



***Olive, Again*, by Elizabeth Strout**
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, April 2020

Olive Kitteridge, the cantankerous title protagonist of Elizabeth Strout's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, takes center stage once more in *Olive, Again*. A complex, unforgettable character, Olive is equal parts exasperating and endearing.

Set in the coastal town of Crosby, Maine, *Olive, Again* begins where *Olive Kitteridge* had left off. Olive, widowed in her 70s, embarks on an unlikely relationship with retired Harvard professor Jack Kennison. Jack couldn't be more different than Olive's late husband, Henry, the town's pharmacist. Jack is proud and arrogant; Henry was cheerfully optimistic and forgiving.

Seemingly a mismatched pair, Olive and Jack are drawn to each other a few months after he is widowed. "Tall, big; she was a strange woman," Jack thought. "She had an honesty...she had something about her." Jack was estranged from his daughter Cassie. He had that in common with Olive whose own relationship with her son Christopher often is contentious.

Similar in structure to the original *Olive Kitteridge* novel, *Olive, Again*, also features thirteen short-story-like chapters wherein Olive interacts with a variety of characters. Some of the characters are new; others, including the Burgess brothers and Isabelle Goodrow, had appeared in Ms. Strout's earlier novels. In her encounters with the townspeople of Crosby, Olive continually discovers she still has a lot to learn.

As Olive looks back, she reflects on her life: "She thought about Henry, the kindness in his eyes as a young man...still there when he was blind from his stroke. She thought about Jack, his sly smile, and she thought about Christopher. She had been lucky, she supposed. She had been loved by two men, and that had been a lucky thing; without luck, why would they have loved her? But they had."

Quite often, an acclaimed novel's sequel isn't as compelling as the original book. *Olive, Again*, however, with its depth of feeling, biting wit, and tender poignancy, is a worthy coda to *Olive Kitteridge*. Indeed, reading *Olive, Again*, is like revisiting a cherished old friend.