

READERS' GUIDE

Semi-Detached by Elizabeth Ruth

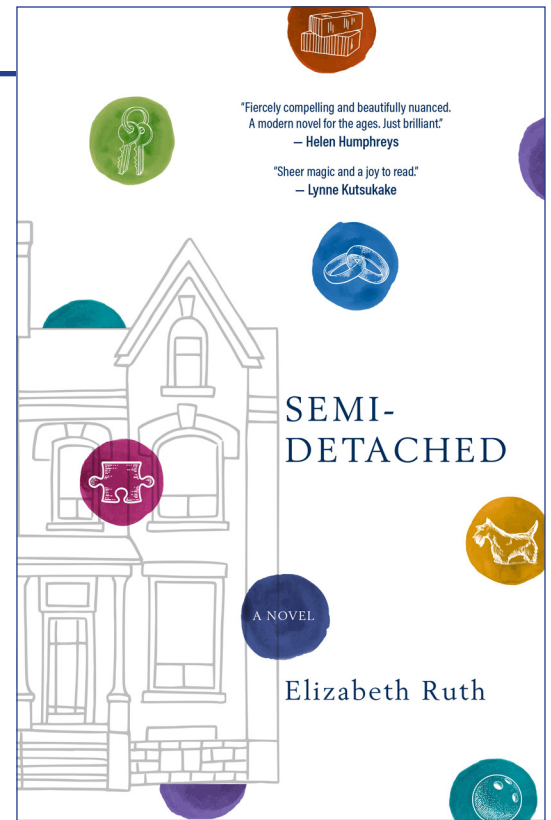
INTRODUCING *Semi-Detached*

Hearts may freeze or thaw, but love never dies.

In December 2013, an ice storm buries Toronto as realtor Laura Keys prepares to sell a one-of-a-kind house on behalf of its comatose owner. Haunting Laura, and longing to be invited in, is a mysterious teenage girl with a Scottish terrier tucked into her coat.

As Laura readies the house for showing, she learns more about its owner, Edna “Eddie” Ferguson. Leading up to the Great Snowstorm of 1944, Eddie, a brickmaker, enters into a passionate yet ill-fated affair with her boss’s daughter. While uncovering the past, Laura navigates both the death of her mother and a troubled marriage straining under the weight of her infertility.

Across two paralyzing winter storms, set nearly seventy years apart and connected by a house and a murder, *Semi-Detached* contends with living after loss, love, and the meaning of home.



ABOUT ELIZABETH

Elizabeth Ruth is the author of the critically acclaimed novels *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*, *Smoke*, and *Matadora*. Her work has been recognized by the Writers’ Trust of Canada Fiction Prize, the City of Toronto Book Award, the Amazon.ca Best First Novel Award, and One Book One Community. CBC named her “One of the Ten Canadian Women Writers You Must Read.” Elizabeth is also the author of a plain language novella for adult literacy learners entitled *Love You To Death* and the editor of the anthology *Bent On Writing, contemporary queer tales*. Before publishing, Elizabeth worked with homeless women and children, counselling in the areas of violence, trauma and recovery. She holds a BA in English Literature, an MA in Counselling Psychology, and an MFA in Creative Writing. Elizabeth Ruth teaches creative writing at the University of Toronto and lives in the city with her family. www.elizabethruth.com

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a highly atmospheric novel that alternates between 1944 and 2013. How does the author connect the two time periods? What mirroring or juxtapositions have been set up between the storylines?
2. What is the significance of ice in this novel – of freezing and thawing – to the characters' inner worlds and lives?
3. Brickmaking is an important part of Toronto's labour history. How does Eddie's job at the brick pit complicate the 1944 storyline and its romantic relationship?
4. This author often writes the lives of working-class characters or those who attempt to cross the class divide. In *Semi-Detached*, how does she explore class issues? Did you notice elements of the story that are straddling two worlds?
5. How is Laura's relationship to her job as a real estate agent presented in the novel? And how does real estate relate to the theme of "home"?
6. Dealing with infertility and grief, Laura withholds a key piece of information from Cat. Why does she do this? What would you do if you were in Laura's situation?
7. There are several versions of motherhood presented in this novel through Marilyn, Frances, Beth, Laura, and Cat. How are these women's lives constrained by the circumstances of their time and place, and by their identification (or disidentification) with traditional notions of motherhood? Are any of their "choices" free?
8. In what ways is *Semi-Detached* an unconventional ghost story? What or who is haunting this tale?
9. What do you think the author is trying to say about love?
10. What is the significance of the title, *Semi-Detached*, and where does it appear in the novel?