

# ELIZABETH JANE HOWARD

*The Light Years*

1.

How does desire in all its forms shape the lives and dreams of the Cazalets? What kind of damage can desire do? What kind of joy can it enable? It is so often thwarted: Rupert longs to paint, but can't; Rachel longs to be with Sid, but won't allow herself. Are there any characters who realize their desires?

2.

Zoë tells herself that all she wants is to be loved, unable to admit to herself all the other things she longs for and covets. The narrative observes, "She was unaware that the secret lies are the ones that endure." What are other examples of "secret lies" told by characters to themselves? What kind of damage do these lies do?

3. What does it mean to be a woman in the world of the Cazalets? Many of these women's lives are simmering with anxiety, despair, desperation. Are any of these women free to choose their own destiny? What kind of power or influence do they enjoy, relative to men? What possibilities can they imagine for themselves?

4.

Sybil is a doting mother who experiences the agony and terror of childbirth, and the pain of loss. Villy seems indifferent as a mother and dreads pregnancy; Zoë dreads the duties of step-motherhood and the prospect of becoming a mother. What questions does Howard raise about the meaning of motherhood in this world?

5.

Villy is one of the most dominant characters, and sharply illustrates the way the reality of marriage can differ from its ideal. How does Howard invite us to understand her private despair - as tragedy, or simply self-pity? Does she inspire compassion? What choices or agency does she have in her own life?