



Web of Dreams (Casteel Book 5)

By V.C. Andrews

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But the pure devotion of Luke Casteel promised her hope and respect. Only Luke knew her deepest of secrets...only Luke would love and protect her. Bravely she bore the suspicions of the Willies' hillfolk, as she tried to grasp the happiness that had so long eluded her. Leigh prayed with all her heart that her bright, shining dreams would save her from tragedy at last...

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Editorial Review

Review

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

About the Author

One of the most popular authors of all time, V.C. Andrews has been a bestselling phenomenon since the publication of *Flowers in the Attic*, first in the renowned Dollanganger family series which includes *Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*, and *Garden of Shadows*. The family saga continues with *Christopher's Diary: Secrets of Foxworth*, *Christopher's Diary: Echoes of Dollanganger*, and *Secret Brother*. V.C. Andrews has written more than seventy novels, which have sold more than 106 million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAAndrews).

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Prologue

Luke and I pass through the tall wrought-iron gates that spell out FARTHINGGALE MANOR. Patches of rust have broken out along the letters like a skin rash and the pounding of sea storms and winter winds have bent the gates back. Now they lean against the somber gray skies and the great house itself looks oppressed, weighed down by time and the heavy and bleak history that lives in its hallways and grand rooms. There are a few employees kept on to look after the house and grounds, but no one really checks on their work and they do relatively little to keep things up.

Luke squeezes my hand. It has been years, centuries, it seems, since we have been here. The dismal skies are appropriate for our arrival, for this is not a nostalgic journey. We would rather not remember my stay here, my imprisonment I should say, after the dreadful accident that took my parents' lives.

But our journey is sadder yet. The funeral air is correct. We have come to bury my real father, to put Troy Tatterton finally to rest alongside his true love, my mother, Heaven.

He had remained in his little cottage all these years, continuing his intricate artistic work on the wonderful Tatterton Toys, leaving only for special occasions like the births of my children. But whenever he visited us, no matter what the occasion, he could never stay away from Farthingale long. Something always called him back.

Now he will never leave.

Even though the great house looms forever in my nightmares, and the memories of those tortured days remain remarkably vivid still, once I took upon this grand estate, I understand why Troy had the need to return. Even I, who have every reason not to, feel a need to reenter the house and walk through its long corridors, up its great stairway to view the room that had been my cell.

Luke doesn't want me to go inside.

"Annie," he says, "it's not necessary. We'll wait for the burial ceremony to start and greet whoever there is to greet outside."

But I can't help myself. Something draws me on.

I don't enter what was my bedroom. There are cobwebs everywhere and everywhere there is dust and grime. Curtains are faded and hang loose. Linens look stained, dirty.

I shake my head and walk on, pausing at Jillian's suite, the famous suite Tony had kept up with a fanatical urgency, refusing to face up to Jillian's passing and all that had gone with it. The suite has always intrigued me. It intrigues me now. I walk in, look up at the mirrors without their glass, gaze at the clothing still draped over chairs, the toiletries still on the vanity table. I pass it all, slowly, moving like one through a dream, the air like gauze.

And then I stop at Jillian's desk. I do not know why I do, but perhaps it's because the drawer is slightly open. Everything about this suite intrigues me and I wonder if there is something in that drawer that Jillian might have written during her days of madness.

Curiosity takes hold of me and I open the drawer. I blow away the dust and peer inside to see blank paper, pens and ink. Nothing unusual I think and then I spot the cloth bag toward the rear of the drawer and reach in.

There's a book in it. I take it out slowly.

LEIGH'S BOOK, it says on the front. I hold my breath. It is my grandmother's diary. I open to the first page and find myself falling back through time.

Chapter 1: Leigh's Book of Memories

I think it first started with a dream. No, not a dream, but more of a nightmare. In it I was standing with my parents -- I don't know where. They were talking with each other and sometimes they would turn and say something to me. The only thing was, whenever I tried to talk to them, they seemed unable to hear me. As I kept trying to get into their conversation I reached up to push my hair back. Yet instead of my hair falling into place, I was horrified to discover a large clump of hair falling into my hand. Again and again I pushed back at my hair and each time I did another clump of my hair came free. I stared, horrified, at the large strands of hair in my hand. What was going on? Suddenly, a mirror appeared before me and in it I could see my image. I choked back a scream. My beautiful cashmere sweater was filled with holes and my skirt was torn and dirty. Then, before my already disbelieving eyes, I watched my features bloat. As I became fatter and fatter I started to cry. A trail of tears streamed down my smudged cheeks. I tore my eyes from my ugly image and turned to my parents, screaming for their help. My screams reverberated and bounced off the walls. Yet my parents did nothing. Why wouldn't they help me?

I couldn't stop screaming. Finally, when I thought my voice was gone and I was unable to utter a sound, they turned to me. Looks of astonishment broke across their faces. I wanted to call to Daddy...to have him cover me with hugs and kisses...to protect me as he always had...but before I could open my mouth, a look of disgust came over his face! I cringed in horror and then he disappeared. Only Momma remained. At least, I thought it was Momma. This stranger looked exactly like her...except for her eyes. Her eyes were so cold!

Cold and calculating...empty of the love and warmth I saw daily. Where had it gone? Why was she looking at me this way? My beautiful momma would never look at me with such hatred. Yes, hatred...and jealousy! My momma wouldn't fail to help me in my most desperate moment. Yet she did nothing. First, a look of disgust, identical to the look Daddy had given me, appeared. Soon it was replaced by a smirk...a smirk of satisfaction. And then she turned her back on me...starting to walk away...leaving...leaving me alone in the darkness.

Somehow I found my voice and cried for her help. But she only kept walking, becoming smaller and smaller. I tried to follow, but was unable to move. Then I turned back to my image and before I could blink an eye, the mirror shattered and shards of glass came directly at my face.

With my last bit of strength I screamed, raising my hands to shield my face as I kept screaming and screaming.

When I awoke I was still screaming and my heart was beating furiously. For a moment I couldn't figure out where I was. Then, as the familiar surroundings of my bedroom came into view, I remembered. I was home in my bedroom in Boston. Today was my birthday. My twelfth birthday. Glad to be out of my awful dream, I put my fears behind me and pushed away the images that had terrified me only seconds ago. I headed downstairs with only thoughts of the day ahead.

On my twelfth birthday, I opened what would be my most precious gift: this book for memories. At the last moment, Daddy slipped it into the small mountain of wonderful and expensive gifts he and Momma had bought me. I knew he had put it there himself after Momma had arranged everything because she was just as curious about it as I was. Daddy usually left the buying of gifts completely in Momma's hands, just as he left her in charge of buying things for the house and buying all my clothes because he admittedly knew absolutely nothing when it came to fashions. He said Momma was an artist, so she would know better about color coordinations and designs, but I think he was just happy not to have to go to department stores and clothing stores.

On a few occasions when I was younger, Daddy brought me models of his steamships, but Momma thought those were silly gifts for a little girl, especially the one that you took apart to learn about the workings of the engine. But I couldn't help being intrigued and very interested and played with it all the time, except when Momma was around.

Everything was stacked on one side of the dining room table at breakfast, just as it always had been on every birthday I could remember. I had woken early, of course, because of the dream. Birthday mornings were usually like Christmas mornings to me, although this morning I was still a little upset by the nightmare, and now I tried hard to forget its scariness.

Daddy had the surprise gift wrapped in light pink paper with birthday candles painted in dark blue that spelled out HAPPY BIRTHDAY all over it. Just knowing he had bought it for me all by himself made it the most important gift there. I tried not to rip the paper as I unwrapped it. I loved saving things like that, mementos of all my special occasions: the candles from my tenth birthday cake, the one that was so big it took both Clarence the butler and Svenson the cook to carry it into the dining room; the candy angel on the top of the four-foot Christmas tree Momma bought to have placed in my playroom when I was only five; tickets from the circus Daddy took me to when it came to Boston last year, a play program from the Punch and Judy puppet show at the museum Momma and I went to when I was seven, and dozens of odds and ends like buttons and pins and even old shoe laces. So Daddy already knew that memories were precious to me.

I took the book out slowly and ran the tips of my fingers over the cover, over my name. I just loved the feel of the buttersoft, rose-colored leather cover with the gilded edging, and I especially loved seeing my name in print written like the title of a book: LEIGH'S BOOK.

I looked up with excitement. Daddy, already dressed in his dark gray three-piece suit and tie, stood back smiling, standing there the way he usually stood with his hands clasped behind his back, rocking on his heels like an old sea captain. Usually, Momma made him stop, claiming it made her nervous. Because Daddy was the owner of a big luxury ocean liner company and was on one ship or another so often, he said he spent more time on the water than on the land and he was used to rocking.

"What is that?" Momma asked when I opened the cover to blank page after blank page.

"I call it a logbook," Daddy said and winked at me. "Captain's log. Keep track of the major events. Memories are more precious than jewels," Daddy said.

"It's just a diary," Momma said shaking her head. "Logbook. She's a little girl, not a sailor."

Daddy winked at me again. Momma had bought me so many very expensive things, I knew I should pay more attention to them, but I clutched the book called LEIGH'S BOOK to my heart and got up quickly to kiss Daddy thank you. He knelt down and I kissed him on his rosy cheek just above his gray beard, and his shimmering rust-brown eyes brightened. Momma claimed Daddy was on one or another of his ships or at the ocean so much, his skin tasted salty, but I never tasted it whenever I kissed him.

"Thank you, Daddy," I whispered. "I'll write about you all the time."

There were so many things to write down, so many private and precious thoughts, I couldn't wait to do it. But Momma was anxious for me to unwrap the other gifts. There were a dozen cashmere sweaters in a variety of pinks and blues and greens, each with a matching pencil slim skirt, the skirt Momma said everyone was wearing even though they were so narrow you couldn't walk very quickly in them. There were silk blouses and gold hoop earrings and a matching bracelet splattered with diamond flecks from Tiffany's. There was Chanel perfume and scented soaps, as well as a pearl comb and brush set.

And lipstick! I was finally going to be able to wear it, lightly of course, and only on special occasions. But I had my very own. Momma always promised she would show me how to wear makeup correctly when the time came.

There was one package she said I couldn't open now. It had to wait until we were alone, later.

"Girl business," she said eyeing my father. She thought it was horrible of him to rush off to his office on my birthday morning, but he said he could spend the rest of the day with me and then take Momma and me to dinner, so I forgave him. There was always one sort of crisis or another for him these days. He blamed it on commercial jet airline travel that was increasingly cutting into the luxury ocean liner business. Momma always criticized him for how much time he spent working, and this all made it worse.

Although we had gone on many trips, she claimed we were like shoemakers without shoes because we didn't go on the trips she wanted.

"My husband's in the vacation travel business and we rarely vacation. We have to check out new routes or new ships, rather than enjoy the way we should," she complained, sometimes bitterly.

I knew my last big package had something to do with all this because she said she bought what was in it, hoping I would have an opportunity to use it, and then she scowled at Daddy and said, "I still haven't had an opportunity to use mine."

I tore open the package quickly and opened the box. It was a skiing outfit: a heavy cashmere sweater and tailored ski trousers with a matching Italian silk blouse. Many times during the summer, Momma had voiced her desire to go for a winter holiday to St. Moritz and stay at the Palace Hotel, "where all the best of society stopped." It was a beautiful outfit.

I looked over all my wonderful presents, squealed with delight and hugged her. She vowed she was always going to make sure I would have better birthdays than she had when she was growing up in Texas. Even though her family wasn't poor, she said her mother, my grandma Jana, was as austere as a Puritan minister. She had told me over and over the sad story of how she wasn't even allowed to have a doll when she was a little girl, and she said her sisters, both older, were just like her mother because they were both so plain looking, they didn't care about being feminine and having dainty and beautiful things.

Aunt Peggy and Aunt Beatrice really were as ugly as the wicked witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. We didn't see them very often, but whenever we did, I hated the way they gaped at me through their thick-rimmed spectacles. Both wore the same ugly black-frame glasses that magnified their dull brown eyes, making them look like frogs. The way Momma always clumped them together when she spoke about them made me think of them as twins. They did have identical shapes. "Ironing boards," Momma called them. She said Grandma Jana found them husbands, spineless homely men themselves: one the owner of a department store in Ludville, Texas, and the other an undertaker in nearby Fairfax.

According to Momma, both Texas towns as well as her own "were so dusty and dirty, you had to take a bath after a walk through Main Street." It didn't take Daddy long to win Momma away from all that. I made her tell me the story again and again, never minding that each time she told it, she added something new or changed or forgot something she had told me before. The main part of the story was always the same and it was one of the first things I wanted to put into my book.

So in the early evening, when she came into my room to talk while we both got ready to go out to a fancy Boston restaurant for my birthday dinner, I asked her to tell me the story again.

"Don't you ever get tired of hearing about that?" she asked, throwing me a quick look.

"Oh no, Momma. I think it's a wonderful story, a dream story. No one could ever write one as beautiful," I said, which made her very happy.

"All right," she said, sitting down at my vanity table. She began to brush her beautiful hair, till it shone like spun gold. "I lived like poor Cinderella did before her prince arrived," she began as always. "But it wasn't always like that. I was the apple of my father's eye. He was a foreman in charge of everything at a nearby oil field, a very important man. Although he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty when he had to, he was a very elegant man. I hope some day you'll find a man like my father."

"Isn't Daddy like him then? He doesn't mind working on his ships, getting down in the engine room with his men?"

"Yes," she said dryly, "he doesn't care. But I want someone different for you, someone who is a real executive, who orders men about and lives in a mansion and..."

"But don't we live in a mansion, Momma?" I protested. Ours was the biggest, most luxurious town house on the street, a classic Georgian Colonial with oversize entryways and fourteen-foot ceilings. All my friends loved my house and were especially impressed with the dining room because it had a domed ceiling and was encircled by Ionic columns. Momma had had it redone two years ago when she saw one just like it in one of her art magazines.

"Yes, yes, but I want you to live on an estate with acres and acres of land, and horses, and pools, and dozens and dozens of servants and its own private beach. And..." Her eyes grew soft and dreamy and faraway as she conjured up this wonderful mansion and grounds, "it will even have an English maze."

She shook her head as though to clear it of its daydreams and with long, graceful strokes began to brush her cascading hair again. She said you had to brush at least one hundred times a night to keep it soft and healthy, and a woman's hair was her crown. She usually wore it up or pulled back from her face to show her sculptured profile.

"Anyway, my sisters, the ironing board twins, were terribly jealous of the love my father had for me. Often, he would bring something beautiful home for me and nothing but practical things like sewing kits or crochet hooks for them. They didn't want pretty ribbons or new earrings or combs anyway. They hated me for being pretty, don't you see? They still do."

"But then your father died and your older brother went into the army," I said, impatient to get to the romantic parts of the story.

"Yes, and how things changed. Then I really became poor Cinderella, you see. They made me do all the chores around the house and hid my beautiful things whenever they could. If I didn't do what they wanted, they broke my combs or buried my jewelry. They threw out all my cosmetics," she declared hatefully.

"But what about your mother? What did Grandma Jana do?" I knew the answer, but I had to hear it.

"Nothing. She approved. She thought my father had been spoiling me anyway. She's just like them, no matter how she acts now. And don't think that because she gave you that cameo pin for your birthday," she added eyeing the cameo on my vanity table, "she has changed in any way."

"It is beautiful and Daddy says it's very, very valuable."

"Yes. I asked her for it years ago, but she refused me," she said bitterly.

"Do you want it, Momma?"

"No. It's yours," she said after a moment. "She gave it to you. Be careful with it, that's all. Anyway, where was I?"

"They were burying your jewelry."

"Burying my...oh, yes, yes. And they tore my best dresses, my most expensive dresses, too. Once, Beatrice, in a fit of temper, sneaked into my room and hacked one of my dresses with a kitchen knife."

"How cruel!" I exclaimed.

"Of course, to this day they deny doing all that. But they did, believe me. They even tried to cut off my beautiful hair once, sneak in on me while I was sleeping and chop it with their long sewing scissors, but I woke up just in time and..." She shuddered as if what followed was too terrible to mention. Then she began stroking her hair again and continued. "Your father had come to Texas on some business venture, and my mother, who was still mingling with the blue bloods, met him at a dinner and invited him to our house, intending for him to fall in love with your aunt Peggy.

"But when he set eyes on me..." She stopped and sat back, looking at herself in the mirror. Momma always had the smoothest skin, not a wrinkle daring to show itself. She had an elegant face, a face that you could find on a cameo or on the cover of *Vogue*. She had shining blue eyes that revealed her moods: brightening like Christmas lights when she was happy, cold like icicles when she was angry, and soft and sad like a lost puppy when she was unhappy.

"When he looked at me," she said to her own image in the mirror, "his heart became an instant slave to my beauty.

"Of course," she added turning to me quickly, "your aunts were insanely jealous. They made me wear this faded, dull brown dress that came down to my ankles and hid my figure, and they wouldn't let me wear any jewelry. I had to have my hair up in a granny's bun and could wear no makeup, not even a dab of lipstick.

"But Cleave saw right through all that. His eyes were fixed on me all night, and every time I spoke, even if it was to say, 'Please pass the salt,' he would stop whatever he was saying to listen as if my words were pearls of wisdom." She sighed and then so did I. How wonderful, I thought, to have such romantic memories. More than anything I wanted to one day have memories just as romantic for my very own.

"Did you fall in love with him right away too?" I knew that answer too, but I had to hear it again because I wanted to get it right for my book.

"Not right away, although I did feel myself turning to him more and more. I thought he had a funny accent, you know, that Boston accent, so I was intrigued with everything he said. He was distinguished and had the look of a successful businessman: confident of himself, but not stiff, he wore expensive clothing, and had a thick gold pocket watch with the longest gold chain I had ever seen. When he opened it, it played the tune of 'Greensleeves.'"

"Did he look like an old sea salt?" I asked, laughing. Daddy always told me he did.

"I didn't know anything about the sea or his business, having lived in central Texas all my life, but he had the same beard he has now, only it wasn't all gray and it was much more neatly trimmed, I might add. Anyway he did talk on and on about his growing steamship line. Grandma found that interesting," she added with a smirk. "Planning on the rich suitor she was going to have for Peggy."

"Then what happened?"

"He asked to see our gardens and before Grandma could get Peggy to guide him, he turned to me and asked if I would do so. You should have seen their faces then. Peggy's dropped even lower, her chin stretched down to her ugly Adam's apple, and Beatrice actually groaned.

"Of course, I agreed to do it, first just to torment them, but after we walked out into the warm Texas night..."

"Yes?"

"And he began to speak softly, I realized Cleave VanVoreen was more than a stuffy, New England businessman. He was rich and clever and handsome in his own way, yes, but he was also very lonely and very taken with me, so taken that he actually proposed that first night. We were standing by the baby roses."

"I thought you were on the swing and it wasn't until the second night."

"No, no, it was by the roses, and it was the first night. The stars...the night was bursting with stars. It was an explosion of light above us. It took my breath away," she said putting her fingers on her throat softly and closing her eyes as if the memory was too much for anyone to bear.

I held my breath. Tonight she had told the story better than ever before. She's making it special for me because it's my twelfth birthday. How wonderful of her. Maybe she changed the story from time to time because as I got older, she thought I could hear more and more.

"And suddenly, Cleave took my hand into his and said, 'Jillian, I have traveled all through this country and seen many other lands, many people and many beautiful women, from the Orient to South America, Hawaiian princesses and Russian princesses and English princesses, but never have I feasted my eyes on someone as beautiful as you. You're a jewel as magnificent as any of the stars above us.'

"'I am a man of action,' he went on, 'who, once he realizes what is valuable in this world and what is not, makes immediate decisions, but fervent decisions, decisions he will stand by through any controversy or turmoil.'

"Then he took my other hand into his and said, 'I won't leave this town until I have you for my wife.'" I mouthed the words in a silent chorus along with her. I had heard that sentence so many times and found it thrilling every time. To think, my daddy would have remained in that dusty Texas town and neglected his business forever and forever until he had the woman he loved...their romance did belong in a storybook, and now it was in mine.

"Well of course, Leigh, I was overwhelmed by such an expression of love. He asked permission to court me and I granted it. Then he went in and spoke to Grandma Jana privately, asking her permission as well. She was shocked, but I suppose she thought she would at least get this rich suitor for one of her daughters.

"He came to the house every day for a week after that and my sisters died with envy, but there was nothing they could do. Grandma Jana was ashamed to let Cleave see me in rags doing menial chores about the house, so I got a reprieve from all that and your aunts had to do them.

"About the fifth day, Cleave formally proposed. He got down on his knees while I sat on the couch in our living room, and I accepted," she said ending the story abruptly. "I left Texas with him and said good riddance to all that.

"Once your grandmother and aunts found out how rich I was, they became as sweet as honey." She looked at my memory book. "Are you going to put all this in there?"

"Oh yes. All my most important memories. Did you ever have a diary, Momma?"

"Never. But that's all right," she added quickly, "I have my memories stored right here," she said pointing to

her heart. "Some of them, I have told only you," she said, her voice so low it made my heart skip a beat. She trusted me more than anyone.

"I won't ever keep secrets from you, Momma."

"I know you won't, Leigh. We're too alike, you and I, to hide anything important from each other," she said stroking my hair with her fingers. "You're going to be a very beautiful young woman someday soon, do you know that?"

"I want to be as beautiful as you are, but I don't think I will be. My nose is too long and I don't have your soft mouth. My lips are too thin, aren't they?"

"Of course not. Anyway, your features aren't fully shaped yet. Just follow my directions, do the things I tell you to do and you will be very attractive. Will you promise to do that?"

"I promise."

"Good," she said and finally turned to the birthday package that she had declared was "girl business...It's time to open this now and talk about it," she said. She unwrapped it herself and opened the box.

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a bra. My breasts had started to grow lately, and some of my friends were already wearing bras. She held it up between us.

"Your figure is developing and you've just had your first period," she declared. "It's time you learned a woman's ways and learned some things about men."

I nodded, practically holding my breath. Such a grown-up conversation between us made my heart pitter-patter.

"You don't wear this all the time, just on occasions when you will meet elegant people and handsome, wealthy suitors, and when you put this on under your new cashmere sweaters..."

I took the new bra gingerly. My heart was still racing.

"Men, especially men of position and wealth, like to be seen with women who are stunning. It strokes their egos, understand?" She laughed and tossed her hair back over her shoulders.

"I think so."

"Even your father, who is oblivious to almost everything but his ships, enjoys walking into a fine restaurant with me on his arm. Men see women as ornaments."

"But is that good?" I wondered aloud.

"Of course it's good. Let them think what they want, as long as they work themselves to the bone making you happy. Never let a man know exactly what you're thinking." Suddenly she turned to me and her soft face became something cold and hard. "Always remember, Leigh, women can never be as promiscuous as men. Never."

My heart began to beat madly again. She was about to discuss the most intimate things.

"It's all right for men to be that way. It's expected. They want to prove their manhood, but if a woman is that way, she will lose everything important. Nice girls don't go all the way. Not until they're married," she added. "Promise you won't forget that."

"I promise," I said, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Good." She looked at herself in the mirror again and her ice-hard expression melted into my sweet, pretty mother once again. "You have opportunities I never had, if I could just get your father to take advantage of them.

"Did your father take us to Jamaica like I asked him to? Did we go to Deauville to the races? We have luxury liners, but do we have our own yacht on which to sail to the Riviera? No, he takes us to London three times because that trip can combine business with pleasure and expects me to cater to the passengers like the wife of a hotel owner or something. I want to go away at least once and be on a real vacation, no business. Nothing but enjoyment. How does he expect me to introduce you to the right kind of people if we don't go to these other places?"

She turned back to me again, her face flushed with anger. "Don't marry a man who is more in love with his business than he is with you."

I didn't know what to say. She had told me so much and overwhelmed me with so many new ideas and things to think about. And I had new questions to ask. When do men start trying to get you to go "all the way" and how do you know which men to trust and which not?

I wasn't ready, I thought, and felt a panic coming over me.

Momma stood up and swept toward the door. "I'm so glad we've had this talk, darling, but we have to get dressed now, I'm afraid. You know how impatient your father gets when he has to wait. Everything's a schedule with him. He treats us like his ships. I'm sure he's downstairs in his office pacing about and mumbling to himself."

"I'll hurry."

"No, take your time," she said as if she were unaware she was contradicting herself. "It's good to practice keeping a man waiting for you. Spend time on your hair, put the lipstick on lightly, as I've showed you before, not pressing down, but gently running it over your lips as if you were caressing it with a kiss," she said, demonstrating. "Understand?" I nodded. "Good."

"And don't forget, put on your stockings and wear your new high-heeled shoes that are just like mine. Always wear high heels, they are much more flattering to one's legs," she said.

She started out and stopped again in the doorway.

"I almost forgot. I have another surprise for you," she announced.

"Something more? But you and Daddy have given me so much today."

"It's not another gift, Leigh. It's a trip, a place I want you to see," she explained. "I'm taking you with me this weekend."

"Where?"

"To that mansion I told you about, the one called Farthingale Manor."

"Where you're painting the murals in the music room?" I asked. She had told me about it very quickly one day. Momma was doing illustrations for children's books, working for Patrick and Clarissa Darrow, the husband and wife owners of a publishing company here in Boston, who were neighbors of ours. Their decorator, Elizabeth Devereoe, was hired to do some work in a fabulous mansion outside of Boston. Momma and Elizabeth were good friends and Momma had accompanied her out there one day and made suggestions, which the owner apparently loved. She and Elizabeth then asked her to carry out the order, which was to paint murals depicting scenes from fairy tales, something Momma had been doing on the covers of books.

"Yes. I'm more than half done and I want you to see that as well as meet Tony."

"Tony?"

"Mr. Tatterton, the owner, and I want you to see this estate. If you would like to go, of course."

"Oh, I do! I can't wait to see what you've painted."

"Good." She smiled. "Now we both better get dressed before your father walks a hole in the floor."

I laughed, thinking about poor Daddy and how it would be for him to have to live with two mature women now, instead of only one. But I could never be cruel to Daddy, I thought. I could never deceive him or not tell him what I was really thinking. Wasn't there ever a time, I wondered, a time after you were in love and married, when you could trust your husband and be honest with him?

I put on the new bra and one of my new cashmere sweaters and the matching skirt. I brushed my hair back and put on the lipstick just the way Momma had instructed and then I found the shoes with the high heels and stood before my mirror to gaze at myself.

I looked so different. It was as if I had grown up overnight, People who didn't know me might not be able to guess my true age. How exciting, I thought, and yet, in a way it was a little scary. I looked older, but could I act older? I always watched Momma in public, how she seemed to slip in and out of parts, become this and become that, sometimes giggle and act silly and sometimes look so elegant and aristocratic anyone would think she was a member of royalty.

Always, she was beautiful; she was the center of attention. Whenever she walked into a room, men stopped their conversations and spun their heads around so quickly, they nearly snapped them off their necks.

It made me nervous to think that the moment we entered the restaurant for my birthday dinner, all eyes would be turned our way and men and women would gaze closely upon me, too. Would they laugh? Would they think there's a young girl trying to be like her mother?

When I finally walked downstairs to Daddy's office, I was filled with apprehension. He would be the first man to see me so dressed up and he was the most important man in my life right now. Momma was still

getting ready.

He was behind his desk, reading one of his reports. Two years ago, Momma had redesigned and redecorated the entire house, except for his office. That was the one room he wouldn't let her touch, even though its floor was covered with a rather worn-looking rectangular rug Momma considered an embarrassment. His desk had been his father's and was scratched and chipped, yet he would permit nothing to be done with it. His office looked cluttered because he had shelves of models of ships and nautical books on all the walls. There was one small, dark-brown leather settee and a worn hickory rocker with an oval maple table beside it. He worked by the light of a brass oil lamp.

The only art in the room consisted of pictures of ships: Yankee Clippers and some of the first luxury liners, and some dried and treated driftwood pieces he had on his cluttered desk and on the oval table. On the wall behind him was a portrait of his father. Grandpa VanVoreen, who had died two years before I was born, had a hard stern face with deep wrinkles and weathered-looking cheeks. Daddy always said that he took after his mother, who had also died before I was born. In her photographs she looked like a diminutive, soft woman, from whom Daddy had probably inherited his quiet, conservative manner.

I often studied the photographs of Daddy's parents, searching for some resemblances to myself. I thought his mother's eyes were like mine in some pictures, but in others, they looked quite different.

He looked up slowly from his desk when he realized I had entered his office. For the first few moments, it was as if he didn't recognize me. Then he stood up quickly, his face filled with amazement.

"How do I look, Daddy?" I asked tentatively.

"You look so...grown up. What has your mother done to you?"

"Is it all right?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes. I didn't realize how beautiful you were becoming, Leigh. I guess I'd better stop thinking of you as being a little girl." He simply stared a little longer. It made me very self-conscious. I felt myself blush. "Well now," he said finally, coming around his desk to me. "I'll have two beautiful women on my arms tonight. How wonderful." He hugged me to him, and warmed my cheeks with kisses.

"Are you sure I look all right, Daddy?"

"Of course, I'm sure. Come on now, let's see how many more hours it will be before your mother comes down those stairs." He put his arm around me and we walked out to the staircase hall and looked up at the scaled, suspended staircase because Momma was descending.

She looked as pretty as ever. Her eyes were sparkling so brightly, they were luminous. Her color was radiant and her hair had an angelic sheen to it. She winked at me as she made the turn.

"Good grief, Cleave, you could have at least changed into a different suit from the one you wore all day," she said stepping down.

"I did!" Daddy protested.

Momma shook her head.

"One is so much like the other, no one could tell." She brushed back a strand of my hair. "Doesn't Leigh look beautiful?"

"Absolutely. Overwhelming. I can't think of when you looked more like mother and daughter," he said, but she seemed hurt by that. He saw it too and corrected himself quickly. "Actually, you look too young to have a daughter who looks this old. You look more like sisters," he concluded. Momma beamed.

"See," she whispered as we started out, "you can always get them to do and say the right things if you want to."

My heart fluttered and my breath caught in my throat and seemed to stay. Momma was really doing it: she was really sharing her womanly secrets with me. Dressed the way I was, going off to a fancy restaurant, I felt more thrilled and excited than I could remember.

And then, at the restaurant, Daddy gave us another surprise. He announced that he had initiated a new Caribbean vacation cruise in hopes of stimulating more business. Primarily it was a cruise to Jamaica and he had made plans for us to go on the commencing voyage. We would leave next week with a bon voyage party and all.

Momma was so speechless, she didn't look happy at first, even though just today she had complained about never going to Jamaica, which had become a vacation spot for the rich and famous.

"But what about Leigh's schooling?" she asked.

"We'll take her tutor along, just like the other times," Daddy replied and looked perplexed about her sudden concern.

I thought it was peculiar for her to be concerned about that, too. She had never been worried about it before.

"I thought you'd be pleased," Daddy said. He looked heartbroken that Momma hadn't gotten more excited over his announcement.

"I am pleased. It's just...just so unusual for you, Cleave, to do anything spontaneous." Her voice sounded strange to me, brittle. "It takes a moment to get used to." She looked at me and after a moment, she laughed and we went on with our birthday celebration.

What a wonderful birthday this has been, I thought. And how perfect it was that Daddy had given me this diary in which to record these precious memories. It was as if he knew I would have so many special ones from now on and would want more than ever to put them down to save forever and forever.

Today I felt some of what it would be to feel like a woman instead of a little girl. Deep in my heart, I wondered if Daddy would still bring me home little presents and call me his little princess. Part of me feared that if I grew up his love for me would change, would lessen.

Momma came by after I had put out my lights and crawled into bed. She wanted to remind me about going to see Farthingale Manor. I sensed how important it was to her that I like it. How could I not like the place she had described. It sounded like a fairy-tale kingdom.

And this Tony Tatterton...he sounded like a king!

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