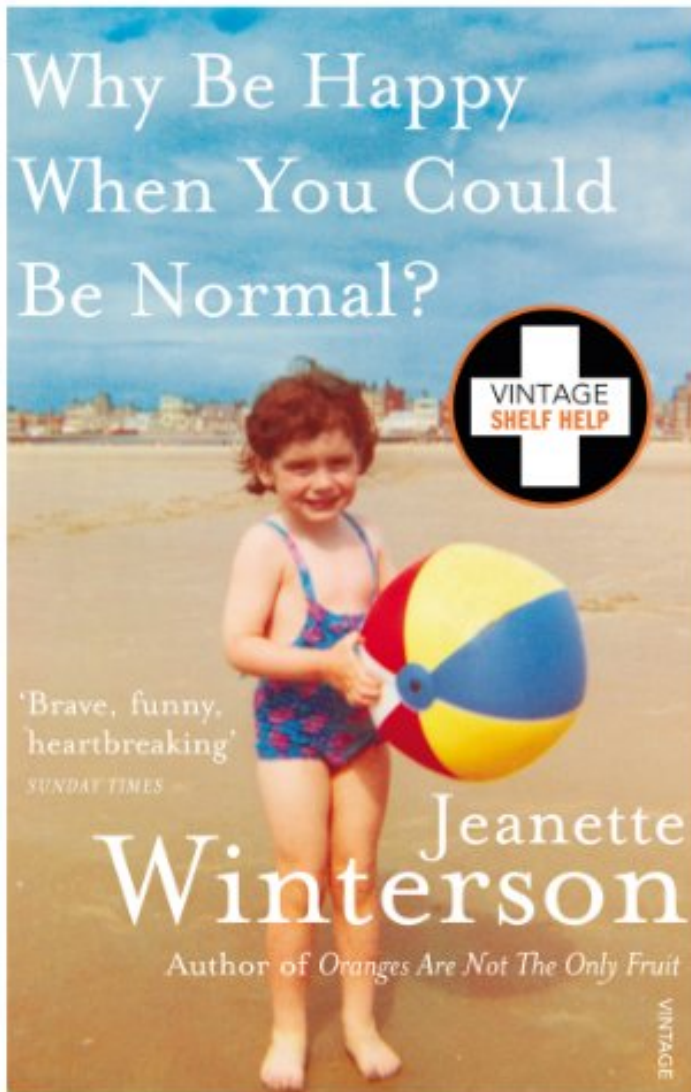


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Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?



Par Jeanette Winterson
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 1985 Jeanette Winterson's first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was published. It was Jeanette's version of the story of a terraced house in Accrington, an adopted child, and the thwarted giantess Mrs Winterson. It was a cover story, a painful past written over and repainted. It was a story of survival.This book is that story's the silent twin. It is full of hurt and humour and a fierce love of life. It is about the pursuit of happiness, about lessons in love, the search for a mother and a journey into madness and out again. It is generous, honest and true.ExtraitWhen my mother was angry with me, which was often, she said, The Devil led us to the wrong crib.The image of Satan taking time off from the Cold War and McCarthyism to visit Manchester in 1960 purpose of visit: to deceive Mrs Winterson has a

flamboyant theatricality to it. She was a flamboyant depressive; a woman who kept a revolver in the duster drawer, and the bullets in a tin of Pledge. A woman who stayed up all night baking cakes to avoid sleeping in the same bed as my father. A woman with a prolapse, a thyroid condition, an enlarged heart, an ulcerated leg that never healed, and two sets of false teeth matt for everyday, and a pearlised set for best. I do not know why she didnt/couldnt have children. I know that she adopted me because she wanted a friend (she had none), and because I was like a flare sent out into the world a way of saying that she was here a kind of X Marks the Spot. She hated being a nobody, and like all children, adopted or not, I have had to live out some of her un-lived life. We do that for our parents we dont really have any choice. She was alive when my first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was published in 1985. It is semiautobiographical, in that it tells the story of a young girl adopted by Pentecostal parents. The girl is supposed to grow up and be a missionary. Instead she falls in love with a woman. Disaster. The girl leaves home, gets herself to Oxford University, returns home to find her mother has built a broadcast radio and is beaming out the Gospel to the heathen. The mother has a handle shes called *Kindly Light*. The novel begins: Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle. For most of my life Ive been a bare-knuckle fighter. The one who wins is the one who hits the hardest. I was beaten as a child and I learned early never to cry. If I was locked out overnight I sat on the doorstep till the milkman came, drank both pints, left the empty bottles to enrage my mother, and walked to school. We always walked. We had no car and no bus money. For me, the average was five miles a day: two miles for the round trip to school; three miles for the round trip to church. Church was every night except Thursdays. I wrote about some of these things in *Oranges*, and when it was published, my mother sent me a furious note in her immaculate copperplate handwriting demanding a phone call. We hadnt seen each other for several years. I had left Oxford, was scraping together a life, and had written *Oranges* young I was twenty-five when it was published. I went to a phone box I had no phone. She went to a phone box she had no phone. I dialled the Accrington code and number as instructed, and there she was who needs Skype? I could see her through her voice, her form solidifying in front of me as she talked. She was a big woman, tallish and weighing around twenty stone. Surgical stockings, flat sandals, a Crimplene dress and a nylon headscarf. She would have done her face powder (keep yourself nice), but not lipstick (fast and loose). She filled the phone box. She was out of scale, larger than life. She was like a fairy story where size is approximate and unstable. She loomed up. She expanded. Only later, much later, too late, did I understand how small she was to herself. The baby nobody picked up. The uncarried child still inside her. But that day she was borne up on the shoulders of her own outrage. She said, Its the first time Ive had to order a book in a false name. I tried to explain what I had hoped to do. I am an ambitious writer I dont see the point of being anything; no, not anything at all, if you have no ambition for it. 1985 wasnt the day of the memoir and in any case, I wasnt writing one. I was trying to get away from the received idea that women always write about experience the compass of what they know while men write wide and bold the big canvas, the experiment with form. Henry James did no good when he said that Jane Austen wrote on four inches of ivory i.e. tiny observant minutiae. Much the same was said of Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf. Those things made me angry. In any case, why could there not be experience and experiment? Why could there not be the observed and the imagined? Why should a woman be limited by anything or anybody? Why should a woman not be ambitious for literature? Ambitious for herself? Mrs Winterson was having none of it. She knew full well that writers were sex-crazed bohemians who broke the rules and didnt go out to work. Books had been forbidden in our house Ill explain why later and so for me to have written one, and had it published, and had it win a prize . . . and be standing in a phone box giving her a lecture on literature, a polemic on feminism . . . The pips more money in the slot and Im thinking, as her voice goes in and out like the sea, Why arent you proud of me? The pips more money in the slot and Im locked out and sitting on the doorstep again. Its really cold and Ive got a newspaper under my bum and Im huddled in my duffel coat. A woman comes by and I know her. She gives me a bag of chips. She knows what my mother is like. Inside our house the light is on. Dads on the night shift, so she can go to bed, but she wont sleep. Shell read the Bible all night, and when Dad comes home, hell let me in, and hell say nothing, and shell say nothing, and well act like its normal to leave your kid outside all night, and normal never to sleep with your husband. And normal to have two sets of false teeth, and a revolver in the duster drawer . . . Were still on the phone in our phone boxes. She tells me that my success is from the Devil, keeper of the wrong crib. She confronts me with the fact that I have used my own name in the novel if it is a story, why is the main character called Jeanette? Why? I cant remember a time when I wasnt setting my story against hers. It was my survival from the very beginning. Adopted children are self-invented because we

have to be; there is an absence, a void, a question mark at the very beginning of our lives. A crucial part of our story is gone, and violently, like a bomb in the womb. The baby explodes into an unknown world that is only knowable through some kind of a story of course that is how we all live, its the narrative of our lives, but adoption drops you into the story after it has started. Its like reading a book with the first few pages missing. Its like arriving after curtain up. The feeling that something is missing never, ever leaves you and it cant, and it shouldnt, because something is missing. That isnt of its nature negative. The missing part, the missing past, can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, and although you can never have that life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille. There are markings here, raised like welts. Read them. Read the hurt. Rewrite them. Rewrite the hurt. Its why I am a writer I dont say decided to be, or became. It was not an act of will or even a conscious choice. To avoid the narrow mesh of Mrs Wintersons story I had to be able to tell my own. Part fact part fiction is what life is. And it is always a cover story. I wrote my way out. She said, But its not true . . . Truth? This was a woman who explained the flashdash of mice activity in the kitchen as ectoplasm. There was a terraced house in Accrington, in Lancashire we called those houses two-up twodown: two rooms downstairs, two rooms upstairs. Three of us lived together in that house for sixteen years. I told my version faithful and invented, accurate and misremembered, shuffled in time. I told myself as hero like any shipwreck story. It was a shipwreck, and me thrown on the coastline of humankind, and finding it not altogether human, and rarely kind. And I suppose that the saddest thing for me, thinking about the cover version that is Oranges, is that I wrote a story I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it. Revue de presse LONGLISTED 2011 Green Carnation Prize FINALIST 2012 South Bank Sky Arts Awards Literature Award WINNER 2012 Independent Booksellers Week Book Award (Adult Category) WINNER 2012 Stonewall Awards Writer of the Year FINALIST 2013 ABA Indies Choice Book Awards FINALIST 2013 Lambda Literary Lesbian Memoir/Biography Award A fierce and funny exploration of her past and of what it means to belong. The Telegraph At every turn . . . her fresh, vivid way of putting things stops one dead in admiration. The New York Times She writes in flights of poetry. . . . She is equally deft with straightforward prose, in which she makes sharp, wry observations on her myriad themes love, sex, technology, society, art, the life and death of the spirit. San Francisco Chronicle Blazingly good. Daily Mail Arguably the finest and most hopeful memoir to emerge in many years, and, as such, it really should not be missed. The Times Breathtaking: witty, biblical, chatty and vigorous all at once.... Powerful. Financial Times Remarkable. Brave and beautiful, a testament to the forces of intelligence, heart and imagination. It is a marvellous book and a generous one. The Spectator