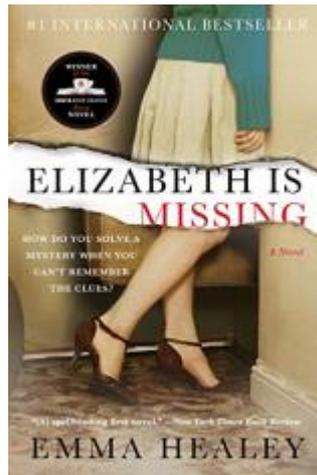


Book Club

Elizabeth is Missing by Emma Healey



In this darkly riveting debut novel, a sophisticated psychological mystery, one woman will stop at nothing to find her best friend, who seems to have gone missing...

Despite Maud's growing anxiety about Elizabeth's welfare, no one takes her concerns seriously --- not her frustrated daughter, not her caretakers, not the police and especially not Elizabeth's mercurial son --- because Maud suffers from dementia. But even as her memory disintegrates and she becomes increasingly dependent on the trail of handwritten notes she leaves for herself in her pockets and around her house, Maud cannot forget her best friend. Armed with only an overwhelming feeling that Elizabeth needs her help, Maud resolves to discover the truth --- no matter what it takes.

As this singular obsession forms a cornerstone of Maud's rapidly dissolving present, the clues she uncovers lead her deeper into her past, to another unsolved disappearance: that of her sister, Sukey, who vanished shortly after World War II. As vivid memories of a tragedy that occurred more than 50 years ago come flooding back, Maud's search for Elizabeth develops a frantic momentum. Whom can she trust? Can she trust herself?

A page-turning novel of suspense *ELIZABETH IS MISSING* also hauntingly reminds us that we are all at the mercy of our memory. Always compelling, often poignant, and at times even blackly witty, this is an absolutely unforgettable novel.

1. Did you enjoy reading this book?
2. What key details are introduced in the Prologue?
3. Consider the prominent image of summer squash in the novel. What are the various effects of the repeated references?
4. How does the consistent shift from present to past affect the telling of the story?
5. What is the importance and effect of "the mad woman" throughout the novel?
6. Consider Douglas and Frank. Both seemingly have moments of menace and kindness. In what ways are they similar or different?
7. Throughout her life, but especially once her sister Sukey goes missing, Maud collects random, found objects. In what various ways do physical objects come to possess meaning or value?
8. At one point, speaking to Frank, Maud denies that she has secrets, but then admits to liking the idea. In what ways might secrets be important and can they be unhealthy?
9. Late in the novel, Maud touches something of her sister's and says, "The contact makes it possible to breathe again." What is she experiencing?
10. What does Maud's granddaughter Katy bring to the novel?
11. Consider the Epilogue. What is the effect of ending the novel with the lyric swirl of Maud's receding memories?

"A few years ago, before I finished writing my debut novel, Elizabeth Is Missing, I gave the manuscript to my grandmother Nancy. She read it aloud and when she'd got through several pages she stopped, looked up, and asked if it was about her. I felt I'd been caught out. Nancy has multi-infarct dementia and lives in a nursing home in Scotland. I explained that, although the novel was about memory loss, the story was completely fictional and the main character, Maud — a woman who is sinking into the fog of dementia while trying to solve two mysteries, one in the present and one in 1946 — was not like her at all. She seemed satisfied with this and read on for a bit,..."

Emma Healey - June 2014 (Sunday Times article)