

A COLLECTION OF FAVORITE SHORT STORIES AND
SELECTIONS FROM ALL THE FAMOUS NOVELS FROM
"A CITY OF BELLS" TO "GREEN DOLPHIN STREET"

THE
Elizabeth
Goudge
&
READER

COMPILED AND ARRANGED,
WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY *Rose Dobbs*

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THE Elizabeth Goudge READER

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BOOKS BY ELIZABETH GOUDGE

Novels

ISLAND MAGIC
A CITY OF BELLS
TOWERS IN THE MIST
THE MIDDLE WINDOW
THE BIRD IN THE TREE
THE CASTLE ON THE HILL
GREEN DOLPHIN STREET

Short Stories

A PEDLAR'S PACK
THE GOLDEN SKYLARK
THE WELL OF THE STAR

Novelette

THE SISTER OF THE ANGELS

Juveniles

SMOKY HOUSE
THE BLUE HILLS

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INTRODUCTION

THE NOVELIST who steers a solitary course between the Scylla of criticism and the Charybdis of popular taste is said to sail under a lucky star. But what of the novelist who embarks on many hazardous voyages and who always comes safely and triumphantly home? Can it be entirely a matter of luck, fickle and capricious in the best of times, and especially tantalizing and elusive in our times, so plagued by depression, civil strife, and world wars with their inevitable disturbing influence on literature? No, it must be something more. It must be something in the novelist which reaches out and takes hold of his readers and gives them a sense of security and a feeling of happiness which their troubled life denies them; an understanding, a sympathy, a sharing of experience; an invitation to laugh, to wonder at, or to enjoy; an affirmation, perhaps of hope, perhaps of belief. All the world over, plain simple people are refusing to accept what our chaotic civilization decrees fashionable: scorn of tradition; denial of ancient values; rejection of old truths. They turn with affection and gratitude to the writer who dares to agree with them.

In the last dozen years or so, many thousands of such people have turned to Elizabeth Goudge. And she has never disappointed them. Miss Goudge's books have always struck responsive chords in questioning hearts. The record is enviable and not at all difficult to account for. She established it with her first novel, *Island Magic*, and maintained it right up to her latest, the phenomenal *Green Dolphin Street*. *Island Magic*, written and published during the worst years of the longest and dreariest depression on record, was like a shaft of light in a dark room. It's a sun-drenched and wind-swept story of love and joy in life, family fun and family loyalties; and it proclaims stoutly the eternal value of abiding

faith. *Green Dolphin Street* was written during the nightmare of continual bombings and the horror of threatened invasion, but as more than its million readers know, it is not shadowed by any cloud of despair. It is gay and exciting and it affirms the truth that things happen for the best; that honor, chivalry and performance of duty did not go out with the sword and lance. In between there is a long list of novels, short stories, books for children—all presented with a delicious humor, a keen eye for character, a sympathetic understanding for human frailty, and a deep and sincere belief in the healing properties of nature and in the essential goodness of man.

Nor is this all. Miss Goudge can, for her readers' pleasure, turn to the past and recreate it so that the period becomes as vivid as the present and the characters as familiar as neighbors. This was done admirably in *Towers in the Mist*, a remarkable novel of Oxford in Queen Elizabeth's time. It is done in numerous short stories, some of which appear in this *Reader*. (See "Escape for Jane," page 77; "The Golden Skylark," page 90; "The Hour Before Dawn," page 111). She can discuss social questions honestly as she did in *The Bird in the Tree*, a story concerned with marriage, the obligations it imposes upon those who enter into it, and the importance of fulfilling those obligations not by way of the divorce courts, but by way of personal sacrifice. She can write of England in the bitter summer of 1940—without bitterness—as she does in *The Castle on the Hill* and she can make us realize in a sentence or two one vital source of the strength which saw the English through that ordeal. The scene is after the destruction of the Castle when destiny brings together a group of people whom war has damaged but not destroyed: Miss Brown, the middle-aged spinster who thought there was no longer any place or need for her in the world; Mr. Isaacson, the victim of the modern Inquisition; and Moppet and Poppet, orphaned London waifs. Miss Goudge writes: "Ten minutes later, the new happy little family sat noisily at tea, father and mother and children. Miss Brown, wielding the teapot, marveled at the powerlessness of evil to destroy that everlasting pattern. It might strike at it, wounding and mutilating, but the several parts only sought their complement again in a new trinity."

Because nature and children and animals are the very spice of life, Miss Goudge's books abound in scenic descriptions of haunting beauty, notably when the scenes are in her beloved Channel Islands; and they

present a matchless gallery of enchanting children and endearing animals.

And finally, but perhaps most important of all, Elizabeth Goudge is a superb story-teller, always giving the reader high entertainment.

In view of all this, it is not surprising to find that Elizabeth Goudge readers have special stories and sections in the novels to which they like to return more than once. The author's pithy sayings and humorous remarks, which lend zest to her style, have been quoted by people as far apart as popular columnists and child educators. Judging from her publishers' mail, these extracts and selected passages are preserved in many personal note and scrapbooks, more often than not minus chapter and verse, a situation which has occasioned many calls for help in identification. Over a period of years, the publishers have spent many hours in research on these correspondents' behalf. Finally it occurred to them that it might be a good idea to bring out a collection made up of selections from Miss Goudge's writings—the volume to be not only for the benefit of the private note and scrapbook keepers, but for the benefit of those people who have not yet met Elizabeth Goudge. For an added attraction Miss Goudge supplied two previously unpublished pieces—an unusually perceptive essay called "Dreams," and a beautiful Christmas story, "The Three Gray Men."

And so—here it is—*The Elizabeth Goudge Reader*—a generous platter full of enticing *hors d'oeuvres*. For the full, rich, satisfying main dish, you must, of course, go to the books themselves. But in the meantime, we wish you happy nibbling!

Rose Dobbs

New York,
Spring, 1946

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* Previously unpublished.

Some People of Importance

It is given to some people to wear the cloak of immortality. They are born, like the rest of us, but, unlike the rest of us, they never die. They leave their mark not only on their own time, but on all time for ever.

Sir Thomas More; the child Madame Ysabeau who became Elizabeth of England; Will Shakespeare; the bright meteor known as Percy Shelley; a girl called Jane Austen—here are a few immortals. Let us look over Elizabeth Goudge's shoulder as she writes. We will see the diminutive Ysabeau defy King Henry, her father, displaying in childhood many of the traits which characterized her when she became Queen. We will watch young Shelley strain at the parental leash and mount Pegasus. We will thrill with small Audrey Flowerdew to the music of Master Shakespeare's words; and we will share with Jane Austen the excitement of saving the English novel.

THE KING'S SERVANT

I

ANNE was picking flowers in the meadows at Chelsea, and as she picked she sang because she was so happy. She was young and good to look upon, she was the wife of an adoring young husband, the spring had come, and all seemed right with her world. Whichever way she looked she saw only beauty, peace, and joy.

It was March fifteen hundred and thirty-four. Though it was so early in the year the sun was warm, and the larks were tossing in the blue sky. The Thames wound through water meadows where the willow shoots were crimson in the sun, and the marybuds spread pools and drifts of lacquered gold in the lush green grass. The fresh earthy smell of them mingled with the sharp pungent smell of the water mint that grew between the rustling spears of the rushes and the silver glint of the flowing river. In the distance the towers and spires and fretted roofs of the city of London rose against the sky like some enchanted city of peace built by the sun out of the clouds and the mists of the early morning. At this distance it was difficult to realize that men and women lived in it; impossible to think that sin and ugliness could dwell within its walls.

And Anne did not want to think that they did. She was so happy, and she did not want her happiness spoiled. Lovely though it was she turned her back resolutely upon that enchanted misty city and gave her whole attention to the marybuds she was picking to adorn the statue of the Virgin in the chapel at the great house where she lived. For it was the spring, the Virgin Mary's own season, and it was only right that her statue should have about it her own flowers, her marybuds, or marigolds,

as some called them. Anne, as she picked, could picture the gold of them edging the hem of her blue robe in the chapel, even as out here in the fields they seemed to edge the hem of the blue robe of the sky.

But Anne's mind was not entirely occupied with pious thoughts. She was only pious by fits and starts. For the rest of the time she was noticing all that was going on out of the corner of a merry and most observant eye. For though the meadows were given over to the flowers and the larks and the soft airs of spring the river was full of human traffic and the bustle of the great world. Rich men who had their fine houses in the country villages of Chelsea, Fulham, and Battersea, were speeding up to London in their barges to their business or their pleasure. They were a cheerful sight in the bright sunshine. Many of the barges were carved and gilded, and the watermen who rowed them wore the gay liveries of their masters and sang as they plunged their oars rhythmically in and out of the silver water. In the stern of each barge sat the master of it, taking the air, dressed in a fine furred gown with a gold chain about his neck. Some of these men, noblemen or rich merchants, were known to Anne. When she caught an eye that she knew she gave an impish grin, but curtsied very demurely. She had been well and strictly brought up, but she was a merry little rogue, not always able to keep the old Adam entirely in subjection; and she was deliciously pretty. All the male eyes that caught hers acknowledged that fact; they took on an added twinkle, and sometimes the owners of them looked back appreciatively over their shoulders at the slim green figure with the armful of golden marybuds.

Anne was just grown-up, but she was so little and small, and so mischievous, that she looked a child still. She wore a green gown, cut low in the neck and full in the skirt, with wide hanging sleeves that showed undersleeves of pale yellow. Her cap of snowy white lawn showed her demurely parted gold hair, and curved caressingly about her small pointed face with its dimpled cheeks, delicate nose, and rosebud mouth that could be by turns roguish, pathetic, or grimly determined, according as the mood took her. Judged by the fashion of the time she was very plainly dressed, for she wore no jewels and her gown was plainly made, but the poise of her head and the dignity of her tiny upright figure bespoke her what she was, a very important little lady both in her own eyes and the eyes of the world at large.

She was Anne Cresacre More, the adopted daughter of the famous scholar and lawyer, Sir Thomas More, who until just lately had been

Lord Chancellor of England, and the wife of his only son. She thought a lot of herself for both these reasons, and would have thought a good deal more had she not been severely chastised from her babyhood up for the inordinate vanity and self-importance that had dwelt in her small body ever since she had been old enough to stagger to a glass and look in it, or bow with shattering dignity from her nurse's arms to the admirers who thronged her nursery. She alone, of all the daughters of Sir Thomas More, renowned through Europe for their learning and their piety, was a little lacking in humility. . . . But then, as she was accustomed to explain when reprimanded, she was only adopted. Such virtue as she had was not inherited but engrafted. She could not be expected to be so good as the others. She did not think she even wanted to be. She had always been their merry babe, their pet and their treasure, and that was all that mattered to her. Secure as she seemed to herself in family love, in comfort and worldly importance, she surely had not a care in the world.

A shadow suddenly fell across her sunshine, and she looked up. A big barge was approaching from the city of London, that magical city built out of clouds and mists, and a pennon floating above it had momentarily obscured the sun. It must be some very important barge, for it had fine tapestries draped over the bulwarks and it was garlanded with flowers. A musician stood in the bows, a lute in his hands, and the rowers were singing as they bent to their oars. Other barges drew into the banks, and the occupants stood up, plucking off their caps. . . . The watermen in the big barge, Anne suddenly saw, were wearing the royal livery.

With a cry of excitement she bunched her flowers into the crook of one arm, gathered up her full green skirts in the other hand, and sped across the meadow to a high bank above the river where she would be able to get a good view. Daughter-in-law of a former Lord Chancellor though she was, she never went to court nowadays because Sir Thomas More did not approve of the goings-on there. To her secret annoyance she had never seen the notorious Queen Anne Boleyn. Now was her chance. The Lady, as she was called, for the English people hated to give to her the title of Queen that they had given to their beloved Queen Catherine, was undoubtedly speeding down from Westminster for one of the water picnics that she had made so fashionable. The previously apparently deserted water meadows became suddenly populous. Little ragged children gathering dandelions for the herb market ran to the river with cries of excitement. More aristocratic strollers, taking the air, followed them more

slowly and with assumed nonchalance. A few young gallants, out hawking, ran up the bank beside Anne, and more and more barges drew in to line the way.

As the royal barge came near Anne stood on tiptoe. The Lady sat on a cushioned seat in the stern, under a canopy of cloth of gold. Beside her lounged the jolly genial King, with his mean little eyes and his crafty mouth, dressed all in green, his doublet encrusted with jewels. So consistently jovial was he, so full of coarse jokes, that it was only in his rare moments of gravity that one realized just how cruel that jolly face could be. He was not grave this morning, he was laughing, and the Lady echoed his laughter.

How beautiful she was, thought little Anne, and how proud. Her eyes were midnight black, yet flashing with light, and her parted hair beneath the pearls that edged her coif was dark as a raven's wing. Her skin was white, like marble, but her parted laughing lips were a passionate red. She leaned back very gracefully in her seat, her scarlet gown billowing around her, her long hands with their fine rings lying quietly in her lap, yet there was something very tense in her attitude, and her head was very arrogantly held. For Queen of England though she was, the people gave her no greeting as she passed. As on that day when they had lined the streets of London to see her pass to her coronation they stood in silence, calling down no blessings on her head, giving no cheer. Respect they would show her, because the King was with her, but no more. She had ousted their beloved Queen Catherine and made a fool of their King, and they hated her, and though she gave no sign yet she knew it.

Anne had expected to dislike the Lady on sight, yet as the barge drew level with her she was seized with a sudden, unexpected passion of pity and admiration. The Lady's dark and delicate beauty, the splendid front of pride and laughter which she presented to the hatred of those about her, touched little Anne. When her eyes met those of the Lady and she saw the misery in them she could have wept. With a sudden impulsive gesture she took up the marybuds that lay in the crook of her arm and tossed them into the Queen's lap; and she, equally impulsive, held up the folds of her scarlet gown to catch them, and the smile that sprang to her eyes and lips was a genuine smile, merry, touched, and tender. . . . They could not guess, the two Annes, how closely their lives were interwoven, or what havoc the beauty of the one was to cause in the life of the other.

The barge passed on, the people, sprung from nowhere, went back whence they had come, and Anne was alone again. But at sight of the misery in the Queen's face her happiness had left her. The marybuds, picked to adorn the blue robe of the Virgin, had been given away to a scarlet woman, but she had not got the heart to gather more. She turned and walked slowly homeward, her green skirts trailing over the green grass, and her thoughts, so merry a short while ago, were full of the anxiety and fear from which she had shrunk when she had resolutely turned her back on the city of London.

For one cannot forever turn one's back on things that exist, however hard one may try, and as she walked homeward Anne faced the fact that all was not well with this lovely peaceful England, or with the world beyond. In the great house where she lived the chief men of the day came and went, and she heard their talk. Moreover her father was accustomed to tell all of his affairs that he could to his children. They were a united family, determined always to stand or fall together. And so she knew that all was not well. It was one of those times, so her father had told them, when the evil of tyranny threatens human life. Again and again in the world's history, in ever-recurring cycles, there come these times of special conflict. It may be some particular race, it may be some particular man, that arises, determined upon domination and the destruction of freedom. Like a great beast he roams the world, trampling out all art, all religion, all the fair flowers of the mind and spirit that make for individuality, welding the people into a piece of inhuman mechanism to do his will. It was so now. They were threatened by both the race and the man. Out in the world the Turk, with his ideal of tyrannical government, was steadily advancing; here in England, King Harry grew daily more dictatorial.

At the thought of the Turk, Anne shivered, as all men and women shivered at the thought of advancing Islam. It was like a tide creeping in. It had won from Christendom Asia, Africa, nearly half Europe, and it was still advancing; and the European nations, continually fighting each other, seemed unable to settle their differences and confront it with that unity which, according to the peacemaker, Sir Thomas More, was their one hope of salvation. The great Christian church of Saint Sophia at Constantinople was now in Turkish hands. Christian children captured in infancy by the Turk were regimented, drilled, and trained in obedience to their masters until they were content to be used as an instrument of