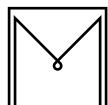


ALL CHANGE

Volume Five of The Cazalet Chronicles

ELIZABETH
JANE HOWARD



MANTLE

CONTENTS

The Cazalet Family Tree viii–ix

All Change: Character List xi

PART ONE June 1956 1

PART TWO June–July 1956 53

PART THREE July–September 1956 83

PART FOUR December 1956–January 1957 123

PART FIVE Spring 1957 155

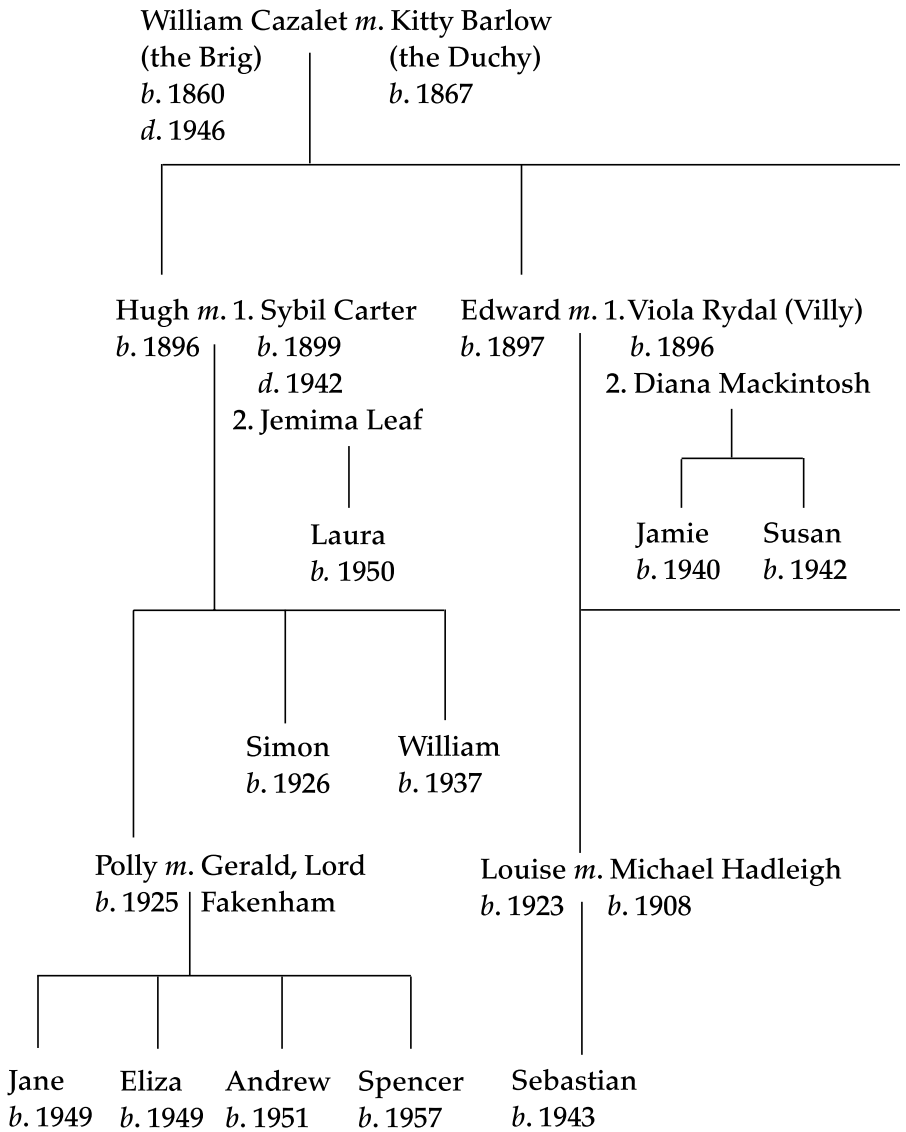
PART SIX Summer–Autumn 1957 193

PART SEVEN November–December 1957 247

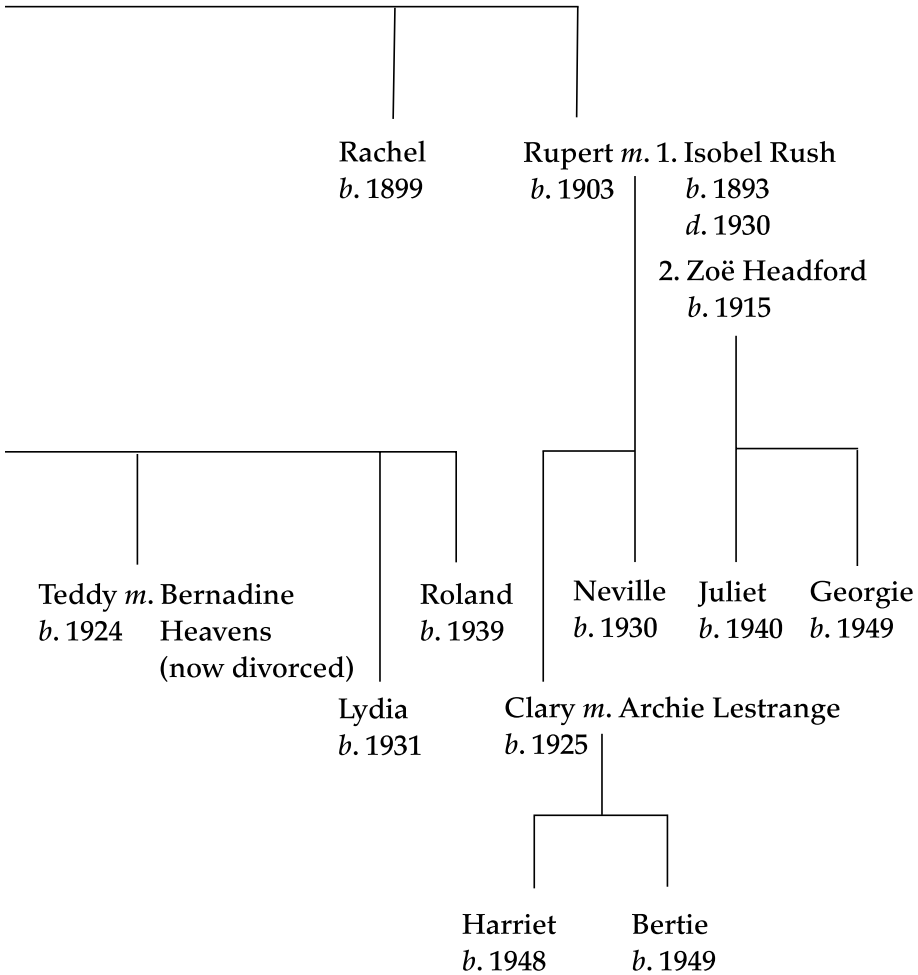
PART EIGHT January–February 1958 343

PART NINE Autumn 1958 379

PART TEN November–December 1958 469



THE CAZALET FAMILY TREE



THE CAZALET CHRONICLES:
ALL CHANGE

Character List

WILLIAM CAZALET, known as the Brig (now deceased)
Kitty Barlow, known as the Duchy (his wife)

HUGH CAZALET, eldest son

Jemima Leaf (second wife)

Laura

Sybil Carter (first wife; died in 1942)

Polly (married Gerald, Lord Fakenham;

their children: Jane, Eliza, Andrew, Spencer)

Simon

William, known as Wills

EDWARD CAZALET, second son

Diana Mackintosh (second wife)

Jamie

Susan

Viola Rydal, known as Villy (first wife)

Louise (married Michael Hadleigh, now divorced;

their son: Sebastian)

Teddy (married Bernadine Heavens, now divorced)

Lydia

Roland, known as Roly

RUPERT CAZALET, third son

Zoë Headford (second wife)

Juliet

Georgie

Isobel Rush (first wife; died having Neville)

Clarissa, known as Clary, (married Archie

Lestrangle; their children: Harriet and Bertie)

Neville

RACHEL CAZALET, only daughter

Margot Sidney, known as Sid (her partner)

JESSICA CASTLE (Villy's sister)

Raymond (her husband)

Angela

Christopher

Nora

Judy

Mrs Cripps (cook)

Ellen (nurse)

Eileen (maid)

Tonbridge (chauffeur)

McAlpine (gardener)

Miss Milliment (Louise and Lydia's old governess, now

Villy's companion)

FOREWORD

The following background is intended for those readers who are unfamiliar with the Cazalet Chronicles, a series of novels whose first four volumes are *The Light Years*, *Marking Time*, *Confusion* and *Casting Off*.

Since the summer of 1945 William and Kitty Cazalet, known to their family as the Brig and the Duchy, have lived quietly in the family house, Home Place, in Sussex. The Brig died in 1946, of bronchial pneumonia, but the Duchy lives there still. She is not alone: she and her husband had four children – an unmarried daughter, Rachel, and three sons. Hugh is a widower, but is no longer mourning his first wife, Sybil, with whom he had three children, Polly, Simon and Wills; he has recently married Jemima Leaf, who had been working at Cazalets', the family timber company. Edward has separated from Villy, his wife, and is contemplating marriage to his mistress, Diana, with whom he has two children. Rupert, missing in France during the Second World War, has returned to his wife, Zoë, Clary and Neville, the children of his first marriage, and Juliet, the daughter who was born to him and Zoë in 1940, after his disappearance. The couple have succeeded in rebuilding their marriage after a difficult start.

Edward has bought a house for Villy. She lives there, unhappily, with Roland, her younger son. She has also

FOREWORD

taken in the old family governess, Miss Milliment. Villy's sister, Jessica, and her husband have come into money, an inheritance from an aged aunt. Their son, Christopher, a pacifist and vegetarian, has become a monk.

Edward's daughter, Louise, hoped to become an actress, but married at nineteen. She has left her husband, the portrait painter Michael Hadleigh, abandoning also her small son, Sebastian. Her brother, Teddy, married an American woman while he was training with the RAF in Arizona. He brought Bernadine home to England, but she was unable to settle and left him to return to America.

Polly and Clary have been living together in London. Polly has been working for an interior decorator and Clary for a literary agent. Through her work, Polly has met Gerald Lisle, Earl of Fakenham, and visited his ancestral home, which needs restoration. Shortage of money had prevented work starting, but Polly has recognised a large number of paintings in the house by J. M. W. Turner, some of which may fund it. She and Gerald are now married.

Clary has had an unhappy love affair with the literary agent but has always been drawn towards writing. Encouraged by Archie Lestrangle, a long-standing friend of her father, she has completed her first novel. Throughout her girlhood, Archie had an avuncular relationship with Clary, but they have grown closer, so much so that they have fallen in love and it seems they will marry.

Rachel lives for others, which her friend, now lover, Margot Sidney, known as Sid, a violin teacher, finds difficult. So difficult, in fact, that she had an affair with another woman. When Rachel discovered the truth, a period of estrangement followed but they are now happily reconciled.

All Change begins nine years later, in 1956.

PART ONE

JUNE 1956



RACHEL

'Not long now.'

'Duchy, darling!'

'I feel quite peaceful.' The Duchy shut her eyes for a moment: talking – as did everything else – tired her. She paused and then said, 'After all, I *have* exceeded the time allotted to us by Mr Housman. By twenty years! "Loveliest of trees" – I could never agree with him about that.' She looked up at her daughter's anguished face – so pale with smudges of violet under her eyes from not sleeping, her mouth pinched with the effort of not weeping – and, with enormous difficulty, the Duchy lifted her hand from the sheet. 'Now, Rachel, my dear, you must not be so distressed. It upsets me.'

Rachel took the trembling, bony hand and cupped it in both of hers. No, she must not upset her: it would indeed be selfish to do that. Her mother's hand, mottled with liver spots, was so wasted that the gold band of her wristwatch hung loosely, the dial out of sight; her wedding ring was tilted to halfway over her knuckle. 'What tree would you choose?'

'A good question. Let me see.'

She watched her mother's face, animated by the luxury of choice – a serious matter . . .

'Mimosa,' the Duchy said suddenly. 'That heavenly scent! Never been able to grow it.' She moved her hand

ALL CHANGE

and began fretfully fumbling with her bedclothes. 'No one left now to call me Kitty. You cannot imagine—' She seemed to choke suddenly, trying to cough.

'I'll get you some water, darling.' But the carafe was empty. Rachel found a bottle of Malvern water in the bathroom, but when she returned with it, her mother was dead.

The Duchy had not moved from her position, propped up by the square pillows she had always favoured; one hand lay on the sheet, the other clasping the plait of her hair that Rachel did for her every morning. Her eyes were open, but the direct, engaging sincerity that had always been there was gone. She stared, sightless, at nothing.

Shocked, mindless, Rachel took the raised hand and placed it carefully beside the other. With one finger she gently closed her mother's eyes, and bent down to kiss the cool white forehead, then stood transfixed as she was assailed by streams of unconnected thoughts – it was as though a trapdoor had suddenly opened. Childhood memories. 'There is no such thing as a white lie, Rachel. A lie is a lie and you are never to tell them.' When Edward had spat at her standing in his cot: 'I don't listen to people who tell tales.' But her brother was reprimanded and never did it again. The serenity that rarely seemed disturbed – only once, after seeing Hugh and Edward off to France, aged eighteen and seventeen respectively, calm, smiling, while the train slowly left Victoria station. Then she had turned away, and had pulled out the tiny lace handkerchief that was always tucked into her wristwatch. 'They are only boys!' There was a small but distinct strawberry mark on the inside of that wrist, and Rachel remembered wondering if she

JUNE 1956

kept the handkerchief there to conceal it, and how she could have had such a frivolous thought. But the Duchy did cry: she cried with laughter – at the antics of Rupert who, from his earliest years, had made everyone laugh; at Rupert's children – notably Neville; at people she regarded as pompous; tears would stream down her face. Then, too, at ruthless Victorian rhymes: 'Boy gun, joy fun, gun bust, boy dust', and 'Papa, Papa, what is that mess that looks like strawberry jam? Hush, hush, my dear, it is Mama, run over by a tram'. And music made her cry. She was a surprisingly good pianist, used to play duets with Myra Hess, and had loved Toscanini and his records of the Beethoven symphonies. Alongside her rule of plain living (you did not put butter *and* marmalade on breakfast toast; meals consisted of roast meat, eaten hot, then cold and finally minced with boiled vegetables, and poached fish once a week, followed by stewed fruit and blancmange, which the Duchy called 'shape', or rice pudding), she lived a private life that, apart from music, consisted of gardening, which she adored. She grew large, fragrant violets in a special frame, clove carnations, dark red roses, lavender, everything that smelt sweet, and then fruit of every description: yellow and red raspberries, and tomatoes, nectarines, peaches, grapes, melons, strawberries, huge red dessert gooseberries, currants for making jam, figs, greengages and other plums. The grandchildren loved coming to Home Place for the dishes piled with the Duchy's fruit.

Her relationship with her husband, the Brig, had always been shrouded in Victorian mystery. When Rachel was a child, she had seen her parents simply in relation to herself – her mother, her father. But living at

ALL CHANGE

home with them all of her life, and while continuing to love them unconditionally, she had nevertheless grown to perceive them as two very different people. Indeed, they were utterly unlike. The Brig was gregarious to the point of eccentricity – he would bring anyone he met in his club or on the train back to either of his houses for dinner and sometimes the weekend, without the slightest warning, presenting them rather as a fisherman or hunter might display the most recent salmon or stag or wild goose. Whereupon – with only the mildest rebuke – the Duchy would tranquilly serve them with boiled mutton and blancmange.

She was not reclusive, but was perfectly content with her growing family, her children and grandchildren, accepting her three daughters-in-law graciously. But her own world she kept very private: the japes of her youth (of an apple-pie-bed nature) or Sardines, played daringly in some remote Scottish castle, surfaced only fleetingly when she told stories to some grandchild who had fallen out of a tree or been thrown by the pony. Her father, Grandpapa Barlow, had been a distinguished scientist, a member of the Royal Society. One of four sisters, she was the beauty (although she had always seemed unaware of that). A looking glass, she had taught Rachel, was for making sure that one's hair was neat and one's brooch pinned straight.

In her old age, when gardening became difficult, she had taken to regular cinema outings, largely to see Gregory Peck, with whom she had quite fallen in love . . .

I didn't ask her enough. I knew hardly anything about her. This, considering fifty-six years of intimacy, seemed dreadful to Rachel now. All those mornings of making

JUNE 1956

toast, while the Duchy boiled water on the spirit lamp to make tea, all those afternoons out of doors in summer, cosy in the breakfast room when it was too cold to be out, in the holidays with grandchildren, who had to eat one plain piece of bread and butter before they were allowed either jam or cake, but most of the time alone together: the Duchy machining curtains for Home Place; making Rachel beautiful frocks, tussore silk smocked in blue or cherry red, and then for the grandchildren – for Louise and Polly, Clary and Juliet; even for the boys, Teddy and Neville, Wills and Roland, until they were three or four and objected to wearing girls' clothes, while Rachel struggled with beginners' knitting, mufflers and mittens. These had been made during the interminable years of war – the awful months and months when letters were longed for and telegrams so dreaded . . .

She had grown up, the daughter of the house, and, except for enduring three dreadful homesick years at a boarding school, she had never left home. She had begged every holiday to be allowed to remain at home – 'If they see a single hair in my hairbrush they give me an order mark' she remembered sobbing, and the Duchy saying, 'Then do not leave a single hair, my duck.'

Her role in life was to look after other people, never to consider her appearance, to understand that men were more important than women, to attend to her parents, to organise meals and deal with the servants who, to a man or woman, loved Rachel for her care and interest in their lives.

But now, with both parents gone, it seemed as though her life's work had finished. She could be with Sid as much as either of them pleased; an alarming freedom

ALL CHANGE

had come upon her; something heard in one of the free-thinking schools, a young pupil saying, 'Must we do what we like all the time?' now applied to her.

She was conscious that she had been standing beside her mother's deathbed as all these disjointed thoughts overwhelmed her – realised that she had been crying, that her back ached intolerably, that there were many, many things to be done: ring the doctor, contact Hugh – he would surely ring the others for her, Edward, Rupert and Villy – and, of course, Sid. She would have to tell the servants – here she was brought up short: since the war the servants had consisted of Mr and Mrs Tonbridge, the ancient gardener who was now too arthritic to do much more than mow the lawns, a girl who came three mornings a week to do the cleaning, and Eileen, now returned after her mother's illness. Rachel turned again to her dear mother. She looked peaceful, and strikingly young. She picked a white rose out of the little jug and put it between her hands. The small strawberry mark on her wrist stood out more clearly; the watch had slipped down to her palm. She took it off and laid it beside the bed.

When she opened the large sash window, the warm air scented with the roses growing beneath came softly into the room, wafted by little zephyr breezes that fanned the muslin curtains.

She mopped her face, blew her nose and (in order that she would be able to speak without crying) said aloud, 'Goodbye, my darling.'

Then she left the room and set about the day.

THE FAMILY

'Well, one of us should go. We can't leave poor Rachel to cope on her own.'

'Of course we can't.'

Edward, who had been about to explain that he couldn't easily cancel his lunch with the blokes who were in charge of the nationalised railways, noticed that Hugh had begun to rub his forehead in a way that announced one of his fiendish headaches and decided that he should be spared the initial painful rites. 'What about Rupe?' he said.

Rupert, the youngest brother and technically a director of the firm, charmed everyone; he was the obvious candidate but his inability to make up his mind and his intense sympathy for the point of view of anyone he met, client or staff, made him of questionable use. Edward said he would talk to him at once. 'He needs to be told anyway. Don't you worry, old boy. We can all go down at the weekend.'

'Rachel said it was completely peaceful.' He had said this before, but the repetition clearly comforted him. 'Rather the end of an era. Puts us in the front line, doesn't it?'

This both made of them think of the Great War, but neither of them said so.

When Edward had gone, Hugh reached for his pills

ALL CHANGE

and sent Miss Corley out for a sandwich for his lunch. He probably wouldn't eat more than a bite, but it would stop her fussing about him.

Lying on the leather sofa in his dark glasses he wept. The Duchy's tranquillity, her frankness, the way in which she had welcomed Jemima and her two boys . . . Jemima. If he was now in the front line, he had Jemima beside him – a stroke of unbelievable luck, an everyday joy. After Sybil's death he had thought his affections would ever after be directed only to Polly, who would naturally marry, as she had, have her own children, which she most certainly had done, and that for the rest of his life he would be first for nobody. How lucky I have been, he thought, as he took off his glasses to wipe them dry.

∞ ∞ ∞

'Darling, of course I'm coming. If I'm quick, I can catch the four twenty – could Tonbridge meet me, do you think? Rachel, just don't fuss about me. I'm perfectly all right – it was just a touch of bronchitis, and I got up yesterday. Is there anything I can bring you? Right. See you soon after six. 'Bye, dearest.'

And she rang off before Rachel could try any more to dissuade her.

As she walked shakily upstairs, the enormity of the changes that now lay ahead struck her. She was still weak, although the marvellous penicillin had more or less knocked the bug on the head. She decided to skip lunch and pack a few things in a bag that would not be too heavy to carry. Rachel would be anguished by her mother's death, but now she – Sid – would be able to

JUNE 1956

look after her. They would really be able to live together at last.

She had loved and admired the Duchy, but for so long and so often her times with Rachel had had to be cut short because Rachel had felt that her mother needed her. And it had got worse after the Brig had died, in spite of the affectionate attentions of the three sons and their wives. This last illness had been an enormous strain upon Rachel, who had not left her mother's side since Easter. Well, it was over, and now at the age of fifty-six, Rachel would at last be able to call her life her own, but Sid also realised that this would be – initially, at least – alarming for her, rather like letting a bird out of its familiar cage into vast open country. She would need both encouragement and protection.

She was so early for her train that there was time (and need) to eat a sandwich and sit down. After some patient queuing, Sid procured two slices of grey spongy bread, scraped with bright yellow margarine and encasing an extremely thin slice of soapy Cheddar. There were very few places to sit, and she tried perching on her suitcase, which showed signs of collapsing. After a few moments a very old man got up from a crowded bench leaving a copy of the *Evening Standard* – 'Burgess and Maclean Taking Long Holiday Abroad' was the headline. They sounded like a couple of biscuit manufacturers, Sid thought.

It was a great relief to get onto the train, after she had struggled against the tide of people who got off it. The carriage was dirty, the upholstery of the seats threadbare and dusty, the floor spattered with extinguished cigarette ends. The windows were so smoke-ridden that she could hardly see out of them. But when the guard blew his

ALL CHANGE

whistle and with a lurch the train began to puff its way across the bridge, Sid began to feel less tired. How many times had she made this journey to be with Rachel? All those weekends when to go for a walk together had been the height of bliss; when discretion and secrecy had governed everything they did. Even when Rachel met the train, Tonbridge had been driving; he could hear every word they said. In those days simply to be with her was so wonderful that for a long time she had needed nothing more. And then she did want more – wanted Rachel in bed with her – and a new kind of secrecy had begun. Lust, or anything approaching it, had had to be concealed – not only from everyone else but from Rachel herself for whom it was terrifying and incomprehensible. Then she had been ill, and Rachel had come immediately to nurse her. And then . . . Remembering Rachel offering herself still brought tears to her eyes. Perhaps, she thought now, her greatest achievement had been getting Rachel to enjoy physical love. And even then, she thought, with wry amusement, they had had to battle through Rachel's guilt, her sense that she did not deserve so much pleasure, that she must never allow it to come before her duty.

Sid spent the rest of the journey making wildly delightful plans for the future.



'Oh, Rupe, I'm sorry. I could join you tomorrow because the children won't be at school. But you'd better ring and see if that is what Rachel would like. Would you like me to tell Villy? . . . OK. See you tomorrow, darling – I hope.'

JUNE 1956

Since Rupert had joined the firm they were much better off – had been able to buy a rather dilapidated house in Mortlake, on the river. It had not cost too much – six thousand pounds – but it was in a poor state, and when the river was high, the ground floor was often flooded in spite of the wall in the front garden and the mounting block where a gate had once stood. But Rupert didn't mind any of that: he was in love with the beautiful sash windows, the splendid doors, and the amazing room on the first floor that ran the whole width of the house, with a pretty fireplace at each end; the egg-and-dart ceiling friezes; the bedrooms that rambled on the top floor, all leading into each other, culminating in one very small bathroom and lavatory that had been modernised in the forties with a salmon-coloured bath and shiny black tiles.

'I love it,' Rupert had said. 'It's the house for us, darling. Of course we'll have to do a certain amount to it. They said the boiler wasn't working. But that's just a detail. You do like it, don't you?'

And, of course, she'd said yes.

Rupert and Zoë had moved in in 1953, the year of the Coronation, and some of the 'details' had been dealt with: the kitchen had been extended by adding the scullery to it, with a new boiler, new cooker and sink. But they could not afford central heating, so the house was always cold. In winter it was freezing. Rupert pointed out to the children that they would be able to see the Boat Race, but Juliet had been unmoved by the prospect: 'One of them's got to win, haven't they? It's a foregone conclusion.' And Georgie had simply remarked that it would only be interesting if they fell in. Georgie was now seven, and since the age of three had been obsessed with animals.

ALL CHANGE

He had what he described as a zoo, comprising a white rat called Rivers, two tortoises that constantly got lost in the back garden, silk worms, when the season allowed, a garter snake that was also a virtuoso at escaping, a pair of guinea pigs and a budgerigar. He longed for a dog, a rabbit and a parrot, but so far his pocket money had not run to the expense. He was writing a book about his zoo, and had got into serious trouble for taking Rivers to school concealed in his satchel. Although Rivers was now confined to his cage during school hours, Zoë knew that he would be accompanying them to Home Place but, as Rupert pointed out, he was a very tactful rat and people often didn't know he was there.

As she prepared their tea – sardine sandwiches and flapjacks she had made that morning – Zoë wondered what would happen to Home Place. Rachel surely would not want to live there alone, but the brothers might share ownership of it, although this almost certainly meant that they would never go anywhere else on holiday and she longed to go abroad – to France or Italy. St Tropez! Venice! Rome!

The front door slammed, followed by the thud of a satchel being dropped on the flagstones in the hall and then Georgie appeared. He wore his school's summer uniform: a white shirt, grey shorts, tennis shoes and white socks. Everything that was supposed to be white was of a greyish pallor.

'Where's your blazer?'

He looked down at himself, surprised. 'I don't know. Somewhere. We had games. We don't have to wear blazers for games.' His grubby little face was wet with sweat. He returned Zoë's kiss with a casual hug. 'Did you give Rivers his carrot?'

JUNE 1956

'Oh dear, I'm afraid I forgot.'

'Oh, Mum!'

'Darling, he'll be all right. He gets lots of food.'

'That's not the point. The carrot is to stop him being bored.' He rushed to the scullery, knocking over a chair in his haste. He returned a moment later with Rivers on his shoulder. He still looked reproachful, but Rivers was clearly delighted, nibbling his ear and burrowing under his shirt collar. 'A mere blazer is nothing compared to a rat's life.'

'Blazers are not mere, and Rivers wasn't starving to death. Don't be silly.'

'All right.' He smiled so engagingly that, as usual, she felt a shock of love for him. 'Could we start tea now? I'm really hungry. We had poison meat and frog spawn for lunch. And Forrester was sick everywhere so I couldn't eat it.'

They were both sitting at a corner of the table. She smoothed his damp hair back from his forehead. 'We must wait for Jules. Meanwhile, I have to tell you something. The Duchy died this morning. Quite peacefully, Aunt Rachel said. Daddy's going down to Home Place today, and we may be joining him tomorrow.'

'How did she die?'

'Well, she was very old, you know. She was nearly ninety.'

'That's nothing for a tortoise. Poor Duchy. I feel very sorry for her not being there.' He sniffed and brought an unspeakably filthy handkerchief out of his shorts pocket. 'I had to clean my knees a bit with it but it's only earth dirt.'

A second bang of the front door and Juliet came into the kitchen. 'Sorry I'm late,' she said, not sounding it at

ALL CHANGE

all, wrenching off her crimson tie and school blazer, which fell to the floor with her satchel.

'Where's your hat, darling?'

'In my satchel. There are limits and that hat is definitely one of them.'

'You'll have scrunched it all up,' Georgie said, his tone a subtle mixture of admiration and cheek. At fifteen, Juliet was eight years older and Georgie desperately wanted her to love and be interested in him. Most of the time she alternated between being carelessly kind and sternly judgemental. 'Guess what?' he said.

Juliet had cast herself into a chair. 'God! What?'

'The Duchy's dead. She died this morning. Mum told me so I knew before you.'

'The Duchy? How tragic! She wasn't murdered or anything?'

'Of course not. She died very peacefully with Aunt Rachel.'

'Is she dead too?'

'No. I meant Aunt Rachel was with her. You'll have to be far older before you know a murdered person,' she added.

Georgie was eating sandwiches rather fast, and Rivers was getting fed bits of them.

'Mummy, must we have tea with that rat?' And then, feeling that it was rather a heartless remark, Juliet said in her school-drama voice, 'I feel so upset, I don't think I can eat a thing.'

Zoë, who knew a good deal about her stunningly beautiful daughter's ways (had they not been her own when she was that age?), spoke soothingly: 'Of course you're upset, darling. We're all sad because we all loved her, but she was quite old, and it's just good that she

JUNE 1956

didn't suffer any pain. Eat something, darling, and you'll feel better.'

'And,' Georgie continued, 'Dad's gone down to Home Place, and we'll all go first thing tomorrow morning if Aunt Rachel wants us to. Which she will.'

'Oh, Mummy! You were going to take me shopping, to get my jeans! You promised!' And at the thought of this betrayal, Juliet burst into real tears. 'We can't buy them on a weekday because of horrible school and that means I'll have to wait a-whole-nother week. And all my friends have got them. It's not fair! Couldn't we go shopping in the morning and then go on an afternoon train?'

And Zoë, not at all feeling like a continuing scene, said weakly, 'We'll have to wait and see.'

Georgie said, 'And we all know what that means. It means we aren't going to do what you want, but we're not going to tell you that now.'

POLLY

'I would start all this at half-term.'

She had been kneeling in front of the lavatory having been wrenchingly sick, as she had been every morning for the last week. It was a very old-fashioned lavatory and she had to pull the chain twice. She bathed her face in cold water and washed her hands just as it was reluctantly turning tepid. There wasn't time for a bath. There was the children's breakfast to make – the nauseating smell of eggs frying came immediately to her, but the children could make do with boiled ones.

There was one of those biscuit tins upholstered in padded chintz by her bed, a relic from her mother-in-law, now filled with Carr's water biscuits. She sat on the bed eating them. Two previous pregnancies had taught her some tricks of the trade. In another eight to ten weeks the sickness would disappear and she would start the fat, backache stage. 'It isn't that I don't love them once they're here,' she had said to Gerald. 'It's all the trouble of having them. If I was a blackbird, for instance, it would simply be a matter of sitting on lovely tidy eggs for a week or two.'

'Think of elephants,' he had replied soothingly, as he stroked her hair. 'It takes them two years.' On another occasion he had said, 'I wish I could have them for you.' Gerald often said he wished he could do whatever was

JUNE 1956

required for her, but he never could. He was neither good at making up his mind nor at acting upon whatever uneasy conclusion he drew about anything. The only thing that Polly could completely, utterly, unfailingly rely upon was his love for her and their children. At the beginning this had astonished her: she had read about marriage in novels, had thought she knew it progressed from the rapturous being-in-love stage to a quiet settlement of whatever would turn out to be the status quo, but it was not at all like that. Gerald's love for her had brought out qualities in him that she had neither known nor imagined any man to possess. His even, steady gentleness, his perspicacity, his continuous interest in knowing what she thought and felt. Then there was his secret sense of humour – he was shy and unforthcoming with most people, his jokes reserved for her, and he could be very funny – but perhaps above all his great talent was for being a father. He had stayed with her throughout her first long labour, had wept when the twins were born and had been a hands-on parent, both with them and subsequently with Andrew, two years later. 'We have to populate this house somehow.' He would be calm about this fourth baby, she knew that – he had probably sensed it already and was waiting for her to tell him.

By now she had struggled into her shirt, pinafore dress and sandals, and brushed her copper-coloured hair into a ponytail. She no longer felt sick, but a bit shaky about cooking. Thanks to the amazing cache of Turners she and Gerald had discovered during that first tour of the house about ten years ago, they had been able to mend the acres of roof, then convert one wing into a comfortable house, with a large kitchen in which they could all eat, a second bathroom and a large playroom (it

ALL CHANGE

had begun as a day nursery). Nan had been offered a warm room on the ground floor, but she had insisted on sleeping next to the children: 'Oh, no, m'lady. I couldn't have my babies sleeping on a different floor. It wouldn't be right.' Her age, which was considerable, was unknown, and she clearly suffered from what she called her rheumatics, but she hobbled about, her eyes and hearing hardly impaired. A good many adjustments had had to be made over the years. Nan's notion of the part that parents played in the upbringing of their children (teatime with Mummy in their best clothes and then a goodnight kiss from her and Daddy) had perforce undergone significant change. Gerald had effected this. In Nan's eyes he could do no wrong, so if he wished to bath his children, read to them, even, in the early stages, to change their nappies, she put it all down to his eccentricity, which she knew the upper classes went in for. 'People have their little ways,' was one of her sayings when anything happened that she disapproved of or did not understand.

In spite of all they had done, the very large remaining parts of the enormous Edwardian house still defeated Polly. It required a lot of attention. Rooms had to be aired regularly in an attempt to fight the damp that crept through the building, leaving swags of weary wallpaper, infesting attics and passages with a minute speckled black fungus that Gerald had remarked looked like Napoleon's disposition of troops before battle. The children, or at least the twins and their friends, played endless games of hide-and-seek, Sardines and a game devised by them called Torchlight Ogres. Andrew minded very much about being left out, and several times Eliza allowed him to join them, but he always got lost and cried. 'I told you,

JUNE 1956

Mummy, he wouldn't enjoy it,' Jane would say. These were everyday arguments and Gerald usually stepped in with a plan that restored goodwill.

He met Polly at the bottom of the stairs to tell her that the Duchy had died. Rupert had gone down to Home Place, and would tell them, once it had been arranged, the date of the funeral.