

The story starts with gangly plain Olivia being rescued from spinsterhood by the smart and handsome Malcolm Foxworth. They soon get married and move to Foxworth Hall where Olivia starts to discover the dark secrets about Malcolm that start to kill her love for him.

She discovers he is still tormented because his beautiful mother Corrine "abandoned" him when he was five and that it was Olivia's plain looks and money that attracted him to her due to his hatred of beautiful women.

When exploring the house she discovers The Swan Room, which belonged to Malcolm's mother and has been kept as a shrine to her. When Malcolm discovers her in the room, they finally consummate the marriage, but with Malcolm saying his mother's name the whole time.

Nine months later Olivia gives birth to a boy Malcolm, then Joel. After this she cannot have any more children and Malcolm ignores the boys for the rest of their lives because he can't have a perfect daughter to remind him that all beautiful women are wicked and deceitful.

Soon Malcolm's father Garland comes back to Foxworth Hall with his new wife Alicia. Olivia is disgusted to see she is only nineteen and beautiful; and Malcolm is enraged to discover she is pregnant, thinking that her child will inherit part of his Garland's fortune. She gives birth to a son, Christopher.

However, Malcolm falls in love with Alicia. When she spurns his advances he is convinced she is leading him on and vows to make her pay dearly.

On the night of Christopher's third birthday, Garland catches Malcolm trying to rape Alicia, has a heart attack and dies in the fight that follows. Then Alicia confesses to Olivia that Malcolm has been doing this regularly and she is pregnant again. Olivia is humiliated and jealous. This is the moment when she hardens herself and becomes more like the grandmother from [*Flowers in the Attic*](#).

Olivia decides that the only thing to do is to hide Alicia up in the attic while she is pregnant and then pass the baby off as hers. Alicia reluctantly says goodbye to Christopher. But while locked away in the attic Malcolm continues to see her and take advantage of her loneliness, so, to make her less attractive to Malcolm, Alicia lets Olivia cut off her beautiful auburn hair, which Olivia leaves on Malcolm's desk to show that she's in charge now.

Over the months that pass, Olivia begins to think of Christopher as her new son and is heartbroken when Alicia leaves quietly taking Christopher with her, but is soon enraged when she discovers Malcolm has named the new child Corrine and plans for her nursery to be next to his study. He acts like an only parent to the young Corrine overriding all attempts by Olivia to raise her to be a proper young woman.

In the years that pass, Corrine grows up into a beautiful but spoiled young girl and Malcolm Jr. and then Joel are killed in tragic accidents. Olivia and Malcolm turn to religion and bond slightly until Olivia receives a letter from the dying Alicia, pleading with her to give Christopher a home and put him through college. Olivia convinces Malcolm to acquiesce, and Christopher comes to live with them. When they meet for the first time, Corrine and Christopher fall deeply in love and are banished from the house when Olivia discovers them making love in the Swan Room.

Years later Corrine returns to Foxworth Hall with her children Cathy, Chris, Cory and Carrie. The book ends with Olivia silently vowing to hide the children from the world forever.

This book, though a prequel, actually changes the entire scandalous nature of the series. Instead of half-uncle and niece, it is revealed Chris and Corinne are actually half-brother and sister. The book also gives a sympathetic side to Olivia and to Malcolm, previously unseen in the other books. However, Olivia's softer side was implied in 'Flowers in the Attic', when Cathy theorizes at one point, though briefly, that Olivia was trying to prevent them from eating the poisoned donuts their mother sets out for them, when Olivia agrees with Cathy's demands that the dying twin Cory be taken to a hospital, and when Christopher witnesses Olivia in prayer at the foot of her bed.

This book also clarifies the suspicious marriage of Corinne and John Amos (mentioned in [*Petals on the Wind*](#)), considering the latter's obvious disgust with incest. As Corinne is not Olivia's biological daughter, she and John Amos are not genetically related.