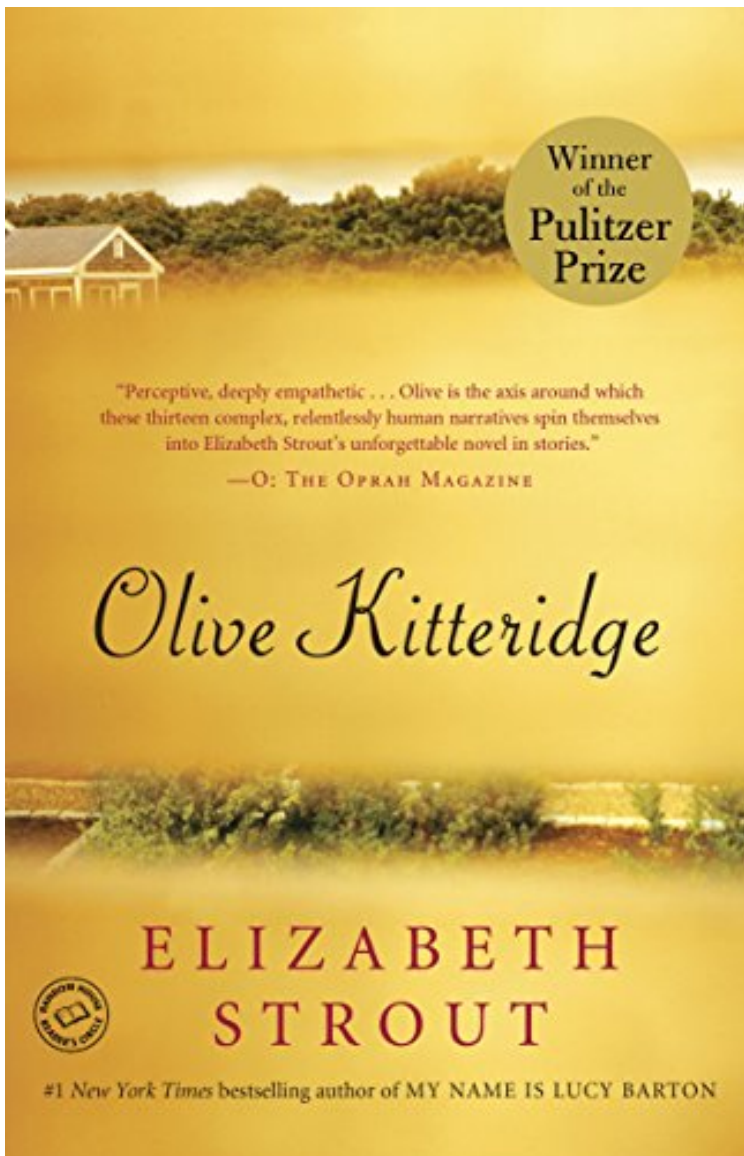


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Olive Kitteridge: Fiction



Par Elizabeth Strout
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE THE EMMY AWARDWINNING HBO MINISERIES STARRING FRANCES MCDORMAND, RICHARD JENKINS, AND BILL MURRAYIn a voice more powerful and compassionate than ever before, New York Times bestselling author Elizabeth Strout binds together thirteen rich, luminous narratives into a book with the heft of a novel, through the presence of one larger-than-life, unforgettable character: Olive Kitteridge. At the edge of the continent, Crosby, Maine, may seem like nowhere, but seen through this brilliant writers eyes, its in essence the whole world, and the lives that are lived there are filled with all of the grand human dramadesire, 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, deplors 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 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.

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY People USA Today The Atlantic The Washington Post Book World Seattle Post-Intelligencer Entertainment Weekly The Christian Science Monitor San Francisco Chronicle Salon San Antonio Express-News Chicago Tribune The Wall Street Journal Perceptive, deeply empathetic . . . Olive is the axis around which these thirteen complex, relentlessly human narratives spin themselves into Elizabeth Strout's unforgettable novel in stories.

O: The Oprah Magazine Fiction lovers, remember this name: Olive Kitteridge. . . . You'll never forget her. . . . [Elizabeth Strout] constructs her stories with rich irony and moments of genuine surprise and intense emotion. . . . Glorious, powerful stuff.

USA Today Funny, wicked and remorseful, Mrs. Kitteridge is a compelling life force, a red-blooded original. When she's not onstage, we look forward to her return. The book is a page-turner because of her.

San Francisco Chronicle Olive Kitteridge still lingers in memory like a treasured photograph.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer Rarely does a story collection pack such a gutsy emotional punch. Entertainment Weekly Strout animates the ordinary with astonishing force. . . . [She] makes us experience not only the terrors of change but also the terrifying hope that change can bring: she plunges us into these churning waters and we come up gasping for air.

The New Yorker BONUS: This edition includes an excerpt from Elizabeth Strout's The Burgess Boys.

Chapter 1 Pharmacy For many years Henry Kitteridge was a pharmacist in the next town over, driving every morning on snowy roads, or rainy roads, or summertime roads, when the wild raspberries shot their new growth in brambles along the last section of town before he turned off to where the wider road led to the pharmacy. Retired now, he still wakes early and remembers how mornings used to be his favorite, as though the world were his secret, tires rumbling softly beneath him and the light emerging through the early fog, the brief sight of the bay off to his right, then the pines, tall and slender, and almost always he rode with the window partly open because he loved the smell of the pines and the heavy salt air, and in the winter he loved the smell of the cold. The pharmacy was a small two-story building attached to another building that housed separately a hardware store and a small grocery. Each morning Henry parked in the back by the large metal bins, and then entered the pharmacy's back door, and went about switching on the lights, turning up the thermostat, or, if it was summer, getting the fans going. He would open the safe, put money in the register, unlock the front door, wash his hands, put on his white lab coat. The ritual was pleasing, as though the old store with its shelves of toothpaste, vitamins, cosmetics, hair adornments, even sewing needles and greeting cards, as well as red rubber hot water bottles, enema pumps was a person altogether steady and steadfast. And any unpleasantness that may have occurred back in his home, any uneasiness at the way his wife often left their bed to wander through their home in the night's dark hours all this receded like a shoreline as he walked through the safety of his pharmacy. Standing in the back, with the drawers and rows of pills, Henry was cheerful when the phone began to ring, cheerful when Mrs. Merriman came for her blood pressure medicine, or old Cliff Mott arrived for his digitalis, cheerful when he prepared the Valium for Rachel Jones, whose husband ran off the night their baby was born. It was Henry's nature to listen, and many times during the week he would say, Gosh, I'm awful sorry to hear that, or Say, isn't that something? Inwardly, he suffered the quiet trepidations of a man who had witnessed twice in childhood the nervous breakdowns of a mother who had otherwise cared for him with stridency. And so if, as rarely happened, a customer was distressed over a price, or irritated by the quality of an Ace bandage or ice pack, Henry did what he could to rectify things quickly. For many years Mrs. Granger worked for him; her husband was a lobster fisherman, and she seemed to carry with her the cold breeze of the open water, not so eager to please a wary customer. He had to listen with half an ear as he filled prescriptions, to make sure she was not at the cash register dismissing a complaint. More than once he was reminded of that same sensation in watching to see that his wife, Olive, did not bear down too hard on Christopher over a homework assignment or a chore left undone; that sense of his attention hovering the need to keep everyone content. When he heard a briskness in Mrs. Granger's voice, he would step down from his back post, moving toward the center of the store to talk with the customer himself. Otherwise, Mrs. Granger did her job well. He appreciated that she was not chatty, kept perfect inventory, and almost never called in sick. That she died in

her sleep one night astonished him, and left him with some feeling of responsibility, as though he had missed, working alongside her for years, whatever symptom might have shown itself that he, handling his pills and syrups and syringes, could have fixed. Mousy, his wife said, when he hired the new girl. Looks just like a mouse. Denise Thibodeau had round cheeks, and small eyes that peeped through her brown-framed glasses. But a nice mouse, Henry said. A cute one. No ones cute who cant stand up straight, Olive said. It was true that Denises narrow shoulders sloped forward, as though apologizing for something. She was twenty-two, just out of the state university of Vermont. Her husband was also named Henry, and Henry Kitteridge, meeting Henry Thibodeau for the first time, was taken with what he saw as an unself-conscious excellence. The young man was vigorous and sturdy-featured with a light in his eye that seemed to lend a flickering resplendence to his decent, ordinary face. He was a plumber, working in a business owned by his uncle. He and Denise had been married one year. Not keen on it, Olive said, when he suggested they have the young couple to dinner. Henry let it drop. This was a time when his sonnot yet showing the physical signs of adolescencehad become suddenly and strenuously sullen, his mood like a poison shot through the air, and Olive seemed as changed and changeable as Christopher, the two having fast and furious fights that became just as suddenly some blanket of silent intimacy where Henry, clueless, stupefied, would find himself to be the odd man out. But standing in the back parking lot at the end of a late summer day, while he spoke with Denise and Henry Thibodeau, and the sun tucked itself behind the spruce trees, Henry Kitteridge felt such a longing to be in the presence of this young couple, their faces turned to him with a diffident but eager interest as he recalled his own days at the university many years ago, that he said, Now, say. Olive and I would like you to come for supper soon. He drove home, past the tall pines, past the glimpse of the bay, and thought of the Thibodeaus driving the other way, to their trailer on the outskirts of town. He pictured the trailer, cozy and picked upfor Denise was neat in her habitsand imagined them sharing the news of their day.

Denise might say, Hes an easy boss. And Henry might say, Oh, I like the guy a lot. He pulled into his driveway, which was not a driveway so much as a patch of lawn on top of the hill, and saw Olive in the garden. Hello, Olive, he said, walking to her. He wanted to put his arms around her, but she had a darkness that seemed to stand beside her like an acquaintance that would not go away. He told her the Thibodeaus were coming for supper. Its only right, he said. Olive wiped sweat from her upper lip, turned to rip up a clump of onion grass. Then thats that, Mr. President, she said. Give your order to the cook. On Friday night the couple followed him home, and the young Henry shook Olives hand. Nice place here, he said. With that view of the water. Mr. Kitteridge says you two built this yourselves. Indeed, we did. Christopher sat sideways at the table, slumped in adolescent gracelessness, and did not respond when Henry Thibodeau asked him if he played any sports at school. Henry Kitteridge felt an unexpected fury sprout inside him; he wanted to shout at the boy, whose poor manners, he felt, revealed something unpleasant not expected to be found in the Kitteridge home. When you work in a pharmacy, Olive told Denise, setting before her a plate of baked beans, you learn the secrets of everyone in town. Olive sat down across from her, pushed forward a bottle of ketchup. Have to know to keep your mouth shut. But seems like you know how to do that. Denise understands, Henry Kitteridge said. Denises husband said, Oh, sure. You couldnt find someone more trustworthy than Denise. I believe you, Henry said, passing the man a basket of rolls. And please. Call me Henry. One of my favorite names, he added. Denise laughed quietly; she liked him, he could see this. Christopher slumped farther into his seat. Henry Thibodeaus parents lived on a farm inland, and so the two Henrys discussed crops, and pole beans, and the corn not being as sweet this summer from the lack of rain, and how to get a good asparagus bed. Oh, for Gods sake, said Olive, when, in passing the ketchup to the young man, Henry Kitteridge knocked it over, and ketchup lurched out like thickened blood across the oak table. Trying to pick up the bottle, he caused it to roll unsteadily, and ketchup ended up on his fingertips, then on his white shirt. Leave it, Olive commanded, standing up. Just leave it alone, Henry. For Gods sake.

And Henry Thibodeau, perhaps at the sound of his own name being spoken sharply, sat back, looking stricken. Gosh, what a mess Ive made, Henry Kitteridge said. For dessert they were each handed a blue bowl with a scoop of vanilla ice cream sliding in its center. Vanillas my favorite, Denise said. Is it, said Olive. Mine, too, Henry Kitteridge said. As autumn came, the mornings darker, and the pharmacy getting only a short sliver of the direct sun before it passed over the building and left the store lit by its own overhead lights, Henry stood in the back filling the small plastic bottles, answering the telephone, while Denise stayed up front near the cash register. At lunchtime, she unwrapped a sandwich she brought from home, and ate it in the back where the storage was, and then he would eat his lunch, and sometimes when there was no one in the store, they would linger with a cup of coffee bought from the grocer next door. Denise seemed a

naturally quiet girl, but she was given to spurts of sudden talkativeness. My mothers had MS for years, you know, so starting way back we all learned to help out. All three of my brothers are different. Dont you think its funny when it happens that way? The oldest brother, Denise said, straightening a bottle of shampoo, had been her fathers favorite until hed married a girl her father didnt like. Her own in-laws were wonderful, she said. Shed had a boyfriend before Henry, a Protestant, and his parents had not been so kind to her. It wouldnt have worked out, she said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Well, Henrys a terrific young man, Henry answered. She nodded, smiling through her glasses like a thirteen-year-old girl. Again, he pictured her trailer, the two of them like overgrown puppies tumbling together; he could not have said why this gave him the particular kind of happiness it did, like liquid gold being poured through him. She was as efficient as Mrs. Granger had been, but more relaxed. Right beneath the vitamins in the second aisle, she would tell a customer. Here, Ill show you. Once, she told Henry she sometimes let a person wander around the store before asking if she could help them. That way, see, they might find something they didnt know they needed. And your sales will go up. A block of winter sun was splayed across the glass of the cosmetics shelf; a strip of wooden floor shone like honey. He raised his eyebrows appreciatively. Lucky for me, Denise, when you came through that door. She pushed up her glasses with the back of her hand, then ran the duster over the ointment jars. Jerry McCarthy, the boy who delivered the pharmaceuticals once a week from Portlandor more often if neededwould sometimes have his lunch in the back room. He was eighteen, right out of high school; a big, fat kid with a smooth face, who perspired so much that splotches of his shirt would be wet, at times even down over his breasts, so the poor fellow looked to be lactating. Seated on a crate, his big knees practically to his ears, hed eat a sandwich that had spilling from it mayonnaisey clumps of egg salad or tuna fish, landing on his shirt. More than once Henry saw Denise hand him a paper towel. That happens to me, Henry heard her say one day. Whenever I eat a sandwich that isnt just cold cuts, I end up a mess. It couldnt have been true. The girl was neat as a pin, if plain as a plate. Good afternoon, shed say when the telephone rang. This is the Village Pharmacy. How can I help you today? Like a girl playing grown-up. And then: On a Monday morning when the air in the pharmacy held a sharp chill, he went about opening up the store, saying, How was your weekend, Denise? Olive had refused to go to church the day before, and Henry, uncharacteristically, had spoken to her sharply. Is it too much to ask, he had found himself saying, as he stood in the kitchen in his undershorts, ironing his trousers. A mans wife accompanying him to church? Going without her seemed a public exposure of familial failure. Yes, it most certainly is too goddamn much to ask! Olive had almost spit, her furys door flung open. You have no idea how tired I am, teaching all day, going to foolish meetings where the goddamn principal is a moron! Shopping. Cooking. Ironing. Laundry. Doing Christophers homework with him! And you She had grabbed on to the back of a dining room chair, and her dark hair, still uncombed from its nights disarrangement, had fallen across her eyes. You, Mr. Head Deacon Claptrap Nice Guy, expect me to give up my Sunday mornings and go sit among a bunch of snot-wots! Very suddenly she had sat down in the chair. Well, Im sick and tired of it, shed said, calmly. Sick to death. A darkness had rumbled through him; his soul was suffocating in tar. The next morning, Olive spoke to him conversationally. Jims car smelled like upchuck last week. Hope hes cleaned it out. Jim OCasey taught with Olive, and for years took both Christopher and Olive to school. Hope so, said Henry, and in that way their fight was done. Oh, I had a wonderful weekend, said Denise, her small eyes behind her glasses looking at him with an eagerness that was so childlike it could have cracked his heart in two. We went to Henrys folks and dug potatoes at night. Henry put the headlights on from the car and we dug potatoes. Finding the potatoes in that cold soillike an Easter egg hunt! He stopped unpacking a shipment of penicillin, and stepped down to talk to her. There were no customers yet, and below the front window the radiator hissed. He said, Isnt that lovely, Denise. She nodded, touching the top of the vitamin shelf beside her. A small motion of fear seemed to pass over her face. I got cold and went and sat in the car and watched Henry digging potatoes, and I thought: Its too good to be true. *Revue de presse* So astonishingly good that I shall be reading it once a year for the foreseeable future and very probably for the rest of my life ... As perfect a novel as you will ever read! *Melanie McGrath, Evening Standard Books of the Year*