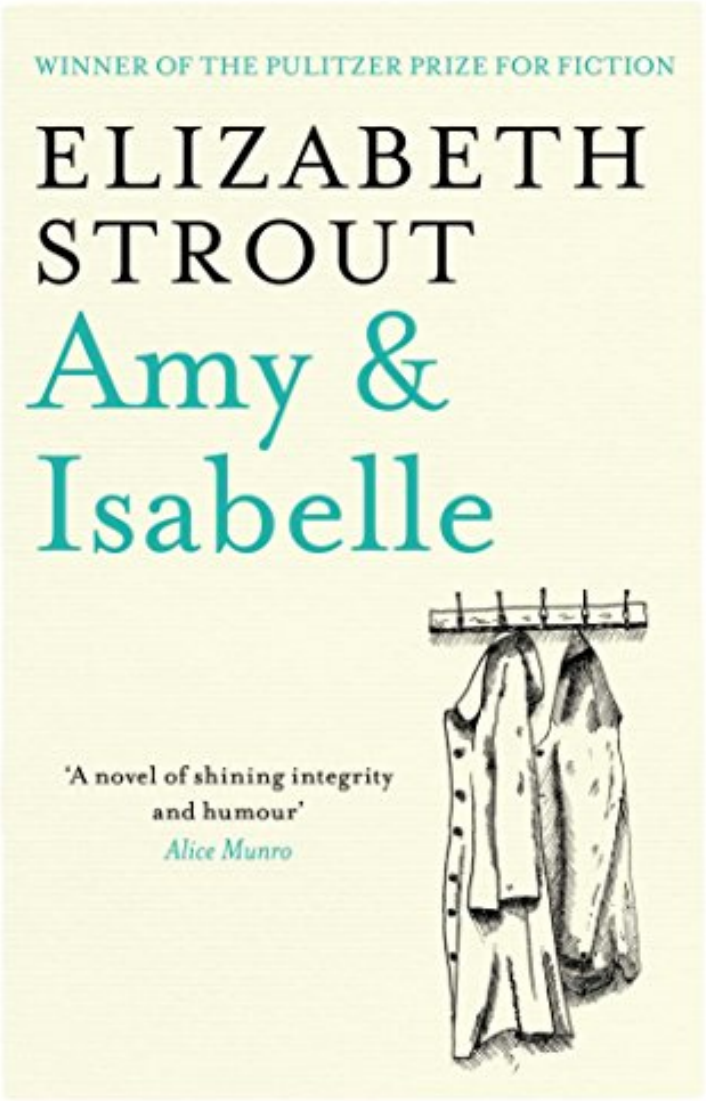
Amy Isabelle (English Edition)



Par Elizabeth Strout
*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks |*
Download PDF | ePub

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #83396 dans eBooksPubli le: 2013-04-12Sorti le: 2013-04-12Format: Ebook Kindle

(Mobile ebook) Amy Isabelle (English Edition)

Par Elizabeth Strout : Amy Isabelle (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Amy Isabelle (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the Man Booker Prize longlisted author ofMy Name is Lucy Barton ? Isabelle Goodrow has been living in self-imposed exile with her daughter Amy for fifteen years. Shamed by her past and her affair with Amy's father, she has submerged herself in the routine of her dead-end job and her unrequited love for her boss. But when Amy, frustrated by her quiet and unemotional mother, embarks on an illicit affair with her maths teacher, the disgrace intensifies the shame Isabelle feels about her own past. Throughout one long, sweltering summer, as the events of the small town ebb and flow around them, Amy and Isabelle exist in silent conflict until a final act leads ultimately to the understanding they both crave.ExtraitIt was terribly hot that summer Mr. Robertson left town, and for a long while the river seemed dead. Just a dead brown snake of a thing lying flat through the center of town, dirty yellow foam collecting

at its edge. Strangers driving by on the turnpike rolled up their windows at the gagging, sulfurous smell and wondered how anyone could live with that kind of stench coming from the river and the mill. But the people who lived in Shirley Falls were used to it, and even in the awful heat it was only noticeable when you first woke up; no, they didn't particularly mind the smell. What people minded that summer was how the sky was never blue, how it seemed instead that a dirty gauze bandage had been wrapped over the town, squeezing out whatever bright sunlight might have filtered down, blocking out whatever it was that gave things their color, and leaving a vague flat quality to hang in the air-this is what got to people that summer, made them uneasy after a while. And there were other things too: Further up the river crops weren't right-pole beans were small, shriveled on the vine, carrots stopped growing when they were no bigger than the fingers of a child; and two UFOs had apparently been sighted in the north of the state. Rumor had it the government had even sent people to investigate. In the office room of the mill, where a handful of women spent their days separating invoices, filing copies, pressing stamps onto envelopes with a thump of the fist, there was uneasy talk for a while. Some thought the world might be coming to an end, and even those women not inclined to go that far had to admitit might not have been a good idea sending men into space, that we had no business, really, walking around up there on the moon. But the heat was relentless and the fans rattling in the windows seemed to be doing nothing at all, and eventually the women ran out of steam, sitting at their big wooden desks with their legs slightly apart, lifting the hair from the back of their necks. "Can you believe this" was, after a while, about all that got said. One day the boss, Avery Clark, had sent them home early, but hotter days followed with no further mention of any early dismissal, so apparently this wasn't to happen again. Apparently they were supposed to sit there and suffer, and they did-the room held on to the heat. It was a big room, with a high ceiling and a wooden floor that creaked. The desks were set in pairs facing each other, two by two, down the length of the room. Metal filing cabinets lined the walls; on top of one sat a philodendron plant, its vines gathered and coiled like a child's clay pot, although some vines escaped and fell almost to the floor. It was the only green thing in the room. A few begonia plants and a wandering Jew left over by the windows had all turned brown. Occasionally the hot air stirred by a fan swept a dead leaf to the floor. In this scene of lassitude was a woman who stood apart from the rest. To be more accurate, she sat apart from the rest. Her name was Isabelle Goodrow, and because she was the secretary to Avery Clark, her desk did not face anyone. It faced instead the glassed-in office of Avery Clark himself, his office being an oddly constructed arrangement of wood paneling and large panes of glass (ostensibly to allow him to keep an eye on his workers, though he seldom looked up from his desk), and it was commonly referred to as "the fishbowl." Being the boss's secretary gave Isabelle Goodrow a status different from the other women in the room, but she was different anyway. For example, she was impeccably dressed; even in this heat she wore pantyhose. At a glance she might seem pretty, but if you looked closer you saw that in fact it didn't really get that far, her looks stopped off at plain. Her hair was certainly plain-thin and dark brown, pulled back in a bun or a twist. This hairstyle made her look older than she was, as well as a little school-marmish, and her dark, small eyes held anexpression of constant surprise. While the other women tended to sigh a great deal, or make trips back and forth to the soda machine, complaining of backaches and swollen feet, warning each other against slipping off shoes because you'd never in a hundred years get them back on, Isabelle Goodrow kept fairly still. Isabelle Goodrow simply sat at her desk with her knees together, her shoulders back, and typed away at a steady pace. Her neck was a little peculiar. For a short woman it seemed excessively long, and it rose up from her collar like the neck of the swan seen that summer on the dead-looking river, floating perfectly still by the foamy-edged banks. Or, at any rate, Isabelle's neck appeared this way to her daughter, Amy, agirl of sixteen that summer, who had taken a recent dislike to the sight of her mother's neck (to the sight of her mother, period), and who anyway had never cared one bit for the swan. In a number of ways Amy did not resemble her mother. If her mother's hair was dull and thin, Amy's hair was a thick, streaky blond. Even cut short the way it was now, haphazardly below her ears, it was noticeably healthy and strong. And Amy was tall. Her hands were large, her feet were long. But her eyes, bigger than her mother's, often held the same expression of tentative surprise, and this startled look could produce some uneasiness in the person on whom her eyes were fixed. Although Amy was shy, and seldom fixed her eyes on anyone for long. She was more apt to glance at people quickly before turning her head. In any event, she didn't know really what kind of impression, if any, she made, even though she had privately in the past studied herself a great deal in any available mirror. But that summer Amy wasn't looking into any mirrors. She was avoiding them, in fact. She would have liked to avoid her mother as well, but that was impossible-they were working in the office room together. This summer arrangement had been arrived at months before, by her mother and

Avery Clark, and while Amy was told to be grateful for the job, she was not. The job was very dull. She was required to add on an adding machine the last column of numbers of each orange invoice that lay on a stack on her desk, and the only good thing was that sometimes it seemed like her mind went to sleep. The real problem, of course, was that she and her mother were together all day. To Amy it seemed as though a black line connected them, nothing bigger than something drawn with a pencil, perhaps, but a line that was always there. Even if one of them left the room, went to the ladies' room or to the water fountain out in the hall, let's say, it didn't matter to the black line; it simply cut through the wall and connected them still. They did the best they could. At least their desks were far apart and didn't face each other. Amy sat in a far corner at a desk that faced Fat Bev. This was where Dottie Brown usually sat, but Dottie Brown was home getting over a hysterectomy that summer. Every morning Amy watched as Fat Bev measured out psyllium fiber and shook itvigorously into a pint-sized carton of orange juice. "Lucky you," Fat Bev said. "Young and healthy and all the rest. I bet you never even think about your bowels." Amy, embarrassed, would turn her head. Fat Bev always lit a cigarette as soon as her orange juice was done. Years later a law would be passed preventing her from doing this in the workplace-at which point she would gain another ten pounds and retire-but right now she was stillfree to suck in hard and exhale slowly, until she stubbed the cigarette out in the glass ashtray and said to Amy, "That did the trick, got the engine started." She gave Amy a wink as she heaved herself up and hauled her large self off to the bathroom. It was interesting, really. Amy had not known that cigarettes could make you go to the bathroom. This was not the case when she and Stacy Burrows smoked them in the woods behind the school. And she didn't know that a grown-up woman would talk about her bowels so comfortably. This, in particular, made Amy realize how differently from other people she and her mother lived. Fat Bev came back from the bathroom, sighing as she sat down, plucking pieces of tiny lint from the front of her huge sleeveless blouse. "So," she said, reaching for the telephone, a half-moon of dampness showing on the pale blue cloth beneath her armpit, "guess I'll give old Dottie a call." Fat Bev called Dottie Brown every morning. She dialed the telephone now with the end of a pencil and cradled the receiver between her shoulder and neck. "Still bleeding?" she asked, tapping her pink nails against the desk, pink disks almost embedded in flesh. They were Watermelon Pink-she had shown Amy the bottle of polish. "Setting a record or something? Never mind, don't hurry back. Noone misses you a bit." Fat Bev picked up an Avon magazine and fanned herself, her chair creaking as she leaned back. "I mean that, Dot. Much nicer to look at Amy Goodrow's sweet face than hear you go on about your cramps." She gave Amy a wink. Amy looked away, pushing a number on the adding machine. It was a nice thing for Fat Bev to say, but of course it wasn't true. Fat Bev missed Dottie a lot. And why wouldn't she? They had been friends forever, sitting in this room for longer than Amy had been alive, although it boggled Amy's mind to think that. Besides, another thing to consider was how much Fat Bev loved to talk. She said so herself. "I can't shut up for five minutes," she said, and Amy, keeping an eye on the clock one day, had found this to be true. "I need to talk," Fat Bev explained. "It's a kind of physical thing." It seemed she had a point. It seemed her need to talk was as persistent as her need to consume Life Savers and cigarettes, and Amy, who loved Fat Bev, was sorry her own reticence must provide a disappointment. Without forming the thought completely, she blamed her mother for this. Her mother was not a particularly talkative person, either. Look how she just sat there all day typing, never stopping by anyone's desk to ask how they were doing, to complain about the heat. She must know she was considered a snob. Being her daughter, Amy would have to be considered one too. But Fat Bev didn't seem the least bit disappointed about sharing her corner with Amy. She hung up the telephone and leaned forward, telling Amy in a soft, confiding voice that Dottie Brown's mother-in-law was the most selfish woman in town. Dottie had a hankering for potato salad, which of course was a very good sign, and when she mentioned this to her mother-in-law, who everyone knew happened to make the best potato salad around, Bea Brown suggested that Dottie get up out of bed and go peel some potatoes herself. "That's awful," Amy offered sincerely. "I guess it is." Fat Bev sat back and yawned, patting her fleshy throat while her eyes watered. "Honey," she said, nodding, "you marry a man whose mother is dead." The lunchroom in the factory was a messy, worn-out-looking place. Vending machines lined one wall, a cracked mirror ran the length of another; tables with linoleum chipping from their tops were haphazardly pushed together or apart as the women arranged themselves, spreading out their lunch bags, their soda cans and ashtrays, unwrapping sandwiches from wax paper. Amy positioned herself, as she did every day, away from the cracked mirror. Isabelle sat at the same table, shaking her head as the story was told of Bea Brown's egregious remark to Dottie. Arlene Tucker said it was probably due to hormones, that if you looked carefully at Bea Brown's chin you'd see she had whiskers, and it was Arlene's belief that women like that were apt to

have nasty dispositions. Rosie Tanguay said the trouble with Bea Brown was that she had never worked a day in her life, and the conversations broke into little groups after that, desultory voices overlapping. Quick barks of laughter punctuated one tale, serious tooth-sucking accompanied another. Amy enjoyed this. Everything talked about was interesting to her, even the story of a refrigerator gone on the blink: a half gallon of chocolate ice cream melted in the sink, soured, and smelled to high hell by morning. The voices were comfortable and comforting; Amy, in her silence, looked from face to face. Shewas not excluded from any of this, but the women had the decency, or lack of desire, not to try to engage her in their conversations either. It took Amy's mind off things. She would have enjoyed it more, of course, if her mother hadn't been there, but the gentle commotion of the place gave them a certain respite from each other, even with the black line between them continuing to hover. Fat Bev hit a button on the soda machine and a can of Tab rocked noisily into place. She bent her huge body to retrieve it. "Three more weeks and Dottie can have sex," she said. The black line tightened between Amy and Isabelle. "She wishes it was three more months," and here the soda can was popped open. "But I take it Wally's getting irritable. Chomping at the bit." Amy swallowed the crust of her sandwich. "Tell him to take care of it himself," someone said, and there was laughter. Amy's heartbeat quickened, sweat broke out above her lip. "You get dry after a hysterectomy, you know." Arlene Tucker offered this with a meaningful nod of her head. "I didn't." "Because you didn't have your ovaries out." Arlene nodded again-she was a woman who believed what she said. "They yanked the whole business with Dot." "Oh, my mother went crazy with the hot flashes," somebody said, and thankfully-Amy could feel her heart slow down, her face get cooler in the heat-irritable Wally was left behind; hot flashes and crying jags were talked of instead. Isabelle wrapped up the remains of her sandwich and returned it to her lunch bag. "It's really too warm to eat," she murmured to Fat Bev, and it was the first time Amy had heard her mother mention the heat. "Oh, Jesus, that would be nice." Bev chuckled, her big chest ris- ing. "Never too hot for me to eat." Isabelle smiled and took a lipstick from her purse. Amy yawned. She was suddenly exhausted; she could have put her head on the table right there and fallen asleep. "Honey, I'm curious," Fat Bev was saying. She had just lit a cigarette and was gazing through the smoke at Amy. She picked a piece of tobacco from her lip, glancing at it before she flicked it to the floor. "What was it made you decide to cut your hair?" The black line vibrated and hummed. Without wanting to, Amy looked at her mother. Isabelle was applying lipstick in a hand mirror with her head tilted slightly back; her hand with the lipstick stopped. "It's cute," Bev added. "Cute as could be. I was just curious, is all. With a head full of hair like yours." Amy turned her face toward the window, touching the tip of her ear. Women tossed their lunch bags into the trash, brushing crumbs from their fronts, yawning with fists to their mouths as they stood up. "Probably cooler that way," Fat Bev said. "It is. Much cooler." Amy looked at Bev and then away. Fat Bev sighed loudly. "Okay, Isabelle," she said. "Come on. It's back to the salt mines we go." Isabelle was pressing her lips together, snapping her pocketbook shut. "That's right," she said, not looking at Amy. "There's no rest for the weary, you know."But Isabelle had her story. And years before when she had first shown up in town, renting the old Crane house out on Route 22, installing her few possessions and infant daughter (a serious-looking child with a head of pale, curly hair), there had been some curiosity among the members of the Congregational church, and among the women she joined in the office room at the mill as well. But the young Isabelle Goodrow had not been forthcoming. She answered simply that her husband was dead, as well as her parents, and that she had moved down the river to Shirley Falls to have a better chance at earning a living. Really, nobody knew much more. Although a few people noticed that when she had first arrived in town she wore her wedding ring, and that after a while she didn't wear it anymore. She did not seem to make friends. She did not make enemies either, although she was a conscientious worker and as a result went through a series of promotions. Each time there was some grumbling in the office room, this last time in particular, when she had risen well above the others by becoming the personal secretary to Avery Clark, but no one wished her any ill. There were jokes, remarks, made behind her back at times, about how she needed a good roll in the hay to loosen her up, but that kind of thing lessened as the years went by. At this point she was an old-timer.

Amy's fear that her mother was seen as a snob was not particularly warranted. It was true the women gossiped about one another, but Amy was too young to understand that the kind of familial acceptance they had for each other extended to her mother as well. Still, no one would claim to know Isabelle. And certainly no one guessed the poor woman right now was going through hell. If she seemed thinner than usual, a little more pale, well, it was dreadfully hot. So hot that even now, at the end of the day, the heat rose up from the tar as Amy and Isabelle walked across the parking lot. "Have a good evening, you two," Fat Bev called out, as she hoisted herself into her car. The geraniums on the windowsill over the sink had bright red heads of

bloom the size of softballs, but two more leaves had turned yellow. Isabelle, dropping her keys on the table, noticed this immediately and went to pluck them off. If she had known the summer was going to be this horrible she would not have bothered to buy any geraniums at all. She would not have filled the front window boxes with lavender petunias, or planted tomatoes and marigolds and Patient Lucys out back. At their slightest drooping now she felt a sense of doom. She pressed her fingers into the potted soil, checking for dampness and finding it too damp, actually, because geraniums needed bright sun, and not this soggy heat. She dropped the leaves into the garbage beneath the sink, stepping back to let Amy get by. It was Amy who made their dinner these nights. In the olden days (which was the phrase that Isabelle used in her mind to refer to their lives before this summer) they used to take turns, but now it was all up to Amy. A tacit understanding: this was the least Amy could do-open a can of beets and fry some hamburgers in a pan. She stood now opening cupboards slowly, poking an idle finger into the hamburger meat. "Wash your hands," Isabelle said, and moved past her toward the stairs. But the telephone, tucked neatly into the corner of the counter, began to ring, and both Isabelle and Amy felt a quickening of alarm. As well as startled hopefulness: sometimes it went for days without making a sound. "Hello?" Amy said, and Isabelle stopped with her foot on the stair. "Oh, hi," Amy said. Putting her hand over the phone and not looking at her mother, she said, "It's for me." Isabelle walked slowly up the stairs. "Yeah," she heard Amy say. And then in a moment Amy said more quietly, "How's your dog these days?" Isabelle walked softly to her bedroom. Who did Amy know that owned a dog? Her bedroom, tucked under the eaves, was stifling at this time of day, but Isabelle closed the door, and did it noisily, so Amy would hear: See how I give you privacy. And Amy, twirling the telephone cord around her arm, heard the door close and understood, but knew her mother only wanted to look good for a moment, score an easy point or two. "I can't," Amy said into the phone, pressing her palm over the hamburger meat. And then, in a moment, "No, I haven't told her yet." Isabelle, leaning against her bedroom door, did not think of herself as eavesdropping. It was more that she was too agitated to go about the business of washing her face or changing her clothes while Amy was still on the phone. But Amy didn't appear to be saying much, and in a few moments Isabelle heard her hang up. Then there was the clanking sound of pots and pans, and Isabelle went into the bathroom to shower. After that she would say her prayers, and then go down for dinner. Although really, Isabelle was getting discouraged with this prayer business. She was aware of the fact that by the time Christ was her age he had already gone bravely to the cross and hung there patiently with vinegar pressed to his lips, having gathered his courage previously while he wandered through the olive groves. But she, living here in Shirley Falls (although she had suffered her own betrayal by her Judas-like daughter, she thought, shaking baby powder over her breasts), had no olive trees to walk through, and no courage to speak of either. Perhaps even no faith. She had doubts these days if God cared about her plight at all. He was an elusive fellow, no matter what anyone said. What the Reader's Digest said was that if you kept on praying, your ability to pray would improve, but Isabelle wondered if the Reader's Digest might not have a tendency to make things a bit simple. She had enjoyed those articles "I Am Joe's Brain" or "I Am Joe's Liver," but the "Praying: Practice Makes Perfect" was really, when you thought about it, a little mundane. After all, she had tried. She had tried for years to pray, and she would try again right now, lying down on her white bedspread, her skin moist from the shower, closing her eyes against the low white ceiling above her, to pray for His love. Ask and you shall receive. This was tricky business. You didn't want to ask for the wrong thing, go barking up the wrong tree. You didn't want God to think you were selfish by asking for things, the way the Catholics did. Arlene Tucker's husband had gone to Mass specifically to pray for a new car, and to Isabelle this was appalling. If Isabelle was going to get specific she wouldn't be so vulgar as to ask for a car-she would pray for a husband, or a better daughter. Except she wouldn't, of course. (Please God, send me a husband, or at least a daughter I can stand.) No, instead she would lie there on her bedspread and pray only for God's love and guidance, and try to let Him know she was available for these things if He cared to give her a sign. But she felt nothing, only the drops of sweat arriving once more above her lip and beneath her arms in the heat of this small bedroom. She was tired. God was probably tired as well. She sat up and slipped on her bathrobe and went down to the kitchen to eat with her daughter. It was difficult. For the most part they avoided each other's eyes, and Amy did not seem to find it necessary to take on the responsibility of a conversation. This stranger, my daughter. It could be a title for something in the Reader's Digest, if it hadn't already been done, and maybe it had, because it sounded familiar to Isabelle. Well, she wasn't going to think anymore, couldn't stand to think anymore. She fingered the Belleek china creamer sitting on the table in front of her, the delicate, shell-like, shimmering creamer that had belonged to her mother. Amy had filled it for Isabelle's tea;

Isabelle liked tea with her meals when the weather was hot. Isabelle, unable to contain her curiosity and telling herself that all things considered she had every right to know, said finally, "Who were you talking to on the telephone?" "Stacy Burrows." This was said flatly, right before hamburger meat was pushed into Amy's mouth. Isabelle sliced one of the canned beets on her plate, trying to place this Stacy girl's face. "Blue eyes?" "What?" "Is she the girl with the big blue eyes and red hair?" "I guess so." Amy frowned slightly. She was annoyed at the way her mother's face was tilted on the end of her long neck, like some kind of garter snake. And she hated the smell of baby powder. "You guess so?" "I mean, yeah, that's her." There was the faint sound of silverware touching the plates; they both chewed so quietly their mouths barely moved. "What is it her father does for a living?" Isabelle eventually asked. "Is he connected to the college somehow?" She knew he was certainly not connected to the mill. Amy shrugged with food in her mouth. "Mmm-know." "Well you must have some idea what the man does for a living." Amy took a swallow of milk and wiped her mouth with her hand. "Please." Isabelle dropped her eyelids with disgust, and Amy wiped with a napkin this time. "He teaches there, I guess," Amy acknowledged. "Teaches what." "Psychology. I think." There was nothing to say to that. If it was true, then to Isabelle it meant simply that the man was crazy. She did not know why Amy needed to choose the daughter of a crazy man to be friends with. She pictured him with a beard, and then remembered that the Mr. Robertson horror had had a beard as well, and her heart began to beat so fast she became almost breathless. The scent of baby powder rose from her chest. "What," said Amy, looking up, although her head was still bent forward over her plate, a piece of toast, the inner edge soggy and bloodied with meat, about to go into her mouth. Isabelle shook her head and gazed past her at the white curtain that billowed slightly in the window. It was like a car accident, she thought. How afterward you kept saying to yourself, If only the truck had already gone through the intersection by the time I got there. If only Mr. Robertson had passed through town before Amy got to high school. But you get into your car, your mind on other things, and all the while the truck is rumbling off the exit ramp, pulling into town, and you are pulling into town. And then it's over and your life will never be the same. Isabelle rubbed crumbs from her fingertips. Already it seemed hard to remember what their lives had been like before this summer. There had been anxieties-Isabelle could certainly remember that. There was never enough money, and it seemed she always had a run in her stocking (Isabelle never wore stockings that had a run, except when she lied about it and said it had just happened), and Amy had school projects due, some foolish relief map requiring clay and foam rubber, a sewing project in home ec class-those things cost money too. But now, eating her hamburger and toast across from her daughter (this stranger) while the hazy early evening sunlight fell against the stove and across the floor, Isabelle was filled with longing for those days, for the privilege of worrying about ordinary things. She said, because the silence of their eating was oppressive, and because she did not dare, somehow, return to the subject of Stacy, "That Bev. She really smokes too much. And she eats too much too." "I know," Amy answered. "Use your napkin, please." She couldn't help it: the sight of Amy licking ketchup from her fingers made her almost insane. Just like that, anger reared its ready head and filled Isabelle's voice with coldness. Only there might have been more than coldness, to be honest. To be really honest, you might say there had been the edge of hatred in her voice. And now Isabelle hated herself as well. She would take the remark back if she could, except it was too late, and poking at a sliced beet with her fork, she saw how Amy rolled her paper napkin beneath her palm, then put it on her plate. "She's nice, though," Amy said. "I think Fat Bev is nice." "No one said she wasn't nice." The evening stretched before them interminably; the hazy, muted sunlight had barely moved across the floor. Amy sat with her hands in her lap, her neck thrust forward like one of those foolish toy dogs you could sometimes see in the back of a car, whose head wagged back and forth at stop signs. "Oh, sit up straight," Isabelle wanted to say, but instead she said wearily, "You may be excused. I'll do the dishes tonight." Amy seemed to hesitate. In the olden days one would not leave the table until the other one was through. This practice, this courtesy, dated back to when Amy was a toddler, a slow eater always, perched on top of two Sears catalogues placed on her chair, her skinny legs dangling down. "Mommy," she would say anxiously, seeing that Isabelle was done with her meal, "will you still sit with me?" And Isabelle always sat. Many nights Isabelle was tired and restless, and frankly, she would have preferred to spend the time flipping through a magazine to relax, or at least to get up and get started on the dishes. And yet she would not tell the child to hurry, she did not want to upset that small digestive tract. It was their time together. She sat. Those days Amy had stayed at Esther Hatch's house while Isabelle was at work. An awful place, that Hatch house was-a run-down farmhouse on the outskirts of town, filled with babies and cats and the smell of cat urine. But it was the only arrangement Isabelle could afford. What was she supposed to do? She hated leaving Amy there, though, hated how Amy never said

good-bye, how she would go immediately to the front window instead, climbing up on the couch to watch her mother drive away. Sometimes Isabelle would wave without looking as she backed down the driveway, because she couldn't bear to look. It was like something had been pushed down her throat to see Amy at the window like that, with her pale, unsmiling face. Esther Hatch said she never cried. But there was one period of time when Amy would do nothing except sit in a chair, and Esther Hatch complained that it gave her the willies, that if Amy couldn't get up and run around like a normal child she wasn't sure she could keep taking her in. This made Isabelle panic. She bought Amy a doll at Woolworth's, a plastic thing with springy, coarse platinum hair. The head fell off right away, but Amy seemed to love it. Not the doll so much as the head of the doll. She carried the head everywhere she went, and colored the plastic lips red. And apparently she stopped confining herself to a chair at Esther Hatch's house, because the woman did not complain to Isabelle again. But it was clear, then, why Isabelle would sit with the girl each night at their table in the kitchen. "Sing Itty Bitty Spider?" Amy might ask sweetly, squeezing a lima bean between her small fingers. And Isabelle-it was horrible-would say no. She would say no, she was too tired. But Amy was such a sweet little thing-she was so happy to have her mother right there, a mere arm's length across the table. Her legs would swing with happiness, her small wet mouth open in a smile, tiny teeth like white pebbles set in her pink gums. Isabelle closed her eyes, a familiar ache beginning in the center of her breastbone. But she had sat there, hadn't she? She had done that. "Please," she said now, opening her eyes. "You may be excused." Amy got up and left the room. The curtain moved again. This was a good sign, if Isabelle had been able to think about it that way, the evening air moving enough to move the curtain, a breeze strong enough to ripple the curtain lightly, holding itself out from the sill for a moment as though it were the dress of a pregnant woman, and then, just as quickly, silently falling back in its place, a few of its folds touching the screen. But Isabelle did not think that at least there was a breeze. She thought instead that the curtains needed to be washed, that they had not been washed in quite some time. Casting her eye about the kitchen, she was glad to see that at least the faucets shone, and the counters did not seem streaky, as they sometimes did, with the dried remains of cleanser. And there was the Belleek china creamer that had belonged to her mother, the delicate, shell-like, shimmering thing. Amy was the one who had brought it down from the cupboard a few months before and suggested they use it each night. "It was your mother's," Amy said, "and you like it so much." Isabelle had said all right. But now, suddenly, it seemed dangerous; a thing so easily to be swept by a sleeve, a bare arm, and smashed to bits on the floor. Isabelle rose and wrapped the leftover part of her hamburger in wax paper and put it in the refrigerator. She washed the plates, red-stained water from the beets swirling into the white sink. Only when the dishes were done and put away did she wash the Belleek china creamer. She washed it carefully, and dried it carefully, then put it far back in the cupboard, where it couldn't be seen. She heard Amy come out of her bedroom and move to the top of the stairs. Just as Isabelle was about to say that she didn't want the Belleek creamer used anymore, that it was too special a thing and too apt to get broken, Amy called down the stairs, "Mom, Stacy's pregnant. I just wanted you to know."Revue de presse"One of those rare, invigorating books that take an apparently familiar world and peer into it with ruthless intimacy, revealing a strange and startling place." -- The New York Times Book "Strout's insights into the complex psychology bewteen [mother and daughter] result in a poignant tale about two coming of age." -- Time"Impressive....Strout writes with abundant warmth." --People"Poignant...sensitively imagined...[Amy and Isabelle] recalls the elgegiac charm of Our Town." --The Christian Science Monitor"Stunning....Every once in a while, a novel comes along that plunges deep into your psyche, leaving you breathless....This year that novel is Amy and Isabelle." --San Francisco Chronicle"A novel of shining integrity and humor, about the bravery and hard choices of what is called ordinary life." --Alice Munro"Excellent....Strout's collective portrait...remains unflaggingly engaging....[W]hat a pleasure to gain entry into the world of this book." --The New Yorker"Lovely, powerful...a kind if modern 'Rapunzel.'" --Newsweek"Amy and Isabelle is an impressive debut....with an expansiveness and inventiveness that is the mark of a true storyteller." --The Philadelphia Inquirer