

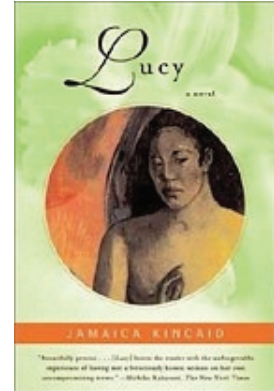
Voices
from the
Gaps*Lucy*
by Jamaica Kincaid**A Stranger in Your Own Skin**

I had begun to see the past like this: there is a line; you can draw it yourself, or sometimes it gets drawn for you; either way, there it is, your past, a collection of people you used to be and things you used to do. Your past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in.

— *Jamaica Kincaid*

Moving to a new region of the world makes you a stranger to your surroundings, growing from a child into an adult makes you a stranger in your own skin. In Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy*, a young woman follows her lifelong dream of leaving her small room and childhood bed and moving to a place that she has always dreamed of. A place filled with buildings, streets and bridges that she read about in her school books. It is only after she gets to this new place that she questions exactly why she had dreamed of leaving all she ever knew to live in a cold, dismal, ordinary place. As Lucy struggles to make a place for herself in North America, she also fights an inner emotional battle with herself to recreate the person she once was into the person she is learning to be.

Lucy experiences American culture with her eyes wide open, what she had before regarded as things beyond her wildest imagination soon became a reality to her. "Everything I was experiencing—the ride in the elevator, being in an apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator—was such a good idea that I could imagine I would grow used to it and like it very much, but at first it was all so new that I had to smile with my mouth turned down at the corners" (4). And since reality can never live up to the idealized imagination, she was often disappointed by what she found and saw. This brought her to, at times, long for the familiar smells, tastes, sights of her past. When she receives letters from her mother she is eventually unable to open or read them because the words would cause a wave of homesickness to wash over her.



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Reviewed by Jessica Barwick



Lucy

by Jamaica Kincaid

The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every spoken word, every face? (31)

Homesickness, which many foreigners suffer from, does strange things to the perceptions of these travelers. For it is often when you are far from home that you feel more in love with your home than ever before. For Lucy, who longed her whole life to leave where she came from, finally did, and then found herself wondering why someone, meaning herself, would ever want to leave a place filled with so much warmth and beauty. While she was there, she couldn't wait to leave, and while she was gone, she couldn't wait to return.

Lucy blocks out memories of her own mother, and refuses to read letters from her. Instead she forms a friendship with the woman she is living with and working for, Mariah. Lucy learns a lot about what being a woman means from Mariah. She learns tolerance and eventually perseverance from Mariah, as she watches Mariah's seemingly flawless life fall to pieces as her husband leaves her for her best-friend. Lucy learns things from Mariah that Lucy's own mother would have never thought to teach. Lucy states, "I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn't know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone" (36). Mariah takes Lucy to the places, hopes and dreams of her own childhood. These things remind Lucy of where she comes from and why she has become the person she is, the person she so longs to leave behind.

Eventually Lucy finds herself comfortable with the new world around her. She is no longer in awe of the change of seasons, the refrigerator, tall buildings. It is then, when she is somewhat comfortable with her surroundings that she questions the new person she is. She no longer knows who she is. Her sexuality is heightened, her passion increased. Lucy falls in love not with the men she is sleeping with, but with the power her sexuality gives her. Power not over men, but power to control her own happiness. Lucy says, "...what an adventure this part of my life had become, and how much I looked forward to it, because I had not known that such pleasure could exist and, what was more, be available to me" (113). Lucy transforms from a lost child into an intuitive female who no longer questions what she has left behind and why. This novel does not have an ending, because it is a beginning. Lucy's own life has only just begun as Jamaica Kincaid writes in the final chapter that Lucy writes in her first chapter, "I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it."