

# **Flowers in the Attic Study Guide**

**Flowers in the Attic by Virginia C. Andrews**

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# Plot Summary

Flowers in the Attic is the first novel in the Dollanganger series by V.C. Andrews. In this novel, four siblings are locked in a secluded second story room in the childhood home of their mother after the death of their father. The children are told they will only have to remain here until their grandfather has died and left his entire estate to their mother. However, as the years pass and the children have been locked away for more than three years, they begin to doubt their mother's devotion to their safety and begin searching for a way to escape. Flowers in the Attic is a dark, Gothic tale of greed and incest that will keep readers spellbound until the final paragraph.

The Dollanganger family lives in Pennsylvania where their father often travels on business for the public relations firm for which he works. When their father is home, the children are plied with many gifts and watch as their parents greet each other with deeply felt affection. The family grows when the mother gives birth to twins, a boy and a girl, each as angelic and perfect as the two older children, Cathy and Chris. However, everything changes when the father is killed in a car accident on the night of his thirty-sixth birthday. The mother begins to struggle to pay the bills. The mother is uneducated and has no means by which to make money to care for her family or any desire to become educated for this purpose. Instead, the mother turns to the family she once shamed and ran away from.

Mother informs the children that they will be forced to abandon their home and all their possessions except for two suitcases in order to move into the home of her parents. Mother tells the children that her father is very ill and will die soon. Due to the fact that mother's two brothers were both killed when they were young, she is her father's only heir. Mother hopes to win back her father's love and to be named in his will. To do this, however, she must return to her childhood home. Mother rushes the children onto a midnight train and marches them through desolate fields to arrive at the biggest, most wealthy home they have ever seen. Once there, the children are marched up the stairs where they are locked in a secluded room on the second floor by their grandmother. The children are given a list of rules and ordered to obey them while they hide in this room to await their grandfather's death.

At first the children believe they will only remain in this room for a few short days until their mother can tell their grandfather of their existence. However, this changes over time and the children are informed that their grandfather must never know of their existence. Mother assures them, however, that grandfather is so ill he will die within days or weeks. Chris and Cathy try to make this situation into a game for the younger children, creating a playroom in the attic that can be accessed through a wardrobe in the secluded bedroom where they wait. Chris and Cathy, with the help of their mother, clean the attic and begin decorating it with flowers and other creations, making a garden for the younger children. Over time, the younger children grow used to playing in the dusty attic, joining in on making bugs and flowers for the garden or playing hide and seek among the old armoires and trunks.



Mother attempts to make the children's time in the secluded room fun by bringing them expensive gifts, drawing implements, a television, and music to listen to. At Christmas, Mother brings rich, decadent food and wonderful presents. However, as time continues to pass, Mother's visits become less and less frequent. One day Mother arrives in the room and announces that she has gotten married to a wonderful man she is confident will love her children. Mother does not notice, however, that her two oldest children are not children anymore, but adolescents who need to be among other teens their own age in order to blossom in their own sexuality. Mother also does not know that the grandmother has caught Cathy staring at her naked body in the mirror and punished her severely by putting tar in her hair and forcing Chris to cut the front of her precious locks.

Chris gets the idea of making a key out of an impression taken from the key his mother uses to gain access to their secluded room. Using this key, Chris is able to escape from the room at night and rummage through his mother's bedroom, stealing the money she leaves carelessly lying around. Chris hopes to get enough money to care for himself and his siblings upon their escape. During this time, Cory becomes ill and Cathy insists that Mother take him to a hospital. Mother does, returning a few days later to inform them that Cory has died. The children are heartbroken, but more determined than ever to escape. Then one night Chris decides to go see the grandfather, to tell him of his and his siblings existence. However, Chris discovers that the grandfather has been dead for months. Not only this, but Chris overhears a couple of servants discussing the will and learn that if anyone ever proves of the existence of Chris and his siblings, their mother will lose everything. Chris also learns that his mother has been spiking the powdered donuts sent to them each day with arsenic.

Chris returns to the room and tells Cathy all he has learned. Chris then feeds Mickey, the mouse Cory tamed, a piece of powdered donut. The mouse dies. Chris and Cathy pack their things and escape that night, taking the mouse with them in the hopes of convincing the police of their mother's crimes against them. However, once they are safe from Foxworth Hall, Cathy and Chris decide to leave revenge for another day.



# Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2

## Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Summary

Flowers in the Attic is the first of a five book series about the Dollanganger family. In this book, the father dies and his children quickly learn that their parents are half-uncle and niece, an incestuous relationship that caused an irreparable rift between their mother and her biological father.

The prologue sets the stage for the novel, informing the reader that this story is true, but the names and places have been changed to protect the innocent. In Goodbye, Daddy, Cathy is eight and her brother Christopher is ten. Their mother sets them down and tells them they are going to have a baby brother or sister. Cathy is upset by this, afraid a sister will replace her in her father's affections. Cathy's father assures her that this is not possible. When the babies are born, twins, Cathy is thrilled to have both a baby brother and a baby sister and is so caught up in caring for them she forgets to be jealous. Life returns to normal for four years as Cathy and Chris help care for the growing twins. On their father's thirty-sixth birthday, they plan a big party and are waiting for their father to return home when a couple of highway patrol officers come to the door. It seems there has been a car accident and father has been killed. The children are devastated, but not nearly as devastated as their mother.

Over the next few weeks, their mother begins hiding herself away at their father's desk, pouring over the bills and writing and rewriting a letter over and over again. Finally a response comes to this letter Mother found so difficult to write. Mother sits the children down and tells them that they have no money and that the bank will soon come to repossess everything they own. Mother says that she has a father who is extremely rich, but has no heirs since her two brothers died years ago in separate accidents. Mother says her father has disowned her because of something she did years ago, but she believes she can convince him to love her again and to make her his sole heir. To do this, however, she and the children will have to leave their home and everything they love to move into this great mansion in Virginia.

The Road to Riches. The children quickly pack all they can into the two suitcases their mother has allowed them. Then the family boards a train to Virginia in the middle of the night, sneaking away like thieves. When they arrive at their destination, there is nothing there but a simple shelter. The conductor only gives Mother the children's bags, leaving her to explain that her bags are going on to the next town where she will claim them the following day. Mother then makes the children walk several miles to the largest, most impressive mansion they have ever seen. They are let into the house by an old woman who has clearly been watching for them. The woman leads them upstairs to a room secluded in the north wing of the massive house. The woman is introduced as their grandmother. Cathy and Chris quickly help the twins undress for bed, but when they put them in the same bed, the grandmother insists that children of the opposite sex should not sleep in the same bed together. Mother and the grandmother argue over this, with



Mother suggesting the boys be given a room of their own. Grandmother argues that this is the only room that can remain locked without arousing the suspicion of the servants. Mother turns to the children and assures them this is temporary and she will be back to see them the following day.

## **Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Analysis**

The novel begins in a glorious setting, showing the reader what a happy family the Dollangangers were and how perfect their parents' love for each other and their children was. This sets up a contrast to the developments that take place after the father is killed. The children quickly discover they know nothing about their mother, not even their real last name. The children learn that their mother is the daughter of a very wealthy and well respected man in Virginia and that she was disinherited years ago for something she seems unwilling to tell the children about. This begins to hint to the reader that something dark and sinister might have taken place in the mother's past, leaving the reader wondering what kind of woman the mother really is.

The children go to Foxworth Hall with their mother, believing they are about to live in the lap of luxury. They are not prepared to be locked in a secluded room under the care of a gray, unhappy woman like their grandmother. The reader watches the mother march her children across the countryside and hide her own luggage and guesses what she is up to, but the children are too innocent to see. However, it becomes clear to everyone when the grandmother begins talking about locking doors and keeping the children secret from the servants. The children are to be hidden in this room for an unknown length of time. Mother promises that it will only be a matter of days, until she can make her father love her again and tell him about the children. However, the reader suspects their confinement could last much longer than this.



## Part 1: Chapters 3-5

### Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Summary

The Grandmother's House. The children wake in the morning and take a closer look at the room where they have been locked in. The grandmother arrives with their day's ration of food and gives them a list of rules they are expected to follow. Most of the rules deal with keeping themselves and their surroundings neat as well as refraining from any behaviors that might be deemed inappropriate, such as boys and girls bathing together. The older children try to make all this seem like fun to the twins, but they find themselves feeling angry and unhappy with the grandmother's assumptions about their behaviors. Cathy finds herself hoping the grandfather is much nicer and will accept them much easier than the grandmother.

The Attic. The children have been told they may play in the attic after ten a.m. each day. The children make their way up the narrow stairs and begin to explore the massive space that covers the entire length of the house. There are many armoires filled with clothing and trunks and furniture and many, many items that would be fun to explore under other circumstances. They also find a school room built in a corner of the attic that contains desks and blackboards as well as several windows the children can open. The twins are not amused by the attic and demand to go outside. Instead, Chris builds a swing for them to play on. As the children play, Chris and Cathy fantasize about what they will do when they access to the millions their mother hopes to inherit. However, the twins soon become bored, so Cathy and Chris are forced to find other ways to occupy their time. Cathy reads to the twins until they fall asleep and then plays checkers with Chris. As they play, Cathy becomes aware that the grandmother has slipped into the room and caught them breaking several rules, including lying on the same bed together and leaving the twins' toys scattered throughout the room.

The Wrath of God. Mother comes into the room, clearly stiff and sore. The grandmother makes her take off her shirt to show the children the whipping she has received for her crimes against God. The grandmother tells the children that their mother married her half-uncle, committing the sin of incest. This, the grandmother tells them, makes them the seeds of the devil. The twins become upset during this speech. Carrie begins to scream. The grandmother insists she be quieted, but when Mother does nothing to make her stop, the grandmother picks her up by her hair. Cory bites the grandmother on the leg for hurting his sister, so the grandmother kicks him away, then slaps him. The grandmother then warns Cathy and Chris if they cannot control the twins and follow the rules, she will whip all of them the way she whipped her daughter, Corrine.

### Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Analysis

The grandmother returns the following morning and gives the children a list of rules to follow. The reader realizes right away that these rules focus more on sexual deviance



than anything else, making the reader wonder why the grandmother is so focused on something innocent children will never do. This question is answered when it is revealed that the crime Mother committed to cause herself to be disinherited was the crime of incest by marrying her half-uncle. Now the reader has insight into the grandmother's thought processes, explaining to some degree why she might be willing to become warden to her grandchildren and why she worries so much about them becoming sexual with one another. In fact, these rules allow the reader to see more into the character of the grandmother than the children might comprehend, expressing both her shame in her own daughter's actions and her deep belief in God.

Cathy and Chris show their depth of character as they begin trying to make this stay in the secluded room an adventure for the younger children. Cathy and Chris are clearly highly intelligent, mature young people who care enough about their siblings to put their needs in front of their own. Not all children of this age would be so strong in such a situation. This strength is important for Cathy and Chris because the reader is beginning to suspect that their time in this room will not be as brief as the mother says, despite their faith in her assurances.





## Part 1: Chapters 6-7

### Part 1: Chapters 6-7 Summary

**Momma's Story.** After the grandmother leaves the room, Mother sits the children down and tells them she wishes to explain things while she is still herself. Mother talks about her parents' deep religious beliefs and what life was like at Foxworth Hall when she was a child, before her brothers were killed in separate accidents. Mother tells them how Christopher Garland Foxworth came to Foxworth Hall after the death of his mother, penniless because her own father stole his half of their father's estate. Christopher was young and beautiful, and fourteen-year-old Corrine fell in love with him at first sight. They kept their love a secret for many months, sneaking around the estate and seeing each other while each was away at school.

Mother says that when their love came out, her parents were shocked, telling them they could not marry because their children would be born deformed. Mother says she and Christopher felt they had no choice, that they had to run away and marry. Mother then tells them that they are perfect children, they are not the spawn of the devil, and that she will soon be able to convince her father of that. Mother also assures them that she is going to enroll in secretarial school so that she can earn a living to get them a house of their own. After she leaves, Cathy expresses doubts about their situation, but Chris assures her that their mother would never lie to them.

**Minutes Like Hours.** Over the next few weeks, the children fall into a routine of waking early and going to bed early. The grandmother begins asking them for Bible verses they have memorized, but stops when it is clear the children know the Bible better than she ever suspected. Mother comes every day, staying for hours on the weekend to share meals with the children. The twins become difficult to deal with, often throwing fits or refusing to play in the attic. Chris becomes something of a father, teaching Cathy how to deal with these tantrums without giving in. One Sunday Mother comes wearing sailing clothes, causing Cathy to attack her for having a good time while her children are locked away in a dusty old room. It is then that Mother tells the children that her father expressed relief at the fact that she did not have children with her half-uncle, causing her to be cautious about telling him the truth. Now Mother tells her children that they will most likely have to stay in that room until their grandfather dies.

### Part 1: Chapters 6-7 Analysis

The children finally learn some of the truth behind their mother's story. The reader will note when Mother begins her story, she tells the children she wants them to know the truth while she is still herself. This suggests that Mother thinks she might change somehow, perhaps grow spoiled by the money her father represents and begin neglecting things from her past, including the children. The reader should keep this in mind as the plot continues to develop.



Cathy and Chris grow to dislike the grandmother more each day. The reader should note how the children always refer to their grandmother as the grandmother, not with a possessive or in any way that would imply they accept their biological connection to this woman. The writer is showing how Cathy has distanced herself from this woman, the woman they think of as their warden, the one person who stands between them and freedom. At the same time, Cathy and Chris continue to show their maturity as they learn to deal with the unhappiness the twins are suffering that causes them to act in unpleasant ways, like typical five-year-olds might do in this situation. Cathy and Chris handle them well, showing the depth of their concern for these children and their depth of maturity in this unpleasant situation.



# Part 1: Chapters 8-9

## Part 1: Chapters 8-9 Summary

To Make a Garden Grow. Chris decides that since they are going to be in this room a while longer, they should make an attempt to make the attic more suitable for play. They decide to begin by cleaning it. Mother helps by bringing cleaning supplies and even working with them a few hours every weekend. During this time, Mother tells them about the people she sees and places she goes, as well as the secretarial classes she takes. Cathy soon becomes frustrated with her mother's lack of success in her typing course. Mother brings them many gifts, including art supplies from which they begin to make flowers and bugs to create the illusion of a garden in the attic. As their confinement approaches a month, the children are forced to hide in the attic one Friday to allow the maids to clean their room. The children become aware of their predicament during this time, breaking down some of their confidence that they soon will be free. One day the grandmother questions Cathy about what the children are doing in the attic. Cathy feels as though she is being accused of something bad even though their actions have always been innocent; therefore, she is shocked the next day when the grandmother brings a plant to add to their garden in the attic.

Cathy begins losing faith that things will get better as yet another month passes. Her siblings console her and Chris pushes her to begin dancing again. A few days later, Mother brings some dance costumes and recordings of great ballet dances, like Swan Lake. Time continues to pass. The children begin sunbathing in the attic under the windows, running around naked together. Cathy worries that they are committing some sin that their grandmother has warned them against and finds herself growing more curious about Chris's body than she had been before. At the same time, Cathy notices Chris's growing interest in her body as well. As the weather begins to change, the children spend less time in the attic because it becomes cold up there. However, Cathy, Chris, and Cory decide to play hide and seek in the attic one afternoon to pass the time. Cory normally hides in an easy-to-discover place, but this time Cathy and Chris cannot find him. It occurs to Chris that Cory might have gotten into a trunk, and sure enough he finds him locked in a trunk, suffering from a lack of oxygen. Chris is able to revive him, but the experience frightens all the children.

Holidays. Thanksgiving comes and the children wait all day for the dinner their mother promised. When the meal finally comes, the children are famished. The food is so different from the cold meals they have eaten for the last few months that they fail to notice that this has also grown cold while their mother waited for a moment to escape the party downstairs to bring it up. Chris eats a lot, almost making a spectacle of himself, while the twins refuse to eat much more than a few bites of turkey. The following day, Cory comes down with a terrible cold. Within a few days, Carrie is sick as well. Cathy demands that her mother take the children to the doctor, but the grandmother insists they will heal on their own. They do, but it takes a long time and neither child is quite the same again. When Cathy argues with her mother that living in



this secluded room is not healthy for the twins, her mother suggests they start taking vitamins.

On Christmas morning, the children wake to find their mother has brought them dozens of presents each. There is also candy, a treat the grandmother has refused them in fear that they will need a dentist. When the grandmother comes to deliver the day's food, Cathy attempts to give her a gift she and her siblings made for her. Unfortunately, the grandmother refuses to acknowledge the gift, causing Cathy to destroy it in a fit of anger. Later in the day, Mother comes and brings Carrie an expensive doll house that once belonged to the grandmother. Mother also announces that her father is going to change his will the following week, that the plan is going well. Finally, Mother tells the children about the party her father is throwing her downstairs. Chris and Cathy beg to be allowed to view the party from a hiding place and Mother finally agrees.

## Part 1: Chapters 8-9 Analysis

The grandmother shows her first bit of kindness when she brings the children a mum to go with their fake garden in the attic. However, this kindness is overshadowed when the grandmother both refuses to allow the mother to take Cory and Carrie to the doctor when they are suffering a terrible cold and when she refuses to acknowledge a gift the children have made her for Christmas. This causes the reader to wonder exactly what the grandmother's feelings are for these children. They are, after all, her grandchildren. The grandmother seems to acknowledge this fact when she gives the children the mum, but when she refuses them medical help and to accept their gift, the reader wonders if this is simple cruelty, or if the old woman is simply showing her strong belief in God and the fact that these children are a product of a sin against God.

The children are coping as well as they can, but as days turn into weeks and weeks into months, the children begin to struggle with their fear of being locked up forever. Cathy is the first to break of the two older children, often accusing their mother of being cruel to them and refusing them the essential elements every child needs to grow up strong and healthy. Chris continues to stay loyal to the mother, leaving the reader wondering what it will take to prove to him that the mother has only eyes for her own greed and cares little for the children. The mother seems to be attempting to placate her children with gifts, often giving them things they have long desired. However, the children are quickly learning that things do not matter as much as the basic freedoms of life. Finally, the mother announces that she will soon be written into the will, giving the children some hope that she is still focused on the original plan.



# Part 1: Chapters 10-12

## Part 1: Chapters 10-12 Summary

The Christmas Party. Mother comes back later that evening dressed in an expensive gown and shows Cathy and Chris to a cupboard from which they can see the party downstairs. They watch as people they do not know move among the expensive decorations and fancily dressed servants. They see the grandmother and are surprised to see her dressed in something other than her typical grey uniform. The grandfather is there as well, dressed in a tuxedo and being pushed in a wheelchair by his nurse. As the children watch, they see their mother with a young, dark man they later learn is Bartholomew Winslow. Chris and Cathy overhear another couple talking about their mother, suggesting that her relationship with Bartholomew is more serious than it looks. After a while, Chris takes Cathy back to the room and then he explores the house on his own.

Christopher's Exploration and Its Repercussions. Mother shakes Cathy awake and insists on knowing where Chris is. Before Cathy can answer, Chris returns. Mother slaps Chris and threatens to whip both him and Cathy. Mother then dissolves into tears and begins to cry, claiming she has been under a great deal of pressure. When Mother is gone, Chris tells Cathy what he saw while he was exploring the house. First Chris had to hide when Mother and Bart came into the hallway, kissing and talking about seeing her bedroom. Then Chris tells her about the house. The house has many rooms, including a trophy room in which the grandfather has many animal heads mounted on the walls. Chris also found Mother's room, a beautiful room with a huge swan bed and many expensive furnishings. Chris tells Cathy the house is big and expensive, but it would never be pretty like their house in Pennsylvania.

The Long Winter, and Spring, and Summer. The children spend much of the winter watching the small television their mother has brought them. As the months pass, Cathy becomes aware of changes to her body and changes happening to Chris. One afternoon Mother comes and talks to Cathy about menstruation, teaching her what to expect and what to do. Cathy is mortified by the idea. A short time later, the twins celebrate their sixth birthday. Shortly after, Cathy and Chris begin teaching the twins to read and write. Summer returns and Cathy realizes it has been a full year since they were brought to this secluded room.

## Part 1: Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Chris and Cathy are allowed out of the room for a brief time to see the luxurious party going on downstairs on Christmas Day. During this outing, Chris overhears some things about his mother that leads him to think she might be thinking of remarrying, though he denies it to Cathy. Chris idolizes his mother and this denial to Cathy is perhaps more of a denial to himself, to assure himself that his mother still makes him and his siblings a



priority over her own happiness. Later, Chris explores the house and discovers that while he and his three siblings are living in a prison of sorts, their mother is living in the lap of luxury. The reader begins to suspect that Chris is beginning to lose faith in his mother as he learns more of her life outside the four walls to which he is confined.

Chris and Cathy are now fifteen and thirteen, teenagers whose bodies are beginning to make the transformation into adulthood. Cathy is shocked and unhappy with the changes that are taking place in her body and finds herself with no one but her brother to share these changes with. Cathy knows that Chris has begun to look at her in a different way, but she does not know how to deal with it. Cathy is frightened of going to Hell as the grandmother keeps insisting she will, but her body is changing in a way that she finds herself growing more and more curious not only about her own body, but Chris's as well. It is a difficult situation, leaving two teenagers who should be exploring their changing bodies with others their own age reliant on one another for answers.



## Part 2: Chapters 13-15

### Part 2: Chapters 13-15 Summary

Growing Up, Growing Wiser. Another year has passed and Mother's visits have become more infrequent. Cathy spends one afternoon exploring her naked body in the mirror while the others are in the attic. Chris comes down and surprises her, but instead of leaving, he watches. The grandmother comes in and catches them. The grandmother accuses them of incest, but Chris stands up to her, insisting they are innocent. The grandmother leaves, but returns a short time later with a pair of scissors. The grandmother insists that Cathy cut her hair or she will not bring them food for a week. Cathy does not want to cut her hair. However, during the night, the grandmother sneaks into the room and dumps tar on Cathy's head. Chris spends the entire following day trying to get the tar out with chemicals from his chemistry kit. A week passes without food. The children eat cheese and crackers they have saved up, but soon this is gone. The twins become so weak Chris feeds them blood from his own arm. Finally, Chris and Cathy decide they must escape, but first they need to eat raw mice for strength. When Chris goes down to the room to get salt, he discovers that the grandmother has brought food, including the rare treat of powdered donuts. However, all the mirrors have either been smashed or removed.

A Taste of Heaven. In August, Chris suggests that he and Cathy climb out of one of the attic windows and go to the nearby lake. Chris and Cathy have built a rope out of bedsheets in case of fire or to escape. They use this rope and go to the lake, spending several hours in the darkness swimming. On the shore, they discuss their mother and the fact that she has not been to visit in over a month. Cathy thinks their mother has forgotten them, but Chris is convinced she is either sick or imprisoned somehow herself. Cathy swears when she eventually has children, she will never treat them the way their mother has treated them.

One Rainy Afternoon. Cathy is daydreaming about her future as a famous ballet dancer when she becomes aware of Chris standing at the windows, peeking behind the draperies they were not allowed to open. Cathy warns him to stop, but Chris refuses. The grandmother comes in the room and insists Chris move away from the windows. They argue and Chris once again claims to be innocent, accusing the grandmother of seeing what she wants to see. The grandmother leaves and returns with a whip. Chris submits to a beating in fear that she will starve them again. Cathy becomes upset and tries to end the beating, causing the grandmother to turn the whip on her. When the whip breaks, the grandmother beats Cathy with a brush. Cathy is knocked unconscious and when she wakes, Chris is tending to her wounds. They share a kiss before Cathy breaks it off, claiming they are doing what the grandmother has accused them of doing.



## Part 2: Chapters 13-15 Analysis

As foreshadowed in previous chapters, Cathy and Chris's sexuality is beginning to blossom like it would for any child their age. Cathy begins exploring her changing body by staring at it in a mirror and Chris comes down. Chris is fascinated with Cathy's body too because it is the only female form, besides Carrie's, that is available to him. If Chris had access to other girls his age or to movies and magazines, he would not be interested in Cathy. However, Cathy is the only girl he has access to, causing a situation in which he has become fascinated with her. Ironically, the grandmother had hoped to avoid this with her rules, but she has caused it by locking them in a room together. As punishment, the children are starved for more than a week, showing how dependent they are on the grandmother and her whims. Later, Chris and Cathy are beaten by the grandmother, again showing their dependence on her and their willingness to do almost anything to help their mother get the inheritance she so desperately believes she needs. This shows the reader that the children have focused on the grandmother as the enemy for good reason. However, the reader is not sure if the grandmother is truly the only enemy to these children.

Chris and Cathy escape from the attic and spend a few hours at the lake. This shows the reader that they can get out of the house if they want to, but the desire is not there. Chris still deeply believes in his mother and he believes that if they are patient they will be allowed out of the room and returned to a reality that is much better than the one they knew before. Cathy no longer trusts their mother, but she trusts Chris, so she is willing to stay put as long as he believes it is important. This episode not only shows the reader the children's trust and respect of their mother and her plans, but foreshadows a time when they might finally decide to escape their imprisonment.





## Part 2: Chapters 16-18

### Part 2: Chapters 16-18 Summary

To Find a Friend. Cory finds a mouse that has gotten its leg trapped in a mousetrap. Chris frees the mouse and treats its leg at Cory's insistence. Cory wants to keep the mouse, so Chris sets up an old bird cage for it. Cory names it Mickey. It takes some time for the mouse to trust Cory, but eventually it begins crawling over his chest, eating food from his pockets.

At Last, Momma. Cathy has come to realize the twins have not grown but an inch or two since they came to Foxworth Hall. Chris suggests they force the twins out onto the attic roof to get some sun, but when they try this, the twins panic. Later, the mother surprises them with a visit and lots of gifts. Chris yells at her, accusing her of living a luxurious life while the twins are suffering from stunted growth. Mother becomes upset and refuses to return until they are ready to apologize. The children open their gifts and discover many of the clothes are the wrong size and the books are titles she has given them before. Cathy is doubly upset because there are no bras among the clothing and she desperately needs one. Chris suggests she write their mother a list of her needs, but Cathy is afraid her mother will ignore the list. Cathy falls into a depression and goes out on the attic roof, thinking of killing herself, but stops because of Chris and the twins. Chris comes and finds her, trying to console her. Cathy tells him they must escape, but Chris continues to defend their mother.

Our Mother's Surprise. Mother returns ten days later and tells the children she has remarried. Mother tells them the month she was gone was her honeymoon and that the gifts she bought were purchased on her honeymoon. Mother tells them Bart, her new husband, will love them all, but that she cannot tell him just yet about her children. Mother insists she must wait until her father is dead and the money is hers. Later, Cathy reads a romance novel and becomes irritated at the story, insisting that it does not make sense. Chris tries to talk to her about it, but Cathy continues to be irritated. Cathy recognizes in Chris, however, a need to feel like a man. Cathy cuts his hair to make him look like Prince Charming. Afterward Chris pretends that he wants to cut Cathy's hair and chases her through the attic. They fall together and Cathy is cut by the scissors. Chris lifts her sweater to bandage the wound and they fall into an embrace. Cathy asks Chris about sex and learns that he has some knowledge because of gossip in the boys room at his school.

Mother's visits become less frequent, so infrequent that even the twins begin to notice her growing distance. Chris decides it is time for them to think about escape. Chris manages to sneak Mother's key to the door off of her during a visit and make an impression of it in a bar of soap. Chris carves a duplicate key out of hardwood and begins using it on the nights they know that Mother will be gone to go to her room and steal money. It takes many trips because Chris does not want to steal more than the small bills his mother leaves carelessly lying around her room. One night, Chris takes



Cathy with him on his stealing spree. Cathy sees the trophy room and the luxury in which their mother lives. Cathy tries on some of her mother's clothes and searches through her drawers. Cathy finds a book in her mother's bedside table that has pictures of men and women having sex in strange positions. Cathy shows the book to Chris and they both look through it. That night, Cathy worries that looking at the book will cause her soul to be damned.

## Part 2: Chapters 16-18 Analysis

The children's predicament is becoming more serious as Cathy realizes the lack of sun and proper nutrients is causing the twins not to grow properly. This realization makes both Cathy and Chris frustrated and insistent to know when they will be rescued. Their mother, however, has begun to come to them less often, leaving them for months at a time while she lives her own life. The children learn that their mother has remarried and has been gone on her honeymoon. In the aftermath of this excitement, their mother comes to them less and less often, ignoring the twins when she does show up. Chris realizes that their mother no longer puts their needs first and that it is time that he begins thinking of the future and their safety. This leads to Chris making a key to escape the room, foreshadowing a time when Chris might lead his siblings out of the house and into a more normal life.

The sexual growth of the elder children is continuing and they find themselves normally curious about sex and romance. When Cathy reads a romantic novel and then finds a book of pornographic pictures, it increases her curiosity about sex and romantic love. This leads Cathy to allow Chris to kiss her in an intimate embrace that is not proper between a boy and a girl. At the same time, the reader is becoming aware of Chris's growing attraction to Cathy and this seems to point toward an incestuous encounter between the two. The reader cannot blame the children, however, aware that their unique circumstances are more responsible for their feelings than they are.



## Part 2: Chapters 19-20

### Part 2: Chapters 19-20 Summary

**My Stepfather.** One night Chris gets sick, so Cathy goes to search for money in their mother's room alone. When Cathy arrives at the doorway, she finds her stepfather sleeping in a chair. Cathy is shocked by how much younger her stepfather is than her mother. Cathy studies him and is overwhelmed by a desire to kiss him, to see what it is like to be kissed by a man she is not related to. Cathy kisses him and then quickly leaves, refusing to tell Chris what happened. A short time later, Chris returns from a trip to their mother's room and finds Cathy in the attic. Chris tells Cathy that Mother and Bart returned from a party while he was in the room, so he was forced to hide in the closet. Chris overheard Bart tell Mother that an angel came into the room one night while he was sleeping in the chair and kissed him. Chris becomes so jealous with the knowledge that this angel was Cathy that he attacks her, telling her only he should be allowed to touch her. They make love. Afterward, Chris acknowledges that it should never have happened and promises to never allow it to happen again.

**Color All Days Blue, but Save One for Black.** Just as Cathy and Chris have decided to leave, Cory gets sick. Chris insists the grandmother get help. The grandmother returns with their mother, who hesitates to do anything. Eventually the grandmother insists that Cory be taken to the hospital. Cathy wants to go with, but the grandmother refuses. The children wait more than twenty-four hours for word about Cory. Eventually their mother returns and tells them she took Cory to the hospital under an assumed name. Mother says it was too late, that Cory had pneumonia, but there was nothing the doctors could do. Mother says he has already been buried. The children are devastated by this news and Chris wonders if he could have saved Cory if he had gotten them out of there sooner. That night Cathy has a dream in which her father comes to take Cory to heaven, helping her deal with the pain of her grief.

**Escape.** The following night, Chris decides he will go steal all their mother's jewels and leave the following morning on the early train. Chris is gone a long time, however, leaving Cathy convinced something has gone wrong. When Chris returns, he tells Cathy that he discovered their mother had removed everything from her room. Chris then decided to go down to the grandmother's room to take some of her valuables. However, the grandmother was still awake, reading the Bible. As Chris stood there, he heard her pray, telling God everything she has done she has done because she thought it was right. From there, Chris decided to go downstairs to confront the grandfather. Unfortunately, Chris discovered the grandfather already dead. Back in the library, Chris was forced to hide while the butler, John Amos, seduced a maid on the couch. Chris overheard John Amos tell the maid that the grandfather had died months ago, leaving a will that stipulates that should it ever be discovered that his daughter, Corrine, had children in her first marriage or a child in her second marriage, all the money would revert to the grandmother.



## Part 2: Chapters 19-20 Analysis

Cathy is still struggling with her sexuality and because of this, she acts out with her stepfather, Bart. When Chris learns of this he goes into a jealous rage and forces himself on Cathy. They make love because they have no other outlet for their sexuality and because Chris believes himself to be deeply in love with Cathy. However, Cathy is still convinced that she will be damned because of this sin, so Chris promises never to touch her in this way again. This episode has been foreshadowed for so long, the reader feels sorry for this young couple and rages at the mother and grandmother who have created this situation.

Cory becomes ill and dies after the grandmother shows some compassion and allows the mother to take him to the hospital. The reader will note, along with Cathy and Chris, that the mother hesitated this time, reluctant to expose the truth after so much time. This shows both the reader and the children that the mother's priorities have changed drastically since the beginning of the novel, bringing to memory the mother's statement that she had to tell them the truth before she began to change. The mother has clearly changed, becoming a spoiled rich girl rather than a compassionate and caring mother. This death leaves the children devastated and determined to run away, making a life for themselves elsewhere. When Chris goes to gather some more money, however, he discovers that the mother has already left and the grandfather has been dead for months. In fact, Chris learns from overhearing a conversation between servants that the existence of Chris and his siblings could cause their mother to lose her entire inheritance, proving to both Chris and the reader that Corrine never intended to free her children from their prison.



## Part 2: Chapter 21 and Epilogue

### Part 2: Chapter 21 and Epilogue Summary

Endings, Beginnings. Chris tells Cathy that he overheard the servants talk about the food the grandmother often brought to the attic to control the mouse population. The butler also tells the maid that Corrine has been putting arsenic in the food to kill the mice. Chris tells Cathy that the arsenic is probably what killed Cory and to prove it, he feeds some of the powdered donuts to the mouse. The mouse slowly dies a terrible death. Chris and Cathy decide to leave that night, but they worry the grandmother might make an attempt to stop them. However, they manage to walk out of the house the same way they walked in over three years ago.

The children ride the train to Charlottesville, the nearest town, without anyone questioning them. Once they are there, Chris asks Cathy if they should take the dead mouse and donuts to the police. Cathy thinks about the revenge she has desired to get against her mother, but decides now is not the time for it. Chris throws the mouse away and they look to their future.

Epilogue. The children focus on the future, keeping their eyes on their goals. Carrie struggles to survive without Cory. The children do survive, however, but how is a different story.

### Part 2: Chapter 21 and Epilogue Analysis

The children have finally learned how desperate their mother is to be rich. Corrine has begun poisoning the children. The grandmother did warn the children not to eat the powdered donuts because they might rot their teeth, but the children did not listen. In fact, Cathy gave all her donuts to Cory because it was all he would eat. This is what Chris now is able to prove caused his death. It is Corrine, their mother, who is the monster, not the grandmother.

The children escape the house and move on to a future on their own. The future is their main concern, so they chose not to hurt their mother, but the reader knows there are more books in the series and therefore it is more than likely their revenge will come eventually.



# Characters

## Cathy 'Catherine Doll' Dollanganger

Cathy Dollanganger is only twelve years old when her father dies in a terrible car accident. Before this time, Cathy's life was angelic. Cathy knew her parents loved one another deeply and that nothing bad could ever happen in her family. Cathy also believed that her father loved her best of all his four children. However, his death revealed a deep flaw in her mother's character. Cathy's mother loved to spend money, but did not know how to make it or to save it. After her father's death, Cathy's mother quickly found herself about to lose everything she owned to creditors. Cathy's mother sets her children down one afternoon and tells them that they must go to live with her parents, rich people who disinherited their daughter years before for some mysterious mistake she made. Cathy's mother hopes to win her father's love and to inherit all his money. Cathy is unsure about this plan and unhappy with the entire situation, but goes along because she loves her mother.

When the children arrive at Foxworth Hall, they have no idea that their mother intends to lock them in a distant second story room with access to the attic. Cathy is the first to rebel, calling her mother out for her abandonment of her children and insisting that she take the youngest children somewhere else where they might have a healthier diet and access to the outside world. Cathy constantly pushes her mother, insisting that what is happening to them is wrong. Cathy also pushes the grandmother, refusing to follow all the rules and behaving like a normal adolescent child. When Cathy discovers her body is changing, the grandmother is outraged at Cathy's fascination with her beauty. The grandmother puts tar in Cathy's hair to force her to cut what the grandmother sees as the source of Cathy's self-conceit.

Cathy is locked in the attic from the age of twelve until she is fifteen. During these years, Cathy's body begins to change and she becomes aware of herself as a sexual being. Cathy has no one to tell her about the secrets of womanhood or other boys to focus her budding sexuality on. This leads to a fascination with her brother, Christopher. This also causes Cathy to become attracted to her stepfather, a man she only sees on a few occasions and from a distance. When Cathy stumbles on her stepfather, asleep in his bedroom, Cathy presses a kiss to his lips, curious to see what it is like to kiss a man. Cathy is also an aspiring dancer and Catherine Doll is the stage name she and her brother came up with in a moment of amusement.

## Chris 'Christopher Doll' Dollanganger

Chris Dollanganger is fourteen when his father dies and his mother decides to lock her children in the attic of her parents' home in an attempt to hide their existence. Chris adores his mother and does not believe she could ever do anything to harm her children. Chris trusts his mother, even when their time of confinement increases from a



few days, to a few weeks, to years. Chris wants to believe his mother would never abandon her children, but as time passes and the younger children become increasingly ill, Chris begins plotting to get his little family out of the attic room. Chris steals a key from his mother and makes an impression of it, carving a new key out of a strong piece of wood that he can use to get in and out of the room where he has been imprisoned for three years.

Chris begins going to his mother's bedroom and discovers that she has been living in luxury while keeping her children locked in a distant, second floor room. Chris looks through his mother's clothes, jewelry, and other belongings and becomes increasingly angry with her. It is clear to Chris that his mother is living the high life while continuing to pretend her children do not exist. When Chris confronts his mother with this, she claims that her children have not wanted for anything due to the number of gifts she has brought them over the years and that he is being unfair in his insistence that they be set free. Chris realizes his mother is never going to set the children free, so he begins collecting money from her room to save up for their escape.

During his time of imprisonment, Chris grows from a fourteen year old child to a seventeen year old man. Chris comes into his sexuality during this time, but has no female to focus his fantasies on except for Cathy. Chris becomes convinced that he is in love with Cathy and that no other girl will ever take her place in his heart. When Chris overhears his stepfather talking about the angelic blond girl who snuck into his room one night while he slept and kissed him, Chris becomes enraged with jealousy. Chris forces himself on Cathy, but quickly regrets his actions. Chris doubles his efforts to help his siblings escape, especially after the death of Cory, the youngest boy. Chris wants to be a doctor and feels guilty that he was unable to save his brother. Christopher Doll is a nickname Cathy calls Chris, a term of affection that comes from the stage name Chris made up for Cathy.

## **Carrie and Cory Dollanganger**

Cory and Carrie Dollanganger are the youngest Dollanganger children. Cory and Carrie are twins and are only five when their father dies. The twins suffer the most from being locked in the room of Foxworth Hall. As young children, Cory and Carrie need fresh air and sunshine to help them grow. The twins complain from the moment the door is first locked against them, begging for the foods they like and the garden they were used to playing in. Chris and Cathy try to make the time in this prison pleasant for the children by cleaning up the large attic and creating a garden out of paper flowers. The first year is not terrible for the twins, who get every gift they could possibly want from their mother and are able to run around in the attic. However, as time passes, the youngest of the Dollanganger children begin to suffer the worst.

Cory is locked in a trunk one afternoon during an innocent game of hide and seek, causing him to suffer from a lack of oxygen. At one point, the twins both become terribly ill from some sort of cold or flu. Unfortunately, the grandmother will not allow them to be seen by a doctor. Later, Cory begins to suffer horrible bouts of nausea and vomiting.



Eventually Cory's illness becomes so bad that the grandmother insists that their mother take him to a doctor. A few days later, their mother returns to tell the children that Cory died of pneumonia in a local hospital under an assumed name. The children are devastated by Cory's death, especially Carrie, and his death spurs the children to become more determined than ever to run away.

## **Corrine Foxworth Winslow**

Corrine Foxworth Winslow is the mother of the Dollanganger children. Corrine and her husband, Christopher, adopted the name Dollanganger to hide from her parents after their marriage because they knew her parents disapproved of the marriage. It seems that Corrine married her half-uncle, her father's brother through a stepmother much younger than him. Corrine tells her children that her father is very wealthy and very ill, expected to die soon. Corrine thinks she can convince her father to leave her his entire estate because his two sons, both older than Corrine, died when they were young.

Corrine is not prepared to be a widow. Corrine has never had to make a living for herself, because she has always had someone to care for her, so she does not know how to care for herself and her children when her husband dies. Instead of attempting to educate herself and get a job, Corrine turns to the parents she shamed and deserted in order to marry her half-uncle. However, Corrine is informed that if her father learns that children were produced during her marriage he would never forgive her, Corrine agrees with her mother's plan to hide the children in the attic until her father dies. Corrine assures her children that her father will die in a matter of weeks, perhaps months. However, years go by. Corrine becomes re-accustomed to living in the lap of luxury, while assuaging her guilt regarding her children by plying them with gifts. Eventually, Corrine remarries and settles into a good life, minus her children.

When Chris begins escaping from their prison at night, he begins to learn about his mother's luxurious life. Chris is shocked that his mother could be so happy while her children are hidden in the attic. Eventually Chris learns that Corrine's father has been dead for months, yet she still has not released her children from their prison. Chris also learns that Corrine has been taking poisoned food to the attic, supposedly to get rid of the noisy mice the servants have complained about hearing in the attic. Chris realizes that Corrine has been poisoning her children because he father's will stipulates that if it ever becomes public that she has children or if she has children in her new marriage, all her money will revert to her mother.

## **Bartholomew Winslow**

Bartholomew Winslow is Malcolm Neal Foxworth's attorney, the same attorney who has written Malcolm Foxworth's new will that includes Corrine as the sole heir. Corrine begins dating Bart and they eventually get married just months before Malcolm Foxworth's death. The children are shocked to hear that their mother has gotten remarried and convinced that she has no intention of ever telling him about them. One





night when Cathy sneaks out of the room that has become their prison to steal money from her mother's room, she finds Bart sleeping in a chair. Cathy is shocked to see that Bart is markedly younger than her mother. Cathy studies him in his sleep and decides to place a kiss on his lips in an attempt to see what it might feel like to kiss a man she is not married to. Later, when Chris is hiding in his mother's closet during another trip to steal money, he hears this story. It turns out Bart was half-awake during Cathy's visit. Chris becomes darkly jealous and forces himself on Cathy, claiming her as his own.

## **The Grandmother**

The grandmother is Corrine's mother and the children's grandmother. The grandmother is never given a name in this novel except for the implied title Mrs. Malcolm Neal Foxworth. The grandmother is a highly religious woman who imprisons the children under the belief that they are an abomination against God, the Devil's seed, because of the relationship between their parents. The grandmother appears harsh to the children, creating rules for them that are difficult to follow in their small, confined space. Once the grandmother finds Cathy looking at herself naked in a full length mirror and sees Chris watching. The grandmother becomes convinced that they are indulging in incest. The grandmother insists that Cathy cut her hair to rid herself of vanity. Cathy refuses, so the grandmother dumps tar in her hair and then stops feeding the children for over a week. When the food begins coming again, there are sugar donuts on the tray even though the grandmother has always refused to bring sweets in fear that the children would get cavities that would require a visit to the dentist. However, these are the only moment of tortured offered by the grandmother. There are also moments of charity, such as the donuts and a plant the grandmother brings for the children to use in their attic garden.

## **The Grandfather, Malcolm Neal Foxworth**

The reader never really sees the grandfather, Malcolm Neal Foxworth, during the course of the novel. However, he is the catalyst to their confinement in the attic room. Malcolm Neal Foxworth is a very wealthy man who has lived in wealth all his life. When Corrine married her half-uncle, her father was shamed and disinherited her. It is implied that the grandfather is deeply religious, like the grandmother. It is also implied that the grandfather is a difficult man who plans to torture Corrine before forgiving her and allowing her to inherit his millions. However, this is all information the children get second hand from their mother and grandmother, two people who are unreliable due to their own motives in hiding the children. Finally, Chris learns that Malcolm Neal Foxworth allowed Corrine to inherit his millions, but stipulated in the will that should it ever be discovered that Corrine had children in her first marriage or from her second, the money would revert to her mother, the grandmother. For this reason, Chris discovers, his mother refused to allow the children out of the attic room after her father's death and attempted to kill them.



## John Amos

John Amos is the butler at Foxworth Hall and is reportedly a cousin of the grandmother's. John Amos runs the household and seems to hold a position of power in the house. Chris sneaks downstairs one night and attempts to find the grandfather, with the hopes of telling him of his and his siblings existence. Instead, Chris finds the grandfather has been dead for some time. As Chris is exploring these downstairs rooms, John Amos comes into the library with a maid. Chris hides behind a couch and listens to John Amos talk about the family. It is through John Amos that Chris learns the truth about his mother, the will, and the arsenic that killed Cory.

## Christopher Garland Foxworth

Christopher Garland Foxworth is Malcolm Neal Foxworth's half-brother. Christopher's father is Garland Christopher Foxworth, Malcolm Foxworth's laid back, playboy father. Garland married a woman who was only sixteen on their wedding day and she gave birth to Christopher upon their return from a three year honeymoon. Garland would die on Christopher's third birthday. Out of outrage for his father's behaviors and a dislike of his stepmother, Malcolm Foxworth cheated Christopher out of his inheritance and sent child and mother away. Years later, when his mother died, Malcolm Foxworth took Christopher into their home and provided him with an Ivy League education. During this time, Christopher and Corrine fall in love, deciding to run away to marry when Malcolm Foxworth and his wife declare their love an abomination and refuse to allow them to marry. Christopher and Corrine would have fifteen years together before Christopher dies when his car is hit by a drunk driver.

## Jim Johnson

Jim Johnson is Mr. Dollanganger's best friend and the one who first dubbed the children, the Dresden Dolls. This nickname would stick, causing everyone in the town where the Dollanganger's lived to refer to the children in this way. Cathy and Chris were proud of this title, believing it made them special, that they were precious like the expensive dolls their nickname was taken from.



## Objects/Places

### Picnic Basket

The grandmother brings a picnic basket full of food to the children every morning, except during a ten day period in which she brings nothing to punish the children for Cathy's vanity and Chris' incestuous desires.

### Powdered Donuts

The children begin receiving powdered donuts on their food trays, a special treat they have not gotten in the past. Chris eventually discovers that the donuts are laced with arsenic and that it is their mother who put it there in an attempt to keep knowledge of the children from taking her inheritance away.

### Paper Flowers

The children attempt to make a garden in the attic by making paper flowers and garden creatures.

### Swing

Chris makes and hangs a swing for the twins on their first week in the attic in order to give them a place to play.

### Ballet Recordings

Cathy wants to be a dancer, so her mother brings her records with popular ballet songs on them.

### Ballet Costumes

Corrine brings Cathy multiple ballet costumes for her to practice her dance moves in.

### Medical Books and Chemistry Set

Corrine brings Chris medical books and a chemistry set for him to study in his desire to be a doctor.



## **Bedsheet Rope**

Chris and Cathy use a bedsheet rope they have created out of multiple bedsheets in their room to escape the room one night. Chris and Cathy go to a nearby lake to swim. They think about using this rope to escape, but know they cannot safely take the twins down to the ground.

## **Wooden Key**

Chris carves a wooden key out of an impression he made of his mother's key to the room where they are locked in. Chris uses this key to escape the room multiple times in order to collect enough money to support himself and his siblings after they leave Foxworth Hall.

## **Whip**

The grandmother brings a whip into the bedroom to beat the children with after finding Chris standing at the windows he has been told not to open or move the draperies on. The whip is broken and the grandmother begins using a hairbrush on Cathy.

## **Mouse and Donut**

Chris feeds a donut to the mouse, Mickey, that Cory has tamed in order to prove that the donuts are laced with arsenic. Chris and Cathy take the mouse and a piece of donut to take to the police. However, Cathy decides they need to focus on the future. Cathy throws the mouse away.

## **Television**

After the first year, Corrine brings her children a television for them to watch in their second floor prison.

## **Secluded Second Floor Room**

The grandmother locks the children in a second floor room of Foxworth Hall that is normally kept locked because it is the only open access to the attic. This room contains its own bathroom, twin beds, a table, a desk, and a wardrobe that hides the access to the attic.

## **Foxworth Hall**

Foxworth Hall is the large home of the Foxworth family and where the Dollanganger children are locked in a second floor bedroom for more than three years.



# Themes

## Incest

The Dollanganger children have no reason to believe there is anything amiss with their parents' relationship. As far as they know, their parents are madly in love with one another and nothing bad could possibly happen. However, after their father is killed in a car accident, the children are placed in a second story room at Foxworth Hall, where they learn from a grandmother they never knew they had that their father is actually their mother's half-uncle. By marrying her husband, their mother has committed incest. This incest causes her parents, deeply religious people, to believe that the pairing is doomed and that the children will go to Hell for their actions. For this reason, the Dollanganger children also learn that Dollanganger is not their true last name, but the name of an ancestor their father chose to use when he and the children's mother ran away to marry.

While locked in the second story room, secluded from not only their grandfather who is not to ever learn of their existence, but from the world at large, Cathy and Chris Dollanganger begin to mature, entering a sexual awareness that is no different from that experienced by any other adolescent children. Due to their seclusion, however, Cathy and Chris only have one another to share these changes in their bodies and their physical needs. A closeness develops between Cathy and Chris, brought on by both their seclusion and their need to mature quickly in order to care for their twin siblings. In time, Chris finds himself attracted to Cathy, often watching her as she undresses and fantasizing about her at night. Cathy is curious too, but she is aware that sexual attraction for her brother is wrong. Cathy has been raised to believe in God and to take the word of the Bible seriously; therefore, she knows that sexual love with her brother will doom her soul to Hell.

Cathy fights the growing sexuality in her body, but finds it growing difficult over time. When Cathy finds a book depicting sexual positions in her mother's bedroom, she is both fascinated and scandalized, afraid she will be punished by God simply for looking at the images. Later, when Cathy finds Bart, her stepfather, asleep in his room, she places a kiss on his lips, wondering how it would feel to be kissed by someone she is not related to. When Chris learns of this, he forces himself on Cathy, telling her that she is his and no one else's. Chris cannot stand the idea of Cathy falling in love with someone else. In this moment, Chris and Cathy commit incest, but promise one another that in order to protect their souls, they will never do it again. It is this, and the relationship between their parents that brought them to this place, that makes incest an important theme of the novel.



## Greed

Corrine Foxworth is a woman who is used to getting what she wants. Corrine was raised in a privileged household with a father who doted on her every whim and was willing to give her anything her heart desired. When her heart desired a relationship with her half-uncle, Corrine jumped in with her eyes wide open despite the shamed reaction of her parents. Corrine, always brought up to believe she could have anything she wanted, took what she wanted despite the blood relationship that made her desire incest. Corrine qualified her choice by suggesting that others in history have married closer relations and nothing bad every happened.

Corrine loses everything the day her husband dies in a terrible car accident. Corrine has never had to earn a living, never had to worry about money or about saving money. Within months of Christopher's death, Corrine finds herself on the verge of having all her possessions repossessed by the bank. Corrine writes to her mother, turning again to the parents who once adored her and whom she believes she can convince to love her again despite her shameful actions in the past. Corrine is so desperate to get back in her father's good graces that she agrees to lock her children in a second story room at her childhood home and pretend they do not exist. It is a choice that seems obvious to Corrine because it would be easier to inherit millions than to work for thousands.

Over time, Corrine begins forgetting about her children as she once again finds herself the belle of the ball, so to speak, as her father's privileged daughter. While her children are locked in a secluded room, dependent on a frightening grandmother for their daily rations of food, Corrine has thousands of dollars of jewelry, goes to parties every night, and remarries a man much younger to herself. Not only this, but Corrine lies to her children, telling them she will let them out when her father dies, but instead keeps them there for months after his death because of a clause in the will that states that she will lose everything if it ever comes out that she had children with her first husband or has children with her second husband. In fact, rather than lose her money, Corrine begins poisoning her children in an attempt to get rid of them for good. It is this that makes greed an important theme of the novel.

## Religion/Heresy

The grandmother is a deeply religious woman who believes that what she does, she does for God. The grandmother knows that Corrine's first marriage to Christopher Foxworth was incest because he was the son of Corrine's grandfather and his second wife. For this reason, the grandmother has decided that it is best to hide the children in the second floor room. The grandmother presents the children with many rules, some of which are difficult to follow because of the closeness of the quarters the children are forced to live in. The grandmother is clearly concerned about the children's sexuality and the possibility that they might commit incest like their parents. It never occurs to the grandmother that by placing the children in this seclusion and tight quarters as she has, she might be forcing incest upon them.

The mother comes to her children and explains her mother's deep religious beliefs. The mother calls it heresy, telling her children that her mother has taken the teachings of the Bible and changed them to fit her own needs. The mother clearly does not believe in the grandmother's beliefs against incest and tells her children that they have done nothing wrong, that their existence could hardly be wrong since they are all perfect children. For this reason, heresy is a theme of the novel.





# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. Cathy Dollanganger tells the story of her childhood, locked in a secluded second story room in her mother's childhood home of Foxworth Hall. Cathy tells this story as though looking back on the this dark time in her life from some point in the future, perhaps as a middle-aged adult, making comments throughout the novel about the actions of her mother and her beliefs at the time that her mother was right, but her understanding as an adult herself that it was not right what her mother has done. In this way, Cathy inserts something of an authorial voice in her narration. Cathy is also something of an unreliable narrator because she is not always given the correct information about her situation by her mother or grandmother; therefore, she cannot give the correct information to the reader about certain circumstances in her story that are implied in other ways throughout the story.

The narration of this novel is interesting in that it is in the voice of a woman who is relating a story that took place when she was a child. The point of view appears to be the first person narration of a child, but the author often makes comments that show that she is writing this story later in life, as an adult, but that she still sees the events of her childhood through the eyes of a child. This unique look at the story allows the reader to see it both through the eyes of an innocent child, but also with the bitterness of an adult who is still dealing with the darkness her mother forced on her when she was young. It is a narration that is often angry, dark, and filled with a need to understand the actions of a person who is supposed to love her children unconditionally, but has clearly chosen her own greed over the needs of her children. In this way, the point of view works well, but can be somewhat confusing and one sided.

## Setting

The novel begins in a lovely, middle-class home in 1950s Pennsylvania. This home is comfortable, clearly the home of a loving family. The feeling of this home is open, light, and happy. Later, however, the setting changes when the father is killed and the mother sneaks her children into her childhood home in the hopes of tricking her father into making her his sole heir. The children are placed in a small room that is overcrowded with furniture, a forgotten room at the end of a deserted corridor in a very large, wealthy home. This room has access to the attic, a large, dusty area the children are able to use as a playroom. This setting is much darker than the first setting, creating a contrast between the before and after of these children's lives.

The setting of the novel is very important to the plot of the novel because the setting of the secluded room and its attic becomes the whole world to four innocent children who had known nothing but happiness until the death of their father. The first setting shows the lightness in these children's lives, the innocence and happiness that was the world



they lived in before their father's death. The darkness of the second setting, the small room and huge attic that becomes their world, shows the desperation of the children's situation as they spend three years locked away, hidden from the world in fear that their existence would end their mother's bid for the millions that their mother stands to inherit from her father. The second setting is also symbolic of the incest that brought about their existence, the hidden shame that their mother brought on the family when she married her half-uncle. Therefore, the setting of the novel works well within the plot.

## Language and Meaning

The novel's language is English, a simple English that is representative of the type of language used in 1950s America. The language contains almost no slang and little use of foreign words or phrases. The dialogue in this novel tends to be stiff and formal, a language that is meant to represent the high breeding and wealth of the family about whom the novel is about.

The language in this novel works with the novel because it reflects the proper, etiquette filled speech of well bred, wealthy people of Eastern America during the 1950s. While the language reflects the backgrounds of the mother and her family, it also shows that the children produced in a less affluent home were also brought up to speak with respect and proper grammar. However, the dialogue in this novel tends to be very stiff, causing the reader to step out of the plot for a short time while attempting to comprehend this stiff dialogue. Despite this, the language of the novel is well used and attempts to reflect the characters within the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into two parts, with a prologue and multiple chapters that are not numbered but that bear names reflecting some character or action that is important within that chapter. The novel begins in the days before the death of the Mr. Dollanganger, the children's father, and moves to their arrival at Foxworth Hall and their confinement in the secluded second floor room. The novel is told in a linear fashion, following the story of the children in a simple time line that begins with their imprisonment and ends with their first hours of freedom.

The novel has only one major plot. The plot tells the story of the Dollanganger children, four children who are locked in a secluded second story room by their mother and grandmother for more than three years. The children are repeatedly told they will be freed when their grandfather dies, leaving his money to their mother. However, as the children begin to distrust their mother and escape from their prison for brief excursions through the house, they learn that their grandfather has been dead for a long time, but their mother has not released them because their very existence could mean she will lose all the money she has inherited. The children escape soon after this, walking away from the house with the intention of making a life for themselves in Florida, far from their mother's shadow.



## Quotes

"It is so appropriate to color hope yellow, like that sun we seldom saw." Part 1: Prologue, p. 3

"Truly, when I was very young, way back in the Fifties, I believe all of life would be like one long and perfect summer day. After all, it did start out that way." Part 1: Goodbye, Daddy, p. 5

"With our father's death, a nightmare began to shadow our days." Part 1: Goodbye, Daddy, p. 21

"Fun, games, parties, riches beyond belief, a house as big as a palace, with servants who lived over a huge garage that stored away at least nine or ten expensive automobiles. Who would ever have guessed my mother came from a family like that?" Part 1: Goodbye, Daddy, p. 35

"Looking backward to that night ride on the train, I realize that was the very night I began to grow up, and philosophize." Part 1: The Road to Riches, p. 37

"The day dawned dim behind the heavy, drawn draperies that we had been forbidden to open." Part 1: The Grandmother's House, p. 52

"At the end of the rainbow waited the pot of gold. But rainbows were made of faint and fragile gossamer—and gold weighed a ton—and since the world began, gold was the reason to do most anything." Part 1: Minutes Like Hours, p. 126

"Chris was right, too. Our happy time would come the day we left this room and went downstairs to attend a funeral." Part 1: To Make a Garden Grow, p. 160

"Another year passed, much as the first did." Part 2: Growing Up, Growing Wiser, p. 235

"Smiling with confidence, he held to the rope and inched his way to the very edge of the roof. We were going down to the ground for the first time in more than two years." Part 2: Growing Up, Growing Wiser, p. 259

"That was the way of all fairy tales—ending with the kiss, and the happy-ever-after. There had to be some other prince for me to bring about a happy ending." Part 2: One Rainy Afternoon, p. 279

"A tiny smile came and went on pale lips that seemed to have forgotten how to smile. But that was enough—for now." Part 2: Endings, Beginnings, p. 411



## Topics for Discussion

Who are the Dollangangers? Are they as happy as they seem? Is Cathy really her father's favorite? Why do you suppose the author chose to begin her story with the birth of the twins? What does this exciting time in the Dollanganger family say about them? What does it say about the children's relationship with their father? With their mother?

How does Christopher Dollanganger die? How do the children handle this death? How does the mother handle this death? What changes does Cathy soon begin to notice in her mother? What do these changes suggest about the mother and the family's circumstances? What does the mother tell her children about the letters Cathy sees her writing over and over? Why does the reader suspect there is more to these letters than the mother is saying?

Why does the mother choose to return to her childhood home? What other options might the mother have had? Why does the mother and grandmother lock the children up in the secluded second story room? What other options might there have been? What excuse do they give to the children? How long do they tell the children they will be locked in this room? Do the children believe this? Explain.

Why does the grandmother force the mother to show her children the results of a beating she has suffered? Is this a warning to the children? What kind of warning? What rules does the grandmother give to the children? Why are some of these rules difficult to follow under the circumstances? Is there a religious overtone to the rules? Explain. What is the grandmother attempting to avoid with her rules? Is this a realistic goal on the part of the grandmother?

Discuss incest. What is incest? Did Corrine and her first husband, Christopher, commit incest? Why was Corrine forced to leave her family home fifteen years ago? Why does Corrine believe her father will take her back now? Why does Corrine want to come back? Discuss the relationship between Cathy and Chris. How has this relationship become more than a sister-brother relationship? Why does Chris often watch Cathy undress? Why does Chris tell Cathy he can never love anyone else? Why does Chris become jealous upon learning of Cathy's kiss with her stepfather? Is this incest?

Discuss the twins. Why is it hardest on the twins to be locked up? Why do the twins stop growing? Why do the twins become ill so often? Why does Cory become so sick and die before the others? How might Cory's death been prevented? Why did the mother not take Cory to a hospital? Why did the mother ignore the pleas on behalf of the twins and not remove them from the secluded room? Could the mother have prevented Cory's death? Did the mother want to prevent Cory's death? Discuss the mother's motives.

Why did the children not escape sooner? Why did Chris continuously insist on giving his mother the benefit of the doubt? How did Chris feel about his mother? Did Chris really



believe their mother had their best interests at heart? Was Chris greedy for wanting to help his mother get her inheritance? How did Cathy feel about their mother? Why did Cathy's opinions change sooner than Chris's? Why did Chris and Cathy not take the twins with them the night they went to the lake and escape then? Why did Chris insist on waiting until they had money? Why did the children never go public with what their mother and the grandmother did to them? Should they have? What might have happened if they had?