



Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel

By Emma Healey



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HOW DO YOU SOLVE A MYSTERY WHEN YOU CAN'T REMEMBER THE CLUES?

In this darkly riveting debut novel—a sophisticated psychological mystery that is also an heartbreakingly honest meditation on memory, identity, and aging—an elderly woman descending into dementia embarks on a desperate quest to find the best friend she believes has disappeared, and her search for the truth will go back decades and have shattering consequences.

Maud, an aging grandmother, is slowly losing her memory—and her grip on everyday life. Yet she refuses to forget her best friend Elizabeth, whom she is convinced is missing and in terrible danger.

But no one will listen to Maud—not her frustrated daughter, Helen, not her caretakers, not the police, and especially not Elizabeth’s mercurial son, Peter. Armed with handwritten notes she leaves for herself and an overwhelming feeling that Elizabeth needs her help, Maud resolves to discover the truth and save her beloved friend.

This singular obsession forms a cornerstone of Maud’s rapidly dissolving present. But the clues she discovers seem only to lead her deeper into her past, to another unsolved disappearance: her sister, Sukey, who vanished shortly after World War II.

As vivid memories of a tragedy that occurred more fifty years ago come flooding back, Maud discovers new momentum in her search for her friend. Could the mystery of Sukey’s disappearance hold the key to finding Elizabeth?

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Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel By Emma Healey Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review



Kimberly McCreight



Emma Healey

Kimberly McCreight, author of the New York Times bestselling *Reconstructing Amelia*, interviews Emma Healey

Kimberly McCreight (KM): One of the things I most admire about *Elizabeth Is Missing*—and there is so much to admire—is the utterly convincing voice of Maud, both in her advanced years and when she is much younger. How did you tackle the challenge of presenting a single character at such disparate times within a single narrative?

Emma Healey (EH): I'm so glad it's convincing, thank you. I started with Maud's voice as an eighty-year-old and found that only needed a little adjusting to take her back into childhood. The voice overall is very much based on my mother's mother, Vera. I was very close to her and she had (ironically) a brilliant memory and had lots of stories to tell about her early life. I spent most of my school holidays with her, so remembering and sticking to the kind of words she would have used gave me a guide for Maud's lexicon. Voice is so much about vocabulary. I do have to say though, I think writing from the point-of-view of a single character, even in two time frames, is much easier than swapping between characters. Reading *Reconstructing Amelia*, I am amazed at how well you alternate a first-person and third-person narrative, from the point-of-view of a teenager and a mother, as well as using Facebook statuses and text messages, all in one novel. I should be asking you how you made that work so well!

KM: Was there something that drew you to writing about a character losing her grip on reality, particularly one struggling with dementia?

EH: The initial inspiration for the book came from my father's mother, Nancy, who has multi-infarct dementia, but my aunt's mother-in-law had suffered from Alzheimer's for several years before that and other members of my family had had various forms of dementia. At the time, dementia wasn't something that was being talked about so much and I was fascinated (as well as terrified and upset) by the way a person could come and go—one minute their old selves, the next in a world of their own. Their patterns of behavior could be anything from perfectly reasonable to completely bizarre and it seemed like there was a lot more going on under the surface, which was difficult to discover or explain, and this seemed ripe for fictional exploration.

KM: Elizabeth is Missing has such a smooth, flawless structure. You move so nimbly through time, without relying on chapter breaks or some such device to delineate different sections. It works so well that I think any demarcations would have interfered with the story. Can you talk a bit about the decision to include chapters that switch back and forth through time?

EH: Thank you. Again, I'm really glad you think so. The structure happened fairly organically. I felt that a dialogue between current and past events was truer to the way memories work – they break into your immediate thoughts, rather than wait for you to decide to have them – and I wanted the sections to be relatively short in order to mirror the fragmentary experience of dementia. Not dividing the past and present into separate chapters made it easier too to increase the length of the past story as Maud's preoccupation with it intensified (and as her awareness of the world around her faded), without signaling too heavily to the reader and without losing the thread or balance of either narrative.

KM: Your book is both a compelling emotional story as well as a mystery. Which comes first for you?

EH: I find plotting a book very exciting, and really enjoy trying to weave in narrative strands and tie up all the ends, but I have to feel there is some real experience behind the story, some "truth" that I'm attempting to represent, too. And these two things seem to me to be inextricably linked. It's much easier to engage emotionally when there is an intriguing story unfolding – a dull character or a character in a dull situation is difficult to take an interest in, even if they are sympathetic. Similarly, for a mystery to work and for the reader to care whether, and how, it is solved, there needs to be a certain amount of emotional investment in the characters and themes.

KM: I couldn't agree more. There needs to be a constant dialogue between character and story. Trying to achieve that balance is, for me, one of the greatest joys and the greatest challenges of being a novelist. What's your biggest challenge as a writer?

EH: Being a writer means being constantly mentally engaged. This is great in some ways as it's exciting and gives a context and significance to every aspect of life, but it also means there are no off-duty hours. So anytime I'm not writing (or not observing, listening, note-taking), I'm feeling guilty about it. Justifying writing is sometimes difficult, too: Why this subject? Why this character? But most of all, why me? What can I offer that another writer couldn't? A terrible question because the answer is invariably nothing.

KM: You're right, that "why" is very important. It inevitably pushes your story to a much stronger place. What's your background? Elizabeth is Missing is such an accomplished debut, I'm assuming—okay, maybe hoping—there was some writing that came before it. Otherwise, I might be far too jealous.

EH: Ha ha! Well, I wrote lots of bits of things, of course, but I hadn't really finished anything before Elizabeth is Missing. My first degree was in Book Arts, and the course did offer a Creative Writing module, but I was too shy to take it. Instead, I learned how to sew pages together and foil block and print. I was

always an avid reader though, and I began to take short courses in writing and editing after I graduated and started the novel while I was working in an art gallery in London. I also found a workshop group, which was brilliant and gave me the confidence to experiment and find Maud's voice. Eventually, I went back to university to get my MA in Creative Writing at UEA.

KM: Well, I certainly can't wait to see what you do next. Best wishes with Elizabeth is Missing. It's such a wonderful book.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Your best friend doesn't respond to calls or knocks on the door. A moving van is loaded with your friend's possessions. Your friend's son, a nasty, grasping type, seems to have taken over. You report what's going on to the police, to your daughter, to anyone who will listen. No one believes you. You hardly know whether to believe yourself since you know that your memory, lately, has gotten so bad. This is the predicament facing Maud Horsham, a woman who survived the London Blitz and is now sinking into dementia. Part of the wallop of this mystery is that a woman with declining memory and mental powers is placed in the position of detective. This adds to the urgency of her quest, since Maud is battling the condescension of her caretakers, the police, and her daughter as her faculties fade. Another part of the power of this debut novel is that Maud is the narrator; this choice of point of view gives readers a lens on the casual cruelties inflicted on the aging, especially those with dementia. Maud writes everything down, to help her remember clues about her missing friend, and she also writes down how she is treated. Maud focuses on a second mystery as well, the disappearance of her sister, Sukey, after the war. Part mystery, part meditation on memory, part Dickensian revelation of how apparent charity may hurt its recipients, this is altogether brilliant. --Connie Fletcher

Review

Praise for *Elizabeth Is Missing*:

"Spellbinding." *The New York Times*

"Engaging and beautifully written.... *Elizabeth Is Missing* not only introduces, in Maud, an unforgettable and poignant character, but it also heralds, in Healey, a new talent with a remarkable knack for observation and an ear for dialogue." *Toronto Star*

"A page turner; clever, well-written and full of insight." *The London Free Press*

"A compelling work that crosses literary genres.... Bold, touching and hugely memorable." *The Sunday Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Nguyen:

The feeling that you get from Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel may be the more deep you digging the

information that hide into the words the more you get considering reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel giving you excitement feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in certain way that can be understood by simply anyone who read it because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your own personal vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel instantly.

Nancy Rush:

In this period of time globalization it is important to someone to acquire information. The information will make someone to understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information better to share. You can find a lot of sources to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended for your requirements is Elizabeth Is Missing: A Novel this publication consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. That book was represented how can the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some investigation when he makes this book. That is why this book suited all of you.

Harold Scott:

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