

FOREWORD

When I was growing up I often heard talk about our famous relative on my father's side, the British writer Elizabeth Goudge. I suppose it became part of my identity, knowing I was kin to someone so illustrious. Certainly it captured my imagination. And maybe that's partly what led to my becoming a writer: I felt it was in my genes. Also, more importantly, through Elizabeth's books and those of other authors, I'd fallen at an early age under the spell of the printed word. I had only to crack the cover of a book to step through a secret door into another world. For that is the greatest gift an author can give his or her readers: a 'magic carpet' ride to other realms. And though there might be writers more lauded for their literary pyrotechnics or more honored in terms of prizes, surely no one was better at that than Elizabeth Goudge. She understood that without a story, and a corking good one at that, there *is* no book, not in any enduring sense. And that's why her novels have endured: Because, above all else, she knew how to tell a story.

As a child, I'd read and loved her children's book *The Little White Horse* (not surprisingly JK Rowling, of Harry Potter fame, cited it as her favorite childhood book). It wasn't until I was sixteen that I was introduced to my first of Elizabeth's adult books, thus launching a love affair that would span more than a decade and bring hour upon hour of reading pleasure. *Green Dolphin Street* struck a chord with me in more ways than one. The second eldest of six (five of us girls), I had always felt myself to be the odd man out. At one point, I was even convinced I was adopted. Thus, I could identify wholeheartedly with the character of Marianne. She is the odd duck in her family, a young woman possessed of a sharp mind and even sharper tongue, interested in such subjects as mathematics and politics in an era when girls were encouraged toward more

lady-like pursuits, such as crewelwork and watercolor painting. She stubbornly resists all efforts to make her marriageable. That she's not beautiful, that her angularity pushes its way through 'four cascading, lace-trimmed petticoats' only compounds her 'predicament.' And yet Marianne emerges as one of the most fascinating female characters of modern fiction. Like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, she is her own woman. She doesn't bow to societal pressures. She is stubborn, at times abrasive, and there is none more determined when it comes to getting her way. The scene in which she uses a hatpin to pierce her ears, after her parents forbade it, is a truly memorable one. It depicts a fearless woman taking charge of her destiny, a woman worthy of respect if not love. Thoroughly modern in every way, except for the fact that she was born into the wrong era.

Only a writer so gifted at storytelling would have known precisely what to do with the anomaly that is Marianne. Here, Elizabeth takes the classic device of mistaken identity to new heights, in a tale that has the man Marianne loves writing to her father to ask for her hand, having in his inebriated state confused her name with that of her fair and gentle sister Marguerite. When Marianne arrives in the then wild frontier of New Zealand, after four months en route aboard a sailing ship, William has no choice but to marry her. Leaving poor Marguerite to suffer the pangs of heartbreak, which leads to one of the most harrowing scenes ever written, in which Marguerite claws her way up a steep rock face in the midst of a storm to a remote hilltop convent, where she eventually takes her vows as a nun.

When *Green Dolphin Street* was first published, in the forties, it caused a minor sensation. My mother, who worked in an LA bookshop at the time, recalls its being the most requested title, along with Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber*. It was later made into a fairly awful, and at times laughable, Hollywood movie

starring Lana Turner and Van Heflin. Don't rent the film – read the book. Its language might seem a bit old-fashioned to the modern sensibility, but the grand and sweeping tale, brimming with romance and drama, and climaxing in an earthquake and a Maori uprising, is a timeless one. It's a tale that will grab you and not let go until you've turned the last page.

Some years ago, after having published my first novel *Garden of Lies*, perhaps not coincidentally a tale of mistaken identity – this one babies switched at birth – I had occasion to travel to England. It was my first trip to the British Isles and I was hoping to finally meet my famous relative. All I knew about her, besides the fact that she was a wonderful author, came from the letters she and my Aunt Betty exchanged. It had been established that Elizabeth's grandfather and my great-grandfather were brothers, or something like that. Which would have made her a cousin many times removed. At any rate, I gave her a call and we had a lovely chat over the phone. She apologized that she was unable to invite me up for a visit. She was then quite elderly and in poor health; her doctor had forbidden her to receive visitors. She had heard about me, though, and said she was pleased to have another writer in the family. Sadly, she died shortly after we spoke.

My only other Elizabeth Goudge 'encounter' came some years later, when I was in Frankfurt attending the Frankfurt Book Fair. I had arranged to meet with the man who had been her editor at Hodder and Stoughton. When I arrived at his crowded booth he walked right up to me and said, 'I would have known you anywhere. You have her face.' Needless to say, it gave me goose bumps. I never thought of myself as physically resembling Elizabeth, but looking at old photos of her I *can* see a bit of a likeness, mainly in the bone structure.

Mostly I'm just pleased to be carrying on the tradition. From Elizabeth I learned that there's no such thing as a story that's *too* over the top. It's simply a matter of making it believable, which

she does, beautifully, in the following pages. So curl up in an armchair, preferably when you can read undisturbed, and be prepared to be swept away. You're in for quite a ride.

Eileen Goudge
New York, May 2008