



Becoming Finola

Suzanne Strempek Shea

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In the latest novel from the award-winning author of *Around Again*, an American takes an unexpected trip to Ireland and finds the woman she was meant to become.

Newly unemployed, Sophie White has nothing better to do when her recently widowed best friend, Gina, invites her along on a much-needed, postcrisis getaway. When, after only one day in Ireland, Gina decides she should do her grieving back at home, she urges Sophie to remain and make the most of the summer in Booley, the tiny seaside village that was their destination.

A job offer accepted on a whim lands her in the village's craft shop, and in the position once held by Finola O'Flynn, a woman who'd swiftly left town a few years before. Sophie takes on Finola's job of creating beaded bracelets, but also takes over Finola's abandoned home, then Finola's left-behind wardrobe, and finally, after her own episode of lost love, Finola's discarded man, charismatic shop owner Liam. But could Sophie -- or anyone -- ever take over the legendary place that her predecessor still holds in the hearts of Booley?

Friend, confidante, and guru to all -- literally a lifesaver to some -- even in her absence Finola continues to captivate. Her myth manages to reenergize Sophie, who passes along the gift through bracelets she infuses with invented "powers" that make the wearers believe they have what it takes to face life's challenges. But is Sophie powerful enough to face a whopper of her own when Finola returns to Booley and to the life she deserted? Does Sophie have the magic to make room in one tiny village for two women who want the very same life?

Becoming Finola Details

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From Reader Review Becoming Finola for online ebook

Danielle says

I picked this book up on a whim while looking for something to read over my staycation a couple weeks ago. I forgot to request any books on my to-read list so I made a quick sweep through the library's browsing section and found this book. I have read several non-fiction books by this author and really enjoyed them. She actually started out as a fiction writer, so I thought I should finally read one of her fiction works. I'm not sure how representative of her other fiction books this one is since in the acknowledgments she clearly states that the book is in response to someone's request for a love story, which makes me think some of her other books aren't. At any rate this book very much is a love story that reminded me of a hundred romantic comedy movies. In fact I am thoroughly surprised that it has not been turned into one because the plot plays out exactly like one in such a way that I knew everything that was going to happen based on conventional romantic comedy plot lines. It's not to say that I didn't enjoy the book, but I'm almost wishing someone would make it into a movie because I seem to stomach stuff like this better in movie form than I do book form.

At any rate the story is about a woman named Sophie who travels to a tiny town in Ireland to stay for several months with a friend who wanted to go there to get over some huge losses in her life. The friend winds up leaving after the first night there, but Sophie remains and begins to work in a shop named for Finola who all the tourists then assume she is. And of course as you would expect she eventually falls for the shop's proprietor, Finola's ex-boyfriend until Finola returns wanting to reclaim her life. What will happen? You can guess or you can read for yourself.

Brenna says

Becoming Finola, by Suzanne Strempek Shea, is an easy to read, enjoyable book. Thinking she is going on an extended vacation with her friend to allow her to get through some tough times, Sophie finds herself staying in the cottage once owned by the town's legend, alone. Her friend, Gina, decided the trip is not what she actually wanted after all and went back to the States after 24 hours. Sophie finds herself immersing herself into local culture, making friends, and working in a local store that was once owned by Finola, the same woman who's former cottage Sophie is now living in. After being asked by several tourists if she was Finola, she starts pretending to play the part. Only she gets several surprises along the way towards the end of her summer stay, one of them being that while pretending to be Finola, she actually is finding she is finding more of herself.

This book flows well. Sophie and the characters of the town of Booley are likable, the description of the town makes the reader feel as if they are right there walking the countryside with Sophie, and the flow of the book makes this an easy read. I wouldn't hesitate to read more by Suzanne Strempek Shea.

Margaret says

I liked this book and I like this author. She has an interesting way of describing things, for example ... "And all I could do was generously spray the Bactine of my most sincere intentions onto the compound fractures she'd suffered from the ending of her dozen-year career ...".

The story had a few little twists in it that kept it from being too predictable. I liked Sophie's relationship with the old man Joe and I thought that her interaction with the others in Booley made her more real-world 3-dimensional.

Lorraine says

Two friends go to a tiny village in Ireland, one to get over a marriage break-up, the other to give her support. After one night, the divorced one realizes she needs to go home, but leaves the other one behind to finish out the summer rental of the house. Our character slowly gets to know the locals and starts working in a gift shop, making and selling jewelry. She discovers that Finola, a local girl who has left town, lived in her house, worked in the same shop, and lived with her boss. Since the shop is called "Finola's" she is mistaken for Finola and finally decides to answer to that name. She also falls for the boss and things are looking great for her until the real Finola comes back.

This was a fun and romantic read.

Iris says

I loved that in becoming "Finola" Sophie was actually becoming herself. Finola was only who she dreamed she was and Sophie didn't even realize it. Great story about our identities and dreaming. So often we don't believe in ourselves, but we believe in others. So, when out of our comfort zones we can pretend to be others and wow, look what we can do!

Victoria says

I don't remember what made me want to read this book, but I'm glad I finally got to it. While I think the pace of the story could have picked up a little more, I really liked the author's easy writing style. Not to say though, that the writing was enough, because it wasn't. What really held me more than the writing and the honestly written characters, was the whole "Finola O'Flynn" situation. Much like Sophie, I began to wonder about Finola and what was so darn special about the woman that seemed to have captivated everyone in the small town of Booley.

But something I found rather strange and even a little disheartening about Sophie, was that she eventually seemed to really want to become Finola. That bothered me, because it made it seem like the message was that it wasn't ok to be yourself, but ultimately, in Sophie's path to "becoming Finola" she really became herself. She became Sophie. I don't think she would have been able to achieve that if the real Finola hadn't shown up again. I was glad for that, because before that, and I hate to repeat myself in a way here, I think Sophie was a little lost on the path to self discovery and healing. And putting a little too much faith in the real Finola, whom she had never even met. I almost hate to admit, that I rather liked the Finola in Sophie's head more than the real one. Mostly because I had become as fond of that Finola as Sophie had, and the real one, wasn't much of a thrill to know.

I began to wonder when or if the real Finola would really show up again, because it was getting near the end

when she finally did. I think it came about a little flat actually. But then, I'm not really sure what I was expecting or hoping for when there would finally be a meeting. But, I think I was actually sweating more than Sophie was when it finally happened, why I'm not quite sure, but I think it was mostly because, like Sophie, I'd never known the real Finola O'Flynn, so I didn't know what her reaction would be to find Sophie in her shop, claiming to be her.

I don't want to spoil it or take away more mystery from the story, so I will end this review here by saying while this wasn't quite what I expected, I really liked reading it and getting to know these characters.

Laura says

This was my first experience reading Suzanne Strempek Shea, and I really enjoyed this book. It was a more complex story than I expected, and I appreciated that. Though there were a couple of long chapters in the middle that I sort of had to slog through, overall I found the book to be engaging and sometimes surprising. As with many books set in locales other than the United States, it made me hope that a town such as Booley exists somewhere in Ireland, and that one day I will have the opportunity to pass through it.

Kendra says

The book was a quick read about a woman (Sophie White) who goes to Ireland to help out a friend, who ends up abandoning her there. Sophie remains in Ireland and slowly takes on the identity of Finola O'Flynn, a local legend. She wears her clothes, lives in her house, acts as Finola in her bead shop and eventually falls in love with Finola's ex. Then, Finola returns and Sophie is shattered because she's not sure who she is without pretending to be Finola.

It's a great story about finding who you really are and the affect you have on other people, whether you know it or not. I really enjoyed reading about her interactions with people in the town, and I liked the way Sophie progresses throughout the book.

However, I found the development of the love story between her and Liam to be seriously lacking. One day they are just working with one another, not saying much, and then next they are making love and she's moved in with him. I wish that the author had tried to include a tender or passionate moment between the two of them to really bring me into the storyline. The only time I could actually picture the love between the two of them was in the last two chapters, which is a little too late for me.

A little side note: I am now very motivated to start wearing bracelets again!

Jo says

I liked it... Not necessarily the writing - or the story - though both were good... But it's the question it raises as to what would we do if we were acting like.... (our best self - or someone we admire)... What would I say, or do, or how would I act if I were...

Slowly I believe we would become our best self... I love the question!

Jenny says

I think I was just really distracted during the week I was reading this. I liked the story and the setting was so romantic but I think the writing style was weird. There were some instances of present tense that would throw me off and there was one passage that was repeated three times. I'm not sure if this is a quirk that the author was embracing because of the mystical story or what. I found the popularity of the bracelets hard to believe but I guess it was a story of belief and how it affects your life perspective. I was just struggling to imagine a gift shop of a small town that overpopulated.

I also never figured out the chapter titles. Was there a logic behind the words?

Joanie says

Cute story about a woman who goes to Ireland with her friend and winds up staying after her friend leaves. She slowly begins to take over the life of a woman from the village named Finola who is off somewhere, moving into her cottage, wearing her clothes, working in her gift shop and all is well until Finola comes back of course.

Bethany Zimp says

This wasn't her finest work. I didn't love the premise: vacationing to Ireland with her devastated friend (to recover) only to be abandoned there, ultimately creating some, frankly, non-interesting relationships with the remaining Irish locals. I was expecting something else (like "Hoopi Shoopi Donna") but got a story I had to slog through. There were moments I thought the story would pick up, but...

Morpheus Reads says

Becoming Finola
by Suzanne Strempek Shea
3-1/2*

This was a slow starter for me, taking nearly 100 pages before it grabbed me. But then it really struck a chord with me and I didn't want it to end. I found the the style of writing was beautiful in a way that's hard to describe. I'm not sure if this will capture my meaning, but this is one phrase that caught my attention:

She'd been studying the village so intensely, but just beyond that lay an entire ocean--bigger than the world, it seemed, and certainly more than large enough to bear all she was seeking. Anticipating her arrival, it had dressed for the occasion, dark midnight-sapphiry-purplish and tinsels of disco ball sparkles as it pitched forward a serious succession of surf-movie-sized breakers.

Yes, that's a mouthful, but the imagery created is really spectacular. Another factor that I really enjoyed was

that this took place right after 9/11, and the MC was the same age as I would have been then. The world created in this story accurately captures the state of the world--politically and culturally--at that time, especially for someone (like me) who would have the same memories. I'm talking about random tidbits of glimpses into the time, i.e. references to "email machines" at the local B&B, the telephones tucked into seat backs on airplanes, smoking gazebos at hospitals, the fact that the tourism industry really suffered because people were afraid to travel, one-liners about Sinead being a "bald, angry Pope ripper", tourists wearing red, white and blue Tommy Hilfiger sweatshirts and T-shirts bearing the words "Never Forget", a wedding gown compared to "a lacy 80s prom dress with the 'Gunne Sax' label", people watching episodes of "Sex and the City" and "Jackass" on MTV.

The plot itself had enough twists to keep it interesting. Sophie White travels to a small seaside village (pop. 400+) in Ireland, called "Booley" (from the original Celtic "Buaille") with her friend, Gina. Gina is going through a life crisis after losing her husband to a car accident, her rebellious 18yo daughter to abandonment, and her job to a factory closure. Sophie has devoted 18 months to keeping Gina organized and sane, working as her personal assistant, but mainly helping her through her grief. Gina decides to spend the summer in this little Irish hamlet and pays the way for Sophie to travel with her from Massachusetts.

The day after their arrival, Gina decides to turn around and go back home. She wants to be alone, however, and requests that Sophie stay on in Ireland for the summer. Sophie feels betrayed and abandoned by her friend, but agrees and soon becomes a fixture in the little town. The friendships she makes eventually help Sophie get through her own personal tragedy as she finds out a truth about her fiance back home.

Sophie is coerced into helping out at a little bead/jewelry-making shop when she shows a natural talent for organization and marketing. The jewelry making, as well as the gentle company of its owner, Liam Keegan, become a kind of therapy, and she learns to embrace and enjoy the quiet life Booley offers her. Because tourists want to buy jewelry directly from the "Irish" local making it and it hurt sales when she said she was in reality from America, Sophie begins to take on the name and persona of the woman who originally owned the shop, Finola O'Flynn.

Finola is constantly talked about and grieved over, and Sophie begins to feel like she knows her after hearing stories of her exploits and how she helped so many people during the time she lived in town. Finola, someone who three years prior had suddenly abandoned the town, her job, her little cottage, and the residents--including her boyfriend, Liam Keegan, has become legend to the local Booleyan. Sophie finds her feet and her own success while using the mythical Finola as her talisman, i.e. "What Would Finola Do?" to help her decide how to live her life--including falling in love with Liam.

Her newfound peace gets shaken up, however, when the real Finola returns.

Janet Gardner says

I've enjoyed everything I've read by Suzanne Strempek Shea, but this is without question my favorite (so far). It's the story of Sophie White, who accompanies her friend Gina to a small village in western Ireland, where Gina hopes to restart her life after a series of misfortunes including the sudden death of her husband, abandonment by her daughter, and the closing of the factory where she had worked. Gina decides after less than 24 hours to return home to Massachusetts, but Sophie--who is at loose ends having lost her job in the same factory closing--chooses to stay in Ireland. Almost immediately, she begins to hear stories of one Finola O'Flynn, a beloved local woman who decamped suddenly from the village three years earlier, leaving

behind an admiring, nearly worshipful public. Sophie gradually finds herself inhabiting Finola's old life: working in her old shop, living in her old cottage, and eventually dating her old boyfriend, and in "becoming Finola," she begins to become more fully herself. I'm a sucker for stories of self-reinvention, which was part of the appeal of this book, but I also really enjoyed the writing and imagery.

Amanda says

I enjoyed this book. The story is pretty predictable and the author's writing style, while not at all *bad*, is not really my cup of tea -- a little jumpy, full of random asides. But the lovely setting and amusing characters made the book charming and engaging. It also brings up the question of the stories we tell about ourselves and each other, and how they relate to who we really are. Satisfying.
