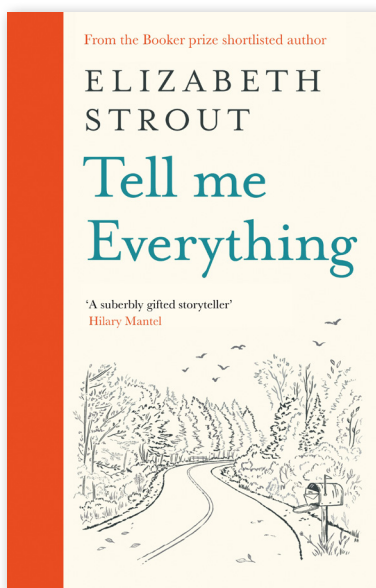


# Tell Me Everything

by Elizabeth Strout



## SHORT PLOT SUMMARY

It's autumn in Maine, and the town lawyer Bob Burgess has become enmeshed in an unfolding murder investigation, defending a lonely, isolated man accused of killing his mother. He has also fallen into a deep and abiding friendship with the acclaimed writer Lucy Barton, who lives nearby in a house next to the sea. Together, Lucy and Bob talk about their lives, their hopes and regrets, and what might have been.

Lucy, meanwhile, befriends one of Crosby's longest-standing inhabitants, Olive Kitteridge, now living in a retirement community on the edge of town. They spend afternoons together in Olive's apartment, telling each other stories. Stories about people they have known – 'unrecorded lives', Olive calls them – reanimating them and, in the process, imbuing their lives with meaning.

Brimming with empathy and pathos, *Tell Me Everything* is Elizabeth Strout operating at the height of her powers, illuminating the ways in which our relationships keep us afloat. As Lucy says, 'Love comes in so many different forms, but it is always love.'

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Strout's character of Olive Kitteridge – an elderly woman revealing her secrets and telling her story and others – is a recognisable trope in fiction. The elderly character that tells either her life story (often, though not always, a woman) or provides useful information on other characters in a story provides the reader with a compelling narrator: someone with age on their side, who has witnessed a lot, and is now ready to talk. It is a feature especially popular in cosy crime and women's fiction genres, where the focus is on secrets being revealed, mystery, personal stories, growth and healing.

In the aptly-titled *Tell Me Everything*, cantankerous Olive and sensitive Lucy – a writer – develop a friendship in which they tell each other

“A slow burn, unusual murder-mystery, with characters that you think about long after you’ve closed the book.”

KIT DE WAAL,  
2025 CHAIR OF JUDGES



‘unrecorded stories’; stories of local people that will never be a part of any kind of official history, but are, nonetheless, important. This storytelling between Olive and Lucy bestows an importance and meaning on stories that, otherwise, might have gone forgotten, and therefore significance to the individuals and their community.

By recounting these ‘unrecorded stories’, Olive and Lucy act as the tale-keepers of their community. This telling of stories enables Strout to continue weaving her richly imagined community of Crosby with a depth and authenticity that means the reader becomes more and more enmeshed with her fictional world. This world, and the lives of these characters, will be recognisable to readers of Strout’s previous works, having been built and developed over a number of Strout’s previous books, including *Olive Kitteridge*, *My Name is Lucy Barton*, *The Burgess Boys* and *Anything is Possible*.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

A theme of the novel is loneliness and isolation. Bob and Lucy both find themselves in marriages where they feel lonely; Olive, facing the loss of her best friend, secretly relates to the feeling. Lucy, when she tells Olive about feeling a sense of love and connection with strangers, asks her, ‘who is not lonely, Olive?’. Certainly, Matt Beach seems to have been lonely for most of his life, as was his mother, isolated from the rest of the village and almost universally hated. Jim, Bob’s brother, also finds himself terribly lonely after his wife Helen passes away. Pam struggles with isolation and alcoholism.

What does Strout seem to be saying about the human condition in *Tell Me Everything*, and about the state of life in contemporary America? Why do people feel that they cannot connect to each other? Why are people lonely? Does Strout seem to suggest a solution to the problem?

### QUESTIONS

Is *Tell Me Everything* a crime novel, or a murder mystery? Why, or why not?

Is love a pleasure, a torture, or a hindrance in *Tell Me Everything*?

How does Strout explore childhood in the novel? How meaningful are her characters’ childhood experiences to them in later life?

Did you like Olive as a character? What about Lucy? How did that impact your reading experience?



Shortlist  
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If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

## NEXT STEPS

Research some 'unrecorded stories' of your own. Are there some family stories you've never heard, or perhaps legends relating to the area where you live – or, even, old gossip that you can research and find out what happened? Talk to family members, friends or community members and ask them for their stories. You might hear something intriguing that will inspire you to write a story based on it, or you might like to record people's stories as a podcast or 'oral history'.

Alternatively, if you enjoyed the murder mystery storyline in *Tell Me Everything*, watch some cold case crime documentaries and think about how you might use them as inspiration for a murder mystery story. Study the key elements of a murder or 'cosy' mystery, such as the fact that it usually features an amateur sleuth as a main character – often, an older woman who is inquisitive and slightly cantankerous, a rural setting, a cast of village characters all with possible motives and a police detective who is a little resistant to the efforts of the sleuth. ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Elizabeth Strout** is the Pulitzer prize-winning author of *My Name is Lucy Barton*, *Anything is Possible*, *Amy and Isabelle*, *Abide With Me*, *The Burgess Boys*, *Olive Kitteridge*, *Olive, Again*, *Oh, William!* and *Lucy by the Sea*. She has been nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the International Dublin Literary Award, and previously for the Women's Prize for Fiction, formally known as the Orange Prize. She lives in Maine.



# If you enjoyed this book...

## RECOMMENDED READS

In *Olive Kitteridge*, Elizabeth Strout introduces her indomitable character and tells the extraordinary story of her life.

In *The Mighty Red* by Louise Erdrich, ordinary people in rural America dream, grow up, fall in love, struggle, endure tragedy and carry bitter secrets.

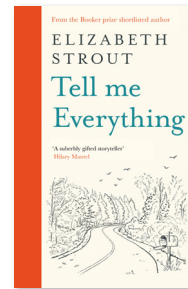
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## EXPLORE THE 2025 SHORTLIST



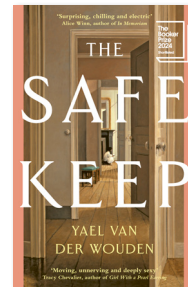
**Good Girl**  
by Aria Aber



**Tell Me Everything**  
by Elizabeth Strout



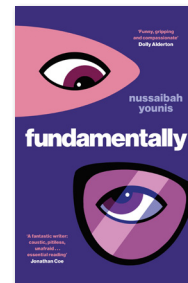
**All Fours**  
by Miranda July



**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.

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