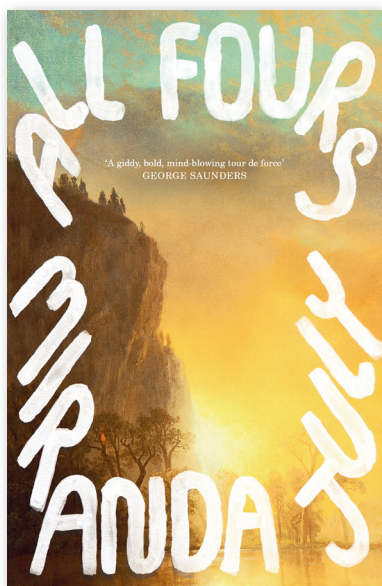


# All Fours

by Miranda July



## SHORT PLOT SUMMARY

A semi-famous artist announces her plan to drive cross-country from LA to NY. Twenty minutes after leaving her husband and child at home, she spontaneously exits the freeway, beds down in a nondescript motel and immerses herself in a temporary reinvention that turns out to be the start of an entirely different journey.

Miranda July's second novel confirms the brilliance of her unique approach to fiction. With a wry voice, perfect comic timing, unabashed curiosity about human intimacy and palpable delight in pushing boundaries, *All Fours* tells the story of one woman's quest for a new kind of freedom. Part absurd entertainment, part tender reinvention of the sexual, romantic and domestic life of a 45-year-old female artist, *All Fours* transcends expectations while excavating our beliefs about life lived as a woman. Once again, July hijacks the familiar and turns it into something new and thrillingly, profoundly alive.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In *All Fours*, July upends a variety of social norms concerning women. First, the middle-aged main character of the book leaves her child and husband behind to go on a trip on her own, then has an affair with a young married man. She experiences menopause as a time of pleasure and sexual liberation, spending most of her time working alone on her art in her garage, taking a female lover and living in an open relationship with her husband.

Rather than be shamed for these actions, July holds the space for her heroine to explore life without judgement. This stands in direct opposition to many female characters in 'classic literature' who, when they were allowed to be sexual or deviate from prescribed female roles and responsibilities, would tend to be killed off or punished.

“Irreverent, very funny, and so unexpected, this is a really fresh voice that speaks to women of a certain age. A delight for readers from beginning to end!”

KIT DE WAAL,  
2025 CHAIR OF JUDGES



Shortlist  
2025

July asks:

‘Why do such a thing? What kind of monster makes a big show of going away and then hides out right nearby? ... This was the thinking that had kept every woman from her greatness. There did not have to be an answer to the question why; everything important started out mysterious... You had to withstand a profound sense of wrongness if you ever wanted to get somewhere new’.

Taking her main character on a personal journey of transformation, July introduces ideas that might be uncomfortable for society or the reader – menopause can be sexy, women can leave their children to pursue their own pleasure, relationships do not have to be monogamous – to ‘get somewhere new’. Her main character is allowed to do things that seem unwise or badly thought through – things that may seem ‘wrong’ – without judgement, which is a profoundly unfamiliar experience for women, both in fiction and in life. In this way, the book is deeply subversive and inspiring.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

The main character of the story ends up creating an open relationship with her husband after her dalliance with Davey. The experience, and her time with Audra, leads her to start to explore her emotional and physical needs after a long time being married, beginning to consider the possibility of having more than one relationship:

‘I should have a lover, sure, but also other specialised relationships – someone who I only cried with, someone for mutual back-scratching, artistic pilgrimages...’

Rather than fall in love with Davey, she realises that she is able to fall back in love with life again on her own terms and redefine what love looks like because of that experience. She describes herself, Harris, Sam and their respective new partners as ‘a nonconforming family’.

What are your thoughts about non-monogamous/polyamorous relationships, ethical non-monogamy or ‘open’ relationships? Do you think they provide empowering alternatives to women, that were previously only acceptable for men in different cultures? Is the main character’s opening up of her marriage a positive or negative development, or neither? How might polyamory empower women?

### QUESTIONS

What did you think about Audra as a character? Was she someone you would aspire to be? Why, or why not?

When Davey removes and replaces the main character’s tampon, she says, ‘I felt close to tears, some combination of shame, excitement and

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an unexpected kind of sadness, as if this were coming after a lifetime of neglect. I had been so completely alone with my period all these years'. Could you relate to this feeling? How did this scene make you feel?

'Without a child I could dance across the sexism of my era, whereas becoming a mother shoved my face right down into it'. How does motherhood affect women's careers? How has it affected yours?

July makes an interesting observation about 'the threat of gayness' for men of her generation as opposed to Davey's, saying, 'Even Harris had been beat up in high school for being 'arty'. So, me purring about gay eroticism was just annoying'. Is it easier to be gay now than thirty years ago? Why, or why not?

### NEXT STEPS

Write interview questions for a famous woman that you would like to talk to if you got the chance – like when the main character gets to meet Arkanda. Who fascinates you and what would you like to ask them? Would you ask them questions about their personal life or keep it just about their work? Are they a mysterious person or do you feel like you already know a lot about them?

Alternatively, inspired by Claire's luxurious renovation of the main character's hotel room, plan a renovation of a room in your home. What would you do if money was no object? You might like to look at some interiors magazines for inspiration and perhaps even make a collage or scrapbook of ideas. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Miranda July** is a writer, filmmaker and artist. Her debut novel, *The First Bad Man*, was an instant *New York Times* bestseller, and her collection of stories, *No One Belongs Here More Than You*, won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. Her writing has appeared in the *Paris Review*, *Harper's* and the *New Yorker*. She lives in Los Angeles.



# If you enjoyed this book...

## RECOMMENDED READS

In *It Chooses You*, Miranda July interviews a random selection of people selling their unwanted items glimpsing thirteen surprisingly moving stories.

In *Wayward* by Dana Spiotta, a middle-aged woman buys a decrepit house on the wrong side of town and flees her suburban life.

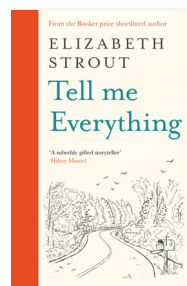
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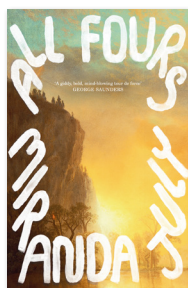
## EXPLORE THE 2025 SHORTLIST



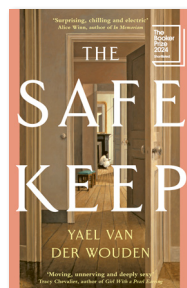
**Good Girl**  
by Aria Aber



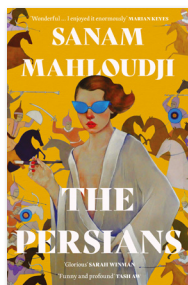
**Tell Me Everything**  
by Elizabeth Strout



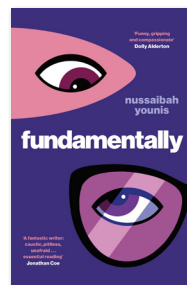
**All Fours**  
by Miranda July



**The Safekeep**  
by Yael van der Wouden



**The Persians**  
by Sanam Mahloudji



**Fundamentally**  
by Nussaibah Younis

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discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

The Women's Prize Trust is a registered charity, and we appreciate donations of any size to support our outreach work with writers and readers from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, however you wish to, **join us and help put more books written by women into the hands of more readers.**

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