



***My Name Is Lucy Barton, by Elizabeth Strout***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, May 2016***

Pulitzer Prize winning author Elizabeth Strout is acclaimed for her ability to make “the ordinary seem extraordinary.” She infuses her novels with everyday themes and characters. In her latest book, *My Name Is Lucy Barton*, Ms. Strout explores the complex mother/daughter relationship.

The title character, Lucy Barton, a writer in New York, had escaped a troubled, impoverished childhood, growing up in a remote Illinois home with no books and often with little food or heat. Her emotionally distant parents routinely ignored and abused Lucy and her brother and sister. Often, the siblings were bullied in school. Fortunately for Lucy, a teacher took an interest in her and encouraged Lucy’s writing ability. Lucy won a college scholarship and then moved to New York.

Now a young married mother of two daughters, Lucy faces an extended hospitalization due to a lingering post-op infection. Unexpectedly, her husband William calls Lucy’s mother, asking her to come for a visit. Lucy is stunned; after all, she and her parents haven’t spoken for nine years. (Lucy’s father, a PTSD-afflicted WWII veteran, disapproves of William, whose parents were German.) But Lucy is excited about the prospect of seeing her mother again: “It was the sound of my mother’s voice I wanted; what she said didn’t matter.”

During their long days together at the hospital, Lucy and her mother chat idly about people they knew in their Illinois town. It was easier for the two women to gossip about others than to talk about their own fractured relationship. But the weeks they spent together in the hospital would impact Lucy’s own marriage and parenting in profound ways.

As a longtime Elizabeth Strout fan, however, I feel *My Name Is Lucy Barton* is not the author’s strongest novel. Several characters were undeveloped and some plot lines were left dangling. But even on an off-day, Ms. Strout’s books are worth a try.