



The Scent of Water

Elizabeth Goudge

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Mary Lindsay met her little niece and namesake only once, but she saw in the quiet, imaginative child a kindred spirit to inherit her ancient house. Fifty years later her niece inherited the house with no knowledge of it beyond her indelible childhood memories, and no experience at all of living in the country.

Mary Lindsay is a born and bred Londoner who has enjoyed her city life-a prestigious job, and friends with whom she takes in the city pleasures of theatre, art and...As a retired businesswoman living in a rural house inherited from her aunt finds consolation for a failed romance with a married blind man by learning more about her aunt and herself.

The Scent of Water Details

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From Reader Review *The Scent of Water* for online ebook

Abigail Bok says

Elizabeth Goudge is an often-overlooked midcentury British author who deserves more respect than she gets, beyond the adulation of the stray fan. I find her writing richer and meatier fare than Barbara Pym, who had her moment of renown a decade or two later. For those who love British fiction of a certain age—that age encompassing everyone from P. G. Wodehouse and Dorothy Sayers to Angela Thirkell—Goudge is a must-read.

The Scent of Water is a quiet novel, but it is full of upheaval and disruption and is ultimately very wise. Mary Lindsay, an unmarried woman of fifty, unexpectedly inherits a house in a small rural village and decides to go live there. Her stated idea is that she wants to experience British country life before it disappears (this is in the 1960s). She imagines quiet and solitude and gets neither, as she is swiftly drawn into the lives of many of the villagers.

Mary is a quick observer who sees pretty accurately into the hearts of all she meets. She is also empathetic and compassionate, making her a quick favorite among the residents, many of whom have major sorrows or challenges in their lives. Mary helps when she can and notices when she can't. The characters are all individuals, not types; they are interesting and unique. But the novel is about more than just the people: the place itself—her house and the neighborhood—is every bit as important a character.

The novel, despite its easy-reading surfaces, is profoundly moral without moralizing. It drags the reader forcefully into spiritual (not religious) depths, compelling us to see profound truths lying behind the façades of daily life. In that sense it is a true humanist work—which makes it sound like a chore, but in fact it is lots of fun to read.

The writing is beautiful, full of sharp observation, vivid description, and unexpected outbreaks of the poetic. You feel and hear and smell every inch of Mary's surroundings. I read slowly, savoring each gorgeous bit of language and insight. Ultimately this is a novel about connection—our connections to place, to people living and dead, to everything that gives our lives meaning and purpose. It is about what we owe to others, to ourselves, and to the world we inhabit. Do please read it!

Marcy says

I read *Child from the Sea* by Elizabeth Goudge a long time ago and fell in love with her style of writing and depth of characters. Her books were out of print and I ordered most of them, which are back in print, from Amazon.

The Scent of Water brought me back to the days of the brilliant, thought-provoking writing from the past. (Not that the "present" writing is less brilliant and thought-provoking, but there are styles of classics that I have missed in my recent reading). Elizabeth Goudge writes about people, old and young, who live in a small village and have personal issues that they seem unable to resolve.

"Colonel Adams was eighty-two and crippled with arthritis...Mrs. Adams was younger, a little creature who hardly reached to her husband's shoulder, but her physique had not been equal to the strain of bearing her

four sons, losing three of them in the war and having the fourth turn out so disappointing...They had had a little private money once but Charles's debts had swallowed most of that long ago. One couldn't refuse to help one's own son, especially one so beloved as Charles...It was only their evident exhaustion and the faded blue eyes of both of them that suggested suffering. Nothing else..."

Elizabeth writes about a blind man and his dog, a wife who berates and belittles him. He finds solace in a new female neighbor who has just moved to the country to find a peaceful refuge in a home left to her by a misunderstood, mentally ill woman. The reader discovers the innermost feelings of most of the characters who live in this small, but intimate village through Elizabeth's telling words.

As the novel continues, the characters find a way to come to terms with their problems. They begin to smell the "scent of water," and refresh and renew their souls in a variety of ways.

Ashley says

While reading this book, I kept thinking about what an amazing mentor Elizabeth Goudge would have made—not necessarily as a writer (though she's a competent storyteller) but as a follower of Christ. *The Scent of Water* is studded with bits of wisdom and spiritual insight that infuse the whole, making it greater than the sum of its parts.

It's also one of the few novels that have gotten under my skin deeply enough to provoke change. I cheered for the little victories along the way as the characters struggled with their individual weaknesses—it reminded me that these interior battles, even the seemingly minor ones, are worthwhile and that many small wins against the worst parts of ourselves ultimately add up to something great.

[The vicar] took the cup without comment but sucked his cheeks in and out, as was his habit when suppressing comment. The suppression of comment was always difficult for him and the movement of his facial muscles was an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual victory.

Right there with you, Vicar.

Somehow, I didn't fully connect with the prose—possibly because I read this on the heels of a novel where the author didn't make a single false move. Goudge wields her words skillfully to conjure up images of great beauty:

Next day the snow began to fall, large slow flakes drifting on a light wind. The sky was leaden and the earth crouched beneath it drained of beauty. All the light and loveliness were in the snow itself, in the movement and glimmer of the flakes large as wild white roses, in the tide of whiteness flowing slowly over the dark earth, like moonlight or the surf of a soundless sea.

Still, the proofreader in me spotted areas that needed finessing, and at times I caught myself thinking, "Would someone really say that?" One or two characters didn't feel fleshed out. And my antennae went up when Mary arrived at her new home and met the housekeeper: "*She knew in one glance at Mrs. Baker that*

she had met her best friend, the best she had ever had or would have.” It’s a charming sentence for a children’s story, but I had a bad feeling Goudge was telling us this fact so she wouldn’t have to show it. (Which turned out to be the case—Mrs. Baker surfaced only one other time, and her interactions with Mary remained on a polite housekeeper/employer level.) And it bothered me that (view spoiler).

But in the end, I gleaned a great deal of wisdom from this story—and to me, that’s the best kind of reading. The vicar will be whispering encouragement in my ear, I suspect, for a long time to come.

Jane says

I remember my mother guiding me when I made the transition from junior to senior member of the library. I remember four authors she steered me towards: Agatha Christie, Daphne Du Maurier, Mary Stewart and Elizabeth Goudge.

The first two I read then, loved then and still love now. The third I didn’t read until more recently, when her books were reissued, and I found that I loved her too.

That just left Elizabeth Goudge. She didn’t appeal to me at all back in the day, and I must confess that when she fell out of fashion and her books disappeared from the shelves I forgot all about her. I can’t remember where I found her again, but I’m sure it’s either a book blogger or a LibraryThing member I should be thanking.

The library offered a range of titles – not on the shelves but tucked away in the fiction reserve – and ‘The Scent of Water’ caught my eye.

It tells the story of Mary Lambert, a middle-aged teacher, who quite unexpectedly inherited a country house from a distant cousin.

Though the two had shared a name they met only once. Mary’s father took her on a visit when she was still very young.

“An ivory coach, you see, Mary,” whispered her cousin. “it’s no bigger than a hazelnut but it’s all there, the horses and the coachmen and Queen Mab herself inside. Do you see her inside?”

Mary nodded speechlessly. She could see the fairy figure with the star in her hair, and the tiny delicate features of the child-like face. It did not occur to her that human hands could possibly have made the queen and her coach for she seemed as timeless as Cousin Mary herself. They had always lived her in this world inside the picture and they always would.”

Mary saw her inheritance as a sign that she should change her life. She moved to the country, and her cousin’s home became hers. She found a new way of life, a new place in the world, and she found time to think.

That allowed her to come to terms with memories of her wartime romance with a naval officer who had been killed just days before they would have been married.

Her story opens out to catch the stories of her new neighbours. A contented elderly couple whose peace was

disturbed by their beloved son. An author who was coping with the loss of his sight rather better than his wife. A couple whose way of life was threatened. Children accustomed to having possession of the old woman's garden and wary of the new arrival...

Mary found her cousin's diaries and she learned her story too. Why she had chosen to live alone, why she had become distant from her family and her neighbours, what she had coped with, and how she had coped.

This is a quiet story but it is so well drawn, the people, the places, the situations all utterly real. And it is a story enriched by lovely descriptions, and by true emotional and spiritual understanding.

A book to read slowly so that you can be drawn into that world, so that you can appreciate everything that is there, and so that you can appreciate that understanding.

I wouldn't have appreciated this in my early days in the adult library, but I do appreciate it now.

The right book at the right time.

And that's four out of four to my mother!

Though she is fallible. She told me that Barbara Pym was dull, and that she had only kept her copy of *I Capture The Castle* because it had been a gift, it wasn't very good ...

Hana says

This book was such a joy. It filled my mind with clarity and quiet pleasure, like a spring bubbling up in a still wood.

While resonant with life, the story begins with a death and one that is something of a mercy, as many deaths in old age are. With her last breaths the dying woman "...said something about sailing out on living water," and with her passing the room is full of "the quietness of the deep country and the light of a marvelous sunset...a tide of gold."

There are two Mary Lindsays in this gentle yet powerful story: the woman whose death we witness in the opening pages and a second Mary Lindsay, her cousin, a thoroughly competent Londoner who capped a successful academic career with service in the war years and then an executive post at the Admiralty. The elder Mary Lindsay has just left a house and a small inheritance to her namesake. Impulsively, Mary Lindsay--a quintessential urbanite--takes early retirement and, based solely on a single childhood memory of that house and her cousin and one magical day, decides to make the old house her home.

She remembers that day, forty years ago...a long drive lined with tremendous lime trees, 'august and unearthly', a garden wall topped with lilacs grown so tall that they made a thicket of purple and white blossom above the wall, and then a door in the wall. An odd old woman, Cousin Mary, leads Mary and her father into a house weighted down with wisteria vines. In the entry hall is an old oak chest where a silver tankard with lilies stood. "The flowers and the polished silver gathered all the light to themselves and Mary gazed at them entranced, noticing that a bird with spread wings was carved upon the top of the chest....and suddenly she was no longer an intruder in this world inside the picture. It was her own world." And most

magical of all, Cousin Mary shows her a collection of tiny treasures, tea sets, birds, animals, a coach with a queen inside: "fairy things of silver and gold, jade, pinchbeck, glass, ebony and ivory, all so small that only the eyes of a child could fully perceive their glory."

This is the dream-memory Mary Lindsay has inherited and which she embraces much to the astonishment (and skepticism) of her London friends. But Mary is heir to more than just a house. She is now part of a village and for one who has spent her existence in private, "landlocked in the sea of life", that is something quite new and astonishing. Mary finds herself opening to the waters of life and the worlds of others in ways she would never have expected.

The village of Appleshaw is peopled by marvelous characters: a small shy girl, Edith, adopted daughter of the artist and architect who live next door; Rose and Jeremy, her sister and brother; Valerie Randall, the long and not silently suffering wife of a war-blinded veteran; Paul Randall himself, who writes and dreams in darkness, his spirit and health broken; the erudite Vicar and his painfully timid sister Jean; and Mrs Hermione Hepplewhite, self-appointed grand mistress of Appleshaw and an inescapable whirlwind of good deeds and unchecked advice. Elizabeth Goudge weaves the lives of these, and many more characters through Mary's story with effortless grace and gentle humor.

At the center of the story are the intersecting lives of Mary Lindsay and her Cousin Mary whose long struggle for faith, purpose and sanity are gradually told in diaries left along with the house. The mysteries of the house, too, are slowly revealed. The house and its treasures, and the two Marys, become catalysts for the healing of many lives.

Content rating G: Some hinted past adultery, nothing shown. A clean read.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

This quietly told story of a woman who moves to a small English village around 1960 is such a lovely, insightful, and inspirational novel. It's only my second novel by Elizabeth Goudge (The Dean's Watch was my first), but clearly I need more Elizabeth Goudge books in my life!

Mary Lindsay, a fiftyish Londoner who never married (her fiancé was killed in WWII), unexpectedly inherits a country house from her father's cousin, an older woman (also named Mary Lindsay) who the younger Mary had met only once, as an eight year old child. But that brief visit made an indelible impression on both Marys. Initially Mary thinks to sell the home, but she soon changes her mind and decides to begin a new phase of her life in small town England. So she moves to the town of Appleshaw, in the Chilterns area of southeast England, not far from London.

Chilterns village

Mary's life in her new village home soon becomes interwoven with many of her neighbors. There are several memorable characters: Paul, an aspiring author and poet who was blinded in WWII; Valerie, Paul's attractive but resentful wife who views herself as a martyr; Squire Hepplewhite, a business tycoon who's focused on making money, hiding his humble beginnings; his lonely wife Hermione (who was once a chorus dancer named Dolly); three neighborhood children who view Mary's garden and back yard as their own and resent her moving in; and more, all well-drawn and interesting characters. Though we never meet her except in a

flashback and through her diary entries, the older cousin Mary Lindsay, who died at the beginning of the novel, remains a real presence throughout the novel, as we read about her lifelong struggles with debilitating depression and mental illness. She quietly perseveres through all her trials, with help from friends and from God.

The Scent of Water is heavier on atmosphere and character development than plot. It's fairly slow-paced: it kind of meanders through the months and the lives of the people of Appleshaw, but it's written so well that I was happy to meander along with it, charmed by Goudge's wonderful writing and her love for people of all stripes. Goudge combines delightful descriptions of settings with her warmhearted analysis of people's characters, and all of their wonderful potential and human failings.

Grace and mercy infuse every page, in a way that's inspiring and uplifting rather than cloying and saccharine. I'm a spiritual person, but a lot of fictional books that include a strong religious element annoy me because they're preachy or sappy. Goudge's spiritual insights, though, went straight to my heart. The "scent of water" (from verses 7-9 in chapter 14 of the Book of Job) is a recurring theme, symbolic of spiritual renewal, and personal courage and integrity are key, though they show up in different ways in different characters.

She realized with deep respect that this woman had always done what she had to do and faced what she had to face. If many of her fears and burdens would have seemed unreal to another woman, there was nothing unreal about her courage.

Highly recommended! June 2017 buddy read with the Retro Reads group.

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.

Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground;
Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.

- Job 14:7-9 (KJV)

Debbi says

Calming and lovely is how I would describe *The Scent of Water* by Elizabeth Goudge. I loved its allusions to the healing waters of baptism through "the scent of water" and how a once sacred space transforms and effects people. It was subtle and realistic rather than an in-your-face Christian book. And no, no one changes that much. And, isn't that how it is in real life? Christ takes us as we are and works gently, and without compunction, to change us into His likeness. When I closed the pages of the book I felt that the work in these people's lives was not over.

Poiema says

A sweet, old-fashioned, and very British novel with all the right elements. The main character, Mary, was a mature woman moving into her retirement years. Alone. She took a huge risk when she quit her lucrative city career and moved to a country cottage, one that she inherited from an elderly relative. Mary quickly became intertwined with the lives of the people in the small village and because of her perceptive nature was able to

glean wisdom even from the most broken among them. Having lost the love of her life in the war, Mary herself had experienced brokenness and had never really resolved the issues. As she became acquainted with the other villagers, she very accurately assessed and empathized with their oddities. Not only did she open her heart to them, but she gleaned wisdom from each encounter.

Each of the characters--- the blind writer, the maladjusted child, the odd spinster---had been thwarted from the usual channels of love. Like water cutting new channels, that love found other avenues of release that were beautiful to behold.

"Beauty not so much vanished as dissolved and itself reshaped, as she had seen the reflected clouds reshaping themselves behind her when she had leaned over the well." pg. 144

This novel was intrinsically spiritual and there was a depth to it that required contemplation. Suffering can create irreversible changes in life. Sometimes in our pain, love is extended from people who are not within our usual sphere. They are drawn to us because they, too, have suffered. A one-time encounter with such a person can leave a lifetime impact. We are forever changed by these interactions at our tenderest moments.

". . .what I seek is the goodness of God that waters the dry places. And water overflows from one dry patch to another and so you cannot be selfish in digging for it." pg 80

"What is the scent of water? Renewal. The goodness of God coming down like dew." pg 225

Kelsey Bryant says

This book was ... absolutely delightful. I didn't want it to end; it flowed along gently, like a stream, and it seemed like a faithful companion I could read and gain and drink from every day. I think I've discovered a new favorite author, right up there with Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell, L.M. Montgomery, and Louisa May Alcott. Her writing is poetic and she uncovers insights that make you think about spiritual and other truths in a new way. She ties the mundane and the eternal together effortlessly, which is how I view life. In this book, she writes from many characters' perspectives, and they are all such fascinating and well-drawn people that it never seemed like I heard from them enough. And her descriptions! I am a sucker for descriptions, of scenery, houses, people, objects ... she painted pictures with her words, and I had the same sorts of feelings about them as I would if I were gazing at real paintings. I want to write more or less like Elizabeth Goudge when I grow up. :)

The Scent of Water is about people finding God, learning to love and connect with others, and to be obedient to God's ways. It's set in the late 1950s or early 1960s in a serene rural village as the deep country parts of England were becoming fewer and fewer. It's adult in theme (mostly because a married couple must work through certain issues), but never inappropriate.

Fortunately, Ms. Goudge has written many other novels, so I'll be able to get to know her better and see if my already deep appreciation for her holds out!

Melody says

Re-read. I love this book with my whole heart. It's not at all the sort of thing you'd think I'd adore, inasmuch as it's not only steeped in Christianity, it's actually a proselytizing vehicle. Still, it's one of my all-time

favorites.

The writing is stellar, the characters are compelling, the setting (a small English village) is my dream home. Even the religion is tolerable as it's not the Christianity with which I'm familiar, rather it's a luminous love that transforms everything into a distillation of joy.

The story unfolds as Mary Lindsay is left a cottage by her aunt, moves to the cottage and reads her aunt's diaries while becoming part and parcel of the village. Involving studies of various inhabitants and their conflicts ensue. There's redemption and love infusing every paragraph. A delight.

K.M. Carroll says

Apparently *The Scent of Water* is one of Goudges' best known works. Delving into it, I see why. It's simply wonderful.

On the surface, it's about a woman who inherits an old little cottage in a village in rural England, and goes to live there. Her coming sends ripples through the whole community and everyone's lives wind up enriched. It also has the most touching, gentle treatment of mental illness I've ever read.

But it's about more than that. It's about *The Scent of Water*, which comes from a passage in Job:

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant."

And that alone tells you more of what the book is about than I could.

Among the many lovely, thoughtful passages, this one stood out to me.

"I had not known before that love is obedience. You want to love, and you can't, and you hate yourself because you can't, and all the time love is not some marvelous thing that you feel but some hard thing that you do. And this in a way is easier because with God's help you can command your will when you can't command your feelings. With us, feelings seem to be important, but He doesn't appear to agree with us."

Kim Kaso says

I love this author, and this book was a lovely re-read. The central figures, the village life, the children, it all filled my heart and was a blessing each day that I read it. I think it is a book that speaks more deeply and eloquently to me in age than it did in youth. I read it more and more slowly as I did not want it to end. Very highly recommended, especially for those who can appreciate books from the earlier 20th century. Ms Goudge has a magical touch in the most every day settings which has been a gift to me down through the years. Her children's book, *The Little White Horse*, was a favorite of mine and my best friend, and, it turns out, J.K. Rowling.

Valerie Kyriosity says

It's probably been well over two decades since I read this book, and I remembered absolutely nothing about it except the feel of it. The more woo-woo, mystical aspects of Goudge's spirituality probably impressed me more back then than they do now, but the overall sense of peace and security and comfort in the book still appeal to me. And while the woo-woo stuff may be a catalyst, it is solid grace and quiet obedience that cause the shalom. "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength...." Characters learn to trust and obey in the face of having to endure hard providences, having to love difficult people, and having to forsake relationships they may not lawfully pursue. In putting self to death, they find that "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." The theme of obedience is most typified in Bess, the guide dog who "trembled to [her master's] will as a compass needle to the north." "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the Lord our God, Until He has mercy on us."

There's a character named Valerie who is self-centered and discontented. Too close to the mark!

I think the author's belief in singular transformative moments isn't terribly well-founded. Change takes a more relentless, in-for-the-long-haul love for most people.

A few favorite quotes:

"She could wield the pruning knife mercilessly yet at the same time she watered the roots." #editorideals

"'My dear,' he said, 'love, your God, us a Trinity. There are three necessary prayers and they have three words each. They are these, "Lord have mercy. Thee I adore. Into thy hands." Not difficult to remember. If in times of distress you hold to these you will do well.'" I take it back. I remember the three prayers (or at least that there were three prayers). And I remember sketching a calligraphy of the them at some? point. Wonder if I still have it somewhere.

"Mrs. Hepplewhite's conversation when she was in movement, dragged one in her wake with a species of suction." Mrs. H was Lewis's "woman who lived for others, and you could always tell the others by their hunted expression."

Words I had to look up (if I weren't on my phone and getting tired of one-fingered typing, I'd add the definitions; might later): lychgate, pinchbeck, mast, bodger, tippet, Twiglets, stock, governess cart, Adam fireplace, chimney breast, riddling, chantry, *vie manquée*, pinnace, copse, wainscot, candle slide, distemper, corbel, daemon, shooting brake, lambent

Holli says

Recommended by my friend Deborah.

I liked this book for several reasons. It was set in England and felt like something I might see on PBS starring Judi Dench. But more than that, the book was very contemplative. It was filled with scenes where

the characters--especially the main character but others too-- stopped in the midst of everyday life and really paid attention to the moment—the light, smells, colors of their natural surroundings, etc. It reminded me of “haiku mind”—a frame of mind that is open to the beauty and mystery that is always there. I don’t normally read “Christian” or “Inspirational” fiction and although this was classified in that way, it wasn’t heavy-handed. The “Inspirational” part simply comes from being in the moment—which is where God is. Here is an example of a passage that I liked:

They are more than themselves and when the wonder grows in me I am more than myself. Whenever I am conscious of this more than ourselves I remember the old man in the garden at home, looking at the butterflies in the buddleia tree, and how the butterflies seemed to shine on his face, or something in him shone on the butterflies, I didn’t know which.

p. 213

I also want to remember and ponder the three prayers that the funny little man (who looked at the butterflies) described to Mary (the writer of the diary). He told her,

My dear, love, your God, is a trinity. There are three necessary prayers and they have three words each. They are these, ‘Lord have mercy. Thee I adore. Into thy hands.’ Not difficult to remember. If in times of distress you hold to these you will do well.

p. 94

Her handling of the theme, which was also the title “the scent of water” was also good. Goudge weaves it throughout the book, relating it to the situation of each of the characters. One of the characters, a troubled business man remembers hanging over the edge of the well and breathing in the cool scent of the water when he was a child: “The scent of water. He had forgotten there was such a thing. Perhaps only children were aware of it.” 136

Mimi says

Given to me by a dear friend who said, "it's my favorite of her books, I think you'll enjoy." I did very much. A quiet story, and as my lovely friend Deb said, it's not action packed, just covers Mary Lindsay settling into the house she inherited from her elderly cousin, and learning to know those around her in the village. Faith, love, and beauty were woven into the story in surprising and beautiful ways. Just delightful.

Kathryn says

A dear friend gave me two of Elizabeth Goudges book, this one and The Bird in the Tree. That was earlier this year and I just didn't get around to reading them. What a fool am I. This book was so wonderful. I was enveloped in the cottage in the country and all of the delightful characters. I cannot wait to read more from her.

Maureen E says

The Scent of Water
by Elizabeth Goudge

When I was younger I really didn't like this book. I liked almost every other Elizabeth Goudge book out there. But not this one. I think that Cousin Mary scared me. Anyway, my grandmother gave me her copy when they moved, about five years ago, I think. Eventually I thought, well I should really read it to make sure I don't like it before I sell it. I read it and I loved it. Which is all to say, sometimes there is a right time and a wrong time to read books.

I don't really have a lot to say about this book besides read it. It's beautiful. So here are a few quotes.

"Most of us tend to belittle all suffering except our own...I think it's fear. We don't want to come too near in case we're sucked in and have to share it."

"...one of those moments when the goodness of God was so real to her that it was like taste and scent: the rough strong taste of honey in the comb and the scent of water. her thoughts of God had a homeliness that at time seemed shocking, in spite of their power, which could rescue her from terror or evil with an ease that astonished her."

"If one's intellectual equipment was not great, one's spiritual experience not deep, the result of doing one's damned best could only seem very lightweight in comparison with the effort involved. But perhaps that was not important. The mysterious power that commanded men appeared to him to ask of them only obedience and the maximum of effort and to remain curiously indifferent as to results."

"You want to love and you can't, and you hate yourself because you can't, and all the time love is not some marvelous thing that you feel but some hard thing you do."

Andi says

Just finished re-reading this book. Elizabeth Goudge is a special kind of writer--a beloved author. There's no one else quite like her. I needed a nurturing story, which is why I chose Goudge. This book is lovely. Her stories are always about God, people, and place, and the powerful interplay of all three.

Jade says

It sounded to me like a poem, yet the story lines were interesting and engaging, the characters brilliantly

alive. Plenty of lovely motifs and lasting wisdom. My favorite story line presented Cousin Mary's diary: her realizations and detailed observations.

The characters were intimately linked even if they had not known one another well. The sense of connectedness and hope I found in this novel made it memorable and wise. I also enjoyed how The Laurels home was a character in itself, nurtured and loved.

My only discomfort was with the relationship between Mary (current Mary) and Paul.

Theresa says

It's Christmas time and I needed a Christmas read. With recent family events and illnesses that bordered on serious, I was looking for something I could pick up when I needed a distraction and a relaxation.

Well, I chose "The Scent of Water". Again.

"I am sitting in front of the parlor fire after tea and the curtains are drawn. There is the smell of burning wood and the scent of the chrysanthemums Ambrose brought me for Christmas. They are gold and cream and deep crimson, and he must have despoiled the greenhouse and infuriated the gardener."

I have read this book so many times, and it never disappoints me! I am so happy to see a resurgence of interest in Elizabeth Goudge's writing and her books being re-published. Not all of them have the quality of writing that this one, and others of hers, have. A few, (very few) of them border on sentimental fare (and, unfortunately, that is probably why she is labelled a sentimental writer and dismissed as such). But as I have said before, her books like "The White Witch", "The Rosemary Tree", and this one, are a treat to read and I am never bored re-reading them!

I chose it actually because I remembered the way the author had written about snow and country Christmases of long ago.

"Next day the snow began to fall, large slow flakes drifting on a light wind. The sky was leaden and the earth crouched beneath it drained of beauty. All the light and glimmer of the flakes large as wild white roses, in the tide of whiteness flowing slowly over the dark earth, like moonlight or the surf of a soundless sea."

Mary moved through her day entranced, for this was not only her first snow at Appleshaw but her first country snow. After she had rescued her six snowdrops from the garden she stayed indoors and gazed out of first one window and then another, watching how the whiteness outlined the church windows and the ledges of the tower, how it lay on the shoulders of her cupid in the garden and crept along the branches of the apple tree outside the parlor window...

When Mary at last reluctantly drew the curtains she shut herself in with a silence so living that she moved about the house or sat by the fire as attentive to it as though she were listening... there was expectancy in her listening but no impatience."

Even though familiar with the story, I found a freshness in Goudge's characters and some insights that add to their motivations and personalities that somehow, in all of my previous readings, I had missed before. "The Scent of Water" once again amused, comforted, and entertained, while giving food for thought.

Mary Lindsay's elderly and ill cousin has passed on and left her home to Mary. Coming as a huge surprise (Mary had only met her cousin, also named Mary, once during her childhood), she found herself deciding to actually leave London, retire, and go live in the village of Appleshaw. She finds a diary that her cousin had left and begins to understand not only who her cousin was, but her struggles, the past, and how to cope with her own life.

And here is where Goudge once again excels. She illustrates life in a small country village through its characters and their own personal triumphs and sorrows. Edith, the young adopted child who resents Mary's coming because it means that she can no longer play in solitude in Mary's garden. Mr. Hepplewhite, who seeks financial success and isn't afraid to use questionable means to get it, and his poor wife Dolly who has changed her name to Hermione merely to add to her husband's status (after all, "Dolly" is too plain a name for a successful businessman!) And, the tormented and unhappily married Valerie and her husband, left blind from a plane crash during the war.

"Valerie had been an enchanting and pretty girl. He was perfectly well aware of the change in her. Whenever he tried to visualize her the thin hard face slipped like a mask over the face that he remembered, and wanted to remember, and repulsed him as she herself repulsed him whenever he tried to restore again some measure of the love that had once been between them. Yet he believed it was still only a mask, not the reality as yet. If he could only get through he would find his girl still alive behind it. Would it have been all right if he had not been blinded, or if he had done what she had wanted and let himself be trained in one of the skills that blind men could practice so lucratively?"

And there is also Colonel and Mrs. Adams, a sweet and contentedly humble elderly couple who have lost two conscientious and esteemed sons, also war casualties, and are now left solely with one son; a 'rotten' son whom they have somehow failed to raise with a sense of responsibility.

Each has their own personal dragons to slay. The author turns these characters inside out, showing the reader how they make choices, why they do what they do, and weaves their story into Mary's life to bring resolution, hope, or failure. Even Mary herself is shocked to find herself, at age fifty, susceptible to having her heart carried away.

There are several references to Christmas and the ending of the story is also set during this lovely holiday.

"It was carol singers not far from my window. There was the bass rumble of a few men's voices and the piping of small boys. It was the choir. They were singing one of the oldest of the carols, "The Holly and the Ivy," the old folk tune that has been part of the English Christmas for so many centuries. I listened to it and I was at peace, and knew I would soon be well again."
