



Not Quite Nice

Celia Imrie

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Theresa is desperate for a change. Forced into early retirement, fed up with babysitting her bossy daughter's obnoxious children, she sells her Highgate house and moves to the picture-perfect town of Bellevue-sur-Mer, just outside Nice.

With its beautiful villas, its bustling cafes and shimmering cerulean sea, the village sparkles like a diamond on the French Mediterranean coast. Once the hideaway of artists and writers, it is now home to the odd rock icon and Hollywood movie star, and, as Theresa soon discovers, a close-knit set of expats. There's Carol, the infinitely glamorous American and her doting husband David; the erstwhile British TV star Sally; the ferocious Sian and her wayward Australian poet husband; the sharply witty Zoe with her strangely youthful face and penchant for white wine--and the suave Brian who catches Theresa's eye.

As Theresa settles to the gentle rhythm of seaside life she embraces her new-found friendships and freedom. However, life is never quite as simple as it seems and as skeletons start to fall out of several closets, Theresa begins to wonder if life on the French Riviera is quite as nice as it first appeared.

Not Quite Nice Details

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Joanne Harris says

I received this ARC from Bloomsbury. It's difficult to write a review without saying how much I admire Celia Imrie's acting (and I do, very much); however, I'm pretty sure that most of the publicity surrounding this launch will concentrate on her film work, rather than the book itself. NOT QUITE NICE is her fiction debut; a chirpy tale, in the tradition of what I have come to think of as Books Set in France, With Recipes, Featuring an Ageing Heroine, Who, After Some Tribulations, Finds Out Something About Herself. It wasn't entirely my cup of tea, probably because I receive so many books of a similar type, written in a similar way. The style is generally comforting, with recipes sewn into the plot and characters that fall squarely into a number of those well-worn types that often work better in movies than on the printed page. There's the Predatory Daughter; the Grandchildren from Hell; the Glamorous American Woman; the Suave Love Interest; and of course, the Heroine of Advancing Years, Determined to Grow Old Disgracefully. Some of the linguistic clichés made me wince a little: the "azure Mediterranean" gets rather too many mentions - and the dialogue often sounds peculiarly middle-aged, even when children are speaking. But that doesn't mean to say that this book won't appeal to many. There are pallid shades of LA CUCINA in here; and of MISS GARNET'S ANGEL; and of course, A YEAR IN PROVENCE. I won't give this a star rating - I think we're all too obsessed with stars, both on and off the screen. Suffice it to say that this is a warm, light-hearted, fast-paced tale that fans of Peter Mayle will enjoy.

Rachel Gilbey says

What an enjoyable way to spend a weekend afternoon by escaping to the Cote D'Azur, and to the charming town of Bellevue-sur-Mer, and its delightful array of residents. The initial descriptions of the town, conjured up pictures of a pretty town in Southern France, and I had the feeling the whole time that it felt like a similar sort of place to the one in Dirty Rotten Scoundrels. And in fact that feeling didn't leave me during the book, and there was a similar storyline to the film, running through part of the book, which made me both smile and gasp.

Theresa is fed up with the way her daughter and grand children treat her, and when she is forced to retire, she decides on a change, and moves to the south of France, and the town of Bellevue-sur-Mer, where there is a thriving ex-pat community.

Sally was a children's TV presenter in the 70's and has been living the expat life for many years now, but doesn't have as much contact with her children as she would like. Then there are Benjamin and William who are a lovely couple, Ted who makes a fabulously hilarious entrance to the book and his wife Sian.

And there is Brian, who is there when Theresa is mugged on one of her first days in France, and helps her out and becomes her lodger. Brian also helps out, when Theresa starts running cooking classes for the ex-pats to gain an income.

Not Quite Nice is a great look at ex-pat life in the south of France, with many moments that will make you laugh and smile. Almost all the characters seem to be hiding something, and as the months roll by, they start unravelling, some with more shocking outcomes than the others.

Imogen, Therese's daughter, reminded me so much of Shirley Valentine's daughter, with her attitude towards her mother. She seems more worried about how the move will leave her babysitter less, than her mother's happiness.

There are recipes dotted about between some of the chapters, mainly for Nicoise delicacies, which are always great to see, although as someone who doesn't cook, I can't really test them out or comment further on them.

I really loved Not Quite Nice, and would love to return to the location again in the future, and really hope the Celia Imrie will be writing some more books.

Tripfiction says

Novel set in the Côte d'Azur ("...it's not quite Nice ... but it's very near..")

Bellevue Sur Mer where the Brits of BSM (not to confused with BDSM, of course, though shenanigans amongst this, the older incomers are rife!) have come to settle like a flock of starlings on the Côte d'Azur. Take Theresa, who in Blighty is nothing more than a useful babysitter for her daughter and grandchildren, and when she is made redundant, well, she needs to make some choices about her future. Echoes here of Imrie's character in the film, The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel.

She soon sets her sights on Bellevue – a shimmering pearl on the Côte d'Azur – and finds a darling little place that suits her down to the ground. Gradually she is chumming up with other Brits Abroad and her social life begins to flourish. She finds the confidence – so lacking at home – to start a cookery club, and the flamboyant and colourful residents congregate at her house. The author slots in some choice recipes for the reader to feast upon, including traditionals such as Pissaladière and Merda de Can (you might guess how that could be translated, and you would be right – nothing to do with dog poo apart from the colour match - it is a kind of gnocchi, comprising potatoes and Swiss Chard).

But as in real life, things turn out quite differently for many of the characters and when a series of increasingly violent burglaries hit the community, some pull together, whilst others have their own agenda. They are not a sedentary bunch of expats but they embrace friendship, and have a high degree of pluck to see them through the vagaries of life in the South of France.

It is a light read that at times struggles to find its rhythm but it is written with sincerity, humour and warmth and some of the observations of both the locale, the customs and the people are beautiful brought to life. The backdrop of the Côte d'Azur adds colour and heat, from Marseille to Menton, as the “yellows of February, the daffodils, mimosa and lemons make way for the purples, reds and shocking pinks of Spring”. Enjoy.

Annette says

Not Quite Nice by Celia Imrie was a Gransnet giveaway.

The book is set in the South of France, and its large than life characters sparkle with wit and life, the Mediterranean sea simmers with sunshine.

Theresa has impulse purchased a charming little property overlooking the sea, in a quaint town. She soon meets a group of expats and looks forward to settling into her new, exciting life. Things don't run smoothly, and some of the expats turn out to be a bit weird, with secrets they don't really want to others to know.

The main focus of the story is the characters, loveable eccentrics who you feel you'd love to meet and chat to. The plot is straight forward, with no great surprises, but enough to make an amusing and readable tale.

The description of the town is excellent- the old buildings, narrow streets, steep steps, colours of flowers, contrast between sunlight and shadow. Familiar to anyone who has walked through a Mediterranean village, and to the author who dedicated the book "to my pals who brought me here to Nice, and to the city whose beauty saved and inspired me".

Although the story is superficially light, there are two underlying ideas which are quite profound. The first is - don't expect to understand your children and make expectations for them. The second is - be a bit selfish when the children have flown the nest, and do what you want to do, not what the family or society expect you to do.

I loved the idea of slipping in recipes. You felt like heading for the kitchen to try them out, before heading to the computer to look for French property sale sites!

The final two sentences were the final flash of humour, bringing the book full circle! (don't look, read the book first!)

Lynn Richards says

What a lovely summer read ! Enjoyed this over two afternoons in the garden and thrilled to find there is a sequel. I love Celia Imrie as an actress and now as an author too.

Kathryn says

This was a nice light read, describing the move to a little village just outside Nice on the French Riviera of a woman retrenched, badly treated by her daughter and grandchildren and looking for a new life in her retirement. I read this as an e-book, but I think it would be perfect as an audiobook, because I could just hear Celia Imrie narrating it.

I think this is her first novel, and she's done a good job. It's a fun read, one which made me jealous (being set in the Mediterranean!) - it was just what I needed at the time!

Jane Hogg says

Was really disappointed in this book. I'm a fan of Celia Imrie on screen, so was expecting something interesting. cultured and intelligent. It's full of dysfunctional, badly spoken, boring characters, all of whom I

would have been glad to see fall off a cliff into the sea...very depressing philosophies of life here. No uplift. Humour was of the slip on a banana skin infantile variety. I'm taking this book straight to Oxfam, where it might help somebody buy a tent!!! Maybe I shouldn't have picked up a book from the bottom shelf of Tesco!

Susan in Perthshire says

This book totally illustrates the fact that famous people can get books published regardless of quality; whereas, if submitted by an unknown writer, they would be thrown straight on to the rejects pile. I love Celia Imrie as an actress, but sadly she is not as talented as a writer. Where to start? Well I should have known from the first chapter which presented the family from hell treating our 'heroine' in the most vicious and appalling way possible, that I was not going to find well-written, original, believable or interesting characters. I was unsure at this point whether the book was attempting to be a farce but it soon became clear as other characters were introduced that we were going to be treated to a bunch of cliché-ridden caricatures rather than real, fully fleshed-out, interesting characters. The plot was unoriginal and lazy. There was absolutely no real sense of being in the south of France. How on earth can she manage to write a book that gives no real sense of the locale? I found the book boring and eventually skimmed through to the end. I was on holiday when I picked this book to read and was really prepared to love it because it was written by Celia. So very disappointingly!!

Marianne says

Not Quite Nice is the first novel by British actor and author, Celia Imrie. A particularly bad day that sees her “let go” from her job and abused by her daughter and granddaughters has Theresa Simmons seriously considering life elsewhere. This “sea change” idea soon takes a firm hold and she sells up, moving from Horrible Highgate to Bellevue Sur Mer, which is very close to, but Not Quite Nice, and well out of baby-sitting range. Her Mediterranean village boasts a lively ex-pat community, and Theresa soon finds herself in the thick of the local dramas.

In this delightful story, Imrie gives the reader a cast of (mostly) charming characters: a widowed ex-actress, a pair of gay men, a narcissistic elderly woman with a flair for cutting remarks, an apparently loving American couple, an Australian lothario and his jealous wife, a timid mother and her bullying son, an ex-prisoner, a self-centred daughter and her three spoiled children, a long-absent hippy son, an over-achieving daughter and a mysterious woman who claims to be recuperating.

All sorts of happenings fill this enjoyable read, including (but not limited to) naked men jumping from hotel balconies, muggings, a cookery club, power boat lessons, robberies, drug deals, credit card cloning, elopement, bank account embezzlements, an artistic installation, a trans-gender revelation and a dramatic climax. And while at first it appears that many of the adult children are selfish, money-grubbing, nasty types interested only in their inheritance, they prove to be as human and flawed as their parents.

There are plenty of laugh-out-loud moments in this highly entertaining novel, which falls firmly into the hen-lit genre, with the main characters aged in their sixties and seventies, thus guaranteeing it a readership amongst that group. But with eight delicious-sounding recipes included, lovers of epicurean delights will also find this an enjoyable read. 4.5★s

Sally906 says

Opens: ...*The small town of Bellevue-Sur-Mer sparkled like a diamond on the French Mediterranean Coast...*

I really enjoyed this light fluffy read – and can relate to feeling used and abused by a demanding selfish grown-up child who thinks that everything hubby and I worked hard for has to be handed to her on a platter. Sixty-year-old Theresa has one such child and when she is laid off from her job the thought of being an unpaid navvy for her daughter for her remaining years fills her with horror. So on impulse she buys a small house in the fictional town of Bellevue-sur-Mer just outside Nice in the south of France. So Theresa now lives not quite in the city of Nice and events that occur are not quite nice either – so I really appreciated the very clever title punning on the two meanings of ‘nice’..

Of course life is not all roses in her new home – starting with a naked man jumping out of a hotel window into her back yard and his insanely jealous, mega rich, wife calling her whore in a strident voice the next day. But she soon makes friends with the local ex-pats. For a small community of friends there are a lot of secrets and then when you add to the mix theft, kidnapping and assault and you have a very exciting read. Despite her naked introduction to her new circle of friends, Therese starts to make a life – she starts to learn French, sets up a cooking school to earn a bit of money and even finds herself attracted to a very nice man.

This is Celia Imrie’s first fictional book – and she has done very well by allowing humour to take over the story at times without it descending into silliness. The lightness balances nicely with the more drama ridden topics of infidelity, sex-changes, homosexuality, drug use and criminal activity. I was often laughing out loud at some of the events – gasping at some more meatier ones and then getting angry at the behaviour of a plethora of offspring that come to get what they can out of their various parents – or think they have the right to be rude to a parent who stands firm against them. The overall message is – it is your life, your needs and your choice. Do not let your children emotionally bully you. Learn to say no when it doesn’t suit you to do what they want.

Beautifully descriptive writing the small Mediterranean town came alive for me on the pages – old buildings, narrow streets steep steps, brightly coloured flowers everywhere and lovely cafes to enjoy the sparkling sea from. I was hooked from page one and certainly hope this will not be her last book.

With thanks to Allen & Unwin and the author for this copy to read and review.

Jacqui Mccann says

A story about mature Brits living near Nice; a cookery club with recipes thrown in between chapters, this book was trying to mimic the style of authors such as Nicky Pellegrine but aimed at older readers. The characters were not believable and the book failed to capture the essence of the village in which it was set. An outlandish story that was written in quite a childish manner. Saying that it provided a mindless read and

may make a good beach read if you enjoy chick lit and can relate to over 50 female characters

Johanne says

In the end I liked this fun and frothy story of ex-pat life on the Cote d'Azur. The pacing is is patchy - a very slow start that had me abandon the book a number of times and none of the characters did it for me and the panto villian could be spotted 100 pages out but....I came back to it so it definitely had something. And the last quarter rolls along at a ridiculous pace so I was hooked in to finish it. An ideal holiday read.

Ann says

Too many characters, I had to keep turning back to previous pages to refresh who was who. Sorry but story too silly and too much crammed in, burglaries, muggings, card clones all in the space of a couple of pages. Thankfully I bought it in a charity shop and that is where it is going back to. Sorry Celia, but this one isn't for me.

Christine says

Ridiculous plot with stereotypical gay and transgender characters, obnoxious adult children abusing their senior citizens parents. Totally unbelievable story with way too much going on. Celia Imrie should stick to acting.

Claire Edwards says

I actually really enjoyed reading this first novel by Celia Imrie. It might not be for everyone, but personally I found it a great bit of escapism and couldn't put it down. I'm a fan of Celia Imrie's film & tv work and wasn't sure what to expect from her writing - I was hoping it would be a good read and not just cashing in on her acting fame. I was really pleasantly surprised. I found Celia Imrie's style of writing very good, with great flow and comedic tones, including some laugh-out-loud moments. Her descriptions of the beautiful locations transported me to the sandy beaches and azure water. Fans of The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel films will no doubt see the resemblance between their storylines and this book - being focused around a group of mature ex-pats in an exotic location - but once I'd got into the book and started finding out about the characters and their various storylines I was hooked. Any fans of those films and that particular genre would appreciate this book. Personally I'd actually love to take a trip to the Nice area now and take this book with me to read while I'm there! I found it very enjoyable! :)
