

Book Review: Tell Me Everything  
By Elizabeth Strout

If you're looking for a strong, character-driven novel, your search is over. "Tell Me Everything" by Elizabeth Strout delivers an entire entourage of likable, highly flawed, easy to identify with characters who often remind us of ourselves.

But before I continue, a disclosure. This is not the first Strout novel built around many of the main characters – Olive Kitteridge, Lucy Barton, and Bob Burgess. It is, however, the first I've read. And I assure you no prior knowledge or experience with these characters is necessary to get the most out of the story.

The setting is the fictitious town of Crosby, Maine, present day. The first third of the book introduces the cast, some backstory on each, and their relationships to one another. While the pacing is a bit slow, it's extremely well written, and provides a welcome entrance into their lives. That's important, because the narrative is all about people's lives.

For example, Lucy, an accomplished writer, spends time with Olive, age 90, who lives in a retirement community, telling each other stories about people they have known. Olive refers to these as unrecorded lives, and the telling of these stories instills their lives with meaning.

Bob Burgess, the town lawyer – who once lived and practiced in New York City – has developed a deep friendship with Lucy. They take weekly walks and share stories about their and other people's lives. It's during these walks that Bob (a happily married man) realizes he is falling in love with Lucy (who lives with her ex-husband).

Adding to the gamut of human emotions is the discovery of a missing woman's body, whereby Bob becomes enmeshed in a murder investigation involving the dead woman's son. Bob, who has a penchant for absorbing other people's sins (Lucy calls him a sin-eater), and has never had children of his own, takes the dead woman's son under his wing.

But the story is *not* about a murder investigation. It's about people's lives. It's about relationships, and Strout expertly weaves her characters' lives into a highly relatable narrative. Because who among us hasn't experienced love, jealousy, loss, confusion and depression? It's easy to empathize with these residents of Crosby, Maine. And to recognize that it's their interpersonal relationships – much as we have ours with family and friends – that gives meaning to their lives.

At one point, Lucy says, “Love comes in so many different forms, but it is always love.” It's a statement that answers Lucy's own question, “What does anyone's life mean?”

“Tell Me Everything” is an enjoyable read that will make you pause and reflect on your own life and relationships. And perhaps in doing so, recognize that most of us have it pretty good.

Five out of five stars for this very well-written novel.