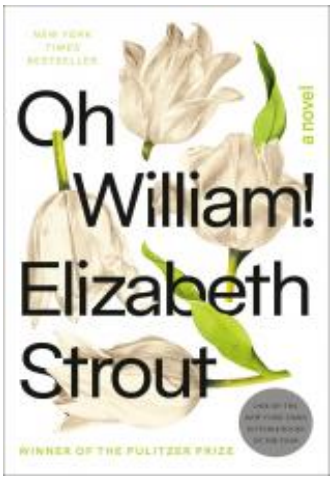
Oh William!

by Elizabeth Strout



About the Book

Pulitzer Prize winner Elizabeth Strout explores the mysteries of marriage and the secrets we keep, as a former couple reckons with where they?ve come from --- and what they?ve left behind.

I would like to say a few things about my first husband, William.

Lucy Barton is a writer, but her ex-husband, William, remains a hard man to read. *William*, she confesses, *has always been a mystery to me*. Another mystery is why the two have remained connected after all these years. They just are.

So Lucy is both surprised and not surprised when William asks her to join him on a trip to investigate a recently uncovered family secret --- one of those secrets that rearrange everything we think we know about the people closest to us. What happens next is nothing less than another example of what Hilary Mantel has called Elizabeth Strout?s ?perfect attunement to the human condition.? There are fears and insecurities, simple joys and acts of tenderness, and revelations about affairs and other spouses, parents and their children. On every page of this exquisite novel, we learn more about the quiet forces that hold us together --- even after we?ve grown apart.

At the heart of this story is the indomitable voice of Lucy Barton, who offers a profound, lasting reflection on the very nature of existence. ?This is the way of life,? Lucy says: ?the many things we do not know until it is too late.?

Discussion Guide

1. Why have Lucy and William stayed in each other?s lives? Did you find yourself wishing they would get back together? How, if at all, did that feeling change over the course of the book?

2. Compare and contrast Lucy?s marriages to William and to David. How does she characterize each relationship? How does each man complement her in a different way?

3. What does Lucy learn about herself through her relationship with William? What have you learned about yourself through your relationships with others?

4. Discuss Lucy?s relationship with her mother-in-law, Catherine. What does the story about Catherine getting rid of the coat Lucy loved say about their relationship? Did your opinion of Catherine change as you learned more about her past? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. How were Lucy and William influenced by their parents? trauma? How were Lucy and William?s daughters influenced by their parents? trauma? Do you think there?s a way to stop this cycle?

6. ?I have never really understood the whole class business in America, because I came from the very bottom of it, and when that happens it never really leaves you,? Lucy says. How do the themes of class and money appear throughout the book?

7. Lucy says of William, ?When I really cried hard he did not get frightened the way I think David might have; but with David I never cried as I had in my first marriage, not the gasping sobs of a child.? Discuss this. Why do you think Lucy cried more with William?

8. ?I began to feel a weird sense of something,? Lucy says about her wedding to William. ?It is very hard to describe but it felt a little bit like things were not entirely real.? Why do you think Lucy felt this way? Have you ever experienced a feeling like this?

9. Despite being a well-known writer, Lucy describes feeling invisible ?in the deepest way.? Discuss her feelings. Does she ever stop feeling this way? Who in her life makes her feel visible?

10. Lucy says she couldn?t really have a home without William, but William could have a home without her. What do you think she means by this?

11. To deny her husband the chance of comforting her, Lucy says, was ?an unspeakably awful thing.? Explain what she means by this. Do you agree? Why or why not?

12. At the close of the book, Lucy says, ?We do not know anybody, not even ourselves. Except a little tiny, tiny bit we do.? What do you make of this statement? Have you found it to be true in your life?

13. How did you feel about Lucy and William by the end of the book?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Strout is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of THE THINGS WE NEVER SAY; TELL ME

EVERYTHING, an Oprah's Book Club pick; LUCY BY THE SEA; OH WILLIAM!; OLIVE, AGAIN; ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, winner of the Story Prize; MY NAME IS LUCY BARTON; THE BURGESS BOYS; OLIVE KITTERIDGE, winner of the Pulitzer Prize; ABIDE WITH ME; and AMY AND ISABELLE, winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction and the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize. She has also been a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Orange Prize in London. She lives in Maine.

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