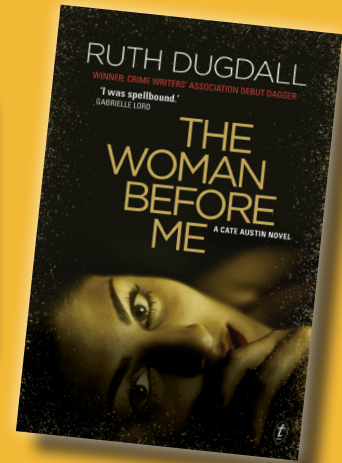


The Woman Before Me

Ruth Dugdall

ISBN 978-1-921922-89-3
RRP AUS \$29.99, NZ \$37.00

Fiction, Paperback



Praise for *The Woman Before Me*

'Dark, disturbing and authentic.' *CWA judging panel*

'Impressive in its unflinching realism, this is a dark and haunting psychological thriller that possesses both depth and sensitivity.' *Crime Time*

'Authentic... diverting.' *The Daily Mail*

'Just when I thought I'd got it sussed, I'm proved wrong. This is a clever and suspenseful story told in an engaging style.' *The Book Bag*

About Ruth Dugdall

Ruth Dugdall is a British crime writer. She worked for almost a decade in the criminal justice system as a probation officer, specialising in the most extreme crimes when she was seconded to a high security prison. Her first novel, *The James Version*, is a historical fiction based on the notorious murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn, Suffolk. *The Woman Before Me*, the first novel to feature probation officer Cate Austin, won the CWA Debut Dagger, the 2009 Luke Bitmead Bursary Award and was shortlisted for the 2011 People's Book Prize. *The Sacrificial Man* is Ruth's third novel.

A reader's introduction to *The Woman Before Me*

They came for me, just like I knew they would. Luke had been dead for just three days.

Rose Wilks' life is shattered when her newborn baby Joel is admitted to intensive care.

Emma Hatcher has all that Rose lacks. Beauty. A loving husband. A healthy son. Until tragedy strikes and Rose is the only suspect.

Now, having spent nearly five years behind bars, Rose is just weeks away from freedom. Her probation officer Cate must decide whether Rose is remorseful for Luke's death, or whether she remains a threat to society. As Cate is drawn in, she begins to doubt her own judgment.

Where is the line between love and obsession? Can justice be served and, if so... by what means?

Ruth Dugdall's *The Woman Before Me* is a brilliant and compelling thriller.

Questions for Discussion

1. The novel starts with Rose entering Emma's house, and then we are told that Luke is dead and Rose has been arrested. Do you think she is guilty? Are your sympathies with her?
2. Rose is telling her story to Jason via her Black Book. What do you think is the purpose of this book?
3. Emma is 'the woman before me', yet the novel is really about several women. Whose story is it?
4. In what way does Rose's childhood make her the woman she becomes?
5. Discuss the various portrayals of motherhood in the novel: Rose, Rose's mother, Emma and Cate.
6. Has reading this novel made you think differently about women who are accused of infanticide?
7. How does the prison environment affect Rose and Cate's relationship?
8. Rose says that her one achievement in life was making Jason want her after having Emma. Is she right?
9. Who is to blame for Rose's jealousy and her stalking Emma?
10. With which character did you most identify and why?
11. In what ways does the symbolism of the birds nest work with the story?
12. How did you feel at the end of the novel? Is it a satisfying conclusion?
13. Rose receives messages from her mother and Auntie Rita. Are these real or in Rose's imagination?
14. In what ways are Rose's and Emma's lives the same and in what ways are they different?

15. Was Jason a likeable character? Why has he stayed with Rose?
16. Could anything have saved Joel and Luke?
17. What future do you predict for Rose and Emma? What about Cate?
18. Is this novel a typical crime novel, or does it try to break the convention? Does it succeed?