Beyond making Raymond uncomfortable, Eleanor's comment shows how delusional she is: she's so convinced that the musician (a complete stranger) is her soul mate that she's willing to insinuate she's is in a relationship with him.

Eleanor and Raymond make plans to visit Sammy later in the week, and Sammy tells them that he considers them family after their act of kindness. As they prepare to leave, Sammy takes Eleanor's hands in his and thanks her, and Eleanor cherishes this brief moment of human contact. She and Raymond leave the ward, and Sammy waves goodbye.

Eleanor might insist that she's fine being alone, but her positive response to Sammy's touch shows that she wants and needs meaningful human contact in her life.

Outside, Raymond tells Eleanor he's going to his mum's house and invites her to come along. Eleanor considers what effect Raymond's invitation will have on her schedule. She figures she'll still have time to pick up vodka afterward, so she agrees to tag along. Raymond tells her they'll have to take the bus.

The more time Eleanor spends around others, the easier and less awkward it is for her to socialize. Eleanor's positive experience with Sammy gives her the encouragement she needs to feel confident accompanying Raymond to his mother's house, thereby allowing her to take on a second opportunity for socialization.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 10

Eleanor isn't surprised that Raymond doesn't own a car, as he already seems somewhat "adolescent" to her, with his bumbling personality, doughy physique, and childish graphic T-shirts. Their bus arrives, and Eleanor and Raymond ride 20 minutes to a neighborhood of identical, square, white homes. The streets are named after poets, and Eleanor remarks that "based on past experience," she'd likely live on "Dante Lane or Poe Crescent." Raymond's mother's house lies beyond these pristine, new-looking homes, in social housing.

There's a sharp divide between the benefit of the doubt that Eleanor gives the musician, whom she doesn't know, and the lack of understanding she extends to Raymond, who is actually in her life. This asymmetry reflects how invested Eleanor is in her fantasies compared to her relative disengagement with the world. Eleanor's comment that she'd likely live on "Dante Lane or Poe Crescent" hints at her traumatic past—"Dante" evokes Dante's Inferno, the hellish subject matter of which evokes fire, and "Poe"(Edgar Allen Poe) evokes Gothic literature, which deals with the sinister and the macabre. These associations support the idea that Eleanor's traumatic past is centered around a sinister fire.

Raymond walks inside without knocking. The house is very clean. Raymond introduces Eleanor to his mother, who appears genuinely pleased to meet a new person. He leaves to prepare tea for the three of them, and Mrs. Gibbons asks Eleanor about her work and where she's from. Mrs. Gibbons notes Eleanor's lack of an accent, and Eleanor explains that she lived "down south" before moving to Scotland when she was 10.

Eleanor observes the extreme tidiness and the joy with which Mrs. Gibbons responds to having a new person in her house, and she seems to sense that the old woman is lonely. Mrs. Gibbons likely cleans because she doesn't have much else to occupy her time, and she is excited to have visitors because she is so often alone.

Raymond returns with biscuits, and he and his mother engage in light conversation. Eleanor spots a photograph next to the clock of a man holding a flute of champagne, and Mrs. Gibbons tells her that the man in the photo is Raymond's father, who died of a heart attack shortly after Raymond started college. At least he got to see Denise get married, though, Mrs. Gibbons says. Raymond explains to Eleanor that Denise is his sister, and Mrs. Gibbons chides Raymond for forgetting to mention her to Eleanor. Eleanor can't imagine forgetting a sibling, as she doesn't have one.

This is the second time Eleanor has overtly claimed that she doesn't have a sibling. Given her tendency to repress the past and her unreliable narration, the reader should start to wonder whether Eleanor is telling the truth: perhaps she does—or did—have a sibling who, for unknown reasons, she feels compelled to forget.

Mrs. Gibbons insists that Eleanor stay longer. Eleanor accepts her invitation and stays for dinner. Mrs. Gibbons and Raymond tease each other affectionately during the meal. Raymond and Eleanor clean up afterward to help Mrs. Gibbons, who has debilitating arthritis. Mrs. Gibbons asks Eleanor if she's dating, and she says no, though she's interested in someone, causing Raymond to drop the ladle he's been washing. Mrs. Gibbons asks about Eleanor's family, and she reveals that she has no siblings, nor is she close with her mother. Eleanor starts to cry. Mrs. Gibbons feels horrible.

Eleanor's emotional response to Mrs. Gibbons's seemingly harmless question about family and siblings suggests that Eleanor is withholding significant information about her family life, and her childhood more generally. It also seems important that Mrs. Gibbons's specific mention of siblings makes Eleanor upset. Meanwhile, Raymond drops the ladle because he thinks that he *is the person to whom Eleanor is referring.*

Eleanor apologizes for reacting so strongly. She explains that she never knew her father and that Mummy lives in an "inaccessible" place. Mrs. Gibbons tells Eleanor that everyone needs their mother. Eleanor disagrees but doesn't explain her reasoning. Sensing some tension, Raymond suggests Eleanor give him a hand with some other chores around the house. As Eleanor brings in laundry that had been drying on the line outside, she reflects on how different Raymond's life is from her own. Raymond's mother, for example, is kind, caring, and normal. Eleanor realizes it's already after eight p.m. and tells Raymond she must leave. He offers to catch a bus with her if she'll stay an hour longer, but she declines.

Eleanor's comment that Mummy is in an "inaccessible" place supports her earlier insinuation that Mummy is in prison; still, given Eleanor's propensity to conceal the truth, it should strike the reader as odd that Eleanor uses such vague language to describe Mummy's whereabouts, suggesting that there's more to know about what makes Mummy's whereabouts so "inaccessible." Eleanor sees Mrs. Gibbons's kindness as a definitive difference between her life and Raymond's, which speaks to how heavily Mummy's cruelty affects Eleanor's life.

Eleanor walks downstairs and says goodbye to Mrs. Gibbons, who thanks her for her company and tells her to come back anytime. This pleases Eleanor immensely, and she leans forward and brushes the old woman's cheek against her own. Eleanor catches the bus. She's exhausted by the day but happy about meeting new people and having new adventures, both of which have made her more prepared to approach the musician.

Eleanor's inability to kiss Mrs. Gibbons on the cheek—despite wanting to—suggests that there is something psychological that prevents her from being affectionate with others, perhaps stemming from her traumatic childhood. Still, Eleanor shows that she wants to be friendly and loving despite whatever psychological baggage prevents her from being more overtly affectionate. The way Eleanor frames her happy afternoon with Raymond speaks to how out of touch with reality she is: Eleanor can't see the real possibilities for relationships right in front of her and can only focus on the hypothetical, unattainable ideal that the musician represents.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 11

Eleanor thinks about Sammy and Mrs. Gibbons while she's at work the next week. She considers visiting them but dreads socializing without having Raymond by her side as a buffer. Eleanor is in the process of reading the manual for the cell phone she bought earlier in the week when she overhears her coworkers discussing the office's annual Christmas lunch. They're talking about having entertainment, and Eleanor dreamily wonders if the entertainment will be the musician's band. Eleanor's coworkers turn to her and mockingly ask where they should hold the party, as she's "a bit of a girl around town." Eleanor expresses patent disinterest, inspiring Billy to joke that she must've had a bad experience with Christmas in the past. Eleanor knows these people don't know the half of the bad experiences she had.

Eleanor is gradually becoming more comfortable with socializing, but not enough to do so on her own. Eleanor's delusional daydreams about the musician continue to dominate her thoughts and distract her from the real world around her. Billy's comment strikes a chord for Eleanor in ways that he and the other coworkers can't imagine, as Eleanor's past was apparently defined by her bad experiences; still, she doesn't correct Billy, as she believes society expects people to say that things are fine even when they're not.

Eleanor receives a call from Raymond asking if she'd like to visit Sammy with him tonight. It's Wednesday, so accepting Raymond's invitation would mean missing her weekly call with Mummy, but Eleanor agrees anyway, reasoning that Sammy needs her to bring him nutritious food, so it makes sense for her to go.

Forgoing a phone call with Mummy to socialize with others is a big step for Eleanor, and it shows how she's becoming more comfortable with deviating from her normal, isolating routine. Still, Eleanor isn't quite ready to admit that she's becoming less reliant on routine and isolation, so she has to make up an excuse to herself—reasoning that it's okay to miss Mummy's call because Sammy needs food—to validate her decision.

Eleanor and Raymond meet after work and walk to the hospital. Eleanor tells Raymond about her day, recalling her coworkers' insipid plans for the Christmas party. She uses air-quotes as she tells this story, which she'd seen Janey use "and had stored away for future reference." Eleanor and Raymond arrive at the hospital. Raymond goes to the hospital shop to purchase a gift for Sammy. Eleanor, who procured her gifts for Sammy earlier that day, is in awe of Raymond's unpreparedness.

Little by little, Eleanor is learning how to socialize and making an effort to practice what she learns in her daily life. However, being harsh toward Raymond reinforces Eleanor's tendency to be unreasonably and hypocritically critical of others, a trait she seemingly inherited from Mummy.

Eleanor and Raymond arrive at Sammy's bed to find him surrounded by visitors. Sammy smiles when he sees them and introduces them to his family. Everyone smiles and shakes hands with Eleanor and Raymond. Eleanor is wearing white cotton gloves for her eczema, which makes people uncomfortable about shaking her hand. Keith, Sammy's older son, thanks Eleanor and Raymond for helping his father. Excitedly, Sammy informs Eleanor and Raymond that he's being released on Saturday. Sammy's daughter, Laura, tells them that her father will be staying at her house for a bit, and she invites them to a party she's holding to celebrate. Eleanor catches Laura staring at her face, but she prefers this to the alternative "sneaky" glances she often receives.

Eleanor's simple act of kindness toward Sammy has resulted in a party invitation. Just as loneliness perpetuates social awkwardness and social awkwardness perpetuates loneliness, so, too, does social interaction perpetuate social ease and social ease perpetuate social interaction. Eleanor prefers for people to stare at her face because staring is a more honest gesture, and one that Eleanor, who so often says exactly what's on her mind, can relate to.

Although Eleanor hasn't been to a party since she was a child, she accepts Laura's invitation. Laura gives Raymond and Eleanor her business card, which reveals that she is an "Esthetic Technician, Hair Stylist, [and] Image Consultant." Eleanor notices Raymond staring at Laura, who has blond hair and a voluptuous figure. Eleanor and Raymond leave the ward. Sammy is confused as he pulls a bag of kale out of the package Eleanor brought for him. "*Zinc*," thinks Eleanor.

Eleanor's grasp on social etiquette is improving—she remembered to bring Sammy a gift this time—but she doesn't quite understand what is considered an appropriate gift. Bringing Sammy a bag of kale because he needs more zinc in his diet is a thoughtful gesture, albeit a slightly strange one.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 12

The next day, Eleanor sees a discarded coupon for a "Deluxe Pamper Manicure" sitting in the office recycling bin. Eleanor doesn't see what "luxury and pampering" have to do with painting nails, but she decides to find out and resume her "**animal** grooming regime." Her new social events have distracted her somewhat, and she resolves to return her focus to the task at hand: winning over the musician.

By comparing her self-improvements to an "animal grooming regime," Eleanor sets herself apart from other humans and also highlights the confusion with which she regards social norms. Eleanor's so-called "distractions" are aspects of the life she desires, but she's too delusional to recognize this. Additionally, given the fact that Mummy's support of the romance is one of Eleanor's primary motivations for winning over the musician, prioritizing him above all else is evidence that Eleanor makes decisions based on what Mummy wants for her rather than on what she wants for herself.

Eleanor arrives at the salon, "Nails Etcetera," and asks for a Deluxe Pamper Manicure. She selects a bright green bottle of nail color from a rack of polishes. Eleanor finds the "pampering" process confusing and unnecessary but goes along with it anyway. She makes odd, awkward conversation with Casey, the nail technician. Eleanor is ultimately underwhelmed by the pampering experience and declines Casey's offer of a loyalty card, reasoning that she could do the same work herself, or "better," even, for free. Eleanor walks out of the salon, leaving Casey and the other worker dumfounded.

Eleanor's blunt response to Casey's offer of a loyalty card demonstrates her social awkwardness. Her blunt criticism is also fueled by the belief that she could do a superior job than Casey, which is evidence of her propensity to be overly critical of others, which she learned from Mummy. Regardless, it seems as though Eleanor is willing to go through the motions of external self-improvements like this in order to win over the musician, which shows how delusional she is about what such a feat will require of her.

Eleanor returns home and looks through her closet for something to wear to Sammy's homecoming party. She has white blouses and black pants for work, comfortable clothes for the weekend, and a single "special occasion" outfit that she bought years ago and that is now out of fashion. She decides to go shopping for something new tomorrow. Eleanor feels happy as she makes pasta and listens to the radio.

Eleanor thinks that wearing the right outfit will be enough to ensure that Sammy's homecoming party is a fun experience for her—she doesn't want to admit that she'll have to put in the effort to socialize in order to make her time at the party a success.

Eleanor's good mood doesn't last long. "Hello?" Eleanor asks, reluctantly. It is Mummy, who is infuriated that Eleanor missed her call last night. Eleanor tries to explain that she was visiting a friend in the hospital, but Mummy accuses her of lying, insisting that Eleanor doesn't have any friends. She tries to make Eleanor feel guilty for abandoning her for others before switching topics to discuss Eleanor's "project" of pursuing the musician. Mummy mocks and berates Eleanor for snooping around outside his apartment. She encourages Eleanor to "tak[e] decisive action" and do what she wants to do, regardless of "the consequences."

This phone call makes it clear that Mummy is threatened by Eleanor's new social life. Mummy's insistence that Eleanor get back to her "project" of pursuing the musician instead of hanging out with her new friends encourages Eleanor to resort to the comforts of fantasy rather than face the risk of social humiliation that Sammy's party poses. Mummy's final word of advice to Eleanor to "tak[e] decisive action" regardless of "the consequences" seems pointed, but it's unclear to what Mummy is referring. It's possible that Mummy's cryptic advice has something to do with Eleanor's childhood incident.

Mummy changes the subject, telling Eleanor not to get too distracted by her job and her new friends. In Mummy's eyes, Eleanor is a complete failure, which is something Eleanor herself should realize every time she sees her scars. Mummy asks Eleanor to remember "how [she] got them," asking, "was it worth it? For *her*?" Then there is silence.

By drawing Eleanor's attention toward her scars, Mummy suggests that Eleanor will always be held back by her traumatic past. When Mummy asks Eleanor if it was "worth it? For her*?" she seems to imply that Eleanor's scars are her own fault, and that she incurred them for another person ("her") who's unknown to the reader thus far.*

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 13

Eleanor feels calm as she rides the bus to work on Friday morning. She remembers that she didn't drink after her talk with Mummy, though this was mostly because she didn't have any alcohol at home. Instead of drinking, she distracted herself with a book on tropical fruit, a cup of tea, and, later, *Sense and Sensibility*, which she likes for the happy ending Jane Austen gives to the characters Elinor and Marianne.

Eleanor's inability to see sobriety as the positive consequence of socializing shows how out of touch with reality she is: her thoughts are so distorted by her task of winning over the musician that everything else seems unimportant and inconsequential. On another note, given that Eleanor shares a name with one of Sense and Sensibility*'s protagonists, it's possible that the other character, Marianne, has some relevance in Eleanor's life, as well.*

Eleanor picks up a trashy newspaper left behind on the bus and sees an advertisement for The Cuttings, a music venue, which reveals that Johnnie Lomond is on tonight's lineup. Excitedly, Eleanor realizes that she needs to shop for a gig outfit in addition to a party outfit and decides to head straight to the shops after work. She'll be cutting it close, but she should have enough time to attend the performance at eight p.m. and arrive early enough to secure a seat close to the stage. Eleanor looks at her phone to check the musician's Twitter account and see if their excitement about the gig tonight is mutual. She sees that @johnnieLrocks has tweeted a banal message about doing a soundcheck and getting a haircut for the show.

While a new outfit might transform Eleanor's exterior, it will likely do little to transform her social skills or psychological disposition. It's interesting that Eleanor remains uncritical of Johnnie Lomond's often banal Twitter presence when she is so indiscriminately critical of everyone else. Given Mummy's approval of Johnnie and disapproval of Eleanor's new friends, one might surmise that Eleanor's idealization of Johnnie is reflective of her larger tendency to act based on what Mummy wants rather than what she herself wants.

Eleanor finds it particularly fortuitous that she found the newspaper advertisement right now, as she is currently carrying a handwritten message for the musician in her purse. The message consists of an Emily Dickinson verse written in a card that features a drawing of a **hare**.

Eleanor turns to animals to make sense of the world. In this case, the hare on the card symbolizes a moment of confidence for Eleanor, as the hare in Aesop's well-known fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" displays (unwarranted) confidence in winning the challenge it's up against. Thus, Eleanor she selects a card with a hare on it because she is confident in her (misguided) feelings for Johnnie and confident that, under the right circumstances, he will reciprocate these feelings.

The work day drags on, but Eleanor finally arrives at the department store at 5:20 p.m., less than an hour before it will close. She "proudly" informs the shop employee that she's going to a show at The Cuttings and needs an outfit. The employee procures black skinny jeans and a black faux-silk shirt for Eleanor to wear. Eleanor is hesitant about the outfit, but the woman assures her that it's exactly what Eleanor needs. Eleanor tries on the clothing and observes that she "look[s] exactly like everyone else." The saleswoman approves of the look and convinces Eleanor to swap out her Velcro-fastened, utilitarian works shoes for a pair of fashionable boots.

To Eleanor, looking like everyone else offers the possibility of being able to communicate *like everyone else, which is something she desperately needs to do if she wants to win over the musician. Physically looking like everyone else also lets Eleanor lie to herself that she's doing better psychologically, when the opposite is true: looking the part merely masks everything that's lacking in Eleanor's life.*

Eleanor thanks the saleswoman, whose nametag reads "Claire," for her help. Claire tells Eleanor that she can get a quick makeover before the store closes if she hurries. She instructs Eleanor to "go to Bobbi Brown." Eleanor follows Claire's instructions, asking "to speak to Bobbi," which causes the makeup staff to laugh. A makeup artist covers up Eleanor's scar with concealer and gives her a "smoky eye" look, which Eleanor at first resists on the grounds that she hates "anything to do with **smoking**." When the artist is done, Eleanor is pleased, though she hardly recognizes herself. She tells the makeup artist that the look is charming and makes her look like a **racoon**. Eleanor leaves the store and heads to The Cuttings.

Again, Eleanor expresses her disgust for "anything to do with smoking," which reinforces the hypothesis that fire is at the center of her childhood trauma. Given her tendency to relate to animals, Eleanor's comment that the makeover makes her look like a racoon implies that she approves of the makeover. Eleanor's approval of a makeup style whose name evokes smoke ("smoky eye") symbolically represents Eleanor moving beyond the reach of her past's influence. Additionally, like the new outfit, makeup creates a shiny exterior that lets Eleanor deny that she's not fine on the inside.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 14

As Eleanor eats dinner at McDonald's before the gig, she imagines the musician's pre-gig thoughts, painting him as a humble, unassuming man who is forced to share his talents with the world. She compares his singing voice to a bird's call as she eats her dinner. It's Eleanor's first time eating fast food, and she can't understand why anybody would pay money to eat processed food at an improperly set table.

Eleanor continues to venture outside of her comfort zone, indulging in society's customs despite the fact that she doesn't understand or particularly like them. Eleanor's descriptions of the musician never venture beyond typical clichés, which underscores how idealized and hypothetical her feelings for him are. Her love isn't based in reality, but in an idealization of what love should *be. Eleanor's use of animal imagery aligns the musician outside of social norms, with Eleanor.*

Eleanor arrives at The Cuttings and discovers that there are no more tickets for the musician's gig. She begins to cry. The bouncer comforts Eleanor, insisting that the band isn't that great and that the singer is an arrogant jerk. Eleanor doesn't know which singer he's talking about. She heads to the bar area of The Cuttings and orders a Magners. Eleanor looks at the detailed tattoos that cascade down the bartender's neck and arms and considers how beautiful it is to be able to know someone's life story by the marks on their skin.

Eleanor doesn't realize that the arrogant jerk the bouncer is talking about is her *musician because her idealization of him blinds her to the reality of his mediocrity. Eleanor views the story that the bartender's tattoos tell in a positive light, which stands in direct opposition to the way she regards her own scars. It's likely that Eleanor's scar also tells a story—but it's a story of which she is unwilling to speak, so she doesn't appreciate her scars the way she appreciates the bartender's tattoos.*

The bartender notices Eleanor looking at his tattoos and asks if she has any. Eleanor doesn't, but seeing the bartender's tattoos interests her in the possibility of getting one. The bartender recommends a place and an artist she should consult if she ever decides to go through with it. Eleanor hadn't expected this pleasant social encounter with the bartender and reflects happily on life's surprises. She decides that her meeting with the musician wasn't meant to happen tonight and consoles herself with the fact that when they do meet, it will be "perfect."

Eleanor's disappointment inhibits her from seeing that her life is already improving without the musician: her conversation with the bartender, for example, shows that she is now capable of engaging in meaningful social interactions. Especially when compared to her unpleasant encounter with the bartender earlier in the novel, it's clear that Eleanor is gaining a better hold on navigating social situations.

In a pompous tweet from "@johnnieLrocks," the musician insinuates that his music at The Cuttings that night was not well-received. The musician accuses the crowd of not understanding his music and compares himself to "#Dylan" and "#Springsteen."

Johnnie's tweet is more evidence that he is an arrogant jerk, just like the bartender said. Eleanor doesn't comment on the tweet, reaffirming the fact that she idealizes the musician so intensely that he is beyond criticism.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 15

Eleanor takes a taxi home from The Cuttings and realizes she has no vodka, so she goes to bed without drinking. She wakes up early and goes to a local shop to buy groceries. When she approaches the register, she asks to buy two bottles of Glen's vodka. Eleanor is normally friendly with the store's owner, Mr. Dewan, but he now bluntly informs her he can't sell her any liquor, as it's too early in the day. Eleanor leaves without her vodka, noting the changed demeanor in their formerly "cordial relationship," though she doesn't understand what caused the change.

The more Eleanor gets out and interacts with others, the more often she forgets to buy alcohol—her growing social life leaves her with less time for her loneliness. Mr. Dewan's bluntness insinuates that he finds it inappropriate or troubling that Eleanor would try to buy a large quantity of vodka so early in the morning. Eleanor can't understand Mr. Dewan's disapproval because she is blind to how others view what she perceives as a healthy relationship to drinking.

Eleanor doesn't understand the point of the licensing law that prohibits the sale of alcohol before 10 a.m. The law seems to be about requiring alcoholics to be sober for at least a few hours a day, but Eleanor reasons that this is counterintuitive: *if* she were an alcoholic, she'd merely buy in bulk so that she can have enough to drink in the early morning hours. But Eleanor isn't an addict, of course; to Eleanor, "vodka is [...] merely a household necessity" that helps her sleep when she hears "Mummy's voice hiss[ing] inside [her] head," along with "another voice, a smaller, timid one," begging Eleanor for help. Eleanor needs vodka to silence these voices. Eleanor heads to a big supermarket, Tesco Extra—one of her favorite places—to procure her vodka and other groceries.

Eleanor doesn't realize—or doesn't want to admit—that she has a drinking problem, so she sets herself apart from alcoholics, claiming that alcohol "is [...] merely a household necessity" for her, not a substance upon which she dependent. The voices Eleanor hears in her head seem to come from whichever childhood incident caused her to incur so much trauma. Although Eleanor's memory is muddled, this "timid" voice implies that there was another person in Eleanor's past besides Mummy—a person whose absence is so painful for Eleanor to process that she cannot consciously remember the person's name. Eleanor's earlier comments about siblings and the fact that this voice in her head is "smaller" and "timid" might suggest that the voice belongs to Eleanor's younger sibling.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 16

Eleanor arrives at the Tesco. She enjoys herself, taking her time as she wanders through the aisles. When she arrives at the bakery section of the store, she spots the musician and is immediately overjoyed at this fateful encounter, imagining herself to be a heroine in a Thomas Hardy novel. Johnnie looks handsome, albeit somewhat tired and scruffy. Because Eleanor isn't wearing makeup or her new clothes, she isn't ready to introduce herself to him.

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet of the Victorian era; Eleanor frequently imagines that she is the heroine of a romantic novel. In so doing, she casts herself outside of reality, projecting her ideals onto a fantasy so that she doesn't have to admit to herself that they aren't real and are thus ultimately unattainable for her.

Eleanor arrives at the register to find that fate has placed Johnnie one person ahead of her in line. Eleanor looks at the contents of his shopping cart: breakfast supplies, orange juice "with bits," and Nurofen tablets. Eleanor almost steps forward to tell the musician that he's wasting his money—that generic painkillers are more inexpensive and just as good as Nurofen—but she resists, reasoning that she needs to make a more memorable first impression.

Even though Eleanor makes her observation of fate in jest, framing this meeting as a fateful occurrence nonetheless speaks to how in denial she is about the prospect of her chances with the musician. Given that Eleanor usually says exactly what is on her mind, it's out of character for her not to tell the musician that he's wasting money on name-brand painkillers.

The musician pays for his groceries with a credit card, handing it to a checkout woman "oblivious" to the musician's charm and good looks. After the musician leaves, Eleanor can't help herself and sends a tweet from "A Concerned Friend" advocating for the perks of a Tesco Club Card. Featured below Eleanor's tweet is one of the musician's tweets, in which he berates Tesco for "pushing Big Brother spy-slash-loyalty on here." He includes the hashtags "#hungover" and "#fightthepower."

The checkout woman is "oblivious" to the musician's charms because he seemingly isn't likeable to others, but Eleanor is too in denial to realize this. Honeyman includes these last two contrasting tweets to reinforce how incompatible the musician is with Eleanor, as well as Eleanor's inability to pick up on this incompatibility.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 17

Sammy's party is tonight at seven p.m., and Raymond has arranged to meet with up with Eleanor beforehand, which Eleanor realizes is probably because he doesn't want to arrive alone. Fear of loneliness, Eleanor believes, is only for the weak. Strong people, like her, know that it's liberating to know one doesn't need others' company to survive. Further, it's best to only have oneself to take care of, as it's impossible to protect others. Still, Eleanor sometimes longs to spend time with others—after all, a **houseplant** isn't quite the same thing as a person. Eleanor knows that she has no one, but she also knows that this is what she deserves.

Eleanor is lonely and does want others' company, but she claims she doesn't because she is ashamed and embarrassed by her loneliness. Eleanor's cynical comments on the impossibility of protecting others are cryptic and seem to be more self-referential than she makes them out to be; it's possible that Eleanor previously failed to protect someone she loved and is jaded as a result of her failure. Eleanor's earlier recollection of a small voice crying out for potentially supports this.

Eleanor is annoyed at Raymond, who arrives 25 minutes after their prearranged 6:50 p.m. meeting time. Raymond tells Eleanor to relax, assuring her that it's ruder to arrive right on time for a party than it is to arrive late. He tries to change the subject, telling Eleanor she looks "nice," and "different," but she's still bothered by the fact that someone would say a party starts at seven p.m. and expect guests to know not to arrive right at seven p.m.

Because Eleanor hasn't been to a party since she was a child, she's unfamiliar with party etiquette to which Raymond is privy.

Eleanor and Raymond arrive at Laura's house. Laura greets Raymond with a smile and Eleanor with a lack thereof. Raymond hands Laura flowers, and Eleanor realizes she's forgotten to get a gift. Before she can apologize, Raymond tells Laura that the flowers are from both of them. Laura is wearing a tight black dress, high heels, and lots of makeup; Raymond stares at her, but she appears not to care. She leads them to the crowded living room where Sammy greets them with a smile. His son cautions him not to drink any more, as he's on painkillers, but Sammy cheerfully resists, offering that "there's worse ways to go." Eleanor agrees, as she "should know."

Eleanor learns from Raymond's thoughtful gesture of claiming that the flowers were from him and Eleanor. The more experience Eleanor has socializing, the more opportunities she has to pick up on cues and gestures like these and store them away for future use. Eleanor's cryptic comment that she "should know" that there are worse ways to die implies that her childhood incident involved an unpleasant death in some capacity.

Laura brings Raymond and Eleanor a fizzy drink. It's delicious, and Eleanor finishes hers in a few gulps. Laura refills Eleanor's glass. Eleanor tells Laura that she has a beautiful home, comparing it, strangely, to a bird's nest, which makes Laura uncomfortable. Laura changes the subject to Raymond, who she assumes is Eleanor's boyfriend. Eleanor hastily corrects her, speaking vaguely of the "handsome and sophisticated and talented" man in her life, though she admits that they haven't actually met yet, which makes Laura laugh. Laura tells Eleanor they should have drinks together and offers to cut her hair. Eleanor remembers her quest for self-improvement and tells Laura she'd love to have her hair cut. They set an appointment for Tuesday at three p.m.

It's a high compliment for Eleanor to compare a person's house to something animal-related, but Laura doesn't know this, so Eleanor's comment about her house looking like a bird's nest strikes her as odd. Whenever animals are referenced in the novel, Honeyman draws attention to how socially alienated Eleanor is from others, as she aligns herself more with animals than with other people. However, this party shows the reader that Eleanor is gaining more opportunities for socialization and is becoming somewhat less awkward as she continues to attend social events.

Eleanor wanders outside to escape the party's hectic atmosphere and runs into Raymond, who is outside for a **cigarette** and some fresh air and has failed to notice the irony of this. They're both feeling a little tipsy. Eleanor tells Raymond that Laura is going to cut her hair and accuses him of liking her. Raymond admits that Laura is beautiful but says that he prefers someone who isn't so high maintenance. He leaves for a minute and reappears with a bottle of wine and two paper cups. Raymond laments his recent breakup with his ex-girlfriend Helen. He thought she was the one and can't fathom how and when things went wrong.

It's ironic that Raymond steps outside to get some fresh air yet chooses to inhale smoke from his cigarette. Honeyman borrows a lot of names from Eleanor's favorite book, Jane Eyre—"Helen" seems to be one of these, though there's no explicit connection between Raymond's ex and the character of Helen Burns Jane Eyre. When Raymond opens up to Eleanor about his love life, it signifies that their friendship has grown to the extent that they no longer only talk about mundane, superficial topics with each other: they can talk about the personal issues they hide from others.

Eleanor sees that Raymond isn't really talking to *her*—he's simply talking to get things out. Eleanor offers Raymond her own story of a failed romance, telling him about her ex from college, Declan, who regularly abused her. At the time, Eleanor had believed Declan's beatings were her fault, though she now knows she wasn't to blame for his abuse. The relationship ended after Declan's beatings sent her to the hospital. There, a concerned nurse explained to Eleanor that people who love you don't hurt you. Eleanor broke up with Declan after this. Raymond comforts Eleanor and touches her arm as she shares these personal details of her life with him.

It's a big deal for Eleanor to talk to Raymond about Declan, as she rarely reveals intimate, painful details of her life to others, preferring to pretend that she is "fine" when she's not. Eleanor rarely acknowledges her painful past even to herself, *so it speaks to the depth and meaningfulness of her relationship with Raymond that she would be vulnerable in front of him.*

Eleanor tells Raymond that she has to go and he calls her a cab. Raymond is visibly drunk and tells Eleanor he's going to stick around the party awhile longer. As Eleanor's cab pulls away, she sees Raymond heading toward Laura, who is standing in the doorway holding two glasses.

Eleanor appears to be jealous of Laura—if not for Raymond's attraction to her, then for the ease with which Laura's good looks and carefree attitude allow her to socialize with others.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 18

Raymond sends Eleanor an email next Tuesday. His abbreviated grammar and spelling choices prove to Eleanor that, as she expected, he is "semiliterate." Raymond asks Eleanor if she'd like to go to Sammy's son Keith's 40th birthday party with him on Saturday. Excited to attend another party, Eleanor accepts Raymond's invitation, replying to his casual message with stiff, formal language.

Eleanor is quick to criticize Raymond's abbreviated language, calling him "semiliterate," but she never extends the same disdain to the musician's similarly casual, abbreviated tweets. This inconsistency reinforces how significantly Eleanor's obsession with the musician is rooted in denial and delusion.

That afternoon, Eleanor heads to Heliotrope, Laura's salon, for her haircut. The salon is loud and full of fashionably dressed staff. Laura arrives and situates Eleanor in a chair. Laura complains about having Sammy stay with her, and Eleanor sympathizes with having difficult parents. Eleanor tells Laura she can do whatever she wants with her hair, and Laura arranges to give her a bob haircut with bangs and caramel and honey-colored highlights. To Eleanor's delight, Laura sets her up with a magazine and a cappuccino before getting to work on her hair.

Eleanor is often opposed to small talk—but when she actually gives it a try with Laura, she discovers that she can relate to Laura about difficult parents. The more Eleanor practices small talk, the more comfortable and worthwhile it becomes for her.

As Eleanor waits for her highlights to finish developing, a vague memory of brushing someone's hair—someone "smaller than [her]"—interrupts her happiness. Eleanor normally drinks vodka to erase thoughts like these.

One of the reasons Eleanor is so hesitant to put herself out there is because so many things trigger traumatic moments form her past and cause her to break down: here, the feeling of Laura brushing her hair triggers an unconscious memory of brushing someone else's hair. The fact that this memory comes to Eleanor as a traumatic flashback implies that Eleanor associates the person whose hair she is brushing with her traumatic past, and the detail that this person was "smaller than [her]" suggests that the person was younger than Eleanor—perhaps a young child.

When the buzzer goes off, Laura leads Eleanor to the back of the shop to rinse the dye from her hair. As she rinses, Laura comments on the tension she feels in Eleanor's scalp. After the color is rinsed out, Laura cuts Eleanor's hair. When she's finished, Eleanor looks in the mirror and tears up: "you've made me shiny, Laura," she says. The bangs Laura cut sweep over the right side of Eleanor's face, covering her scar.

Eleanor's tense scalp reveals the toll her repressed loneliness and trauma takes on her body; Eleanor can insist that she's fine all she wants, but her body betrays this lie. Eleanor likes her "shiny" haircut because it conceals her scar, symbolically erasing the event or events that gave it to her.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 19

Back at work, Bob calls Eleanor to his office and awkwardly tells her that her hair looks nice. Eleanor handles the comment awkwardly. Bob tells her that Loretta is going on leave and offers Eleanor her position. The promotion would involve a slight raise, but Eleanor knows this raise would bring a lot of extra work with it. She tells him she'll need to consider his offer a few days. Bob tells her he admires her dedication to her job; Eleanor counters his compliment, telling him she's not dedicated, she's just never missed work because she doesn't have anyone to go on vacation with. Before Eleanor leaves, Bob asks her if she'll organize the office Christmas party. Eleanor says that she will.

The mutual awkwardness of Bob's compliment and Eleanor's response shows that Eleanor's not really any weirder than anyone else. Communicating with other people is often an awkward task, and everyone's just trying the best they can. Honeyman casts Eleanor's awkwardness in a relatable light to encourage the reader to be more sympathetic toward people who might seem a little different on the surface.

Eleanor heads back to her desk and mulls over the features of her newly "intense" life: Keith's party on Saturday, decisions to make about work, and her "project" of pursuing the musician. Eleanor begins to feel immensely overwhelmed and wishes she had someone to talk to. Just then, she receives an email from Raymond asking if she's still interested in Keith's party. Eleanor responds and spontaneously asks Raymond out for lunch. Raymond says that he'll meet her in front of the office in five minutes. Raymond actually shows up eight minutes later, but Eleanor doesn't mind his lateness as intensely as she did before. Raymond recommends they dine at a somewhat dilapidated café around the corner.

The more experience Eleanor gains socializing, the more confident she becomes. A couple of weeks ago, she wouldn't have dared to ask another person out for lunch; now, however, her newfound confidence allows her to do so spontaneously. Eleanor has also become more patient with Raymond—before, she would have been appalled if he said he'd arrive in five minutes and was three minutes late. She's learned to be more understanding and interpret people less literally.

Eleanor is disgusted by Raymond's sloppy eating, but she ignores it and brings up Bob's offer to promote her to office manager. Raymond stops eating and congratulates Eleanor. They weigh the pros and cons of accepting the position, and Raymond asks Eleanor how the promotion might be beneficial to whatever her next step is, career-wise. Eleanor hadn't given her future much thought, before. Raymond praises Eleanor's skills and tells her that there are plenty of places that would love to employ her. He sympathizes with her, telling her that with no siblings, a difficult mother, and no partner, she's had a lot to deal with on her own. Raymond picks up the bill and they part ways at the office building as they head back to their desks.

Eleanor's preoccupation with her past—and with repressing it—blinds her to the possibilities her future could hold. When Raymond asks Eleanor about her career goals, it's the first time she's really entertained the thought of a successful future. Raymond's questions force Eleanor to think about her future in concrete terms; up until now, her thoughts about the future have been limited to her idealized, fantastical imaginings of a future with the musician.


When Eleanor gets back to her desk, she realizes that she's neither completed the crossword puzzle nor had any desire to do so. Eleanor sends Raymond an email thanking him for lunch. Eleanor realizes she hasn't even thought about the musician at all that afternoon. She commences work on her growing list of responsibilities, logging on to her computer to look for venues for the office Christmas party.

Lunch with Raymond forces Eleanor to stop thinking about the musician, which illustrates a shift from projection and idealization to acceptance and reality. By extension, Eleanor's decision not to think about the musician and be present in her own life suggests a shift away from Mummy's influence and toward honoring her own wants and needs.



GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 20

It's Saturday morning. Eleanor realizes she hasn't drunk her usual amount of vodka—she has a mostly full bottle of Smirnoff leftover. She puts this and some cheese slices in a bag to bring to Keith so as not to arrive empty-handed, as she previously did at Laura's party. Eleanor leaves and meets Raymond at the train station, and they walk to the party together. Eleanor is wearing her new boots and struggles to keep up with Raymond, but he notices and slows down to meet her pace. Eleanor is touched by this small, kind gesture. She used to do things like this for people, "but that was *before*."

A partially-consumed bottle of liquor and a bag of cheeses slices aren't ideal items to bring to a party, but Eleanor is catching on to social etiquette practices little by little. When Eleanor notices Raymond slow down to meet her piece, it signifies that she is becoming more attuned to how humans relate to and help out one another. Being around others more often renders her more observant of these gestures. The fact that Eleanor could offer such gestures "before" suggests that she is not innately awkward, but rather that she is socially stunted as a result of her past.

Raymond and Eleanor arrive at the clubhouse where Keith's party is being held. The party is chaotic, with children running and screaming and loud music blasting. Raymond tells Eleanor he needs a drink, and she readily follows him to the bar. Raymond laments the unpleasantness of family and how much worse it is to be around one when it isn't one's own. He apologizes for complaining, and Eleanor offers to get them both a second drink. On her way to the bar, Eleanor finds Sammy, who is happy to see her. Eleanor continues on to the bar and observes the party. To Eleanor, it seems as though all of the guests have taken it for granted that they will have parties to attend and families and loving relationships in their lives.

It's difficult for Eleanor to see people carelessly spending time with their families because her own family situation is so complicated, likely in ways the reader has yet to understand. As much as Eleanor would like to enjoy herself at Keith's party, thoughts like these enter her consciousness when she least expects them and affect her ability to be comfortable and live in the moment. This is another instance of past trauma's influencing her present life.

When Eleanor returns with drinks, Raymond is nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, she feels Raymond's hand on her shoulder. Human touch startles Eleanor because she has so little physical contact with others. Eleanor recalls that she and Declan had sex often, but it was only on his terms, and it was never affectionate.

Eleanor's abusive relationship with Declan clearly still affects her present life, making it more difficult for her to accept human touch.

Raymond asks Eleanor if she's been on her own since she was with Declan; not all men are like Declan, he reminds her. Eleanor says that she knows that not all men are like Declan because she's recently met a nice man. Raymond responds uncomfortably to this remark and excuses himself to go to the bar. Eleanor asks him to bring her a vodka and cola, as she's not feeling comfortable herself and needs vodka to fix it.

Raymond assumes that Eleanor is talking about him when she mentions meeting a nice man—but she is actually talking about the musician. Once alone, Eleanor seems unable to be sober and at peace with her thoughts; despite the fact that Eleanor has become better at socializing, she still needs vodka to dull the pain that comes when she is alone and starts to remember the past.

Keith approaches Eleanor and asks her to dance, but the music changes to a song he dislikes and he excuses himself. Gary's girlfriend, Michelle, pulls Eleanor into a group of women and Eleanor dances with them, enjoying herself. A ruddy, short man approaches her and offers to buy her a drink. Eleanor excuses herself to find the restroom. As she waits in line, she and another woman complain about the comparative lack of a line outside the men's restroom. The woman asserts that it's so easy for men, as they just "piss everywhere and then waltz off." She's clearly speaking figuratively, but Eleanor responds literally, arguing that she feels sorry for the men, as it must be rather uncomfortable to display one's genitals around others. The woman calls Eleanor "mental," and they don't speak again.

Eleanor's awkwardness cuts short her conversations with strangers. In this instance, her choice to respond literally and bluntly to the lovelorn woman's wry complaints about men's propensity to "piss everywhere and then waltz off" upsets the woman, leading her to exit the social situation before she and Eleanor have any opportunity to discuss anything beyond the superficial.

Eleanor returns from the bathroom and buys herself a Magners and a beer for Raymond, but he's nowhere to be seen. She finally spots him dancing with Laura, whispering into her ear. Hurriedly, Eleanor drinks both her drink and Raymond's before leaving the party.

Eleanor appears to be jealous of Raymond and Laura's visible and easy-seeming intimacy. It's possible that Eleanor is resentful that her past traumas and social awkwardness have made it more difficult for her to engage in effortless moments of intimacy than it is for Laura to do so.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 21

It's Monday. Eleanor feels on edge, so much so that she took the bus back to the department store earlier that afternoon and got another makeover. She wanted to see "Bobbi Brown" again, but "Bobbi" wasn't there and she had to use a different artist. Eleanor ended up buying her own makeup supplies at the appointment, and now she'll be able to do her own makeup at home.

Before, Eleanor might have turned to alcohol and isolation when she felt on edge; now, however, she gets out of the house to combat unpleasant feelings. She's learning to engage with the world instead of shutting herself off from it.

Eleanor walks into the office the next morning with makeup and her new outfit on and Billy greets her with a wolf whistle. The women all compliment Eleanor's hair and clothing. Eleanor "proudly" tells Janey that her friend Laura did her hair, and she hands Laura's card to Janey. Eleanor notes that she's gotten more attention from these women today than she has gotten in the past few years. She's happy.

Everybody's approval of Eleanor's new look gives her a false sense of confidence that these superficial changes are enough to improve her life. In reality, all that these external improvements do is mask Eleanor's internal strife.

Eleanor receives an email from Raymond asking if everything's alright—she left the party on Saturday without saying goodbye. Eleanor says she's fine, and Raymond responds with a lunch invitation, which Eleanor accepts, responding "C U there E." She's surprised to realize that she's actually looking forward to seeing Raymond.

Eleanor starts to look forward to socializing now that she has had more time to practice it. She feels more comfortable interacting with others, which is apparent in her willingness to respond to Raymond with the abbreviated language she had early denounced.

Eleanor and Raymond meet at their usual café, and Raymond tells Eleanor that she looks nice. Eleanor says people seem to like her better with makeup on, and Raymond shrugs. They talk about the party on Saturday. Raymond asks Eleanor about her promotion, and she tells him she'd decided to accept it. He smiles and congratulates her. Eleanor asks Raymond about his mother. Raymond says that his mother is lonely, which Eleanor sensed the first time she saw her. Raymond excuses himself to use the bathroom.

Raymond's indifference toward Eleanor's makeup suggests that unlike Eleanor's coworkers, he sees through the superficiality of makeup and other external indicators of wellbeing. This shows that Raymond is naturally intuitive and is genuinely invested in Eleanor as a friend.

A baby seated next to Eleanor starts to cry, triggering a flashback in which Eleanor appears to plead with someone to stop crying: "please don't cry. There isn't anything to eat. Mummy will be back soon. Where's Mummy?" The baby stops crying, and Eleanor returns to reality. Raymond returns from the bathroom, Eleanor pays for lunch, and they head back to the office. Raymond tells Eleanor to "take care," and she can tell he means it. Eleanor tells him to do the same.

The crying baby triggers an unconscious memory of Eleanor comforting someone—seemingly someone younger—who had been crying. It's possible that this person is the same one whose hair Eleanor recalled brushing in the traumatic flashback she underwent at Laura's salon. On another note, as Eleanor's friendship with Raymond deepens, she learns that gestures like saying "take care" don't have to be shallow—one can genuinely mean it when they express sentiments like this.

Eleanor returns home. She checks tabs on Johnnie Lomond, but there's nothing of interest on any of his social media accounts. In an unplanned and unfortunate turn of events, Eleanor hears from Mummy, who has two things to talk about. First, she asks Eleanor if she wants her to "pull some strings" and pay her a visit to help her with her "project," however impossible that might be. Eleanor refuses, insisting that she has everything under control. Mummy calls Eleanor a "bumbling idiot" and tells her she needs to speed things up with the musician. Eleanor agrees: since first seeing Johnny, her new obligations have halted her pursuance of him. Eleanor asks Mummy what the second thing was that Mummy was talking about, and Mummy replies that she just wanted to remind Eleanor that she's "a pointless waste of human tissue," and then there is only silence.

When Mummy tells Eleanor to refocus her attention on her "project," she encourages Eleanor to retreat into the safety of fantasy and delusion (represented by the musician) instead of making herself vulnerable by forging real relationships with people (represented by Raymond). At this point in the novel, it is a recurring pattern for Mummy to play on Eleanor's insecurities and berate her immediately after she has had a good day. Mummy cuts Eleanor down to erase any progress Eleanor makes toward moving forward in her life.

A tweet from @johnnieLrocks, the musician, informs his followers that he is leaving his band, Pilgrim Pioneers, to go solo. He includes the hashtags #astarisborn and #iconoclast.

Honeyman includes more of Johnnie's tweets to alert the reader to Johnnie's unpleasant personality and to the way Eleanor's delusions blind her to this reality.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 22

Mummy talks to Eleanor again on Wednesday. Eleanor tells her about Keith's party, and Mummy mocks Eleanor for dancing and having a good time. Eleanor tells her about her promotion and Mummy dismisses this news as well, cautioning her not to let these silly things distract her from her "project."

Mummy instructs Eleanor to refocus her attention on the musician so that she remains isolated from her new friends and, by extension, reliant on Mummy for social interaction. Mummy seems set on ensuring that Eleanor remains dependent on her and unable to move forward in life.

Later, Eleanor reflects on humanity's ability to get through times of pain, reasoning that the possibility of change allows one to persevere through times of hardship. Eleanor's new promotion gives her a renewed sense of purpose at her job. She works with Bob more often now, and he fills her in on more details about the business and about the annoyances of working with clients. Eleanor continues to plan the Christmas lunch, working toward finding the perfect venue. She continues to meet Raymond for their weekly lunches.

Hope that her life will change for the better is what allows Eleanor to live on in the wake of her traumatic past. Now, she is finally witnessing changes: she receives a promotion at work, and she is building more meaningful relationships with colleagues and friends. Despite Eleanor's misguided belief that altering her appearance will change her life, it's clear to the reader that Eleanor only experiences meaningful change when she makes the choice to socialize and venture outside her comfort zone.

One day, Raymond asks Eleanor to meet for lunch a second time that week because he has something to tell her. Eleanor arrives at their usual café early and talks with Mikey, a waiter, who tells her he'll be leaving his job soon to care for his girlfriend, Hazel, who has cancer, and their baby. Raymond arrives soon after and tells Eleanor more bad news: Sammy is dead—he had a heart attack at Laura's over the weekend. Eleanor asks if he was alone at the time and wonders if the death was the result of foul play. Raymond is disgusted by Eleanor's crass remark, though she insists it just popped into her head and she didn't mean any harm by it.

Tragedies like Sammy's death and Hazel's sickness seem to be the reason that Eleanor is hesitant to bring more people into her life, as she's alluded to the fact that past experiences have taught her how loss is a side effect of love. Raymond is disgusted by Eleanor's inappropriate remark about the circumstances surrounding Sammy's death, but Eleanor didn't mean to be insensitive: she likely only makes this comment because she's uncomfortable with death and uncertain of how to manage her discomfort.

Eleanor thinks about the cruelty of horrible things happening to good people and begins to cry. Raymond puts his arm around her, and Eleanor notes how much better Raymond's touch makes her feel. Eleanor expresses sympathy toward Sammy's family and she and Raymond remember what a funny, kind man Sammy was.

Eleanor used to avoid others' affection, but now she accepts Raymond's comforting gesture. Eleanor is slowly learning to accept that she needs other people.

Eleanor decides that she will attend Sammy's funeral. She and Raymond leave the café and walk back to the office in silence. When they arrive, they squeeze each other's hands and part ways. Eleanor feels emotionally raw. When she returns to her desk, there's an email waiting for her from Raymond: "C U Friday Rx," to which she responds, simply, "X."

Eleanor usually numbs her pain with vodka or denial, but now she allows herself to feel emotionally raw. Eleanor's email exchange with Raymond shows that she's willing to compromise her preference for non-abbreviated language to communicate with Raymond.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 23

Eleanor returns to the department store and buys black clothing for Sammy's funeral, as well as a handbag and a wool coat. She defends these purchases because they are practical: she can wear them to the hypothetical events she will attend with the musician. Eleanor realizes how expensive it is to have a social life. Mummy had lived a lavish lifestyle, "but after…everything changed…" Eleanor had to learn to be frugal.

Eleanor daydreams about the musician because she wants to escape reality. Thinking about wearing her new black clothes on a date with the musician lets her avoid thinking about wearing the clothes to Sammy's funeral. On another note, it's unclear what "changed" in Mummy's life to make her lifestyle no longer lavish—the fact that "everything changed" could refer to Eleanor's traumatic incident, but it could also refer to Mummy giving birth to Eleanor. If "everything changed" refers to the latter, it might be the case that Mummy is so cruel to Eleanor because she is resentful of Eleanor for the impact that raising her had on Mummy's social life.

Eleanor dresses for the funeral on Friday. She hasn't worn tights or a dress in years, and between the new clothes, hair, and makeup, she feels like she's "wearing someone else's skin." Raymond picks her up in a taxi and they depart for Sammy's funeral in the suburbs.

By observing that she feels like she's "wearing someone else's skin," Eleanor highlights the superficiality of her external self-improvements. Underneath the new hair and the new clothes, she's still the same depressed Eleanor.

There are many attendants at Sammy's funeral. It's sunny outside, but the atmosphere is silent and serious. Eleanor and Raymond make their way across the grounds and enter the room where the funeral will be held. They sit down in a pew on the left side of the room. Sammy's sons and some other men carry Sammy's coffin down the aisle and place it on a platform with a roller belt. The pew is packed, so Eleanor and Raymond sit close to one another. Eleanor notes that Raymond smells particularly nice today—not like **cigarettes**—and she observes that even Raymond must know it would be tactless to smoke next to a crematorium.

The fact that Eleanor can't even smell cigarette smoke on Raymond adds another measure of distance between Eleanor and her traumatic past, as she subconsciously associates anything smoke-related to the fire from her childhood.

Laura enters the room. She looks glamorous, as always. A minister follows Sammy's family into the room, the keyboardist begins to play hymns, and everyone sings along. Eleanor finds the communal singing to be uninspired and lacking in quality, and she and Raymond sing loudly to make up for it. Eleanor is an atheist, so the hymns mean nothing to her, but she sings proudly in honor of Sammy. Eleanor and Raymond's performance causes others to turn around, but Eleanor assumes this is out of approval of their "vocal tribute." The minister gives a speech about Sammy's life, and the coffin is carried out of the room. Everyone cries and sings a concluding hymn. The service concludes, and the minister invites the attendees to join Sammy's family at the Hawthorn House Hotel for a reception.

People are probably turning around because Eleanor and Raymond are behaving inappropriately by singing so loudly, but Eleanor doesn't realize this. Normally, Eleanor makes people uncomfortable on her own, but now she has a friend with whom she can act out—Eleanor doesn't feel as socially alienated with Raymond by her side.

Eleanor tells Raymond she doesn't want to attend to the reception, but Raymond insists that they go: nobody wants to go to painful things like these, but it's the right thing to do. The reception is walking distance from the crematorium. As Eleanor and Raymond make their way over, she thinks to herself that she'd rather be fed to **animals** than burned when she dies. She wonders if it's possible to make such an arrangement.

Eleanor's odd thought about animals signifies that she wants to detach herself from her current situation. She repeatedly evokes animal comparisons and imagery to separate herself from surrounding people or social customs.

At the reception, Eleanor tells Keith how sorry she is for his loss. Disappointed that she can't find any refreshments, she heads to the powder room. On her way back, she spies Laura sitting on Raymond's lap. Eleanor leaves them alone and reflects on grief, which she decides must be "the price we pay for love," though she feels this is too great a cost. Hotel staff set up the buffet, but Eleanor decides she's more in the mood for vodka, so she goes off in search of a bar.

Eleanor's remark that grief is "the price we pay for love" once again highlights that she has firsthand experience with grief. Eleanor's sudden craving for vodka shows that she doesn't want to think about whatever unresolved feelings of grief are being resurfaced by Sammy's funeral.

Eleanor finds a bar in a placed called the Hawthorn Lounge at the end of a long corridor. The lounge is empty. Eleanor orders a vodka and cola from the bartender. The bartender is watching a TV show that Eleanor has never seen before, and he invites her to stay and watch with him. Eleanor continues to drink to dull the pain of Sammy's death. The bartender begs Eleanor to stay and tries to proposition her for sex.

Being around death and grieving people is difficult for Eleanor. On a subconscious level, she might fear that in letting herself feel grief for Sammy, she runs the risk of remembering more of her traumatic past. As a result, she numbs herself with alcohol to prevent these painful memories from resurfacing.

Suddenly, Eleanor feels a hand on her shoulder and sees Raymond behind her. Raymond glares at the bartender and drags Eleanor out of the Hawthorne Lounge and into the corridor. He leaves for a moment and comes back with a plate of pastries, which he urges Eleanor to eat. Eleanor scarfs down the pastries and falls asleep as mourners walk up and down the corridor. Raymond wakes her at 4:30 p.m. and takes her back to his place. Eleanor feels much better after some food and a nap, and they drink wine together. Raymond talks about the funeral and recalls grieving for his dad years ago.

Eleanor lets Raymond help her instead of trying to deal with her grief and drunkenness alone. She's more willing to be vulnerable and outwardly not "fine" than she was before, though there are still many parts of herself that she continues to hide from Raymond. For example, Eleanor's repression prevents her from sharing her own experiences of grief with Raymond, even after Raymond opens up to her about his father.

Eleanor and Raymond watch a movie to distract themselves from their grief. Raymond continues to drink wine, becoming noticeably drunk. Uninhibited, he asks Elanor what happened to her face. Eleanor realizes that she *wants* to talk about her scar with someone and tells Raymond that she was injured in a house **fire** that was set deliberately, though she doesn't specify by whom. After the fire, she lived in foster homes until she got her own flat when she started college. Eleanor's story makes Raymond immensely sad, prompting Eleanor to downplay her life's hardships.

Raymond continues to drink because feeling grief uninhibited and with undivided attention is uncomfortable and painful for him. Meanwhile, Eleanor finally explicitly states that she got her scars in a house fire. Given how rigorously Eleanor has avoided addressing this painful memory, it speaks to the intimacy of her friendship that Raymond that he is the first person she opens up to about this critical detail of her past. However, Eleanor's downplaying of her problems shows that she still wants to deny the severity of her past traumas. The fact that the fire was set intentionally adds a critical layer of intrigue to the plot, and it also clarifies some earlier details about police and social workers being involved in Eleanor's case. The criminal aspect of the fire also opens up the possibility that Mummy was involved in some way—Eleanor has insinuated that Mummy is in prison or institutionalized, so one might theorize that it was Mummy who started the fire.

Raymond asks Eleanor what happened to her mom, but she tells him she doesn't want to talk about it. He's fine with this and assures Eleanor that they're friends now. Eleanor is elated to have her "first pal." As a child, she hadn't been able to make any new friends since the **fire**. In college, she immersed herself in classics studies or was otherwise occupied with Declan, and she began working for Bob immediately after graduating.

Having Raymond as a "pal" is an important step for Eleanor in moving forward from her past and reintegrating herself into the world. Eleanor's sustained refusal to talk about Mummy makes it seem increasingly likely that Mummy was involved in the fire—and perhaps even the person who intentionally started it.

Eleanor questions Raymond's motivations for being her friend and wonders whether it's only because he's just as lonely as she is or because he feels sorry for her. She allows herself to entertain the notion that he wants to be her friend because he likes her. Raymond has since drifted off, and Eleanor realizes it's almost nine p.m. She wakes Raymond, asks him to call her a cab, and leaves for home, telling him she'll see him on Monday.

Eleanor's doubts about what motivates Raymond to be friends with her seem to be the effect of Mummy's unceasing cruelty: Eleanor thinks that she's unworthy of friends because Mummy has convinced her that she is unlovable and defective.


GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 24

The chapter begins with a tweet from @johnnieLrocks informing his followers of a "Farewell Pilgrim Pioneers gig." He claims it's going to be the #gigofthecentury. Eleanor sees the tweet and, later on, a poster with the musician's face on it posted in the window of a record shop. Remembering her mistake with The Cuttings gig, she immediately buys two tickets to this so-called "gig of the century" and sets about preparing for the event to make sure everything goes smoothly. She decides to invite Raymond to a different gig at the venue in order to scope out the vibe of the place in advance of the musician's gig.

The pompousness of Johnnie's tweet emphasizes what a jerk he is. That Eleanor can't realize something so blatantly apparent speaks to how thoroughly her obsession with him blinds her to his glaring inadequacies. It's also ironic that Eleanor continues to put effort into ensuring her first introduction to the musician goes smoothly despite maintaining the fantasy narrative that it was fate that brought them together—if fate is truly involved, Eleanor's efforts would presumably have no impact on how their meeting unfolds.

Eleanor selects a random show and emails Raymond to invite him to see "Agents of Insanity" at Rank Dan's with her tomorrow. Raymond is surprised, as he didn't think Eleanor was into this type of music, but he agrees to go along. The next day, Raymond shows up wearing all black and a sweatshirt with a skull plastered across it—he tells her he's trying to "look the part." Eleanor doesn't know what he's talking about, but it becomes blatantly obvious as the band starts to play. It's a grindcore show, and the band that performs emits a noise Eleanor compares to "the cacophonous din of hell." Eleanor can't stand the band or the thrashing audience that surrounds her and runs upstairs to escape. Raymond has a good laugh. After Eleanor finally calms down, she also sees the amusement in her oversight.

This concert is another instance of Eleanor's social awkwardness leading to a humorous misunderstanding. Whereas before, such an instance would have been humiliating to Eleanor, having Raymond by her side allows her to see the humor of her mistake. This moment also shows the strength of Eleanor and Raymond's friendship: Eleanor would be mortified to have her mistake exposed to a stranger, but because she's close with Raymond, she feels more comfortable admitting to her mistake and recognizing the humor in it.

Eleanor realizes that she doesn't know very much about music and asks Raymond what he thinks of Johnnie Lomond and the Pilgrim Pioneers. She passes him her phone and opens a link to Johnnie's website. Raymond takes out his headphones and listens for a bit before asserting, with a smirk, that the musician sounds like "shit" and seems like a phony. Eleanor decides she doesn't know enough to judge whether or not Raymond's opinion is correct and says nothing. They walk toward a pub and Eleanor asks Raymond to tell her more about music.

Eleanor trusts Raymond's expertise on technology, but she regards his legitimate criticism of Johnnie skeptically. This speaks to how in denial Eleanor remains about Johnnie and the promising future that a relationship with him could offer.

GOOD DAYS: CHAPTER 25

It's finally the day of the musician's gig. Eleanor has followed through with all of her preparations and waits in anxious anticipation for it to be time to head to the venue: tonight is the night she will meet the musician, the night she will "rise from the **ashes** and be reborn."

The imagery of the phoenix evokes Eleanor's belief that moving forward from her traumatic past will come about in a fateful, miraculous way rather than as the result of personal growth psychological work. Essentially, Eleanor wants the miracle of rebirth and the promise of a fresh start without incurring the burden of revisiting her past. The phoenix imagery is even more significant now, as the reader knows with certainty that Eleanor experienced a traumatic fire, and phoenixes are reborn from ashes in a burst of flames. Given this, Eleanor's evocation of the phoenix to symbolize rebirth takes on a more literal significance.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 26

Eleanor is naked on the kitchen floor of her apartment under a pale, wooden table, upon which she's lined up 12 packets of prescription painkillers, a bread knife, and drain cleaner. She wishes she were dead, but she knows that it won't be long before she grants herself this wish. Beyond the table, Eleanor sees a mess of empty vodka bottles, but she feels too numb to feel shame. She decides she has two options: to get dressed and buy more vodka or to kill herself. She settles on the latter but drinks more vodka and loses consciousness.

Eleanor represses memories that are too painful or traumatic for her to confront directly, so the narrative skips over the event that triggered this depressive episode: the novel's chapter headings shift suddenly from "Good Days" to "Bad Days," and the reader—and Eleanor—are not immediately privy to the details required to piece together what happened in between these two sections.

Eleanor wakes up again and can't discern how much time has passed. She vomits. In disgust, Eleanor thinks about all the liquids, bones, and organs that exist inside her body. She can't believe she'd ever thought anyone would be able to love her.

Eleanor's disgusted thoughts about her body seem to reference Mummy's earlier remark that she's a waste of human tissue, which highlights the negative impact Mummy's emotional abuse continues to have on Eleanor's self-image.

Eleanor drinks more vodka, vomits, and struggles to recall what happened the night of the concert. She remembers that **Polly the Plant** died the morning of the show, which she now takes to be a bad omen. Eleanor had believed that Polly could persevere through anything, but Eleanor's new social obligations distracted her from caring for Polly. Eleanor recalls crying as she dumped the dead plant in the garbage, knowing that caring for Polly had been the only thing getting her of bed in the morning.

Repression, assisted by extreme alcohol consumption, initially prevents Eleanor from remembering what happened at the musician's concert. Meanwhile, Polly's death is a huge blow to Eleanor because it reaffirms her fear that she is incapable of protecting others.

Eleanor remembers coming home from work the day of the concert, getting dressed up, and attending the gig alone. Reality hit her at the concert when she realized that the musician didn't even know she existed. Eleanor feels shame as she recalls how she stood at the front, dolled up, pining for a man who looked right through her. She realized that the musician would never want her and that pursuing him had been pure "fantasy."

Eleanor had been so deeply and fully invested in her "fantasy" that the musician was a perfect man and that he was all she needed to turn her life around that she was unable to cope with reality once it hit. She finally sees through the superficiality of her romance and the external self-improvements she underwent to win him over.

Back in the present, Eleanor falls asleep again. She wakes up and decides to postpone killing herself and get more vodka instead. Eleanor throws on some clothes and walks to the corner shop. She asks Mr. Dewan for three liters of Glen's vodka; Dewan is concerned, but Eleanor insists on the three liters. Eleanor is weak, and the walk home takes forever. When she returns to her apartment, she gets into bed and drinks more vodka in an effort to suppress her painful thoughts and memories. She is utterly ashamed of what she now sees as complete self-delusion. Eleanor realizes that Mummy has been right all along: Eleanor Oliphant is nothing but "an embarrassment."

Eleanor's pain operates in a vicious cycle: she denies reality to avoid feeling shame and embarrassment, but this denial only brings her more shame and embarrassment, creating the need for yet more denial. Eleanor's realization that Mummy is right about her being "an embarrassment" further underscores this point: Mummy's statement is a projection of Eleanor's insecurities and lack of confidence.

Eleanor realizes that she believed, falsely, that she could "solve the problem of [herself]" with work and vodka, and that she'd "clutched at a random straw" when she decided to pursue the musician. She thought she could have a future, but she now knows that this was wrong. Eleanor laments how alone she is and how badly she needs someone "to help [her] manage Mummy."

Eleanor now sees her drinking and pursuit of the musician not as mentally healthy behaviors, but as evasion: she used these things as coping mechanisms to avoid undergoing the psychological work necessary to move forward from her traumatic past. When Eleanor realizes that she needs someone else "to help [her] manage Mummy," she unconsciously means that she needs someone's help to "manage" her depression and insecurities.

Eleanor's thoughts return to the night of the gig. She'd had a lot of vodka to drink. The band stopped playing to fix a broken guitar string. To entertain the audience, the musician dropped his pants and mooned the audience, which was greeted with a mixture of cheers and boos. Eleanor finally sees the musician for the jerk her truly is. The band starts up again, but Eleanor leaves to get another drink.

The musician isn't even disappointing in a particularly interesting way—he's just a dumb jerk—which contributes to Eleanor's sense of shame over pursuing someone so mediocre. Eleanor uses vodka to dull her effects of her embarrassment.

It's back in the present, and Eleanor feels hopeless and like she doesn't matter to anyone. She realizes she's spent her life waiting for death but that she's tired of waiting. She drinks more vodka and her thoughts return to the night of the gig. She remembers seeing a misty substance appear by the stage. The substance was actually dry ice—stage **smoke**—but, at the time, Eleanor thought it was real. The room filled with the stage smoke and Eleanor heard screams but couldn't tell if they were coming from her or from someone else. Panting, Eleanor runs outside. She is alive but horribly, utterly alone.

The fog machine on stage triggers a traumatic memory of smoke and the house fire for Eleanor, and the screams Eleanor hears suggests that she wasn't alone in the house fire. Earlier in the novel, Eleanor heard voice of a child in her head, calling for help; it's possible that the screams she hears now and the cry for help are memories of the same person whom Eleanor failed to protect. Eleanor runs out of The Cuttings because she's either unable or unwilling to confront whatever painful memories these flashbacks threaten to reveal to her.

In the present, Eleanor wakes up again. It's night, and moonlight passes through her window. She thinks some more about loneliness, recalling that there were times she thought she'd die of it. During these dark moments, she aches for human contact—any human contact. Sadly, she realizes, the only contact she receives is from hands "wearing disposable gloves."

Metaphorically, Eleanor's observation suggests that people view other people's pain as an unwelcome burden, preferring the option to "dispose" of it rather than feel the discomfort of second-hand struggle.

People are uncomfortable with the fact of loneliness, Eleanor realizes. People are always expected to say they're "FINE," even when they are hurting. She recalls a woman in the office when she first started working for Bob. The woman's sister had ovarian cancer, and she spent most of her time caring for her sister. Despite this, the woman would only talk about the cancer "in the most oblique terms." Eleanor thinks that "loneliness is the new cancer," as society perceives of loneliness as "a shameful, embarrassing thing brought upon yourself in some obscure way." People don't want to talk about loneliness out of fear that they will catch it. Eleanor drinks some more and passes out.

Eleanor is so ashamed of her loneliness that she even tries to convince herself that she's "FINE." Just as the former coworker only discussed her sister's illness "in the most oblique terms," so, too, does Eleanor discuss her childhood trauma vaguely and incompletely. By comparing physical illness to loneliness, Eleanor draws attention to how problematic it is to blame people for their mental health struggles: just as people shouldn't be blamed for their physical ailments, they also shouldn't be blamed for their mental suffering.

Eleanor wakes to the sound of a man banging on her door and shouting for her. She'd been having a nightmare about a **fire** and at first thought the banging wasn't real. Eleanor struggles to get out of bed and walk to the door. She looks down at her bare feet and sees a big, ugly bruise splayed across one of them, though she can't feel anything. Eleanor finally answers the door. She's too weak to raise her head to see who her visitor is, but she hears a man's shocked voice exclaim, "Jesus Christ!" She responds, calmly, "Eleanor Oliphant."

Eleanor dreams about the fire because it's too painful for her to deal with consciously. However, the way the knocking on the door straddles the divide between unconsciousness and consciousness shows how Elanor's dreams and reality are starting to blur: it's becoming increasingly impossible for her to repress the past completely, and she's going to have to deal with it sooner or later.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 27

Eleanor wakes up on the sofa, which is covered in towels. Her body hurts and her head is pounding. She realizes she's wearing her lemon nightgown. She wonders whether she's alive. Eleanor sees a tall glass of vodka on the coffee table before her. She gulps it down before realizing, to her disappointment, that the liquid is water. She hears a man in the kitchen and wonders who he is. Suddenly, she hears a knock and Raymond's head appears. Raymond asks her how she's feeling and tells her she's going to be fine, which Eleanor doesn't find especially consoling. Raymond leaves to make Eleanor soup.

Eleanor has been falsely convincing herself and others that she's completely fine for the entire novel, so Raymond's reassurance that everything will be fine is not particularly reassuring to Eleanor.

Raymond returns with a mug of tomato soup. Eleanor tries to eat it with a spoon, but her hands are shaking too badly. Raymond helps Eleanor to her bed, and she falls into a deep sleep. Eleanor wakes up later, drinks more water, and takes a shower. She walks out of the bathroom to find her apartment has been tidied, the empty vodka bottles nowhere to be seen. There's a vase of yellow tulips with a note from Raymond on her kitchen table. Eleanor cries, realizing that nobody's given her flowers before.

Eleanor's shaking hands might be a symptom of alcohol withdrawal. Notably, the yellow color of the tulips matches the yellow of Eleanor's nightgown. Earlier, Eleanor noted that the color yellow is comforting to her because it reminds her of old-fashioned candies, which were something she never had as a child because Mummy believed sweets were for unsophisticated palettes. In this way, Eleanor seems to find yellow comforting because it represents the absence of her past.

Eleanor realizes that she's been living her life the "wrong" way and doesn't know how to fix it. She makes some tea and calls Raymond. Raymond answers and asks Eleanor how she's feeling, to which she responds "fine," as she knows this is "the correct answer." Eleanor's response exasperates Raymond. He tells her he'll come over in an hour.

Eleanor used to respond to setbacks by isolating herself further, but now her impulse is to call Raymond. Eleanor is increasingly able to see that she doesn't need to hide her loneliness and depression.

Raymond arrives with a bag of candy for Eleanor and starts to fill her in on the events of the past week. When she didn't show up to work for three days, everyone was concerned. Bob gave Raymond Eleanor's home address. Raymond arrived at Eleanor's apartment and found Eleanor preparing to kill herself. Raymond tells Eleanor she can talk to him about things—she doesn't have to keep them inside.

Earlier, Eleanor doubted that her coworkers would notice if she stopped coming to work, and Raymond's concern proves her wrong. Raymond encourages Eleanor to set aside her shame to talk to him so that he can help her.

Eleanor doubts that sharing her pain with others will make her problems go away: nobody can understand what it feels like to be her. Raymond suggests that Eleanor see a therapist, but she scoffs at this suggestion, as well. Raymond gently suggests that a healthy person wouldn't give herself alcohol poisoning and entertain suicidal ideations. Eleanor downplays her actions, suggesting that she just had a stressful night and a little too much to drink.

Just as Eleanor downplays the seriousness of her trauma, she downplays the seriousness of her negative ways of coping with that trauma. Eleanor is skeptical of therapy because she has never experienced the positive effects of confiding in others, as she doesn't allow herself to do so since the fire out of fear and apprehension.

Raymond really wants Eleanor to seek help: if he hadn't gone to her house when he did, he tells her, she might be dead now. Eleanor finally admits that she's unhappy, but reasons that everyone feels sad from time to time. Raymond emphasizes the seriousness of Eleanor's suicidal thoughts and Eleanor agrees to see a therapist. Raymond asks her if she wants him to get in touch with her mother, but Eleanor shakes her head, saying that Mummy would only be happy to know that Eleanor has been suffering.

Eleanor's reluctant decision to see a therapist suggests that she is finally starting to be upfront and less ashamed of not being fine. Eleanor's comment that it would please Mummy to know that she is suffering shows that Eleanor is more willing to disclose details about her relationship with Mummy to Raymond; in this instance, she alludes to the fact that Mummy is emotionally abuse toward her.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 28

Raymond arrives unannounced over the next few days to check on Eleanor. She's touched by his persistence—when things would go awry when she'd been in the foster system, she'd simply be sent off to a new house. Eleanor wonders what it would be like to have a family who would be there for her whenever she needed them.

Raymond provides Eleanor with continuity, something she hasn't had until now. He doesn't give up on her and allow her to sink back into her old habits of drinking and denial.

Eleanor recalls how Raymond showed up earlier that day with a balloon for her. She made tea and Raymond asked her about the GP. Eleanor told him she made an appointment for tomorrow. Raymond was relieved and told Eleanor to be honest and forthcoming with the doctor. Eleanor plans to tell the doctor *almost* everything, though she'll leave out the pills (which have been flushed down the toilet) as well as her talks with Mummy.

Eleanor's motivation for not telling the doctor about the pills seems to be to downplay her level of emotional distress, but it's not entirely clear why she doesn't want the GP to know about her talks with Mummy. Eleanor's decision not to tell the doctor about Mummy suggests that there is something about these conversations that Eleanor is withholding from the narrator—and perhaps even from herself.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 29

The GP gave Eleanor time off work, which feels odd to her, as she's worked—with no days off—since the week after she finished college. The doctor diagnosed Eleanor with depression and recommended a combination of therapy and medication. Eleanor worries she'll become reliant on medication like she did with vodka but agrees to see a counselor. Today is her first therapy session with Maria Temple.

Agreeing to take time off work means that Eleanor is beginning to come to terms with the fact that she's not as fine as she wanted to believe she was. Maria Temple's name seems to be another Jane Eyre reference—Ms. Temple is the name of Jane Eyre's mentor at boarding school.

Maria Temple's office is located in the city center. The building is gray and gloomy, and it reminds Eleanor of the many institutions she became familiar with as a child. Eleanor knocks on Temple's door, and Temple invites her inside. Eleanor is stiff with the therapist at first, insisting on being called Ms. Oliphant instead of Eleanor and answering vaguely when Temple asks whether Eleanor has received counseling before. Maria Temple reminds Eleanor that she can feel safe and comfortable in her office. Eleanor says nothing in response.

In comparing Maria Temple's building to the state institutions she was exposed to as a child, Eleanor attaches a negative connotation to Temple, thereby implicitly expresses her skepticism toward therapy. It makes sense that Eleanor would be on guard in Maria Temple's office, given the negative experiences she had with social workers and the legal system as a child.

Temple consults her notes, acknowledges the GP's depression diagnosis, and asks Eleanor how she's been feeling lately. Eleanor responds stiffly, admitting to feeling "a bit sad." She continues to maintain her distance from Temple but agrees to Temple's repeated request to call her Eleanor. Temple asks Eleanor to tell her about the events leading up to her diagnosis, and Eleanor downplays them, again, insisting that things just got a little out of hand. Temple urges Eleanor to tell her why she was feeling sad, and Eleanor realizes she wants to cry.

Eleanor downplays her depression because she still isn't comfortable admitting to the fact that she's struggling and to the shameful feelings she attaches to mental illness and loneliness.

Eleanor tries to talk about her infatuation with the musician casually, describing it as "boring," and merely a failed romance. Eventually, Eleanor admits that she never actually met the man before, which sparks Temple's interest. Temple asks Eleanor if she's ever been in a similar situation before, and Eleanor says she hasn't.

Eleanor is ashamed of how carried away she got with pursuing the musician, so she tries to pass it off as a failed romance. Again, Eleanor is reluctant to admit the extent of her mental health issues or show signs of vulnerability in front of someone she doesn't know well.

Temple deconstructs Eleanor's crush some more, framing her feelings for the musician as a "trial run" for a future, feasible romance. She asks Eleanor how her feelings for the musician ended, and Eleanor starts to open up, explaining that she actually did believe, "on some level" that the romance was real and that she and the musician had a future together. Her feelings ended when she realized, once and for all, that the entire thing had been a fantasy, a desperate attempt "to please M—" but she cuts herself off before she can finish. Maria tells her she'd like to talk more about Eleanor's childhood, but Eleanor refuses.

Therapy won't benefit Eleanor until she can be honest and direct with Maria Temple. Once Eleanor admits that she believed her romance with the musician was real, it triggers a domino effect that gets to the root of Eleanor's problem. When she says she constructed the fantasy romance "to please M—" (that is, to please Mummy), Eleanor begins to better understand her motivations for feeding the fantasy. Eleanor's refusal to talk about her childhood comes naturally to her after years of repressing the past.

Temple asks about Eleanor's relationship with Mummy, and Eleanor says they have consistent contact, though it's "complicated." Temple pushes for Eleanor to elaborate, but Eleanor says it's too difficult for her to discuss, and that Mummy wouldn't want her to, either. Eleanor remembers what happened when she was a child and talked about Mummy to a teacher at school, noting that talking about Mummy to others "wasn't a mistake you made twice." The memory causes her to shake uncontrollably.

That talking about Mummy to others "wasn't a mistake you made twice" seems to insinuate that Mummy had previously punished Eleanor for disclosing unsavory details about their home life. This perhaps implies that Mummy was physically, as well as emotionally, abusive. Once Temple forces Eleanor to confront this memory of talking about Mummy with the teacher, Eleanor breaks down, feeling all the pain she has tried to suppress.

Temple asks Eleanor to imagine that Mummy is sitting in an empty chair in the room, and to tell the chair everything she'd like to say to her. Still shaking, Eleanor turns toward the chair and says "Mummy…please […]. Please don't hurt us."

Addressing the chair as a stand-in for Mummy is the most directly Eleanor has been able to confront her past in quite some time. When she asks "Mummy" not to "hurt us," the "us" it is further evidence that there is someone else from Eleanor's past whom Eleanor has suppressed out of trauma and pain. The use of the word "hurt" is also more proof that Mummy was physically—as well as psychologically— abusive to Eleanor.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 30

Eleanor reflects on yesterday's therapy session: after she started crying as a result of the chair exercise, Dr. Temple had the nerve to tell her that their time was up and she'd see her next week. Eleanor couldn't believe that someone could see another person in pain and throw them out on the street in the way Dr. Temple had done with her. After the appointment, she went to a pub, ordered a vodka, went home, and went to bed.

Eleanor is upset that Dr. Temple tells her she has to leave while she is still in a state of emotional vulnerability. When Dr. Temple orders Eleanor to leave, she reinforces Eleanor's belief that people are uncomfortable seeing others' pain, and that the cost of confiding in others is discomfort and disappointment.

Eleanor still isn't going to work, but she continues to meet Raymond for lunch. Eleanor notes that the more regularly you see someone, the more "immediately pleasant and comfortable" your interactions with that person become. Raymond continues to ask Eleanor about Mummy. Eleanor is slightly more forthcoming with him, revealing that Mummy is in "a bad place, for bad people" but refuses to elaborate. Raymond grows frustrated with Eleanor's coy attitude: they're friends, and she should be able to talk to him about these things. He asks what Mummy did, but Eleanor won't say.

It seems that a good deal of Eleanor's former social awkwardness wasn't the fault of her personality—it was simply a side effect of being under-socialized. When Eleanor tells Raymond that Mummy is in "a bad place," it's unclear if she is being coy or if she can't actually wrap her head around where Mummy is—at this point in the novel, Eleanor still has yet to explicitly reveal Mummy's specific whereabouts.

Eleanor reveals to Raymond that "Oliphant" isn't her real name—it's the name that was given to her to protect her identity after the incident. Raymond asks Eleanor if she wants him to find out what happened to her—he could do some research online—but she declines; she could do so on her own, if she wanted. She's sure it's for the best that she doesn't remember, as it suggests that the incident must have been truly awful.

On a metaphorical level, one can construe Eleanor's new name as a metaphor for the distance Eleanor keeps between her present and her past; it's easy for Eleanor to separate herself from her past because she's legally not the same person now as she was then.

After this conversation, they switch to talking about more normal topics, like travel. Eleanor tells Raymond about all the places Mummy has visited. Raymond is unimpressed and asks how old Mummy is. Eleanor knows her mother had her very young—at 19 or 20—so she estimates she must now be in her early 50s. Raymond wonders how easy it could've been for Mummy to cart around a toddler on her travels. It doesn't seem possible to Raymond that Mummy could've done all the things she claimed she'd done. Eleanor starts to wonder the same thing.

Just as Eleanor idealized the musician, she idealizes Mummy's cosmopolitan past. Her repression denies her the ability to see Mummy from a reliable perspective; to an outsider like Raymond, however, Mummy's stories seem fishy.

The next time Eleanor talks to Mummy, she asks her how old she was when she was born. Mummy eventually tells Eleanor that she was 20 and then goes on to say this is the biologically perfect age to have a child because it's so easy to bounce back from the birth before going off about how she still has the perfect body. Eleanor is embarrassed, and Mummy mocks her, telling her how "hard to love" she is. Mummy suddenly coughs, and Eleanor thinks she can detect sadness in Mummy for the first time. Mummy assures Eleanor that she's fine and that talking to Eleanor always "revitalizes" her.

Mummy's sickness symbolizes her diminishing strength: as Eleanor begins to open up to Dr. Temple and Raymond, she has less need for Mummy, and Mummy has less power over Eleanor. When Mummy tells Eleanor that their talks "revitalize[]" her, she underscores the point that Eleanor's loneliness and lack of confidence perpetuate her social ineptitude. The more Eleanor relies on Mummy for socialization, the greater the hold Mummy has on Eleanor. When Eleanor is feeling more insecure, she is less willing to socialize. Thus, Eleanor's loneliness "revitalizes" her insecurities.

Eleanor tells Mummy about her clinical depression diagnosis and about seeing a counselor, and Mummy explodes, telling Eleanor that she must not talk about her childhood with anyone. She threatens Eleanor and then there is nothing but "dead air." Mummy scares Eleanor, but for the first time, Eleanor thinks that she detects a hint of fear in Mummy's voice.

Mummy sounds scared because Eleanor is challenging her for the first time. Therapy is teaching Eleanor to have a stronger sense of self and to own her past; eventually, Mummy will lose the power she holds over Eleanor.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 31

A few weeks pass, and Eleanor starts to accept therapy sessions as part of her schedule. She likes walking to Dr. Temple's office and being a part of the world around her, taking pleasure in small gestures, like smiling at an ugly baby she passes on the street.

Eleanor's schedule shifts from one that feeds her loneliness to one that encourages her to open up to others. Soon, other aspects of her life start to pick up, as well, and she feels like she's more integrated with the world around her.

On her way to Dr. Temple's office one day, Eleanor runs into Laura, whom she hasn't seen since Sammy's funeral. They catch up, and Laura tells Eleanor she's seeing Raymond over the weekend, which upsets Eleanor. Eleanor lets Laura know that *she* recently had lunch with Raymond, and that they do so on a regular basis. Laura seems happy knowing that Eleanor and Raymond meet for lunch, though Eleanor doesn't understand why. They part ways. Eleanor admires how Laura can move so well in heels, though she notes that her ankles are "on the chunky side."

Laura is glad that Eleanor and Raymond have been meeting for lunch, presumably because lunch implies they are meeting as friends (as opposed to dinner, which might connote a date). Eleanor's comment about Laura's "chunky" ankles seems spiteful, as though she's upset or jealous that Laura is seeing Raymond. Like so many other emotions, Eleanor conveys her jealousy indirectly.

Eleanor arrives at Dr. Temple's office. Today, the therapist is dressed in bright yellow tights. Dr. Temple wants to talk about Mummy. Eleanor resists, so Dr. Temple asks about Eleanor's father. Eleanor says she never knew him but that her mother frequently insinuated that the man had sexually assaulted her and that Eleanor was the result of this trauma. Dr. Temple tells Eleanor that a woman's relationship with her father can influence her future relationships with men, though Eleanor doesn't necessarily think this is the case with her. She thinks that her mother's insistence that they only associate with "proper" people had a greater influence on her social skills.

Eleanor's father might not have directly influenced her future relationships with men, but Eleanor's relationship with Declan does mirror Mummy's relationship with Eleanor's father: just as Eleanor's father abused her mother, Declan abused Eleanor. In Eleanor's case, being abused by Mummy has had a far greater impact on her future relationships, but Dr. Temple doesn't know this, as Eleanor still has yet to disclose the truth about Mummy in full.

Eleanor continues to talk, telling Dr. Temple that Mummy had always wanted her to be proper and perfect, but that she was never able to be good enough to satisfy Mummy's demands, and that Mummy had "direct methods of correcting us when we said the wrong thing, did the wrong thing."

Eleanor's mention of "direct methods of correcting" vaguely refers to the physical abuse Mummy inflicted on her. It's still too painful for Eleanor to discuss this abuse explicitly, so she relies on oblique phrasings.

Dr. Temple asks Eleanor how things were once she and Mummy "parted company." Eleanor says that foster care and residential care were both "fine" because they satisfied her most basic needs. Dr. Temple tells Eleanor that she has other needs—"emotional needs"—that foster care hadn't satisfied. Eleanor insists that she doesn't have these needs, but Dr. Temple pushes further, asking Eleanor if there was ever someone in Eleanor's life who loved her "unconditionally." With some difficulty, Eleanor says there was someone, with "pale brown eyes." She remembers a **dog**, though she never had one.

Whenever Eleanor insists that she's fine, she's speaking in terms of her physical health: for instance, she can believe that she is fine if she's physically healthy, waking up in the morning, and going to work. Dr. Temple teaches Eleanor that she should also be assessing her fineness in terms of her mental *health: Eleanor has emotional needs, and if these needs aren't being met, Eleanor* isn't *fine—regardless of the state of her physical health. Meanwhile, "pale brown eyes" might refer to the other, mysterious person from Eleanor's past.*

Eleanor continues to search for the answer to something she can't remember. Just as she's on the verge of remembering, Dr. Temple tells Eleanor that time is up. Eleanor tells Dr. Temple to "go to hell."

When Eleanor tells Dr. Temple to "go to hell," she's finally expressing a direct emotion: anger. This is progress, as Eleanor often takes great care to filter, project, and repress her raw emotions.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 32

Dr. Temple is glad that Eleanor is "finally getting in touch with [her] anger" because it means that she's becoming better equipped to deal with the issues she's repressed. It's hard for Eleanor to feel anger, and it's also hard for her to settle into her new routine: in addition to not having work, she also doesn't have vodka as a fallback. In place of these activities, Eleanor cleans her apartment, listening to the radio as she works. She entertains the idea of inviting Raymond over and of sprucing up the place, perhaps buying another plant.

In Dr. Temple's eyes, anger is good because it is the opposite of repression: it is direct, unfiltered, and uninhibited. Eleanor has fought to do just the opposite for so long, redirecting her emotions through projection, or else numbing them with alcohol.

Suddenly, the doorbell rings. A deliveryman is there with a basket of flowers from Eleanor's coworkers. It makes Eleanor happy that they've been thinking of her. Eleanor puts the flowers down on the coffee table and continues to clean. When she's finished, a pop song comes on the radio. Eleanor listens to the music, looks about the place, and feels happy. She realizes she hasn't had any vodka in a few weeks now, not even to help her sleep. Eleanor's thoughts are interrupted by a text message from Raymond, who asks to come over that night, as he has a surprise for her.

Eleanor's projection and repression has prevented her from feeling pure happiness, too; now that Eleanor is getting more in touch with her feelings, she's better able to feel legitimately happy. The fact that Eleanor hasn't been drinking lately suggests that she hasn't felt the need to dull her emotions: she wants to experience herself and the world around her fully and unmediated.

Eleanor realizes that nobody's ever asked to come over before. She heads to the corner store to procure supplies for tea. As she stands in line, she hears a couple ahead of her mispronouncing the word "tagine" and corrects them. They respond coldly to Eleanor's unsolicited information, but Eleanor doesn't mind.

Tagine refers to a North African dish as well as to the clay pot in which it is cooked. Despite Eleanor's newly acquired social skills, this awkward interaction with the couple in line proves that she is still her uninhibited, quirky self.

When it's Eleanor's turn to check out, Mr. Dewan smiles at her and tells her she's looking well. Mr. Dewan finishes ringing up Eleanor's groceries and asks her if she'd like anything else. Eleanor looks at the bottles of vodka behind the counter but grabs an issue of the *Telegraph* instead.

Eleanor's choice not to buy vodka symbolizes her choice not to dull or sidestep her emotions any longer.

Eleanor returns home and prepares for Raymond's visit. He arrives holding a cardboard box in one hand and a bulging plastic bag in the other. Raymond opens the carboard box to reveal a fat black **cat** with green eyes and covered in bald patches. Eleanor picks up the cat and buries her face in its fur. Raymond sets up the litter box and explains to Eleanor that his roommate, Desi, rescued the cat, who had been placed in a bin that had been set on **fire**. Eleanor feels a connection with the cat and agrees to take care of her. She decides to name her Glen, "after an old friend."

Eleanor connects with the cat because they were both victims of a fire. The "old friend" Eleanor is referring to is the brand of vodka called Glen's. Glen the cat gives Eleanor a new, positive connection to fire: before, fire and smoking represented a darkness in Eleanor's past. Now, with Glen's help, Eleanor can associate fire with survival and perseverance.

Glen is lying next to Eleanor when she wakes up the next day, and the **cat** continues to follow her around throughout the house. Eleanor runs out and buys more supplies for Glen and then returns and spends the rest of the day with her. Eleanor invites Raymond and Mrs. Gibbons over for tea a few days later. Raymond brings Glen some "gourmet" food, and he tells Eleanor that she "*deserve[s]* to have nice things." Raymond, Mrs. Gibbons, and Eleanor chat over tea, and Eleanor tells Mrs. Gibbons how lucky she is to have Raymond in her life. As Mrs. Gibbons and Raymond leave, they give Eleanor a kiss on the cheek, and Eleanor "[doesn't] even flinch."

It's revolutionary for Eleanor to hear Raymond tell her that she "deserve[s] to have nice things" because Mummy repeatedly told her the exact opposite. When Eleanor "[doesn't] even flinch" when Raymond and Mrs. Gibbons kiss her on the cheek, it's a sign of how open she's become to accepting that she's deserving of love and respect, and how much more comfortable she is with human interaction. It also suggests that Eleanor is beginning to recover from incurring Mummy's physical abuse as a child.

Eleanor notices that Raymond left his trashy newspaper in her living room. She picks it up and sees an article about the Pilgrim Pioneers: after Johnnie Lomond left the group, they saw great success in America. Reading the article doesn't bring Eleanor any vindictive joy, however, because her infatuation with the musician no longer feels like a part of her reality. She doesn't care what Johnnie Lomond is doing now. The last page contains two tweets from @JohnnieLrocks. In the first, Johnnie expresses congratulations to his former band members on their recent success. The next tweet, sent some hours later, contains a series of expletives. The second tweet was "later deleted."

Eleanor's new life is increasingly rooted in reality, and as a result, she finds it hard to feel anything or Johnnie Lomond—he's simply a non-issue for her now. Johnnie's tweets reinforce how disingenuous and arrogant he is.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 33

Eleanor arrives at Dr. Temple's office for her next therapy session. Dr. Temple tells Eleanor she'd like to talk about the **fire** today—a subject Eleanor has, thus far, avoided. She tells Eleanor to close her eyes and imagine she's back at home. Eleanor feels unprepared to delve into a subject she's spent so many years repressing, but goes along with Maria's request. Eleanor remembers Mummy being "angry" because "we've woken her up again." She begins to cry. Maria urges her to continue. Eleanor hesitates before whispering: "where's Marianne?"

Eleanor has repressed Marianne's existence for years, so it's a big deal for her to finally say Marianne's name out loud. Symbolically, speaking Marianne's name raises her from the depths of Eleanor's unconscious mind to the surface of consciousness. Given the context clues Eleanor provides here through the memory of Mummy being angry that Eleanor and Marianne have "woken her up again," it's somewhat safe to assume that Marianne is Eleanor's sibling.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 34

It's Sunday, and Eleanor is about to leave to meet Raymond for lunch. She tells Glen goodbye and heads out. All Eleanor has been able to think about since her last therapy session is Marianne. After her breakthrough, Dr. Temple told Eleanor to prepare herself to talk more about Marianne during their next session.

Speaking Marianne's name aloud has made her real for Eleanor. Now that Eleanor is no longer repressing memories of Marianne, she can begin to unpack what happened to them both and start to understand how Marianne has affected her life in the years since the fire.

When Eleanor arrives at the Black Dog, Raymond is already there. She notices that he looks unwell, and Raymond tells her he had a late night. Eleanor suspects that Laura was involved, and she asks him about her, explaining that she ran into Laura on the street weeks before. Raymond says he and Laura had been seeing each other, but that she's too "high maintenance" for him. He cares about looks, but it's more important that he can enjoy his partner's company.

Raymond's criticism of Laura proves that Eleanor's initial judgment of Raymond—that he was a dumb male who only cared about looks—was incorrect. The more Eleanor engages with the world, the more she realizes that people take time and nuance to really understand, and that it's very often worth it to take the time and effort to understand them. Eleanor previously embodied Mummy's hypercritical attitude toward the world, but now she's ready to form her own thoughts.

Eleanor and Raymond move on to other inconsequential subjects, but Raymond continues to look uncomfortable. Eventually, he tells Eleanor that he was doing some research about her past and found out some things she might want to know. He asks Eleanor where Mummy is. Eleanor becomes hostile and refuses to answer. Raymond apologizes for upsetting Eleanor, and Eleanor apologizes for becoming upset.

Eleanor's refusal to answer Raymond's question could stem from stubbornness or from a genuine confusion about Mummy's whereabouts—after all, she has yet to explicitly state where Mummy has been throughout the course of the novel. Raymond seems to acknowledge that it's an important part of Eleanor's recovery to understand the truth about Mummy and the fire on her own terms.

On her way home from lunch with Raymond, Eleanor thinks about how she's often tempted to drink after her therapy sessions but that the thought of Glen keeps these urges at bay: Glen needs Eleanor, and Eleanor needs to be there for Glen. Eleanor decides that Glen's need for her is a "privilege," not a "burden."

Glen helps Eleanor realize that she's been thinking about the "cost" of relationships all wrong: she shouldn't be perpetually worried about the pain that might come with loving someone. Instead, she should instead focus on the "privilege" of having people in her life, regardless of the risk of emotional vulnerability that accompanies all relationships.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 35

Eleanor starts seeing Maria Temple twice a week and gets used to talking about her childhood, though she still finds it difficult to talk about Marianne. Dr. Temple asks Eleanor to recall her happiest memory of life before the **fire**. Eleanor pieces together a foggy recollection of a school picnic. The picnic was happy for Eleanor because she and Marianne were both safe.

The picnic was a happy time for Eleanor because she was still under the impression that she could protect Marianne—she could feel love and connection without fearing that it could be taken from her.

Eleanor remembers school being a safe place for her, because teachers cared and "asked about where you got your cuts and bruises." After the happy picnic memory, Eleanor recalls, Mummy discovered that a teacher had been curious about her bruises. Mummy homeschooled them after this. Eleanor blames herself for "dragg[ing]" Marianne into this mess.

Eleanor misplaces blame when she takes responsibility for not protecting Marianne from Mummy; in reality, she should blame Mummy for abusing her and her sister. Eleanor will exhibit a similar response to abuse later in life, when she blames herself for Declan's beatings.

Dr. Temple observes that Eleanor mentions Marianne a lot in this memory, and Eleanor reveals that Marianne was her sister. Saying this out loud makes the memory real for Eleanor, though she isn't yet ready to talk about what happened to Marianne. She tells Maria she'll see her next week as Maria smiles.

The reader finally discovers the identity of the mysterious other person in Eleanor's memories: her younger sister, Marianne. Telling Dr. Temple that Marianne was her sister fills another gap in Eleanor's memory.

Later that day, Eleanor sits on the couch watching an insipid game show with Glen and thinks about how stupid people are. The doorbell rings: it's Keith, Sammy's son. Eleanor invites Keith in for tea, and he reveals the reason for his visit. He'd been going through Sammy's things when he found Sammy's red sweater, which he offers to Eleanor as a memento. Eleanor is touched and thanks Keith, feeling grateful for the things between them that remain unsaid. After he leaves, she puts on the sweater.

Accepting Sammy's sweater shows that Eleanor wants to remember him. Although it's painful to feel his loss, the privilege of remembering his friendship is worth the pain. Eleanor no longer wants to repress the things that hurt her: she wants to feel them as fully as she can.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 36

Eleanor's trip to Dr. Temple's office requires a bus ride and a walk, but she's let her bus pass expire, which she takes as a symptom of her newfound "anomie." Nothing matters to her now except for Marianne.

Eleanor's new obsession with Marianne reveals how heavily she had been repressing her. However, the aftermath of Eleanor's previous obsession with the musician should flag the potential self-destructive effect this preoccupation could have on Eleanor.

Eleanor pays her bus fare with coins and sits down at the front of the bus. Many people get on the bus after Eleanor, but none of them sit next to her, which leads her to think that she must be mad. She becomes increasingly anxious, causing a man wearing no socks to ask if she's alright. Eleanor assures him that she's fine. He tells her it's fine to "tak[e] a wee moment" for oneself, and Eleanor sees that this is true. Eleanor had previously thought the man was mad because he was wearing no socks, but now she sees that she shouldn't have judged him so harshly.

Eleanor keeps an open mind, forces herself to stay in touch with her emotions and, as a result, transitions from a state of alienation to a state of connection and understanding. Earlier in the novel, when Eleanor was still repressing her own thoughts and acting under Mummy's hypercritical influence, she tended to sink into her social alienation and retreat deeper inside of herself. Now, she makes more of an effort to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Eleanor recognizes her sympathy toward the man as her own thoughts, and her prior judgment of the man as Mummy's. Feeling kind makes her feel like herself, not like Mummy.

The line between Eleanor and Mummy has been blurred and indistinct for much of the novel, but now it's becoming easier for Eleanor to distinguish her thoughts from Mummy's thoughts.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 37

Eleanor is finally ready to talk about Marianne with Maria Temple. Eleanor tells Maria that Mummy is "a bad person." She also expresses a concern that she people can "inherit *badness*," and that she might be as bad as Mummy. Maria consoles Eleanor, assuring her that she isn't her mother—that she's "a completely separate person."

*Eleanor is worried that "*badness," *like trauma, can be inherited. Maria's assurance that Eleanor is "a completely separate person" from Mummy is important for Eleanor to hear because she's had trouble separating her own thoughts and opinions from Mummy's for so long.*

Eleanor tells Maria that she's still talking to Mummy but finally believes it's time to sever contact with her. Maria thinks this is a good idea. Eleanor tells Maria that the reason she hasn't cut Mummy out of her life sooner is that Mummy was the only person she had left after the **fire** and she feared loneliness.

By helping Eleanor recover and unpack memories from her past, Dr. Temple shows Eleanor that she is capable of moving forward with her life and, as a result, Eleanor is finally able to realize the full extent of Mummy's abuse.

Eleanor tells Maria that she's always known something was "very, very wrong" with Mummy, but she kept it bottled up inside, even though "people died." With difficulty, Eleanor finally tells Maria that Marianne died in the **fire** Mummy set to kill her two children. They sit in silence, and Eleanor tells Maria that she feels horrible guilt for surviving the **fire** that killed her little sister. she thinks she should have been able to protect Marianne.

Eleanor had always known that something was "very, very wrong" with Mummy, but she had repressed the full truth. She now remembers Marianne's death and sees the full picture, which helps her understand the root of her current feelings of shame and guilt.

Maria tells Eleanor that her guilt is a normal, healthy reaction. It was Mummy who neglected and harmed her children, and Eleanor needs to forgive herself. Eleanor decides it's finally time to say goodbye to Mummy.

Thus far, Eleanor has taken on the guilt and shame that she should have directed at Mummy. Maria's reassurance that Mummy is to blame and that Eleanor should forgive herself is likely the first time anyone has expressed such a sentiment to Eleanor.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 38

Raymond wants to meet Eleanor at Maria Temple's office for coffee. He arrives, and they go to a coffee shop. Eleanor gets into a minor altercation with the barista when he tells her that he needs to write her name on her coffee cup. Amused and unsurprised by this scene, Raymond tells the barista his name is "Raoul" when it's his turn. Raymond looks at Eleanor's face and sees that she'd been crying earlier, and she tells him about Marianne. He tells her that he knows. Eleanor continues, explaining to Raymond that now that she's acknowledged what Mummy did out loud, she can no longer continue to keep her in her life. Raymond approves of this decision.

Eleanor's quirky mannerisms have become familiar and endearing to Raymond since getting to know Eleanor, so he's amused and not annoyed by her adamant refusal not to give the barista her name. Raymond's amusement suggests that the more one gets to know others, the more sympathetic and understandable their quirks become Eleanor's decision to stop talking to Mummy shows that she is ready to leave her past behind and come to terms with the unresolved trauma in her life.

Eleanor tells Raymond that she wants him to find out about and tell her everything that happened to her. He tells her that he will, and that he'll share his findings with her whenever she's ready. Raymond squeezes Eleanor's hands and she feels a "gentle heat" reach all the way down to "the unscarred piece of [her] heart." She thanks him for his friendship. He tells her he knows she'd do the same for him. Eleanor starts to cry, which makes her makeup run. Raymond tells her she looks better without it.

This scene resonates with the moment earlier in the novel in which Eleanor looks in the mirror and hopes that there is enough of her left undamaged to love and be loved; her closeness with Raymond proves to her that "the unscarred piece of [her] heart" is unmarred enough to connect with others. When Raymond tells Eleanor that she looks better without her makeup, he's really telling her that she doesn't need makeup to give off the appearance of being fine—she truly is doing fine now, from the inside out.


Before they part ways, Eleanor tells Raymond that she has a surprise for him. Afterward, Eleanor becomes distracted by thoughts of Mummy and Marianne. She knows it's time to confront her past.

Before, Eleanor could only repress and deny her past; now, she can't stop thinking about it. This change shows how significantly Eleanor's relationship to her past has changed—for the better.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 39

A pleasant phone call with Bob gives Eleanor the confidence she needs to return to work. She dresses in a new outfit to mark the occasion, which triggers a fond memory of back to school shopping when she was living with one of her foster families. That morning, she eats breakfast. She heads to the bus stop and appreciates the walk more than she used to, taking note of moss growing on the walls of buildings and weeds in the gutters. As she approaches the bus stop, she sees a **fox** drinking from a discarded coffee cup, which makes her laugh.

Eleanor dresses to boost her confidence, but she's no longer using external self-improvements to mask inner turmoil like she did when she was pursuing the musician. Eleanor turns to animals to know how to act and what to do. To see a fox doing something a human would actually *do—drink coffee—is a humorously literal instance of animals paralleling humans.*


When she arrives at the office building, Eleanor is initially anxious that she isn't ready to return to work. Just as she is about to break down, Raymond appears behind her, easing her into an embrace. He's happy to realize that returning to work was the surprise Eleanor was talking about at the coffee shop. Raymond's embrace gives Eleanor the courage she needs to face the office. They enter the building together, arm in arm.

Human affection no longer intimidates Eleanor: Raymond's embrace gives her confidence, not discomfort. The more Eleanor has gotten to know Raymond, the more comfortable she becomes with him. Social awkwardness is often the product of one's unfamiliarity with others, not an innate inability to be social.

Bob greets Eleanor with an embrace and a kiss on the cheek. They go through the paperwork required for Eleanor's reentry, and Eleanor asks about the Christmas lunch, which Bob has completely forgotten about. Eleanor tells him she'll get right on it—she's happy to have a project in which to immerse herself. She gives him a "thumbs-up sign," a social gesture she hopes she's executed correctly.

Eleanor's successful execution of the thumbs-up gesture shows that, while social cues still don't come naturally to her, she's now practiced enough to feel confident employing social gestures in her daily life.

Eleanor finds flowers from her coworkers waiting for her on her desk. She logs onto her computer and sees an email from Raymond inviting her to a classical music concert in a few weeks. Before Eleanor can respond, her coworkers approach her desk. Rather formally, Eleanor thanks them for the flowers and good wishes, and an awkward silence follows. Eleanor fills the silence by instructing them all to get back to work, as "those overdue invoices aren't going to process themselves." Billy replies, She's back!" Everyone laughs, including Eleanor.

Eleanor's coworkers used to mock her for her differences, but now they accept them as part of Eleanor's personality. Just as Eleanor learned not to judge people before knowing them, her absence from work has shown her coworkers that people are often struggling more than they let on, so one should learn to be more open and understanding, refraining from passing judgment until one knows the fuller picture.

BAD DAYS: CHAPTER 40

It's Wednesday night, and Eleanor is talking to Mummy. Eleanor tells her she doesn't like her anymore, and that she doesn't want talk to her anymore. Mummy mocks Eleanor's seriousness before inquiring about her "project" with the musician. Eleanor tells her it was never really her project—that it was really Mummy's idea all along. Mummy denies this accusation, arguing that she'd merely been "supportive" of Eleanor.

It's ironic for Mummy to tell Eleanor that she's been "supportive" of her when her only role for the entire novel has been to cut Eleanor down. Eleanor's decision to cut ties with Mummy symbolizes her decision to move beyond her traumatic past.

Eleanor thinks about her childhood and realizes that Mummy had never been "supportive" of her or Marianne. She tells Mummy that starting the fire was hardly a "supportive" gesture. Mummy accuses Eleanor of being fed lies and makes excuses for her actions. Eleanor realizes that she and Marianne were never more than "inconveniences" to Mummy. Hearing her own voice clearly, Eleanor tells Mummy "good-bye."

By telling Mummy good-bye, Eleanor symbolically reclaims complete control of her life. She's now comfortable enough with herself to take ownership of her own thoughts and actions, and she's now better capable of accepting her trauma and starting down the path toward recovery—she doesn't need Mummy to hold her back any longer.

BETTER DAYS: CHAPTER 41

Despite feeling "completely fine," Eleanor will work only mornings for her first few weeks back at work, per HR's orders. Eleanor meets Raymond for lunch on Friday her first week back. Last night, Eleanor did some research online and printed out two articles. She only read the articles' headlines before sealing them in an envelope. She's sure Raymond has already read these articles, but she wanted to find them herself. Eleanor and Raymond meet at the café, and Eleanor places the sealed envelope on the table. She tells him she's ready and opens the envelope.

Eleanor has learned that there are different levels of "fine," and that it's okay to take a step back when she needs to have a moment to herself. Eleanor needs Raymond to be there for her, but it's psychologically important for her to read the truth about her past herself so that she can confront it directly.

The first article, published in *The Sun*, is from August 5, 1997, and bears the headline: "'Pretty but deadly' kiddie killer 'fooled us all,' neighbors say." The article is about "Killer Mum" Sharon Smyth, 29, who intentionally started a fire in her home. Smyth's neighbors recall that she was beautiful and went out often. One neighbor recalls a time she was talking to Smyth's older child when Smyth approached them and "shot [the child] such a look, she started to shake like a little dog." Neighbors couldn't imagine what happened when no one was watching. The article closes by revealing that a 10-year-old child, unnamed, was hospitalized after the fire and remains "in critical condition."

In a shocking twist, Eleanor learns that Mummy is actually dead and that the voice Eleanor has been talking to was actually a projection of her own insecurities. All the times Eleanor has mentioned her mother's sophisticated tastes and past travels should now be seen in a different light, as well: for all that Eleanor remembered about Mummy's stories, she'd completely blanked on the fact that Mummy saw Eleanor and Marianne as impeding on her formerly lively, cosmopolitan lifestyle. The 10-year-old child the article mentions is Eleanor.

The next article is from the *London Evening Standard*, from September 28, 1997, and bears the headline "Maida Vale murder latest: two dead, plucky orphan recovers." The article reveals that Sharon Smyth and her younger daughter, Marianne, both died in the fire. Eleanor, the older child, survived, despite running back into the burning building to try to save her sister and incurring severe injuries in the process.

Eleanor blocked details of the fire from her conscious memory because they were too painful for her to deal with and because she was ashamed of herself for not being able to save Marianne.

Eleanor finishes reading the articles. Raymond asks her if she's okay. She says she is but that she's going to continue talking to Dr. Temple, as she still has a lot to unpack. Despite this, Eleanor tells Raymond that she's fine, and she finally means it. A woman with a **dog** jog past their table, and Eleanor remembers that Marianne loved dogs.

Eleanor shows that she is more open about living with insecurities when she tells Raymond that she has more things to unpack with Dr. Temple. This shows how much Eleanor has changed since the beginning of the novel, when she was ashamed to admit to her failings and inadequacies.

Eleanor tells Raymond that she's finally put in a request with Social Services to view her case file. She wants to know everything there is to know about herself. Raymond tells her that she has a right to know. Eleanor says that what matters most now is that she "survived."

Eleanor is now confident enough to unpack her past and make plans for the future. She sees herself not as a hopelessly damaged victim, but as a survivor.

Eleanor and Raymond get ready to leave, and Eleanor observes Raymond trying to shift the conversation to a lighter subject. He asks her if she has plans for the rest of the week, and she talks about taking Glen to the vet and planning the office Christmas party. Raymond asks about the concert he emailed her about, and Eleanor tells him "yes." Eleanor tells Raymond goodbye and kisses him on the cheek. "See you soon, Eleanor Oliphant," he says. Eleanor picks up her bag and heads home.

Honeyman leaves Eleanor Oliphant's *final scene open-ended: Eleanor doesn't know exactly what the future will hold, but this is okay. She will continue to see her friends and to form new connections. She is no longer beholden to her past traumas—she is a* survivor *of them.*

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