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The Attic and The Wheelchair V.C. Andrews's Accident and The Dollanganger Series

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THE ATTIC AND THE WHEELCHAIR

V.C. ANDREWS'S ACCIDENT AND THE DOLLANGANGER SERIES

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Author V.C. Andrews became known in 1979 with her first novel *Flowers in the Attic* and continued the series with *Petals on the Wind*, *If There be Thorns,* and *Seeds of Yesterday*. Problematic themes such as sudden accidents, romantic rape, incest, and mother daughter rivalry emerge continuously in each novel. In her interview with Douglas E. Winter, Andrews explains that since her debilitating fall down the stairs at the age of fifteen she lived with and depended on her mother. Unable to fulfill the goals of her childhood, Andrews read fairy tales, and romance novels and wrote her fantasies in the Dollanganger Series. The troublesome characteristics of sudden death, taboo sex, and gender roles reveal a stunted emotional development in the author. This thesis examines the possibility that the series's disturbing, repeated themes are inspired by Andrews's debilitating fall down the stairs when she was fifteen.

DEDICATION

The completion of my Master's degree would not have been possible if I hadn't received such useful instruction and advice of my committee chair, Linda Belau, who discussed all aspects of the project with me. Also significant were the opinions of my committee, Ed Cameron and Rebeca Mitchell, and the assistance of Gary Schneider is highly appreciated.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, readers were introduced to a series of paperback fiction that began with a controversial novel by first time author V.C. Andrews. *Flowers in the Attic* and its three sequels were all featured on the *New York Times* best-seller list, the last of which was the best selling novel of 1984 (Huntley 5). Although the novels are narrated through the often exorbitant, voice of a child, their content is thick with abuse, incest, exaggerated gender roles and even forced sex, themes that are, in most cases, glorified by the characters instead of chastised. This lack of sexual maturity from the perspective of the author, the recurring themes of unforeseen accidents, and the age fifteen are significant when considering the fact that when Andrews was fifteen years old, she suffered a sudden fall that left her unable to walk. The problematic nature of the series, as well as the meaningful juxtaposition between their content and the author's life lead to one conclusion. *Flowers in the Attic* and its following Dollanganger Series was a response to Andrews's debilitating injury at the age of fifteen and the lack of emotional development it caused.

The novel *Flowers in the Attic* tells the story of four children who, after the death of their father, are kept in the attic of a wealthy, southern mansion by their mother and grandmother for three years. As the story proceeds in first person from the point of view of the oldest girl, Cathy, we learn gradually that the reason for their entrapment is their

parents' incestuous union; their father was their grandfather's half-brother. Their mother will lose her inheritance if her father learns of her tainted offspring. The children believe that once their religious grandfather dies, they will be free to live in the house like normal children, and in fact enjoy the many pleasantries of their mother's vast inheritance, so they find ways to stay alive throughout weeks of neglect and starvation. During this time, Chris and Cathy begin to have perplexing, sexual urges towards one another, which eventually come to a point when he rapes her, an action that is blamed on many factors including Cathy's tendency to be very desirable.

Eventually the ignored children realize that their mother is slowly poisoning them. Furthermore, as faith in her fails, they learn that their grandfather has been dead for many months and therefore was never in control at all; their mother simply wanted them out of her life. After their youngest brother dies of neglected pneumonia, the other three children manage to escape the mansion using a home-made, wooden key that they had kept secretly for months before gaining the courage to use it. After that, they take a bus to North Carolina in the hopes of joining the circus. They do not bother alerting authorities or the media about the terrible abuse, and the first book leaves its readers with the question of what they will do to survive.

The following novel, *Petals on the Wind*, continues the tale of the remaining Dollanganger children as they come into adulthood. After having been liberated from the attic, the remaining siblings are damaged emotionally and physically by their long isolation. The youngest sister's growth is permanently stunted, Cathy and Chris are confused by an intense sexual attraction between them, and all three must find a way to surpass the anger they feel for their mother. However, the only professional help they

seek is from a lonely, middle aged doctor who ends up adopting them and becoming Cathy's first consensual lover even though she and her brother still hide a guilty passion.

Cathy becomes a ballerina, is widowed twice, has an affair with her mother's husband, and eventually finds her way back to her brother Chris, who has been in love with her the whole time. Meanwhile Carrie, their youngest sibling, becomes depressed and suicidal, eventually succeeding in bringing her life to an end. Chris and Cathy battle their sorrow and continue the family tradition of incest, keeping it a secret—as their parents did—from Cathy's two sons, Bart and Jory. *If There be Thorns* is narrated jointly by those two boys and follows their discoveries of the family's dark secrets. They meet their grandmother and realize that their parents are brother and sister. Jory forgives them, but Bart brings his anger into the next book, *Seeds of Yesterday*, which takes place when he and his brother are grown men. Here, the family ends up back in the mansion where Chris and Cathy had been tortured, forcing them up against emotions of fear, guilt, and anger. With the family isolated in the house together for years, we see a tangled mess of drama ensue.

At the end of the Dollanganger Series, Chris is killed in the same manner of his father, leaving Cathy distraught and no longer motivated to keep living. She goes back to the fateful attic, writes a short goodbye letter to her children and their families, sits on the window seat and dies peacefully. Her letter expresses happiness that she will soon be joining her three siblings as well as reminders that she has never forgotten being locked in the attic when she was a girl.

Despite the many disturbing aspects of the series, *Flowers in the Attic, Petals on the Wind, If There be Thorns* and *Seeds of Yesterday* continue to spark the interest of girls

in their teens. Today there are dozens of chat-rooms for Andrews fans. Throughout her life, however, she remained surprisingly private, and nowadays there is little reliable information available about her. In the book *V.C. Andrews: A Critical Companion*, author E.D. Huntley describes Andrews's childhood as a happy time for her, spent with two parents who gave her what she wanted and indulged her love of reading. She was born and grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia and has described "her childhood as happy and generally uneventful" (Huntley 1). In her interviews she mentions her particularly strong imagination and attraction to adventure stories and fairy tales. She was a talented writer and painter at an early age and had aspirations of using these abilities to take her to new places and new experiences. In the first chapter of *Flowers in the Attic*, Andrews's main character Cathy Dollanganger states that when she was a child she thought her life was going to be "like one long and perfect summer day. After all, it did start out that way" (5).

For Cathy, what changes this hoped for summer day into a much darker reality is the death of her father in an unforeseen accident; for Andrews it was just such an unforeseen accident. When she was fifteen years old, she suffered a fall down a flight of stairs at her high school. In an interview with Douglas E. Winters, in his book *Faces of Fear,* she explains*,* "I was coming downstairs at school when my heel caught on something, and I fell forward and twisted to catch the banister. Later, the doctors found that the twist had been very violent, and that it tore the membrane on my hip and started little bone spurs" (168). The following back surgery and consequential arthritis left her permanently unable to walk without assistance for the rest of her life. Therefore, she remained living with her parents in Virginia until her father died thirty years later. Her

accident only strengthened her fixation on fiction and the escapism it allowed her. She wrote and painted almost constantly throughout these years, never getting married or having a family.

Andrews began publishing her novels when she was fifty-five years old and achieved great attention through her prolific writing career. However, she maintained her privacy and chose never to leave her mother's house. She died in 1986. After the day she fell down the stairs and became dependent, she was never able to live alone, travel the world or pursue the aspirations she had previously looked forward to. She admitted in interviews that the tragic accident and the following, debilitating surgeries were certainly a "curve-ball" (Huntley 3), but she maintained consistently that, even though she used crutches, being injured took nothing away from her life, and she disliked being labeled as handicapped or disabled. She states in *Faces of Fear*, "They think that if you are in a wheelchair, you are paralyzed, or else you would be up on your feet. And I do walk; but since they don't see me walk, they don't think I can" (168). Significantly, in the stories she was writing at the time there are visions of physical, sexual and emotional isolation.

There is no evidence that Andrews was ever abused sexually or otherwise, or that she ever had any incestuous experience with her father or brothers; however, the one story she published before reaching fame with *Flowers in the Attic* was entitled "I Slept with My Uncle on My Wedding Night." This particular story seems to be lost to the public, but the title gives great insight into the fact that taboo sex was never far from the author's mind. This recurring concept is not a literal one, but serves the same purpose as ballet dancing. Andrews was never a ballet dancer, but weaves it consistently into her stories as

a wish fulfillment. As becoming a ballet dancer is conquering physicality, having sex with

the father figure is conquering sexuality. Although Cathy Dollanganger does manage to become a world class prima ballerina, she injures her knee and is forced to give it up. In the same way, she may sleep with her brother, step-father, and adoptive father, but she has lost her real father forever. The approaching of and the loss of goals are present here.

In Rachel Devlin's book *Relative Intimacy*, she discusses the concept that in the 1940s and 50s a type of incest between a young girl and her father was considered a part of growing up and becoming initiated into mature womanhood (22). The father is, after all, the first man in every girl's life. Without a father, Devlin clarifies, a girl will not develop the way she is meant to. The theme that mothers alone cannot properly do the job is reiterated in Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*. In fact, not only was the mother considered incapable of raising a teenage girl alone, but damaging because of the gap that is inevitably caused between childhood and validated sexuality (Devlin 19).

Therefore, when Cathy Dollanganger's father is killed in the abrupt car accident, life for the family warps into a strange story of torture as it is ruled by an incompetent mother and a cruel grandmother under only the illusion of the grandfather's paternal control. Andrews's father died when she was in her forties and she continued to live with her mother, who was her caregiver and companion. Again, the use of the maternal as negative in her novels is not literal, but a representation of the lack of stability, proper psychological growth and physical health. When the father is taken away in a sudden mishap, isolation, pain, and confusion are introduced. As Cathy's life was supposed to be one “long and perfect summer's day” with a present

father, Andrews's was supposed to be this as well, with the power to walk.

Many of the themes that emerge throughout the Dollanganger Series, such as incest, warped gender roles, and rape may be seen more clearly as representatives of other

issues instead of literal portrayals of the author's life. However, one detail which makes itself known repeatedly is a great deal more direct. Cathy Dollanganger is the primary character in *Flowers in the Attic, Petals on the Wind* and *Seeds of Yesterday.* She narrates the stories and the conflicts revolve first around her. The books are a record of her life from childhood to death, but the most significant year for Cathy is her fifteenth. When Cathy is fifteen she experiences her initiation into love and sex, escapes the dreaded, matriarchal household, and fulfills her dream of becoming a ballerina. Such meaningful, adult experiences happen at an age that was particularly significant to her writer, for it was at this age that Andrews suffered the fall that would greatly affect the rest of her life.

Andrews did not hide the fact that as she wrote the adventures of Cathy Dollanganger, she was expressing her own feelings of pain and restriction, but it did not simply end with pain or restriction. She states in *Faces of Fear*,

> You are made helpless by circumstances that you don't have any say about. It's not justly dealt to you. I always felt that if I had done some terrible thing, this would be a punishment; but I hadn't done anything yet...So it does affect you, and that's why I write. When I wrote *Flowers in the Attic*, all of Cathy's feelings about being in a prison were my feelings. So that, when I read them now, I cry. (169)

The ages of fifteen, fourteen and sixteen are featured through other characters as the years of disillusionment or sexual introduction. An event constantly made reference

to throughout the Dollanganger saga is the incestuous, yet passionate union between the parents of Cathy, Chris, Carrie and Cory. Their mother, Corrine, was fifteen when she fell in love with her half-uncle, causing her familial ruin. In *If There be Thorns*, the only novel in the series that is narrated by Cathy's two sons instead of herself, Jory is fourteen when he is told of his mother's incest with his stepfather, and Cindy is sixteen when her parents witness her losing her virginity. A message is related through the consistent use of this mid-teen age; this is the age when things change, and the veil of childhood innocence is somehow removed.

The Dollanganger Series ends with its protagonist, Cathy, remembering her siblings as she sits once again in the attic she was supposed to have escaped decades before. It is expressed that despite the eventful life she has led, she never moved on from the wrongs she suffered after her father was plucked from her life. In this the reader is reminded that if it had not been for the initial accident which occurs in the first chapter of the first book, removing from the family its paternal voice, none of the following tragedies, broken relationships or incestuous encounters would have taken place.

Just as Cathy never mentally leaves the attic, neither did her creator. The attic to Andrews was her isolation from a normal life; at times this literally meant living dependently in her mother's house, at others it meant physical restriction to the point of not being able to move. She never had a family of her own, never mentioned a romantic relationship and could not, or chose never to leave the care of her mother. In her dreamlike tales of the Dollanganger children, Cathy serves as a fantasy identity who does everything Andrews could not. She physically escapes the attic, becomes a ballet dancer, travels the world and has intensely sexual relationships, the majority of which are with

father figures. Therefore, Cathy attempts again and again to regain the father who was taken from her as a child, the father that represents that “long and perfect summer day” that her life was supposed to be.

Andrews finished the series of four books between the years 1979 and 1984 and also completed *My Sweet Audrina* in 1982. After, *Flowers in the Attic, Petals on the Wind, If There be Thorns* and *Seeds of Yesterday* followed in quick succession. She recognized that these novels were expressive and fantastical, products of her excessive imagination, but Andrews did not realize perhaps the disguised reflections in her works of the unfulfilled desires to be physically able, sexually liberated and socially independent. The bizarre dialogs of her characters as well as the repetition of unexpected themes such as incest and sudden accidents introduce another meaning to these four novels.

The purpose of this project is to explore the strong role Andrews's dramatic fall plays in the Dollanganger Series. Through examinations of her portrayals of unexpected accidents, male sexuality, incest, and mother-daughter rivarlry, I will illuminate that the four novels which make up the Dollanganger Series are expressions of the author's lack of emotional development and mental progression caused by her unpredictable accident at a crucial age.

CHAPTER II

FATE DIDN'T CHOOSE THE UNLOVED:

SUDDEN ACCIDENTS AND INCOMPLETENESS IN THE DOLLANGANGER SERIES

V.C. Andrews did not give many interviews during her life despite how well known her books became. In the few interviews she did give, her answers are somewhat vague and benign. When asked to describe her childhood she talks mostly about what she read and how her art career began. As she tells it, art was not her first aspiration. When she was a young girl she wanted to be a stage actress: “I think it's very boring being one person. And when you are an actress, like when you are a writer, you can be all the people that you create. I always felt thwarted just to be Virginia Andrews. Maybe that's why I wanted to be everything” (Winter, 168). But Andrews did not become an actress, and this she blames on her fall and the following physical complications it caused: “Then, when I had arthritis, I couldn't go on the stage; so I just accepted what I could do, and that was the art” (168).

Andrews's reflections on her ruined future of becoming a stage performer are telling. When she was incapacitated by the extreme pain of surgeries and arthritis, she was suddenly unable to make future decisions for herself, resulting in feelings of regret, helplessness and resentment towards her career in art. Winter explains in his interview:

“...she was thrust into art as a vocation, against her wishes. 'Teachers pushed me into art'” (167). Such regrets do not describe her feelings towards a career in art as much as they reflect her regret at having not been able to achieve what she wanted to with stage acting. When she fell down the stairs she was suddenly faced with obstacles she had never considered before, and this left her with a real feeling of incompleteness. Winter reflects, “The fundamental element of terror, she believes, is lack of control” (172).

Erik Erikson's analysis of development states that during adolescence an individual establishes an identity that is necessary for further, proper maturation into adulthood, particularly intimacy with other people. He places this important stage in the child's development between the ages of thirteen and nineteen years old. The stage before is when the child begins to feel power over her environment and personality. It is significant therefore, that what happened to Andrews took place right in the middle of what was supposed to be the fifth stage of her psychosocial development, according to Erikson. In the years preceding, she should have gained a sense of control, only to have it taken away in an unexpected accident and then again with multiple surgeries and incessant pain.

According to Erikson, if a person should be given a conflict she cannot overcome, she may not be able to successfully move on to the next level of proper, psychosocial development. Such a consequential injury in the author's life at the age of fifteen could possibly have done its part to warp her sense of personal identity. This, considering Erikson's analysis, would therefore affect the next stage of development, which is intimacy. Andrews never mentioned any close relationships in her life outside of family. By dissecting her interview with Winter it becomes evident that there is an ambiguity

present when discussing Andrews's sense of identity. She has varying points by which she defines herself, largely including her writing, and she also possesses strong defenses against being defined by the accident that occurred when she was so young. This sensitivity seems to suggest that her sense of identity is incomplete.

The author's unusual sense of identity is expressed first of all by her feelings concerning her birth date and other important dates in her life. According to Winter, “Andrews likes to call her birth date 'a big mystery,' ... 'But perhaps,' she laughs, 'I was never born.' The matter is not one of conceit, she explains. She loathes the notion of being judged on such simplistic facts as date of birth” (164). He goes on to recount an experience of Andrews's that happened when she was nineteen. Apparently some acquaintances of hers were under the impression that she was younger than she actually was by several years. When they found out otherwise, she claims, “they seemed disappointed” (164). This was evidently enough to inspire the author to remain enigmatic about specific dates for the rest of her life. She then speaks of age as a defining part of a person and something she is therefore frightened by.

Another striking concept Andrews reveals in this interview is that she openly believes in past lives and reincarnation after death: “When I was a little girl...I would look at things like automobiles and skyscrapers, and I would say, 'They didn't have those things when I was here before.' I was sort of expecting horses and carriages. And then I would feel strange thinking this” (167). It is clear that, even as a very young child, the author possessed a fierce imagination, most likely visualizing images from books and recalling pictures she had seen. When this interview took place she was fifty years old, still incorporating these ideas into her personality and defining herself by them.

The most significant part of the author's interview is how she discusses her accident. She tells of the event and the following mishaps that led to her present state, but when asked to describe her present state, her explanations become ambiguous and defensive: “I really don't like to talk about it a lot—I get too emotional. A newspaper once said that I was 'paralyzed.' it made me really angry because I'm not paralyzed” (168). When Winter asks Andrews how her health should be described in his book, “she replies: 'Why do you have to describe it? I'm just another writer” (168). Andrews would rather her condition not be named at all because every name is somehow wrong. She explains what happened to her and that it does affect what she writes, but calling it by a specific name makes her uncomfortable. Soon after in the interview her need for privacy is expressed.

According to Winter, “Her first book was an autobiography, which she later tore up. 'I'm a Gemini, and I've got a tremendous need for secrecy. I don't want to tell people all about myself. I decided that I would put bits and pieces of me in all of my novels, and they won't know which parts are really me'” (169). This is where Andrews's unusual perspective of herself is made particularly clear. She attributes her acute desire for privacy to the fact that she is a Gemini, but what she is describing is a fear of being known, especially when it comes to her disability. She talks about herself in magical terms that include having been reincarnated and possessing powers of precognitive dreams. However, she also defines herself through her novels. “I put so much of myself into writing that I feel like I'm in the book. I weighed one hundred and ten pounds when I began *Flowers in the Attic*, and when I finished, I weighed ninety-four. I live all of my books” (172). Such a statement, of course, provokes us to wonder how much of these

novels are themselves autobiographical.

In the Dollanganger Series, readers are presented with stories about overwhelmingly beautiful people who dance professional ballet and engage in intense love affairs. Before the children escape the Grandmother's house, they dream of becoming trapeze artists. Frequently the reader comes across passages describing physical feats or the eroticism of a person's muscular build. Andrews's characters are physically exceptional in ability and beauty. These features just so happen to be written into the novels of a person who had extreme restrictions when it came to mobility. Even as she denies that she lives through her characters, she admits her characters do serve as vehicles for her own wishes: “I have one life. Even though I try to pretend I have many, I don't. I may be Cathy or Audrina for a while, but I always have to come back to being me” (172). This statement is meant to counter the claim that her characters are fantasized identities, but it sounds more similar to a confession. She does live through her characters sometimes, but she must return to being herself because she has no choice.

Instead of giving one answer about whether her books are fantasy fulfillments or not, she gives two ambiguous replies. She has already said that there are times when she loses her real self and escapes into her novels, but then she insists that she does not write her own fantasies: “I have an uncle who came and said, 'What do you write about, the things that you miss in your life? Things you can fulfill in your books?' And I said no, because a lot of the things that happen in my books, I wouldn't want to happen to me. But I enjoy the awful things, because they are kind of fun” (172). In two adjoining sentences, Andrews contradicts herself as if she has not yet decided or does not understand why she writes what she writes.

Andrews's uncle was astute in his assertion that her novels portray activities missing from her life. After all, she discusses having wanted to become a stage actress before falling down the stairs. The Dollanganger Series' protagonist, Cathy, becomes a famous ballerina. And her adopted daughter Cindy later goes to Hollywood to act in movies. Andrews tells her uncle that her novels are not fantasies because her novels are full of terrible events as well as nice ones. Immediately after she confesses that "the awful things...are kind of fun," proving her uncle's point. Andrews does make it clear, despite herself, that her stories and her characters move about in her made up world fulfilling her own wishes, saying and doing the things she is unable to say or do. Her characters complete a part of her that was left incomplete when she suffered a fall that disabled her for the rest of her life.

Frequent, unexpected accidents are an overt part of the Dollanganger Series. Because the author suffered a life changing fall as a teenager, this repetition of the event in her novels may be explained through Freud's theory of trauma, and a hesitation to acknowledge her disability is similar to repression. While Andrews harbors a fear of defining herself by her disability, she expresses pain and loss in her novels through the characters of Christopher Dollanganger, Chris Dollanganger, Julian Marquet and Jory, three of whom die as a result of their accidents. Through this expression, she draws an association between sudden accidents and permanent loss of self.

Flowers in the Attic, Petals on the Wind and *If There be Thorns* are dominated by repeated themes that take on very important meanings when juxtaposed with the author's life. While Andrews admits that Cathy's entrapment in the attic as a teenager was inspired by her own feelings of isolation and pain following her accident, she does not, according

to her conversation with her uncle, consider her books as fantasy logs. She claims that her books do not reflect her desires because “awful things” happen alongside good things. However, the repetition of painful experiences is commonly accepted in psychoanalysis as a way to stave off unwanted memories. In Freud's paper, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” he examines the tendency for patients to use the act of repetition to take the place of remembering: “We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember” (151). In this way, a repetition of “awful things” may be a significant part of the fantasy.

In Andrews's case, she remembers exactly what happened to her, but she does not accept that her life has been enormously changed because of it. She will not give her condition a name that would make it a part of her identity. Freud describes such a refusal of acknowledgment as “the ostrich-like policy of repression...” (152). But for Andrews, it is not the memory of the fall itself that she is repressing, but its effect on her life, and this is what she is repeating in her novels: first the sudden accident, then the life she will never have. Expressing this in her writing gives the author a fulfilling, if temporary, sense of completeness.

The exposition of *Flowers in the Attic* introduces readers to a beautiful, happy family living in Gladstone, Pennsylvania. For the first five pages of the novel, Andrews describes the wholesome existence of four children and two adoring parents. It is punctuated with verbalized affection and the envy of friends. After those five sweet pages, however, the atmosphere changes into a dark melodrama that encompasses every following page in the series. The event that so markedly changes the course of Cathy

Dollanganger's life is the death of her father in a car accident. This most important event is imitated later by the death of Cathy's first husband, the paralysis of her son Jory's legs and, finally, the perfect repetition of her father's fate when her brother Chris is involved in a replica of that accident. Each of these tragedies occurs unexpectedly and has no distinguishable cause other than a nameless drunk driver or a clumsily placed backdrop. What happened to Andrews had no precise purpose either. She simply says, “I was coming downstairs at school when my heel caught on something...” (Winter, 168). Pointless accidents litter the Dollanganger Series and bring the reader constantly back to Andrews's own unexpected fall.

Of the four poignant accidents in the series, two immediately cause death and the other two cause disability, followed by significant losses. Christopher Dollanganger, Cathy's father, is killed at the beginning of the series and her brother, Chris, at the end of the series. Both die in car accidents on their ways home from work. The unforeseen nature of Christopher Dollanganger's death is emphasized dramatically by the author with the fact that it takes place on his birthday while his family and friends are waiting for him to walk into his surprise party. Cathy's reaction to her father's death is one of denial: “It's not my daddy! I know it's not! He stopped by a store to buy ice cream. He'll be coming in the door any minute!” (*Flowers* 18). On the other hand, when her brother dies she seems to be expecting it: “Not Chris, not my Christopher Doll. No, not yet, not yet” (*Seeds* 400).

It is understood at this point in the series that accidents are an inescapable part of life. Cathy reflects, “And then I was sobbing. For my father had been a wonderful man, and that hadn't mattered. Fate didn't choose the unloved, the derelicts, the unneeded or

unwanted. Fate was a bodiless form with a cruel hand that reached out randomly, carelessly, and seized up with ruthlessness" (*Seeds* 402). This is a passage which confesses the feelings of Andrews concerning purposeless accidents. These are accidents from which there is neither recovery nor hope of recovery. These irrecuperable accidents can be seen as a vehicle for the author's regret at having been injured at a young age when there were so many goals she wanted to fulfill. Rather than expressing or working through her feelings, however, Andrews repeats them in her writing.

Freud states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that painful events are repeated by patients in dreams because it is only when they sleep that their minds are allowed to recall the memory: "I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with not thinking of it" (13). As has been stated, Andrews's trauma was not necessarily her tumble down stairs that injured her back, but the loss of social experience it caused. Furthermore, as Cathy Caruth illuminates, a patient who has suffered a physical injury is less likely to develop a neurosis because she is able to embody the trauma in her physical wound (61). Therefore, as the wound heals the trauma heals. In the case of Andrews, the wound does not heal, and her emotional incompleteness cannot heal either; she can only repeat it over and over in the pages of her fiction.

As Cathy's father dies in the first chapter of *Flowers in the Attic*, a tragedy is established that is never reconciled, only repeated. The primary death of the father is imitated again and again until the cycle is ended inevitably by the death of Chris and Cathy herself. There is no completion or found purpose; it remains as random and

careless as Cathy expresses. Cathy lives in a world of accidents and losses. She loses her mother to greed, her younger brother to pneumonia and her first husband to the same type of accident that killed her father. Julian Marquet is injured in a car accident but does not die. He is told that he may never walk again, and this is where the series first confronts the concept of living with a disability.

Julian Marquet is a professional ballet dancer that Cathy meets when she is fifteen. He is a perfectionist and incredibly beautiful until he suffers a series of injuries in a sudden crash. “A broken neck! Plus a leg fracture, and a compound fracture of his forearm—to say nothing of the internal injuries that had kept him on the operating table three hours!” (*Petals* 271). Julian is in a coma for several days before waking up and telling Cathy, “I'd rather be dead than like this” (273). These are nearly his first words after realizing the condition he is in. Even though he realizes that Cathy is pregnant, he cuts his IV tube and dies. The next day Cathy and Chris find him dead, and Cathy's reaction explains a great deal: “It's alright' I said dully. 'If he hadn't done it this way, it would have been another...There was no life for him if he could never dance again. No life at all” (276). Julian feels that without ballet he is no longer himself. This incompleteness that drives him to suicide might seem slightly exaggerated, but it expresses the author's strong feelings of loss. This theme is expressed more clearly in the fourth novel when Julian's accident is repeated by his son.

Just like his father, Jory becomes a very successful ballet dancer and defines his life by his profession. He and his wife travel the world dancing ballet professionally and have a passionate sex life. However, in the midst of his active career, Jory is injured in a mysterious collapse of his stage props. Even though there are strong suggestions of foul

play, no conclusion is ever reached as to how the set tumbled at such a convenient moment and why the sand in the sandbags was wet, making it heavy enough to break Jory's spine. This lack of reason is appropriate only considering Cathy's words about fate being random and careless, words that most likely express the feelings of Andrews concerning her own "bodiless" tragedy. The language used by the characters surrounding Jory is significant when considering Andrews's situation while writing them. Like Julian Marquet, Jory's wife Melodie is extremely negative about her husband's sudden inability to walk or make love: "But he won't be the same!...What will he do? What will I do? Where will we go, and how will he survive without walking and dancing? What kind of father will he make now that he has to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair?" (*Seeds* 118). Melodie embodies the fears and the negativity associated with a loss of mobility.

While Andrews, in her interview with Winter, does not speak of her injury as something that keeps her from the mainstream, Melodie makes very clear the fact that if Jory should "spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair" it will redefine him as a person. Disabled will be his new identity. It is ironic considering that the author would not even give her condition a name, fearing that it should define her to the public. The personal loss of the sudden accident is reiterated when Melodie states to Cathy, "Perhaps death is what he'd prefer—have you thought of that?" (119). Again Andrews makes an immediate association between a sudden accident and death. Caruth explains how such connections might be made:

> For consciousness then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life. It is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its

> death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living. (62)

Andrews brings her readers again and again back to the equation of sudden accident and death because she is alive after her fall, living with the purposeless consequences of it. When her characters die she is repeating the event and attempting to understand it.

Through the character of Jory, Andrews is able to repeat not just the experience of suddenly losing all control, but the trauma of surviving as well. Unlike Julian, Jory must push through the years of further loss that follow. His feelings are described through narration: “Briefly he met my eyes. His were full of bitterness, anger, frustration, a rage so terrible I had to turn away. It was all over him, his fierce resentment at having been cheated and stolen from before he'd had enough” (*Seeds* 116). As a fully grown man Jory has not had enough of life. Similarly, the author was only fifteen when she was “cheated and stolen from.” The reactions of Julian, Melodie and the initial response of Jory are portrayals of how Andrews likely felt when she realized she would be perceived as a disabled person in a wheelchair.

However, a positive attitude is added to the scenario. Cathy insists that Jory can still be complete even without his legs. She tells him after his accident, “The road to achievement is still ahead and wide open, only you'll have to roll along that road instead of run or dance...You will just find another craft, another career, and with your family you will find happiness” (*Seeds* 117). Cathy is giving the right answers to Jory in the middle of his enormous loss, and ultimately Jory lives as the only optimistic portrayal of disability the author offers. He does not die, but he loses his incredible dancing career and his wife who has loved him since junior high. Jory then begins painting as a creative

channel that does not involve mobility. Unsurprisingly, this mimics the actions of Andrews: “...I couldn't go on the stage; so I just accepted what I could do, and that was the art” (Winter 168).

Andrews creates characters who wrap their identities in the role of dancer and their motivation for living in the ability to move. For Julian and Jory the concept of living a disabled life is nightmarish if not impossible. The author herself lived just the life her characters are terrified of, and much like the author, they feel identified by their abilities. The difference between her characters and herself is the crucial age of fifteen during which, according to Erikson, a conflict of identity may cause ramifications well into adulthood. Andrews is destined to repeat the event throughout her life in an attempt to understand it and therefore obtain the completeness she is missing.

In her interview with Winter, she describes her life before the fall as rather boring: “...my childhood was so ordinary, and I wanted it to be exciting” (165). It can be argued that Andrews is expressing resentment in her interview because the excitement she was waiting for as a child never presented itself in her life. Instead, she escaped into her characters and through them lived her fantasies and loss in constant repetition. Her attempt to fill herself with fantasies is a reminder of the incompleteness that inspired them. All that seems to define Andrews after her fall is reading, writing and painting. She received all her knowledge of intimacy from books and her own stilted imagination, and here lies the source of the problematic portrayals of men, women and sex in the Dollanganger Series.

CHAPTER III

PRINCE CHARMING AND THE GENTLEMAN RAPIST:

MALE SEXUALITY IN THE DOLLANGANGER SERIES

Throughout *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind*, the protagonist Cathy falls in love with four different men: her brother Chris, adoptive father Paul Sheffield, dance partner Julian Marquet and step-father Bart Winslow. Other than Paul Sheffield, each of these men forces Cathy to have sex with him, and the abuse does not end there. Scenes of brutal rape in the Dollanganger Series are followed by compassion for the rapist, and even functional, romantic relationships. Andrews portrays rape in these books not as a perversion of a man's love for a woman, but an expression of it. Some have asked about Andrews's own experience with rape, but there is no evidence of abuse in what we know of her life. What readers see in *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind* are simplified versions of the masculine sex, written by a woman who, after having her adult life drastically changed by an unforeseen accident, has no real understanding of sex and is simply writing her fantasies of being taken, using only clichéd notions from romantic literature and fairy tales as a manual. This accounts for the bizarre and problematic sexual roles repeated in the Dollanganger Series.

As Andrews states in her interview with Winter, she spent the majority of her childhood reading: “I loved the fairy tales. But there is an element of horror in fairy

tales...” (166) As Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz explain in their article, “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales,” the basic concept of a woman's beauty in a fairy tale sets up the premise for abduction: “Although beauty is often rewarded in Grimms' tales, it is also a source of danger...For instance, there are examples of women who must flee or disguise themselves for protection because they are so beautiful” (719). By this seemingly innocent foundation the act of rape is made possible, for, as Janice Radway explains, in popular romantic literature the hero is usually justifiably overcome by the heroine's beauty.

In her interview with Winter, it is also insinuated that as a small child, Andrews read romance novels: “I would read books that were way beyond my years and I didn't know what the words meant. And I would ask my mother, 'What is a harlot?' and she would say, 'Look it up in the dictionary'” (165). While Andrews tells us that she did not stop reading after she was injured, it appears that she continued to read romances, especially since we see themes in the Dollanganger Series that mirror those found in romance novels. The presentation of rape, for example, as a biological urge brought on my a deep passion for the irresistible woman is prevalent in both Andrews's novels and romance novels. Radway explains that a “...willingness to see male force interpreted as passion is also the product of a wish to be seen as so desirable to the 'right' man that he will not take 'no' for an answer” (76). While this skewed representation of passion is common in romance novels, it is also a central motif in Andrews's writing. The Dollanganger Series, in fact, consistently presents male characters who are controlled not by rationality but by their encompassing passion for the heroine.

In *Flowers in the Attic*, the four Dollanganger children, Chris, Cathy, Carrie and

Cory, are locked in a top floor bedroom by their mother and ultra-religious grandmother. For three and a half years they see only those two matriarchs and each other. Chris is fourteen and his sister Cathy is twelve when the door first shuts them away from all other children their age, and as they both continue to grow into pubescent, sexual young adults, the tension between them rises as their activities evolve from innocently naked sunbaths together to mouth kissing. Cathy develops into a voluptuous fifteen year old and Chris is enthralled by her body. Because of the previous incest between their parents, Chris and Cathy's grandmother is obsessed with their potential impurity and warns them often not to be nude together, not to look at one another too much and not to sleep in the same bed with a sibling of the opposite sex. This is misunderstood by the children until Cathy realizes that when she and Chris are alone together, it is not as innocent as it seems.

The attraction between them escalates and comes through varying levels of intensity. Lines of kinship are crossed when Chris first sees Cathy naked as a fully developed teenage girl in the chapter entitled “Growing Up, Growing Wiser.” Cathy, being curious about her changing body, disrobes in front of their bedroom mirror and admires herself, thinking she is alone: “A rippling sensation on the back of my neck gave me the awareness that someone was near, and watching me” (236). Cathy realizes that her older brother has been witnessing her self adoration in silence. “His eyes lowered from my flushed face down to my breasts, then lower, and lower, and down to my feet before they traveled upward ever so slowly[...]He also seemed weak, dazed, perplexed, and if I moved to cover myself, I'd steal from him something he'd been starving to see” (237). It becomes at this point very clear that the feelings Chris has for his younger sister are not brotherly at all. When Cathy tells him he should not be looking at her the way he

is, he replies, “I know I shouldn't be, but you look so beautiful[...]” This is the beginning of Chris's apparent inability to control his sexual urges towards his sister.

Throughout *Flowers in the Attic* and its sequels, Chris's lack of poise is blamed on various forces including the fact that he is not allowed to see any young women other than his sister during this crucial time in his sexual maturation. The reader is also told that Chris was so moved by Cathy's physical beauty that, try as he might, he could not withstand his urges. Clearly the theme that the author is setting up is one of male sexuality being a force of its own, amoral perhaps and totally impossible to curb. As Sabine Sielke examines in her book *Reading Rape*, these assumptions of male sexuality have been challenged since the 1970's by feminists such as Susan Brownmiller who “...objected to the predominant notion that rape is a natural expression of male sexual desire and an act of sex and lust” (48). Chris's rape of Cathy makes it clear that the author is unconcerned with the feminist movement of her time and is relying on a much more traditional understanding of masculinity. The significance of Chris's age is that it proves a man's forceful sex is innate, not learned.

The sexual encounter between brother and sister in *Flowers in the Attic* leaves little room for the question of whether it is rape or not. Cathy is fifteen, Chris is eighteen, and he forces himself upon her and even admits to having raped her afterwards: “You're mine, Cathy! Mine!” he shouts at her. “I'll make you mine...tonight...now!” (355). This statement makes it clear that Chris's carnal desires are not only beginning to control his body, but his mind; he essentially turns into a different person. Cathy reflects, “he had much more determination than I to use something hot, swollen and demanding, so much it stole reasoning and sanity from him” (356). Even though Chris is clear in his

motivations and his intentions towards Cathy at that moment, Cathy (and the author) justify what he is about to do by remarking that his organ had overcome his better judgment. His sanity and his reason are not with him, and he rapes her. In romance fiction, Radway clarifies, there are two versions of rape: "[...]authors of ideal romances always make a clear distinction between men who rape as an act of aggression against women and those who, like their heroes, do so because they[...]find [the heroine] irresistible" (141). According to this rule of romance, Chris's rape is not heinous, but understandable.

What Chris says after he attacks Cathy and her reaction towards him reveal a dependence on romantic removal from reality and a lack of understanding when it comes to sexual violence. Instead of fearing her brother or developing anger, Cathy feels love and sympathy for him as he holds her. She admits that half of the blame should belong to her, and Chris claims that he could not help it. "I didn't mean to rape you, I swear to God. There's been many a time when I've been tempted, and I was able to turn it off" (355). This scene is not a condemnation of Chris for what he did; it is a justification. This time he was unable to "turn it off," as it is like a program in his brain.

The concept of a man being rendered mentally helpless by his sexual desires is not a new one. In her essay "Offensive Feminism: The Conservative Gender Norms that Perpetuate Rape Culture, and How Feminists Can Fight Back," Jill Filipovic tackles this male stereotype:

> At the heart of the sexual assault issue is how mainstream American culture constructs sex and sexualities along gendered lines. Female sexuality is portrayed as passive, while male sexuality is aggressive[...]But the myth of passivity is not

> only cultural narrative about female sexuality. Women are simultaneously thought of as living in inherently tempting bodies and using those bodies to cause men to fall. (18)

In this way, Filipovic explains, men are justified by society when they behave in an active manner. Women are required to remain passive in order to retain their innocence.

In *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind*, Cathy embodies the woman that all men want; therefore, after she submits to a man's physical force, she can still be an admirable heroine while at the same time, becoming a fully sexual creature. Filipovic further discusses in her essay the role that force has historically played in sexual relationships: "...what is now called 'date rape' used to be called 'seduction'" (21). For Cathy, being taken sexually was part of her initiation as a temptress. She admits that despite the pain involved, it was what she wanted: "And I loved him. I wanted what he wanted—if he wanted it *that* much, right or wrong" (*Flowers* 356). In the scenario Filipovic analyzes, the woman should want to be taken because otherwise the encounter cannot take place. Women and men are simply fulfilling their biological roles as passive and active.

Therefore, Chris may have allowed his more primitive nature to take control of him, but he did not actually do anything wrong according to Andrews, and this is why directly after the fact, as well as throughout the rest of the series, Chris is never castigated for what he did to his younger sister. Instead, the experience serves as Cathy's raw initiation into the passionate womanhood she so highly anticipated. Chris's rape shows us the innocence of rape. Cathy's next lover will express further the darker duplicity of a fully grown man.

Paul Sheffield is Cathy's first consensual lover. In *Petals on the Wind*, Cathy is immediately drawn to the middle aged, Southern doctor on account of his physical similarities to her step-father, Bart. Immediately upon taking in the three siblings, Paul begins to make his lust for the teenage girl obvious by staring at her. “I really don't like the way he keeps looking at you, Cathy,” Chris says as he expresses his concern. “His eyes follow you about all the time. Here you are, so available, and men his age find girls your age irresistible” (28). This is not the first time Chris acts as an expert on male sexuality and fascinates Cathy with shocking new knowledge about the inner workings of men. However, his information is nothing if not problematic.

Paul is not presented as a predator; on the contrary, he represents stability, kindness, and the father they lost years before. He gives the spurned children the ability to survive and plan for their futures. So why, at the same time, do Chris and Cathy have no trust in him? It is as if they expect him to take advantage of the young girl in his home even as he promises to be a source of security. This is a clear contradiction outside of the fantastical reality created by the author. In *Petals on the Wind*, Cathy is an enchanting, sexy creature who renders men unable to control themselves, and this is just the way she likes it. She reflects on what her brother revealed about older men: “But how fascinating to know that men of forty were susceptible to girls of fifteen. How wonderful to wield over them the power that my mother had” (28).

Cathy's simple statement that she is in control immediately romanticizes the previous observation that she is “available” to the older man. It also says a great deal about how the author views the role of the male when it comes to sexual relationships. Although he is active, he is not in control of his urges or ultimately what he does,

whether it is a “sin” or not. The simplicity of this concept reveals an underdeveloped comprehension and upholds an image of rape that was, in the late twentieth century, unraveling quickly. Sielke explains the shift that took place in the 1970's and its interest in women's possession of their own bodies. This, she clarifies, led to discussions specifically about rape (46). *Petals on the Wind* was published in 1980 when Andrews was fifty-six. Yet throughout this novel, as well as the rest of the series, there is no hint of such social progression. Instead, the values enriching this strange world mimic a past, more patriarchal decade.

Although Paul never rapes Cathy, he makes it clear that he would like to. While she is still a child, he buys her sexy lingerie and watches her constantly. In the chapter entitled, “Enchantress...Me?” he pulls her to him so she is sitting in his lap and then, tipsy on wine, he starts to touch her under her nightgown. Then he asks her what she would do if he asked her to take off all her clothes and let him do as he pleased with her. Cathy makes no attempt to get away from him; in fact, she is enjoying the touches when he suddenly pulls away. “Why did you let me do what I did?” he demands. Cathy in turn feels sorry for him. “He was ashamed...he was thinking all sorts of self-condemning thoughts, chastising, berating, whipping himself—I knew it was my fault; as always it was my fault” (72). Now, after the predatory comments made by Paul only seconds before, we are encouraged to understand him as merely another soul tortured by physical impulses towards Cathy. Therefore, the fact that a man is mature, educated and nurturing is no reason to trust him not to rape a young girl or his wife.

Married rape occurs twice in *Petals on the Wind*, once to Paul's former wife and again between Julian and Cathy. Because rape within marriage was made illegal in 1975,

Andrews must have been well aware of the growing attention paid to sexual crimes against women. However, when Paul finally discloses his guilty secret of having raped his former wife continuously until she attempted suicide, in the process losing her mind, he is not condemned. Paul never ceases to be portrayed as the kindly doctor, albeit with dark regrets, who cared for the Dollanganger siblings when their own mother no longer wanted them. Eventually, he and Cathy begin a romance, and he remains a lover of hers until the day he dies in his rocking chair. While Paul Sheffield has shown clearly the strange split personality of male sexuality; Julian Marquet, Cathy's second consensual lover in *Petals on the Wind*, plays the part of the rapist who simply does not know how to constructively show his love.

Julian Marquet is Cathy's first husband, the spellbinding, arrogant male ballet dancer she meets when she is fifteen. Their courtship is nothing if not violent and bizarre. Julian calls her names, is physically threatening and demonstrates his control over her several times. In the chapter entitled “My First Date,” Julian responds to her plea to slow down by attacking her: “He seized my arm and ruthlessly twisted it behind my back until I cried out from pain. I thought he meant to break it. But he released it just when I was about to scream” (87). After this happens, Julian claims that he is falling in love with Cathy, and she does not stop seeing him. In fact, she marries him and is sexually abused by him throughout their short marriage. As Filipovic explains in “Offensive Feminism,” “aggression is such a deeply entrenched characteristic of maleness that it is often justified through references to nature and evolutionary biology” (19). Although Julian's behavior is considered dark and pitiful by the author, he, like Paul and Chris, is not given consequences or stigmatized in the story. Cathy feels no anger towards Julian concerning

the abuse, extra-marital affairs or—shockingly—the secret violation of her younger sister.

When Carrie, Cathy's small-framed sister, is fifteen she comes to visit Cathy and Julian in New York. While Cathy is away, Julian coerces Carrie into giving him oral sex. Years later, after Julian's death, Carrie feels the need to report this incident to Cathy and receives a reaction that is so removed from reality that it may only make sense to a teenager who has no grasp of adult sexuality: "He said it would be fun and wasn't real sex, the kind that made babies—so I did what he wanted, and he kissed me and and said next to you he loved me best." Cathy replies, "Don't cry and feel ashamed, darling. There are all kinds of love and ways to express love...if Julian convinced you to do something you feel was wicked, that was *his* sin, not yours. And mine too, for I should have told you what he might want" (318). Cathy does call what Julian did "*his* sin," but in the same breath she places blame on herself for having neglected to mention that her husband might want oral sex. She accepts it as a lack of judgment on her part that she did not plan ahead for such a situation. Julian, Paul and Chris were expected to do the things they did; this is the concept of male sexuality that Andrews seems to understand.

In Tania Modleski's analysis of romance novels in the book *Loving with a Vengeance*, she explains that to the fantasizing woman, the idea of a gentleman's internal struggle over her is more important than the actual treatment she receives from the him: "The man...spends all his time thinking about the woman. Even when he appears most indifferent to her, as he frequently does in Harlequin Romances, we can be sure he will eventually tell her how much the thought of her has obsessed him" (17). She goes on to discuss how this desire in the readers and the writers of these paperback novels proves a

sort of struggle against the submissive stature of women in the late nineteenth century.

In Andrews's plot lines, this is exactly the case. It does not matter to the writer or her main character how a man treats a woman, whether he rapes her, bends her arm behind her back or makes her cry with verbal abuse, as long as he is being tortured innerly by the thought of her. In between the threats and battery, Julian frequently tells Cathy that he is in love with her or that he never received the affection he wanted from his parents, statements that seem to dilute his behavior and make Cathy want to hug him. Julian is presented as a disturbed young man who is too proud or repressed to show love in a soft way. His sexuality is used like a weapon against Cathy, and she is powerless, but this does not make him a bad person; he is fulfilling the same role as Chris and Paul by acting aggressively male.

Chris and Paul have tremendous guilt for their rapes and for their unwholesome urges towards young Cathy. They feel sorry for what they cannot control, making them rather pitiful characters racked with guilt. Julian harbors no inner turmoil for how he treats Cathy or the many other women he abuses throughout their marriage, but he is painted as a tragically unhappy character who is so wrapped up in his fear of rejection that he kills himself. Although characters like Julian Marquet are common in frothy, romance novels, Andrews did not consider that her writing reflected that genre. This displays a basic lack of understanding that the concepts she is utilizing are literary themes and not reality. For example, she claims that “[Women] don't understand why I personally like to write the way I do. To me, it's more challenging than writing about romance. I don't think romance is enough” (Winter, 174). Reality is understood through experience, and Andrews simply never had the opportunities to discover the real world.

Instead, this series serves as a channel for her fantasies about the interactions between men and women.

The night Cathy is raped by Chris, his anger is originally caused by her impulse to kiss their sleeping stepfather, Bart Winslow, on the lips while he dozes in a rocking chair. Chris'sjealous frustration foreshadows a connection between Cathy and Bart that is more than a childish crush. Consistently throughout her love affairs with Paul Sheffield and Julian Marquet, she expresses a need to seduce and win her mother's husband. The final gentleman rapist in Cathy's romantic history is none other than her own stepfather, who marries her mother while Cathy and her three siblings are still being harbored in the attic. Bart illustrates for us the complete male: dominant, sensual, and entirely unapologetic for how he treats the submissive sex. Cathy eventually manages to win his passion but not without consequences.

Cathy's attempt to initiate and control the sexual relationship between herself and her stepfather is the first and only time she consciously uses her power over a man. Although the encounter is first planned out as revenge against her mother, it is never successful, as Bart immediately proves himself resistant to the control of his wife or Cathy. This chase is described in literal terms both by the chapter title "Tiger by the Tail" and the scene in which Cathy is jogging through the forest. Bart Winslow spots her, on a jog himself presumably, and begins to chase her. She dares to taunt him as she is feeling so confident: "A man who can't catch a woman is *no man at all!*" (358). This, metaphorically and actually, is what Cathy wants. However, he is faster and stronger than she expects. Her above average fitness and exceptional speed prove helpful, but in the end it is not Bart's power that ends her winning streak, but nature's, when she is tripped

up by her “trick knee,” an injury that has never been an issue until this moment. “No sooner did this self-conceit flash through my mind than my stupid knee suddenly gave way and I went down again, on my face in the dead leaves. And this time I was hurt, really hurt” (359). This encounter between Cathy and Bart in the woods is another illustration of the inherent roles of men and women as active and passive. Cathy falls because nature has dictated that she should submit to her pursuer.

The jog through the woods may easily be seen as a metaphor for relations between the sexes. She may run, but he will catch her because that is the way it should be. Her “self-conceit” of trying to take the reigns of seduction from this older, more sophisticated man is punished promptly, and she is put in her place. However, this is not the only time she is forced to submit to Bart. In the chapter entitled “Spider and the Fly,” Bart is invited to Cathy's home to have dinner with her while her son sleeps in the next room. Cathy's objective is to lure Bart away from her mother as a kind of revenge, but just as she has this connived seduction in the bag, she changes her mind; she does not want to sleep with Bart and ruin his marriage, so she asks him to leave. Bart, in the tradition of males in the Dollanganger Series, will not be defied by any woman and therefore, carries her to her room and rapes her.

> 'Get out of here.' I screamed. 'I'm calling the police! I'll have you thrown in jail, charged with assault and rape!'
>
> He laughed scornfully, chucked me under the chin playfully, then stood up to pull on his clothes. 'Oh,' he said, mocking me with the imitation of my own voice, 'I am so frightened...you aren't happy, are you? It didn't work out the way you planned it, but don't you worry, tomorrow night I'll be back, and maybe then you

can please me enough, so I'll feel like taking the time to please you.' (369)

This is the first time Cathy has shown the expected reaction to having been attacked and violated, threatening with a report to the authorities, although she does not follow through. The next night they embark on another date, which leads to a passionate love affair between them. Cathy admits that she had been a fool to try and control the encounters between them.

In any realistic situation, an unambiguous crime like the one Bart commits in "The Spider and the Fly" would be negative, and consequences would be encouraged. His condescending manner and warnings that he will come back the next night could be considered as further abuse. Why, again, does Cathy begin a loving relationship with a man who has raped her? Why does the author only portray these men as caring, heroic gentlemen who do their best to love Cathy? According to the author and, perhaps, the basic story lines of varying romance novels, Chris, Paul, Julian and Bart indeed do their best to love Cathy, but dominant, forceful actions are what the male is designed for. Even though the term "rape" is used several times in *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind*, the connotations are vastly different than what we consider rape today. Cathy was simply able to have the pleasure of being taken while retaining her innocence. Therefore, these romances Cathy has are not reflective of modern relationships. Rather, they suggest old fashioned values and the fantasies of a young girl who is tantalized by abduction instead of repulsed by it.

As has been stated, these books were written after the laws concerning married women and rape had been established. True, the time period in which the story takes place is set twenty years earlier, but that does not have to effect the presentation. What

comes through in the author's overtly childlike narration is a confusion of rape and the romantic abduction in fairy tales and romance novels, a blurred border line between victim and victimizer, and an obscured definition of the crime itself. But it seems erroneous that there should be such a misunderstanding of a type of abuse that was frequently talked about at the time Andrews was writing these books.

In her interview with Winter, Andrews states, “As I was growing up, I had to put the thrills and chills into my imagination, because they weren't there” (174). Andrews never was able to achieve the “thrills and chills” outside of her writing. Intimacy, forced or otherwise, carries heavier meanings for mature adults, especially those who have experience. Andrews was never in love with her brother or raped by a husband; if she had been, *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind* would look much different in their use of characters, dialog and general content. As with ballet dancing, she utilized the language of an activity she had no first-hand experience with and conveyed not the ponderings of a fifty year old woman, but the fantasies of an isolated fifteen year old school girl. This, it would seem, is why all four of the Dollanganger books are full of such extravagant themes, including taboo sex.

CHAPTER IV

BRED INTO HIS BONES

BEAUTIFUL INCEST IN THE DOLLANGANGER SERIES

Disturbing, repeated themes such as accidents and rape are pervasive in Andrews's Dollanganger Series, serving to remind readers of the author's feelings of loss after her debilitating fall as well as the lack of emotional development it caused. Huntley describes this use of repetition as "...an important plot device...that highlights parallels and relationships among and between them, creating a nightmare world in which anything of significance invariably has an echo in another time and place" (59). What Andrews creates is a nightmare world, but it is also a dream world where she acts out the optimistic hope of her childhood again and again followed each time by painful loss. Frequently, she tells of literal accidents and consequential death, but her history of incompleteness utilizes metaphor as well.

More striking than the feature of repeated incest is the fact that the incest is undeniably beautiful. In *Flowers in the Attic* there is an explicit sex scene between a brother and sister and a strong message against those who would call such a relationship sinful. Andrews depicts a happy family in which the parents are related to one another, and she romanticizes this concept by giving them a perfect marriage and four exceptional children. The villain in *Flowers in the Attic* is the grandmother who continually berates

the four siblings for being born of an incestuous union. As authors such as Rosaria Champagne and Richard A. McCabe explain, incest throughout literature has not classically been portrayed or accepted in positive terms, but in the Dollanganger Series it is made clear that incest produces passionate romance and genetically superior offspring. Given Andrews's own feelings of incompleteness, we could argue that incest in the Dollanganger Series is a representation of completeness, and joining with the father is the author's fantasy of joining once again with the physical stability she had before falling down the stairs.

To use the theme of father-daughter incest to represent something constructive and positive is unusual considering the fact that, for the most part, incest has been associated with the destruction of self and society. Classically, explains McCabe, incest is taboo. In his study of English and French drama from 1550—1770, he discusses how incest became associated with atheism and nihilism. In his play *The Unnatural Combat*, playwright Philip Massinger presents "incest from a pathological perspective less as desire than as disease" (257). McCabe argues that incest has historically been portrayed as an ugly and soulless act. This concept is further developed by Champagne.

In her book, *The Politics of Survivorship*, Champagne discusses society's reaction to stories of incest in fiction and reality: "Incest is the oldest taboo. It also is a very ordinary part of many children's lives: one out of three girls; one out of seven boys. In the United States, incest became a legal crime in the late 1860's" (14). She continues to explain the refusal of society to accept histories of incest, particularly father-daughter incest, even in fiction and gives the example of Mary Shelley's *Matilda*, which went unpublished for 140 years after it was written because "*Matilda* radically decenters the

power of paternity and the Law of the Father...” (54). Telling of incest, she claims, is threatening to our patriarchal society. Therefore, she explains that father-daughter incest is blamed too often on the victim's own fantasies. Champagne's insight sheds light on society's hesitance to accept narratives of incest, but it does not explain the beautiful incest Andrews writes into her novels. Such a theory only becomes more unusual when juxtaposed with Champagne's arguments.

However, there is a more positive vision of father-daughter incest in much more modern, American society. Devlin's analysis of father-daughter relationships offers a counter to the statement that incest is always portrayed as threatening, destructive and ugly. She describes a type of innocent, patriarchal incest which became very popular in war-torn and post-war America when the United States was returning to its traditional patriarchal order. In her book *Relative Intimacy*, she explores the importance placed on the father figure in the 1940's and 1950's and his significant effect on the sexual maturation of his daughters. Plays like *Junior Miss* placed emphasis on the role of a father is his daughter's sexual initiation. Of course, this was not about physically sexual acts, but his erotic gaze (3). This is an important difference between the ugly incest discussed by McCabe and Champagne. In Devlin's post-war incest there is no physical penetration, only fantasy.

In the Dollanganger Series Andrews writes characters that exist between these two types of incest by acting as fathers and lovers simultaneously. By doing so she displays a misunderstanding of the issue and places her fiction outside the borders of realism, into a realm of fantasy where sexual assault by a brother, seduction by an adoptive parent and rape by a step-father do not produce a victim or a trauma. The author

instead expresses the three events as having no negative consequences. In this way, incestuous unions in the Dollanganger Series are the way that Andrews expresses true completeness. It is perfect love between two people that transcends right and wrong. Cathy's brother Chris says to her in *Petals on the Wind*, "'How can I find anyone else, when you've been bred into my bones—and are part of my flesh? Your blood runs fast when mine does! Your eyes burn when mine do—don't deny it'" (53). This statement communicates an experience of incestuous love that cannot be matched by any love between an unrelated couple. Furthermore, each incestuous union in the series is superior, eternal, and exaggerated by the author. The only downfall in these relationships is the inescapable, repeated loss of the perfect lover by an inevitable accident or death, which represents the author's unfortunate fall down the stairs and the developmental retardation it caused.

Andrews had a father who did not pass away until she was in her forties, and she describes her childhood as being ordinary. In *Flowers in the Attic* her protagonist's father is killed suddenly, but the biographical connection is not literal. It is an expression of a different kind of loss: the loss of her ability to walk. In *Faces of Fear* she describes her own perspective of her books and makes clear the tie between Cathy's father's sudden fatality in her first novel and her own fall down the stairs:

> The perfect life is the one in which we are the captain of our own ship, and we are the master of our fate—certainly that's the ideal way. And for a lucky few, the ship sails on without squalls, with our own hands at the helm; but life does get out of hand, accidents do happen, the wind does whip up and crash the waves, and death does strike before its time, and bad health does occur... (Winter174)

In the same sentence, Andrews mentions accidents, death, and bad health, drawing a parallel between them. The death of Cathy's father in the first chapter of *Flowers in the Attic* is a safe representation of the author's unforeseen accident. As the main character, Cathy, attempts to reclaim her father, with whom she shared a considerably intimate relationship, Andrews is grasping at the health she lost when she was a young girl. And, as Cathy's wishes are impossible to fulfill, so are the author's.

Andrews incorporates incestuous themes into the Dollanganger Series from the beginning to the end. The reader learns early in the first book that Corrine, Cathy's mother, was married to her half-uncle with whom she shared a deeply passionate relationship and had four children. The romance between Corrine and Christopher Dollanganger is not chastised by the author. Instead it is glorified. Not only are their children well-rounded, all-American boys and girls, they are considerably beautiful: "Just because we were all blond, flaxen haired, with fair complexions...Jim Johnston, Daddy's best friend, pinned on us a nickname, 'The Dresdon Dolls.' He said we looked like those fancy porcelain people who grace whatnot shelves and fireplace mantels" (*Flowers* 13). The appearance of the family members, as well as the fact that they look very much alike, is emphasized by the author a great deal as if to drive into the reader that the incestuous marriage of a woman and her half-uncle is anything but shameful.

Setting up the premise of beautiful incest is significant to the rest of the series because of the erotic adventures of Cathy throughout *Petals on the Wind* and her eventual marriage to her brother. There is also a strong implication that incestuous tendencies are in the genes of the Dollanganger children like their "flaxen" hair and symmetrical features. Cathy blames the sexual energy between Chris and herself on their inherited,

incestuous blood: “And so it had come to pass, just as the grandmother predicted. Devil's issue. Created by evil seed sown in the wrong soil, shooting up new plants to repeat the sins of the fathers. And the mothers” (*Flowers* 360). Adding the detail that incestuous tendencies are born within the Dollanganger children stabilizes the author's argument that there is nothing sinful about it, and she defends this ardently throughout the series.

Cathy has incestuous relationships with not one man, but three, each representing, stronger than the last, her biological father whom she lost when she was twelve years old. Paul Sheffield adopts her and her two siblings after they have virtually become orphans, Bart Winslow is her mother's husband, and Chris is not only her older brother but resembles her biological father to an extreme, even sharing his name. Therefore, the quest of Cathy in the first and second books of the series seems to be that of reuniting with her actual father, Christopher Dollanganger. However, every time she obtains one of these men he is taken away from her. Paul suffers a stroke at a fairly young age and spends his remaining years practically paralyzed, Bart dies in a massive fire and, finally, Chris is killed in a sudden car accident. This is the precise event that killed Cathy's father, reiterating her loss detail by detail and bringing all attention back to the primary loss of one, perfect man.

In the first chapter of *Flowers in the Attic* the reader is introduced to the Dollanganger family. Corrine and Christopher Dollanganger have two children, Cathy and Chris. Christopher Dollanganger is quickly described as being the charismatic glue that fills the family with an excess of love and affection. For Cathy, he is more like a romantic hero than a father: “Our father was perfect. He stood six feet two, weighed 180 pounds, and his hair was thick and flaxen blond, and waved just enough to be perfect”

(6). Twice the author uses the word “perfect” in this childlike description. Clearly, the reader is meant to understand immediately how wonderful this man is. Cathy continues, “his eyes were cerulean blue and they sparkled with laughter, with his great zest for living and having fun. His nose was straight and neither too long nor too narrow” (6). At this point in the story Cathy is a child, but her appreciation for her father goes beyond that of an eight-year-old girl. She considers his sensual personality and his gorgeous appearance first and foremost.

Cathy and her father's relationship resembles that of a more mature couple when she is eight and has discovered that her mother is pregnant with twins. Instead of feeling any excitement, she becomes terrified that the twins might be girls and therefore steal her father's affection: “Daddy would think only of mama, of Christopher, and those hateful babies that would displace me!” (9). Never does Cathy mention any fear of losing her mother's attention. She is only concerned for her relationship with her father. When she discusses these feelings with him the word “jealous” is mentioned by both of them. She cries that he will love another girl more than her. Her father responds by giving Cathy a ring and telling her, “'With this ring, I do vow to forever love my Cathy just a little bit more than any other daughter—as long as she never says that to anyone but herself'” (11). His consolation of his daughter sounds deliberately like a wedding vow, already blurring the lines between husband and father.

This ambiguous dialog between father and daughter is reminiscent of Freud's essay “Femininity” where he describes the young girl's fantasy: “It was only later that I was able to recognize in this fantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women” (149). With an alternative marriage ceremony,

Cathy is being courted—or seduced—cheerfully by her father. This seduction represents the connection between Cathy and her father that she does not share with anyone else in her family, including her mother. When he tells her that he vows to love her more than any other daughter, he makes a display of eternal, unconditional love. This is the “long and perfect summer day” wished for on the first page. Andrews creates the perfect man as Cathy's father and then has him killed pages later in a sudden car accident. As Cathy's perfect happiness is taken away by a sudden accident, so was Andrews's when she lost her ability to walk. As the author romanticizes her life before the fall, she writes Cathy's connection with her father as an ideal that cannot be matched even though Cathy tries to do so throughout her adulthood.

Almost immediately following her father's death, the Dollanganger household falls to ruin financially as well as emotionally. Corrine is not a proper mother anymore. The next thing the four children know, they are totally isolated from the outside world, stuck in an upstairs bedroom for the next three years, all the while being abused and slowly poisoned. In the course of two chapters the Dollanganger family transforms from the epitome of familial balance to complete devastation all because of the perfect father's death. Devlin describes the post-war perspective that supports this story line: “A successful Oedipal father-daughter relationship began to be viewed as the key to psychological health, and a diagnosis of 'Oedipal conflict' applied to a wide range of adolescent disturbances” (19).

Perhaps the popularization of Freud in the 1940's managed to take the original work out of context and present an “Oedipal Conflict” in terms that better suited that particular culture's ideals. For, as Freud makes clear in “Femininity,” the complex a girl

experiences for her father is based on penis envy, and the fantasy of fatherly seduction is based on this as well (156). This, perhaps misinterpreted, version of parental incest in the 1940's and 1950's is what is reflected in the Dollanganger Series, leading to the conclusion that when Andrews was writing her first novels, she was influenced by the popular culture of her young adulthood. That is another way she was reliving feelings of being young, vibrant and completely isolated.

Consistent with the concept of the destructive mother emphasized in modern America, Cathy Dollanganger's mother is drastically damaging to her children's emotional and physical growth to adulthood. It was the father who provided stability, health and happiness to his family. *Junior Miss*, a Broadway play about the bond between a father and daughter as she becomes a woman, was hugely popular in the early 1940's, when Andrews was in her late teens, a time when she was struggling through her surgeries and spending her young adulthood in hospitals. According to Devlin, *Junior Miss* is just one example of how innocent incest between father and daughter was emerging in popular culture during those years when patriarchy returned to the country. Andrews's unconscious decision to use that cultural trend as a metaphor for her disability while writing her novels in the 1980's serves as evidence that her creative process was still being dictated by her post-fall mindset.

With the ultimate importance of the biological father having been established, we may now understand the journey of Cathy Dollanganger as she attempts to fill the void in her development with father substitutes. First, she is drawn to her brother, who looks like their father and acts like him, but Cathy's first erotic experience is actually with her mother's newly-wed husband, Bart Winslow. Cathy first sees Bart up close in *Flowers in*

the Attic's chapter, “My Stepfather” when she is fifteen years old. She has gone from the attic to secretly steal valuables from her mother's room so that she and her siblings will have money to leave the maternal house forever. She finds Bart asleep in a chair, much the same way she eventually finds Paul. She is immediately attracted to her stepfather: “And no wonder she adored him, worshiped him—he was the kind of man any woman would want. Just to look at him so casually, elegantly sprawled, I guessed he was both tender and passionate when he made love to her” (345). Cathy's thoughts leap to his bedroom performance with her mother, and she has the impulse to kiss him. “Such a beautifully shaped mouth—sensual lips that must kiss my mother...everywhere...it came over me all of a sudden—the impulse to kiss him—just to see if the dark mustache tickled” (346).

Cathy's desire for her stepfather is presented as instinctual, and according to Devlin, an attraction to the mother's husband was considered a natural part growing up for a pubescent girl as early as the 1920's. This is not just because the father figure is the first man in a girl's life, but because a young female's healthy compulsion should be to strive away from the mother, objectifying the father in the process (28). This concept was introduced by Freud in the 1930's and was further developed by his colleague, Helene Deutsche, in her work *The Psychology of Women*, published in 1944 when Andrews was twenty. Andrews utilizes what was at the time a popular understanding of young girls in the presentation of her main character Cathy. The latter positively searches for the father-figure to aid in her transcendence from child to woman the same way the author searches for her portal to a regular, healthy life.

In *Petals on the Wind* Cathy is fifteen years old when she and her two remaining

siblings escape the dreaded, matriarchal household. It is not long before they find Paul Sheffield, a Southern doctor who they first see dozing domestically in a porch rocking chair. Paul lives alone in a house with plenty of bedrooms and allows the three children to stay with him for several weeks before asking to adopt them. In the chapter entitled "A New Home," Cathy describes their relationship with Paul: "We moved quietly into the doctor's home and into his life...He made it seem we were doing him a favor by relieving him of a dreary, lonely life by adding our youthful presence. He made us feel that *we* were being generous to share *his* life, and oh, we did want to believe in someone" (21).

With Paul playing the part of the single-parent, Cathy's life in *Petals on the Wind* becomes completely motherless and, despite her anger, this is portrayed as a positive part of her new life. This fits in with the traditional perspective that seems so pervasive in Andrews's writing. In "Femininity," for example, Freud points out that the natural path of the properly developing young girl is to reject the maternal figure: "This, as we know, is its usual fate; it is destined to make room for an attachment to her father" (426). The absence of a mother figure in the Dollanganger children's new home is striking. Henrietta Beech is Paul's housekeeper. She cooks and cleans the house and is said to have a special bond with the children, but significantly, "Henny" is African American and unable to speak. These details separate Henrietta from the new family and bar her from the role of wife or mother, thereby leaving a gap that is frequently mentioned by Paul and the children. This absence of a matriarch establishes a nonthreatening atmosphere in Paul's house and allows Cathy to develop into the consensual, erotic woman she desires to be.

Freud would agree that the most healthy way for Cathy to achieve the proper sexuality she desires is through a father figure, but, as *Relative Intimacy* explains, a

sexually physical relationship is not the goal of this father-daughter incest. The sensuality of the father figure and the fantasies of the daughter may remain unconscious so that the girl “will find her way from this paternal object to her final choice of an object” (Freud, 425). But Andrews writes Paul's sexuality as a flagrant, recognized part of himself and his house. Paul's easy-going, nurturing attitude is described alongside a long account of his backyard rose garden in which he displays his impressive art collection. “There were nude statues of men and women, placed at random, which lent to his gardens an atmosphere of seduction, of worldly sensuality...I knew that garden for what it was. For I'd been there before in my dreams” (29). Andrews foreshadows an intimate relationship between Cathy and the doctor immediately even as she develops him as an almost motherly replacement parent for the siblings. Andrews's concept of the father-daughter incest veers from the rules, making it clear that the thing it represented was far removed from literal incest.

In Andrews's interview with Winter she emphasizes how pleasant her childhood was by saying that she “had a lot of pretty clothes” (165). This is how she counters the concept of an abusive upbringing inspiring her novels. Parents buying their children clothing is an issue frequently returned to in the Dollanganger Series, especially in *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind*. For example, Corrine's abandonment is recognized first by Cathy when the clothing bought for her is too small, proving that she no longer cares about or knows her children. In *Petals on the Wind*, Paul takes the three children clothes-shopping, solidifying his role as parent. He advises Carrie about her color preferences: “'Darling, I adore blond girls with blue eyes in pastels, so why not wait until you're older to wear all those brilliant colors?'” (36). His erotic, fatherly gaze

becomes evident even in the way he speaks to the youngest Dollanganger girl. The line between this innocent incestuous manner and his actual seduction of Cathy is blurred by the author because either way Paul is represented as an admirable character and has willpower enough to keep himself from Cathy until she is seventeen.

Cathy and the doctor's affair is intense and punctuated by the fact that Paul does consider Cathy a child. Their attraction is consummated in the chapter entitled "A Birthday Gift." Cathy attempts to seduce Paul, and his answer reveals this: "'You're only a child. We can't let this happen. I swore I'd never let this happen, not with you'" (*Petals* 147). But their unity is inevitable and healthy. After the romance is established Paul continues to behave in a manner that combines the innocent incest of fatherhood with actual sex by bathing Cathy and washing her hair: "Like a young child I allowed him to dry me off and brush my hair, and do what he would with kisses and caresses, until the embers always ready between us caught fire and he picked me up and carried me to his bed"(154). This type of interaction with Paul is a completion for Cathy. It is what she missed with her father. But just as Andrews cannot return to the completeness of her childhood, Cathy is not allowed to keep her fulfilling connection with her adoptive father.

Paul is a father figure while Cathy is young, but after she goes to New York to dance professionally he becomes only a lover, and the relationship must end. Cathy leaves Paul after discovering that his wife, Julia, is not dead but in a mental institution, and she is still his legal wife. This reference to *Jane Eyre* is disclosed by Paul's sister, Amanda. Again, matriarchy ruins Cathy's hopes of a "long and perfect summer day," and she is driven to marry her dance partner, Julian. This marriage never comes close to

giving Cathy the perfect unity of an incestuous relationship, and when Julian dies Cathy goes on to plot the seduction of her mother's husband, Bart Winslow, whom she has thought about continually since she escaped the attic.

Cathy's unity with Bart begins as a selfish, albeit understandable, strike of vengeance against the mother who tried to keep her from becoming a woman, but it quickly grows into a much deeper connection. As her mother's husband, Bart Winslow is a closer representation of Cathy's biological father than Paul simply because of his intimacy with her mother. Andrews creates a struggle between Cathy and her stepfather that is caused by Corrine's possession of him. Despite his true desire for Cathy, Bart refuses to marry her based on his devotion to Corrine who, he claims, depends on him emotionally. However, once Cathy's secret abuse is made known to him, Bart changes his mind: "'You have lifted the blinders from my eyes, Cathy. You were right. Certainly I was meant for better things than this" (426). When Bart rejects the mother to marry the daughter, it mirrors Cathy's childhood wedding vows to her biological father, and this is Cathy's triumph: winning her stepfather for herself, thereby completing herself and punishing her mother. Of course, true completeness is not allowed because the original death of the father cannot be undone.

Much like Cathy's biological father, Bart Winslow is killed in an accident. Foxworth Hall catches fire during a Christmas party, and Bart dies trying to rescue the evil grandmother who is unable to walk. His death is noble and unexpected and leaves Cathy, again, incomplete. Cathy then returns to Paul Sheffield and marries him, but still is unable to resolve her Oedipal conflict because he has had a debilitating stroke and is unable to make love to her. She marries him to take care of him and pity him. It is not

until Paul passes away, an old man in a rocking chair, that Cathy finally becomes her brother's wife and is able to possess the person who is more like her father physically and personally than any other man she has been with. Their relationship is passionate and accented by the guilt of secrecy, but at last Cathy feels secure. The reader is reminded that true incest is completion. “Chris had a lover's way of looking at me,” she reflects in *Seeds of Yesterday,* “of reaching to caress my cheek with the back of his hand, brushing my hair with his fingertips, kissing my neck and in all ways touching me deeply with his abiding love” (171). Like their parents' relationship, Chris and Cathy's is superior to the average married couple's, the final example of beautiful incest.

When Chris is killed it is in the exact manner of his father, Cathy's first reaction is to say, “Not Chris, not my Christopher Doll. No, not yet, not yet” (*Seeds* 400). She cries out as if she has known all along that it was going to happen, but she had not known when until now. It is significant that Cathy expects her brother to eventually die in an accident because it communicates the author's understanding that this completeness is not a permanent situation. As Andrews states: “...accidents do happen, the wind does whip up and crash the waves, and death does strike before its time. (174)” Unable to write her own experience of incompleteness due to the loss of mobility and childhood aspirations, Andrews wrote about Cathy, who loses a perfect, fulfilling father and spends the rest of her life searching for the beautiful incest that will make her whole again.

The incest in the Dollanganger Series is blatant and problematic because of its ambiguous context. This incest is sexual and innocent simultaneously, and it is glorified. According to Champagne, while incestuous fantasies might be somewhat normal, there are real boundaries: “What happens, then, when a parent transgresses in a child's sexual

fantasy? A seductive daughter may desire her father, but she does not 'want it.' ... because the unconscious cannot say no, incest, especially when desired by the child, cannot be confused with consent" (145). While Champagne explains incest as a potential trauma, Devlin analyzes the concept of wholesome incest that does not include physical sex. Andrews introduces a type of incest in her books that incorporates all of this sans the trauma, and here is the proof that it represents a theme entirely separate from real, incestuous intimacy. After all, the only relationship Andrews does discuss in her interview with Winter is the one between her mother and herself.

CHAPTER V

THE BEARER OF LIFE AND DEATH:

MOTHER DAUGHTER RIVALRY IN THE DOLLANGANGER SERIES

In Andrews's interview with Winter she describes her parents' treatment of her during her childhood: “A lot of people think I was tortured, but my parents didn't do anything. They didn't beat me. They didn't whip me. They didn't lock me away. I didn't even go hungry” (165). After her accident and the following arthritis that ultimately bound her to a wheelchair, Andrews continued to live with her parents, William Henry Andrews and Lilian Lilnora Andrews. During this time she received her degree, managed a successful art career and was even pronounced Norfolk, Virginia's Professional Woman of the Year in 1984 (Huntley 7). Her father passed away when Andrews was in her early forties, and she continued to depend physically on her mother as they moved from Virginia to Missouri. According to Huntley the pair made another move soon after, this time to Arizona.

Andrews began publishing her famous novels in 1979 and was finally able to do some traveling as she had always wanted to do. However, her mother was never far from her, and in the 1980s Andrews's “new wealth enabled her to build for herself and her mother a spacious home on a wooded lot overlooking Lynnhaven Bay in Virginia Beach, and she hired a nurse to accompany her when she traveled” (Huntley 6). Andrews had a

personal nurse and the financial ability to be independent in her forties and fifties, but until her death in 1986 her mother was still close at her side.

In 1985 Mrs. Andrews opened the door for Douglas E. Winter when he arrived at her daughter's home for the interview that would appear in his book *Faces of Fear*. He asks, “What do [reporters] feel when her mother greets them at the door? 'Shock. How could such a sweet lady do all of those awful things?'” (165). The “awful things” Andrews is referring to are the many instances of emotional, physical and psychological abuse by mother figures described in *Flowers in the Attic* and the constant jealous rivalry between the series' protagonist and her vain, irresponsible mother. In reality, Andrews's mother was her lifelong companion and caretaker while in the Dollanganger Series, Corrine Foxworth abandons her children entirely in order to pursue wealth and luxury. Although Andrews claims in her interview that her novels are not autobiographical, mother daughter conflicts are betrayed by Andrews as she describes her life and the inspiration for her first series.

Throughout the interview Andrews comments about feelings of control and lack thereof: “Unfortunately, the people most likely to be caught in circumstances beyond their control are children. Children, out of necessity, live on faith: faith in mommy and daddy, in grandparents...So many to trust – and so many who can betray” (Winter 173). She then states that the real fear children have is, “the fear of being helpless, the fear of being trapped, the fear of being out of control” (Winter 173). In a significant way, Andrews lived her life without control, and a great deal of control was given to her mother. Although she is quick to discourage suspicions that her parents abused her, she claims that families can be a real source of pain: “My books also offer more of an honest

viewpoint about families and the conflicts within them. I think families can be about the most destructive element in your life" (Winter 171).

In these comments emerges a contradiction. Families are a source of pain and constriction, yet Andrews chose to remain close by her mother through her adult life. Helplessness and parental betrayal, she claims, are sources of great fear, but she is quick to explain that her mother never abused her and certainly never abandoned her. Furthermore, in the Dollanganger Series, Cathy is rejected continuously by her mother and tortured by her grandmother. Clearly there are deeper feelings of helplessness and resentment that Andrews expresses in her novels, but which she does not address directly in her interview. However, a closer reading of her indirect references to her relationship with Mrs. Andrews is revealing.

There are several instances during her interview with Winter in which Andrews separates herself from her mother: first, with her views on religion. She explains that when she was young her maternal grandfather was a very passionate Baptist and strongly encouraged his family to attend church regularly: "...my mother fell under his control, and he insisted that everybody go to church on Sunday morning and Sunday night and on Wednesday, and she resented it. She didn't want to go. And she didn't go, but she made me go" (167). This emphasis on the detail that her mother did not go, but she made her daughter go becomes significant when considering Andrews's religious perspective of adulthood: "I think I have a freewheeling religion all my own. I have all kinds of beliefs" (167). This freedom of spirituality is perhaps a reaction to having been encouraged as a young person to accept a more structured doctrine.

This act of rebellion against her family is focused particularly on a distinction

between herself and her mother: “I happen to believe in reincarnation. And I know I'm an old soul. I tell my mother she's a new soul” (167). In her comment about new and old souls she is specifically separating herself from her mother by claiming they come from two different times, and placing her soul's origin in an older time may also represent a rivalry, as it establishes her soul as wiser than her mother's. This might also reveal a desire for role reversal.

As Winter recounts in his book, after Andrews became a popular writer she was able to travel and claim a bit of freedom, albeit always returning to the home she shared with her mother. Social interaction was apparently very important to her in her later years after a young adulthood that was overshadowed by pain and loneliness. Until her death her mother was her companion, but according to Andrews's words, the two did not share the same social needs. This is another way Andrews separates herself from her mother and grasps at an identity independent of her:

> I know my mother...needs family, but she doesn't really need other people. I feel I do. Family sometimes are so close to you; they are opinionated. When you break the pattern they've fixed in their minds as to what you are, they are disbelieving. But you don't have to face that with other friends and outsiders and people that you meet. (171)

Andrews seems to hold feelings of resentment about her family's control over her and their opinions of her. This becomes especially meaningful when she discusses the development of her writing career and creative projects.

Andrews claims that when she was young she was encouraged by teachers and her mother to pursue art. The explanation Andrews gives as to why her mother prefers

the visual arts is significant: “Mother enjoyed my artwork; there, she could see what I was doing. Now, when I'm typing or writing on the computer, she can't see a thing” (Winter168). Andrews is clearly stating that, even as an adult, she feels her mother wants to somehow manage what she does with her time and how she expresses herself. Considering that Andrews was always a highly creative individual, it is significant to consider that her mother's watchfulness as well as her opinions were always issues for her.

Mothers in the Dollanganger Series and particularly in *Flowers in the Attic* represent extreme control and misunderstanding. Corrine Foxworth imprisons her children and forgets them out of selfishness. The grandmother enforces irrational regulations and fierce judgment on Cathy and her three siblings when all they want is to be free to grow up like normal teenagers. Throughout each book there is a deeply rooted fear in the protagonist that she will eventually grow into her mother. As a result she strives to separate herself from Corrine, all the while desiring vengeance. This desire to distance her personality from that of her mother is what Andrews does again and again in her interview. Her fear of maternal control is what Cathy experiences as a young girl trapped in her grandmother's house.

In the exposition of *Flowers in the Attic*, Corrine Dollanganger is described as a loving, beautiful wife and mother. Her relationship with her husband is phenomenally passionate, and her interactions with her children are nurturing. However, when her husband, Christopher, is killed in a sudden accident everything changes immediately. First, it is depression. Cathy describes her mother as “...someone who didn't want to talk, or eat or brush her hair, or put on the pretty clothes that filled her closet[.] Nor did she

want to attend to our needs" (22). This foreshadows what will ultimately happen to Corrine. Somehow, the sudden accident that killed her husband also destroyed her will to be a proper mother. Corrine is so incapable of making money or supporting her children in any way that she takes them to her parents' large mansion where they are locked away. Corrine claims that if she were to disclose the fact that she has children, her hopes of inheriting her father's estate and money would be lost. For the first year she visits them, brings them presents and food and spends time with them. However, it eventually becomes obvious, especially to Cathy, that Corrine has lost interest in her offspring all together. A mother that abandons her daughter does not reflect Andrews's experience, but may represent the fears she expresses in her interview of being betrayed.

Another fear Andrews discusses is that of being controlled. This is portrayed in her novels by a second matriarch. When Cathy arrives at Foxworth Hall she is confronted by her grandmother, who is vastly different from Corrine. It is difficult to ignore the absence of a patriarch throughout the children's three year entrapment in the attic of Foxworth Hall. Even though they are told continually that it is their grandfather who ultimately has the power over their situation, he is never seen by the children, and when the full story is told his influence becomes very questionable. The chapter in which the children are first introduced to the rules in their prison-like home is entitled, "The Grandmother's House," suggesting that all control in this house is embodied in her. Her description drastically contrasts that of the other women in the series:

> Her hair was a strong, steel-blue color, drawn back from her face in a severe style which made her eyes appear somewhat long and cat-like...Her nose was an eagle's beak, her shoulders were wide, and her mouth was like a thin, crooked

> knife slash. Her dress, of gray taffeta, had a diamond brooch at the throat of a high, severe neckline. (*Flowers* 44)

The adjectives in this portrait of the grandmother are somewhat repetitive. The terms "strong," "steel-blue" and twice the word "severe" are used by the author in order to convince the reader of this character's lack of femininity and even of humanity. Andrews solidifies it by saying finally, "Nothing about her appeared soft or yielding; even her bosom looked like twin hills of concrete." As her description is architectural, Cathy's grandmother seems to represent imprisonment itself.

The grandmother does not only attempt to control the children by isolating them physically. She also does her best to stifle them sexually and creatively by giving them a list of twenty-one bizarre rules. These rules include how they should eat, sleep, and dress, but more importantly, how they should think and what they should read: "Eleven: you will not allow wicked, sinful, or lusting thoughts to dwell in your minds. You will keep your thoughts clean, pure, and away from wicked subjects that will corrupt you morally" (*Flowers* 60). As Andrews stated in her interview, she considered the most terrifying part of life to be helplessness and lack of control. Cathy, Chris, Cory and Carrie are trapped in a room where all they can do to keep occupied is be creative. However, their very thoughts are being constricted by guilt.

The conclusion of the grandmother's rules is revealing:

> I am a very observant woman who misses nothing. Do not think you can deceive me, mock me, or play jokes at my expense, for if you do, your punishment will be so severe that your skins, and your egos, will bear lifetime scares, and your pride will go down in permanent defeat. (63)

Her references to egos and pride seems somewhat too mature to be included in a warning for children because it strays so far from physical punishment and into the very adult realm of personal validation. To Andrews, this is an element of terror. After her accident she was trapped in her mother's house with only her imagination and her hobbies to keep her busy. Fears of being controlled or watched by her mother are represented by the grandmother and her stringent rules.

Throughout Andrews's adulthood in her mother's house she loved writing, but tried not to write the sort of things that would offend her mother. After being told that her writings would sell if they were more provocative, Andrews decided to add more sex and controversy to her novels despite what her mother might think: “So once I brushed her off my shoulder and got gutsy enough, I sold. I decided that I would have to be embarrassed and write these things. That's how simple it was. Now I don't feel embarrassed at all” (Winter170). At this point Andrews is a fully grown woman but still somewhat controlled by her mother's opinions. Writing the Dollanganger Series is a way in which Andrews is pushing herself creatively away from her mother. Winter describes Andrews's secretive writing: “She began working at night—a 'closet writer,' hiding her work from her mother” (169). Although Andrews and her mother lived together for many decades, there is a clear resentment present, and Andrews took pleasure in writing all of those things that her mother would not approve of.

It is significant that Andrews introduces two mothers in Cathy's life where there is no father. In Julia Kristeva's work *The Black Sun*, she explains her theory of the death-bearing mother. This mother is both possessive of the daughter and careless: “Such a mother, who is imagined as indispensable, fulfilling, intrusive, is for that very reason

death-bearing: she devitalizes her daughter and leaves her no way out" (78). The description of the "fulfilling, intrusive" mother may be representative of Andrews's mother-story. Mrs. Andrews was needed by her daughter even as her observation was resented. Kristeva explains further the feminine fear of being "abandoned, neglected, or misunderstood by the mother" (79). The destructive mother who is both neglectful and intrusive is present in The Dollanganger Series, but is represented by two vastly different characters.

The first matriarch slowly abandons her children and fails more and more to grasp Cathy's maturing needs. Mysteriously, she loses all interest in her children to the extent that she allows them to be poisoned. This mother is beautiful, charming and capable of being admired by the child Cathy. The second mother contrasts this sharply. She is ugly and unfamiliar to the protagonist. More importantly, her crime is not neglect of the children. It is brutal possession, control and constant observation of them. Both portraits of maternity are despised by the protagonist. Kristeva explains the destruction of the death-bearing mother as a triumph: "Within feminine fantasy such a jouissance assumed as triumph over the death-bearing mother, in order for the interior to become a source of rewards..." (79).

In The Dollanganger Series it becomes Cathy's mission to have revenge against her two death-bearing mothers. In *Petals on the Wind*, Cathy and her remaining siblings have escaped from the maternal household and proceed to pursue the creative and sexual goals they set for themselves. While Chris and Carrie do not think about punishing their mother, Cathy makes elaborate life changes in order to hurt Corrine as well as the. grandmother. In the chapter "The Time for Vengeance," Cathy explains her need to

punish the matriarchs as “some unfinished business” (*Petals* 339). Then her plan to steal her mother's husband becomes clear: “At night I went on the prowl, looking, of course, for one particular man. So far he had eluded me, but sooner or later fate would see that we met—God help you then, Momma!” (339). The daughter's plan to possess the mother's husband strongly suggests a desire to steal her role.

Cathy soon succeeds in beginning an affair with her stepfather, and then she turns her sights on the grandmother, who is now unable to walk or speak. Therefore, the former powerful matriarch is now the isolated. This, Cathy reflects, is “the sweet irony of it” (381). In the chapter “The Grandmother Revisited,” Cathy is a grown woman with a small son. She breaks into Foxworth Hall one night knowing the grandmother is alone and unprotected. Dressed in a white ballet costume and carrying a weapon made from her dead sister's hair, Cathy bursts in on her bedridden grandmother with the intentions of physically beating her and explaining her anger: “'I hate you for making of me what I am!' I wanted to feed her arsenic by the handfuls and sit to watch her die and rot before my eyes...I pirouetted around the room to release my frustrations, lashing my legs, showing off my fine young body...” (385).

Cathy's compulsion to ballet dance in front of her paralyzed grandmother is revealing. While at one point this old woman had totally controlled Cathy and the other children, now she is impotent. She is forced to use a wheelchair as Andrews was for the majority of her life. Furthermore, her ability to speak and express herself has been taken away, making it impossible for her to even yell for help as she is berated by her angry granddaughter. This role reversal is poignant when considering the author's situation and her fear of being helpless. When Andrews places the maternal figure in the wheelchair

and, in this particular chapter, in bed while she is punished is wish fulfillment. When Cathy prances about with her hair down and wears a leotard “sheer enough to let the pink of my skin show through” (381) perhaps she is portraying Andrews's fantasy of not only having control over the maternal figure, but of having complete control over her own body.

Cathy does not stop at verbally punishing her grandmother: “Naked. She had to be stripped...She had to suffer through the humiliation of being without clothes while contemptuous eyes made her shrivel even smaller” (387). After the grandmother is laying silent and unmoving and now nude in her bed, Cathy turns her over and says, “I'm going to whip you now, Grandmother...I promised a long time ago I was going to do this if ever I had the chance and so I will do it!” (388). Having made her intentions clear, Cathy hits her grandmother across her posterior with the whip she made out of Carrie's long hair. A final literal blow that moves the matriarch from a place of authority to that of the child.

Despite her anger and the cruelty Cathy exacts on her grandmother, ultimately she is unable to act without remorse. After wounding her victim with the hair whip, she is immediately gripped by guilt and weeps as she cleans the old woman: “I couldn't do to her what she'd done to us. I was a Foxworth twice over, and yet God had changed the mold so I didn't fit” (389). Here, Andrews indicates clearly that there is a separation between Cathy and her two evil mothers. Even though she has refused to forgive them she is simply too different from them to be able to reenact their sins. This may be another wish of the author being written into her novel. Andrews does not want to be like her mother and is distinguishing herself by writing. Cathy's character is softened by the fact that she does not harm the grandmother any more than she does, but neither of the

wicked matriarchs goes unpunished by the author.

In the finale of *Petals on the Wind*, Cathy appears at her mother's annual Christmas party where she discloses to the guests who she is and that Corrine Foxworth has been lying for eighteen years about being childless. Just after Corrine admits to her crimes and begins a descent into madness, a fire begins suddenly: “They took her away in a straitjacket, still screaming of how I had betrayed her...” (429) Meanwhile, the grandmother dies silently in the house, having not been able to escape the fire with everyone else. In this way Andrews creates the fantasy of triumphant destruction of the death-bearing mother while allowing her protagonist to be totally innocent of her death.

Corrine receives her comeuppance as well, as she loses her sanity, her beauty and especially her freedom when she is locked away in a mental institution. Even though Cathy is somewhat responsible for her mother's madness and imprisonment, she cannot be blamed because she was only a victim voicing crimes committed against her. Furthermore, she and Chris continue to visit their destructive mother once a year in her cell. Now Corrine is isolated instead of Cathy and reacts to this role reversal by lashing out against the defiant daughter. Cathy innocently explains:

> Usually she screams when she sees me. Then she jumps up and tries to tear the hair from my head. When she is restrained, she turns the hatred upon herself, trying time after time to mutilate her face, and free herself of any resemblance to me...remorse has made her something terrible to see. And once she had been so very beautiful. (437)

It is important to note that as Corrine is locked away alone, she begins to despise her appearance. Throughout *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals on the Wind* Cathy resents her

resemblance to Corrine, as external similarities represent internal ones. The daughter Cathy is a copy of Corrine. When Corrine is dealt the role of prisoner she also attempts to distance herself physically from Cathy because she has now become the copy.

The final entrapment of the mother is wish fulfillment for Cathy as well as the author who struggled with a physical weakness that left her with feelings of incompleteness. When Cathy obtains the role of matriarch over her own mother who is now a copy of her, she has been completed, even marrying the man who, more than any other man, resembles her father. In the last book of the series Foxworth Hall, which was once referred to as "The Grandmother's House" is rebuilt and Cathy possesses it. Her ascent to power and matriarchy is symbolic of the author's desire to turn from the disabled to the able. Therefore, it is significant when in *If There be Thorns* and *Seeds of Yesterday* Cathy is the mother and even takes on the role of caregiver when her own son becomes crippled from the waist down in an unexpected collapse of his stage set.

Andrews does not want to give her disability a name and tells Winter that she was bothered when a reporter called her "paralyzed" in an article. However, in *Seeds of Yesterday*, Cathy does not hesitate to refer to Jory as crippled. "So you're crippled and you'll have to sit in a wheelchair until you can manage crutches... So you're feeling sorry for yourself, and wondering how you can go on" (130). She voices his feelings when he refuses to speak, and she feeds him when he will not eat. Cathy is experiencing the other side of disability as the caregiving mother. It is possible that Cathy is not only speaking for the forlorn Jory, but for the author. Just as Cathy represented Andrews in *Flowers in the Attic*, expressing the author's feelings of anger and isolation, Cathy portrays a fantasy in *Seeds of Yesterday* as a physically able matriarch.

Andrews lived her life under the care and the watch of her mother. When she wrote the series that made her famous it was, in a certain sense, an act of rebellion, and when Winter asks what Mrs. Andrews thinks of her daughter's famously provocative novels, the answer is, “She doesn't read it. She tells me she hears so much about it that she doesn't need to” (Winter 171). Mrs. Andrews's disregard perhaps hints at her own resentment at having been rebelled against, and makes it impossible for Andrews's desires for triumph to be validated. Triumph over the death-bearing mother can only exist in the form of her protagonist Cathy who succeeds in destroying her stifling and abandoning mothers. In this rise to power is the author's fantasy of transforming from the invalid to the empowered and the complete.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Angela H. Rice was born in San Bernardino, California in 1984. She is the second daughter of parents Steve and Gayle Rice. In 1989 her family moved to Edinburg, TX where she was home-schooled by her mother until the age of eleven. At that age she began attending Teacher's Academy where she graduated in 2002. In the fall of that year she began undergraduate work at the University of Pan American.

While obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in English and a Minor in Sociology, Rice published several works of fiction in the university's yearly magazine, *The Gallery*. She also contributed to other local publications such as *Lost*.

In 2007 Rice began her graduate career in Literature and Cultural Studies. During this time she tutored English and History at South Texas College, managed a local office supplies and engraving store, worked as a cashier at a liquor store and began teaching English as a Second Language at South Texas College. She enjoys teaching and would like to continue her education with a Ph.D.