



### Emma Healey

*'I grew up in London where I completed my first degree in bookbinding and was the third generation of women in my family to go to art college. I then worked for two libraries, two bookshops, two art galleries and two universities, and was busily pursuing a career in the art world before writing overtook everything. In 2008, after the death of one grandmother and the decline of the other, I began to explore the idea of dementia in fiction, and I moved to Norwich in 2010 to study for an MA in Creative Writing.'*

Her debut novel, *Elizabeth is Missing*, was published to critical acclaim in 2014, became a Sunday Times bestseller and won the Costa First Novel Award. (<http://emmahealey.co.uk>)

### **Look at the book cover, the author's photograph and short biography:**

- Describe the book cover (and the author). Be as precise as you can.
- Select one or two interesting pieces of information about the author.
- Draw conclusions :
  - o What do you expect the book to be about?
  - o Imagine who the main character or narrator could be.
  - o In your opinion, where could the book be set? When?
  - o Think of a plot. (use your vivid imagination)
- Get ready to report to the class. (Speak for two minutes minimum)

## **Now read about the book:**

Were you right? About the main character, the setting (time and place), the plot?

Select information that you think is important.

From what you have learnt so far, would you like to read the book? Why? Why not?

Get ready to report to the class.

## **Synopsis and Reviews**

### **Synopsis One (<http://emmahealey.co.uk>)**

Maud's been getting forgetful. She keeps buying peach slices when she has a cupboard full, forgets to drink the cups of tea she's made and writes notes to remind herself of things. But Maud is determined to discover what has happened to her friend, Elizabeth, and what it has to do with the unsolved disappearance of her sister Sukey just after the Second World War.

### **Synopsis Two ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk))**

The story starts where we meet Maud, an aging grandmother with dementia who is slowly losing her memory and her grip on everyday life. She refuses to forget her best friend Elizabeth, who she is convinced is missing and in terrible danger. Equipped 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 but no one will listen to Maud - not her frustrated daughter, Helen, not her caretakers, not the police, and especially not Elizabeth's temperamental son, Peter.

This story is set in two time frames - Maud's past and the present day. The singular obsession of Maud finding Elizabeth 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?

### **Reviews**

The novel is both a gripping detective yarn and a haunting depiction of mental illness, but also more poignant and blackly comic than you might expect from that description... perhaps Healey's greatest achievement is the flawless voice she creates for Maud. **(The Observer)**

A compelling mystery that capture the experience of Maud, a highly memorable elderly woman losing her memory **(Sunday Express)**

A thrillingly assured, haunting and unsettling novel, I read it at a gulp **(Deborah Moggach)**

One of those semi-mythical beasts, the book you cannot put down **(Jonathan Coe)**

.....already being tipped for literary stardom. At the London Book Fair last April, nine publishers fought for her debut, *Elizabeth is Missing*... a tale of dementia, its TV rights have already been sold.

**(Evening Standard's Fourteen in 2014)**

Memory - or the lack of it - continues to be a big theme in fiction. The manuscript of this debut mystery narrated by an 81 year old who can't quite remember what she's investigating created a buzz at the London book fair in 2013 **(Guardian's 2014 Books)**

*Elizabeth is Missing* will stir and shake you: an investigation into a seventy-year-old crime, through the eyes of the most likeably unreliable of narrators. But the real mystery at its compassionate core is the fragmentation of the human mind. **(Emma Donoghue, award-winning author of Room)**

### **3 more reviews from Amazon.UK**

I really could not say that I "enjoyed" reading this book, as the subject matter was too near the bone for me at times. My mother had Alzheimer's & now my MIL is going down the same route. I found some of the things Maud says & does were so like some of the experiences we had (& are having) with our mothers. However having said that, I could not put this book down. It was fascinating seeing all the confusion from the other side of the fence, as it were & I had tears in my eyes several times as I realised just how scary all the experiences must have been for my mother. I say a huge "bravo" to Emma Healey for her so accurate descriptions of the confused old lady...& her loved ones who struggle hard to look after her & keep her safe - not always an easy job. Do read this book...especially if you are dealing with anyone who is suffering from memory loss or Alzheimer's.

I am so impressed with this new author's ability to portray the travails of dementia, both from the main character's viewpoint (who is suffering from the onset of dementia) and her family's viewpoint. The dual mysteries of a present and a past disappearance are revealed through the veil of forgetfulness, and the actions of other characters. Having been through this with my own mother, I thought it was extremely realistic, and the "repetitive" parts that other readers have mentioned simply illustrate the repetitive nature of someone with dementia.

At one level, this is a murder mystery that never gets solved. But it is really a journey into the mind of one who suffers from dementia. That may be frightening to those concerned about their own future mental health, which may include most of us, but it is a journey worth taking. My central question in reading this novel was how the author can know what is in the mind of the dementia sufferer. The answer is that she cannot, but this description feels right, as right as I can imagine one can get. The fact that nothing gets resolved in this novel may be disturbing to some, but that is the essence of life, with or without dementia.

**NOW, PRESENT THE BOOK (PLOT, CHARACTERS AND SETTING), ITS AUTHOR, YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND TELL THE CLASS WHY YOU WOULD OR WOULDN'T LIKE TO READ IT (AND MEET EMMA HEALEY) . (SPEAK FOR 4 MINUTES MINIMUM)**

**NEW VOCABULARY YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE CLASS:**