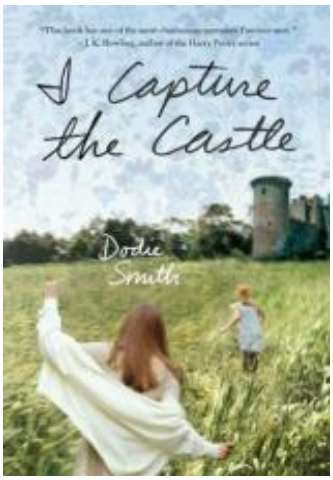
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I Capture the Castle

by Dodie Smith



About the Book

The glorious return of one of the century?s most beloved novels! **I Capture the Castle** is as brightly witty and adventuresome today as it was when it was first published fifty years ago. Long unavailable in American stores, it has been lovingly passed down from generation to generation. Until its reissue, it enjoyed the rare privilege of being one of the most requested items of used bookdealers.

I Capture the Castle tells the story of seventeen-year-old Cassandra and her family, who live in not-so-genteel poverty in a ramshackle English castle. Here she strives, over six turbulent months, to hone her writing skills. She fills three notebooks with sharply funny yet poignant entries. Her journals candidly chronicle the great changes that take place within the old castle?s walls, and her own first descent into love. By the time she pens her final entry, she has ?captured the castle?--and the heart of the reader--in one of literature?s most enchanting entertainments.

Discussion Guide

1. I Capture the Castle was first published in 1948. How might readers have responded differently to the novel at that time? How might their responses have been the same? Why does the novel continue to appeal to readers today as it did in 1948?

2. I Capture the Castle is told through Cassandra?s entries in her journals, an exercise she has undertaken in order to teach herself how to write. Why do you think Dodie Smith chose the form of the diary to tell the story of Cassandra and the Mortmain family?

3. Mortmain?s celebrated novel is described throughout **I Capture the Castle** as a literary breakthrough, a predecessor to James Joyce?s work, and meriting the analysis of famous literary critics. Yet beyond a few spare descriptions, Smith tells us little about the actual story. What do you imagine Jacob Wrestling to be about?

4. A voracious reader, Cassandra compares her situation to that of the Bennets in Jane Austen?s Pride and Prejudice. How would you compare the situation of the Mortmain sisters to that of the Bennet sisters?

5. Why does Mortmain encourage Cassandra to be ?brisk? with Stephen? What does **I Capture the Castle** say about class in mid-twentieth-century England?

6. What is the meaning of the book?s title?

7. Cassandra is fascinated by the Cottons and their American mannerisms, traditions and expressions, just as the Cottons are fascinated by the Mortmains and their English mannerisms, traditions and expressions. What does **I Capture the Castle** say about English preconceptions of Americans and America and vice versa?

8. How does **I Capture the Castle** reflect society?s changing views toward women during the first half of the century? How do the women in the novel view the roles and opportunities open to them both in the family and in the world at large differently? Consider Cassandra, Rose, Topaz, Mrs. Cotton, and Mrs. Fox-Cotton.

9. Over the course of the novel, Cassandra comes to seem less a child ?with a little green hand? and more a young woman. How is **I Capture the Castle** a story of Cassandra?s coming of age?

Author Bio

Dorothy Gladys ?Dodie? Smith was born in 1896 in Lancashire, England. She was one of the most successful female dramatists of her generation, she wrote ?Autumn,? ?Crocus,? and ?Dear Octopus,? among other plays. Her first novel, **I Capture the Castle** (Little Brown, 1948) was written when she lived in America during the ?40s and marked her crossover debut from playwright to novelist. The novel became an immediate success; it was also produced as a play in 1954. Her other novels were **The Town in Bloom, It Ends With Revelations, A Tale of Two Families**, and **The Girl in the Candle-Lit Bath**. Today however, she is best known for her stories for young readers, **The Hundred and One Dalmatians** (Heinemann, 1956) and **The Starlight Barking** (Heinemann, 1967; Simon & Schuster, 1968). **The Hundred and One Dalmatians** was inspired by Dodie?s own Dalmatian named Pongo, and became the basis of two Disney films. **The Starlight Barking** is also available in paperback from St. Martin?s Press. Dodie Smith died in 1990.

Critical Praise

"It is an occasion worth celebrating when a sparkling novel, a work of wit, irony and feeling, is brought back into print after an absence of many years. So uncork the champagne for **I Capture the Castle**. "

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