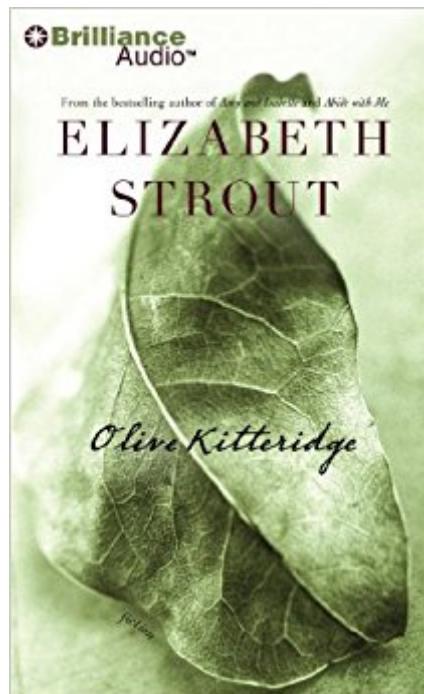


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# Olive Kitteridge



## Synopsis

2009 Pulitzer Prize winner in the Letters, Drama and Music category

At the edge of the continent, Crosby, Maine, may seem like nowhere, but seen through this brilliant writer's eyes, it's in essence the whole world, and the lives that are lived there are filled with all of the grand human drama—desire, despair, jealousy, hope, and love. At times stern, at other times patient, at times perceptive, at other times in sad denial, Olive Kitteridge, a retired schoolteacher, deplores the changes in her little town and in the world at large, but she doesn't always recognize the changes in those around her: a lounge musician haunted by a past romance; a former student who has lost the will to live; Olive's own adult child, who feels tyrannized by her irrational sensitivities; and her husband, Henry, who finds his loyalty to his marriage both a blessing and a curse. As the townspeople grapple with their problems, mild and dire, Olive is brought to a deeper understanding of herself and her life — sometimes painfully, but always with ruthless honesty. Olive Kitteridge offers profound insights into the human condition—its conflicts, its tragedies and joys, and the endurance it requires.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Thirteen linked tales from Strout (Abide with Me, etc.) present a heart-wrenching, penetrating portrait of ordinary coastal Mainers living lives of quiet grief intermingled with flashes of human connection. The opening Pharmacy focuses on terse, dry junior high-school teacher Olive Kitteridge and her gregarious pharmacist husband, Henry, both of whom have survived the loss of a

psychologically damaged parent, and both of whom suffer painful attractions to co-workers. Their son, Christopher, takes center stage in *A Little Burst*, which describes his wedding in humorous, somewhat disturbing detail, and in *Security*, where Olive, in her 70s, visits Christopher and his family in New York. Strout's fiction showcases her ability to reveal through familiar details—the mother-of-the-groom's wedding dress, a grandmother's disapproving observations of how her grandchildren are raised—the seeds of tragedy. Themes of suicide, depression, bad communication, aging and love, run through these stories, none more vivid or touching than *Incoming Tide*, where Olive chats with former student Kevin Coulson as they watch waitress Patty Howe by the seashore, all three struggling with their own misgivings about life. Like this story, the collection is easy to read and impossible to forget. Its literary craft and emotional power will surprise readers unfamiliar with Strout. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

\*Starred Review\* “Hell. We’re always alone. Born alone. Die alone,” says Olive Kitteridge, redoubtable seventh-grade math teacher in Crosby, Maine. Anyone who gets in Olive’s way had better watch out, for she crashes unapologetically through life like an emotional storm trooper. She forces her husband, Henry, the town pharmacist, into tactical retreat; and she drives her beloved son, Christopher, across the country and into therapy. But appalling though Olive can be, Strout manages to make her deeply human and even sympathetic, as are all of the characters in this “novel in stories.” Covering a period of 30-odd years, most of the stories (several of which were previously published in the *New Yorker* and other magazines) feature Olive as their focus, but in some she is a bit player or even a footnote while other characters take center stage to sort through their own fears and insecurities. Though loneliness and loss haunt these pages, Strout also supplies gentle humor and a nourishing dose of hope. People are sustained by the rhythms of ordinary life and the natural wonders of coastal Maine, and even Olive is sometimes caught off guard by life’s baffling beauty. Strout is also the author of the well-received *Amy and Isabelle* (1999) and *Abide with Me* (2006). --Mary Ellen Quinn --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

At over 1,500 reviews, I know my review won't make a difference, but I just wrote a negative review,

so I felt the need to balance things out. I'll make this brief. This is one of the most outstanding novels I've ever read. I normally don't reread books, but this one will be the exception. Stout tells small stories about small people, in a small town, but none of this is small, because Stout reveals that all of our stories--and yes this is an every person type of book, are beautiful. Stout's empathetic authorial voice is beautiful. Beautiful is a word I use over and over describing this book. Her use of language is heart bracingly beautiful to the point where sometimes I had to put the book down just to absorb the profound pathos she describes. I promised a short review, so I will conclude by saying my life has been enriched by reading this novel.

Read this book a few months ago and truthfully I don't remember much about it. It did not make an impression on me and I remember being disappointed at the end because the author was one who was highly recommended. Not my cup of tea, I guess.

What a subtle portrayal of an "ordinary" woman! I expected a stoic, unemotional depiction of a small-town wife and mother. Instead, we are given someone who loves, gives, endures, and painfully adjusts. I wish I had known Olive - and now, I look for her traits in the older women around me, in my own small town. This book was my intro to Elizabeth Strout, and now I'm totally addicted to her. New readers may experience the same effect. Read this book slowly!

Olive Kitteridge is a book of linked stories that bring alive a number of residents in a small Northeastern town. Each story is crafted to stand alone but I feel they are an exciting read together. Characters are painted with a brush of realism that will make you feel a part of their lives. And Olive, herself, is a force. This book may leave you changed and will certainly leave you entertained.

This is a difficult book to review because it defies categorization. It is composed of 13 short stories about or involving the title character, Olive Kitteridge. It can also be called a novel because the stories flow, one into the next building a context so that we get to know Olive, her surroundings and her life. Short stories can't do this yet novel chapters can not often stand alone. Olive is both complex and simple. She has a mercurial, tough and direct manner and it is difficult to predict how she will respond to a particular circumstance. Yet she is also perceptive and can go out of her way to be kind to others in situations where she could easily turn her head. She has a tender side, a side aching for love and realizing the meaning of life as her days grow shorter. She has interactions with others that can effect the course of their lives. In one story she takes the time to talk to a suicidal

man who was once her student. In another story she has the gut feeling that a student in her class may be troubled and she takes the time to ask her if anything is bothering her. Yet she embodies the existential theme of aloneness, taking her loneliness and aloneness as a mandate - we are all alone and must face our deaths and fates solely by ourselves. She just hopes that when her death comes it will be quick. She is a tough woman who intimidates others. Sometimes she will be callous and not give others the time of day. She can be coarse and prejudiced. She also has another side, one that is so sensitive that she can hardly bear the pain of appearing weak. She grieves the rift with her son who she loves so much yet her sensitivity gives way to self-sabotage. She desires love so much that the caress of a dentist's hand on her face creates a longing within her. On the other hand, she takes the precious days with her devoted husband in stride not realizing that life is not a dress rehearsal. Do I like Olive? I'm not sure. Yet reading this book gave me the sense that I know her. She has stayed in my consciousness in many ways. This is a great book. I have been a fan of Ms. Strout's since her first novel, *Amy and Isabelle*.

There are so many good things to say about this book that it's hard to know where to begin. First, there is the structure. The book is marketed as a novel-in-stories, and that's fine, but it doesn't really do it justice. This is a novel in which Olive Kitteridge is the main character, the one capable of the most change and of causing the most change to happen. Some of the 'stories' are told with Olive in full central spotlight, but in many she's peripheral, sometimes little more than a walk-on. Because of this, we get a sense that Olive is very much who she is because of where she is, and because of the people with whom she shares this landscape. It's a wonderful device. I am reminded of James Agee's book, *Let Us Know Praise Famous Men*, in that section where he slides out across the town, into the minds of the townspeople, to let the reader see how the family with whom he's living is perceived by others. But here Strout shows us not only how Olive looks to others, but she shows us how the way she acts affects others once she's walked away. It's riveting. Second, there's the writing. It's splendid. This is a book concerned with loss - of youth, of relationships and of one's illusions -- TO READ THE REST OF THE REVIEW, PLEASE GO TO: [...] Thank you.

Elizabeth Strout laces together stories in a rough weave with great tensile strength. Told direct and slant, the interlocked tales introduce readers to Olive, her family and friends, and people she barely knows but whose lives she has touched for better or worse. What emerges is a large, difficult woman determined to live her small life, filled with passions and regrets, until the end.

I was quite taken by this beautifully written book. As an author myself, I can only aspire to write such compelling insights into emotions and personalities. I imagine this book wouldn't appeal to everyone, but as a "senior citizen" myself, there was a lot that spoke to me.

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