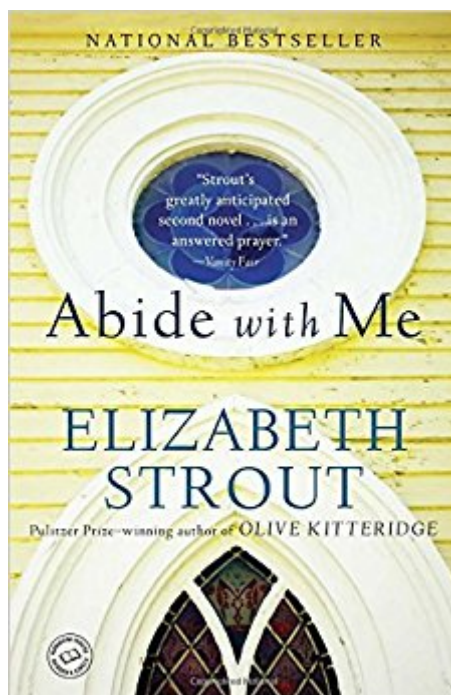


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Abide With Me: A Novel



Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER — Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more. In her luminous and long-awaited novel, bestselling author Elizabeth Strout welcomes readers back to the archetypal, lovely landscape of northern New England, where the events of her first novel, *Away, My Heart*, unfolded. In the late 1950s, in the small town of West Annett, Maine, a minister struggles to regain his calling, his family, and his happiness in the wake of profound loss. At the same time, the community he has served so charismatically must come to terms with its own strengths and failings — faith and hypocrisy, loyalty and abandonment — when a dark secret is revealed. Tyler Caskey has come to love West Annett, — “just up the road — from where he was born. The short, brilliant summers and the sharp, piercing winters fill him with awe — as does his congregation, full of good people who seek his guidance and listen earnestly as he preaches. But after suffering a terrible loss, Tyler finds it hard to return to himself as he once was. He hasn't had the feeling that God is all around him, in the beauty of the world — for quite some time. He struggles to find the right words in his sermons and in his conversations with those facing crises of their own, and to bring his five-year-old daughter, Katherine, out of the silence she has observed in the wake of the family's tragedy. A congregation that had once been patient and kind during Tyler's grief now questions his leadership and propriety. In the kitchens, classrooms, offices, and stores of the village, anger and gossip have started to swirl. And in Tyler's darkest hour, a startling discovery will test his congregation's humanity — and his own will to endure the kinds of trials that sooner or later test us all. In prose incandescent and artful, Elizabeth Strout draws readers into the details of ordinary life in a way that makes it extraordinary. All is considered — life, love, God, and community — within these pages, and all is made new by this writer's boundless compassion and graceful prose. Praise for *Abide with Me* — “Strout's greatly anticipated second novel . . . is an answered prayer.” — *Vanity Fair* — “Superb . . . a shimmering tale of loss, faith, and human fallibility . . . You feel yourself in the hands of a master storyteller.” — *O: The Oprah Magazine* — “Deeply moving . . . In one beautiful page after another, Strout captures the mysterious combinations of hope and sorrow. She sees all these wounded people with heartbreaking clarity, but she has managed to write a story that cradles them in understanding and that, somehow, seems like a foretaste of salvation.” — *The Washington Post* — “This lovely second novel confirms Strout as the possessor of an irresistibly companionable, peculiarly American voice: folksy,

poetic, but always as precise as a shadow on a brilliant winter day. •The Atlantic Monthly •“Graceful and moving . . . The pacing of Strout’s deeply felt fiction about the distance between parents and children gives her work an addictive quality. •People (four stars)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In Strout’s graceful if languid second novel, set in the cold northern reaches of New England during the Cold War, Tyler Caskey is a young minister tending to the faith of his small, gossipy parish. He’s also struggling with the aftermath of his wife’s premature death, which has left him with two little girls to raise. What the plot lacks in pace and surprise, Strout makes up for with intelligent, revealing portraits of many characters, and Raphael’s versatile voice makes them even more memorable. Her voice shrinks remarkably to speak the lines of Caskey’s traumatized older daughter; turns gruff and unhappy for Charles Austin, a church deacon wrestling with his own secret demons; and ratchets up into startlingly cold and imperious territories for Caskey’s meddling mother. Raphael deftly switches from the plummy, slightly British-accented voice she uses for most of the narration to speak in the drawn-out, nasal tones of Caskey’s plainspoken, friendly housekeeper. Though the abridgment cuts out some of the background story, events are still sometimes drawn out. But fans of such closely observed period pieces will no doubt revel in Strout’s evocative prose and in Raphael’s richly textured interpretation. 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.

The handsome minister Tyler Caskey, of West Annett, Maine, is beloved by his parishioners because he really does think they're all God's children. But in the bleak autumn of 1959, more than a year after the death of his wife, Tyler is still awash in grief. The man who once held them rapt from the pulpit now appears ridiculous up there "like a big tractor being driven by a teenage kid, slipping in and out of gear"; and his daughter has started screaming and spitting in kindergarten. How can he lead them if he himself is lost? Just as she did in her first novel, "Amy and Isabelle," Strout has created an absorbing world peopled by characters who argue the merits of canned cranberry sauce and using one's turn signal; meanwhile, dark fears about Freud and Khrushchev run beneath the surface of their lives like water under ice. With superlative skill, Strout challenges us to examine what makes a good story and what makes a good life. Copyright © 2006 The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tyler Caskey is a widower pastor in Maine. He has two children and his wife died sometime after he took his position at the church. Like the other Elizabeth Strout novels I've read (Amy & Isabelle; The Burgess Boys) we read about a life changing event. Like The Burgess Boys we are viewing the lives after that event. Tyler is obviously having difficulty dealing with his wife's death and his oldest daughter - an elementary school student - is obviously having problems as well. There is no way Tyler can adequately deal with his problems in this small, reserved town. "He had expected an easing of his grief after that first year, but this was not the case. When Doris Austin's desire for a new organ became known to him - the church treasurer, the board, even a deacon had spoken to him on her behalf - it seemed like an ant in the far corner of a room that people were pointing to, while for him the room was spinning" (p277) We see that the marriage wasn't perfect and how difficult it would be to be a pastor, or a pastor's wife, in a small 1-church town in Maine with all its noted reserve. The town starts to pull away from him based on gossip and innuendo until everything comes to a head one Sunday. Strout has some fantastic insights into life and she is just fantastic when describing nature, light and shadow. "It was still October when the first snow fell. It came in the afternoon, light as white dandelion thistles being dropped from high in the sky. They took their time reaching ground, so light and sparse they floated. But there was a quiet steadiness to the snow, and by late afternoon, a soft covering lay over places where the ground swelled." (p 177) "The world, with its pale noonday light washing down through the mostly bare trees, seemed filled with invisible currents - strips of knowledge he seemed unable to get hold of." (p 211) The HBO series "Olive Kitteridge" is taken from her novel of that same name. I haven't seen the series or read

the book but I think Tyler's mother is the same type of person. Come the end of the day, I don't find this novel nearly as strong and compelling as the other two I've read. The plot ties up just a little too easily.

If you enjoy stories of people who lack perfection, yet somehow make you admire them, you will appreciate *Abide with Me*. Since I loved *Olive Kitteredge*, by Elizabeth Strout, I wanted to read more of her work. It is a real talent that can get a reader to love such flawed characters, and this writer has that talent. The story centers on a pastor, so it weaves his relationship to God and the Bible into it. Not the least off-putting to me, someone who no longer attends church or reads the Bible, so don't let that stop you. A good read!

Such a great writer. The language and imagery was at a very high standard...a wonderful read. I enjoyed it so much that I bought all of her books and read them one after another. I have only ever done that with a few writers...

If it were possible, I'd opt for an extra half a star for *Abide With Me*: Of course, being by Elizabeth Strout, it is well-written. I just had to read more by her after the marvelous *Burgess Boys* - but the slow-paced timing made me feel like a brisk walker pulling a slow-paced ambler urging, "Faster! Faster!" In short, it took me many days to finish because I couldn't stand any more and would fall asleep. Too bad - the psychological orientation is interesting, though not profound. Had it moved more quickly, it might have worked better.

At first I did struggle getting into this story. I never had a small town small church type of life so I wasn't ok with how much everyone seemed to know about one another. It took awhile to get used to the cadence the author used but then I found I didn't want to put the story down. When it ended, I cried, I was amazed at how warm I felt about the father/minister. This book is an experience, not easily forgotten.

A lovely book about a very human pastor who has his own trials and tribulations with his family and children and the death of his wife. His experience unfolds amidst the community of the town where he lives. We see poignant characters around him as he goes about his duties in the church and town. Elizabeth Strout has provided us with human insights and careful artistic descriptions of the environment where he lives, nature and the town itself.

A tremendous book. Read it in book club and the discussion was best one ever. Picking apart characters and motivations seemed endless. Finally had to call it a night with reluctance. A compelling cast of characters.

The main character, a grieving widower/minister, spends his days after his wife's death repressing his emotions and neglecting, to a point of abuse, his 6 year old daughter Katherine. He turns to no one for solace, but immerses himself in the homilies of sermons and loses himself in meditation of his idol, Bonhoeffer, while not understanding, or even noticing, the need for intimacy with human beings - with individuals in his congregation. Unfortunately, throughout the book, the repetitive focus on his fanatical relationship with Bonhoeffer, sermonizing, and homily-speak, to exclusion of intimacy in the human world is so dominant that it becomes painful and boring to read. I think I continued to read just to see how Strout would manage to get Katherine out alive and how she would create a wake-up moment for the minister at the end. Yes, she did manage; but hey! This book isn't simple. It raises many moral issues: end-of-life assistance, tolerance and bigotry. But I think it is weak as a novel.

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