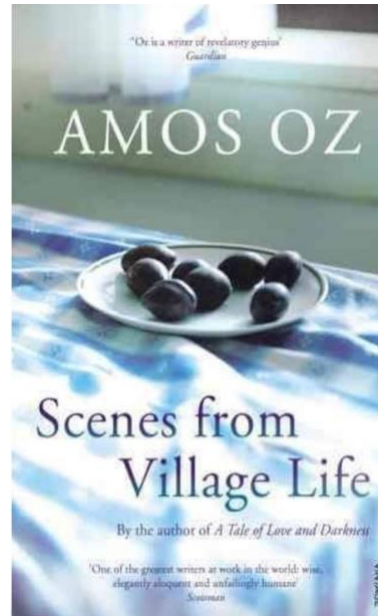


**SEPTEMBER 2025**

**SCENES FROM VILLAGE LIFE BY  
AMOS OZ**



This is a collection of short stories from an Israeli writer about the people who live in a small village in Israel called Tel Ilan. Each story provides a glimpse into their lives and dreams and what often lies beneath the outward veneer. Each one stands alone although some of the characters sometimes appear in others' stories.

This was a difficult book to make sense of but I don't think we are meant to – it's about the outward appearance of people and what lies hidden beneath the façade. An intriguing book, reminiscent of Kafka. It is no surprise that Oz won the Franz Kafka Prize for Literature in 2013 – a prize which “honours authors whose work transcends cultural and national standards”.

Comments from members of the group:

“A stranger turns up at a house and persuades the owner, Zelnick, (to murder his mother?) whose presence is preventing him from selling the house and moving on with his life; Gili, the family doctor waits for her nephew who is not on the bus as expected – she is clearly in love with him and is distraught that he has not arrived; an old man hears digging under his room in the middle of the night; a teenager's love and angst for an older woman; a man who waits for his wife who has left a note “Don't worry about me” and does not realise she has left him – or why; a man wanting to buy a house and mesmerised by the owner Yardena; a man drawn to the bedroom of a house he is visiting where the son committed suicide underneath his parents' bed – and they slept in the room unaware of his body beneath them. The last story “In a faraway place at another time” could be the village as it is in the future where evil has prevailed in a god-forsaken place. Who knows? I'm still not sure whether or not I enjoyed it!”

“As a portrayal of different characters, I thought this book was well written. I would, however quibble over a village of any size having a mayor and council officers.

The reader is only allowed a glimpse of each character's life, the outcome being left to our imagination. Personally, I found this frustrating. Did Ariel and Wolff get away with murder? What had happened to Gillis nephew? There was something about each character we wanted to know more about. I was expecting an outcome in the final chapter and felt let down when this did not happen. If there was a deeper meaning behind the story, I'm afraid I didn't get it!"

"This village did not seem to be a village as it appeared to be bigger and have more facilities that you would expect from a village. More Par than Tywardreath. No-one Amos Oz described was happy. The writing was very descriptive and evocative but not like somewhere I would want to live. It felt like everything was in shades of grey.

I found the ending of the first story "**Heirs**" quite disturbing. I decided it must be some sort of allegory for the situation with the land occupied by the Jews and the insecurity of the people who live there. There was an uneasiness. It takes place at the house of Arie Zelnick Though why the Arab should be caressing the elderly mother's face I could not fathom. It had a rather dreamlike quality.

The second story, **Relations** was an aunt, Dr Gili Steiner waiting for her adult nephew to arrive on a bus. He doesn't arrive. We don't find out why. Their relationship seems to be troubled. There is a feeling of loneliness, loss and longing. Quite a long story for nothing to happen.

The third story **Digging** is about a middle-aged daughter Rachel Franco living with her elderly father who thinks he can hear digging under the house. In the end she can hear digging under the house as well. There is a young Arab student, Adel, living on their land. The relationship between them is one of distrust from the father but they have an interdependence and the boy sings for them when asked. A feeling of unease, dissatisfaction, loneliness, hopelessness.

The fourth story "**Lost**" is about an estate agent who would like to buy a particular house and then he seems divided between living in it or pulling it down. He eventually calls at the house without notice and finds a young girl there, the niece of the elderly owner. The young girl shows him round and there is a very odd kind of flirtation between them which seems inappropriate. Bizarrely she eventually leaves him in the cellar where he appears to be in a comatose trance. It must surely be symbolic for something but I have no idea what.

**Waiting.** In this story Adel appears again. He brings a note to the Mayor, Benny Avri. The note is from the Mayor's wife saying, "Don't worry about me". That's it. The rest of the story concerns the mayor finding his wife is not at home and wandering around looking for her in a desultory way. He doesn't summon help or report her missing he just wanders around. Sits on the bench where she was last seen and waits for her. For no discernible reason a dog starts following him. He doesn't seem to know whether he wants to stroke its head or chase it away. Their marriage sounds rather dull. We don't find out what happened to her. The only clue is that his wife, Nava, was pressured into having an abortion before they were married.

**Strangers:** This story is equally miserable. A boy with a crush on the postmistress, an older woman, Ada Dvash. Both of them unhappy and lonely. An awkward encounter between them in the library. This puts an end to their uneasy friendship as he basically sexually assaults her.

**Singing.** Written in the first person. The writer? He describes himself as a confirmed bachelor. Some characters from other stories appear. A party at the house of Avraham and Dalia Levin. A couple whose only son commits suicide under their bed. Macabre as they don't realise he is there. It describes their miserable lives. Then introduces a new character Dafna Katz. Dr Gili Steiner is there – she was waiting for her nephew in Relations; Rachel (from Digging) and Arie Zelnik (from Heirs) arrive together or at the same time. Etty is mentioned (she was mentioned once in Lost) – apparently the wife of the estate agent. In that story he says she may be trying to phone him.

I thought this story might draw everything together and make some sense or give some closure to the other stories but instead it becomes more bizarre as while the party continues the speaker goes upstairs to the abandoned bedroom and gets down on the floor presumably intending to get under the bed where the son of the hosts committed suicide. Why and what this means I have no idea. There is talk about bombing raids and the politics of this amongst the guests but this too leaves me wondering what I am supposed to conclude.

The last story I could not understand at all. Seemed to be a scene of hell. Was it still the village but in another era?"

A collection of connected short stories but stories that are unusually incomplete in as much as any action or thought processes of the characters are inconclusive. One is left high and dry wanting an outcome. However, the descriptions of homes, landscapes and peoples have a breadth and beauty that is very engaging. Eg the "digging" story involves a widow who lives with her difficult dad who is obsessed by the noise of someone digging underneath their dwelling. The daughter tells her dad it is his bad conscience. Overall, the conclusion infers the village is an inhospitable swamp. Singing is better than getting worked up about politics. It drowns out the sound of the bombs. Yes, the final powerful tale is very bleak and depressing. But the beauty of the translated prose is exceptional. I was tempted to reread to understand perhaps more about the book's intention particularly relevant to the ongoing horrors of Gaza and the Israeli situation."

"The prose is really descriptive and you get a clear and vivid picture of the characters and their everyday lives and routines but each tale has a strange event, a mystery and at the end, the character is waiting.... that is never fully explained. The stories stand alone but the characters appear in others'. It is like a soap opera. The final chapter is very strange – a description of madness, perhaps a prophecy of how remote villages will become if they have no contact with the outside world. I liked this book there is so much detail and I would read it again."

"I liked the way the author left much to the reader's imagination by the strangely loose connections with the characters in the stories. Extraordinarily intense beautiful

writing describing feelings and thoughts in the ordinary lives of folk living in Tel Ilan. This reminded me of the wonderful "Under Milk Wood" by Dylan Thomas. There was a sense of poetic mystery in each chapter – I particularly liked "Waiting" – an elderly mayor looking for his wife around the village not realising that she has walked out on him. The last chapter is a faraway place in another time and prophetically describes a nightmare vision of a village gone mad and mad – it is very sad. The pharmacist could almost be describing some of recent scenes in war-ravaged Gaza."

Christine Wright