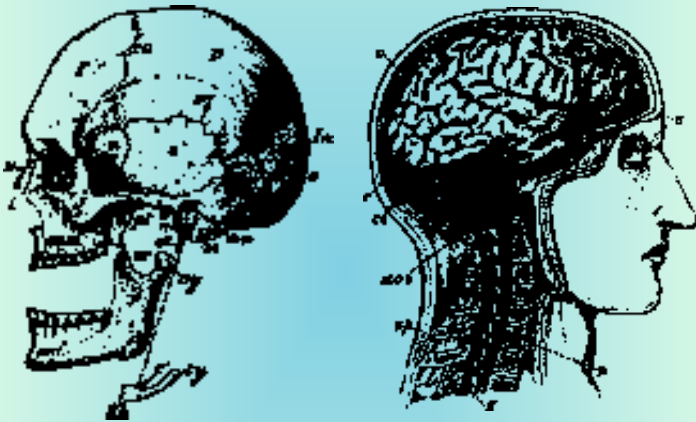


the twinwithin



janetkuypers

scarspublications

The music was still blaring, even at 4:30 in the morning, it was a movie opening after-hours party, Hollywood style. All the top models were there, all holding cigarettes in one hand, drinks in the other. The lights were pulsating in time with the throbbing music, dancing in the smoke rising to the ceiling and the condensation dripping from the outside windows. Some movie stars were there, all in little groups, trying to look more important than the rest. Of the few musicians left, the ones that were not still on the dance floor were in corner booths of the club, tossing white bags at each other. Some of the cast made an early escape, but the leading actor was still there, at a corner table with a few agents and lackeys.

His date wasn't in this film, but her fame was great enough that she was still the most wanted at the party.

They were the perfect couple, the tabloid writers thought, two starlets of the silver screen, partying together, winning all the awards together. The young actress knew just as well as the young actor that their relationship was only for the cameras, they knew that this was the price they chose to pay for the lives they had.

For the money, for the fame. The loss of who they were.

It bothered Veronica less than it bothered Alan. He needed to cover his homosexuality in order to get the roles that would make him famous, and their relationship for the press worked perfectly. And she knew that with this man by her side at these parties, she would be guaranteed more media coverage.

Not that she needed it. She had won awards for two films in three years, her newest film hit the box offices three weeks ago and was still breaking records in ticket sales, and everyone under the sun wanted her in their new movie. She was gold, and she knew it. But she was a business woman at heart, a marketing agent, and Alan was added security.

She didn't have to mingle at this party; people came to her in waves. She knew she made enough appearances for the night, besides, it would be breaking up soon, and she signalled for someone to make sure her limousine was out front, then walked over to Alan's table.

"Alan, honey, I'm going to go, are you going to be all right?" she asked.

"Sure, honey, go ahead. I'll talk to you when I get back." Alan usually used the same term of endearment for her that she used for him if he couldn't think of one on his own. No one noticed.

She left the building, and the two bouncers at the door escorted her to the door of the limousine. Even at 4:45 in the morning a small crowd waited for her.

She crawled into the back, opened her purse, found the half-pack of cigarettes and tossed them to the floor. She only smoked when she was at these damn parties. Thank God I don't have to go on the set tomorrow, she thought. As soon as one movie is over another one begins. Can't even enjoy the riches for a minute.

"At least I have tomorrow off," she groaned aloud to the empty back seat of her private limousine.

If there is a God, she thought again. She rolled her head back against the car seat and tried to find some stars in the early morning sky as she rode through Manhattan.

The driver escorted her to her door before he parked the limousine. She got into her home, kicked off her shoes, left them where they fell. She could do that, she thought, because she was famous.

"Maybe I am God," she said aloud to the empty, well-guarded house. She walked upstairs.

12:30 rolled around this particular Sunday afternoon when Veronica rolled over in her bed and reached over to her phone. She dialed her chef, asked for a good amino acid breakfast shake. She then dialed One World Spa, the best place in town, the only place that happened to have a standing reservation for her. She said she'd be there at 1:30.

At 1:40 her limousine driver escorted her out of the black Mercedes and to the front doors. The afternoon was needed for rejuvenation, she thought. She used facial peels, but avoided the mud baths and favored the massages and water tanks.

Back home she went, after shopping a little. She told her staff they could go home for the rest of the evening, so she could have the house to herself. She told her chef to have a pizza delivered before

he left. That always irritated him.

She went upstairs to find her shopping bags waiting for her in her bedroom. One by one she pulled out her purchases and spread them across the bed. She tried on one straight silver dress and walked downstairs. The house was so quiet when she walked through it and no one was there. No chefs, no maids, no guards, no landscapers or decorators. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. She stopped, watching the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She turned around and watched her own shadow. It must be fifteen feet long, she thought, and then she stretched her arms over her head in a triumphant arc, watching the shadow stretch even further.

After surveying the house in her first outfit and seeing that no one was there, she walked upstairs, back to her bedroom, to her safe in her bathroom. In the back of the safe was the key she needed; she closed the safe door, covered the safe with the wall panel, and walked to the end of the hall to the top of the stairs.

Her staff knew the two doors at the top of the stairs; one was to the roof, which only she was to go on, and the other was for the storage attic. Tonight, instead of sipping champagne and watching the east coast from her rooftop, she opened the second door.

She told Monica the coast was clear. She reached over and turned on the light by the door; it was a small light that only half-lit the attic. The kitchenette and bookshelves were well-lit now, but the back half of the mini-apartment was still in darkness.

At last, as if making her own grand entrance the way only Veronica would, Monica slowly walked toward her, out of the darkness.

"God, Ron, could you have waited any longer to get me out of here?"

"Just come downstairs," Veronica replied, "I bought some new dresses."

They sat on her bed, three hours later, Veronica wearing her new silver satin dress and Monica wearing a black strapless cocktail

dress, eating the last bites of the pizza.

"Oh, I'm stuffed," Veronica moaned as she threw her body back on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Monica got up, and walked over to the mirrors. "I think we look good in this black dress, but we have so many. No one can tell this one apart from all the others. Couldn't you get something more contemporary?"

"They can tell it apart, Monica, and we can buy as many dresses as I want."

"You're being frivolous. And selfish."

"I'm being whatever I want to be, because I can."

For a while, the silence in the bedroom was only broken by Monica turning from one side to the other in front of the mirror. Veronica remained face-up on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

"Ron, why don't you let me out more?"

"You know I bring you out whenever I can. It's tough to get the entire staff out of here. We have to be careful."

"I know, it's always careful. But I fidget up there. I could take your place more - you know you could use the rest."

Veronica looked at her twin sister in the mirror, and wasn't sure whether or not she was looking at herself.

"Monica, you know that's not a good idea. You'd go out there and look like me but not remember a thing that happened the day before. I can only brief you on so much. We agreed that the only time you'd replace me was when I was ill and needed some time to recuperate."

"Well, you've been Veronica for a while. I can't stand it up there. You're getting to call all the shots out there." Monica walked closer and leaned over the comforter. "I want to live, too."

Veronica sat up on the bed. "Monica, you know it's better this way. We agreed."

Monica sat on the bed next to her and looked at her twin sister. They looked over to the mirror and stared at themselves. Veronica put her arm around Monica's shoulder and smiled.

"Besides, we both reap the benefits of this success," Veronica

told her sister. "You're up there now, but when we get enough money for the both of us to retire we can get away from here and live in luxury and never have to worry about a thing again. You want that, don't you?"

Monica paused. "Of course," she said under her breath as her eyes darted away. She knew she couldn't argue with Veronica, even if she wanted to. Even though they were twins, she always thought she couldn't fight her.

"There, that's better. Do you want to stay down here tonight? I can set the alarm early so that things are clear before the staff comes back."

Monica didn't know what to answer.

She realized it didn't matter, that she'd still have to go back sometime, whether it was now or a few more hours from now. "I don't care," she answered.

The next day was back-to-the-set day, Veronica worked the next few days, but after the fourth day she felt very tired and wanted to stay home. This isn't like me, she thought, I never get sick.

Monica pushed a little harder every night in her attempt to get outside. "Look, Ron, you're obviously not feeling well, and you don't want to mess up filming at this point. Let me fill in for a few days. I mean, you said that that is what I'm here for."

Her arguments were winning Veronica over, and two days later Monica slept in the master bedroom while Veronica stayed in the attic. Before Veronica moved into her secret hideaway, however, she made a duplicate of the attic key.

"I'm making an extra key, Monica, so don't get any ideas."

"Did you really think I'd do that, Ronnie? I told you I'm doing this for both of us. Now, don't worry, I won't screw anything up, and I'll check up on you tomorrow night when I call off the staff, just like we discussed. Now get some sleep, honey - you've been so exhausted, you probably just need to sleep this illness off. There's vegetable soup for when you're hungry, just use the hot plate to heat it up." Monica paused.

"Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah, sure."

Without another word, Monica walked out of the attic and became Veronica.

The new Veronica walked down to the basement, to the second bar, and dropped the wrapper from the jar of sleeping pills in the trash can. She couldn't have Veronica find them while she was staying behind the second door upstairs.

For the next few weeks they went back and forth, and although people noticed a difference from day to day, the main difference was mood change and slight forgetfulness. That everyone attributed to the stress of filming. And possibly the trouble Veronica was having with Alan.

The tabloids were revealing the fact that Alan was getting more and more destructive in his lifestyle, and more and more depressed. Everyone else thought that had to be having some effect on Veronica.

And one day Monica - Veronica - went to see Alan to make sure he was okay. They usually didn't bother getting together unless it was for appearance's sake, but his behavior was starting to affect Veronica's appearance in the public eye, so off she went.

Alan was sitting in his living room. His apartment was clean to the point of being antiseptic - the walls were white, the couches were white with black accents, the tables and cabinets were black with white and chrome accents. The walls were bare, except for one black painting framed on the north wall, above the bar and adjacent to the entertainment center. Mozart was playing through Alan's speakers. Alan, holding a low-ball glass with his fingertips, was sitting in the center of his couch. The ice spun around with the thick, clear tan liquor when he moved his hand.

Monica - Veronica - walked into the living room. Alan sat slouched, head leaning back, instead of sitting upright, as he normally would, paying attention to his posture, his appearance, or his guests.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Don't do this to me, this affects me, too. Tell me what's going on."

"Oh, as soon as it affects little Veronica, oh, then we have to do something."

She stood in silence next to the couch. She didn't know if she should stand or sit.

A moment, or a minute, or ten, passed. She finally sat down on the couch next to him.

"Really, Alan, I want to know. I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

Alan turned his eyes toward her. He let his drink slip out of his hands on to the carpet, spilling all over the floor. He didn't move.

"Veronica, we put on this show for everyone, and all the while I have to hide my lover, hide who I am. Do you know how that makes me feel?"

She didn't answer.

"Do you know how it makes my lover feel?"

She could have answered, but didn't.

"I'm tired of this, Veronica. I don't know how much longer I can go on with this game."

She looked over and saw a shattered bottle on the adjacent floor; streaks of tan liquor dripping from the black painting on his wall.

Monica came home, ordered the staff out immediately. Within ten minutes they were gone, and she made her way for what was normally her bedroom.

"Ronnie - get out here. There's a problem."

Veronica stepped outside into the hallway.

"Alan is thinking about going public. He's freaking out."

"What - why? Was he going to tell me?"

"I had to fight to get it out of him. Ron, do you know what this means if he comes out?"

"It means I'll be the laughing stock of Hollywood. I didn't even know my own boyfriend was gay, and had a lover.' It'll destroy me." Veronica paused, in exasperation, and leaned her head against the hallway wall. "Shit, what do I do?"

"You mean what do we do, Ron. I got you this far, and -"

"And the more we mix roles the better chance we have of getting caught. We've got to stop this, so let me get to Alan, I can shut him up for a while, I can call him tomorrow and -"

"And nothing, Ron. We're not playing it your way anymore."

"And since when did you get so cocky?"

Monica paused, then turned to walk away. In a quick moment she turned back and pinned Veronica by the neck to the wall. "Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear." She let go of Veronica and walked down the hall to the staircase.

Walking down the hall, Monica continued: "A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet." Her voice became more and more quiet, more and more calculated with every word she spoke.

She took the first step down the stairs at the end of the hall, then stopped and turned back. "And I'm not disappearing anymore," Monica said before she walked away, leaving Veronica bruised and shaken at the top of the stairs.

The next day Veronica was on the set, she got to the studio at four-thirty in the morning for make-up and was in front of cameras by seven. They filmed at the studio and on location in the morning, and by eleven-thirty she was starved and ready for a drink. She walked over to her trailer, her make-shift dressing room and second home. Inside she poured some bourbon into a glass and sat in the only chair not covered with costumes.

Someone knocked on her trailer. "Who is it?" she asked. A young male voice responded, "Hi, my name is John, I'm a really big fan. I just wanted to say hello and tell you how good your work was."

She knew every male thought she was beautiful, and no male thought twice about her acting. She got up and moved her way to the door. As her door creaked open, she saw a handsome young man, nervously grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, you can say hello, but actually talking to me will cost you."

The young man stood there, a few steps below the trailer, dumb-

founded.

"Look, kid, I'm starved. Get me a sandwich and I'll talk to you while I'm eating before my next scene, okay? I could go for a falafel or something. There's a place down the street that makes them - would you mind?"

"No problem - I mean - I mean, it would be my pleasure. Falafel - okay, cool, no problem. I'll be back in a minute -" and the young man turned around and ran off toward the next block.

Waiting for some food was killing her. She rummaged through her mini-refrigerator and found some white bread and cheese slices and gave up on the young fan. She was getting used to fast food and hard liquor for her lunches, hard liquor and cigarettes for her dinners. She didn't want to go home much anymore. Monica got a hold of the extra key, so now anyone could take over, if one of them would slip up and let the other take over. The longer Veronica stayed away from the house, the longer Monica had to stay there to protect their secret - and the longer Veronica was Veronica.

Her fan never showed up with lunch, but she didn't care. Someone else will always get her food. But she liked the idea of talking to someone new.

At eight-thirty at night, after working sixteen hours, Veronica sat in her trailer again, this time eating a rice cake with her bourbon. A knock came on her door again.

John appeared as she opened her door and let the fan into her trailer, even without food.

It was nice, she thought, to have a fan adore her like this. Even if it was two in the morning.

For hours John sat there, leaning forward, eyes widened in amazement that he was actually talking to Veronica. He would ask a question, and Veronica would tell him all about life with fame, what this actor was like, how she got into show business. It was nice, she thought, to have someone think so much of her, to pay her so much attention. He was just some nobody to her, she couldn't even imagine what he looked like, even though she was sitting right there with him, staring him in the face.

But she didn't care what he looked like. What she cared about

was that she was still loved, for one reason or another. And so she gave this fan what he wanted - time with her. And she talked.

And after two in the morning, John left. And Veronica passed out in her trailer.

The next thing she realized was that someone was knocking on her door. She woke up. Looked at the clock. It was already eight-thirty in the morning, she had no sleep, her make-up wasn't ready, and someone outside was expecting her to shoot the next scene. She couldn't even remember what scene the crew was filming today. She dragged herself out of her make-shift bed and got to the door.

"Ms. Phillips - are you ready for the first scene?" asked a young stage-hand. He was wearing a t-shirt, jeans, a baseball cap, a crew badge around his neck. He was holding a pot of coffee.

She looked at him in silence, leaning on the door frame. She was barely conscious.

"Oh, Ms. Phillips, did you hear the news already? Oh, you don't look very good. Why don't you sit down - I can get you some coffee."

"What news?" she managed to say.

The stage-hand then realized that she hadn't heard the news, turned and ran away.

It was the director who came to her trailer with the morning paper. He poured her coffee as she read that Alan died the night before of a drug overdose.

The next three days were a blur to Veronica. She had to act sad, and although she didn't want him dead, she really didn't care about him, either. So she put on her actress face and did her best mourning job, wore some of her best black dresses, and gave up being social. Besides, all she really wanted to do was stay at home and drink herself to sleep.

But Monica was more concerned about their future. "You don't think any of Alan's sexual past will be dug up, will you?"

Veronica leaned against her bar and rubbed her face in her hand. "You know, I really don't know. What would anyone have to gain

from that?"

"Ron, you mean to tell me Alan's not going to have a bunch of male lovers popping out of the woodwork saying they have a right to part of Alan's estate? What do we do if that happens?"

"Well, there's nothing we can do now, is there? If Alan's reputation gets smeared there's really nothing we can do about it."

Monica paused, then went to the bar to get Veronica another drink. "There's got to be something. And if I were you, I'd mourn a little more. If some of his lovers do come out of the woodwork, you'll look like a jealous ex that found out he was gay."

"And what difference does it make?"

"Just keep our bases covered, and we should be fine."

"I have nothing to cover up, Monica. Besides, there was no foul play involved - he just killed himself."

Monica leaned back and lit a cigarette. "All I'm saying is that you could stand to look a little more clean."

Veronica put her head down for a moment, then got up the strength to get up and go to bed. She reached the end of the room when Monica spoke.

"Oh, and Ronnie - you look like hell. I'll cover for tomorrow."

Veronica just turned away and walked out of the room.

At 5:07 the next afternoon Monica slammed the attic door open. "Veronica, turn your television on. This is it."

Veronica walked over to the set, turned it on, and stood there for a moment while Monica changed the channel. Veronica tried to fix the reception while they both listened to the press conference on the evening news.

"I have every reason to believe that Veronica Phillips murdered Alan. Coroners found traces of cyanide in Alan's bloodstream, and Alan didn't do drugs - he was a drinker, but he never shot up."

The press standing below him roared with questions. "But why do you think it was Veronica Phillips?"

"She was nervous about her career being shattered if her boyfriend - Alan - came out of the closet - which he was contemplating doing."

Another roar from the crowd ensued. "And how do you know all

of this?"

"Because I am his real lover," the young man said.

"Change the channel," Veronica said. When Monica did, the police chief of the local county police department was being questioned. "With the findings from the Coroner's office, we definitely agree that there was foul play. As for Veronica Phillips, well, we'll be contacting her to answer some questions, but that is all we can say at the moment."

Veronica got up and turned off the television set, then sat back down on the bed. Monica lit up a cigarette. "Well, you better call the lawyers," Monica said as she took a long drag.

"But I didn't do it," Veronica mumbled under her breath. She dropped her head into her hands.

"No, of course you didn't, Ronnie," Monica said. She took another drag. "You know that, I know that -"

Veronica looked up. "Oh." She sat in silence.

Monica sat in silence with her.

Veronica figured it out.

"Oh my God," whispered Veronica. Veronica couldn't say any more. Monica picked up her head and looked at Veronica and waited.

"Monica, you did it, didn't you?" she finally asked.

Monica then looked down at the cigarette she was inhaling from. She pulled the cigarette away from her lips. "Well, honey, I've got to take care of you, now, don't I?"

Veronica jumped up from the bed. "I can't believe this! I can't believe you did this to us! Now you expect me to cover this up? What if someone saw you there, or saw you going there? Or what if someone from staff here saw you? God, Monica, this is why I'm the one on the outside most of the time, this is way out of control! You can't go around killing people! Do you think this is going to make my life easier? Monica, we need to have only one of us on the outside at a time - oh, God, and now I've got to figure out a way to get us out of this? Take care of me? You call this taking care of me? You've turned our life upside-down, you've possible destroyed our

only chance for the future we wanted, and you call this taking care of me? And another thing, I'm the one that takes care of you, not the other way around. I've managed perfectly well so far, I've managed to not kill anyone, and then you go out when you're not supposed to and do this. And what if we have to go to jail?"

"First of all, Ronnie, only one of us can go to jail. The other one would have to go into hiding. Remember that there's only one of us on the outside. Second, this is a perfect time to have both of us on the outside. I went there at twelve-thirty or one in the morning, and since you weren't home I knew you were at a club, so you'd have a room full of witnesses to back you up. You have an air-tight alibi, Ronnie. Third, Alan was only going to be trouble for us later on, and -"

"Monica, I wasn't at a club, I was talking to a fan in my trailer until two in the morning. Jesus Christ, I can't even remember his fucking name, it was, oh shit, it was -"

"Veronica, you didn't go out that night? Damnit, Ronnie, you can - but wait, the fan, just remember his name and he'll come forward."

"Um, I think it was John."

Monica sat for a moment in silence.

"John." Monica paused. "John - that's all you can think of, John? No last name?"

"He never told me his last name."

"So what we're saying here is we're supposed to go out on a search for a fan named John in all of California?"

"Well, don't blame me, I'm not the one going around killing people."

Veronica put her head back into her hands. Monica got up and walked to the door. "Well, you will be blamed if you don't find this mysterious John. So tomorrow, you go to your lawyers, tell them the whole story about John. Then talk to the police, with the lawyers, of course, and tell them exactly what you did. The more details you give, the more convincing it will be. Then have a press conference, looking for the fan. I'm sure he'll show up to get more fame, to see you again, and... To save his damsel in distress."

Monica opened the door and checked to make sure the upstairs hallway was empty. She leaned back in the room. "And yes, Ronnie,

remember that you aren't the one going around killing people. I am."

Monica turned away and shut the door behind her.

Veronica watched the cigarette smoke Monica left behind glide up toward to solitary ceiling light. "But if this doesn't work, which one of us goes to jail?" she spoke out loud to the four empty, cold walls.

The next day went perfectly according to plan. Veronica got her team of lawyers together, and she explained everything. She put on her most conservative suit and went to the police without being asked. She had her lawyers set up a press conference for five o'clock in the afternoon that day.

As everything was happening around her, all she could think was that if this didn't work out, if Veronica Phillips was going to go to jail, then she would go into hiding and let them drag Monica away.

But five-o'clock rolled around, and the room was filled at Veronica's press conference with news reporters, photographers, other actors, anyone who could get a badge. Veronica looked out from the edge of the stage, and wondered if they all came because they loved her or because they hated her.

This would have to be her best performance yet, she thought, sound intelligent, look sweet, act conservatively, use emotion, but not so much that it is unbelievable.

Her head lawyer went up on stage first, delivered a seven-minute speech, then fielded questions from the press. They questioned him for nearly ten minutes. Then he handed the stage over to Veronica, and she started her carefully prepared speech. Explaining that she wasn't alone but talking with a fan in her trailer on the set, all she asked was for that fan to step forward. Hot lines were set up, toll-free phone lines were activated, all he had to do was call. John was the only thing that could prove her innocence to her, and she was sure he would step forward.

At least that is what she said in the press conference.

Veronica went home that night feeling worse than in the morn-

ing. She delivered her speeches to the lawyers, to the police, to the media flawlessly, but no John had stepped forward. She waited at her lawyer's offices, waiting for John to call, for hours. He never did.

"What if he never comes forward?" she asked herself over and over again in her limousine ride home.

Hordes of media were waiting at the edge of her driveway, following her car in after eleven o'clock that night. The police cars that followed her home pushed the media away long enough for her to get into her home. She had her lawyers call for bodyguards and security for 6 a.m. the next morning.

Veronica went upstairs, and a moment later Monica came back down. She asked her staff to close all the shades that weren't already closed, then to go on a small vacation. The less people around, the better. "I'm sure you understand, and I appreciate your consideration during this time for me. When I need you again, I'll call you all back," she told her staff.

Within twenty minutes the house was empty. Veronica went downstairs to the bar and poured herself a glass of bourbon. She sat at a chair, with her elbows on the bar, her left hand on her forehead. She couldn't move.

Monica circled around her, pacing back and forth. "Well, we're going to have to come up with something. And you, Ronnie, you look like hell. That better be an act because we need your mind sharp when you're out there."

"Monica," Veronica responded, "Alan is dead, you killed him, and everyone thinks it was me. I look like hell because I'm in it."

She looked down, swirled the bourbon around the bottom of the glass, and finished her first round.

Veronica poured herself another glass. Monica started to walk out the room when Veronica spoke.

"So, cyanide, huh? How did you give it to him?"

"In his drink. He was already sloshed."

Veronica paused. "Did you take the glass with you?"

"Of course. And yes, I wore gloves. Don't worry, Ronnie."

Monica walked up the stairs.

Veronica wondered how many opportunities Monica had to lace her drinks, too.

For the next few days she had the lawyers call her at home and visit her instead of going out herself. She had security posted at every doorway, and a few monitoring the windows around her property. She felt like she was already in prison.

During the third night, while Veronica sat in her living room with a glass of sherry, Monica leaned over the back of the couch and whispered in her ear, "Are you beginning to see how I've felt all of these years?"

Veronica closed her eyes. She was afraid to say anything to Monica anymore. Monica walked away, whistling.

The fifth day was when the phone call came. John called at noon, and they immediately arranged a press conference for five o'clock in the afternoon. By three-thirty, John was at the police station with Veronica's lawyers. Veronica stayed at home and prepared for the press conference.

She only first saw him when he came on stage to join her. Her eyes turned into saucers when John walked on stage, but she quickly regained her composure. They answered a few questions, then Veronica took her lawyers, and John, out to dinner. By eight o'clock that night, the police issued a formal statement that Veronica Phillips was not considered a suspect in Alan's death. A celebration was in order.

Everyone went back to the lawyers' offices and drank from their private bar. At nearly two in the morning, they decided to leave.

Veronica stayed in the parking lot with John while her lawyers, one by one, drove away. In a few minutes, the two of them were alone.

She turned to him. "You're not John."

"Yes I am, Veronica, John Lowry. I-"

"Sure, you're John, but you're not the John I met."

"I know." He paused. "I was wondering what you'd say."

"What are you doing? Why did you come forward and say you were the man I was with?"

"Miss Phillips, your fan wasn't coming forward. I know you didn't do it. I know you couldn't do it. And I'm sure you were with a fan.

I couldn't let the police drag you over the coals, and they were about to do it."

"But where were you then? Could someone identify you as being somewhere else at the same time?"

"Miss Phillips, I live alone, I have no family around here, and not many friends, either. I work as a pool cleaner in Beverly Hills. No one knows anything about me, and no one saw what I was doing that night. I was alone, in my darkened apartment, on the phone with no one. I was reading a book, in my bedroom, which doesn't even have any windows. You have nothing to worry about."

"But what if the real John comes forward?"

"Miss Phillips, if he were going to come forward, don't you think he would have done it by now? I think you feared that he would never show up. If you didn't, you wouldn't have remained silent during the press conference."

Veronica leaned against her Mercedes in the parking lot. A street light illuminated the ground behind her car, leaving the two of them just out of the spotlight.

"But why did you do it?"

"I told you. I know you're innocent. I know you wouldn't do that. And -"

"And what?"

"And... I'm a big fan, too."

They sat in silence together, both leaning against her car.

"I don't know, just to be able to meet you, to talk to you, that's a big enough thrill, but I thought, hey, it would be an honor to help you when you needed it."

"But I don't know how to thank you, I mean, I could give you something, but then it would look like I was paying you off, and -"

"I'm not asking for anything. I mean, I got something - I'm the only person that could save you, and I did."

John looked up at the insects circling around the street light.

"Maybe, Miss Phillips -"

"Yes?"

"Maybe you could keep in touch. A phone call, or dinner once or twice a year."

"I think I could do that, John. But one thing -"

"Yes, Miss Phillips?"

"You have to call me Veronica."

John looked down as a sheepish grin came across his face.
"Sure, Veronica."

She gave this stranger a hug before she got into her car and drove away.

Veronica called her producers the next day and told them that she would have to take a few days off from filming to recuperate. She stayed in bed late.

Monica walked into the master bedroom at eleven-thirty in the morning. "Why aren't you on the set?"

"I called in and told them I needed a few days for myself. They understood. I told them less than a week."

"Ronnie, why the hell did you do that? I could have covered for you. You don't want people to wonder what's going on."

"Monica, people will wonder if I'm able to just go right back to work after all this happened. It's natural to need some time off after something like this. It's traumatic."

"You are such a whiny bitch, Ron. You should have checked with me first."

Monica walked out of the bedroom, but popped her head in for a brief moment.

"Oh, and get this, Ron, the morning news updates say that Alan's lover is now the primary suspect. What a riot. Now the little fucker will get his for pointing the finger at us, right?"

Monica started to laugh as she left Veronica's bedroom and walked down the hallway.

Veronica spent the afternoon drinking. By four-thirty in the afternoon she decided to make a phone call.

"Doctor Wolcott's office."

"Yes, I'd like to make an appointment to see Doctor Wolcott as soon as possible. It's a bit of an emergency."

"Have you visited with Doctor Wolcott before?"

"Yes, but it hasn't been for a few years. Look, is there anything available in the next day or two? Tell him it's Veronica Phillips, he'll

remember me."

"Oh, Ms. Phillips, let me check with the doctor and see what we can do."

She made an appointment with her psychiatrist for the next afternoon.

"Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

For the rest of the evening Monica's words kept pounding through Veronica's brain.

From the living room she heard Monica walking down the stairs. "Veronica, I'm going out to the clubs tonight. Don't go anywhere, will you?"

"I won't," Veronica answered. "Try to look like you're shaken up, will you?"

"Don't worry, darling. I'm a great actress." And with that she turned around and headed for the door.

As Monica walked away Veronica listened to her footsteps. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. The front door opened, closed. Veronica looked around at the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She sat with her feet up on her couch. Her drink was almost empty. She reached over for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Tony?"

"Yeah, who is this - Veronica?"

"Yeah, hope I'm not calling too late."

"No, honey, I was just going to go out in a bit. What do you need?"

"Well, after this whole fiasco with the police I feel like everyone's watching me a little more closely. I feel so unsafe, even in my own house. I know you offered this to me before, so -"

"You want a gun for your house?"

"Yeah, Tony."

"Well, first you gotta learn how to shoot the thing."

"Would you be interested in teaching me?"

"Sure, Veronica. When do you wanna do this?"

"As soon as possible. Can we get together tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but only at like noon. Do you want me to pick you up?"

"Sure, Tony. And thanks."

"No problem. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, Tony. Oh wait - I might be going out to the clubs, so if I see you out tonight, don't talk about this. I don't want other people knowing I'm getting a gun."

"Got it, honey. See you later."

"Bye, Tony."

She laid the phone down on the cocktail table. She got up and walked into the bathroom. She turned on the light and stood in front of the medicine cabinet. She stared at herself in the mirror, noting the new wrinkles she gained over the past two weeks. She opened the cabinet, found every package of codeine and lithium, as well as two jars of sleeping pills. She walked upstairs and did the same in the master bathroom. She then walked down the stairs into the kitchen and hid everything in a crock pot, and put it in the oven. Monica couldn't poison her, she thought, if she couldn't find the drugs.

She straightened herself up, left the kitchen, walked into the living room. She looked around her quiet house. She used to like it when she let the staff go for the night, she like the feeling of being alone. Never before did it feel unsafe, or even lonely. She got her glass, and walked to the bar. She had twelve more hours to kill before seeing Tony.

The next morning went perfectly. Since Veronica was in bed when Monica came home, and probably because Monica was still drunk at dawn, she went to the attic to sleep. Veronica got up, took some aspirin, and got ready to see Tony.

When she saw Tony pulling into her driveway, she walked outside. She got into his car and they made their way towards the shooting range.

"Hey, Veronica, in the back seat - do you like it?"

She looked in the back seat and saw a .38 special laying in the back seat. It looks like it was just thrown there nonchalantly, she thought, by someone who didn't know what it was capable of doing.

"Is it loaded?"

"Nah. Thought I'd teach you how to do that once we got to the range."

She reached to the back seat and picked up the gun.

"It's a beauty, ain't it, honey?"

She didn't answer; she just sat there in amazement at how heavy the gun really was.

Tony explained everything to her, and after two-and-a-half hours she felt calm and focused when she shot her new gun. He brought her home by three-thirty, which gave her just enough time to hide her gun in the pot in the oven, change clothes, and take her limousine to her doctor's appointment.

She walked through a back entrance into the office to avoid the exposure. She walked in with a calm she thought she couldn't have until after she talked to her old doctor.

Doctor Wolcott's previous appointment had already left, so he was waiting for her when she arrived. She walked into his office and immediately sat on the couch. He got up from his chair, walked around and sat on the corner of his desk.

"Ms. Phillips, it's good to see you again."

"Monica's getting out of control."

Doctor Wolcott paused. "The last time we talked was a few years ago, but then you said that Monica wasn't bothering you."

"Well, she's come out of hiding, and she's on a rampage. I'm scared of her. I'm afraid she's going to try to take over me."

"Why would you say that Veronica? You're a strong woman. You know you can handle her, you've done so before."

"You don't get it, Doctor Wolcott," she answered. She paused, took in a deep breath. "She killed Alan."

Doctor Wolcott leaned his head back. His smile faded.

"It was her, doctor. I swear, it wasn't me. I wasn't there. She did it, and I had to cover it up." Her eyes started to water; she put her

hand to her cheek, brushed her hair back behind her ear. "And she's been threatening me, saying she's not going to stay in hiding anymore, that no one will miss me if I'm found floating down the river two weeks from now by the police. God, I really think she's going to kill me."

"Veronica, she's not going to kill you. She needs you. She needs you to be alive. What she wants is to take over your spirit and rule your life. What you have to do is fight that, fight her will."

"No, Doctor Wolcott, you don't understand. I think she fed me sleeping pills a couple of weeks ago. I keep finding codeine and lithium in the medicine cabinets that I didn't put there. I've had to hide it from her. I'm really afraid she's trying to kill me off."

"Veronica, I'd like to admit you somewhere to get some rest. You could be away from Monica then, you'd have time to recuperate, time away from work, time to fight her and win yourself back."

"Doctor Wolcott, if I do that, then she'll definitely take over my life. She'll get out, there's nothing I can do to stop that. And she'll make it so I can never get back out. She'll never let me out."

"Then you have to fight her will now, Veronica. Let me help you."

Veronica's tears slid down her face in quiet desperation. "I have to fight her. I have to get rid of her."

Doctor Wolcott responded to her comments, but she no longer heard them. For the rest of the hour all she could think was that she had to confront Monica, do it reasonably and rationally, make it a test of wills. She always won in the past. She has to do it again.

At six o'clock, Veronica left the office and stepped into her limousine. She checked to make sure there was some liquor in the back. She told the driver to drive around. She didn't want to go home yet.

After two hours, she told her driver to stop at a liquor store and buy her a bottle of red wine. When he got back to the car, she asked him to drive her to the shore.

He drove her to a hill near the shore, so that she could watch the sunset without having to leave the back of her car. Veronica sipped her wine as she watched the glowing red sun slide down into the cool blue waters, illuminating the sky with oranges and purples.

"You know, I haven't watched the sunset in years," she told her driver as they pulled away from the hill and headed back to her home. Inside, she wondered if it would be her last.

Veronica walked into her home at nearly ten-thirty that night. She heard classical music playing from upstairs. She hoped she could avoid her confrontation for just a little while longer. She kicked her shoes off at the front door and started to head for the bar when she stopped.

"God, I haven't eaten all day," she thought, and turned around and headed into the kitchen.

The light was on in the kitchen, and she walked around the island to her refrigerator to grab a piece of cheese. She set the block of cheese down next to the refrigerator and grabbed a piece of french bread from the counter, ripping off the end and shoving it in her mouth. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the oven door slightly open.

Awake of fear fell over her. In a mad panic, she ran up the stairs to her bedroom.

She grabbed the door frame at her bedroom to stop her forward motion. Monica sat in the center of the bed, bottles and packages of drugs and boxes of bullets fanned around her. Veronica's gun was resting in Monica's lap; Monica gazed intently at it as she repeatedly ran her fingers along the handle. She didn't look up to acknowledge Veronica's arrival.

Veronica stood in the doorway, holding herself up with the door frame, panting.

Monica continued to stroke the side of the gun.

"I'm so disappointed in you, Ronnie. Did you really think I wouldn't find this?" Her eyes never left the gun in her lap.

"I just bought it. I was afraid of freaks trying to hurt us because of Alan's murder."

"And that's why you were collecting the drugs, Ronnie?"

"No, I was afraid you were going to hurt yourself. We've both been under a lot of stress, and I didn't want you resorting to -"

"Do you really think I'm stupid, Ronnie?"

Veronica stopped making up an explanation and just looked at her. Monica picked up the gun from her lap and got up from the bed.

"I mean, do you really think I'm that stupid?" She asked again, this time louder, almost screaming.

Veronica stood motionless in the doorway. Monica walked up to her. Their noses almost touched.

"I'm smart enough to know that the two of us can't do this any longer, that the two of us can't go one being one person any longer. One of us has to die tonight, for the sanity of the both of us."

They both stood in silence, waiting for the other to make the first move.

"Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

Thoughts raced through Veronica's mind. She finally spoke. "You're the one who decided that one of us has to die tonight, not me. But I'm not going to -"

In mid-sentence, to catch her off-guard, Veronica pushed Monica down and ran out the room toward the stairs.

Monica quickly jumped to her feet, picked up the gun and ran after her. She caught up in the living room. Monica started to yell.

"What, Ronnie, going to get another drink? You can't drink yourself away from this one, Ron. I'm not going away. I'm not blowing this entire career because you can't handle it."

Veronica started to cry. "I thought we were a team. I thought we needed each other." Veronica slid to the floor and leaned against the bar.

Monica crouched down next to her. "It's got to be this way, Ronnie. You know it does."

"But I don't want to die," Veronica whispered. She looked down at the carpet.

"One of us has to go away in order for the life of Veronica Phillips to move forward. All of her work will be forgotten if we're fighting on the sidelines."

Veronica looked up. "I'm Veronica Phillips," she said as she swung her right arm and punched Monica. Monica fell back, but jumped back and lunged for Veronica.

From two blocks away, a pair of joggers heard a single gun shot during their daily run.

It was two mornings later when the police entered the home of Veronica Phillips at the request of Doctor Wolcott. They found assorted pills and drugs scattered on Veronica's bed. And they found Veronica Phillips laying dead on her living room floor next to her bar, with her gun in her hand.

"I should have done something," Doctor Wolcott said under his breath.

"Did you have reason to believe she was going to kill herself?" one of the police officers asked while a plain-clothes officer took photographs of the scene.

"No," Doctor Wolcott responded, "but she was afraid her other personality was going to kill her. She saw me two days ago, she made an appointment for the first time in years. When I worked with her before I knew she had multiple personality disorder, but she had been in extensive therapy with me and she said that Monica - the second personality - wasn't around anymore, wasn't bothering her. So, I never admitted her anywhere. And just two days ago she came to my office, saying Monica was back."

Doctor Wolcott stood back while the paramedics carried a stretcher into her home.

"And now she destroyed both of them," Doctor Wolcott whispered.

On the set, her director got a body-double to finish the film.

On the other side of town, John was waiting for Veronica Phillips to call.

children churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented
literary and art magazine

Produced By

Scars Publications and Design

Editorial Offices

Children, Churches and Daddies
Scars Publications and Design
2543 North Kimball
Chicago, Illinois 60647-2559

E-Mail

c.c.andd@shout.net

Web Site

<http://www.shout.net/~ccandd>

Staff

Janet Kuypers, Publisher/Managing Editor

Publishers/Designers Of

Children, Churches and Daddies, The Burning mini poem books, God Eyes mini poem books, The Poetry Wall Calendar, The Poetry Box, The Poetry Sampler, Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters, Reverberate Music Magazine, Down In The Dirt, plus assorted chapbooks and books

Sponsors Of

Scars Publications Poetry Chapbook Contest, Scars Publications Poetry Book Contest, Scars Publications Prose Chapbook Contest, Scars Publications Prose Book Contest, Scars Publications Poetry Calendar Contest, Collection Volumes

Children, Churches and Daddies (founded 1993) is written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, England and Italy. Monthly features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. Children, Churches and Daddies is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment. Children, Churches and Daddies (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by Scars Publications and Design, 2543 North Kimball, Chicago, Illinois 60647-2559; Janet Kuypers, president. Permanent address: 8830 West 120th Place, Palos Park, Illinois 60464. Subscription price: \$36 per year in the United States. To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; include SASE & bio. Work sent on disks or through email given special attention. Previously published work accepted. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission of the publisher is forbidden. Copyright © 1995 Scars Publications and Design, Children, Churches & Daddies, Janet Kuypers. All rights of pieces remain with their authors.