

# Family Tree

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Russet was the youngest daughter of four. There was a boy, younger than Russet by seven years but he never knew his mother who died minutes before he was born. The autopsy revealed Greta had a brain tumour which would have taken her anyway.

Amber, the eldest girl, was newly eighteen and took over from her mother. She named her brother Ford after Burford their village in the Cotswolds. Always a difficult and headstrong boy, he hated this name and changed it to Rufus when he went to upper school.

After the death of his wife, Albert Oakridge mourned for two years before ending his suffering by hanging himself from the iconic oak tree which stood on the hill above their once thriving market garden where they grew vegetables, soft fruits, harvested honey and made preserves which they sold at local farmers' markets.

In the aftermath of their father's death, the twins, Alder and Ash, now aged seventeen, moved to Blenheim in New Zealand to live with their mother's sister Alice and her family who had sponsored them. James and Alice Sycamore owned a successful vineyard and needed helpers.

Under Amber's strict leadership the remaining three children soldiered on, scraping a living by running a small shop and travelling to the local towns to sell their produce in an aging, ramshackle Transit van.

On her twenty-first birthday, Russet announced she was engaged to Danny Fresner, the son of their neighbour who owned a large mixed arable and livestock farm. At this stage Russet was five months pregnant.

Rufus, aged fourteen and still at school full time, showed no interest in horticulture, preferring to spend his free time at the local library using its computer.

Russet's 'desertion' was the last straw for Amber. Unable to carry on alone, Amber agreed to sell their smallholding to Danny's widowed father, Ivan. Always go-ahead, Ivan saw an opportunity to grow a variety of seeds to retail to city dwellers to feed to their garden birds.

As part of the settlement Amber and Rufus moved to live in an upgraded cottage near the main farmhouse. For the first time in her life, Amber had money to spend; she bought a small second-hand car, new clothes, a new hairdo, plucked her eyebrows, applied make-up, joined a slimming programme and began evening classes for drawing and painting.

Her world was expanding and she hoped for romance.

After a few years of working closely with her employer, Amber agreed to marry Ivan despite the twenty-three year age gap. At that stage she was already three months pregnant but they both knew Ivan was not the father. Although it was not widely known,

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Ivan had been 'snipped' after his wife had suffered three miscarriages and, in recent years, had suffered from erectile disfunction related to prostate issues.

By this stage, Danny and Russet had three sons; Albert, Rory and a 'bonus' toddler called Dan.

When it was evident she was pregnant, Amber confided to Ivan that Danny was the father and after a long angry discussion, they agreed to keep this revelation a secret.

Amber Fresner called her love-child Autumn.

Five years later Autumn had a brother. Amber called him Alan, shortened to Al. Again, Amber said that Danny was the father but this time Amber's secret unravelled because Danny too had been snipped at Russet's insistence. Although Amber's adultery became common knowledge, she steadfastly refused to say who the father or fathers were.

Aged seventeen, Autumn fell in love with Dan aged nineteen. They understood they could not marry and, acting in secret, they decided to elope to New Zealand. When they 'disappeared', they left a note explaining their situation, promising they would not have children.

In New Zealand Autumn shared her dilemma with her great-aunt Alice only to learn that Autumn's mother Amber was a love-child born before Autumn's grandmother Greta Green had met and married her grandfather Albert Oakridge.

Dan and Autumn sent off DNA samples to Auckland. After an anxious wait, it was confirmed they were not genetically related.

Autumn changed her name to Autumn Green and married Dan Fresner.

With help from James and Alice Sycamore, they moved south to Prebbleton where they established a smallholding, growing organic fruits and vegetables, preserves and harvesting honey which they sell at local farmers' markets around the Christchurch area.

Five years on, the antipodean Fresners have three children, all boys: Shawn, Harry and Bryn.