



Garden of Shadows (Dollanganger)

By V.C. Andrews

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V.C. Andrews' thrilling new novel spins a tale of dreadful secrets and dark, forbidden passions -- of the time before *Flowers in the Attic* began. Long before terror flowered in the attic, thin, spinsterish Olivia came to Virginia as Malcolm Foxworth's bride. At last, with her tall handsome husband, she would find the joy she had waited for, longed for. But in the gloomy mansion filled with hidden rooms and festering desires, a stain of jealous obsession begins to spread...an evil that will threaten her children, two lovely boys and one very special, beautiful girl. For within one innocent child, a shocking secret lives...a secret that will taint the proud Foxworth name, and haunt all their lives forever!

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Viginia Andrews: 'Beautifully written, macabre and thoroughly nasty... it is evocative of the nasty fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood and The Babes in the Wood, with a bit of Victorian Gothic thrown in. ... What does shine through is her ability to see the world through a child's eyes' Daily Express 'Makes horror irresistible' Glasgow Sunday Mail 'A gruesome saga... the storyline is compelling, many millions have no wish to put this down' Ms London 'There is strength in her books - the bizarre plots matched with the pathos of the entrapped' The Times

About the Author

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*. V.C. Andrews has written more than seventy novels, which have sold more than 106 million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty-five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAAndrews).

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Prologue

Addendum to the last will and testament of Olivia Winfield Foxworth. To be opened twenty years after my death.

I have been forced to leave this record. Had others not decided to tell my story for their own gain, the secrets of the Foxworths would have been buried in my grave with me. Cruelty comes in many forms -- ignorance is one of them. Because of ignorance, I have been judged. Now I have gone to Him, the only judge whose verdict matters, and accepted His pronouncement on my soul. Those of you who remain below will here come to know the true story. And knowing the truth, judge me if you dare.

Olivia Winfield Foxworth

Chapter 1: The First Bud of Spring

When I was a little girl, my father bought me a priceless handcrafted dollhouse. It was a magical miniature world, with beautiful tiny porcelain dolls, furniture, even paintings and chandeliers and rugs all made to scale. But the house was enclosed in a glass case and I was never allowed to touch the family inside -- indeed, I was not even permitted to touch the glass case, for fear of leaving smudges. Dainty things had always been at peril in my large hands, and the dollhouse was for me to admire but never to touch.

I kept it on an oak table under the sash of stained glass windows in my bedroom. The sun coming through the tinted windows always spread a soft, rainbow colored sky over the tiny universe and put the light of happiness into the faces of the miniature family. Even the servants in the kitchen, the butler dressed in white livery who stood near the entrance door, and the nanny in the nursery all wore looks of contentment.

That was as it should be, as it should always be -- as I fervently hoped and prayed it would be for me

someday. That miniature world was without shadows; for, even on overcast days, when clouds hung their gloom outside, the tinted-glass windows magically turned the gray light into rainbows.

The real world, my own world, seemed always to be gray, without rainbows. Gray for my eyes, which I had always been told were too stern, gray for my hopes, gray for the old maid no one wanted in the deck of cards. At twenty-four, I was an old maid, already a spinster. It seemed I intimidated eligible young men with my height and intelligence. It seemed that the rainbow world of love and marriage and babies would always be as closed off to me as that dollhouse I so admired. For it was only in make-believe that my hopes took wing.

In my fantasies I was pretty, lighthearted, charming, like the other young women I had met but never befriended. Mine was a lonely life, filled mostly with books and dreams. And though I did not talk about it, I clung to the small hope my dear mother had given me just before she died.

"Life is very much like a garden, Olivia. And people are like tiny seeds, nurtured by love and friendship and caring. And if enough time and care are spent, they bloom into gorgeous flowers. And sometimes, even an old, neglected plant left in a yard gone to seed will unexpectedly burst into blossom. These are the most precious, the most cherished blossoms of all. You will be that sort of flower, Olivia. It may take time, but your flowering will come."

How I missed my optimistic mother. I was sixteen when she died -- just when I most needed to have those woman-to-woman talks with her that would tell me how to win a man's heart, how to be like her: respectable, competent, yet a woman in every way. My mother was forever involved in one thing or another, and in everything she was competent and in charge. She threaded her way through each crisis, and when one ended, there was always another to replace it. My father seemed content that she was busy. It mattered not with what.

He often said that just because women weren't involved in serious business, that didn't mean they should be idle. They had their "womanly" things to do.

Yet, when it came to me, he encouraged me to go to business school. It seemed right and proper that I would become his private accountant, that he would give me a place in his den, a manly room with one wall covered with firearms and another with pictures from his hunting and fishing expeditions, a room that always had the odor of cigar smoke and whiskey, its dark brown rug the most worn-looking of any rug in the house. He set aside a portion of his large black oakwood desk for me to work meticulously on his accounts, his business expenses, his employees' wages, and even his household expenses. Working with my father, I often felt more like the son he had always longed for -- but never got -- than the daughter I was. Oh, I did want to please, but it seemed I would never be just what anyone wanted.

He used to say I would be a great help to any husband, and I used to believe that was why he was so determined I would get a business education and have that experience. He didn't come out and say it in so many words, but I could hear them anyway -- a woman six feet tall needed something more to capture a man's love.

Yes, I was six feet tall; I had shot up as a teenager, much to my dismay, to giant proportions. I was the beanstalk in Jack's garden. I was the giant. There was nothing dainty or fragile about me.

I had my mother's auburn hair, but my shoulders were too wide and my bosom large. I often stood before my mirror and wished my arms shorter. My gray eyes were too long and catlike and my nose was too sharp. My lips were thin, my complexion pale and gray. Gray, gray, gray. How I longed to be pretty and bright. But

when I sat before my vanilla marble vanity table trying to blush and to flutter my eyelashes -- look flirtatious -- I managed only to look a fool. I didn't want to look empty-headed and silly, yet I couldn't help but sit before the glass-encased dollhouse and study the pretty, delicate porcelain face of the tiny wife. How I wished it were my face. Maybe then this would be my world.

But it was not.

And so I left my hope encased with the porcelain figures and went about my way.

If my father had really expected to make me more attractive to a man by providing me with an education and practical business experience, he must have been sorely disappointed in the result. Gentlemen came and went, all coming because of his manipulations, I discovered; and still I was yet to be courted and loved. I was always afraid that my money, my father's money, money I would inherit, would bring a man to the door pretending to be in love with me. I think my father feared the same thing, because he came to me one day and said, "I have written into my will that whatever money you receive shall be only yours and yours to do with what you like. No husband will ever expect to take control of your fortune simply by marrying you."

He made his announcement and left before I could even respond. Then he screened any candidates for my romance carefully, exposing me only to the highest class of gentleman, men of some fortune themselves. I had yet to meet one I didn't tower over, or one who wouldn't scowl at the things I said. It seemed I'd die a spinster.

But my father wouldn't have it so.

"There's a young man coming to dinner tonight," he began one Friday morning late in April, "who I must say is one of the most impressive I've met. I want you to wear that blue dress you had made for yourself last Easter."

"Oh, Father." It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "Why bother," but he anticipated my reaction.

"Don't argue about it, and for heaven's sake don't start in on the woman suffrage movement when we're at the table."

My eyes flamed. He knew how I hated to be bridled like one of his horses.

"A man no sooner shows some interest in you than you challenge the most treasured of manly privileges. It never fails. The blue dress," he repeated, and pivoted and left before I could offer an argument.

It seemed pointless to me to go through the rituals at my vanity table. I shampooed my hair vigorously and then sat down to brush it a hundred times, softening it and pinning it back neatly but not too harsh with the ivory combs my father had given me for Christmas the previous year.

My father didn't know or even seem to recognize that I had commissioned the "blue dress" because I wanted a dress that looked like the dresses women wore in fashion photographs. The bodice was low enough to expose some of the fullness of my bosom, and the tight waist gave me a suggestion of an "hourglass" figure. It was made of silk, and the material was exceptionally soft and had a sheen to it like nothing else I owned. The sleeves were cut just above the elbow. I thought that made my arms look shorter.

I put on my mother's blue sapphire pendant, which I thought made my neck look slimmer. There was a blush

in my cheeks but I couldn't say if it was there because of my healthy body or because of my nervousness. I was nervous. I'd been through enough of those evenings before -- watching the man's face fall as he rose to greet me and I towered over him.

I was merely rehearsing for another failure.

By the time I went downstairs, my father's guest had arrived. They were together in the den. I heard my father's loud laughter, and then I heard the gentleman's voice, low but deeply resonant, the voice of a man with some confidence. I pressed my palms against my hips to dry off the wetness and proceeded to the doorway of the den.

The moment I appeared, Malcolm Neal Foxworth stood up and my heart skipped a beat. He was at least six foot two and easily the most handsome young man who had ever come to our house.

"Malcolm," my father said, "I'm proud to present my lovely daughter."

He took my hand and said, "Charmed, Miss Winfield."

I was looking directly into his sky-blue eyes. And he was gazing just as forthrightly into mine. I'd never believed in schoolgirl romantic notions such as love at first sight, but I felt his gaze slide right over my heart and lodge in the pit of my stomach.

He had flaxen blond hair, a little longer in the back than most men wore, but the strands were brushed neatly and looked heavenly light. He had a strong Roman nose and a thin straight mouth. Broad shouldered, slim-hipped, he had an almost athletic air about him. And I could tell by the way he was gazing at me, with almost a wry smile of amusement, that he was quite accustomed to women falling into a flutter about him. Well, I thought, I mustn't give him something more to be amused at Olivia Winfield. Of course, such a man would hardly give me the time of day, and I would have to get through another evening of Father's doomed matchmaking. I shook his hand firmly, smiled back, and quickly looked away.

After we were introduced, my father explained that Malcolm had come to New London from Yale, where he had attended a class reunion. He was interested in investing in the shipbuilding industry because he believed that with the Great War over, the markets for exporting would develop. From what I learned of his background that night, I understood that he already owned a number of cloth factories, had commanding interest in a few banks, and owned some lumber mills in Virginia. He was in business with his father, but his father, even though he was only fifty-five, was distracted. I didn't learn until later what that meant.

At dinner I tried to be the polite, quiet observer that my father wanted me to be, the way my mother used to be. Margaret and Philip, our servants, served an elegant dinner of beef Wellington, a menu my father had chosen himself. He did so only on special occasions. I thought my father was being quite obvious when he said, "Olivia's a college graduate, you know. She has a business degree and handles a major portion of my bookkeeping."

"Really?" Malcolm seemed genuinely impressed. His cerulean blue eyes brightened even more with interest and I felt he was taking a second, more serious look at me. "Do you enjoy the work, Miss Winfield?"

I shot a glance at my father, who sat back in his high-backed light-maple chair and nodded as if prompting my responses. I did so want this Malcolm Foxworth to like me, but I was determined to be who I was.

"It's better to fill your time with sensible and productive things," I said. "Even for a woman."

My father's smile faded, but Malcolm's widened. "I totally agree," he said. He didn't turn back to my father. "I find most so-called beautiful women vapid and rather silly. It's as if their good looks are enough to see them through life. I prefer intelligent women who know how to think for themselves, women who can be real assets to their husbands."

My father cleared his throat. "Yes, yes," he said, and turned the conversation back to the shipping industry. He had it from good sources that the merchant marine fleet, built for the war effort, would soon be offered to private owners. His topic took Malcolm's attention for most of the dinner, but nevertheless, I felt Malcolm's eyes on me and at times, when I looked up at him, he was smiling at me.

Never had I sat with one of my father's guests and been so enraptured. Never had I felt as welcome at the table. Malcolm was polite to my father, but it was clear to me that he wanted to talk more to me.

To me!

The handsomest man ever to come to our house was interested in me? But he could have a hundred beautiful girls to adore him forever. Why should he be interested in a Plain Jane such as I? But oh how I wanted to believe I wasn't imagining all those side glances, those times he asked me to pass him things he could have easily gotten himself, the way he tried to bring me into the conversation. Perhaps, just for a few hours I could allow my slight bud of hope to blossom. Just for tonight! Tomorrow I'd let it gray again.

After dinner Malcolm and my father adjourned to the den to smoke their cigars and talk more about the investments Malcolm wanted to make. With them my hopes, so briefly flowered, so quickly withered. Of course Malcolm wasn't interested in me -- he was interested in business with my father. They would be in there for the rest of the evening. I might as well retire to my room to read that new novel that was attracting attention, Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*. But I decided instead to bring the book down to the sitting room and read by the Tiffany lamp, happy to see Malcolm just to say good-bye.

It was very quiet on our street that time of evening, but I looked up to see a couple walking arm in arm. It was the way the husband and wife in my glass-encased doll world would walk if they could escape their imprisonment, I thought. I watched them until they disappeared around the corner. How I wished I could someday walk with a man like that -- a man like Malcolm. But it was not to be. It seemed God was deaf to my hopes and prayers for love. I sighed. As I turned back to my book, I realized all I could know of love and life would be from books.

Then I spied Malcolm in the doorway. Why, he had been watching me! He stood so straight and still, his shoulders drawn back, his head high. There was a calculating look in his eyes, as if he were sizing me up unawares, but I didn't know what to make of it.

"Oh!" My surprise brought heat to my cheeks. My heart began to thump so loudly, I thought he might even hear it across the room.

"It is a lovely evening," he said. "Could I interest you in a walk?"

For a moment I just stared. He wanted to take me out walking!

"Yes," I said. I could see he liked the way I came to a quick decision. I didn't try to flutter my eyelashes or

act uncertain to tease him with my answer. I wanted to go for a walk and I wanted very much to go for a walk with *him*. If I had a hope that what appeared to be his interest in me would flower, I was going to be just who I was. "I'll just run up and get my coat." I was glad for a reason to go off and catch my breath.

Malcolm was waiting at the front door when I returned. Philip had gotten him his overcoat and stood beside him waiting to open the door. I wondered where my father was and if this was something he might have arranged. But even though I knew Malcolm only a short while, I believed he was not a man to do something he didn't want to do.

When Philip opened the front door, I caught a look of satisfaction in his eyes. He approved of this gentleman.

Malcolm took my arm and escorted me down the six front steps. Both of us were quiet as we proceeded down the walkway until we reached the front gate. Malcolm opened the gate and stepped back to permit me to pass through first. It was a cool April evening, with just a hint of spring in the air. The trees by the gate still reached into the sky with bare gray arms, but their arms were softened by hundreds of tiny buds about to spring to life. Yet winter's chill still hung in the air, still hung in me. For a crazy moment I wished to turn to Malcolm and bury myself in his arms, something I'd certainly never done with a man, not even my father. I determinedly walked ahead and pointed toward the river.

"If we go to the end of the street here," I said, "and turn right, we have a beautiful view of the Thames River."

"Fine," he said.

It was always a fantasy of mine to walk along the banks of the river on a spring evening with a man who was falling in love with me. I was a blur of emotion -- so many hopes and fears, confusion, frightening feelings moving through my body, I felt dizzy. But I couldn't let Malcolm see my agitation, so I kept my bearing straight, my head high as we walked. The lights of the ships moved up and down with their cargo. On a night as dark as that one was, the lights on the water in the distance looked like fireflies caught in cobwebs.

"Rather beautiful view," he said.

"Yes."

pard

"How is it," he said, "that your father hasn't married you off yet? I won't insult your intelligence and tell you that you're beautiful; but you are extremely attractive and it's quite apparent that you have an extraordinary mind. How is it no man has captured you yet?"

"How is it you haven't taken a wife?" I responded.

He laughed. "Answer a question with a question. Well, Miss Winfield," he said, "if you must know, I find most women today tedious with their effort to be beguiling. A man who is serious about his life, who is determined to build something significant of himself and his family, must, it seems to me, avoid this type."

"And this is the only kind of woman you've known?" I asked. I couldn't see precisely, of course, but I felt he blushed. "Haven't you searched for others?"

"No. I've been too occupied with my business."

We paused, and he looked out at the ships.

"If I may be a little forward," he went on, "I feel you and I share some things in common. From what your father tells me and from what I can observe, you are a serious-minded person, pragmatic and diligent. You appreciate the business world already, and therefore you are already head and shoulders above most women in this country today."

"Because of the way most men have treated them," I said quickly. I nearly bit my lip. I wasn't going to express my controversial opinions, but the words just seemed to form on my lips by themselves.

"I don't know. Maybe," he said quickly. "The point is, it's true. And you know," he said, taking my elbow gently and turning me so we would walk on, "we have other things in common as well. We both lost our mothers at an early age. Your father explained your circumstances," he added quickly, "so I hope you don't feel I'm intruding."

"No. You lost your mother at an early age?"

"Five." His voice grew somber and faraway.

"Oh, how hard it must have been."

"Sometimes," he said, "the harder things are, the better we become. Or should I say, the tougher." Indeed, he did sound tough when he said that, so cold that I feared to ask him more.

We walked on that night. I listened to him talk about his various enterprises. We had a little discussion about the upcoming presidential elections and he was surprised at how informed I was about the candidates vying for the Republican and Democratic nominations.

I was sorry when we reached my house so soon, but then I thought, at least I had my walk with a handsome young man. I thought it would be left at that.

But at the doorway he asked if he could call again.

"I feel as if I have dominated the evening with my conversation," he said. "I'd like to be more of a listener next time."

Was I hearing right? A man wanted to hear *me* talk, wanted to know *my* thoughts?

"You could call tomorrow," I said. I suppose I sounded as eager as a schoolgirl. He didn't smile or laugh.

"Fine," he said. "There's a good seafood restaurant where I am staying. Perhaps we could have dinner."

Dinner? An actual date. Of course, I agreed. I wanted to watch him get into his car and drive off, but I couldn't do anything so obvious. When I reentered the house, my father was standing in the den doorway.

"Interesting young man," he said. "Something of a business genius, I'd say. And good-looking, too, eh?"

"Yes, Father," I said.

He chuckled.

"He's coming to call tomorrow and we're going to dinner."

His smile faded. His face took on that look of serious hope I had seen before.

"Really? Well, what do you know? What do you know?"

"I don't know what to tell you, Father."

I couldn't contain myself anymore. I had to excuse myself and go upstairs. For a while I simply sat in my room staring at myself in the mirror. What had I done differently? My hair was the same.

I pulled my shoulders back. I had a tendency to turn them in because they were so wide. I knew it was bad posture and Malcolm had such good posture, such confident posture. He didn't seem to see my inadequacies and imperfections, and it was so good not having to look down at a man.

And he had told me I was very attractive, implied that I was desirable to men. Maybe I had underestimated myself all those years. Maybe I had unnecessarily accepted a dreadful fate?

Of course, I tried chastising myself, warning myself. A man who's been to dinner has asked you out. It doesn't have to mean he has romantic inclinations. Maybe he's just lonely here.

No, I thought, we'll have dinner, talk some more, and he will be gone. Perhaps, some distant day, on some occasion, like Christmas, I'll receive a card from him, on which he will write, "Belated thanks for your fine conversation. Happiest of holidays. Malcolm."

My heart fluttered in fear. I went out to the glass-enclosed dollhouse and looked for the hope I left encased there. Then I went to sleep dreaming about the porcelain figures. I was one of them. I was the happy wife -- and Malcolm, he was the handsome husband.

Our dinner date was elegant. I tried not to overdress, but everything I picked out to wear looked so plain. It was my own fault for not caring enough about my wardrobe. In the end I chose the gown I had worn to a wedding reception last year. Perhaps it would bring me good luck, I thought.

Malcolm said I looked nice, but the conversation at dinner quickly turned to more mundane things. He wanted to know all about the work I did for my father and he made me elaborate in detail. I was afraid the conversation would prove boring, but he showed such interest that I went on and on. Apparently, he was quite impressed with my knowledge of my father's affairs.

"Tell me," he asked when we returned to my house, "what do you do to entertain yourself?" At last the conversation was to be more personal; at last there was interest in me.

"I read a great deal. I listen to music. I take walks. My one sport is horseback riding."

"Oh, really. I own a number of horses, and Foxworth Hall, my home, is situated on grounds that would fascinate any explorer of nature."

"It sounds wonderful," I said.

He saw me to the door and, once again, I thought this would be the end. But he surprised me.

"I suppose you know I will be joining you and your father to attend church tomorrow."

"No," I said. "I didn't know."

"Well, I look forward to it," he added. "I must thank you for a most enjoyable evening."

"I enjoyed it too," I said, and waited. Was this the moment when the man was supposed to kiss the woman? How I regretted not having a close girlfriend in whom I could confide and with whom I could discuss the affairs between men and women, but all the girls I had known in school were married and gone.

Was I supposed to do something to encourage him? Lean toward him, pause dramatically, smile in some way? I felt so lost, standing before the door, waiting.

"Until the morning, then," he said, tipped his hat, and went down the steps to his car.

I opened the door and rushed into the house, feeling both excited and disappointed. My father was in the sitting room, reading the paper, pretending to be interested in other things; but I knew he was waiting to hear about my date. I made up my mind I would not give him a review. It made me feel more like someone auditioning and I didn't like all these expectations.

What could I tell him anyway? Malcolm took me out to dinner. We talked a great deal. Rather, I talked a great deal and he listened. Maybe he thought I was a chatterbox after all, even though my conversation was about things in which he showed some interest. I'm sure I talked so much because I was so nervous. In a way I was grateful for his questions about business. That was a subject on which I could expand.

I could have talked about books, of course, or horses, but it wasn't until just now that I learned he had any interests in anything other than making money.

So what would I tell my father? The dinner was wonderful. I tried not to eat too much, even though I could have eaten more. I tried to look dainty and feminine and even refused to order dessert. It was he who insisted.

"Did you have a good time?" my father asked quickly. He saw I would just go right up to my room.

"Yes, but why didn't you tell me you had invited him to join us for church?"

"Oh, didn't I?"

"Father, despite your expertise in business, you're not a good liar," I said. He roared. I even laughed a bit myself.

Why should I be mad anyway? I thought. I knew what he was doing and I wanted him to do it.

"I'm going to sleep," I said, thinking about how early I would get up the next morning. I had to take extra pains with my appearance for church.

Before I fell asleep that night, I reviewed every moment of my date with Malcolm, condemning myself for this, congratulating myself for that. And when I recalled our moments at the door, I imagined that he did kiss me.

Never was I as nervous about going to church as I was that morning. I couldn't eat a thing at breakfast. I rushed about, not quite confident about my dress, not sure about my hair. When the time finally came to leave and Malcolm had arrived, my heart was beating so rapidly, I thought I would go into a faint and collapse on the stairway.

"Good morning, Olivia," he said, and looked quite satisfied with my appearance. I didn't even realize until we were all in the car and on the way to church that he had called me "Olivia" and not "Miss Winfield."

It was a lovely, warm spring day, really the first warm Sunday of the year. All the young ladies were dressed in their new spring dresses with veiled hats and parasols. And the families all looked so fresh, with the children scampering about in the sun, waiting to go in to the service. As we stepped from the car, it seemed all those gathered turned to look at me. Me, Olivia Winfield, arriving at church on a fine Sunday morning with my father and a strikingly handsome young man. Yes, I wanted to scream, yes, it's me! See? But of course I would never stoop to such guttersnipe behavior. I stood straighter, taller, and held my chin high as we walked directly from the car and into the dark, musky church. Most had stayed outdoors to enjoy the sun, so we had our choice of pews, and Malcolm led us directly to the very front seats. We sat silently as we waited for the sermon to begin. Never had I had such difficulty following the sermon; never did I feel so self-conscious about the sound of my voice when we stood to sing the hymns. Yet Malcolm sang out clearly and loudly, and recited the Lord's Prayer at the end in a deep, strong voice. Then he turned to me and took my arm to escort me out. How proud I felt walking down the aisle with him.

Of course, I saw the way other members of the congregation were watching us and wondering who was the handsome young man accompanying the Winfields and standing beside Olivia Winfield?

We left a stream of chatter behind us and I knew that Malcolm's appearance would be the subject of parlor talk all day.

That afternoon we went horseback riding. It was the first time I had gone horseback riding alone with a man and I found his company invigorating. He rode like an experienced English huntsman. He seemed to enjoy the way I could keep up with him.

He came to Sunday dinner and we took another walk along the river. For the first part of the walk I found him more quiet than ever and I anticipated the announcement of his departure. Perhaps he would promise to write. Actually, I was hoping for that promise, even if he didn't hold to it. At least I would have something to look forward to. I would cherish every one of his letters, should there be more than one.

"Look here, Miss Winfield," he suddenly began. I didn't like his reverting back to calling me Miss Winfield. I thought that was a dark omen. But it wasn't.

"I don't see the point in two people who have so much in common, two sensible people, that is, delaying and unnecessarily prolonging a relationship just to arrive at the point they both agree would be best."

"Point?"

"I'm speaking of marriage," he said. "One of the most holy sacraments, something that must never be taken lightly. Marriage is more than the logical result of a romance; it's a contractual union, teamwork. A man has

to know that his wife is part of the effort, someone on whom he can depend. Contrary to what some men think, my father included, a man must have a woman who has strength. I'm impressed with you, Miss Winfield. I would like your permission to ask your father for your hand in marriage."

For a moment I could not speak. Malcolm Neal Foxworth, six feet two inches tall, as handsome a man as there could be, a man of intelligence, wealth, and looks, wanted to marry me? And we were standing on the bank of the river with the stars above us more brilliant than ever. Had I wandered into one of my own dreams?

"Well..." I said. I brought my hand to my throat and looked at him. I was at a loss for words. I didn't know how to phrase my response.

"I realize this seems rather sudden, but I'm a man with a destiny who has the good fortune to realize almost immediately what is valuable and what is not. My instincts have always proven reliable. I am confident that this proposal will be a good one for both of us. If you can place your trust in that..."

"Yes, Malcolm. I can," I said quickly, perhaps too quickly.

"Good. Thank you," he said.

I waited. This was surely the moment for us to kiss. We should consummate our faith in each other under the stars. But maybe I was being childishly romantic. Malcolm was the kind to do things properly, correctly. I had to have faith in that too.

"Then, if you will, let us return to your home so that I can speak to your father," he said. He did take my arm and draw me closer to him. As we walked back to my father's house, I thought about the couple I had seen strolling on the street that first night he came to dinner. My dream had come true. For the first time in my life, I felt truly happy.

My father waited in his den as if he had anticipated the news. Things were moving so quickly. On more than one occasion, I had brought myself to the double doors that separated my father's den from the sitting room and listened in on conversations. I resented being left out of some of the conversations anyway. They had to do with family affairs or business affairs that could affect me.

Nothing would affect me more than the conversation that was about to ensue. I stood quietly to the side and listened, eager to hear Malcolm express his love for me.

"As I told you the first night, Mr. Winfield," he began, "I am quite taken with your daughter. It is rare to find a woman with her poise and dignity, a woman who can appreciate the pursuit of economic success and grow gracefully with it."

"I am proud of Olivia's achievements," my father said. "She is as brilliant an accountant and bookkeeper as any man I know," he added. My father's compliments always had a way of making me feel less desirable.

"Yes. She's a woman with a steady, strong temperament. I have always wanted a wife who would let me pursue my life as I will, and would not cling to me helplessly like a choking vine. I want to be confident that when I come home, she won't be sulky or moody, or even vindictive as so many flimsy women can be. I like the fact that she is not concerned with superficial things, that she doesn't dote on her own coiffure, that she doesn't giggle and flirt. In short, I like her maturity. I compliment you, sir. You have brought up a fine,

responsible woman."

"Well, I --"

"And I can think of no other way to express that compliment better than to ask for your permission to marry her."

"Does Olivia...?"

"Know that I have come in here to make this proposal? She has given me permission to do so. Knowing she is a woman of strong mind, I thought it best to ask her first. I hope you understand."

"Oh, I understand that." My father cleared his throat. "Well, Mr. Foxworth," he said. He felt it necessary to refer to him as Mr. Foxworth during this conversation. "I'm sure you understand as well that my daughter will come into a sizable fortune. I want you to know beforehand that her money will be her own. It is specifically stated in my will that no one but she will have access to those funds."

There was what I thought to be a long silence.

"That's as it should be," Malcolm finally said. "I don't know what your plans might be for a wedding," he added quickly, "but I would favor a small church ceremony as quickly as possible. I need to return soon to Virginia."

"If Olivia wants that," my father said. He knew that I would.

"Fine. Then I have your permission, sir?"

"You understand what I have said about her money?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"You have my permission," my father said. "And we'll shake on it."

I released the air that I held in my lungs and stepped quickly away from the double doors.

A man, most handsome and elegant, had come calling and then had asked for my hand in marriage. I had heard it all and it had all happened so quickly, I had to catch my breath and keep telling myself it wasn't a dream.

I hurried upstairs and sat before the dollhouse. I would live in a big house with servants and there would be people coming and going. We would entertain with elaborate dinner parties and I would be an asset to my husband who was, as my father had said, something of a business genius. In time we would be envied by all.

"Just like I have envied you," I said to the porcelain family within the glass.

I looked about me.

Good-bye to lonely nights. Good-bye to this world of fantasy and dreams.

Good-bye to my father's face of pity and to my own forlorn look in the mirror. There was a new face to know -- and so much to learn about Malcolm Neal Foxworth -- and a lifetime to learn it in. I was to become Olivia Foxworth, Mrs. Malcolm Neal Foxworth. All my mother had predicted had come true.

I was blooming. I felt myself opening out toward Malcolm like a tightly closed bud bursting into blossom. And when his blue, blue eyes looked into my gray ones, I knew the sun had come and melted the fog away. My life would no longer be colored gray. No, from now on it would be blue -- blue as the sun-filled skies of a cloudless day. Blue as Malcolm's eyes. In the flush of being swept away by love, like any foolish schoolgirl I forgot all I knew about caution and looking beyond appearances to see the truth. I forgot that never once when Malcolm proposed to me and then made his proposal to my father had he mentioned the word "love." Like a foolish schoolgirl I believed I would lie beneath the blue sky of Malcolm's eyes, and my tiny little blossom would grow into a sturdy, long-lasting bloom. Like any woman stupidly believing in love, I never realized that the blue sky I saw was not the warm, soft, nurturing sky of spring, but the cold, chilling, lonely sky of winter.

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Users Review

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