

# Beneath the Attic (9) (Dollanganger)

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Forbidden passions have shaped and haunted the Dollanganger family since their first novel—*Flowers in the Attic*—debuted forty years ago. Now discover how twisted the family roots truly are, and witness the clan's origins as a result of one wild and complicated relationship. In this evocative and thrilling tale from New York Times bestselling author V.C. Andrews, see Corrine Dixon as a young girl and discover the fascinating family history of the Dollanganger clan.

Two generations before Corinne Foxworth locked her children in an attic, her grandmother, a gorgeous young girl named Corrine Dixon, is swept away by the charms of rich, sophisticated, and handsome Garland Foxworth. After discovering that she's pregnant, Garland does what appears to be the honorable thing and marries her in a huge ceremony on the luxurious Foxworth Hall grounds. Both families fervently overlook the pregnancy, happy for a suitable resolution.

Now the mistress of a labyrinthine estate, Corrine discovers that nothing is what it seems. Garland is not the man once captivated by her charms, and she's increasingly troubled by his infatuation with memories of his departed mother.

Can Corrine survive this strange new life? Or is her fate already sealed?

Explore the origins of the legendary Dollanganger family in this page-turning, gripping gothic thriller.

One of the most popular authors of all time, V.C. Andrews has been a bestselling phenomenon since the publication of *Flowers in the Attic*, first in the renowned Dollanganger family series, which includes *Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*, and *Garden of Shadows*. The family saga continues with *Christopher's Diary: Secrets of Foxworth*, *Christopher's Diary: Echoes of Dollanganger*, and *Secret Brother*, as well as *Beneath the Attic*, *Out of the Attic*, and *Shadows of Foxworth* as part of the fortieth anniversary celebration. There are more than eighty V.C. Andrews novels, which have sold over 107 million copies worldwide and have been translated into twenty-five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews). *Beneath the Attic*

"It's easier for you, Corrine," my best friend, Daisy Herman, declared. "You're so pretty that boys flop about like silly seals at your feet."

Daisy was easily what anyone would call adorable rather than beautiful. Shorter than most of us our age, she had diminutive facial features. She was doll-like, someone who would look like a little girl forever, which was nice when you were a child but not something a grown woman would want.

It was midafternoon on a Saturday, and, like some invisible magician, early spring had run her palm over bushes and flower buds to startle us almost overnight with a bright green, rich cherry-red, and corn-yellow world. Daisy, Edna Howard, Agnes Francis, and I were lying on a brown horsehair blanket under the old, spreading oak tree my father had named

Henry the Eighth because of the six smaller oak trees around it. He said they represented Henry's wives. Proof, he said, was that two of the six had had their tops blown off in a storm, and Henry the Eighth had beheaded two wives. When I was little, I believed it. My mother thought it was all ridiculous.

This was the first time Edna and Agnes had been invited to one of my so-called womanly talks. Both were rather dumpy and plain, grateful for any attention, especially from me. I left it up to Daisy to issue the invitations. That responsibility made her feel more important and helped her convince anyone that she was my trusted personal assistant.

After Daisy's comment, Edna and Agnes looked at me, anticipating some protestation of modesty, but I wallowed in and often sought compliments more like someone who was far more insecure about her appearance than someone who was confident of her beauty. I even requested praise from mirrors hanging anywhere I went, often pausing to ask, "Am I truly lovely?" I always heard the answer I expected, the answer I deserved.

However, whenever my mother caught me studying myself, she would pounce, declaring, "You're too arrogant and full of sinful pride, Corrine."

I would feel my insides twist and knot so tightly that I couldn't breathe and had to get away from her as quickly as I could. I swear, if she had claws, I'd have been scratched from head to toe.

Why couldn't she see that it wasn't so much my being narcissistic as it was my realizing that anyone who wasn't blind or stupid had no choice but to praise my features, from my unique sapphire-blue eyes with my long eyelashes to my diminutive nose and full, soft, and naturally crimson lips? I had my mother's high cheekbones but a strong hint of character in the way my jawline was just slightly prominent. I had inherited that from my handsome father. I was rarely sick and never pale. My father swore that I had possessed my rich magnolia-white skin from day one, but my mother said that was a preposterous exaggeration.

"Beauty is often not enough," I told Daisy.

I sipped some lemonade and looked past my girlfriends into the woods at the cool shadowy areas. Even from this distance, I could see a swarm of bees madly circling a dead log. For a few moments, I was elsewhere, riding a beautiful white horse beside my debonair fantasy fiancé .

"You mean you have to be smart, too," Agnes said. "Right?" she asked, nodding when I didn't add any other comment. Her highly nasal voice broke my dream bubble.

"Not in the way you're thinking, Agnes," I snapped at her. I was so enjoying my reverie. "I know how much you like to read and pretend you're as informed about politics as any boy or young man our age. But there is a particular book of knowledge that I think belongs with women only."

"Where did you get it?" Edna asked, wide-eyed. "Did you read it?"

"No, silly frog. It's not actually a book. It's something that comes naturally to you when you start to feel more like a woman than a girl. You do things instinctively to water men's mouths with desire."

Now the two of them were smirking at me with skepticism. As usual when I spoke to girls like this, I had to spell it all out.

"For example, there are special ways to look at boys who even slightly attract you. You bat your eyelashes and run your tongue over your lips to signal your interest. There are things you can do with your parasol to make yourself look sexier or indicate to a young man that you have interest in him when walking by. Maybe next time, if there is a next time, I'll bring one to illustrate."

I paused and, like a heart-to-heart confession, added in a suggestive whisper, "I've often tested these suggestions."

"And what happened?" Edna asked quickly. Her eyes reminded me of sizzling egg yolks.

I shrugged. "Nothing in particular, because I didn't want it to go any further. Even though we don't have the right to vote, we can have an influence on what happens in our lives. More women should think like that. As my father says, 'If you act like sheep, they'll act like wolves.'"

Daisy smiled. She loved when I spoke with anger when it came to the rivalry between male and female.

"How do you know so much about how to behave around men?" Agnes demanded with some annoyance. "We're about the same age, and I would never think to do any of that."

"Are we?"

"Well, I was fourteen last week," she said. "Edna is and Daisy is and you are."

I shrugged.

"Years as a measurement of your maturity are . . ." I looked again at Daisy, who had a better vocabulary since her mother was a schoolteacher. She knew instinctively by now when I wanted her to finish one of my sentences.

"Nebulous," she said.

"Huh?" Edna said.

"Vague, unclear. In other words, Edna, time passed pulling up your own knickers doesn't guarantee your maturity."

She and I laughed.

"Daisy is exactly right. We've all learned the science about making love, but when you're an adult, you realize that's hardly enough. You can't learn all you need to know from boring old books in order to conduct a satisfactory romance. Most of what's really important is, as I said, natural instinct. That's how it comes to me and hopefully someday soon will come to you. You grow into it, ripen like an apple or a grape."

"What exactly are we to expect?" Agnes asked. She had small eyes as it was, but when she squinted, they looked like pinholes. "I mean, how would we know when it's come?"

Two swallows flew close to us and then turned off to the right.

"It's like birds," I continued. "Female birds don't go to a school for birds to learn how to attract male birds and create new ones, do they? They do what they must to make it happen. It's in you, in your very female bones," I said. "Things just . . . explode inside you."

"Explode?" Agnes asked.

I raised my eyes and coached myself to have more patience. Then I glared at her.

"Don't you have new and different feelings, Agnes? No tingles, no urge to touch yourself? You have had your period. You shouldn't act like a child and cover your eyes at the sight of a penis."

"The sight of what?" Agnes looked like she had swallowed one of the swallows.

"Some girls are ashamed to admit their feelings. But we've all agreed to be honest with each other. Right?"

"Absolutely," Agnes said.

"Well?"

She looked at Edna.

"Yes," Edna confessed. "I have seen only my little brother's penis, but I've had those feelings."

"There. And there's nothing evil about it, Agnes. One day, the man you love or marry will be touching you in exactly the same places you're touching yourself. And don't deny you do." I quickly accused like a head-on-fire minister.

I thought she would faint. Her face reddened until it was as crimson as fresh-spilled blood.

"I'm sure your father touches your mother there, too. Or if he doesn't, he finds another woman to touch."

Daisy laughed, and Agnes's jaw dropped.

Edna shook her head. I think she wanted to put her hands over her ears, but she was entranced. I smiled to myself. If only my mother could see how infatuated most of my girlfriends were with me, she might appreciate me more. After she had her heart attack learning I conducted these secret womanly talks, of course.

Actually, now that I was older and my loveliness more obvious, my mother's criticism of the pride I took in myself infuriated me. Why would she want to rein in such beauty anyway? Most mothers would be proud, beaming and gathering compliments like a cotton picker.

"Has your mother told you most of this?" Edna asked. "Is that where you learned about it?"

"My mother?" I laughed. "Hardly. It would be too shocking. She would have heart failure, and I would be accused of matricide."

I wouldn't tell them, but in the deepest, darkest, and most secret chambers of my heart, I couldn't help but harbor the suspicion that my mother was simply jealous of me and used her heavy, thorny golden rules of humility to keep me from bursting out of the background in any room or place we had entered together. She knew I would quickly seize all the male attention, not that my mother was looking for any. She was simply drowned in my shadow and practically ignored when she brought me along.

Of course, she wasn't wrong to accuse me of being too forward. I sought to command every smile and all the praise the men around me could afford before their own wives turned their eyes into red-hot embers of disapproval, disapproval that would be directed at my mother for raising such a vamp. That was what it really was for her anyway: concern about her precious reputation.

"My mother would be shocked, too, if she found out we were even discussing such things," Agnes said. "She would forbid me from spending any time with you, any of you."

"Well, don't say anything," Edna warned. "We pledged that everything we tell each other is sacred, didn't we?"

"I won't say anything." She looked more frightened. "My mother would have my father take the strap to me."

"Mothers often forget what they were like when they were our age," I said. I looked back at my house and then leaned toward them to impart a great secret, and the three leaned toward me. "Or they are afraid to confess it. Oh, they might give you a little advice when

some proper gentleman asks permission to propose marriage, but until then . . ." I sighed and sat back. "Until then, we're really on our own, aren't we? We have to know how far we can go and what we can do and not do. My best advice is, nibble but don't bite."

"What?" Edna said. "Nibble what?"

"Don't you have any imagination, Edna? Just dare yourself to think about it."

Agnes and Edna stared. They looked quite frightened. I smiled at Daisy.

"Daisy and I know how to do that, don't we, Daisy? We dare ourselves to think about it."

"Yes, but my guess is you'll be the first who attracts a proper marriage proposal, whether your mother likes to admit it or not."

I smiled. She was probably right.

There was nothing my mother could do about all this. Rules, lectures, and pouty faces were useless. It was simply my destiny to draw the admiration and desire, most assuredly the lust, of every man who stepped within the radius of my beauty. I had the power, the glow. To pretend I could stop it or even moderate it was as silly as pretending I could prevent the sun from rising.

"My father would certainly agree when it comes to my attracting the interest of men. I wish it wasn't indelicate for a father to have a conversation with his daughter about a man's sexual needs and all that we must know to be successful at romance. Men know more than women when it comes to the art of lovemaking anyway."

"The art?" Edna said, nearly laughing. I didn't smile.

"Of course it's an art, Edna. That's what I've been trying to tell you. Haven't you listened to anything?"

"You could probably get your father to talk about it," Daisy said, half joking. "He dotes on you."

"Yes," I said proudly. "He does. If I grimace at something my mother says about me, he comes to my defense, and a tear trickling down my cheek would rush along a gift or a promise of one to compensate for my bruised feelings. I know when that will work and when it won't."

"Do you mean to say you do that deliberately? I mean, start to cry?" Agnes asked.

I shrugged. "Whatever works, Agnes. It's called a woman's wiles, a chapter in that book I asked you to imagine. It's part of what you have to learn to do when it comes to men."

"But your father isn't . . ."

"What? A man? Of course he is, and it's good practice. There'll be many other men."

"My father doesn't dote on me like that," Agnes said. "My crying wouldn't matter."

I could practically see the jealousy dripping from the corners of her mouth. She was the youngest of four, and all three older than her were boys.

"Yes," I said. "Men do favor their sons."

"You're an only child," Agnes whined.

"But my being an only child is not the only reason he treats me special."

"What other reason is there?" Edna asked. I could see her mind swirling with sinful and forbidden possibilities now that I had said he was a man.

"Pride," I said. "And not simply because I'm his daughter, Edna. My father is quite experienced and objective when it comes to attractive women. His work and his important responsibilities require him to be a connoisseur of beauty, especially when it comes to the wives of his clients and business associates."

They nodded, but I doubted that they fully understood. Not even Daisy completely understood. Before he had married my mother, my father was already a rising star in the newly formed First United Bank of Alexandria, Virginia, and thus one of the most eligible bachelors in the city. While it was men who were doing the investing in the booming businesses, their elegant wives and daughters were players in a constant parade of social events, wearing the most fashionable clothes and winning the hearts of powerful entrepreneurs.

"I once heard my father say that some men wear their beautiful women like expensive jewelry."

"Wear them? Like jewelry?" Agnes said. She started to laugh. "How do you wear a wife?"

"Think about it a moment, Agnes. What powerful man wants a plain-looking wife on his arm? My father greets many of these women and knows whom to bestow his attention on and whom to ignore."

"That makes sense," Daisy said.

"Yes. It's a business thing. He's quite aware of which women are worshipped by their husbands and could order them about, even when it comes to business decisions."

They were all quiet, thinking.



"Gosh," Agnes said with a painful grimace. "There's so much for a girl to learn before she's a woman."

"Precisely, and my father does help and encourage me in little ways."

"What little ways?" Edna asked.

"He's always bringing me presents, trinkets, a pin for my clothes or a new hair clip. Usually, he's observed something one of the more fashionable women is wearing or hears about what she is thinking of buying and then he thinks of me. He thinks of me as more of a woman than a young girl."

"What does your mother say about that?" Daisy asked. Even she was unaware of all my father's gifts.

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