



NICOLA
THORNE

Past Love
&
In This Quiet Earth

PAST LOVE

Nicola Thorne



PAN BOOKS

This edition published 1999 by Pan Books
an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Ltd
25 Eccleston Place, London SW1W 9NF
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.macmillan.co.uk

Copyright © 1998 by Nicola Thorne.

All rights reserved.

The moral rights of the author has been asserted.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Thorne, Nicola

Past love

1. Title

823.9'14 [F]

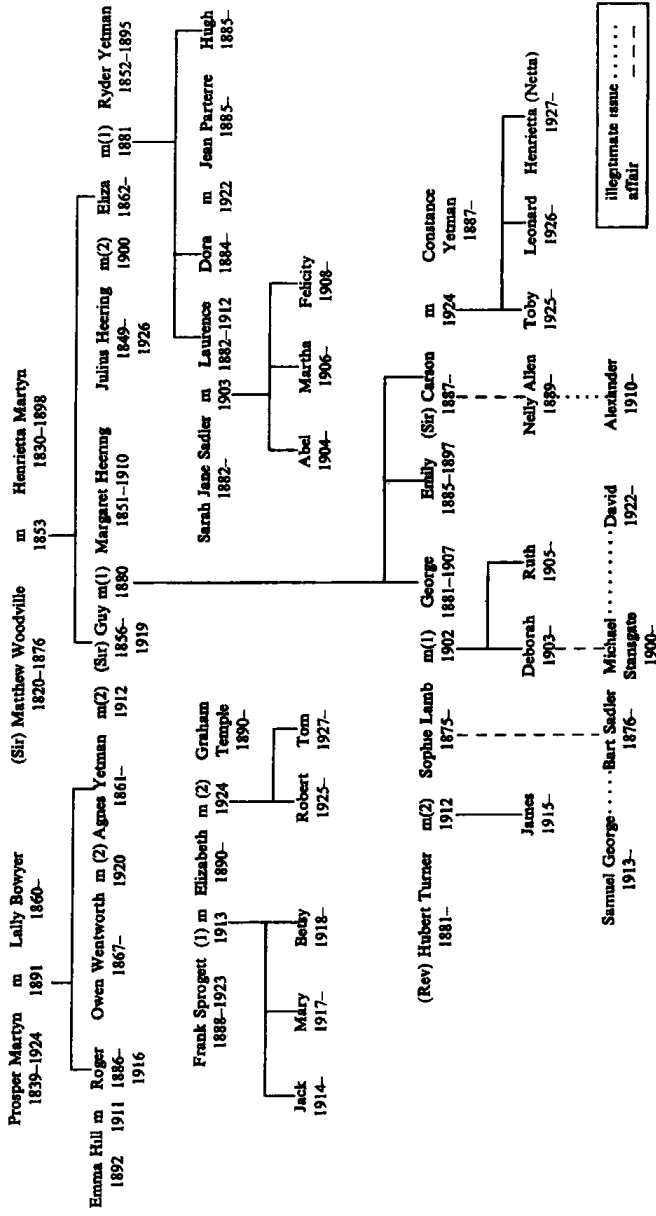
ISBN 0 330 39649 8

All situations in this publication are fictitious and
any resemblance to living persons is purely coincidental.

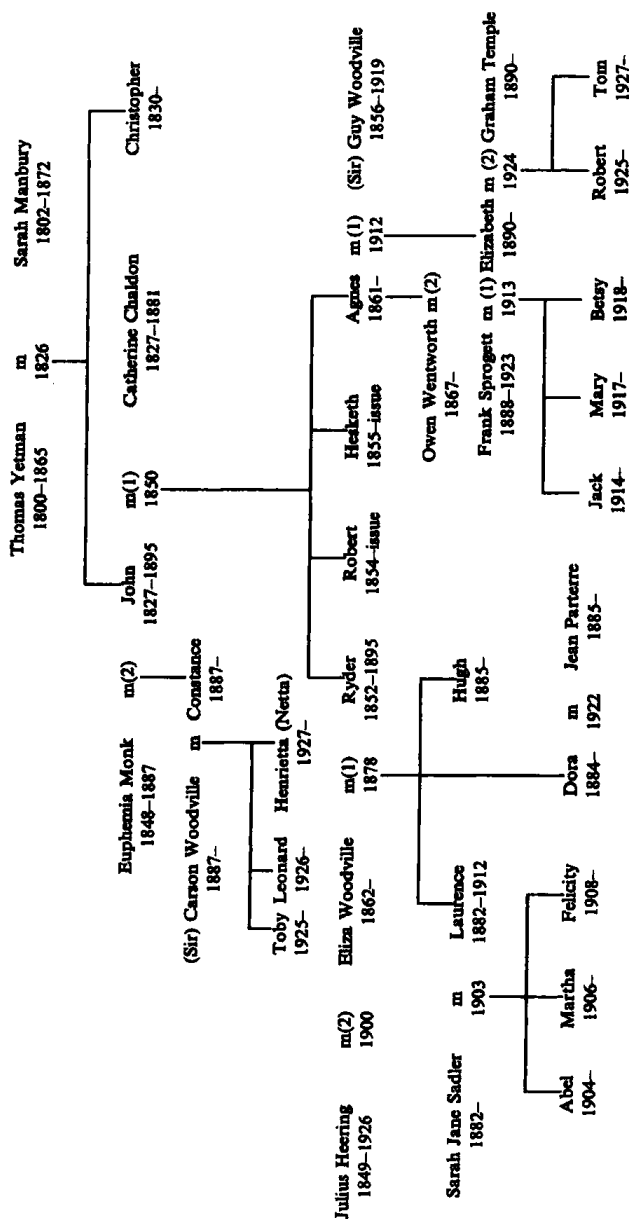
Typeset by Hewer Text Composition Services Ltd,
Edinburgh, Scotland.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

Family Tree of the Woodville Family 1820-1928



Family Tree of the Yetman Family 1800-1928



‘The People of this Parish’ series

The story so far:

In 1880 young Sir Guy Woodville brings his Dutch bride Margaret to his ancient Dorset family home, Pelham’s Oak. With Margaret comes a much needed dowry to restore the fortunes of the impoverished but noble Woodville family. The marriage is one of convenience for Guy, if not for the rather plain bride who is very much in love with her handsome husband.

Guy has a rebellious, high-spirited younger sister, Eliza, who spurns her family’s attempts to marry her well. She elopes with Ryder Yetman, the son of a local builder, thus causing great scandal in the sleepy market town of Wenham, over which the Woodvilles have presided for centuries as lords of the manor. Volume One, *The People of this Parish* (1880–1898), follows the fortunes of the Woodvilles and the Yetmans as they intermarry and breed, their joys and sorrows, triumphs and disasters.

Margaret and Guy have three children. Pious George falls in love with the rector’s daughter, Sophie Lamb, and elopes with her to Papua New Guinea, where he quickly dies of fever. The only daughter, Emily, dies young, and the heir is Carson, a charming rebel with an eye for the ladies or, preferably, the buxom country girls, who would rather be a farmer than a baronet with a large estate.

Eliza, meanwhile, has been ecstatically married to Ryder, who becomes a prosperous builder, and they too have three children. When Ryder is killed in an accident, Eliza marries Julius, the brother of Margaret, her sister-in-law. A cold, mean-minded man, he refuses to help his stepson Laurence when he is facing bankruptcy. This leads Laurence to commit suicide, leaving an embittered widow and a young family.

Volume Two, *The Rector’s Daughter* (1907–1913), follows the fortunes of Sophie Woodville when she returns as a widow to her birthplace, accompanied by her two young children. She is not

welcomed by George's parents, who feel she is responsible for his untimely death; her own parents, too, disapproved of the marriage. Sophie endures many vicissitudes before being happily married to her father's curate, even though when he proposes he knows she is pregnant with another man's child.

Also in this book, Carson, after his mother's death, is prevailed upon to propose to a wealthy but plain and withdrawn young girl, Connie, in order to save Pelham's Oak and the Woodvilles from financial ruin. But he does not love her and when his father remarries, to a supposedly rich woman, Agnes, Connie leaves Wenham to travel the world with her wealthy guardian. Volume Two ends on the eve of the First World War.

In This Quiet Earth (1919–1921), the third volume, takes up the story of war hero Carson who, having inherited the title from his late father, returns at the end of hostilities to find the Woodville estate once more in financial difficulties, due largely to the excesses of Agnes, his stepmother.

Soon after Carson's return the rejected Connie, transformed from a duckling into a swan, once more enters his life, now a very wealthy woman. Carson, who proves adept at running the family estates and has no need of her money, sets out to woo her back.

His stepmother continues to plague him, especially after her marriage to fortune hunter Owen Wentworth, who has assumed a spurious title and marries Agnes for her money only to find that she has none either. He makes off with what jewellery she possesses and she is left destitute, dependent on Carson and Connie, who rally to her support.

This book also concerns the fortunes of Agnes's daughter by Sir Guy, Elizabeth, who lives in penury with her war-wounded husband and three children, only to discover that she is a Woodville by birth. She is determined to exact revenge on the family who have disowned her, but kind-hearted Carson tries to make amends.

Prologue

May 1928

"I baptise thee Henrietta Euphemia in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The Rector of Wenham held the baby in his arms tenderly as he pronounced the words of baptism, pouring the water over her head. Perhaps because she was conscious of her patrimony Henrietta was as good as gold and smiled round at everyone, a natural scene-stealer. She was already six months old so had some practice in capturing hearts.

Carson adored her; the longed-for girl. Now the family was complete. He looked lovingly across at his wife who returned his glance, as if she understood. Yes, thankfully, there would be no more. Connie had found childbearing irksome despite its rewards and, a late baby, they had nearly lost Henrietta and the mother as well, which was why the christening was so long delayed.

Henrietta's small brothers Toby and Leonard, their hands tightly clasping those of their nurse, looked on in some awe as the baby was carefully restored to the arms of her godmother, her aunt Elizabeth, Carson's half-sister.

The church, of course, was full. All the inhabitants of Wenham had pressed in for the occasion. It was Sunday, but even if it had been a weekday every shop in the town would have

been shut, only the pubs would have stayed open for the hoped-for influx of revellers. The Woodvilles and Wenham were synonymous. So many events concerning the family had been enacted here over the years, solemn as well as happy, that many of the people of the parish, some of whom were now very old, could still recall.

The marriage in 1880 of Carson's father and mother, Guy and Henrietta. The christenings of their three children, George, Emily and Carson. The marriage of his sister, Eliza Woodville, and Ryder Yetman whose elopement had scandalised the town. The marriage of Laurence Yetman, Carson's cousin, to Sarah-Jane Sadler and the subsequent christenings of their children. The sad, sad funeral of little Emily, still a child and, later, of her uncle Ryder and cousin Laurence, both tragic deaths. The marriage of Sophie Woodville to Henry Lamb, now Rector of Wenham, and the christenings of their two sons. The funerals of Sir Guy and Lady Woodville, almost state occasions when everyone had worn mourning and shops and buildings were hung with black ribbons.

More recent was Carson's grand wedding to Constance Yetman, a woman he had once proposed to only to change his mind and then, years later, change it back again. And now, happily, the christening of his third child, the much wanted daughter.

The Woodvilles and the little town of Wenham were inextricably linked. Woodvilles had been Lords of the Manor of Wenham since the sixteenth century when a prosperous burgher, Pelham Woodville, had built a great house on top of a hill three miles or so out of the small town which was visible from its grounds. His heir, Charles, who had been a soldier, was later ennobled by Charles II for services rendered to that monarch when he had served him in exile.

Over the years, like other noble families, the Woodvilles had

Past Love

known good times and bad. Some had been clever businessmen and managers of money, and the estate had prospered. Others were hopeless and it went into a decline. Unfortunately, two recent holders of the title, Carson's father, Guy, and his grandfather, Matthew, had been among the less astute and had to be bailed out by marrying rich women.

But Carson had stemmed the tide. Inheriting a bankrupt property on his father's death just after he had returned from the war, he had restored the house and turned the many farms, wood mills and small businesses on the estate into flourishing concerns. He had also married a woman of considerable wealth, but for love, and her money remained hers for the benefit, perhaps, of their children in the fullness of time.

The baptism over, prayers were said, the blessing given and the congregation piled out of doors into the spring sunshine. Everyone gathered around the family who, as all families do, posed for a long time for photographs. There were photos of the parents alone with the baby; they were then joined by the two small sons, then by close members of the family. The numbers swelled to more distant ones, to family retainers and hangers-on and, finally, as many townsfolk who could get a look in, pushing and jostling good-humouredly for a coveted place in the picture.

And after the family had departed, as so often in the past, a procession set on its way to follow them, a giant caterpillar of vehicles of all kinds – carts, traps, automobiles, even bicycles – which wound along the narrow lanes towards the Woodville family seat where Carson, fourteenth baronet, waited to greet them.

PART ONE

The Black Sheep of the Family

One

It was a glorious spring day, the countryside of North Dorset at its best.

The swifts, returning to their breeding sites, were whirling high in the sky looking for nest holes. Sometimes when they found them, often occupied by other birds, they became quarrelsome and their indignant shrieks pierced the air as territorial battles raged.

A few bluebells remained in the hedgerows but their hour was almost done and the fragrant cow parsley, ox-eye daisies, red campion and purple mallow flowers were now jostling for room with a scattering of dog roses, their thick buds turning into floppy pink petals. In the fields on either side of the narrow road, the grass was already high, ready for the first cutting.

Carson's cousin, Dora Parterre, drove in her open tourer, her husband beside her. In the back seat was her mother, Eliza, and brother, Hugh. Dora flung her head back, her spirits high.

"It's so *glorious* to be back," she cried glancing behind her at her mother who sat holding firmly on to her hat.

"I hope you're going to stay a few weeks," Eliza Heering said.

Dora looked at her husband, Jean, always nervous when he was beside her in the car because she drove at such speed. For some odd reason, though he was a builder and a man of action, he had never learned to drive.

He was a strange, rather taciturn man and he sat ramrod straight, staring in front of him.

"Jean?" Dora looked quizzically at him.

"Well, at least you can stay, my dear, as long as you like." He gave her a pleasant smile and then fastened his eyes again on the road as if he were driving and a moment's diversion would cause an accident. Dora was used to this and took no notice, putting her foot on the pedal as hard as circumstances allowed.

"I thought Connie looked tired," Eliza said after a few moments' silence. "I don't think she should have had that last baby."

"They so wanted a girl," Hugh, who was unmarried, said, trying unsuccessfully to light a cigarette in the wind.

"Well, there won't be any more," Eliza said firmly, "that's for sure. Poor Connie had a horrible time . . . and dear little Henrietta . . ." She faltered, too upset by the memory of those anxious days to continue.

"But you couldn't have a healthier baby now." As Dora once again looked back at her mother Eliza couldn't help wondering if her daughter, married now for four years, had any regrets about her own childlessness. It was a subject about which, up to now, they had not spoken.

They turned into the gates and joined the queue of assorted vehicles slowly making their way along the drive towards the house which had once been Eliza's home. She was born there and always thought of it as the place where she really belonged.

Despite her two marriages she was a true Woodville at heart, happy and content among the Woodvilles, in the place that so many centuries before Pelham had built.

This, standing at the top of the incline up which they now drove, was a stately Palladian mansion faced with Chilmark stone, with a large portico and a broad balustrade staircase running down to the gravel drive. On the lawn beyond it, facing

Past Love

the town of Wenham, stood a majestic oak which tradition said Pelham had planted over three hundred years before, and which gave the house its name: Pelham's Oak.

As they edged at a snail's pace towards the house some people passed them on foot and hailed Eliza and Dora, who most of them knew, with a cheery greeting. Jean was not so well known, a man of some mystery who had arrived at Pelham's Oak soon after the war to renew his friendship with his comrade-in-arms, Carson, and had stayed on to marry his cousin Dora.

Eventually they arrived at the house where Carson was busy shaking hands. In the old days, when Eliza was young, only the gentry were invited into the house, while the ordinary people – local farmers, tenants, servants, shopkeepers and their families – celebrated under cover of a marquee on the lawn, and instead of drinking fine champagne and eating smoked salmon and quails' eggs were offered beer, of which there was plenty, and robust country fare.

Now the situation was very different. The war had changed attitudes and the local people, if not considered the peers of the Woodvilles, in everything else were treated as equals. All sorts of people from all walks of life were there, but they had one thing in common: they were all dressed in their best as they slowly ascended the steps leading to the stately porch to shake Sir Carson's hand.

Helping to greet the guests was Carson's half-sister, Elizabeth, and his brother-in-law, Graham Temple, Elizabeth's second husband. In the background various youthful Yetman and Woodville cousins milled around, helping to escort the guests into the grand first floor drawing room with its splendid view of the town on the hill.

Elizabeth Temple was a handsome woman: tall, fair and blue-eyed. She had a sense of style and dressed well. Her

besotted husband, who had been a bachelor until he married in his thirties, could deny her nothing. The consequence of this was that, like her mother before her, whom she very much resembled in looks as well as character, Elizabeth got through a vast amount of money. Her mother, Agnes Woodville, was not there that day. For many years the two women had not spoken to each other and Elizabeth now circulated round the vast white and gold drawing room, cultivating the quality and ignoring the peasantry, giving the cold shoulder to many who had known her for years as she was growing up in their midst.

Arriving some time later Connie, having fed her baby and put her to rest and had a little rest herself, stood for a while unnoticed at the door watching the throng, some two hundred or so people, though there were really too many to count. It was difficult not to notice Elizabeth and her progress through the room, Carson in respectful attendance as if it was she and not Connie who was the mistress of Pelham's Oak.

But Connie knew better than to criticise her sister-in-law, towards whom Carson felt a sense of guilt, and she slowly made her way into the room stopping to greet people, to receive congratulations, to respond to enquiries about the baby and her own health which at the moment was not too robust. Her mother had died in childbirth and, subconsciously, this was something Connie had always dreaded especially as, like her mother, hers was a late marriage and she was a little old for childbearing.

Carson put out his arm as he saw her and gently drew her towards him.

"All right, darling?"

She nodded.

"Did you manage a little rest?"

"I rested while I fed baby. She is asleep now."

She put out a hand to steady Toby who was racing round the