



Anything Is Possible

Elizabeth Strout

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Short story collection *Anything Is Possible* explores the whole range of human emotion through the intimate dramas of people struggling to understand themselves and others.

Here are two sisters: one trades self-respect for a wealthy husband while the other finds in the pages of a book a kindred spirit who changes her life. The janitor at the local school has his faith tested in an encounter with an isolated man he has come to help; a grown daughter longs for mother love even as she comes to accept her mother's happiness in a foreign country; and the adult Lucy Barton (the heroine of *My Name Is Lucy Barton*) returns to visit her siblings after seventeen years of absence.

Anything Is Possible Details

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From Reader Review Anything Is Possible for online ebook

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

Once again, here is another book I read for a Goodreads challenge on audio. And it's another one I'm going to buy and add to my collection. BUT! I need to buy the first book (Lucy Barton) first. I had no idea this was the second book in that story line.

I loved everything about this book as well and the narrator was awesome!

I absolutely loved it!

Happy Reading!

Mel ♥

Karen says

I loved My Name is Lucy Barton!

Anything is Possible, focuses on different characters, in each chapter, from Lucy's hometown of Amgash, Illinois. There is quite a lot of sadness and pain in these stories, but these characters and their situations were so well written, that I really felt like I knew them. I had a few favorites, and I am glad that Lucy made an appearance, and, the way the book ended, wow, what a way to go out!

Thank you to NetGalley and Random House for an ARC!

Jen says

Strout has quickly become for me a go-to-author. She creates memorable and complex characters for the simplest of stories.

Everything is Possible is an attestation to this. She links the character from My Name is Lucy Barton and weaves her into vignettes of the townspeople she grew up with. Those who knew of her as she was able to flee the stifling small town and successfully move on from her own sadness and despair. Themes of forgiveness, redemption and love of family and friends, because quite honestly, anything is possible when one is transparent with their emotions.

I'm not a fan of the short story by any stretch but the writing here is lyrical and smooth.

I remain a devout Strout fan. 4****

Brenda - Traveling Sister says

4.5 Stars

Anything is Possible is the sequel to My Name is Lucy Barton and is read as short stories. In these unforgettable wise, simple and gracefully told short stories we learn more of the siblings and neighbours known to us from My Name is Lucy Barton as they share gossip, judgement and their sadness and disappointments. I found My Name is Lucy Barton to be more of quieter story while Anything is Possible felt a bit louder with more things said as we learn the characters stories of disappointments. I found there is a gift here in these stories as I learned the wisdom and saw the forgiveness in the silence of things that were left unsaid.

These stunning short stories and characters reminded me that with a little kindness and compassion Anything is Possible. I highly recommend.

All of Norma's & my reviews can be found on our Sister Blog:
<http://www.twogirlslostinacouleereadi...>

Diane S ? says

Linked stories from Lucy Barton's home town and the people that made up the town. First story features Charlie, former maintenance man at the school the Barton children attended, an elderly man who remembers Lucy and tried to be kind to her, though many didn't. The Barton's too poor and in fact Lucy's brother Pete still lives alone, in the dilapidated house of his youth. Charlie makes a point to visit this lonesome and strange man though he has good reason to write the whole family off as you will see when you read this wonderfully thought out novel.

All have stories to tell, of past and present, and they are startling in some of their admissions. Stout has a fantastic understanding of the sorrows, fears, secrets and the many ambiguities that make up the human condition. Not only does she understand but that she is able to put them down so succinctly is admirable. Her deft hand with dialogue is also a big plus. All these stories are interesting, some appalling but taken as a whole we garner a pretty good understanding of where Lucy came from and what and who has changed since she left.

Lucy herself puts in an appearance to visit her brother and sister, a visit that has a startling finish. Sometimes you can physically leave a place but the scars still linger. A short novel, but one that contains much. Another fantastic offering from this very proficient author.

ARC from Netgalley and Random House
Release date: April 25th, 2017.

Larry H says

I'm between 4 and 4.5 stars here.

I don't know about you, but people watching utterly *fascinates* me. It's really amusing to watch the dynamics of families and groups of friends, but what's even more fun is making up stories about those we see,

developing a narrative about their relationships, challenges, and victories. (It would be great to find out how far from the truth these stories are, wouldn't it?)

Reading Elizabeth Strout's new collection of linked stories, *Anything is Possible*, feels like a cross between people-watching and eavesdropping, because the stories give you glimpses into people's lives you might not ordinarily get, without facing the embarrassing risk of getting caught. These stories are beautifully written, at times utterly moving, and, like people-watching, often truly fascinating and compelling.

I haven't read Strout's *My Name is Lucy Barton*, but the stories in this collection feature Lucy's small Midwestern hometown of Amgash, Illinois, and Lucy has a presence in many of the stories, and an adult Lucy is a character in one. These are stories of people struggling with challenges—emotional, romantic, familial, professional, even philosophical. As Strout says of a character in one of her stories, but this applies to most of them, "Life had simply not been what she thought it would be."

My favorites in this collection included: "The Sign," in which an elderly man finds his faith tested after a conversation he has with a troubled man he occasionally looks after; "Sister," where an adult Lucy Barton returns to her hometown and her siblings after being away for nearly 20 years; "The Hit-Thumb Theory," about a Vietnam veteran suffering from PTSD who has a dilemma that could radically change the course of his life, and he finds a moment's solace in a small bed-and-breakfast; "Windmills," in which a lonely widow changes her life after reading a book written by someone from her hometown; and "Snow-Blind," about a shocking discovery a young actress makes after she has left her family behind.

These are not happy, well-adjusted people in many cases. A few of the stories deal with odd sexual situations, and at times the characters are quite mean to each other. But Strout's talent as a storyteller makes even the somewhat bizarre stories, and those with unappealing characters interesting, and you want to keep reading them.

Interestingly enough, I've only read one of Strout's earlier books, *The Burgess Boys*, and I didn't like it that much. But now I'll definitely need to read more of her work, because I really found these stories moving and so well-written. If I had any criticism, it's that she uses subsequent stories to advance the plot of previous ones, referring to a character and saying, "Did you hear that so-and-so did...?" But that was a minor irritation for me.

I know short stories, even linked ones, don't appeal to everyone. But *Anything is Possible* feels a little like hanging out a party—you spend some time with lots of different people and get the opportunity to hear something about their lives and what makes them tick, then you move on. But the good news is, you don't have to bring an appetizer, help clean up, or worry how you're going to get home afterward.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>...

Perry says

Artistry refreshingly revealing how *anything is possible* when one human makes an honest, authentic connection with another.

"Lucy, Lucy, Lucy B, where did you go to, how did you flee?"

{significantly revised/improved, May 14, 2017}

Following the critical success of Olive Kitteridge and My Name Is Lucy Barton, Elizabeth Strout strops her razor-sharp discernment of the nuances, uncertainties and frailty of the human psyche in conflict with itself and as it confronts moral depravity. Anything is Possible is a collection of nine interrelated stories set around Lucy Barton, a celebrated writer who grew up in extreme poverty in an ostracized family, and her hometown farming community of Amgash, Illinois.

While the tales cover many of the folks making brief appearances in My Name is Lucy Barton, reading that short novel is no prerequisite to this set. If you liked the novel, you must read this collection of stellar shorts because it so illuminates the novel's cast of characters who came up in Lucy's recollections from her youth or in conversations with her mom while she was in her hospital room. Strout commandingly evokes gorgeous revealing imagery, but her singular skill lies in creating dialogue so loaded with what is not said, in stories brimming with genuine moral and family dilemmas.

In the first story, "The Sign," a retired school janitor visits Lucy's lonely, isolated brother Pete just to check on him. The encounter palpates with a tension arising from long circulating whispers that Lucy's long-deceased dad burned down the man's barn after he was fired for polishing his sausage behind it. The destruction of the barn resulted in the janitor's loss of his farm and forced him into the custodial job. The conversation resulted in Pete's contemplation of years of his mother's emotional neglect and his destruction of a sign after the janitor shared a spiritual moment experienced as he watched his "burning barn."

The second and third stories cannily contrast the life paths taken by the two Nicely sisters. In "Windmills," Patty contemplates a life racked by insecurities arising from a weight problems and an unhealthy modesty, even prudishness, wrought by the shock of walking in on her mom having extramarital sex with one of Patty's teachers, vexed by an indelible image of her mother's "*braless ... breasts swaying as that man grabbed one in his mouth.*" "Cracked" peeks into the home of the amoral and vacuous Linda and her husband, a violent sexual pervert.

In "The Hit-Thumb Theory," a Vietnam vet, trapped in a loveless, sexless marriage, seeks solace and sexual healing from a prostitute who no longer charges for her services because, she says, she's in love with him. He discovers that sex in "love" can be much more expensive.

Other stories involve everything from the relationship between a daughter and her mother, nicknamed Mississippi Mary, who fell in love on a trip to Italy then left her husband ten years later to move to Italy and marry her lover; Lucy making a brief return trip to her childhood home with unexpected consequences; a widowed cousin, running her own bed and breakfast, exacts a small act of vengeance on snobbish married guests who make it a point to offend her; and, another cousin returns to the local theatre after a performance of The Christmas Carol to retrieve his granddaughter's teddy bear only to be confronted by the down-on-his-luck, suicidal actor who played Scrooge.

In the most revealing story, "Snow Blind," an actress's elderly, demented father has been committed for psychiatric treatment and begins repeatedly spilling the beans on his secret life in graphic ways. *"Annie ... thought how for years onstage she had used the image of walking up the dirt road holding her father's hand, the snow-covered fields spread around them, the woods in the distance, joy spilling through her--how she had used this scene to have tears immediately come to her eyes, for the happiness of it, and the loss of it. And now she wondered if it had even happened, if the road had ever been narrow and dirt, if her father had ever held her hand and said that his family was the most important thing to him."*

More than simply examining the question of how sincerely good, virtuous people endure pettiness and ruthlessness, Strout delves deeper: into the human condition of the people who harm, in a way that wisely,

subtly and mercifully looks at the root causes so that we might understand these scoundrels as spiritually sick people.

Each of the stories in Anything is Possible is poignant, hopeful and tends to haunt the heart. Collectively, they represent art that refreshingly reveals how *anything is possible* when one human makes an honest, authentic connection with another.

Thank you, Random House and NetGalley, for providing an ARC of this outstanding book in exchange for an honest review.

Debra says

4.5 stars

There is something so wonderfully absorbing and enthralling about Stout's books. I am absolutely certain that Stout could write a book about watching pain peel off a wall and I would read it. I love her writing. I read books and think that they are good and then I read Stout and think "Yes! Yes! Yes!" I can't quite put my finger on exactly what it is that draws me to her writing. She has a gift. She is a brilliant Author who can take people and their lives and add a certain type of brilliance to their story.

This book was written in tandem to "My name is Lucy Barton" and showcases the people who grew up with Lucy and continue to live in their small town. Each had some type of connection to either Lucy Barton herself or her family. Their stories are told in the form of short stories. I am not a short story fan but I loved these beautifully written short stories. These short stories are about people and their relationships. The people struggle with love, greed, jealousy, abandonment, loneliness, ptsd, and guilt to name a few. Her characters are well developed, interesting, likable (some not likable), and compelling. Some characters are full of compassion, understanding, humor, and are able to take things as they come. They do not let hardship get in their way of living a full life, while other characters are uncaring, sick, and have their own personal demons.

I am not going to give a synopsis of this book. Please seek out a copy and read this for yourself. If you have not read stout before, start with "Olive Kitteridge" and go from there. Stout does not disappoint. Her words are her gift. There is something so lovely and graceful about her writing. I love opening up, and falling into her books.

I received a copy of this book from Random House and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

See more of my reviews at www.openbookpost.com

Debbie says

Firecrackers in my soul!!!

Socks knocked off AGAIN! My feet are cold, but my soul is on fire. This collection of stories goes directly to my all-time-favorites shelf. Brilliant, just brilliant. I can barely sit still just thinking about it.

I wasn't super hot to try this collection, because even though I gave *My Name Is Lucy Barton* 4 stars, I wasn't all a-gush. I had loved its subtle tension and its introspection, but I had had sort of a hefty Complaint Board. My biggest gripes were that Lucy and her mom were too passive, and everything seemed a little too vague, like it was coated in Valium.

So when I heard that this book had to do with Lucy and the small town where she grew up, I was skeptical. What if passivity, vagueness, and boring country folks were the scene? What if my need for jazz and pizazz was again a "tough luck, kiddo"? But I was curious after reading umpteen-million gushing reviews.

When I started reading, though, a big "uh oh" slipped from my lips. The first story, BAM, there's a barn and the God word. I don't want any "oh, gosh" tractor talk and canned-peaches speak, please! I figured I was doomed. But despite my fears, I got totally drawn into the story and ended up loving it. Loneliness, secrets, guilt, memories, reaching out to strangers—these are things I remember when I think about this story. The dialogue is intense and brilliant, and the atmosphere is stark, and if you put the talk inside the stark you get high drama, even though there isn't some big event making it happen. I fully expected to remain on a farm throughout the rest of the stories, but I was okay with it since story number 1 had been so powerful.

When I got to story number 2, though, it was a totally different vibe. It was about a guidance counselor. She was in a small town but there wasn't any God or peaches. The small town was not the point. This story, too, was insightful, and I loved it.

Don't worry, I won't list stories number 3 through 9 and tell you the same thing, that it was oh so insightful and I loved it to death, yada yada, though both are true. One of the things that impressed me was how different each story is. The setting, the personalities, the theme, the vibe—all varied. How did Strout do this? The only word I come up with is genius. As I began each story, I wiggled with glee, oh who are we going to visit today? I couldn't wait to get there. And I was never disappointed. Not only did I get to sit down in their living rooms, but I also got to sit down inside their heads—oh is that the beauty of literature or what?!

Strout has a way of making you feel like you really know these people she creates. Truly, she has amazing psychological insight, and as I implied, she is a master at letting you wander inside her characters' heads. Her characters repress, express, ponder, hesitate, spill the beans, withhold, confess, get anxious or sad, and very occasionally find peace. Her stories all zero in on intense interactions—between a guidance counselor and a troubled student, a PTSD veteran and a desperate hooker, a grandfather and a crazed actor. These interactions are all buzzy and quiet at the same time.

Each story is self-contained and has closure (oh how I love closure), and yet they are interconnected in this cool way. I felt like I was looking at a high school yearbook, with a journalist (ha, or a gossip) sitting beside me, telling me in detail how each person turned out—or actually, taking me over to their house so I can see them in action. I must reread *Lucy Barton* because I'm dying to hear the gossip that I didn't care about before. I'm all ears now.

Another miraculous thing is that each story has the depth of a novel. Strout serves up robust characters in a well-developed plot, and tops it off with a believable, satisfying, and often profound ending—and she does all this in the cramped span of a short story. Rich rich rich is all I can say.

I had my favorites, of course, though I can honestly say I loved every one of the stories. Okay, okay, if I had to say which one I liked least, it would be "Mississippi Mary," which was about a daughter who goes to visit her mother in Italy. I figured out that it was my least favorite because it was about a mother-daughter relationship, and I had an epiphany: I didn't have a good relationship with my mother, so I don't want to hear

about mother-daughter stuff—good or bad. So, ta-da! I’m thinking that’s why I didn’t completely love *My Name is Lucy Barton*.

My absolute favorite story was “Sister,” which was about Lucy coming home to visit her brother and sister. (This was the only story about Lucy, even though she is mentioned in several stories.) There’s an odd story about a perverted husband, which is also high on my list, and a funny story about a pissed-off B&B owner. Another favorite was the last story, “Gift,” about a grandfather stuck in a room with a crazed actor. Oh my god was it great.

Time for a list of favorites (pulled from various stories):

Favorite scene: a woman having a panic attack

Favorite line:

“No one should be in a room with a man who’s at the end of his rope.”

Second favorite line:

“Don’t you go pissing down my back and then tell me it’s raining outside.”

This line is pretty cool, too:

“To listen to a person is not passive. To really listen is active, and Dottie had really listened.”

Can you tell this character is a little depressed?--

“You could buy a snow blower or a nice wool dress for your wife, but beneath it all people were rats scurrying off to find garbage to eat, another rat to hump, making a nest in broken bricks, and soiling it so sourly that one’s contribution to the world was only more excrement.”

Here is one of my favorite dialogues. The funny thing is, the woman talking isn’t in the least crazy—she’s just pissed. And her comments totally make sense, though Dr. Small doesn’t know it:

“Precisely what I said is what I mean. I offer guests a bed, and I offer them breakfast. I do not offer them counsel from lives they find unendurable.’ She closed her eyes briefly, then continued, ‘Or from marriages that are living deaths, from disappointments suffered at the hands of poor friends who regard their houses as a penis. This is not what I do.’”

“‘Jesus,’ said Dr. Small, who was backing away from her. ‘You’re a whackjob.’”

I could keep adding quotes but I don’t want my review to be any more gargantuan than it already is. I did get my jazz and pizazz, oh yes. And as far as I’m concerned, these stories are perfection. I don’t have even one item to put on my Complaint Board; it’s in the shed, collecting cobwebs.

I hope that this wasn’t Strout’s sole trip into short-story land; I want her to stay there. O’Henry, Cheever, Carver—move over. Her stories are as deep and wavy as the ocean. I really think I will remember them all.

Pouting Always says

I haven't read *My Name is Lucy Barton* but after finishing this I totally want to, also maybe if I would have read it before hand I'd have given this five stars. I really enjoyed the writing style, I actually felt the difference between chapters when the point of view shifted to that of another character which is amazing in my opinion because everyone has a certain writing style and because of that a lot of the characters end up being written similar enough that you don't really feel the shift as much from one point of view to the next. I don't really like short stories that much but I enjoyed this because all the stories seemed to be threaded around the common theme of Lucy and happening in the same story line enough so that I didn't feel like they were short stories but a sort of continuing narrative. I also loved how complex the characters were, so many of them had faults but I really could empathize with them and how they ended up in the situation and so many times I felt really emotional about the character's problems even though they're supposed to be fictional and all, it just really upset me especially the ending with Abel and the whole time Lucy was visiting her brother Pete and the whole beginning of the story with Tommy. I very much enjoyed this and I really need to read more of Elizabeth Strout's writing now.

Angela M says

Elizabeth Strout is one of our best contemporary authors, so I was thrilled to get an advanced copy of this book. I was especially excited to read it because this book is a continuation of *My Name Is Lucy Barton*, which was moving in so many ways. I was definitely not disappointed. This is a collection of connected stories and probably could be read as a stand alone, but I have to admit that my enjoyment and appreciation of it was enhanced by having met Lucy previously.

Some of the unspoken things we surmised about Lucy's childhood from Strout's previous book, are confirmed in the first story, "The Sign". Tommy, the school maintenance man tells some sad and lovely anecdotes about Lucy. This was my favorite story. Of course it's ultimately Tommy's story. Not only was he kind to Lucy as a young girl but his kindness continues with looking in on Lucy's recluse brother Pete. Even though these stories are about some of the people in Lucy's past, she is ever present in these character's memories. In "Windmills" Patty, a guidance counselor, remembers the tough life Lucy and her siblings had as children and is inspired by Lucy's new book, a memoir, inspired enough to help Lucy's niece get into college. She does this in spite of the rudeness shown to her by the girl. It isn't just the memories that people have of Lucy and their past connection to her, but Lucy herself appears front and center in the story, "Sister". Here in a visit with her brother and sister, they confront some of the terrible things they endured at the hands of poor and unfit parents. Yet what is so amazing to me is that in spite of everything, in spite of Vicky's resentment that Lucy left, there is love between these siblings. "The Gift" about one of Lucy's cousins is one that impressed me as well. This one too has memories which ultimately make Abel believe that anything is possible as do many of the other characters.

This is structured in a similar way to *Olive Kitteridge*, with stories that connect so intimately that it had for me the feel of a novel. The writing flows, not an extra word, and the picture she gives of these characters is as clear as if we knew them ourselves. Strout always gives us the reality of living, of the human condition with the sometimes gritty, tough and sad parts along with the beautiful things that give hope and possibility.

She remains one of my favorite writers.

I received an advanced copy of this from Random House Publishing Group - Random House through NetGalley.

Cheri says

!! NOW AVAILABLE !!

Once again, Elizabeth Strout has exquisitely examined and shared the life of a small group of people in a small town in this lovely compilation of intermingled stories that form this novel. If you've already read *My Name is Lucy Barton*, you'll be familiar with many of them, and with Lucy.

In "Anything is Possible", the focus is again on the relationships, in this case most are relatives of one degree or another of Lucy. Siblings. Cousins. Parents. Strained relationships in one way or another, all. Some have shared stories, shameful secrets that they hold close, they can't share them, can't lose them, so they continue to hold onto them to hide them from the prying eyes of others.

Amgash, Illinois isn't so much the town that Lucy grew up in; it's more the small town that Lucy's family lived on the outskirts of, out where the beyond poor lived. And all through these days in this place, these places, these people, Strout weaves magical links through each of their stories, binding them together in secrets, shame, humility, compassionate service, laughter, pain, fear. All the sorrows, all in the loveliest of simple prose, never using a single unnecessary word, yet leaving nothing unsaid. Each story serves a purpose, conveys a message. This is about Life. These particular lives, yes, but it's really about every life, all lives. How we hold onto those moments as long as we hold onto life, carrying things we should set down, left behind long ago, but we carry these with us. Never setting them down. Never without them. And yet, we somehow carry on.

Highly recommended.

Pub Date: 25 April 2017

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Random House

Elyse says

WONDERFUL!!! LOVED IT!!!! MELTING!!! WISH IT DIDN'T HAVE TO END!!!

Elizabeth Strout begins with Tommy Guptill who once owned a dairy farm in Amgash, Illinois. The house had burned down. His family had to move to a more run-down town. Their family went from having their home be a place that class trips came to-- --to having to see their father push a broom as a janitor at their school.

The kids were now grown, his wife 82 years old.....and as Tommy said...

"Well, they had all lived through it".

Elizabeth Strout weaves together distinctive stories where we are left to marvel at the difficulties - history - and life changing experiences of the many characters.

One of the characters that stands out for me was Patty Nicely. Patty understood that most people were only interested in themselves. Except, Sebastian, (her Sibby, husband; no longer alive), he had been interested in her, and she had been terribly interested in him.

"This was the skin that protected you from the world – this loving of another person you shared your life with".

Knowing about Sibby's painful childhood - and teen years deepen her own compassion and commitment to the work she did working with adolescents as a school counselor. After a student calls her 'Fatty Patty', the shifting dynamics and tensions are significant. The conclusion to this story left a deep 'thankful' lasting impression on me.

A little funny: Angelina visits her 78 year old mother, Mary. The 'entire' story emphasizes the bonds between mother and daughter....which goes deeper than the swim - funny - they are about to take:

Angelina says, "Mom, you're wearing a bikini"

"A two-piece, honey. Look around. Do you see one person wearing a one-piece? Except for you? Mary put her goggles on and walked into the water".

Wonderful imagery of windmills, cornfields, and bright soybeans in summertime, Lovely feelings of an old fashion town with red houses, black shutters, with a swing porch, deeply moving intimate prose, psychological awakenings of characters, and we come away withanything is possible for anyone.

Thank You Random House, Netgalley, and Elizabeth Strout....(I LOVE YOU)

Paromjit says

This is a wondrous book, it is my first read by Elizabeth Strout and I was just so impressed. It is a beautifully written collection of 9 short stories set in Amgash, Illinois. We encounter Lucy Barton through the perspectives of others, where she comes across as a wonderful woman, she has survived difficult circumstances, to become a renowned writer of a well received memoir. I get to finally meet her in Sister, where she finally returns to Amgash only to find it is more than she can bear. Strout's talent in creating and developing diverse characters with such complexity, depth and ordinariness is extraordinary. You meet and learn more about the history and fate of the characters as they criss cross across the stories.

The kind and humble Tommy Guptill lost his farm and livelihood when it burned down. His family had to relocate to a poorer part of town and he becomes a janitor at Lucy's school. He received a sign which he has never told anyone else about until he has an uncomfortable encounter with Pete, Lucy's brother. Patty comes to understand that we love imperfectly. Linda's marriage into wealth is of scarce recompense when it comes

to the price paid for having Jay as a husband. Charlie's need and relationship with Tracy leads to his marriage crumbling. A mother and daughter relationship gains perspective and depth in Italy. Dottie handles with aplomb the atrocious behaviour of a couple who come to stay at her bed and breakfast. Annie comes to understand why her father forbids her to go into the woods and just how judgmental the local community can be. Abel Blaine, a good man, carries the guilt of being well off, having grown up with extreme poverty. Upon trying to retrieve Sophia's pony, he meets and is forced to converse with Scrooge. His thankfulness in receiving a precious gift leads him to the perfect knowledge that anything is possible for anyone. This almost has me weeping.

I am finding it hard to put into words just how much I loved these short stories. The characters have so much grace, humour and love amidst the loss, hardships and travails that life brings. Of course, there are troubled, unkind, difficult, and judgmental characters, but this is what people comprise of. Strout finds the emotional heart and humanity of the Amgash community, and leaves the reader wanting more. Simply brilliant. Highly recommended.

Jaline says

This book is a series of related short stories, linked to each other, but also linked through connections to Lucy Barton. Raised in extreme poverty, Lucy Barton manages to escape the confinement of her class through education, hard work, and most of all by leaving the environment of her origins. Whether the connection is direct or peripheral, the people in this book know Lucy Barton, or know of her, or know people who know people who knew Lucy Barton.

Through sadness, contentment, pain, joy, sorrow, serenity, tragedy, triumph, spitefulness, sincerity – through a kaleidoscope of human emotion, these are their stories.

At one point, a young girl in this book asks her brother to do something with her and he replies that he doesn't have an appetite for it. I did have an appetite for this amazing nine-course meal, and voraciously consumed it all. Each course is a delicacy and savouring it made me want to eat only that. Yet when the plate was whisked away and the next course served, my appetite was focused entirely on that course. In the end, I felt I had been treated to one of the finest literary banquets I have been privileged to attend.

I recommend this book to anyone who has read “My Name is Lucy Barton” and/or to anyone who enjoys exceptionally well written stories about very real people living very real lives.
