



The Bird in the Tree

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A Vibrant Novel About the Joys of Life ... and The Pangs of Love

Love had come to David for the first time, glorious, overwhelming, passionate. It was far greater and far more lovely than he had ever dreamed possible. And it was returned in full measure, with equal passion. But he could not take her without pain--pain for himself, for her, for his beloved family.

Lucilla has spent a lifetime making the Hampshire estate of Damerosehay a tranquil haven for the Eliot family. When her favourite grandson, David, falls in love with an unsuitable woman Lucilla feels is unsuitable, she sees her most cherished ambitions put at risk. But can she persuade David and Nadine to put duty before love?

At last, in the magical peace of the countryside, watched over by a benevolent old house that had nourished so much love, they knew the path their hearts must take....

The Bird in the Tree Details

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From Reader Review The Bird in the Tree for online ebook

Kate Howe says

4.5 Stars

This checked so, so many of my boxes. Beautiful seaside location in a beautiful mansion, lush passages on nature and the feelings of the characters, subtle romance, rewarding family relationships, the glorifying of every day life and mundane household tasks, and a period setting. I loved so many of Goudge's descriptions and this to me had just the right ratio of description to action.

This was only the first in a trilogy so I'm very much so looking forward to seeing many ends being tied up with characters I grew to love very quickly. I definitely came away wanting more so I'm very pleased I still have two more books.

Emma Hinkle says

Fantastic book. I always love Elizabeth Goudge and this book is no exception. I always leave her books feeling empowered to take on the world because of the lessons I learn from the characters.

Theresa says

I love this book, and the entire 'Eliot Heritage' trilogy!

Elizabeth Goudge writes so convincingly and yet non-offensively. As she has been a favorite author of mine since teen years (our local library stocked most of her books), I have turned to her again and again, and always took away something fresh and new to apply in my life.

David Eliot has fallen in love...with a (divorced) relative's wife. How will this affect the family, the children, and the home that his grandmother, Lucilla, has built up over the years?

Written in the 1940's, this novel takes us to a charming setting, a maritime village near the sea in England. Goudge's descriptive writing in both her setting and her characters are masterful and engaging:

"Pointing a moral to the grandchildren she would wave a hand towards her Sheraton chairs with the petit-point seats worked by her grandmother in a pattern of purple pansies and crimson gilliflowers. She would tell them how the exquisite curves of the wood had been created by the hands of a craftsman, each tool in its aptness and simplicity itself a thing of beauty in his hands as patiently, line by line, he fashioned the vision that was in his mind. And the same with the grandmother's needlework. She had spun the wool herself and dyed it to its lovely colours with the juices of plants picked upon her walks, she had seen with the eyes of her mind a vision of her garden, formalized and touched with perpetual stillness, and painted the picture with her needlework upon canvas. And now though their legs were scratched and their colours were faded, the chairs were as lovely as ever. Lovelier, Lucilla declared, because a work of art is like a human being, the more it is loved the more beautiful it grows, reflecting the gift of love like light back again to the giver."

This book has lessons to teach us, and although they are gentle, conventional lessons, they are also timeless and enduring. Is it too late for Lucilla to pass down her values to her adult grandson, the values of fidelity, self-sacrifice, duty to one's family, and preservation of traditional family life? And, from David's side, how can an aged grandmother possibly understand what David and Nadine are experiencing?

But Lucilla has her own story to tell, and she does it with tact and understanding, and although shocking, it is pertinent to David and Nadine's life choices.

Elizabeth Goudge has been criticized by some for her 'sentimental' writing, but in reading other's reviews, I am pleased to see that I am not the only reader who finds comfort, encouragement and cheer, in her novels. She writes sympathetically about the human personality and cleverly teaches us to laugh at ourselves and our human foibles while attempting to understand the complicated emotions and circumstances of life that sway us.

There is so much more to say here, but once again, I came away from this lovely novel (that others have done so much better at reviewing than my own attempt here!), refreshed and reminded to take joy in the little everyday things of life that, taken and added one by one, build up to a stable foundation to withstand the tests of time.

Jess says

Relationships. Self-sacrifice. Loved this one!

Ginny says

I read the bulk of this book during Hurricane Florence, and it was a perfect read during the storm. The examination of character and place leaves me contemplating my motivations and concept of home. It makes me hope to love my loved ones better and wish I had Margaret's knack for gardening. Now, to Pilgrim's Inn!

Annette says

This is a book not to be hurried but read leisurely just to savour the beautiful writing.

The beautiful pictures that Elizabeth Goudge paints are just delightful.

Jane says

Pagan that I am, I still have a weakness for the British Christian apologists I read as an adolescent. C.S. Lewis? Check. Such a beautiful mind, such clarity!

Elizabeth Goudge? Linnets and Valerians? Sigh . . . the best. Re-reading her Damerosehay trilogy, I found myself falling for her again. Her children, like E. Nesbit's, are so individual, so real, so un-sugar coated. Her descriptions of landscape, of weather and wildlife are so perfectly realized you can practically smell the rain coming. But it is her values - children, family, community, self-sacrifice - that I most admire. She is a gem of a writer.

Sarah says

As a teenager I read the sequel to this book, Pilgrim's Inn and didn't like it. I realize now it all due to a bit of immaturity on my part as the reader and also the fact I was missing a lot of back story. The Bird in the Tree has the back story.

This book came highly recommended by a reader I highly respect. I decided to give it a try, but found the early chapters a little slow and LONG. (Each chapter is about 20 pages, which is not conducive to "I'll read a quick chapter and then..." Something a busy mother of young children needs.) Nevertheless, I pushed on. About page 90 the story suddenly took hold and I found myself picking the book up to read a paragraph or page whenever time permitted. In the end I found this to be a very powerful story. I loved it. There is such deep rich truth in this that is as applicable today as it was when the story was written 74 years ago.

I'm planning to return to Pilgrim's Inn and read it with fresh eyes, but knowing Goudge's books aren't "quick" reads means it may be a month or two before I get the chance.

Definitely recommend this book. Push past the first 100 pages and you'll be glad you did!

Hana says

Three and a half stars. Not her finest outing, but I enjoyed it and I cared enough about the all of the Eliots that I'm adding the second book in the series, Pilgrim's Inn to my priority reading list.

This was my third Elizabeth Goudge this year. I loved The Dean's Watch and The Castle on the Hill. She runs true to form in this book, which is graced with lovely descriptions and wonderful characters. The pace is as languid as a late summer afternoon, but despite the slow pace I found the most of the book very absorbing. Until the last fifty pages or so, Goudge effortlessly and sympathetically shifts from one point of view to another so that the reader lives the varied thoughts and emotions of each member of this large extended family. The whole has a subtle richness to it, like an old, well-faded Turkish carpet.

Alas, she lost me in the home stretch! I loved it up through the meeting with Uncle Hilary (one of my favorite Eliots since lol he reminded me of myself). Then she inserted a plot line about a diary that reveals the back story about Damerosehay and its original inhabitants. I suppose Goudge thought things were getting dull; they *were* sort of somnolent, unless you like those delicate family dramas, but I was rather enjoying it and the insertion seemed intrusive.

Then the multiple POVs got a bit too tangled up, and everyone was agonizing and moralizing a bit too much and there was this unnecessary storm....

Oh well. In the end, unlike many other reviewers, I felt that the right choices had been made, and for pretty much the right reasons. One thing that I'll add (view spoiler). While some have objected to the overtly religious message (and it did get preachy at times), I found myself pondering how hard it is to do the right thing without a sense of God--and without family and community.

Jean says

My first introduction to Elizabeth Goudge. If I had the option, I would have given this book 4.5 stars. From the description it sounds like a romance novel which I do not ever read. Although there is a romance element, that is not what the story is ultimately about. It is an ethical/moral dilemma. This is the kind of book that makes one want to live more...better...fuller. Beautifully written. I enjoyed Goudge's British Christian apologetic views. A search for truth, goodness and beauty even in the ugliness and storms of life. Everlasting tradition, duty and sacrifice over selfishness and personal fleeting happiness of the moment. This is a book I know I will go back to over and over again.

Sarah says

The more I read Elizabeth Goudge the more I trust her. No matter the current trouble, she will make it right in the end, somehow. I think that might be the highest praise one could give an author.

Jacqui says

One reviewer of this novel characterized it as a crushing sermon on the importance of duty over one's personal happiness and at times I did find the book a little preachy. I can certainly see their point of view but I think the character's arguments for this "duty bound" view on life was somewhat persuasive. I think Elizabeth Goudge was good at questioning our views of personal happiness vs. obligation. Is it right to sacrifice all you have held dear so far in life for a love that is all consuming (in the moment) but may dwindle over time? Is it best to hold onto those things which will last for passing unhappiness? Yes, there is an element of duty in that sacrifice but won't your new love at some point become a duty too? Probably and then you look back at the sacrifices you made and they don't seem worth it but then it's too late.

Anyways, I enjoyed it but it is VERY slow to get going, even more than some of her other works. The character exploration and detailed descriptions of the surroundings are somewhat worth it but I was tempted to skip stuff!

Sarah says

I've previously read *The Herb of Grace* (Pilgrim's Inn) and *The Heart of the Family* (books 2 & 3 in the series), but had never read this one, the first in the series, 'The Eliots of Damerosehay'.

This is a book about true life being rooted in a deeper life source than mere passing fancy and passion; it's a

book about faithfulness and truth.

It's also magical. The house, the history, the people, give this story so much depth and heart.

The grandmother Lucilla, dignified and much loved doyenne of Damerosehay is distressed to learn that her grandson, David, is passionately and overwhelmingly in love with someone who will cause much pain for the family.

I wrote a few quotes down, but I love this, which is part of a speech by Lucilla to David in response to his heartfelt belief that being true is being true to your most passionate feelings, however much pain they may cause others:

'What is it once one moves beyond the narrow conception of truth as the correctly spoken word?...[T]rue action is the creation of perfection while lying action is the creation of something that falls short of the ideal...truth at its greatest is something made in the likeness of God.

'[I]f truth is the creation of perfection then it is action and has nothing to do with feeling. And the nearest we can get to creating perfection in this world is to create good for the greatest number, for the community or the family not just for ourselves; to create for ourselves only means misery and confusion for everybody. That made me see that acting a part is not always synonymous with lying, it is far more often the best way of serving the truth. It is more truthful to act what we should feel if the community is to be well served rather than behave as we actually do feel in our selfish private feelings.'

The story does not merely focus on David and Lucilla, but also on Damerosehay and its history, and the other family members, and local residents. It's a wonderful, wonderful story.

Julie Durnell says

I loved this book, in fact it is to date my favorite of Elizabeth Goudge stories. Lucilla is the wise matriarch of the family and her relationship to her children and grandchildren is well told. I came away with the sense of family as prime importance to the point of sacrificing some of one's own desires for the greater good of family and community. The home she made in Damerosehay is a sheltering and nurturing place for all who come to stay. I look forward to the other books in the Eliot series!

Emily says

This is one of my grandma's favorite books. I liked the writing style (very descriptive!) and the characters, and will probably read the subsequent books in the trilogy.

Update a few days later: My brief review didn't do this book justice. Goudge's writing is actually BEAUTIFUL, and I keep thinking about the landscapes and characters she created. She clearly has a real admiration and respect for the earth's beauty and bounty, and painted wondrous pictures of Damerosehay's gardens and all the fowl and foliage therein. I would love to visit a real estate like that. Actually, I have a burning desire to LIVE in a place that can have multiple gardens on its grounds, including one that is SECRET. Can you imagine?! I really really want a secret garden, attached to my kitchen garden and flower

garden by way of a wrought-iron fence, that has a giant oak tree with a swing hanging from its largest limb right in the middle of it. Is that too much to ask?

As for the characters, I can picture most of them clearly in my head. They were all entirely likable, even the antagonist Nadine, which is a slight grievance I have with the book. Every one of them were ultimately very honorable, and did the right thing, which was kind of refreshing but maybe not very realistic. I don't know; maybe in that day and age (1920's?) it was more realistic. I didn't really like the author's apparent obsession with beauty, and how beautiful people are usually lacking in other areas (such as intelligence or dilligence.) Again, maybe that is the truth in her world, but as a beautiful person I found it offensive. (HEE HEE! HA HA!!)

Anyway, I think Bird in the Tree was a fine stand-alone book, but I am interested to see where the next two books take the story. Will the Eliot children be grown in the next book? Will Lucilla be dead? I will have to ask my grandma if she has those books too.
