



## Eleanor & Park

*Rainbow Rowell*

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**Eleanor & Park** Rainbow Rowell

*Two misfits.*

*One extraordinary love.*

*Eleanor...* Red hair, wrong clothes. Standing behind him until he turns his head. Lying beside him until he wakes up. Making everyone else seem drabber and flatter and never good enough...Eleanor.

*Park...* He knows she'll love a song before he plays it for her. He laughs at her jokes before she ever gets to the punch line. There's a place on his chest, just below his throat, that makes her want to keep promises...Park.

Set over the course of one school year, this is the story of two star-crossed sixteen-year-olds—smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try.

## **Eleanor & Park Details**

Date : Published February 26th 2013 by St. Martin's Press

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Author : Rainbow Rowell

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Genre : Young Adult, Romance, Contemporary, Fiction

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# From Reader Review Eleanor & Park for online ebook

## Steph Sinclair says

Should I break out in song and dance to "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep?" One lonely star. I'm just as surprised as you are, considering I just KNEW going into *Eleanor & Park* that I would love it, love it, love it. What reason would I have to believe otherwise? Almost all of my friends loved this book and have sworn fealty to the Goddess of Feels and Might, Rainbow Rowell. And I get it because she *is* a pretty awesome person and I think she is totally lovely. So trust me when I say I REALLY wanted to love this book. In fact, I am blindsided that I didn't, saddened that I can't join the *Eleanor & Park* Kool Kidz Fan Club and disappointed at such a disjointed reading experience.

Random Reasons Why I Didn't Like This Book:

### 1. The Romance

My main issue stems from the romance between Eleanor and Park. I just... didn't get it. Though, that's not for lack of trying because I had many arguments with Adult Me and Teen Me in my brain. Teen Me remembers the infatuation of meeting someone exciting and experiencing all those special moments for the first time. However, with Eleanor and Park, it was entirely unrealistic and unbelievable.

Park went from "God! Just sit the fuck down, Eleanor!" to "God, she has incredibly soft hands."

Eleanor went from "That stupid Asian kid" to "He's so pretty. I love his hair! I want to eat his face!"

The next thing I know, Park is telling Eleanor that he's in love with her, how he can't imagine being without her, that she's IT for him. Then Eleanor is telling him she doesn't breathe when she's away from him. Adult Me was not on board because the romance moved entirely too swiftly for my feelings to catch up with the events that were taking place. No, I take that back. "Swiftly" would indicate that there was some sort of actual pacing involved, but that was absent. One day they disliked each other and the next they were holding hands and proclaiming their love.

I remember listening to that part while I was out on a morning run, and I had to stop and rewind because I legitimately thought I missed an entire chapter. But then I realized that I hadn't and I argued with myself.

Adult Me: \*twitch\*

Teen Me: Yeah, but remember when you thought you were in love with that guy and how you were going to marry him?

Adult Me: Yes...

Teen Me: So obviously they're not going to be together forever and ever and gallop into the sunset, but you can't discount those feelings.

Adult Me: \*gumbles\* I KNOW THAT. But I also never wanted to eat a guy's face...

Teen Me: Please don't tell me I grow up without a heart.

Adult Me: ...

### 2. The Historical Background

*Eleanor & Park* takes place in Omaha, 1986, where there's racial tension. Park is half white and half Korean.

He spends most of his time trying not to be noticed by other kids at school and struggling with his own insecurities over his mixed heritage. Yet, oddly, throughout the entire novel, Park doesn't encounter any racism. Apart from a few brief monologuing sessions about his classmates thinking he was Chinese, Eleanor's off-hand "stupid Asian kid" remarks and Park's own dislike for, in his opinion, looking too feminine, there wasn't anything that felt accurate.

Park's character had so much more potential that was not utilized. I was hoping for something more from his development regarding how he viewed himself and his mother. Perhaps a certain level of acceptance or resolve would have been appropriate.

There were also two black girls who befriend Eleanor, but even they don't seem to face any racism in this predominately white neighborhood. It was like Rowell deliberately tip-toed around them and instead threw in a reference to the community being offended by a black boy getting a white girl pregnant. Strangely, the only one who seemed to get picked on was Eleanor. I do think it's awesome that this novel had diversity, something that is sorely missing in YA, but I wasn't buying what Rowell was selling.

At the same time, Rowell never let you forget that this book was set in the 80s since *Eleanor & Park* is overloaded with pop culture references on almost every other page. (I admit to chuckling to the 867-5309 reference.) Still, we also never forgot Park was Asian with Eleanor constantly referencing it in her narration to the point that I started feeling uncomfortable.

### **3. The Narration**

I wasn't a huge fan of the back and forth narrative and found that it annoyed me more than anything. This is where I wonder if my rating is more an indication of how I felt about the audio vs. the actual story. I disliked both of the narrator's voices. The parts of Eleanor's dialogue that was "snarky" wasn't portrayed with the right kind of emotion. Park's narration was slightly better, but the narrator, Sunil Malhotra, bored me to tears with his monotone reading and unbelievable voice for Eleanor.

### **4. The Story**

I'll be honest and admit that it's possible that I didn't "get" this book. It may have just gone *way* over my head. Why? Rowell tried to cram a lot of story and situations into one little book and it didn't work for me. Before going into *Eleanor & Park* I was told that the ending was heartbreak, but I didn't feel that at all. Rowell relies on Eleanor's grim family life to spark sympathies from readers and I can see how this works and why it's marketed to John Green fans. However, the ending relies on your connection to their romance to feel the heartbreak. The problem with that was, by the end, I wanted to know what became of Eleanor's mom and siblings, but the focus was instead on her feelings for Park and letting him go. Eleanor spent a good amount of the story in this terrible environment, feeling these feelings and when I genuinely wanted to know her feelings about everything, all I get is a freaking post card and the book ends. Since the romance was doing absolutely nothing for me, I needed for the plot to come in and rescue this book. It did not.

I'm not saying this was a terrible book. Not by a long shot. It's clear that this story has touched a lot of people and I wouldn't go as far to not recommend it, but I also think this is a bit overhyped. I went in with really high expectations, thinking I was going to be blown into next week by the awesome. Instead, I'm walking away with feelings brewing a special pot of "meh."

Even still, I'm holding out hope for *Fangirl...*

## Duchess Nicole says

### **READ THIS QUOTE, MY ROMANTIC HEARTED FOOLS...READ IT AND LET YOUR HEART GO PITTER PAT...**

~\*~

““I don’t like you, Park,” she said, sounding for a second like she actually meant it. “I...” - her voice nearly disappeared - “think I live for you.”

He closed his eyes and pressed his head back into his pillow.

“I don’t think I even breathe when we’re not together,” she whispered. “Which means, when I see you on Monday morning, it’s been like sixty hours since I’ve taken a breath. That’s probably why I’m so crabby, and why I snap at you. All I do when we’re apart is think about you, and all I do when we’re together is panic. Because every second feels so important. And because I’m so out of control, I can’t help myself. I’m not even mine anymore, I’m yours, and what if you decide that you don’t want me? How could you want me like I want you?”

He was quiet. He wanted everything she’d just said to be the last thing he heard. He wanted to fall asleep with ‘I want you’ in his ears.”

~\*~

The setting? 1986...I was five years old, but I do remember random tidbits of the eighties...memories mostly accompanied by a cringe. But not here. This story was perfection. I think I liked it even better than Fangirl, simply because it was more dramatic and poignant. Eleanor and Park (the people) stole my breath.

The initial story starts out with Eleanor, the new girl in school, getting on the bus for the first time and having no place to sit. Everyone is staring, no one helps her out, including Park. Finally, Park caves in and scoots over so that she can sit down, but he does it grudgingly, almost angry with the stupid redhead girl in the frumpy man clothes who made such a spectacle of herself. Over the next weeks, these two go from pointedly ignoring each other to a reluctant yet silent cameraderie, bonding on the bus over Park’s comic books and eventually music. Once their silence is broken, the floodgates sort of open, and they become fascinated with one another.

The dual point of view here quite literally **MADE THIS STORY.**

Being in Park’s head as well as Eleanor’s was paramount to my enjoyment. Park has a romantic soul, made evident by the way he thinks of his Eleanor, the way he goes from train wreck curiosity to utter fascination and adoration with the awkward girl with so many secrets...he stole my heart.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~

“Eleanor was right. She never looked nice. She looked like art, and art wasn’t supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something.”

~\*~

These characters are unique...so new and fresh, the word has been reinvented. Eleanor comes from a broken home...quite literally, her home is broken. Her parents, both not so great to begin with, are divorced. Her mom remarried a man who loves to drink and loves to bully...and bully he does, but he does so much more. Eleanor's back story is one to make me feel like the world's best mom quite simply because I could never allow what happened to her to happen to my daughters. And yeah...her mom ALLOWS this bastard to treat Eleanor like trash, allows her daughter to be left alone and scared, without the support and love that a parent owes their children.

Park, on the other hand, has a wonderful home life. His Dad met his Mom in Korea, married her and brought her home. They still kiss and hold each other like they haven't seen each other in months. They are simply adorable, and no matter how Park rolls his eyes, the reader can tell that his parent's love for each other gives Park a wonderful sense of security that he absolutely takes for granted...as kids really **should** be able to.

It takes awhile for Park to realize what kind of life Eleanor is leading.

~\*~

“ “My girlfriend is sad and quiet and keeps me up all night worrying about her.” ”

~\*~

It seemed to me that this high school love story is one of the few that I can actually see continuing on through the years and becoming...more. The bond between Eleanor and Park is already so deep, so strong. Nothing will keep them apart. They are young but they are realistic. They are also made for each other, and though Eleanor seems to be more skeptical, I know that deep down, she wants this to be a forever kind of thing...more than any other wish in the world, aside from her tragic circumstances, against all of the odds, she just wants Park.

~\*~

“Nothing was dirty. With Park.

Nothing could be shameful.

Because Park was the sun, and that was the only way Eleanor could think to explain it.”

~\*~

This goes down as one of my favorite books of 2013, and Park goes onto my favorite heroes shelf. Because he **is** the best kind of hero...the one who saves his girl against all odds, who fights against the world because of his devotion. I loved this story with all my heart. It was just beautiful. Recommended read for everyone.

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**Kat O'Keeffe says**

AMAZING BOOK! Heartwarming and heartbreakng all at the same time! I wasn't expecting to care so much about these characters and their relationship but I was completely caught up in this story. It's told in

3rd-person past tense, which I sometimes have trouble connecting with, but not so in this case! I feel like I really know both Eleanor and Park, and I love them both separately but I especially love them together. It seemed like their relationship shouldn't work, but it does, so well. I was grinning like an idiot while reading because I was just so giddy over their blooming romance. I could feel how much they cared for each other like it was oozing off the page.

Overall, I loved this book--the characters, the romance, the writing and just the way everything unfolded so beautifully and felt so real. One of the best contemporary novels I've read in a while! DEFINITELY RECOMMENDED!

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### **Jesse (JesseTheReader) says**

HOLY BATMAN THAT ENDING. I'M A MESS. THAT HURT, BUT IT DIDN'T AT THE SAME TIME. WHAT IS THIS FEELING EVEN? NYEAAHHH.

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### **Katrina Passick Lumsden says**

If you've experienced that first love - that heart-wrenching, soul-squeezing, crush-the-air-out-of-your-lungs- whenever-you're-apart first love - this book will bitch slap your feels all to hell.

I love it. I love its warmth and its vibrancy, its heartache and its pain, its humor, its meanness, the ugliness, the beauty, the crying, the laughter, the sarcasm. I love Eleanor and I love Park, and I love that there's still a tiny chance for them...and for everyone whose first love was torn away. Even if you never see that person again, they change you in ways that no one else will ever understand. They will always, *always* hold that little piece of your heart that no one else will ever be able to touch.

I love you, Rainbow Rowell, for giving me this. Thank you.

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### **Cinda says**

I've often said that nobody should write for teens who doesn't remember what it was like to be one. Rainbow Rowell remembers, and has captured it beautifully in this book.

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### **Emily May says**

*"I don't like you, Park," she said, sounding for a second like she actually meant it. "I..." - her voice nearly disappeared - "think I live for you."*

*He closed his eyes and pressed his head back into his pillow.  
"I don't think I even breathe when we're not together," she whispered.*

Three stars is not a wholly negative rating but I have to admit that I'm disappointed with this one. Eleanor & Park has enjoyable parts, but the only real difference I can see between this and Pushing the Limits is that the characters in the latter are meant to be hot. Which could have been interesting because I've always preferred reading about the so-called freaks, losers and ugly people, but these two books follow the same generic pattern of teen love stories with a whole ton of behind-the-scenes angsty issues.

### **Though this one was less entertaining.**

It's 1986. Eleanor is the new girl and she is not only genetically made to look like a victim but she does herself no favours by pairing her looks with a bizarre fashion sense. Having nowhere to sit on the school bus, she takes a seat next to the clearly reluctant Park. Park is half-Korean in an extremely white school, but he is given enough respect by the popular kids to help him get by. His home life, unlike Eleanor's, is pretty much perfect apart from a bit of badgering by his dad.

Slowly over time, these two individuals develop a relationship that is formed around stuff like reading comics together and exchanging mix tapes. And other nerdy things like Star Wars and Shakespeare - which I could easily relate to. I think one of the major problems I had with this book is that **I failed to get a sense of the attraction between them.** Their relationship to me seemed more suited to friendship than love. The progression from reluctant bus partners to friendship was natural in the story, but I then felt that the jump from that to romantic and/or sexual feelings was too fast and unbelievable.

Not only that, but where I felt the start of their relationship avoided the usual cliches and did something a bit different (like the way their relationship begins without them speaking to one another), I felt that once they were "together", it quickly dissolved into the usual sweet nothings and thoughts like "I'll die if I never see him again" after knowing each other for a few weeks.

**This isn't instalove, but it's silliness.** Or perhaps I really am just a cold-hearted, unromantic person. And I also didn't like the way chubby Eleanor receives self-validation through Park:

*"He made her feel like more than the sum of her parts."*

I did like the well-rounded feel of both characters, though. The author gave them many different levels, making them experience a range of emotions in a realistic way. I also thought the darker element of this novel were mostly handled well. Eleanor's home life is revealed gradually in a frightening way. But it does just make it easier to compare this book to Pushing the Limits. And I don't like it when serious issues like domestic violence are used to fuel the love angst and create a Romeo and Juliet kind of forbidden love scenario. It just leaves a bad taste in my mouth.

Eleanor & Park will be great (hopefully) for fans of quirky, nerdy romance stories with an underlying dark angsty side, and for those who love nerdy references. If you don't usually like young adult romance and were eying this up as possibly being the book to change all that... you'll probably be disappointed. **It has good parts, but it's not that different from anything else out there.**

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## Maria says

3.8/5 Stars ?? ?? ?? ??

“Eleanor was right. She never looked nice. She looked like art, and art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something.”

Wait a fucking minute. There are no more pages? It just ended... like that? Rainbow Rowell, why do me like this? Do you not love your readers? Why would you leave it hanging there? I NEED CLOSURE. OR MAYBE A SECOND BOOK. Or a movie. Who the fuck knows? I know I'm dying right now.

*Set over the course of one school year in 1986, this is the story of two star-crossed misfits-smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try. When Eleanor meets Park, you'll remember your own first love-and just how hard it pulled you under.*

This book had flaws. Flaws I couldn't not see. But let's look first at everything. The writing. Rainbow Rowell is an exceptional writer. The way she writes is engaging to the point you can't leave the book down. She creates realistic situations and characters that you can relate to and want to punch and love and hate and loathe and adore. I have read one other of her books, Fangirl and her writing in this one was different than that. Her writing in Eleanor & Park was poetic, unique and pretentious. More than John Green pretentious. But this was an aspect I adored, it added something to the book, to the characters, to the time and the depth of the situations. For some reason I will never understand, she made me think of the characters as too young or too old. Never their actual age. This is probably only me, but at certain situations they seemed too childish and at other too mature. Their real age didn't show for me. But that's probably just me.

I really enjoyed Eleanor and Park's romance, even though it was stretched out at points. Their relationship was special, they made each other better, they loved each other deeply. But it was destructive as well. At the point of them ditching their friends to be with each other. Or how jealous Eleanor got over nothing. Or how mad she got at him for saying the most minor shit. Honestly I felt that some situations between them were too dramatic for no reason. Some lines spoken between them, and also lines or thoughts that were completely unnecessary and didn't add anything to the plot. Sometimes I cringed without wanting to, I'm sorry. You all might find these lines extremely romantic but I'm not a romantic person. Mostly.

I quite enjoyed the rawness of the situations. The bullying, the domestic abuse, the fat shaming, the racism, all of these real life situations this book brought to light. Especially, because they were more prominent at that time. Furthermore, I adored how after everything that happened, the jocks and the bullies helped Eleanor. And Steve didn't bully Park for his eyeliner. I loved that this showed how people can change or they can be misunderstood easily. For example, when Eleanor found out Tana wasn't writing this filthy shit on her books.

This book was full of references... fucking full of references. It's to be expected, anything written in the 21st century about the 80s is always full with references. TV and film as well. It's like they want to show how much they know about that time. And that we didn't live then to understand. So they're just throwing references around fucking everywhere without even needing them to be there to show their spectacular knowledge. We get it. You're old af. The jokes will go over out little heads, as it is to be expected. Fuck off. I

don't hold this against the author, obviously, it's a nice way to make us get the vibe of the time but the audience this book is targeted at won't understand a thing. But she has no choice. I get it. And older people will read this book, I suppose. And younger people understand these references. I suppose.

In conclusion, I loved this book okay? I finished it in two fucking days, for God's sake. Yes, it was flawed, yes, it was too much at times, yes, the ending left me hanging for more, but I loved it. Books are supposed to be flawed. Like real life and real people are. So, till the next one K BYE!!!

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### **Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says**

I fully admit that I'm a sucky book reviewer. This book for me was so personal that this review is just for me. Eleanor is just that girl. The weird one that people pick on. Who knows exactly why? She doesn't stand up for herself, she doesn't fight back. I was that girl. This is me my 10th grade year.

If this book had been around then I would have completely worn the pages out. As it is I feel like highlighting and just re-reading the thing until it falls apart.

Talking about Romeo and Juliet Eleanor's comments were "It was 'Oh my God, he's so cute' at first site. It's Shakespeare making fun of love."

Exactly.

I hated PE class. That was the worst time of my school life. Not because I didn't want to participate..that's just when the mean girls/boys were the worst. "I'm going to tell Mrs. Burt that my mom doesn't want me to do anything that might rupture my hymen. For religious reasons." I can't tell you how many notes I forged in my mom's name and how creative I was in those reasons.

Park's thoughts on Eleanor at one time. "He couldn't figure out why it upset her so much. Sometimes, it seemed like she was trying to hide everything that was pretty about her. Like she wanted to look ugly." Believe me..you do get to that point. You don't really understand why. Your mind just completely gets to the point where if everyone else thinks badly about you, so do you.

I never had my Park. I did have friends. But I can remember when the teasing started that I could see the embarrassment on their faces too. You hate to see that but it happens. I don't think worse of them now. It just happened.

I ended up leaving home at age 15. I went out on my own and met new people and guess what? I wasn't judged like I had been in middle and high school. I realized it was just that group of people. I can be included in groups of people and liked for who I am.

My daughter faced some bullying last year at school. Not because of what she looked like or wore. (she is beautiful) She was picked on because she stood up to the bullies that were picking on a friend of hers. So I did learn something from my teen years. I raised someone who just won't stand for it.

And now me? I'm the queen bitch of you piss me off and I'll tear your arm off and beat you with it. (well in words anyways).

Remember guys and girls. What doesn't kill you makes you strong as hell.

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## **Nick says**

You can find the full review and more about this book on my blog!

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***“Eleanor was right. She never looked nice. She looked like art, and art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something.”***

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## **5 PERFECT STARS!**

You can find the full review and more about this book on my blog!

*I never read contemporary books. I have read like 4 maybe till now and didn't really like them. Anyway I decided to give this book a try, because if you haven't notice, this book is greatly rated here on Goodreads. And believe me, the hype is real. This was so worth the time, for a hundred reasons.*

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***“Holding Eleanor's hand was like holding a butterfly. Or a heartbeat. Like holding something complete, and completely alive.”***

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*Halfway through the book, I realized that Park is me, beside the Asian and the eyeliner, he is completely me. My favorite bands are Joy Division and The Smiths, and also I dig comics so much. So it was like reading about my life, more like my wannabe life.*

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***“I want everyone to meet you. You're my favorite person of all time.”***

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*I liked this book, and not because of the romance, I never like the books based on their romance. Because it was peaceful and wild and sad and beautiful and the same time. And it made me want to read more, made me search for a sequel, made me think a lot after I finished, made me happy, like entirely happy.*

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***“What are the chances you’d ever meet someone like that? he wondered. Someone you could love forever, someone who would forever love you back? And what did you do when that person was born half a world away? The math seemed impossible.”***

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*I didn’t like the ending, I loved it. It was predictable at some points, at least for me, but still so freaking beautiful. And am I the only one who wants a sequel, of what will happen with them after the end? I think it would be awesome, like the best surprise we could get. So Rainbow, write one:)*

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***“I just want to break that song into pieces and love them all to death.”***

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*I highly recommend this book to you, even if you don’t like books, read it:)*

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### **karen says**

years after everyone else, i have finally read this book. and now i'm all caught up on the zeitgeist! phew. and damn, now i understand why rainbow rowell is so beloved. i mean, i read Fangirl and thought it was excellent, but this one, while it is not as good as Fangirl, does a couple of things so freaking well that it gave me all the swoons and the swirls.

rainbow rowell has this ability to tap into the teenage experience that is a little spooky. and while john green gets all the credit for being the author that writes the contemporary YA novels sophisticated enough to convert stubborn adult readers into YA fans, i think this book is more faithful to the realities of teenlife than his. green's characters are winning and funny and smart and articulate, and they have appeal coming out their ears, but they're a little idealized - too knowing, too confident, too much like miniaturized adults. rowell remembers the rough edges, the uncertainty, and her characters are a puddle of messy contradictions and still-developing personalities. and this, to me, makes them even more appealing because they channel all sorts of messy nostalgia for my dumb teen self.

the best thing about this book is not even the love story because love-schmove. but *goddamn*, the way she writes about falling in love with *music* is astonishing. all the making of heartfelt mix tapes for other people, the way certain lyrics can stop your heart, the doodling of band names and songs - not the ones you love, but the ones you *want* to love - that drive to investigate the bands you encounter through chance and want to remember to check out as part of some teenage rite of passage - that was a perfect scene.

this book did for me what The Perks of Being a Wallflower apparently does for other people. it slices off a moment in time and pop culture that is so essential and precious and you can just feel the pulse of musical revelation. and i don't want to be one of these old fogies that says to the kids, "your music is overproduced and soulless. in *MY* day..." but it's true. there is no joy purer than a teenager discovering the smiths.

the other amazing, perfect thing, and it's such a small moment, but when - (view spoiler)

i mean, it's not a perfect novel. there's a lot crammed into here, and it can get to feeling a little claustrophobic with all the competing "problem" narratives and underdeveloped secondary characters. there are a lot of unexplored storylines and opportunities to develop situations that weren't and a narrower focus might have made this more powerful overall. but even though it can feel a little overstuffed, it doesn't detract from the novel. the most complimentary thing i can say about a book is that it is *honest*. not necessarily realistic or authentic, but *honest*.

and i guess we gotta talk about the romance parts. since that's kind of the whole point of the book, as little interest as i usually have in YA romance novels. for all my eye-rolling over teen romance, this book captures all the feels and the consuming nature of young love and its hollow devouring obsession. and it's handled in a smart way. after eleanor pooh-poohs romeo and juliet as ...*two rich kids who've always gotten every little thing they want* and dismisses the play as shakespeare "making fun of love," the less-cynical park hesitantly pinpoints the appeal of romeo and juliet:

*"...because people want to remember what it's like to be young? And in love?"*

and that's probably why this book, and other YA romances, are popular with older readers. because while no one (hopefully) ever claims that romeo and juliet's (spoiler alert) five-day infatuation/suicide pact brings back memories of their own teenage love lives, this book sorta does.

perfect example: eleanor and park's "first contact" moment when he realizes that any sort of romantic dalliance before this was unsatisfying and meaningless playacting and that the missing element of excitement in the experimentation wasn't a lack in himself, but a lack of emotional attraction and now he "gets" it.

*Or maybe, he thought now, he just didn't recognize all those other girls. The way a computer drive will spit out a disk if it doesn't recognize the formatting.*

*When he touched Eleanor's hand, he recognized her. He knew.*

i mean, an adorably nerdy way to phrase it, but definitely relatable.

i think the writing of eleanor was much stronger than the writing of park. the whole "outsider" romance thing was a little uneven to me. i understand what sets her apart - she's "big" and constantly comparing herself to the adult beauty of her mother, she comes from a damaged home, she dresses like a hobo clown, she's socially awkward, etc, but as for park, he's what - half asian? and that's a problem? i mean, it's mentioned that his dad thinks he's a pussy and that people don't think asian guys are hot, but he's reasonably popular and

athletic and girls like him and he seems cool as shit. so his half of the "outsider" dynamic seems forced. but it might just be me not relating to the perceived stigma against asian guys - one of my first crushes was on data from the goonies because - adorable:

and maybe in omaha in the 80's, people didn't think asian dudes were hot, but i don't think park would have much trouble getting a girl on racial grounds today, right?

(i might be the only one with a crush on b.d. wong, but whatever.)

and once you start adding the eyeliner?? yeah, i am all aboard the park train.

and for that matter, i don't think redheads with big boobs are frowned upon much, either.

it gets better, kids. it really does. but until it does, go listen to the smiths.

come to my blog!

---

### Nat says

*"She never felt like she belonged anywhere, except for when she was lying on her bed, pretending to be somewhere else."*

I randomly decided to read **Eleanor and Park** again because I have no chill.

Also, I recently picked up Fangirl (for the tenth time), so that definitely had a weighing hand in whether I should reread more of Rainbow Rowell's stories. But I don't have any regrets for rereading this wondrous book.

This review contains **\*spoilers\***.

Eleanor is the new girl in town, and with her chaotic family, her mismatched clothes and unruly red hair, she couldn't stick out more if she tried.

Park is the boy at the back of the bus. Black T-shirts, headphones, head in a book — he thinks he's made himself invisible. But not to Eleanor... never to Eleanor.

It's really been a while since I last visited Eleanor and Park's story, I even forgot some things here and there. And I always, always forget Eleanor's backstory with Richie, which then makes my heart tighten all anew when I reread it.

But let's start at the beginning: Eleanor and Park sitting next to each other on the bus, not talking, not staring. Until one day...

*"They still didn't talk on the bus, but it had become a less confrontational silence. Almost friendly. (But not quite.)*

*Park would have to talk to her today – to tell her that he didn't have anything to give her. He'd overslept, then forgotten to grab the stack of comics he'd set out for her the night before. He hadn't even had time to eat breakfast or brush his teeth, which made him self-conscious, knowing he was going to be sitting so close to her."*

*'So,' he said, before he knew what to say next, 'you like the Smiths?' He was careful not to blow his morning breath on her.*

*She looked up, surprised. Maybe confused. He pointed at her book, where she'd written 'How Soon Is Now?' in tall green letters."*

Ahh, I forgot how much I loved these characters, they're so precious to my heart. Their interactions were so timid (in the best way).

Also, can I just mention their first ever meeting because I'm on cloud nine:

*"Before he'd even decided to do it, Park scooted toward the window.*

*'Sit down,' he said. It came out angrily. The girl turned to him, like she couldn't tell whether he was another jerk or what. 'Jesus-fuck,' Park said softly, nodding to the space next to him, 'just sit down.'*

*The girl sat down. She didn't say anything – thank God, she didn't thank him – and she left six inches of space on the seat between them.*

*Park turned toward the Plexiglas window and waited for a world of suck to hit the fan."*

I love the "Jesus-fuck," it's gold.

Slowly, steadily, through late-night conversations and an ever-growing stack of mix tapes, Eleanor and Park fall for each other.

*'You can borrow it,' he said quietly. 'Listen to the rest of the tape.'*

*'I don't want to break it,' she said.*

*'You're not going to break it.'*

*'I don't want to use up the batteries.'*

*'I don't care about the batteries.'*

*She looked up at him then, in the eye, maybe for the first time ever. Her hair looked even crazier than it had this morning – more frizzy than curly, like she was working on a big red afro. But her eyes were dead serious, cold sober. Any cliché you've ever heard used to describe Clint Eastwood, those were Eleanor's eyes.*

*'Really,' she said. 'You don't care.'*

*'They're just batteries,' he said.*

*She emptied the batteries and the tape from Park's Walkman, handed it back to him, then got off the bus without looking back.*

*God, she was weird.”*

God, I love those weirdos.

And their first conversation on the phone always gets to me:

*‘You can ask me why,’ he said again.*

*‘Yeah?’ She sniffed.*

*‘Yeah.’*

*‘Okay.’ She looked down at the turntable, at her own reflection in the tinted acrylic lid. She looked like a fat-faced ghost. She closed her eyes.*

*‘Why do you even like me?’”*

Eleanor's question punctured me right in the heart. It reminded me of this scene in *My Mad Fat Diary* (which is set 10 years after **Eleanor and Park**), where Rae asks Finn something similar.

(Season two was my favorite.)

And not only were the romantic aspects of this book described wonderfully, but the familial relationships astonished me.

I just find it remarkable how Rainbow Rowell can write both incredibly supportive fathers (*Fangirl*) and incredibly not supportive fathers (*Eleanor & Park*). I just... How does one make both work so well???

I'll never forgot Richie's awfulness. I mean, what kind of next-level creep writes such horrendous things on someone's books? He's a bastard. A demon. I hate him.

(Rebecca Bunch knows what's up.)

So when Eleanor formed a close bond with Park's family, I truly thanked the stars. I mean, it took Park kicking Steve in the head for Eleanor and the family to really connect, but all was good.

*‘I know that your stepdad isn’t an easy man to be around,’ Park’s dad said finally, stepping toward her. ‘And I’m just saying, you know, that if it’s easier to be over here, then you should just be here. That would make Mindy and I feel a lot better, okay?’*

*‘Okay,’ she said.*

*‘So this is the last time I’m going to ask you to stay for dinner.’*

*Eleanor smiled, and he smiled back, and for a second he looked a lot more like Park than Tom Selleck.”*

I loved seeing her happy.

And speaking of happy... I completely adored Eleanor and Park's first kiss (maybe a little too much).

Source

*'I've never done this before,' she said.*

*'S'okay,' he said.*

*'It's not, it's going to be terrible.'*

*He shook his head. 'It's not.'*

*She shook her head a little more. Just a little. 'You're going to regret this,' she said.*

*That made him laugh, so he had to wait a second before he kissed her.*

*It wasn't terrible. Eleanor's lips were soft and warm, and he could feel her pulse in her cheek. It was good that she was so nervous – because it forced him not to be. It steadied him to feel her trembling.*

*He pulled away before he wanted to. He hadn't done this enough to know how to breathe.*

*When he pulled away, her eyes were mostly closed. His grandparents had a light on, on their front porch, and Eleanor's face caught every bit of it. She looked like she should be married to the man in the moon."*

*"He pulled her closer and kissed the top her head. He tried to find her ear under all that hair.*

*'Come here,' he said, 'I want to show you something.'*

*She laughed. He lifted her chin.*

*The second time was even less terrible."*

These guys...

I really loved them getting together...but I didn't like it when they said stuff like:

*'I don't want to think about an after.'*

*'That's what I'm saying, maybe there won't be one.'*

*'Of course there will.' She put her hands on his chest, so that she could push him away if she had to. 'I mean ... God, of course there will. It's not like we're going to get married, Park.'*

*'Not now.'*

*'Stop.' She tried to roll her eyes, but it hurt.*

*'I'm not proposing,' he said. 'I'm just saying ... I love you. And I can't imagine stopping ...'*

*She shook her head. 'But you're twelve.'*

*'I'm sixteen ...' he said. 'Bono was fifteen when he met his wife, and Robert Smith was fourteen ...'*

Ha! That's what I kept thinking, "but you're like twelve..." Seriously though, why are you in such a rush???

But a lot went down afterwards that not only broke my heart, it broke all the surrounding area too.

The whole escaping and running away in the middle of the night kept me on the edge till the last page.

Rereading those passages made me feel so worried and worn out by the end.

*"Somewhere in the house her mother was crying like she was never going to stop."*

I'm... just extremely grateful Eleanor managed to escape without running into Richie the Bastard, but I'm still so worried about her future. And I kept thinking, 'what about the little kids?? What's going to happen to them??'

*"Fuck. Just ... fuck.*

*She should go back for Maisie.*

*She should go back for all of them – she should find a way to fit them in her pockets – but she should definitely go back for Maisie. Maisie would run away with Eleanor. She wouldn't think twice ..."*

*"If Eleanor were the hero of some book, like The Boxcar Children or something, she'd try. If she were Dicey Tillerman, she'd find a way.  
She'd be brave and noble, and she'd find a way.  
But she wasn't. Eleanor wasn't any of those things. She was just trying to get through the night."*

That last sentence is still breaking my heart.

So I was extremely grateful when we got some closure on the kids:

*"When he got sick of his bedroom, when there was nothing left in his life that smelled like vanilla – Park walked by Eleanor's house.  
Sometimes the truck was there, sometimes it wasn't, sometimes the Rottweiler was asleep on the porch. But the broken toys were gone, and there were never any strawberry-blond kids playing in the yard."*

But damn, that ending never fails to hurt me right at my core.

*'Mail call,' his dad said, almost gently. Park put his hand to his heart.*

*Eleanor hadn't written him a letter.*

*It was a postcard. 'Greetings from the Land of 10,000 Lakes,' it said on the front. Park turned it over and recognized her scratchy handwriting. It filled his head with song lyrics.*

*He sat up. He smiled. Something heavy and winged took off from his chest.*

*Eleanor hadn't written him a letter, it was a postcard.*

*Just three words long."*

Okay, so I've had years to think about what my guess is for the three words, and I keep coming back to: 'I miss you.'

It's very casual, no strings, no obligations.

What's your guess for the three words?

*\*Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **Eleanor & Park**, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!\**

Support creators you love. Buy a Coffee for nat (bookspoils) with Ko-fi.com/bookspoils

This review and more can be found on my blog.

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### **Ariel says**

I have so many thoughts and ideas and things I want to discuss, and I can't possible put them all here, but here are some of my main thinkings:

1) PARENTS: Parent's are such an integral part of teenage life - they are the reason you can do things, the reason you can't do things, the reason you have money, etc. This book had parents that were just as

important, interesting, and developed as the main characters and I so appreciated that. I especially enjoyed Park's parents: they were so complex and confused about their son, but ultimately so supportive.

2) ODDBALLS: I love that basically every character in this book was weird and quirky and individual. I could imagine so many imperfections in everybody, they felt so real.

3) PARK: Guys, I love Park. He had a handful of not-so-honourable moments, but he owned up to them, he felt bad about them, and he tried his best to overcome them. He was so glorious. So very very glorious. #TeamPark

4) EYELINER: I loved the eyeliner. So much. Park owned it, he embraced it, and it caused trouble in his house but it was worth it. And later on we see him using it more smudge-ingly, and just brilliant.

5) THAT ENDING: Woah. Woahhh. When Eleanor went to her bed and everything clicked into place.. from that moment on we were in such a dangerous and nervous place. I felt genuine fear and concern for everyone. It was intense! The ACTUAL ending was kind of cliff-hangery.. I think the ending makes perfect sense, it's very realistic, but that doesn't mean I don't want a sequel ;)

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### **Laura says**

**This review originally appeared on *Clear Eyes, Full Shelves*.**

**\*Reviewer's Note (added 2/5/2016)\***

*Please be aware that I have turned off all notifications for this review and do not check or respond to comments. It's not that I don't like y'all; it's just that I'd rather spend my time talking about books that I actually, ya know, like.*

I have thought about Eleanor & Park everyday since I read it two months ago.

That's not a compliment.

In some respects, my attitude is perhaps not terribly fair because a particular aspect of Eleanor and Park elicited a visceral reaction from me that is personal to me, a reaction that a lot of people would not have or understand.

But as I've thought about the novel over the past two months, mulling over the possibility that I was perhaps being too sensitive, that the possibility of my being too sensitive was unfairly impacting my view of the rest of the book, and the book as a whole, my final analysis has always been the same: I don't believe this book.

I don't believe the historical context.

I don't believe the characters.

I don't believe the romance.

Let's start with the first issue, the historical context.

Eleanor and Park is framed as a historical novel, taking place in Omaha, Nebraska, the author Rainbow Rowell's hometown, in 1986. Our titular 16-year-old characters meet on the school bus when Park grudgingly allows new kid Eleanor to share his seat.

Park is half-Korean, his parents having met and married in South Korea, where his father was stationed as a member of the army. Hmmmm. Okay, so they met around 1968? 1969? I have to assume it was no later than 1969 since as a sixteen year old in 1986, Park would have to have been born in 1970. So...during the height of the Vietnam War, when a draft was in place to send as many young men as possible into the fray, Park's father, an able-bodied member of the U.S. military was...stationed at an army base in Korea. Possible, I suppose, but still a bit ludicrous to me.

Ok, so then his parents get married and move to his father's hometown of Omaha, Nebraska where Park is raised and, according to Park, the good people of Omaha,

*“...couldn’t call him a freak or a [anti-Asian slur] or a [homosexual slur], because—well, first, because his dad was a giant and a veteran and from the neighborhood.”*

Let me get this straight.

Park's interracial family faces minimal racial prejudice in the midwestern United States, an area known for lacking in diversity, during the 1970s and 1980s. Park's Korean mother and Caucasian father married and lived happily with their biracial children, facing little racism in Omaha, Nebraska starting in 1970, less than 30 years after United States citizens of Japanese descent were forced into internment camps during World War II, less than twenty years after the Korean War took 36,516 American lives, only seven years after interracial marriage was legalized in the state of Nebraska, only three years after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all other anti-miscegenation laws throughout the country via their Loving v. Virginia decision, only two years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and smack-dab in the middle of the controversial Vietnam war, which made villains out of members of the military who served in it upon their stateside returns and caused a swell of anti-Asian sentiment throughout the country.

I call bullshit.

Furthermore, while a version of racism does appear in the novel in the form of bad kung-fu jokes and “You are Asian therefore you must be Chinese” assumptions, it seems deliberately placed within the historical framework. As Rainbow Rowell stated in a Publisher's Weekly interview,

*“The neighborhood Eleanor and Park live in is the neighborhood I grew up in. And at that time, it was white and racist.”*

Therefore, the author was attempting to portray racism *as it was*, as if that racism is limited to that time frame. Unfortunately, as I discussed at length during our first podcast, that 1986 version of racism is alive and well in 2013, and I seriously resent the placement of it in a historical novel as if it no longer exists today.

So, while Eleanor and Park was conveniently accurate as far as pop culture, cutely peppered with nostalgia-inducing references of many 80s bands and comic books, I found the historical context extremely shallow and unconvincing. In addition to being devoid of so many of the broader, deeper societal issues of the time, the context also wrongly and paradoxically relegated issues that still gnaw at the framework of our current society to history.

Moving on to the characters: I never deeply connected to either of them, despite having much in common with both of the main characters.

While the third person past tense POV that switched from Eleanor and Park's perspectives throughout the novel made sense for the story, it also seemed to create a barrier that did not allow me to experience what the characters were going through or how they felt with immediacy or intensity. Considering how much I could relate both of the characters, the disconnect struck me as especially odd.

I know what it's like to be relentlessly bullied in school for weeks, months on end. I know what it's like to have to walk on eggshells in what is supposed to be the safety of home, and I understand the undercurrent of fear that results from knowing that walking on said eggshells doesn't guarantee safety from someone else's volatile temper. I know what it's like to have ridiculous racial stereotypes thrown in my face on a regular basis.

And yet, when I encountered these situations in Eleanor and Park, I felt nothing more than a mild discomfort as I felt my own memories merely tickle at the edge of my awareness, rather than force their way to the forefront and mirror whatever provocations Eleanor or Park happened to be enduring at that point of the book.

Moreover, while Eleanor and Park are on the surface atypical YA characters, I still found their life circumstances portrayed in a way that did not allow me to take them seriously.

For instance, at the beginning of the book, Eleanor has just moved back in with her family after having been kicked out by her stepfather and spending a year at a friend's house. During that time, her family moved to a different house, in which the bathroom has no door and she has to share a tiny bedroom with her four younger siblings. Her stepfather is an abusive alcoholic, her biological father is a deadbeat who doesn't pay his child support, thereby making her mom stereotyped abuse victim 101. Catie from the Readventurer aptly noted in our podcast comments that she appreciated the novelty of a poor, struggling caucasian character in Eleanor.

While it's true that the poor, struggling characters in YA books tend to be boys and/or minorities, Eleanor's troubles in the book, by having bullying AND abuse AND alcoholism AND poverty all crammed in there, struck me as caricatures, rather than authentic struggles. I know it may be hard to believe, but sometimes not all of these issues happen simultaneously in real life. Sometimes parents are assholes without the fuel of alcohol. Sometimes they're abusers without the frustration of poverty. Sometimes they're poor AND \*gasp\* good, hardworking people!

Additionally, as I also spoke about at length during our first podcast, I found Park's character, which had so much potential for nuance, to be flat as a freshly zambonied ice rink. First of all, I do not understand how he could not be somewhat aware of the issues surrounding Eleanor's crapfest of a home life. I get teenage self-absorption and all, but the obviousness of the situation combined with his obliviousness made him look like a moron. Furthermore, rather than have him deal with the intangible struggle of being caught in between two very different cultures and value systems between his Korean-born mother and American surroundings, the author instead has Park spend his time whining about his insecurities over his Korean appearance. He is ashamed of his mother's accent. He blames his short height on his Korean genes. He fears his white dad looks at him as effeminate because he looks more Korean than his younger brother Josh. He is jealous of his brother because Josh barely looks Korean at all.

As a Korean-American, I found this simplistic attitude that portrays being a minority solely as a negative

solely based on racial appearance shallow, offensive and frustrating because this type of poor depiction has been going on for my whole life, repeatedly, in every cultural medium. I suppose it would be easy to assume that every minority in the US wishes they could just snap their fingers and be white, but the reality is far more complicated. Rainbow Rowell had a huge opportunity to explore these intricacies via Park's character, and Park's mom, for that matter, but clearly did not do her research, and therefore did not deliver.

Ultimately, I found could not buy into what is supposed to be the focal point of the book, which is the romance (more like romance?) between Eleanor and Park.

I did find the framework of the romantic development, in which the Eleanor and Park slowly connect on the school bus via the sharing of mixtapes and comic books, novel and charming. But, the 180 degree contrast of Eleanor's home life to Park's financially stable, loving home life felt like a forced, exaggerated version of Pretty in Pink, which as a movie is charming but never struck me as realistic. And because I never felt like the book delved into either character in a deep manner, which limited the character development, which limited the relationship development, I was unable to believe in the all-consuming teenage love that Rainbow Rowell tried to portray.

However, even though I found myself incredibly let down by Eleanor and Park, due in large part to the lack of proper research and context into cultural and historical issues that I find quite important, especially for what is termed a historical novel, I still harbor optimism for any of Rainbow Rowell's future works.

As a huge fan of Rowell's previously published book, Attachments, which utterly charmed me with its portrayal of vivid connections between characters who don't interact in person as well as convinced me of the 1990s setting, I look forward to being delighted by her writing once again because I am convinced that it will happen.

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***FNL Character Rating: J.D. McCoy: Cute on the surface, initially promising, but ultimately a huge disappointment that I'd love to forget but can't because he was so darned infuriating.***

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### **Lola says**

I should have read Eleanor & Park during winter, when it's freezing outside.

Because it completely warmed my heart, and it's so hot already, I thought my heart would burst into flames inside my chest.

Believe me or not, but I always thought I was immune to the usual young adult romanticism in books. You know: hand holding, shy smiles and flushed cheeks. I didn't think I would ever feel actual butterflies reading a YA contemporary romance book.

But I did. And it took me by such surprise that at first I didn't even know what it was. What? Can a book really have this kind of effect on a human being?

Well, I have my answer now.

Eleanor & Park... It's like they're the main reason why the word "love" exists. They symbolize true love.

It's not dirty, or sickening, or lustful or manipulative. It's like two angels fell in love and you can see a halo above their heads and all you can think is "God, I wish them forever. If *they* can last, then maybe there is hope for the rest of us," and then you can't help but cry.

I wanted to lock the characters some place safe where they could be together, forever protected from the looming danger in the world.

Oh god, I can't believe it took me this long to read Eleanor & Park.

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