



The Woman before Me

Ruth Dugdall

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The interweaving of past events and present circumstances creates a delightful though solemn cadence.

Ruth Dugdall brings some of her own life experience to this fictional tale of a probation officer charged with making a parole decision concerning the case of a deeply disturbed woman.

Heartbroken after the loss of her infant son, Rose Wilks takes comfort in spending time with her friend Emma's newborn son. It isn't long before things go horribly awry, however, and Rose finds herself accused of a horrific crime involving Emma's family. In the wake of committing what Rose considers to be the ultimate sacrifice in the name of motherly love, lives are torn apart. Intent on making a success of her first parole decision at her new job, Cate Austin comes to realize that she, also a mother, may have more to learn from Rose than the criminal herself does.

While one chapter highlights Rose's devotion to her child, the next chapter shares details about a young Rose and her relationship with her own mother years before. Rose's early relationships are well captured and brilliantly written, with events relayed detail by detail—every morsel is important; every emotion raw and real.

Throughout the narrative, it is clear that the author is knowledgeable both as a mother and as a probation officer; citing things like parental guilt and the plight of a woman working in a predominantly male profession. This expertise enhances an already compelling writing style. Clever references such as laughing "like a spoon in a glass" bring a unique way of looking at and expressing ideas.

Written almost in letter format, many of the chapters share important details of Rose's life and are addressed to her lover, Jason. As she pieces the story of her life together for him, it is only fitting that we learn things as he does. The other chapters follow a typical storytelling format.

Intended for a UK audience but engaging for all, *The Woman Before Me* is sure to please anyone interested in a story about love, loyalty, and loss.

LAURA MAHON (Fall 2015)

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