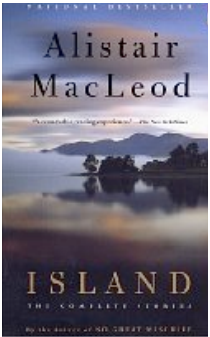


# Keep It Short

Short stories are wonderful to read because you can see things in their entirety very quickly. It's like having a preference for small watercolors over an elaborate oil painting. It's also a demanding genre because while a novel can sprawl or contain flaws, a short story follows a strict writing regimen. There is a diamond aspect to the short story. It requires perfection. I also find that when they are well written, they always leave me hungry for more information about the characters or denouements. Short stories are ideal for folks who have little time to read and want to spend their spare moments with high-quality fiction. So if you're busy, check one of these out right away.

## F M165i Macleod, Alistair. *Island*.



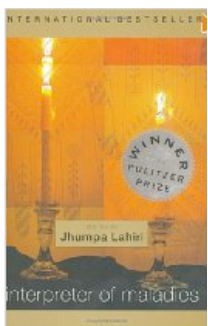
The sixteen exquisitely crafted stories in *Island* prove Alistair MacLeod to be a master. Quietly, precisely, he has created a body of work that is among the greatest to appear in English in the last fifty years. A book-besotted patriarch releases his only son from the obligations of the sea. A father provokes his young son to violence when he reluctantly sells the family horse. A passionate girl who grows up on a nearly deserted island turns into an ever-wistful woman when her one true love is felled by a logging accident. A dying young man listens to his grandmother play the old Gaelic songs on her ancient violin as they both fend off the inevitable. The events that propel MacLeod's stories convince us of the importance of tradition, the beauty of the landscape, and the necessity of memory.

## F S925o Strout, Elizabeth. *Olive Kitteridge*.



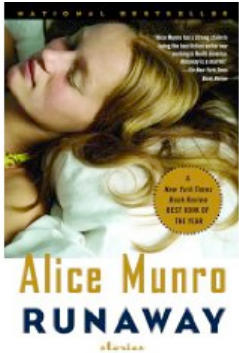
Elizabeth Strout constructs her stories with rich irony and moments of genuine surprise and intense emotion. At times stern, at other times patient, at times perceptive, at other times in sad denial, Olive Kitteridge, a retired schoolteacher, deplores the changes in her little town of Crosby, Maine, 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 her husband, 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.

## F L183i Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. 1999.



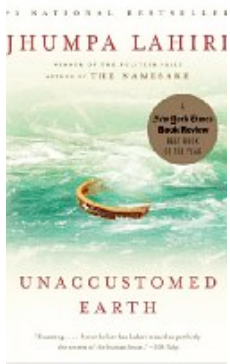
Maladies both accurately diagnosed and misinterpreted, matters both temporary and life changing, relationships in flux and unshakeable, unexpected blessings and sudden calamities, and the powers of survival—these are among the themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's extraordinary, Pulitzer Prize-winning debut collection of stories. Traveling from India to New England and back again, Lahiri charts the emotional voyages of characters seeking love beyond the barriers of nations, cultures, religions, and generations. Imbued with the sensual details of both Indian and American cultures, they also speak with universal eloquence and compassion to everyone who has ever felt like an outsider.

**F M435r Munro, Alice. *Runaway*.**



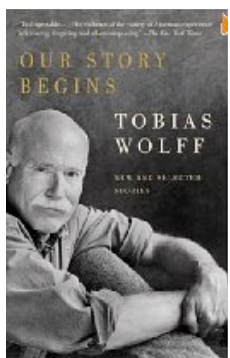
Alice Munro is recommended for busy people because hers are large short stories. Let's put them in the "novelini" category. They will appeal to you because they are long and involved and have the feel of a novel. Alice Munro is so highly regarded that she's credited with reinventing the short story. *Runaway's* stories take place throughout Canada--northern Ontario, the Prairies, the West Coast, Stratford--and feature women and men drifting in and out of each other's orbits, pulled by forces they don't understand. In "Runaway," a woman considers leaving her husband with the help of a neighbor, but the husband has other plans. In "Chance," a woman leaves her life behind in a quest for a man she met on a train crossing the country. Their intertwined lives play out through two more stories, "Soon" and "Silence," but the path they follow is as unpredictable to the reader as it is to them. In "Trespases," a small town's women dream of escaping their lives only to find themselves in lives they never imagined. What really marks the stories is Munro's sense of mood. There's a sense of hidden menace or even violence everywhere in *Runaway*. It occasionally erupts, but always in surprising and unexpected ways, and with unintended consequences. If you like this set of stories, come in and check out *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) and *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, 2001.

**F L183u Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth*.**



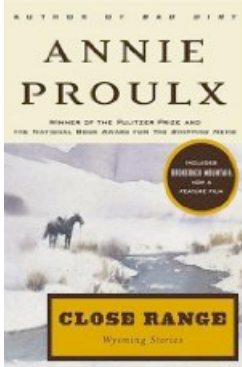
The eight stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* have in them an emotional wisdom weightier than in Lahiri's first collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*. In the earlier collection, identity and blending cultures gave the narratives their shape; the writing was spare, elegant, knowing. Here grief figures prominently in the new collection. The parent-child relationship is scrutinized more sharply. Old-fashioned in her approach, contemporary in her subject matter, Lahiri anchors these stories in character. In the title piece, (inspired by a Hawthorne quote) Ruma's solitary, brooding, and recently widowed father comes to love his little grandson working with him in the garden while he harbors a secret from his daughter about his new lover. In "Hell-Heaven," Usha's mother silences her attraction to a regular family visitor through well-planned meals and abundant courtesy, the secret of her near implosion tamped down. In "A Choice of Accommodations," Amit—fretful about the ordinary dangers that could befall his daughters—blurts out to a stranger at a wedding that his marriage "disappeared" after his children were born. Critics are referring to Lahiri's work as "diaspora fiction, and if it is, I want more of it.

**F W855ou Wolff, Tobias. *Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories*.**



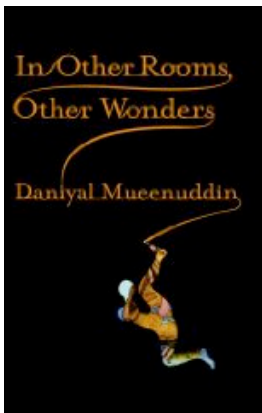
Tobias Wolff is worthy to be mentioned among the greats of short story writing. Like Hemingway, his stories often begin in action, immediately capturing the attention. Like Chekhov, his endings break the flow of life and cast a reflection on our own weaknesses and strength. He has a fluid style and voice embedded in the rhythms of 21st American life. He's unobtrusive, yet knowing. He's streamlined in capturing every detail. The opening story, "In the Garden of the North American Martyrs," a widely acknowledged masterpiece, satirizes academe, specifically the pretensions inherent in professorial posturing, at the same time sensitively understanding a college professor who gets her quiet revenge against merciless colleagues. Wolff's understanding of the tender aspects of character surfaces in another masterpiece, "Soldier's Joy," which is set on a military base, and, in parallel with the previously discussed story, pecking order rules the day and everyone's life. In any story, in all of them, Wolff dexterously probes, in immaculately clear prose, the core of ordinary people's passions and vulnerabilities.

**F Pro Proulx, Annie. *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*.**



Pulitzer Prize-winner Annie Proulx forays through the underside of America's beloved Wild West in *Close Range*, a collection of eight stories about hardship and more hardship in Wyoming territory. Understanding that the West's infinite spaces tended to inspire neither introspection nor contemplation, but a violent and insatiable restlessness, Proulx's eight stories are dark reflections on the lives of a handful of characters striving to define themselves against the unforgiving landscapes. These macabre tales feature the powerful "Brokeback Mountain" that explores with plangent understated compassion the lifelong sexual love between two cowboys destined for separation, and the harsh truth that "if you can't fix it you've got to stand it." Gritty, authoritative stories of loving, losing, and bearing the consequences. Nobody else writes like this, and Proulx has never written better.

**F M945 Mueenuddin, Daniyal. *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*.**



Mueenuddin has done what many Indians and Pakistanis are doing once educated in the West. They return to their homelands to mine them for rich story sources and memories. Mueenuddin, a graduate of Dartmouth and Yale Law School, is presently managing a farm in Pakistan and writing. In eight beautifully crafted, interconnected stories, Mueenuddin explores the cutthroat feudal society in which a rich Lahore landowner is entrenched. A complicated network of patronage undergirds the micro-society of servants, families and opportunists surrounding wealthy patron K.K. Harouni. In "Nawabdin Electrician," Harouni's indispensable electrician, Nawab, excels at his work and at home, raising 12 daughters and one son by virtue of his cunning and ingenuity—qualities that allow him to triumph over entrenched poverty and outlive a robber bent on stealing his livelihood. Women are especially vulnerable without the protection of family and marriage ties, as the protagonist of "Saleema" learns: a maid in the Harouni mansion who cultivates a love affair with an older servant, Saleema is left with a baby and without recourse when her lover must honor his first family and renounce her. Similarly, the women who become lovers of powerful men, as in the title story and in "Provide, Provide", fall into disgrace and poverty with the death of their patrons. An elegant stylist with a light touch, Mueenuddin invites the reader to a richly human, wondrous experience.