



The Light Between Oceans, by M. L. Stedman
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, September 2014

Since its publication, *The Light Between Oceans*, by M. L. Stedman, has been a popular book-group selection. The story takes place in Australia in the years following World War I—the “Great War.” Tom Sherbourne, who had served in the trenches of the western front, longs for a quiet, peaceful life when he returns home. He becomes a lighthouse keeper on the remote island of Janus Rock. There he brings his bride Isabel to begin a new life together.

The author is quite adept at describing the bleak loneliness of day-to-day life on a distant lighthouse. Readers can almost hear the roar of the tides and see the vast, unchanging black horizon. One day rolls into another; visitors are few and far between. But the young couple hopes to start a family to bring them joy.

Alas, Isabel suffers several miscarriages and the loss of a stillborn baby. Tom becomes worried about Isabel’s fragile emotional state. Then one day, a small boat washes up on shore, apparently from a shipwreck. In the boat are the dead body of a man and a very much alive, beautiful baby girl. Isabel is overjoyed; she sees the baby as a gift from God. She names the child “Lucy.” (“Lucy” comes from the Latin *lucere*: “to shine.” Hence, in the book’s title, “Lucy” is “The Light Between Oceans.”)

Tom initially thinks they should alert authorities on the mainland about their discovery. But soon he gives into Isabel’s heartfelt pleading. Tom buries the body of the man they had found in the boat. The couple decides to keep Lucy and bring her up as their own daughter, not telling anyone of the baby’s precarious arrival.

Tom and Isabel live blissfully and quietly on the lighthouse with Lucy for the next two years. Then on a trip to the mainland, they slowly learn the truth of Lucy’s parentage. The husband and wife have very different ideas of what they should do. And the decision they ultimately make puts a strain on their marriage.

As mentioned, *The Light Between Oceans* is a favorite choice for book groups—my longtime book group included. My friends truly enjoyed this novel; however, the group's usual critic (me) thought the author was more sympathetic towards Tom than to Isabel. But the story is captivating and universally appealing, and its movie version is worth seeing.