

Heirs and Successors

BOOK 4 IN THE
BELLEVILLE FAMILY SERIES

J MARY MASTERS



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About the author

J Mary Masters (Judith) was born in Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia in the 1950s, the youngest of four children and raised on a cattle property. For more than twenty years, she was involved in the magazine publishing industry as a senior executive.

Having now given up full time magazine work, Judith is devoting her time to her writing career, with an emphasis on writing for women readers. Her stories feature a mix of town and country settings, drawing heavily on her early country life.

She is a member of the Queensland Writers Centre (QWC) and the Australian Society of Authors (ASA). She has also completed a fiction writing course with noted literary agency Curtis Brown.

Judith now lives on Queensland's Sunshine Coast with her husband Peter.

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Belleville series

BOOK 1 Julia's Story

BOOK 2 To Love, Honour and Betray

BOOK 3 Return to Prior Park

BOOK 4 Heirs and Successors (2023)

Philippe Duval series

BOOK 1 First Born Son (2023)

BOOK 2 Price to Pay (coming 2024)

Acknowledgements & insights

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the readers who have contacted me to say they enjoyed the first three Belleville books. It means a lot to an author to know someone is reading—and enjoying—their work. Thank you.

With this book, I have also released *First Born Son* as a companion book. It covers a similar time frame to *Heirs and Successors* but deals with the Julia Belleville/Philippe Duval relationship. I had to make this choice to ensure that *Heirs and Successors* did not become a book too large and unwieldy to read.

I would like to acknowledge my good friend Nigel Pittaway for his contribution to my understanding of light aircraft of the period, vital information for the first chapters of this book.

And lastly, my thanks go to my husband Peter for his unfailing love and support and to my sisters Deidre and Beverley. Having a writer in the family inevitably requires compromises so having an understanding family is a blessing.

I hope you enjoy the book. And if you do, please tell your friends.

Good reading.

Judith M Masters writing as J Mary Masters

Key characters

AUSTRALIA

BELLEVILLE FAMILY (Prior Park)

Richard Belleville
Kate Belleville (formerly Lester)
William Belleville
Alice Belleville (formerly Fitzroy)
Julia Duval (formerly Belleville/Fitzroy)
Dr Philippe Duval
Pippa Duval
Paul Belleville
Anthony Belleville
Susan Belleville
Marianne Belleville
Mrs Duffy
Charles Brockman

Elder son of the family
Richard's second wife
Younger son of the family
William's wife
Only daughter
Julia's second husband
Julia & Philippe's daughter
Richard & Catherine's son
Richard & Catherine's son
Richard & Kate's daughter
William & Alice's daughter
Housekeeper, Prior Park
Manager, Prior Park

FITZROY FAMILY (Mayfield Downs)

Amelia Fitzroy
James Fitzroy
John Fitzroy

Mother
Son, Julia's former husband
James & Julia's son

OTHERS

John Bertram
Dr Robert Clarke
Patricia Clarke
Anita Clarke
David Clarke
Deborah Clarke
Karen Clarke
Ian Dixon
Angela Dixon
Lucy Dixon
Tim Lester
Nancy Lester
Howard Robinson
Amanda Robinson
Alex Fraser
Daniel Harrington

Richard's friend, Qantas pilot
Registrar/Surgeon
His wife
Their daughter
Robert Clarke's brother
His wife
Their daughter
QC
His wife
Their daughter
Kate Belleville's son
Kate Belleville's daughter
Owner of Glenmoral station
Howard's daughter
Stockman on Glenmoral station
Architect

ENGLAND

CAVENDISH FAMILY (Haldon Hall)

Catherine Cavendish (formerly Belleville)
Sir Edward Cavendish
George Cavendish

Richard's first wife
Catherine's second husband
Their son

Author's Note

I had intended to write only three books about the Belleville family but, to me, they became cherished friends and I could not leave them out of my writing life.

If you are coming to the Belleville family story for the first time with this fourth book, I hope you'll find I've provided enough background in this book to help you fill in the gaps in your knowledge.

Briefly, the Belleville story began with two great deceptions, the consequences of which rippled down the years.

Who could foresee the actions of a weak, over-privileged man leading to the great tragedy that befalls the Belleville matriarch and her grand home at Prior Park? And Julia's secret? Who could foresee how that would unravel so spectacularly?

Yet, despite all this, by December 1960 at the end of book three, we left the Belleville family facing the future with more certainty and apparently more settled lives.

Only the ruins of the family's grand nineteenth century country home at Prior Park remain as a constant reminder of their earlier dark days.

Don't worry if you haven't read books 1-3, I'm sure you will pick up the story, and, hopefully, be encouraged to begin the Belleville story at the beginning.

Julia's Story – Book 1

To Love, Honour and Betray – Book 2

Return to Prior Park – Book 3

About Heirs and Successors

We fast forward to 1968 as the next Belleville generation is coming to adulthood. And once more we see the apparently settled lives of the Belleville family unravel spectacularly against a backdrop of new betrayals and the revival of old loyalties.

And for those who can't get enough of the Belleville story, I encourage you to read the parallel book *First Born Son*, published alongside *Heirs and Successors*, exploring the story of Julia Belleville's husband, Dr Philippe Duval, who has always been something of an outlier in the Belleville family story. The two stories run parallel across the same time period, intersecting and diverging as Philippe's life reaches an unexpected fork in the road.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Judith M Masters

CHAPTER 1

February 1968

AS HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS, Paul Belleville's last thoughts were of his father. The last image in his mind, his father's diminishing figure standing on the tarmac as his small plane headed west into the bright clear day. The last sound he thought he would ever hear, the sickening crunch as his plane hit the ground hard. Was this the last thing he would ever smell, he wondered? The stench of aviation fuel mixed with the acrid smoke of the fire he thought was about to engulf him.

In his last conscious moments, he tried and failed to unfasten his harness. He could feel blood trickling down his face. With a supreme effort, he put his hand up to his face to touch the source of the blood. Why am I so weak? I need to get out of here. But his body refused to obey. He could feel his strength ebbing away. He tried desperately to fight off the darkness but the darkness won.



The shrill ringing of the telephone echoed throughout the house, its insistent sound reverberating harshly for the few seconds it took Richard Belleville to reach it. He fully expected to hear his son's voice on the other end of the line.

Only moments before he had, with no sense of alarm in his voice, looked across the table at his wife Kate and voiced his thoughts.

‘Paul should have called by now,’ he had said.

But the relief displayed clearly on his face at the sound of the telephone ringing was momentary as he listened intently to the voice on the other end of the line.

Kate could hear only Richard’s side of the conversation but it was enough to alarm her.

‘I helped him fill up with fuel. He should be there by now. Well and truly,’ he told the voice on the other end of the phone.

There was silence as he listened. Then he spoke again.

‘You’ll need to advise the local police,’ he said, only this time he spoke with the authority of the caller’s employer.

He waited briefly to hear the response. He paused. What more was there he could do from this end? Kate could almost hear his mind turning over the available options. Finally, he spoke again.

‘I’ll organise the aerial search from this end,’ he said, ‘but call me any hour if you have news.’

He began searching his wallet for a telephone number. Anxious now, Kate had come to stand alongside him.

‘Paul’s plane?’

He nodded.

‘Missing.’

He checked his watch.

‘If he’s lost, he’d be out of fuel by now.’

It was not a guess. He had helped Paul refuel the Cessna himself. He knew its range. He knew everything about it just as, years before, he had known everything about the Lancaster bomber he had flown in bombing raids over Germany.

All Richard could think was Paul should have already landed at the makeshift strip at Belleville Park. And he hadn’t. Where was he? Lost? Engine trouble? He could not bring himself to think the worst. Crashed? The word almost formed but he refused to let it.

‘Jock Hudson, I assume?’

Again, he nodded.

‘He sounded worried.’

The Belleville Park manager was not a man to panic. For him to sound worried was troubling, Kate thought, but she did not say it out loud.

‘What are you going to do? What can you do?’

But Richard didn’t answer her. He was already repeating a Sydney telephone number to the operator on the other end of the line.

There was a long pause.

‘John,’ he said. ‘I need you up here now. With a plane.’

By sheer luck, John Bertram had chosen that week for long overdue leave from his job as a Qantas pilot. Even as Richard told him the bare facts, he was mentally ticking off the possible aircraft he could hire to fly the seven hundred or so miles north to meet Richard and help with the search.

Richard, too, was a pilot but John was more experienced now. It had not been like that during the war when Richard had been the pilot and John the navigator. That experience had created a bond between the two men nothing could sever.

Now, when Richard needed him, he did not hesitate. Within half an hour, he had banged the door shut on his Sydney flat and headed to the airport. A couple of calls had secured the aircraft he needed and it was ready and waiting for him. Within an hour, he was in the air headed northwards. He prayed Paul had simply put down because of engine trouble and was waiting somewhere by his plane to be rescued. For John Bertram, every other scenario was too awful to contemplate.

‘You will have to call Catherine,’ Kate said, as she returned to the living room after putting seven-year-old Susan to bed.

Richard grimaced. It was not a call he was rushing to make even though duty demanded it.

‘You didn’t tell Susan, did you?’ he asked anxiously.

Kate shook her head.

‘No, of course not, although she knows something is up.’

He smiled for the first time in hours. Susan was his unexpected daughter and she delighted him. She was a lively, inquisitive child,

always sensitive to everything going on around her.

Once again, he walked towards the telephone. He checked his watch. It was long past sundown but it would be hours before John Bertram would touch down in Springfield. And even then, they could only begin the aerial search at first light.

He made a mental calculation. Mid-morning in England. No reason not to call. His marriage to Catherine had ended more than eight years earlier but their two children, Paul, now twenty-two, and fifteen-year-old Anthony were a link with his first wife that could never be broken.

He had waited to call as long as he could in the vain hope of good news. Too long, perhaps. She would reproach him for it. He had already called his brother William at Prior Park where, just days before, they had celebrated Paul's birthday with a family lunch.

For a brief moment Richard's hand hovered over the receiver, his mind conjuring up an image of his sophisticated first wife whom he had married at the end of the war, she already pregnant with Paul. With the distance of years, he could see clearly how their two worlds, colliding briefly, could never reconcile. And so it proved. She had returned to England on the death of her father, never to return. But his two sons were her two sons. He could never forget that. And he could never forget how much he had loved her.

'Operator, I want to place a call to England,' he said, repeating the number more times than he thought should have been necessary.

He waited, listening to the operators and the crackling interference that would make a difficult conversation almost impossible.

'Haldon Hall, may I help you.' A faint voice finally echoed down the line.

Richard waited a few seconds before answering.

'May I speak with Lady Cavendish, please. It's Richard Belleville calling.'

He had no need to tell the staff at Haldon Hall who he was. He guessed his marriage to Catherine had been a rich source of gossip in the house. At least now that Paul and Anthony were older he had no need to accompany them on their visits. It had been a relief not to be reminded of how much the failure of his first marriage had hurt

him. She had quickly married the heir to her father's baronetcy, her distant cousin Edward Cavendish, and produced the next heir, George. Her life, he imagined, revolved around a social season to which her aristocratic lineage gave her unfettered access.

He heard the sound of the telephone receiver being picked up and heard Catherine's voice for the first time in years.

'Richard, how are you?' she asked politely. 'This is a surprise.'

But already he could hear the concern creeping into her voice.

'Something's wrong, isn't it? Is it Anthony? Or Paul?'

He could almost hear her mind rewinding to the memory of a similar phone call years before to tell her Paul was having emergency surgery after falling out of a tree. Now it was news about Paul again. He breathed deeply and then spoke quickly.

'Paul was flying from Springfield to visit Belleville Park out near St George,' he said. 'He should have touched down about five o'clock but he didn't.'

He heard the quick intake of breath.

'What time is it there now?'

'Just gone eight in the evening,' Richard replied evenly, not wanting the alarm in his voice to match hers.

'Was he alone?'

For one awful moment, she thought Anthony might be with him.

'Yes. He was alone.'

'In the Cessna,' he added.

He assumed she would know they had acquired a Cessna for the purpose of getting between the properties. It was the best way to cover the hundreds of miles in a short time. How could she not know, he thought? Paul talked of little else. He'd had his picture taken with it. He was sure he would have sent one to his mother.

'Do you think he's ...'

Her words trailed off. She could not give voice to her worst fears, just as he could not. He tried to sound calm.

'He may have had engine trouble and put down somewhere,' he offered.

It was a little white lie he told convincingly. He privately thought engine trouble was unlikely given the fact the plane was almost brand

new. Better to offer Catherine some plausible explanation, he decided, than none at all.

‘What are you going to do?’ she demanded.

It was as if she was almost accusing him of doing nothing to find their son.

‘There’ll be an aerial search tomorrow,’ he said, trying to make it all sound coherent and organised. ‘John Bertram is on his way with a twin engine plane. He’s flying it up from Sydney tonight. We’ll join the aerial search from this end at first light.’

‘Thank God for good old John,’ she said. ‘When does he arrive?’

‘It will be a couple of hours yet.’

He waited for her to say something. He was desperate to keep the conversation short.

‘I feel so helpless so far away,’ she said finally. ‘Is Anthony with you?’

‘No, he’s not here right now,’ he replied. ‘He’s staying out with William and Alice for a few days.’

He answered her next question before she could ask it.

‘We celebrated Paul’s birthday out at Prior Park on Sunday. Anthony was due to come back tomorrow with William. School is just starting up again for the year.’

There was silence for a few moments as she digested this information.

‘You’ll let me know as soon as you have any news?’

‘Of course I will, Catherine,’ he said. ‘Of course I will.’

He was doing his best to reassure her, but he did not want to give her false hope. He knew the odds were stacked against Paul. Yet he could not bring himself to dash her hopes entirely.

‘Don’t worry, he’ll be fine,’ he said, with a confidence he did not feel.

He pictured it all now in his mind. Out beyond the horizon lay miles and miles of sparsely populated country, heavily timbered ridges, rocky outcrops, few landmarks, what chance did they have of spotting him? A Cessna was, after all, a small fragile speck in the sky. It could so easily become a small fragile wreck impossible to see from the air.

He shook his head and made a silent vow. Only when we've searched for days without luck will I start to think about that.

'As soon as we have any news, I'll let you know immediately.'

It was all he could say. He replaced the receiver and turned towards Kate who was close beside him. It was her turn to pick up the telephone.

'I must let Tim and Nancy know,' she said.

He nodded. Tim and Paul were as close as brothers. It had been through Paul's schoolboy friendship with Tim that Richard had met Tim's mother, Kate. But it had been the unexpected death of Tim's father Gerald that had allowed them to marry. And allowed Richard to claim Susan as his child. Now at twenty-two, Tim was the master of Berrima Park, a short drive from Sydney. His sister Nancy, older by two years, lived with him.

'They're both very worried,' Kate said, as she hung up the telephone.

She couldn't help but voice her thoughts.

'Do you think he got lost?'

He shrugged.

'It's all speculation at this stage,' he said quietly. 'I know his flight plan. That will be a starting point.'

He walked to the sideboard and refilled his glass with whisky.

'What time do you think John will arrive?'

'At a guess, eleven, maybe later. But I'll need to make sure the runway lights are on. I'll head out there shortly.'

She walked across to him and put her arms around him.

'I'm sure it will all end well,' she said. 'Paul's a very clever boy. And resilient. He won't have panicked.'

He embraced her then, grateful for the circumstances that had brought them together after his divorce.

'I hope you're right. I couldn't stand to lose him. Not this way. Not at twenty-two.'

He held her for some time. Then he turned towards the door and headed down the front steps to his car. He knew he might face hours at the airport waiting for John. He didn't mind that. It was the thought of Paul lying injured, waiting for rescue, his life ebbing away,

that haunted him.

Hours later, as a faint light was just beginning to show on the eastern horizon, Richard sipped the hot cup of tea Kate had placed in his hands.

‘Have you woken John?’ he asked.

His own sleep had been restless and troubled. He hoped John had been able to get a few good hours.

‘He’s up already,’ Kate replied. ‘I’ve just taken him a cup of tea.’

They both turned at the sound of his footsteps on the timber floor.

‘Morning all.’

John’s greeting was cheery despite the circumstances. His presence and good sense reassured Richard.

‘I hope you managed to get some sleep, John,’ Richard said, turning to greet his old friend.

‘Out like a light as soon as my head hit the pillow.’

It was a little white lie meant to reassure those who heard it.

‘We should be getting out to the aerodrome now,’ Richard said, discarding the remainder of his tea over the verandah rail.

‘Looks clear, anyway. A good day for flying.’

John handed his cup to Kate and took the pack of food she offered him.

‘You could be up there for hours.’

He smiled his thanks.

‘You’ll find him,’ Kate said. ‘I know you will.’

She hugged both men and waved from the verandah as they headed to the aerodrome on the western edge of the city. To the east, the sun was just about visible above the horizon. It was dawning a hot, clear day. At least that was something. If they were going to find Paul, good visibility was essential.

At Prior Park, the family’s flagship cattle property, Paul’s disappearance on his flight to Belleville Park had dominated the anxious conversation around the breakfast table, with William doing his best to sound optimistic. He looked up from his plate as his nephew Anthony sat down at the table.

‘You’re to stay with us for a few more days, Anthony,’ he said. ‘Your

father thought it best. He was leaving with John Bertram at first light to begin the search for your brother. He'll phone as soon as he has news.'

Anthony nodded, trying desperately to hide his anxiety. At fifteen, he was too young to have the freedoms his older brother enjoyed. Yet, despite the years that separated them, they had grown close just as their father had hoped when he had insisted Anthony grow up in Australia.

'I'm due back at school, Uncle William,' he volunteered reluctantly.

Unlike his older brother, he was a reluctant student. He was teased relentlessly for his English accent which never quite gave way to a broader Australian voice.

'I'll contact the school. They'll understand,' his uncle replied.

William looked around the table. It was a sad end to what had been a marvellous family reunion. He looked down the table where his sister Julia sat with her daughter Pippa. They were due to fly back to Sydney the next day. Her son John had joined the birthday party too. William had been pleased at that. At least it proved the bitter rift caused by his sister's divorce from her first husband James Fitzroy, their neighbour at Prior Park and his wife's brother, did not extend to their son.

He let out a long sigh. There was absolutely nothing he could do to help find his nephew. All he could do, all any of them could do, was hope. And pray.