her chair, looks down at the table, and blinks rapidly.

"When my dad passed away, that really *threw* me," she says. "It was just that… my dad, you know, was my primary caregiver, and I was only 20. So it was a blow. Even though I had been supporting myself since I was 14 and living alone since I was 14…" She brushes a hand below her eyes, takes a sip of Coke, and clears her throat. "When that happened, I had to take a break for a while. And now," she reiterates, sitting up a little straighter in her chair, "I'm focusing on acting."

If there is such a thing as an acting bug, Phillips is totally delirious with infection. She goes on and on about it, her round brown eyes getting bigger and rounder as she speaks: "I really *love* my job. It's *so great*. *Nothing's* more fun than going on-set. It's so complicated and intricate and *difficult*. You read a scene on paper and it's all flat and gray, but then you get to create something that people watch, and feel like they're not themselves any more. You can carry people away to this other place, if you can *hypnotize* them, *convince* them… it's like snake charming. It's so cool."

One of the reasons Phillips is finding it so easy, and appealing, to funnel all of her passion and energy into acting is that she has a lot more free time these days: Last spring, she broke up with Sean Lennon, with whom she had shared a New York apartment for four years. The couple split amicably ("he's still my absolute best friend," she gushes), but they failed to divvy up their six Chihuahuas equally—she got one, he was left with five.

"He tried to pretend that some of them were mine, but they were really his," she giggles. "And now he's the weirdo with five Chihuahuas! Can you imagine going on a date with a guy and he's like, 'Come over,' and then there are five Chihuahuas there? You'd just be like, 'Um… This guy's really smart, and really funny, but… *five Chihuahuas?*'"

"It's so *different* and *good* now," she continues. "I have my own place, and I love it. I can do whatever I want. It's like being alone in a hotel room in a strange city. You look out the window and get that feeling of excitement, like, *anything could happen*. I could take off my clothes! Say *anything*! Think *anything*! Be *anything*! I keep catching myself standing in the mirror screaming—having, like, full conversations with myself. I guess I can't always say stuff to people's faces, so when I'm alone it comes out." She shakes her head. "I'm not going to move in with a guy again—at least, not for a long time. My new rule is: if you live together and you're not married by two years, *get out*. Because it's *not* going to happen."

The sun is sinking behind the hills. Phillips' skin has taken on an eerie white glow in the candlelight from the table; her teeth glint. A pile of wadded up gum wrappers rests by her hands, some of which catch the wind and float away over the pool. Phillips is talking about books (her favorites are *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and a book about the occult; right now she's struggling with *Swann's Way*—"Why's it so weird? I don't *care* about your stupid bedroom! Let's get to Swann! What's the *point*?"), and how excited she is to be going to New Orleans tomorrow, where she'll be shooting a Kevin Williamson-produced horror film called *Backwater*. "It's scary," she says. "People die. I die. I don't know exactly how, I just know that it involves hanging on metal hooks. It's a pretty quick role."

She hasn't even begun to pack, she confesses, and she has a script for another movie to read tonight. "I'm so busy," she says, scooting her chair back and making ready to leave. "But I'm happy. *Really* happy."

Phillips has figured it out: You are not bound by what your parents were or doomed to follow in their footsteps. She's witnessed the ugliest consequences of abusing the word "party" as a verb, and now she's made up her mind to be a capable, creative adult. She's done the usual child star arc in reverse —first she lost it, then she got it together. She's intense, but not completely nuts—which is quite an achievement for someone with such a bizarre background. She's just getting on with things.

"I don't take anything that seriously," Phillips says, cramming a last stick of gum in her mouth. "I'm open to anything. I believe in everything. I love everything. I'm going to embrace every person and every situation. And that's kinda good." She grins, and nods as if agreeing with herself. "That's *cool*."

"ANYONE WHO KNOWS ME WELL JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND HOW I EVER HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING, LIKE, *OUT THERE*."

BLOUSE BY DOLCE, VEST BY DOLCE & GABBANA, JEANS BY TOUMI, ANKLE BOOTS BY GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI, RING BY MARIANNE WESTWOOD, FINGERS, BY GUY DE GUAN AT EE CORSETS

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