



★ **This Is the House That Luke Built**

Violet Browne

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Set in Newfoundland, Violet Browne's evocative, lyrical novel *This Is the House That Luke Built* is about a woman from a small fishing village who loses her husband at sea.

The novel traces fifty years in Rose's life via brief, powerful vignettes, from her girlhood fishing trip with her father to her graying middle age as a union worker in the city of St. John's. At the center is her love for Luke, a handsome, burly fisherman. There are vibrant descriptions of the lemon meringue pie that Rose bakes for their first date; of the three children whom they bring to the marriage and the birth of tiny Emily; laughter over an irreverent Christmas prayer; and the foundation for the house that Luke was building. When Luke's boat goes down in a squall off of the Grand Banks, Rose describes his four tattoos to police as identifying marks.

While her marriage to Luke comprises only a fraction of the story, Rose's memories of him are "etched into her muscles and her sinews and her bones." Straddling past and present, she struggles to let go and learns to walk through walls to visit with her departed husband. Her story evokes a strong sense of place, including of the fishing village—worried by weather, with air as dense as rain—and of the two-hundred-year-old home that Rose buys in St. John's. Elsewhere, Rose experiences time as a waterfall, "still as a photograph"; and she compares Emily's tattoos and piercings to "the topography of natural and human scars" on the earth.

This Is the House That Luke Built is an atmospheric literary novel that celebrates the persistence of love and makes note of the fragmentary nature of memories.

KRISTEN RABE (January / February 2023)

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