

Tell Me Everything



a novel

Elizabeth Strout

#1 New York Times
bestselling author

Winner of the
PULITZER PRIZE

BY ELIZABETH STROUT

Tell Me Everything

Lucy by the Sea

Oh William!

Olive, Again

Anything Is Possible

My Name Is Lucy Barton

The Burgess Boys

Olive Kitteridge

Abide with Me

Amy and Isabelle

Tell Me Everything

...

A N O V E L

ELIZABETH
STROUT



RANDOM HOUSE

NEW YORK

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Acknowledgments

About the Author

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Book One

...

1

THIS IS THE story of Bob Burgess, a tall, heavysset man who lives in the town of Crosby, Maine, and he is sixty-five years old at the time that we are speaking of him. Bob has a big heart, but he does not know that about himself; like many of us, he does not know himself as well as he assumes to, and he would never believe he had anything worthy in his life to document. But he does; we all do.

*

AUTUMN COMES EARLY to Maine.

By the second or third week in August a person driving in a car might glance up and see in the distance the top of a tree that has become red. In Crosby, Maine, this year it happened first with the large maple tree by the church, and yet it was not even midway through the month of August. But the tree began to change color on its side facing east. This was curious to those who had lived there for years, they could not remember that being the first tree to change color. By the end of August, the entire tree was not red but a slightly orange yellowy thing, to be seen as you turned the corner onto Main Street. And then September followed, the summer people went back to where they had come from, and the streets of Crosby often had only a few people walking down them. The leaves did not seem vibrant, overall, and people speculated that this was because of the lack of rainfall that August—and September—had endured.

—

A FEW YEARS EARLIER, people entering the town of Crosby from the turnpike's exit would drive past a car dealership and a donut shop and a diner, and also by large run-down wooden houses whose porches held things like bicycle tires and plastic toys and coat hangers and air conditioning units that had not been used in years, and in one of these houses a middle-aged man named Ricky Davis lived. He was a large man and frequently drunk and could often be seen leaning over the rail of his side porch with his pants halfway down showing his huge bottom, crack and all, to the folks driving by, and those who had not seen this before would turn their heads to watch with a sense of wonderment. But then the town council had voted to put in the new police station at that spot, and so Ricky Davis and the house he had lived in were now gone; it was rumored that he was living out near the old fairgrounds in a Hatfield Housing unit.

WHEN YOU GOT into the middle of the town you could see a large brick house that stood a little off Main Street. After the clocks were set back in November, making it dark earlier, the few folks driving by, and those who might be strolling on the sidewalk across the street, could see into the windows of this house, yellow from the lamps turned on inside, and Bob Burgess and his wife, Margaret Estaver, might be observed cooking together in their kitchen until they tugged their curtains closed. People knew who they were, and in a way not fully conscious there was a sense of safety that came from this couple living right here in the middle of town: Margaret was the Unitarian minister, and she had her following. Bob had been a lawyer in New York City for many years in his younger days, but nobody held this against him, probably because he had grown up in Shirley Falls, forty-five minutes away; he had returned to Maine almost fifteen years ago when he married Margaret. He still took occasional criminal cases in Shirley Falls and was known to keep an office there, though he had mostly retired by now. And also—people spoke of this quietly—Bob had suffered a tragedy in childhood: He had been playing with the gearshift of

the family car and it had rolled down the hill of the Burgesses' driveway; people in town understood that the car—and therefore Bob—had killed Bob's father, who was checking on their mailbox there.

—

OLIVE KITTERIDGE, who was ninety years old and living in the retirement community called the Maple Tree Apartments, knew this about Bob Burgess and she had always liked him, she thought he had a quiet sadness to him, most likely from this early misfortune. Olive did not particularly care for Bob's wife, Margaret. This was because Margaret was a minister and Olive did not like ministers—except for Cookie, who had married her to her first husband, Henry. Wonderful man, Reverend Daniel Cooke. And wonderful man, Henry Kitteridge.

The pandemic had been hard for Olive Kitteridge—hard for everyone, really—but Olive had endured it, day after day in her little apartment in this retirement community, yet when they stopped allowing people to eat in the dining room and started bringing their food to them instead, she thought she would go absolutely batty. By the end of that first year, though, with her vaccinations and then later a booster, she was able to get out a bit more, someone might drive her into town or take her down by the water. But the real problem was that during the pandemic, Olive's best friend, Isabelle Goodrow, who lived two doors down from her, had taken a bad fall and—of all the awful things that could have happened—had been moved “over the bridge” to the nursing home part of the place. Now Olive went to visit Isabelle every day, reading her the newspaper from front to back. But it had been hard, and it still was.

—

OUT ON THE end of the point of Crosby, high up on a cliff that looked over the (mostly) roiling waters of the Atlantic Ocean, lived a woman named Lucy Barton, who had arrived with her ex-husband, William, two years

before, escaping New York City during the pandemic, and they had ended up staying in town. There were mixed feelings about this: The natural reticence toward New Yorkers was part of it, but also housing prices in Crosby had gone through the roof exactly because of folks like this Lucy Barton, who had decided to stay in town, and anyone from Maine who had been hoping to move into a nicer house now found that they could not afford one. Lucy Barton had grown up in a small town in Illinois and had lived in New York City her whole adult life; she had never even been a summer person in Maine before arriving here with her ex-husband. Also, Lucy Barton was a fiction writer, and that made people have different feelings; mostly they would have preferred her to go back to New York, but nobody seemed to have anything bad to say about her; and except for her walks along the river with her friend Bob Burgess she was rarely seen. Although she was sometimes observed going through the back door that led up to the little office space she rented above the bookstore.

—

ON MAIN STREET THERE were HELP WANTED signs or HIRING NOW signs in most of the store windows, and along the coastline a few restaurants had to close because there were not enough people to work in them. What had gone wrong? There were different theories, but it would be fair to say that most inhabitants of Crosby did not know. They only knew that the world was not what it had once been. And most of these people in the town of Crosby were old, or almost old, because this is the way the population of Maine had been for years. Some said that this was the problem, that there were no young folks to take these jobs. Others argued that the unemployment situation was happening not just in Maine but all across the country; some speculated that it was the opioid crisis, that people weren't able to pass their drug test in order to work. And then others claimed that the younger generation was at fault; Malcolm Moody's sixteen-year-old grandson, for example, had come to visit for three days and was playing videogames on his iPhone constantly. What could you do?

Nothing.

AND THEN IN October the foliage exploded, shattering the world with a goldenness. The sun shone down, and yellow leaves fluttered everywhere; it was a thing of beauty. The days were cold and at night it rained, but in the morning there was the sun again, and all the glory of the natural world twinkled and nestled itself around the town of Crosby. The clouds that were low in the sky would suddenly block out the sun, and then just as quickly the clouds would part and it was as though a bright light had been turned on and the sky was blue and bright again with the yellow and orange leaves floating quietly to the ground.

*

A THOUGHT HAD taken hold of Olive Kitteridge on one of these days in October, and she pondered it for almost a week before she called Bob Burgess. “I have a story to tell that writer Lucy Barton. I wish you would have her come visit me.”

The story was one that Olive had been reflecting on with more and more frequency, and she thought—as people often do—that if her story could be told to a writer, maybe it could be used in a book one day. Olive did not know if Lucy was a famous writer or not quite a famous writer, but she decided it did not matter. The library always had a long wait list for Lucy’s books, so Olive had ordered them from the bookstore instead, and she read through them, and something made her think that this Lucy might like—or could possibly use—the story Olive had to tell.

SO ON THIS particular autumn day, the yellow leaves of the tree seen through Olive’s large windowed back doorway were quivering to the ground as she

waited for Lucy Barton to show up. Olive, sitting in her wingback chair, saw two chickadees and a titmouse at her feeder. She leaned forward and spotted a squirrel. Olive rapped her knuckles against the window, hard, and the squirrel scurried away. “Hah,” said Olive, sitting back. She hated squirrels. They ate her flowers, and they were always bothering her birds.

Olive found her glasses on the small table next to her and picked up her big cordless phone, which was also on the table, and pressed some numbers on it.

“Isabelle,” said Olive. “I can’t come visit you this morning, I’m having a visitor. I’ll tell you about it when I come see you this afternoon. Bye now.” Olive clicked the phone off and looked around her small apartment.

She tried to imagine the place through the writer’s eyes, and Olive decided it was all right. It was neat, and not cluttered with hideous knickknacks the way so many old people had in their homes, tabletops crowded with photographs of their grandchildren, such foolishness. Olive had four grandchildren, but she only had a photograph of one of them in her bedroom, a small photo of Little Henry, who was not so little anymore. And in the living room on her hutch she kept a large photograph of her first husband, Henry, and that was enough. She looked at it now and said, “Well, Henry, we’ll see if she’s responsive.”

—

AT FIVE MINUTES before ten there was a light knock on her door that faced the hallway, and Olive yelled out, “Come in!”

In stepped a small woman who looked meek and mousy. Olive could not stand meek-and-mousy-looking people. The woman said, “I’m sorry I’m early. I’m always early, I can’t seem to help it.”

“That’s fine. I hate people who are late. Sit down,” Olive said, and she nodded toward the small couch against the wall across from her. Lucy Barton came in and sat down. She was wearing a blue and black plaid coat

that went to her knees and jeans that Olive thought were too tight for a woman her age; Lucy was sixty-six, Olive had looked it up.

The sofa was a stiff one, Olive knew this, but the woman somehow—the way she sat on it—made it appear even stiffer. And she had the strangest things on her feet, boots with long big silver zippers right up the front of them. Olive could see the small ankles and the tight pants that were tucked into them.

“Take your coat off,” Olive said.

“No thank you. I get cold easily.”

Olive rolled her eyes. “I would hardly say it’s cold in here.”

Olive was disappointed in this creature. A silence fell into the room and Olive let it sit there. Finally, Lucy Barton said, “Well, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Ay-yuh” was all Olive said, swinging one foot back and forth. There was something odd about this woman: She wore no glasses, and her eyes were not small, but she had a slightly stunned look on her face. “What are those things you’ve got on your feet?” Olive asked.

The woman looked down at them, sticking her toes straight up. “Oh, they’re boots. We went to Rockland last summer and I found these in a store.”

Rockland. Money. Of course, Olive thought. She said, “There’s no snow on the ground, don’t know why you need boots.”

The woman closed her eyes for a long moment, and when she opened them she did not look at Olive.

“So, I hear you’re with us in town to stay,” Olive said.

“Who told you that?” The woman asked this as though really curious to know the answer, and she continued to look slightly bewildered.

“Bob Burgess.”

And then the woman’s face changed; it became gentle, relaxed, for a moment. “Right,” she said.

OLIVE TOOK A breath and said, "Well, Lucy. How are you liking our little town of Crosby?"

"It's quite a change," Lucy Barton said.

"Well, it's not New York, if that's what you mean."

Lucy looked around the room and then said, "I guess that is what I mean."

Olive continued to watch her. For a few moments there was only the ticking of the grandfather clock and the slight whirring sound of the refrigerator in the alcove kitchen. "You told Bob that you had a story to tell me?" Lucy asked. She slipped off her coat then, letting it stay on her back, and Olive saw a black turtleneck. Skinny. The creature was skinny. But her eyes were watching Olive now with a keenness.

Olive swung an arm lightly toward the stack of books on the bottom shelf of the small table beside her. "I've read all your books."

Lucy Barton did not seem to have any response to this, though her eyes briefly dropped down to the books on the shelf.

Olive said, "I thought your memoirs were a little self-pitying, myself. You're not the only person to come from poverty."

Lucy Barton again seemed to have no response to this.

Olive said, "And how does your ex-husband William feel, being written about? I'm curious to know."

Lucy gave a small shrug. "He's okay with it. He knows I'm a writer."

"I see. Ay-yuh." Olive added, "And now you're back with him. Together again. But not married."

"That's right."

"In Crosby, Maine."

"That's right."

AGAIN, THERE WAS a silence. Then Olive said, “You don’t look a bit like your photograph on your books.”

“I know.” Lucy said it simply and gave a shrug.

“Why is that?” Olive said.

“Because some professional photographer took it. And also my hair isn’t really blond anymore. That photo was taken years ago.” Lucy put her hand through her hair, which was chin-length and pale brown.

“Well, it was too blond in the photo,” Olive said.

A sudden slant of sunlight came through the window and fell across the wooden floor. The grandfather clock in the corner kept on with its ticking. Lucy reached behind her and took her coat and placed it on the couch next to her. “That’s my husband,” said Olive, pointing to the large photograph on the hutch. “My first husband, Henry. Wonderful man.”

“He looks nice,” Lucy said. “Tell me the story. Bob said you had a story you wanted me to hear.” She said this kindly. “I’d like to hear it, I really would.”

“Bob Burgess is a good fellow. I’ve always liked him,” Olive said.

Lucy’s face got pink—this is what Olive thought she saw. “Bob is the best friend I have in this town. He’s maybe the best friend I’ve had ever.” Her eyes dropped to the floor as she said this. But then she looked up at Olive and said, “Please—tell me the story.”

Something in Olive relaxed. She said, “Okay, but now I don’t know if it’s worth telling.”

“Well, tell me anyway,” Lucy said.

*

THE STORY WAS THIS: Olive’s mother had been the daughter of a farmer in a little town in Maine called West Annett, about an hour away from Crosby. And oh, by the way, Olive did not like her mother. But that was probably irrelevant.

“Why didn’t you like her?” Lucy asked, and Olive thought about it and said, “I suppose because she didn’t like me.” Lucy nodded. “I was five years old by the time my little sister was born, and I have a memory—who knows if it’s true—of having asked my mother why I didn’t have any brothers or sisters, and she had looked at me and said, ‘After you? We wouldn’t dare have another child after you.’ But then they did.”

“Why would she say that? What was so wrong with you as a little kid?” Lucy asked.

“Well. For one thing, I didn’t like to cuddle and, oh, Mother just *loved* Isa, who would cuddle with her. Mother loved to cuddle, and apparently I did not.”

“Isa? Your sister. Great name, okay, go on.” Lucy picked something off her jeans.

So, Olive’s mother—“What was her name?” Lucy interrupted, looking over at Olive—and Olive said that her mother’s name was Sara. “With an ‘h’?” Lucy asked, and Olive shook her head. No “h.” Sara had one brother, Sara remained devoted to him throughout her life, even though he was completely nutty. “I think his testicles never dropped,” Olive said. “He never had a beard, and he had a high voice, and he was a very peculiar person, oh, he got married to a woman named Ardele, she was a nut too, and they never had kids, but anyway, Mother remained devoted to her brother, she even died at Ardele’s house.”

So, Sara was raised on this small farm in the town of West Annett. She was very short, and a cheerful person—and pretty. “I have never been pretty,” Olive added. Lucy just sat watching her, and Olive had to look out the window. “Go on,” Lucy said quietly.

Olive glanced down at her belly, which stuck out like a basketball, she tugged the side of her jacket over it and continued. “Mother wanted to become a schoolteacher, so she went to Gorham Normal School. Normal school was what it was called to train teachers back then.” Olive added, “This would have been around the second half of the 1920s.”

At the end of the first year Olive's mother had taken a job waitressing at a resort farther down the coast; she had lived at the resort while working there. And she had fallen in love with the son of the woman who owned the resort.

"Are you listening?" Olive asked.

Lucy said that she was.

"Money. His mother had money, came from money. Don't know what had happened to the father—dead, I think." But the point was that Olive's mother, Sara, had really fallen in love with this fellow, his name was Stephen Turner. And as far as Olive knew, this fellow loved her back.

Stephen's mother also owned a resort in Florida, so although Olive's mother went back to Gorham Normal School, she suddenly quit at the end of that first semester and went down to Florida to work in this woman's—this Mrs. Turner's—resort.

"Your mother told you this?" Lucy asked.

"She did."

"Go on."

"And by the time she came back to Maine—"

"Was the fellow there in Florida?" Lucy asked, and Olive said, Oh yes, Stephen was there. But by the time Sara came back, she and Stephen were no longer a couple. Mrs. Turner had decided that Sara was not sophisticated enough for her son, so she had broken them up in Florida. Stephen was going to be a doctor, which meant that Sara was simply not good enough for him, having come from just a poor, small farm.

"Wait. You heard all this from your mother?" Lucy asked; she was leaning slightly forward.

"Well, yes. Mother told me all this when I was a young girl, twelve or so, I don't know, but Mother told me. Only one time, though. I don't remember her ever mentioning it again."

"Go on," Lucy said.

Sara went back to normal school in Maine, and three months later she met Olive's father at a barn dance.

"He was sitting on the end of a bench because he couldn't socialize, so he stuck himself on the end of the bench and Mother started talking to him, and two months after that they got married." Olive's mother became a teacher—her first job was in a one-room schoolhouse—and Olive's father, who had never finished high school, went to work in a canning factory. He lost his job during the Depression, and he could not pay for groceries.

Olive remembered going with her father to the little grocery store, and the grocer refused to give them food on credit. She remembered that her father had tears in his eyes as he walked out of the store.

Olive paused and looked out the window again. Finally she turned back and said, "Now this part is not so much the story I wanted to tell, but I do want to tell you: My father was an exceptional man."

"In what way?" Lucy asked.

"In every way," Olive said.

"All right," said Lucy.

Olive turned back to the window. "He was a man of very few words. He came from a dreadful background. His father beat him, and his father would try and beat the smaller children, but Father always intervened and took the beatings for those younger kids."

Lucy said nothing. She was just sitting and watching Olive, her coat still next to her on the couch, her hands in her lap.

"When my father was fifty-seven, he took a rifle and shot himself." Olive said this glancing at Lucy.

"Where?" Lucy asked quietly. "Where did he do this?"

"In the kitchen. He was in the kitchen when Mother got home from teaching. Brain stuff splattered all over the ceiling."

"Whoa," Lucy said, very quietly.

"But that's not part of the story."

“Go on with the story,” Lucy said. “We don’t know if that’s part of the story or not.”

Olive felt surprised by that, but she continued. “So, when my mother died, three years after my father did—”

“What did she die of?” Lucy asked.

“Brain tumor.” Olive squinted across the room and said musingly, “It’s interesting, sort of, I think, because her doctor told me that she may have had that brain tumor for years but the distress of my father’s death—the suicide—may have set it off, growing. I always thought that was interesting.”

“It is interesting,” Lucy said. She settled herself against the back of the couch. “You know, I knew a woman who had two of the most adorable kids you ever saw, they were small, and she had a husband who became a famous writer, and he went to some university for a semester and ran off rather quickly with a different woman, and his wife got a brain tumor and within a year she had died. I always wondered if it was related.”

Olive said, “Godfrey. What happened to the husband?”

“He ended up alone and not famous at all after a while.”

“Well, *good*,” Olive said, and Lucy shook her head slowly and said, “No, it was really sad.”

Olive rolled her eyes.

Lucy said, “Go back to your story. So your mother died. At Ardele’s house,” she added, and that pleased Olive, that Lucy Barton had remembered that detail.

“Yes, she died at Ardele’s house, and in her handbag—” Olive shifted slightly in her chair and leaned forward. “In her handbag, when I went through it, I found a tattered old clipping. It was not in her wallet but slipped into a little pocket on the inside of her handbag that zipped shut. A newspaper clipping. Now, back then, at that time, when someone of so-called importance came to town there would be a silly little newspaper article about it. And this clipping was dated from back when Mother would

have been married about seven years and already had her two daughters. And the clipping was this.”

A small newspaper article in the *Shirley Falls Journal*—with a photograph—saying that Dr. Stephen Turner—son of Blah-blah and the late Blah-blah Mr. Turner—and his wife, Ruth, had come to town with their daughters. Stephen Turner was a doctor in Boston, his wife, Ruth, was the daughter of some hoity-toity in the Boston area, and they also had two very small girls who were also in the photograph.

THE GIRLS’ NAMES were Olive and Isa.

OLIVE WAITED.

Then Lucy said, “Oh my God.” And Olive nodded her head. Lucy began tapping her knees together, and she looked around the room, her hands on the sofa. “Oh my God,” she repeated, looking at Olive now, and again Olive gave a small nod.

“Ay-yuh,” Olive said.

“So your mother kept that clipping her whole life.”

“She did.”

“And his kids had the same names as you and your sister.”

“That’s right.”

Lucy shook her head slowly. “So your mother and Stephen Turner must have spoken of the names they wanted to call their kids.”

“Well, I did wonder about that,” Olive said.

“You *should* wonder about that.” Lucy sat forward. “It couldn’t possibly be a coincidence, the names are too unique.” One of Lucy’s hands moved as she said slowly, with a sense of wonder, “They talked with each other about what to name their kids. And of course Ruth, the man’s wife,

never knew that. No woman would name her kids the same names that her husband had planned to name his children with a previous girlfriend.”

“Well, this is what I thought—”

But Lucy continued. “So for the rest of their married lives they were never in touch, your mother and Dr. Stephen Turner?”

“Oh no, I don’t think so. No, no, I don’t think that was ever part of the story.”

Lucy nodded. “Probably not.”

Lucy sat back and looked straight in front of her, and then she looked down at her hands, and finally when she looked back at Olive her eyes were very red. And then tears came out of her eyes. Tears!

“I thought you never cried. Isn’t that what you wrote in your memoir?” Olive said.

“I think I wrote that it was hard for me to cry.” Lucy was looking through her coat pocket. “Right there,” Olive said, pointing to the table at the other end of the couch, and Lucy got up and took a tissue and sat back down.

“Now, why is this making you cry?” Olive really wanted to know.

“Because it’s such a sad story!”

“Well, it’s an interesting story. At least to me.”

“Mrs. Kitteridge, this is a *sad* story.”

Olive looked out the window again. “Yes, I guess it is.”

“It’s sad because your mother and this Stephen fellow—they were really in love. They were young and deeply in love—talking about what to name their kids—and his mother breaks them up and they never forget each other. So the whole time your mother is married to your father, every time he does something she doesn’t like, she thinks of Stephen and how wonderful he would have been in that situation. And Stephen’s wife, this Ruth woman—the same thing, probably. Every time she disappointed him, he would think of his pretty, cheerful Sara and what a life together they might have had. So both these couples lived their entire lives with these

ghosts in the room. And *that* is sad. Sad for everybody, but especially for your father and Ruth, who didn't even *know* they were living with these ghosts."

Lucy was no longer crying. But she wiped her nose with the tissue.

Olive said, "My parents did not have a happy marriage. Father would try and please her, but she was not to be pleased. He would go and get her every week during the Depression, she taught three towns away, and he was the one to take care of us when we were little, and he would go and get Mother in his old beat-up truck that was always breaking down, every Friday afternoon, and one time he stopped and picked her a bouquet of mayflowers. And I don't think she even cared."

Lucy was sitting far back on the uncomfortable couch, her skinny legs stretched out in front of her. And then she sat back up.

"What are mayflowers?" she asked.

"Oh—" Olive looked around the room and then she said, "They're a wildflower that you find in the darker parts of the pine forests, and Father had stopped by the side of the road and gone into the woods and picked her a little bouquet of them."

"How do you know your mother didn't care? Did your father tell you that?"

Olive considered this. "In my memory Mother told me, and she said it—oh, not exactly disrespectfully—but as though she didn't care. As though he would think it might help them, but what were mayflowers going to do? That's how I always understood it."

Lucy tapped her hand against her mouth. Finally she said, "So do you blame your father's suicide on your mother?"

Olive felt a small stinging in her chest. She looked straight ahead and said nothing for a long time, and then she said, "Yes, privately I have."

When she finally looked over at Lucy, Lucy was watching her. Olive said, "What? What is it you're thinking?"

“I’m thinking his father was probably more responsible for it than your mother.”

Olive thought about this, and then she said, “Well, two of his brothers died the same way.”

“They *did*? Then your mother couldn’t have been responsible.” Lucy let out a huge sigh and said, “But it’s a sad story. Carrying that clipping with her all her life.” She shook her head and said, “Jesus Christ. All these unrecorded lives, and people just *live* them.” Then she looked at Olive and said, “Sorry for swearing.”

“Phooey, swear all you want.” Olive added, “Well, that’s the story. I always wanted to tell someone. But for whatever reasons I never did.”

Lucy said, contemplatively, “I wonder how many people in long marriages live with ghosts beside them.”

“Henry and I never did.” Though as Olive said that she had a quick memory of Henry liking that foolish girl who worked with him for a while in the pharmacy, and she herself had been attracted to a man she taught with. But weren’t those tiny drops of oil in a fry pan? Not like the story she had just told.

So she looked at Lucy and told her about the nitwit girl that Henry had liked briefly, and the man she had been drawn to briefly.

And Lucy listened and said, “Yeah, that’s not the same thing. I mean, how long did those last?”

“Oh, not even a full year,” Olive said.

Lucy waved her hand. “Little infatuations, unacted-on crushes, they’re not like living with a ghost.” Then Lucy’s phone pinged, and she took it out of the pocket of her coat. She had to really squint at it, and she held it close to her eyes. “’Scuse me for just one minute. It’s Bob. He wants to know if we’re through. He picked me up at my studio to bring me here, and he’s going to pick me up now.”

“Well, I guess we’re through,” Olive said, though she was disappointed. She would have liked to talk to this Lucy Barton longer.

“Hold on, let me tell him.” Lucy squinted hard and punched her phone with her fingers and then slipped it back into the pocket of her coat, looking over at Olive then.

“Awful glad to talk with you,” Olive said, and Lucy said, “Yeah, it was great.” She smiled, and what a difference that made to her face! Why, she was almost a pretty little thing! “Really great,” Lucy repeated.

Olive said, “Glad you have Bob as a friend. A good friend makes all the difference. I have a friend, Isabelle Goodrow—”

But Lucy’s face had grown pink again. She said, “His wife, Margaret, she’s a good person too.”

“Never took to her myself. There’s nothing wrong with her. Except that she’s a minister.”

Lucy said, “No, she’s a really good person.” Then she said, “You know, Bob is the main reason I—” She stopped herself. “The reason I got to meet you.”

But when the knock came on the door and Bob Burgess walked in, Olive saw something. She saw Bob’s face, how he looked at Lucy. He was in love with her, and when Lucy looked up at him from the couch, her face changed so radically, it became so soft and happy-looking, and she said, “Hi, Bob.”

“How’d it go?” Bob asked, looking at Olive, then back at Lucy.

“Success,” Olive said.