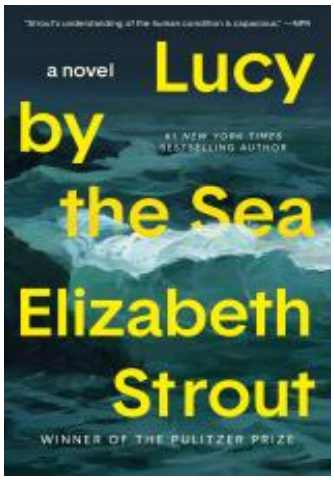
Lucy by the Sea

by Elizabeth Strout



About the Book

From Pulitzer Prize?winning, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Elizabeth Strout comes a poignant, pitch-perfect novel about a divorced couple stuck together during lockdown --- and the love, loss, despair and hope that animate us even as the world seems to be falling apart.

With her trademark spare, crystalline prose --- a voice infused with ?intimate, fragile, desperate humanness? (*The Washington Post*) --- Elizabeth Strout turns her exquisitely tuned eye to the inner workings of the human heart, following the indomitable heroine of MY NAME IS LUCY BARTON through the early days of the pandemic.

As a panicked world goes into lockdown, Lucy Barton is uprooted from her life in Manhattan and bundled away to a small town in Maine by her ex-husband and on-again, off-again friend, William. For the next several months, it?s just Lucy, William and their complex past together in a little house nestled against the moody, swirling sea.

Rich with empathy and emotion, LUCY BY THE SEA vividly captures the fear and struggles that come with isolation, as well as the hope, peace and possibilities that those long, quiet days can inspire. At the heart of this story are the deep human connections that unite us even when we?re apart --- the pain of a beloved daughter?s suffering, the emptiness that comes from the death of a loved one, the promise of a new friendship, and the comfort of an old, enduring love.

Discussion Guide

1. At the start of the novel, Lucy doesn?t understand William?s concern about getting out of New York City. Could you understand Lucy?s ambivalence? How did you process the early days of the pandemic?

2. Reflective. Melancholy. Hopeful. Insightful. How would you describe the tone of LUCY BY THE SEA, and why?

3. Discuss Lucy?s relationship with her ex-husband, William. Why do you think they have remained in each other?s lives for so long? Were you satisfied with how they ended up at the end of the novel, or were you wary, like their daughters? Please explain.

4. There are many moving scenes in LUCY BY THE SEA. Which ones stayed with you, and why?

5. Lucy?s brother. William?s half-sister. How did these siblings shape Lucy and William? What role did siblings play in their lives?

6. What is the significance of Lucy?s feelings toward Bob Burgess? Were you surprised by the direction it took? Why, or why not? How do you think this connection will endure beyond the novel?

7. Why do you think Lucy invented a mother? What does this say about how we deal with trauma in the past?

8. William became quite curious about the discovery of the distant guard tower along the shore. What do you think this represented for William? What sort of touchstone did it provide?

9. Lucy takes many walks, alone and with others. Do you like to take walks? Why, or why not? What are the benefits of this activity, particularly for Lucy?

10. Discuss Lucy?s relationship with her daughter, Becka. How was hers different than Becka?s relationship with William? Why do you think Becka started to pull away from Lucy after leaving her poet-husband?

11. What did you think about Lucy?s friendship with Charlene Bibber, a fellow volunteer from the food pantry? Did it provide any lessons for Lucy? What do you make of Charlene?s story about stealing a nursing home resident?s shoe?

12. After a surprise visit with her daughters, Lucy observes: *It is a gift in this life that we do not know what awaits us.* Do you agree with this sentiment? Why or why not?

13. William had many affairs. Lucy had hers. Now their daughter, Chrissy, was thinking of having one. Why do you think people cheat on their spouses? Is it all about loss, as Lucy?s therapist once suggested, or are there other circumstances to consider?

14. Later in the novel, Lucy observes: *My childhood had been a lockdown.* What did she mean by this? How do you think growing up poor shaped Lucy?s life? How did she persevere?

15. When Lucy was pregnant with Chrissy, she remembers putting her hand over her stomach and thinking, *Whoever you are, you do not belong to me. My job is to help you get into the world, but you do not belong to me.* Do you understand what Lucy means? What does this statement mean to you?

16. If you were to have Lucy and William over for supper, what would you serve, and why?

17. Throughout the novel, Lucy reflects on many parts of her life: her mother, her siblings, growing up, her marriages. Later Lucy starts to forget things. What role does memory play in LUCY BY THE SEA?

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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