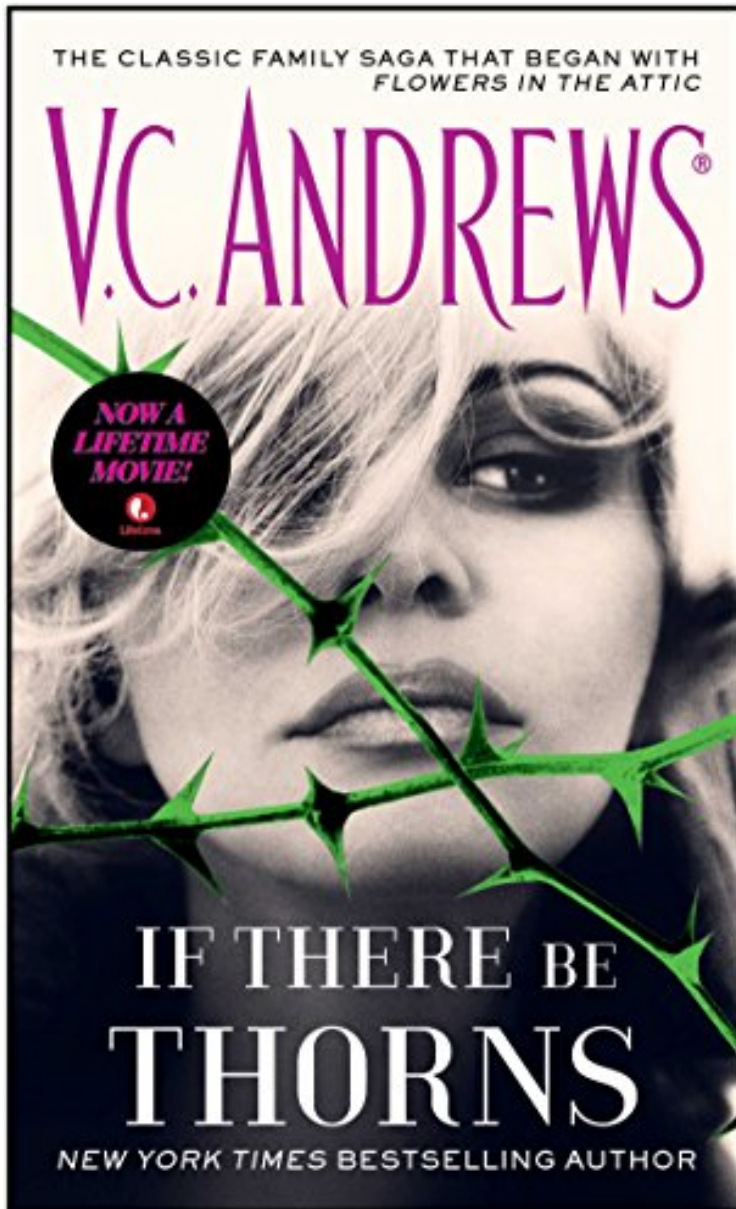


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If There Be Thorns



Par V.C. Andrews
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Description : Description du produitChris and Cathy made such a loving home for fourteen-year-old Jory -- so handsome, so gentle. And for Bart,who had such a dazzling imagination for a nine year old. Then the lights came on in the house next door. Soon the Old Lady in Black was there, watching them, guarded by her strange old butler. Soon she had Bart over for cookies and ice cream and asked him to call her "Grandmother". And soon Bart's transformation began... Fed by the hint of terrible things about his mother and father...leading him into shocking acts of violence. Now while this little boy trembles on the edge of madness, his anguished parents await the climax to a horror that flowered in an attic long ago, a horror whose thorns are still wet with blood, still tipped with fire.

Prsentation de l'diteurNow a major Lifetime movie eventBook Three of the Dollanganger series that began with Flowers in the Atticthe novel of forbidden love that captured the worlds imagination and earned V.C. Andrews a fiercely devoted fanbase.They hide the shocking truth to protect their children. But someone who knows their dark secret is watching. Christopher and Cathy have made a loving home for their handsome and talented teenager Jory, their imaginative nine-year-old Bart, and a sweet baby daughter. Then an elderly woman and her strange butler move in next door. The Old Woman in Black watches from her window, lures lonely Bart inside with cookies and ice cream, and asks him to call her grandmother. Slowly Bart transforms, each visit pushing him closer to the edge of madness and violence, while his anguished parents can only watch. For Cathy and Chris, the horrors of the past have come homeand everything they love may soon be torn from them.ExtraitChapter One: JoryWhenever Dad didn't drive me home from school, a yellow school bus would let me off at an isolated spot where I would recover my bike from the nearest ravine, hidden there each morning before I stepped onto the bus.To reach my home I had to travel a winding narrow road without any houses until I came to the huge deserted mansion that invariably drew my eyes, making me wonder who had lived there; why had they deserted it? When I saw that house I automatically slowed, knowing soon I'd be home.An acre from that house was our home, sitting isolated and lonely on a road that had more twists and turns than a puzzle maze that leads the mouse to the cheese. We lived in Fairfax, Marin County, about twenty miles north of San Francisco. There was a redwood forest on the other side of the mountains, and the ocean too. Ours was a cold place, sometimes dreary. The fog would roll in in great billowing waves and often shrouded the landscape all day, turning everything cold and eerie. The fog was spooky, but it was also romantic and mysterious.As much as I loved my home, I had vague, disturbing memories of a southern garden full of giant magnolia trees dripping with Spanish moss. I remembered a tall man with dark hair turning gray; a man who called me his son. I didn't remember his face nearly as well as I remembered the nice warm and safe feeling he gave me. I guess one of the saddest things about growing bigger, and older, was that no one was large enough, or strong enough, to pick you up and hold you close and make you feel that safe again.Chris was my mother's third husband. My own father died before I was born; his name was Julian Marquet, and everyone in the ballet world knew about him. Hardly anyone outside of Clairmont, South Carolina, knew about Dr. Paul Scott Sheffield, who had been my mother's second husband. In that same southern state, in the town of Greenglenna, lived my paternal grandmother, Madame Marisha.She was the one who wrote me a letter each week, and once a summer we visited her. It seemed she wanted almost as much as I did, for me to become the most famous dancer the world had ever known. And thus I would prove to her, and to everyone, that my father had not lived and died in vain.By no means was my grandmother an ordinary little old lady going on seventy-four. Once she'd been very famous, and not for one second did she let anyone forget this. It was a rule I was never to call her Grandmother when others could overhear and possibly guess her age. She'd whispered to me once that it would be all right if I called her Mother, but that didn't seem right when I already had a mother whom I loved very much. So I called her Madame Marisha, or Madame M., just as everyone else did.Our yearly visit to South Carolina was long anticipated during the winters, and quickly forgotten once we were back and safely snuggled in our little valley where our long redwood house nestled. "Safe in the valley where the wind doesn't blow," my mother said often. Too often, really -- as if the wind blowing greatly distressed her.I reached our curving drive, parked my bike and went inside the house. No sign of Bart or Mom. Heck! I raced into the kitchen where Emma was preparing dinner. She spent most of her time in the kitchen, and that accounted for her "pleasingly plump" figure. She had a long, dour face unless she was smiling; fortunately, she smiled most of the time. She could order you to do this, do that, and with her smile take the pain from the ordeal of doing for yourself, which was something my brother Bart refused to do. I suspected Emma waited on Bart more than me because he spilled when he tried to pour his own milk. He dropped when he carried a glass of water. There wasn't anything he could hold onto, and nothing he could keep from bumping into. Tables fell, lamps toppled. If an extension wire was anywhere in the house Bart would be sure to snag his sneaker toes underneath and down he'd go -- or the blender, the mixer, or the radio, would crash to the floor."Where's Bart?" I asked Emma, who was peeling potatoes to put in with the roast beef she had in the oven."I tell you, Jory, I'll be glad when that boy stays in school just as long as you do. I hate to see him come in the kitchen. I have to stop what I'm doing and look around and anticipate just what he might knock off or bump into. Thank God he's got that wall to sit on. What is it you boys do up on that wall, anyway?" "Nothing," I said. I didn't want to tell her how often we stole over to the deserted mansion beyond the wall and played there. The estate was off-limits to us, but parents weren't supposed to see and know everything. Next I asked "Where's Mom?" Emma said she'd come

home early after cancelling her ballet class, which I already knew. "Half her class has colds," I explained.

"But where is she now?" "Jory, I can't keep my eye on everybody and still know what I'm doing. A few minutes ago she said something about going up to the attic for old pictures. Why don't you join her up there and help her search?" That was Emma's nice way of saying I was in her way. I headed for the attic stairs, which were hidden in the far end of our large walk-in linen closet in the back hall. Just as I was passing through the family room I heard the front door open and close. To my surprise I saw my dad standing stock-stiff in the foyer, a strange look of reflection in his blue eyes, making me reluctant to call out and break into his thoughts. I paused, undecided. He headed for his bedroom after he put down his black doctor's bag. He had to pass the linen closet with its door slightly ajar. He stopped, listening as I was to the faint sound of ballet music drifting down the stairs. Why was my mother up there? Dancing there again? Whenever I asked why she danced in such a dusty place, she explained she was "compelled" to dance up there, despite the heat and dust. "Don't you tell your father about this," she'd warned me several times. After I questioned her, she'd stopped going up there -- and now she was doing it again. This time I was going up. This time I was going to listen to the excuses she gave him. For Dad would catch her! On tiptoe I trailed him up the steep, narrow stairs. He paused directly under the bare electric bulb that hung down from the apex of the attic. He riveted his eyes upon my mom, who kept right on dancing as if she didn't see him there. She held a dustmop in one hand and playfully swiped at this or that, miming Cinderella and certainly not Princess Aurora from *The Sleeping Beauty*, which was the music she had on the ancient record player. Gosh. My stepfather's heart seemed to jump right up into his eyes. He looked scared, and I sensed she was hurting him just by dancing in the attic. How odd. I didn't understand what went on between them. I was fourteen, Bart was nine, and we were both a long, long way from being adults. The love they had for each other seemed to me very different from the love I saw between the parents of the few friends I had. Their love seemed more intense, more tumultuous, more passionate. Whenever they thought no one was watching they locked eyes, and they had to reach out and touch whenever they passed one another. Now that I was an adolescent, I was beginning to take more notice of what went on between the most meaningful models I had. I wondered often about the different facets my parents had. One for the public to view; another for Bart and me, and the third, most fervent side, which they showed only to each other. (How could they know their two sons were not always discreet enough to turn away and leave like they should?) Maybe that was the way all adults were, especially parents. Dad kept staring as Mom whirled in fast pirouettes that fanned her long blonde hair out in a half circle. Her leotards were white, her pointes white too, and I was enthralled as she danced, wielding that dustmop like a sword to stab at old furniture that Bart and I had outgrown. Scattered on the floor and shelves were broken toys, kiddy-cars and scooters, dishes she or Emma had broken that she meant to glue back together one day. With each swipe of her dustmop she brought zillions of golden dustmotes into play. Frenzied and crazy they struggled to settle down before she attacked again and once more drove them into flight. "Depart!" she cried, as a queen to her slaves. "Go and stay away! Torment me no more!" -- and round and round she spun, so fast I had to turn to follow her with my eyes or end up dizzy just from watching. She whipped her head, her leg, doing fouettes with more expertise than I'd seen on stage. Wild and possessed she spun faster! faster! keeping time to the music, using the mop as part of her action, making housework so dramatic I wanted to kick off my shoes and jump in and join her and be the partner my real father had once been. But I could only stand in the dim purplish shadows and watch something I sensed I shouldn't be watching. My dad swallowed over the lump which must have risen in his throat. Mom looked so beautiful, so young and soft. She was thirty-seven, so old in years but so young in appearance, and so easily she could be wounded by an unkind word. Just as easily as any sixteen-year-old dancer in her classes. "Cathy!" cried Dad, jerking the needle from the record so the music screeched to a halt. "STOP! What are you doing?" She heard and fluttered her slim pale arms in mock fright, flittering toward him, using the tiny, even steps called bourrs. For a second or so only, before she was again spinning in a series of pirouettes around him, encircling him-and swiping at him with her dustmop! "STOP IT!" he yelled, seizing hold of her mop and hurling it away. He grabbed her waist, pinioning her arms to her sides as a deep blush rose to stain her cheeks. He released his hold enough to allow her arms to flutter like broken bird wings so her hands could cover her throat. Above those crossed pale hands her blue eyes grew larger and very dark. Her full lips began to quiver, and slowly, slowly, with awful reluctance she was forced to look where Dad's finger pointed. I looked too and was surprised to see two twin beds set up in the portion of the attic that was soon to be under construction. Dad had promised her we'd have a recreation room up here. But twin beds in all this junk? Why? Mom spoke then, her voice husky and scared. "Chris? You're home? You don't usually come home

this early..."He'd caught her and I was relieved. Now he could straighten her out, tell her not to dance up here again in the dry, dusty air that could make her faint. Even I could see she was having trouble coming up with some excuse."Cathy, I know I brought those bedsteads up, but how did you manage to put them together?" Dad shot out. "How did you manage the mattresses?" Then he jolted for a second time, spying the picnic hamper between the beds. "Cathy!" he roared, glaring at her. "Does history have to repeat itself? Can't we learn and benefit from the mistakes of others? Do we have to do it all over again?"Again? What was he talking about?"Catherine," Dad went on in the same cold, hard voice, "don't stand there and try to look innocent, like some wicked child caught stealing. Why are those beds here, all made up with clean sheets and new blankets? Why the picnic hamper? Haven't we seen enough of that type of basket to last us our whole lives through?"And here I was thinking she'd put the beds together so she and I could have a place to fall down and rest after we danced, as we had a few times. And a picnic hamper was, after all, just another basket.I drifted closer, then hid behind a strut that rose to the rafters. Something sad and painful was between them; something young, fresh, like a raw wound that refused to heal. My mother looked ashamed and suddenly awkward. The man I called Dad stood bewildered; I could tell he wanted to take her in his arms and forgive her. "Cathy, Cathy," he pleaded with anguish, "don't be like her in every way!"Mom jerked her head high, threw back her shoulders, and, with arrogant pride, glared him down. She flipped her long hair back from her face and smiled to charm him. Was she doing all of that just to make him stop asking questions she didn't want to answer?I felt strangely cold in the musty gloom of the attic. A chilling shiver raced down my spine, making me want to run and hide. Making me ashamed, too, for spying -- that was Bart's way, not mine.How could I escape without attracting their attention? I had to stay in my hidden place."Look at me, Cathy. You're not the sweet young ingenue anymore, and this is not a game. There is no reason for those beds to be there. And the picnic basket only compounds my fears. What the hell are you planning?"Her arms spread wide as if to hug him, but he pushed her away and spoke again: "Don't try to appeal to me when I feel sick to my stomach. I ask myself each day how I can come home and not be tired of you, and still feel as I do after so many years, and after all that has happened. Yet I go on year after year loving you, needing and trusting you. Don't take my love and make it into something ugly!"Bewilderment clouded her expression. I'm sure it clouded mine too. Didn't he truly love her? Was that what he meant? Mom was staring at the beds again, as if surprised to see them there."Chris, help me!" she choked, stepping closer and opening her arms again. He put her off, shaking his head. She implored, "Please don't shake your head and act like you don't understand. I don't remember buying the basket, really I don't! I had a dream the other night about coming up here and putting the beds together, but when I came up today and saw them, I thought you must have put them there."Cathy! I DID NOT PUT THE BEDS THERE!"Move out of the shadows. I can't see you where you are." She lifted her small pale hands, seeming to wipe away invisible cobwebs. Then she was staring at her hands as if they'd betrayed her -- or was she really seeing spiderwebs tying her fingers together?Just as my dad did, I looked around again. Never had the attic been so clean before. The floor had been scrubbed, cartons of old junk were stacked neatly. She had tried to make the attic look homey by hanging pretty pictures of flowers on the walls.Dad was eyeing Mom as if she were crazy. I wondered what he was thinking, and why he couldn't tell what bothered her when he was the best doctor ever. Was he trying to decide if she was only pretending to forget? Did that dazed, troubled look in her terrified eyes tell him differently? Must have, for he said softly, kindly, "Cathy, you don't have to look scared. You're not swimming in a sea of deceit anymore, or helplessly caught in an undertow. You are not drowning. Not going under. Not having a nightmare. You don't have to clutch at straws when you have me." Then he drew her into his arms as she fell toward him, grasping as if to keep from drowning. "You're all right, darling," he whispered, stroking her back, touching her cheeks, drying the tears that began to flow. Tenderly he tilted her chin up before his lips slowly lowered to hers. The kiss lasted and lasted, making me hold my breath."The grandmother is dead. Foxworth Hall has been burned to the ground."Foxworth Hall? What was that?"No, it hasn't, Chris. I heard her climbing the stairs a short while ago, and you know she's afraid of small, confined places -- how could she climb the stairs?"Were you sleeping when you heard her?"I shivered. What the devil were they talking about? Which grandmother?"Yes," she murmured, her lips moving over his face. "I guess I did drift into nightmares after I finished my bath and lay out on the bedroom patio. I don't even remember climbing the stairs up here. I don't know why I come, or why I dance, unless I am losing my mind. I feel I am her sometimes, and then I hate myself!"No, you're not her, and Momma is miles and miles away where she can never hurt us again. Virginia is three thousand miles from here, and yesterday has come and gone. Ask yourself one question whenever you are in doubt -- if we could survive

the worst, doesn't it stand to reason we should be able to bear the best?" I wanted to run, wanted to stay. I felt I, too, was drowning in their sea of deceit even when I didn't understand what they were talking about. I saw two people, my parents, as strangers I didn't know -- younger, less strong, less dependable. "Kiss me," Mom murmured. "Wake me up and chase away the ghosts. Say you love me and always will, no matter what I do." Eagerly enough he did all of that. When he had her convinced, she wanted him to dance with her. She replaced the needle on the record and again the music soared. Shriveled up tight and small, I watched him try to do the difficult ballet steps that would have been so easy for me. He didn't have enough skill or grace to partner someone as skilled as my mom. It was embarrassing to even see him try. Soon enough she put on another record where he could lead. Dancing in the dark, 'Til the tune ends, we're dancing in the dark. Now Dad was confident, holding her close, his cheek pressed to hers as they went gliding around the floor. "I miss the paper flowers that used to flutter in our wake," she said softly. "And down the stairs the twins were quietly watching the small black-and-white TV set in the corner." His eyes were closed, his voice soft and dreamy. "You were only fourteen, and I loved you even then, much to my shame." Shame? Why? He hadn't even known her when she was fourteen. I frowned, trying to think back to when and where they'd first met. Mom and her younger sister, Carrie, had run away from home soon after Mom's parents were killed in an auto accident. They'd gone south on a bus and a kind black woman named Henny had taken them to her employer Dr. Paul Sheffield, who had generously taken them in and given them a good home. My mom had started ballet classes again and there she had met Julian Marquet -- the man who was my father. I was born shortly after he was killed. Then Mom married Daddy Paul. And Daddy Paul was Bart's father. It had been a long, long time before she met Chris, who was Daddy Paul's younger brother. So how could he have loved her when she was fourteen? Had they told us lies? Oh gosh, oh gosh... But now that the dance was over, the argument began again: "Okay, you're feeling better, yourself again," Dad said. "I want you to solemnly promise that if anything ever happens to me, be it tomorrow, or years from now, you swear that you will never, so help you God, hide Bart and Jory in the attic so you can go unencumbered into another marriage!" Stunned, I watched my mom jerk her head upward before she gasped: "Is that what you think of me? Damn you for thinking I am so much like her! Maybe I did put the beds together. Maybe I did bring the basket up here. But never once did it cross my mind to...to... Chris, you know I wouldn't do that!" "Do what, what? He made her swear. Really forced her to speak the words while her blue eyes glared hot and angry at him all the while. Sweating now, hurting too, I felt angry and terribly disillusioned in my dad, who should know better. Mom wouldn't do that. She couldn't! She loved me. She loved Bart too. Even if she did look at him sometimes with shadows in her eyes, still she would never, never hide us away in this attic. My dad left her standing in the middle of the attic as he strode forward to seize the picnic hamper. Next he unlatched, then pushed open the screen and hurled the basket out the open window. He watched it fall to the ground before once more turning to confront my mom angrily: "Perhaps we are compounding the sins of our parents by living together as we are. Perhaps in the end both Jory and Bart will be hurt -- so don't whisper to me tonight when we're in bed about adopting another child. We cannot afford to involve another child in the mess we've made! Don't you realize, Cathy, that when you put those beds up here you were unconsciously planning what to do in case our secret is exposed?" "No," she objected, spreading her hands helplessly. "I wouldn't. I couldn't do that..." "You have to mean that!" he snapped. "No matter what happens, we will not, or you will not, put your children in this attic to save yourself, or me." "I hate you for thinking I would!" "I am trying to be patient. I am trying to believe in you. I know you still have nightmares. I know you are still tormented by all that happened when we were young and innocent. But you have to grow up enough to look at yourself honestly. Haven't you learned yet that the subconscious often leads the way to reality?" He strode back to cuddle her close, to soothe and kiss her, to soften his voice as she clung to him desperately. (Why did she have to feel so desperate?) "Cathy, my heart, put away those fears instilled by the cruel grandmother. She wanted us to believe in hell and its everlasting torments of revenge. There is no hell but that which we make for ourselves. There is no heaven but that which we build between us. Don't chip away at my belief, my love, with your 'unconscious' deeds. I have no life without you." "Then don't go to see your mother this summer." He raised his head and stared over hers, pain in his eyes. I slid silently on the floor to sit and stare at them. What was going on? Why was I suddenly so afraid? Copyright 1981 by Virginia

Andrews Presentation de l'diteur Now a major Lifetime movie event Book Three of the Dollanganger series that began with *Flowers in the Attic* the novel of forbidden love that captured the world's imagination and earned V.C. Andrews a fiercely devoted fanbase. They hide the shocking truth to protect their children. But someone who knows their dark secret is watching. Christopher and Cathy have made a loving home for their

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