

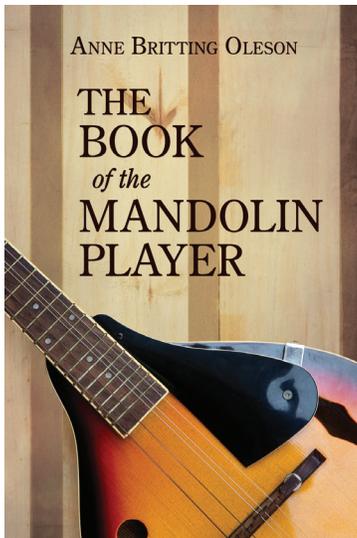


Reading Guide

The Book of the Mandolin Player

by Anne Britting Oleson

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Meg Cross lives in a small Maine town with a family that is too big, too loud, too everything.

Life in a small Maine town: where everyone is related by blood or marriage, where everyone knows everything there is to know about everyone else, and where there is no anonymity. So it seems for Meg Cross, living in an old farmhouse on the side of a mountain with her young niece, Maeve. It's easy to fall in line with her family's expectations, but easy, too, to resent them, when she's certain there's something more out there for her. Then tragedy strikes to the core of who and what she believes she is.

How does a person remake a life from all the broken pieces? Meg finds herself forced to re-examine all she formerly found important, and in the process, comes to realize that, though it might chafe, there is strength to be drawn from the place she comes from, and the people to whom she is truly known.

From the author

My inspiration is twofold. The novelist Stephen Benatar wrote a book called *The Man on the Bridge*, which has at its heart lessons of life mistakes and redemption. I like to think *The Book of the Mandolin Player* has those as well. The second inspiration is a conversation I had with Brenda Prescott, walking to dinner after visiting the AWP Bookfair. She had seen, at the fair, someone at a publisher's table playing a mandolin, and suggested that someone had to write *The Book of the Mandolin Player*. I took that as a challenge.

Discussion Questions

1. Meg describes Maeve as "a dweller on the threshold." What do you think she means by that? Why is that important?
2. Meg's extended family is firmly entrenched in the daily life and goings-on of their small town. something that at times makes Meg frustrated and impatient. Can you relate to those feelings?
3. Meg also struggles with guilt and sadness about her own past. How do you think those feelings color her perceptions of the world?
4. The friendship between Meg and her neighbor Lydia is central to the novel; at one point, Meg wishes Lydia were in fact her sister. Can friendship be stronger than family relationships?

About the author

Anne Britting Oleson lives in the mountains of central Maine with her family. She is the author of three poetry chapbooks, *The Church of St. Materiana* (Moon Pie Press, 2007) and *The Beauty of It* (Sheltering Pines Press, 2010). She is a founding member of Simply Not Done, a women's reading, writing, and teaching cooperative.