

Pearl^{in the}Mist

V.C. ANDREWS®



POCKET BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore

Pearl^{in the}Mist

V.C. ANDREWS®



POCKET BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore

Following the death of Virginia Andrews, the Andrews family worked with a carefully selected writer to organize and complete Virginia Andrews' stories and to create additional novels, of which this is one, inspired by her storytelling genius.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 1994 by Virginia C. Andrews Trust

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-671-75937-X

V.C. Andrews is a registered trademark of the Virginia C. Andrews Trust.

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster Inc.

Printed in the U.S.A.

B.T.

Pearlⁱⁿ_{the}Mist

Prologue

Dear Paul,

I waited until the last minute to write this letter to you, mainly because I wasn't sure until now that I would do what my father asked and, with my twin sister, Gisselle, attend a private school for girls in Baton Rouge. Despite the promises I made to him, I have been having nightmares about it. I've seen the brochures of the school, which is called Greenwood. It does look beautiful, consisting of a grand structure containing the classrooms, an auditorium, a gym, and even an indoor pool; as well as three dormitory buildings, each with sprawling willow and oak trees in front; its own lake filled with lavender hyacinths; beautiful wooded grounds of red oak and hickory; clay tennis courts and ballfields; in short, everything anyone could want. I'm sure it has far better facilities and opportunities than I would have at our public school in New Orleans.

But it is a school attended by only the wealthiest, upper-class young women from the finest Creole

V. C. ANDREWS

families in Louisiana. I'm not prejudiced against wealthy people who come from highly respectable backgrounds, but I know I'll be surrounded by dozens and dozens of girls who have been brought up the way Gisselle has. They will think like her, dress like her, act like her, and they will make me feel like an outsider.

My father has great confidence in me. He thinks I can overcome any obstacles and I would be more than a match for any and all snobby girls I might encounter. He's so confident in my artistic talent that he believes the school will immediately recognize it and want to see me develop and succeed so they can get credit for it. I know he's just trying to help me shake off my doubts and fears.

But no matter how I feel about going to this school, I guess it's the best thing I could do at the moment, for it will at least get me away from my stepmother, Daphne.

When you came to visit us and you asked me if things had gotten better, I told you yes, but I wasn't telling you the whole truth. The truth was, I had almost been put away and forgotten in the mental institution my poor Uncle Jean, my father's brother, is in. My stepmother had conspired with the administrator to have me committed. With the help of a very nice but deeply disturbed young man named Lyle, I escaped and returned home. I told my father what had occurred and he and Daphne had a horrible argument. After things settled down, he came to me with the proposal to send me and Gisselle to Greenwood, the private school. I saw how important it was to him that we get away from Daphne, and I saw how happy she was that we were leaving.

So I am being pulled in two directions. On the one hand I am very nervous about attending Greenwood, but on the other I am glad to get away from what has become a very dark and dreary

PEARL IN THE MIST

home. I feel bad about leaving my father. He seems to have grown years older in just a few months. Strands of gray have popped up here and there in his chestnut hair, and he doesn't stand as straight nor move as energetically as he did when I first arrived. I feel almost as if I'm deserting him, but he wants Gisselle and me to attend this private school and I want to make him happy and ease his burdens and tensions.

Gisselle hasn't once stopped complaining and whining. She is constantly threatening not to go to Greenwood. She moans and groans about having to be in a wheelchair and has everyone in the house running this way and that getting her things and satisfying her every whim. Not once did I ever hear her say the automobile accident was her and Martin's fault because of their smoking pot. Instead, she wants to blame the unfair world. I know the real reason she complains about going to Greenwood is that she's afraid she won't get what she wants whenever she wants it. If she was spoiled before, it was nothing compared to the way she is now. It makes it hard for me to feel sorry for her.

I have told her everything I know about our backgrounds, although she still won't accept the fact that our mother was a Cajun woman. Of course, she readily accepts all I tell her about Grandpere Jack, how he took advantage of our mother's pregnancy to make a bargain with Grandpere Dumas to sell Gisselle to the Dumases. He didn't know our mother was pregnant with twins, and Grandmere Catherine kept that fact from him until the day we were born, refusing to sell me too. I told Gisselle she could have easily been the one left in the bayou and I could have been the one brought up in New Orleans. That possibility puts the shudders into her and gets her to stop complaining for a while; but nevertheless,

V. C. ANDREWS

she has a way of getting under my skin and making me wish I had never left the bayou.

Of course, I often think of the bayou and the beautiful days we had together when Grandmere Catherine was still alive and you and I didn't know the truth about ourselves. Whoever said ignorance is bliss was saying the truth, especially when it comes to you and me. I know it's been harder for you to face up to it. You, perhaps more than I, have had to live with lies and deceit, but if I've learned anything, it's that we must forgive and forget if we are to go on enjoying anything in this world.

Yes, I wish we weren't half brother and half sister, and yes, I would come running home to you and we would build our lives together in the bayou, which is where my heart really is; but this isn't the course Destiny has laid out for us. I want us to be forever friends as well as brother and sister, and now that Gisselle has met you, she wants the same. Every time I get a letter from you she insists on my reading it aloud, and whenever you make a reference to her or tell her hello, she brightens with interest. Although with Gisselle you can never tell if it's just a momentary whim.

I love your letters, but I can't help feeling a bit sad whenever I get them. I close my eyes and hear the symphony of cicadas or the owl calling. Sometimes I imagine I can actually smell Grandmere Catherine's cooking. Yesterday Nina made us a crawfish etouffee for lunch, just the way Grandmere Catherine used to make it, with a roux glazed with butter and sprinkled with chopped green onions. Of course, as soon as Gisselle heard it was a Cajun recipe, she hated it. Nina winked at me and we had a private laugh, for we both knew Gisselle had eaten it heartily before.

Anyway, I promise I will write to you as soon as we are settled in Greenwood and maybe shortly, if

PEARL IN THE MIST

you are able, you will come to visit us. At least you will know where to write.

I'd like to hear about the bayou and the people there, especially Grandmere Catherine's old friends. Most of all I'd like to hear about you. I suppose a part of me wants to hear about Grandpere Jack too. Although it is hard for me to think of him and not think of the terrible things he has done. I imagine he's a pathetic old creature by now.

So many sad things have happened to us so soon in our lives. Maybe . . . maybe we've already had our share of hardships and misfortune and maybe the rest of our lives will be full of good and happy things. Am I a fool to think so?

I can just see you smiling at me with those darling blue eyes of yours twinkling.

It's a very warm night here tonight. The evening breeze carries the scent of the green bamboo, gardenias, and camellias up to me. It's one of those nights when every sound can be heard seemingly for miles and miles. Sitting by my window, I can hear the streetcar rattling along St. Charles Avenue, and somewhere in another house someone is playing a trumpet. It sounds so sad, and yet it sounds so beautiful.

Now there's a mourning dove on the upper galerie railing, moaning its sad cry. Grandmere Catherine used to say I must wish for something good for someone the first time I hear the dove at night and wish it quickly, otherwise the dove's sad note will bring hard luck to someone I love. It's a night for dreaming and for making wishes. I'll make one for you.

Go out and call to the marsh hawk for me. And then make a wish for me.

As always,
Love, Ruby

1



First Day

The rap, rap, rapping of a woodpecker woke me out of a restless sleep. I had been awake for most of the night, tossing and turning with worry about what the next day would bring. Finally the weight of fatigue shut my eyes, and I felt myself falling into the world of twisted dreams, until once again I had a familiar nightmare. In it I was drifting in a pirogue through the swamp. The water was the color of dark tea. I had no pole; the current was taking me mysteriously along into the darkness draped with Spanish moss, ghostlike as it undulated in the slight breeze. Over the surface of the water, green snakes slithered, following my canoe. The luminous eyes of an owl peered at me with suspicion through the darkness as I drifted deeper and deeper into the swamp.

In this nightmare there was usually the sound of a baby crying. It was too young to form words, but the cry sounded very much like a call for "Mommy, Mommy." It drew me on, but usually I woke up from this terrible nightmare before I went much farther into the darkness. Last night, however, I passed my furthestmost point and continued into the murky, black world.

V. C. ANDREWS

The pirogue made a turn and moved a little faster until I could see the luminous bone-white outline of a skeleton pointing its long, thin forefinger ahead, urging me to look into the darkness, until finally I saw the baby all alone, left in a hammock on the front galerie of Grandpere Jack's shack.

The pirogue started to slow down and then, right before my eyes, Grandpere Jack's shack began to sink into the swamp. The baby's cries grew louder. I reached over the side of the pirogue to row myself along faster, but my hand became entangled in green snakes. The shack continued to sink.

"NO!" I screamed. Deeper and deeper into the murky, muddy water it sunk, until only the galerie and the baby in the hammock remained. She had a small face, the color of a pearl. I reached out as I drew closer, but just as I could finally take hold of the hammock, the galerie sunk too.

It was then that I heard the rapping of the woodpecker, and my eyes snapped open to see the morning sunlight seeping in around the curtains to light up the pearl-colored silk canopy above my dark pine queen-size bed. As if they were blooming, all the colors in the floral wallpaper brightened under the warm illumination as well. Even though I had barely slept, I was happy to wake up to so much sunshine, especially after my nightmare.

I sat up and scrubbed my face with my palms until I had wiped the Sandman's traces out of my eyes and cheeks, and then I took a deep breath and told myself to be strong and be ready and be hopeful. I turned toward the window when I heard the voices of the grounds staff as they fanned out to clip the hedges, weed the gardens, and sweep the banana leaves off the pool patio and tennis courts. My stepmother, Daphne, insisted that they always make the grounds and buildings look as if nothing had happened the night before, no matter how gusty the wind or hard the rain.

The night before I had chosen and laid out my clothing for traveling to our new school. Expecting my stepmother would scrutinize how I was dressed, I chose one of my longer skirts and matching blouses. Gisselle finally relented

PEARL IN THE MIST

and permitted me to set out her things as well, although she went to sleep vowing never to get up. I could still hear her threats and vows echoing in my ears.

"I'd rather die in this bed," she whined, "then make this dreadful trip to Greenwood tomorrow. Whatever you choose for me will be what I will wear when I take my last breath. And it will be all your fault, too!" she declared, falling back histrionically in her bed.

No matter how long I might have lived with my twin sister, I never got used to how unlike we were despite our virtually duplicated faces and figures, eye and hair color. And it isn't only because of the differences in our upbringing, either. I am sure that even in our mother's womb we didn't get along.

"My fault? Why would it be my fault?"

She propped herself up on her elbows quickly.

"Because you've agreed to all this, and Daddy does whatever you agree to do. You should have argued and cried. You should have thrown a tantrum. You'd think you would know how to throw a tantrum by now. Haven't you learned anything from me since you ran away from the swamps?" she demanded.

Learn how to throw a tantrum? Learn how to be a spoiled brat is what she really meant, and that was one lesson I could do without, even though she thought she had been doing me a favor by teaching me to be more like her. I swallowed back my laughter, knowing it would just enrage her more.

"I'm doing what I think is best for everyone, Gisselle. I thought you understood. Daddy wants us to be away. He thinks it will make life easier here for Daphne and him and for us too. Especially after all that has happened!" I emphasized, my eyes as big as hers could be.

She sank back in her bed and pouted.

"I shouldn't have to do anything for anyone else. Not after what's happened to me. Everyone should be thinking of me first and my suffering," she moaned.

"It seems to me everyone does."

"Who does? Who?" she snapped, with sudden energy and

strength. "Nina cooks what you like, not what I like. Daddy asks your opinions before he asks mine. Beau comes around to see you, not me! Why . . . why . . . even our half brother, Paul, writes only to you, never to me."

"He always sends his regards to you."

"But not a separate letter," she emphasized.

"You've never written one to him," I pointed out.

She considered this a moment. "Boys should write first."

"Boyfriends, maybe, but not a brother. With a brother, it doesn't matter who writes first."

"Then why doesn't he write to me?" she wailed.

"I'll tell him to," I promised.

"No you won't. If he won't do it on his own . . . then . . . he won't. I'll just lay here forever, left to stare at the ceiling as usual and wonder what everyone else is doing, what sort of fun they're having . . . you're having," she added sharply.

"You don't lay here wondering about anything, Gisselle," I said, finally unable to stave off a smile. "You go wherever you want, whenever you want. You merely have to snap your fingers and everyone jumps. Didn't Daddy buy the van just so you could be taken everywhere in your wheelchair?"

"I hate that van. And I hate being taken in the wheelchair. I look like something being delivered, like breads or . . . or . . . boxes of bananas. I won't go in it," she insisted.

Daddy had wanted to drive to Greenwood in Gisselle's van, but she vowed she wouldn't set foot in it. He wanted to use it because of all the things she had insisted on taking with her. She had had Wendy Williams, our maid, in her room for hours and hours packing everything, deliberately demanding the most insignificant things just to make it all that much more difficult. My pointing out to her that we had limited space in the dormitory and we had to wear uniforms didn't dissuade her.

"They'll make space for me. Daddy said they would do all that they could to accommodate me," she insisted. "And as for wearing uniforms . . . we'll see about that."

She wanted her stuffed animals—each and every one—her books and magazines, her photograph albums, almost

PEARL IN THE MIST

her entire wardrobe, including all her shoes, and she even had Wendy pack every last thing from her vanity table!

"You'll be sorry when you come home for vacations," I warned her. "You won't have the things you want here, and then—"

"And then I'll just send someone out to buy them for me," she replied smugly. Suddenly, she smiled. "If you would insist on more, Daddy would see how horrible this move is and maybe then he would change his mind."

Gisselle's conniving never ceased to amaze me. I told her that if she put half as much energy toward doing the things she had to do instead of working on getting out of her responsibilities, she would be a success at anything.

"I'm a success when I want to be, when I have to be," she replied, so I gave up on another sisterly conversation.

Now it was the morning of our trip to the school and I just dreaded going into her room. I didn't need one of Nina's crystals to predict how I would be greeted and what to expect. I dressed and brushed out my hair before going in to see how far along she was. I met Wendy in the hallway hurrying away, practically in tears and muttering to herself.

"What is it, Wendy?"

"Monsieur Dumas sent me up to help her get started, but she won't listen to a word I say," she complained. "I plead with her and plead with her to get her body movin' and she lay there like a zombie, her eyes sewn shut, pretending she's asleep. What am I supposed to do?" she wailed. "Madame Dumas will yell at me, not her."

"No one's going to yell at you, Wendy. I'll get her up," I said. "Just give me a few moments."

She smiled through her tears and wiped them off her plump cheeks. Wendy wasn't much older than Gisselle and me, but she had stopped going to school when she was only in the eighth grade and become a maid for the Dumas family. Ever since Gisselle's car accident, Wendy was more like Gisselle's whipping boy, bearing the brunt of her rages and tantrums. Daddy had hired a private duty nurse to look after Gisselle, but she couldn't tolerate Gisselle's tantrums.

Neither could the second and third nurse, so the responsibility of looking to Gisselle's needs was unfortunately added to Wendy's chores.

"Don't know why you even care about her," Wendy said, her dark eyes as furious and bright as two shiny discs of black onyx.

I knocked on Gisselle's door, waited, and then entered when she didn't respond. She was as Wendy had described: still under the blanket, her eyes shut. I went to her window and looked out. Gisselle's room had a view of the street. The morning sunlight glittered off the cobblestone walk, and there was light traffic. Along our cornstalk fence, the azaleas, yellow and red roses, and hibiscus had all bloomed in a burst of breathtaking color. No matter how long I lived in this mansion, this estate in New Orleans's famed Garden District, I remained in awe of the homes and landscaping.

"What a beautiful day," I said. "Think of all the nice things we're going to see on the trip."

"It's a boring trip. I've been to Baton Rouge before," she said. "We'll see ugly oil refineries belching smoke."

"Oh my, she is alive!" I declared, slapping my hands together. "Thank heaven. We all thought you had passed on during the night."

"You all *wished*, you mean," she said angrily. She didn't pull herself to a sitting position. Instead, she turned and left her head sunk in the big, fluffy pillow, her arms at her sides, and sulked.

"I thought you finally agreed to go and not to make a fuss, as long as you could take everything you wanted along, Gisselle," I said with controlled patience.

"I just said I give up. I didn't say I agreed to go."

"You and I looked over the brochures. You admitted it looked like a beautiful place," I reminded her. She focused her gaze on me, her eyes small.

"How can you be so . . . so . . . agreeable? You'll have to leave Beau behind, you know," she reminded me. "And when the cat's away, the mice will play."

Beau had taken my going to Greenwood very hard when I first told him. We had been having a hard enough time as it