

Elizabeth Is Missing

Harper Perennial

by Emma Healey

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Introduction

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....

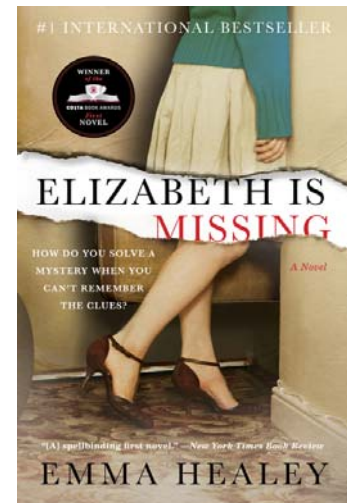
Despite Maud's growing anxiety about Elizabeth's welfare, no one takes her concerns seriously—not her frustrated daughter, not her caretakers, not the police, and especially not Elizabeth's mercurial son—because Maud suffers from dementia. But even as her memory disintegrates and she becomes increasingly 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 fifty 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.

Questions for Discussion

1. What interesting and complex narrative effects result from the narrator having such difficulty with her memory?
2. Consider the prominent image of summer squash in the novel. What connotations does it add to the story? What are the various effects of the repeated references?
3. What key details are introduced in the Prologue?
4. How does the consistent shift from present to past affect the telling of the story? How does the author transition between them?
5. In Chapter 1 there are several allusions to Little Red Riding Hood. In what ways might this fairy tale be relevant to the story?



6. Carla, one of Maud's caregivers, often tells of horrible crimes she's read about in the news. What does this add to the novel? How does it affect Maud?
 7. What is the difference between something or someone being missing, lost, or gone? Consider various points of view.
 8. In what relevant ways does the war—and all the lengthy separations it causes—affect the people and relationships in the novel?
 9. What is the importance and effect of "the mad woman" throughout the novel?
 10. Consider Douglas and Frank. Both seemingly have moments of menace and kindness. In what ways are they similar or different?
 11. In Chapter 10, Maud, having forgotten what room she was headed to, says, "I must be going mad." In what ways is she similar to or different from the mad woman?
 12. What does the subject of Maud's childhood illness add to the story?
 13. 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?
 14. Of what particular significance to the novel is the detail of Maud collecting "boxes full of disintegrating bees and wasps and beetles"?
 15. 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? How can they be unhealthy?
 16. 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?
 17. What does Maud's granddaughter Katy bring to the novel?
 18. Consider the Epilogue. What is the effect of ending the novel with the lyric swirl of Maud's receding memories?
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