

**NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

**FIRST IN THE  
NEW SERIES THAT  
DARES TO BREAK ALL  
THE RULES!**

# W.C. ANDREWS<sup>®</sup>



# APRIL SHADOW

VC  
ANDREWS

APRIL SHADOWS



POCKET STAR BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney

The sale of this book without its cover is unauthorized. If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that it was reported to the publisher as "unsold and destroyed." Neither the author nor the publisher has received payment for the sale of this "stripped book."

Following the death of Virginia Andrews, the Andrews family worked with a carefully selected writer to organize and complete Virginia Andrews's 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.

An *Original* Publication of POCKET BOOKS



A Pocket Star Book published by  
POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.  
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2005 by the Vanda General Partnership

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-13: 978-0-7434-9386-4

ISBN-10: 0-7434-9386-9

First Pocket Books paperback edition September 2005

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

V.C. ANDREWS and VIRGINIA ANDREWS are registered trademarks of the Vanda General Partnership \*

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

Cover illustration by Lisa Falkenstern

Cover handlettering by Jim Lebbad

Manufactured in the United States of America

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-800-456-6798 or [business@simonandschuster.com](mailto:business@simonandschuster.com).

# Prologue



**A**bout six months or so after my thirteenth birthday, my daddy changed into a monster. It was truly as if he woke up one morning with someone else in his body. We didn't take note of the actual day, because we all thought he was just in a bad mood, and everyone, especially someone who worked as hard as he did, deserved the right to have what Mama calls "a bad hair day." If my sister, Brenda, had one or Mama had one, or even I had one, the best advice was to steer clear, nod, walk away, or change the subject. The only thing was, we couldn't do any of that to Daddy. He had a way of focusing his eyes like tiny laser beams, and he always demanded complete attention. He wasn't to be ignored, and attempting to change the subject with him was like trying to step out of a speeding automobile.

Anyway, about this time, he stopped doing any fun things with us and started complaining daily about everything in sight. He never seemed to be able to get

out of a bad mood or throw off this shroud of grouchiness. According to him, neither my older sister, Brenda, nor I could ever do anything right anymore, whether it was the way we made our beds, cleaned up our rooms, or helped Mama with her house chores. Mama started to call him Mr. Hyde from the story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. No matter how she protested, it didn't seem to bother him, which disappointed and surprised my sister and me. Up until then, when Mama complained about something Daddy did, especially in relation to us, he softened. He would rather walk barefoot over hot coals than see her unhappy. She was always our savior, but now she was like a fairy godmother who had lost her powers and her wings. She fell back to earth to wallow in the real world with the two of us.

"It's like water off a duck's back," she muttered when he turned abruptly away from her or just left the room after she had protested about something he had said or done. "I might as well have addressed the wall. He was never like this, never," she said, wagging her head like someone who wanted to shake out what she had heard and what she had seen.

It became worse than that for her, however. Eventually, Mama cried a lot over Daddy's new ways and words when she thought we weren't looking. As a result of all this, the three of us changed. Brenda became Miss Angry Face, leaving her smile outside the front door whenever she came home from after-school activities, and I felt too numb and frightened most of the time, never knowing when Daddy would explode with another burst of complaints. That was the year Daddy started to criticize my weight, too. He looked at me with such displeasure in his eyes that I felt my insides twist, turn, and shrivel. I tried to turn away, but then

came his words, which were like tiny knives poking at my heart.

“Your face looks like a balloon about to explode. Maybe we’ll have to have your mouth sewn shut for a month and feed you through a straw like someone with a broken jaw,” he said, bringing the blood so quickly into my cheeks I’m sure I looked as if I had a high fever.

It got so I was afraid to put my fork into anything on my plate. My hand actually shook, and my stomach tightened until I could barely breathe. A few times, I actually threw up everything I had eaten. Mama got very angry at him then. She widened her eyes and stretched her lips so thin they turned white, but even that didn’t stop him. Brenda protested on my behalf, and when she did, Daddy turned his anger and criticism on her by saying, “What kind of a big sister are you? You should be on her back more than anyone and especially more than me. You know what it means to be physically fit and how being overweight can cause so many health problems.”

Brenda was an excellent athlete. At five-foot-eleven in her junior year, she was the star of the girls’ varsity basketball team and the girls’ volleyball team. She had already broken all the school’s scoring records. Her picture was almost always in the weekend paper’s sports pages. Scouts had come from colleges to watch her play. There was talk that she might have an opportunity to play for the United States volleyball team in the Olympics. Other fathers attended the games and sat watching with proud smiles on their faces. About the time Daddy became our own Mr. Hyde, he stopped going altogether and then started to ridicule Brenda by telling her things like, “You’re not going to be a professional athlete. Why waste your time?” He told her

he thought her grades could be higher, even though she ran a good B+ average with all her extracurricular activities.

“If you didn’t waste your time with all these games, you’d have As instead,” he said. “It’s about time you got serious about your life and stopped all this childish nonsense.”

He had never called it that, had never tried to discourage her from participating.

When he spoke to her like this, Brenda’s eyes would become glassy with tears, but she would not cry or respond. Sometimes, she could be harder than he was, and she would stand there as still and as cold as a petrified tree while he rained his lectures and complaints down around her. She looked as if she had turned off her ears and turned her eyes completely around. I cowered in the corner or ran up to my room, crying as much for her as I did for myself and Mama.

Because of all this, our family dinners turned into silent movies. The tinkle of glasses, dishes, and silverware was like thunder. Brenda wouldn’t talk about her games anymore, and Mama was afraid to bring up any subject because Daddy would either be sarcastic or complain. He would sit there scowling or rubbing his temples. If Mama asked him what was wrong, he would just grunt and say, “Nothing, nothing. Don’t start nagging me.”

I kept my eyes down. I was afraid to breathe too loudly.

After dinner, Daddy often retreated as quickly as he could to his law office, claiming he had work he had to finish, and on weekdays he was gone before any of us had gotten up for breakfast. He never used to do that. Mornings were a happy time for us once. We greeted one another as though we had been apart for weeks.



Soon there were days when he didn't come home at night at all, claiming he had to make trips to service clients or deal with business matters. It seemed he would find any excuse he could to avoid being with us, and when he had to be with us, he was there only the minimum amount of time possible. Although Mama was ashamed to tell us, there were nights when he didn't come to bed. Instead, he claimed he had fallen asleep in his office on the sofa.

At first, Mama thought that he had found a lover and he wanted to get rid of us. She theorized that in his eyes, we had become a burden, dragging him down into waters that aged and weakened him. She was sure he blamed us for every gray hair, every wrinkle, every new ache.

“Men go through their own sort of change of life,” she rationalized. “It actually terrifies them. He'll get over it,” she said. It sounded more like a prayer she wasn't getting answered, because neither Brenda nor I saw any signs of his getting over it. On the contrary, he was getting worse.

Mama spent hours and hours sitting in what we called her knitting chair, where she made our sweaters, gloves, and hats, only now she wasn't knitting. She was just staring at the wall or through the television set, no matter what we were all watching. She didn't laugh; she didn't cry. Her face, the face that people called *the porcelain face*, began to show tiny cracks around her eyes and her quivering lips. The sadder she became, the angrier Brenda grew, and the more frightened I was.

Eventually, we found out why Daddy had turned into Mr. Hyde. The revelation was a bright flash that lit up all our dark confusion. It was like lightning piercing the walls of our home and making the air sizzle around



us. All of our lives were caught in mid-sentence. Our hearts tightened like fists in our chests. Even our tears were caught unaware and too far down, buried under layers of anger and disappointment, to come quickly enough to the surface. I thought the whole world had stopped in surprise and shock. Everything I had thought real turned out to be illusion, and everything I thought was just an illusion turned out to be real.

The hardest thing for us to learn and accept was that Daddy had done all he had done, said all the nasty things he had said, avoided us as much as he had avoided us because he loved us so much. To love someone so much that you would rather hurt them now than have them unhappy forever is a love so powerful it is beyond understanding.

Mama felt betrayed because he hadn't told her, Brenda hated herself for the things she had done and said to him, and I wondered what the difference really was between love and hate.

It took me a long time to find out, and I'm still not totally sure I know.

# 1

## Sunny Memories



I used to feel as if it were Christmas every day, all day long, at our house. Mama's voice was so full of happiness whenever she spoke. Anyone who saw how we all woke and greeted one another in the morning would think we had expectations of gifts around a tree. Laughter and giggles rang like silver bells, and Mama's smile beamed so brightly that there were never dark days, even when the Tennessee sky was totally overcast and bruised, angry-looking clouds threatened to drench us in a bone-chilling rain.

I wasn't afraid to pretend, to dream, and to imagine anything. I'd blink and see sunlight glimmering off mounds of snow that looked like coconut, and Daddy seemed to know that those sorts of days, days that threatened to depress us, were days when he should bring home surprises, whether it be a bouquet of Mama's favorite baby roses, a new doll for

me, or some game for Brenda. Back then, he bought her a Ping-Pong table and rackets, a Wiffle ball and bat, a new tennis racket, and a set of golf clubs. She played every sport well, even though she eventually favored basketball and volleyball because of her height and speed. As soon as Daddy realized that, he put up a basketball net and backboard in our driveway.

Mama said that back then, his friends kidded him about trying to turn his daughter into the son he didn't have. Mama and Daddy had stopped having children after I was born. I never asked why. Brenda told me it was because Daddy wouldn't be able to stand having three girls. He was already outnumbered so much. However, we couldn't help believing it had something to do with Mama's health, because I had been such a difficult birth, and in the end, she had to have a cesarean delivery. In the back of my mind, I couldn't prevent myself from thinking that if it weren't for me, Daddy might have had the son he wanted.

No one ever made me feel guilty about it. No one even so much as hinted at my birth being the problem. Despite it all, we were truly the perfect family in the eyes of all our neighbors and family friends.

I used to wish that we would be frozen in time. While most of my friends were hoping the hands would spin quickly over the faces of their clocks and watches so that they could drive their own cars, be able to stay out later and later on weekends, have dramatic heart-shattering romances, and collect boyfriends like butterflies, pinning their pictures on the walls, I tried to tread time the way I would tread water. I wanted Mama and Daddy to be forever as young as they were, still passionate about each other, always holding hands or hugging and kissing.

At an early age, I noticed that the parents of my friends didn't stand as close to each other, didn't touch or look at each other as much as my parents did. I would hover close by, believing that just being in their shadow, bathing in their laughter and their smiles, was enough to protect me forever and ever.

Brenda wasn't as sensitive to all this as I was, and she certainly wasn't interested in freezing time. She was anxious about trying out for college varsity teams and competing seriously in games where she could excel and win the appreciation and interest of people who could further her athletic career. Adolescence seemed to be more of a nuisance. She would get absolutely impossible when she had her period. On more than one occasion, she wondered aloud why boys' lives weren't equally interrupted. Why weren't their rhythms changed, their energy sapped, their moods depressed?

"If I could change my sex," she once whispered to me, "I'd do it in a heartbeat."

The very thought of such a thing made my own heart race. I had nightmares in which Brenda grew a mustache, but more frightening than anything was the idea of her having a boy's sex organ. Once, I dreamed of surprising her in the bathroom after she had taken a shower and seeing her cover herself just a second or two too late. That dream woke me, and I sat up quickly, my heart pounding, my skin clammy. I was only twelve then. Brenda was nearly fifteen and close to five-foot-eleven inches tall. She took after Daddy's side of the family. He was six-foot-three and his father had been six-foot-five. Mama was five-foot-ten herself.

I had fears of being so short people would think I wasn't really a part of the family or that I had been

malformed. My body grew out more than up. I had bigger bones than Brenda and already wider hips. My weight went first into my thighs and spread around to my rear. It crept up my back and thickened my waist. By the time I was twelve, I was one hundred fifty pounds. Even though I was overweight from the age of seven on, neither Mama nor Daddy made much of it. Mama used to say, "She'll grow out of it as she gets older and taller."

I grew older, but I wasn't growing all that much taller. I was still five-foot-three, and it began to look as if when I had wished time would freeze, it had, but it had frozen only for me.

Another reason I felt out of place was that I was not half the athlete Brenda was. She didn't like to play any sport with me because I was so poor at it. I was no match for her in Ping-Pong, and I was pathetic when it came to basketball, half the time not even reaching the rim with a shot, and when I threw a baseball—or anything, for that matter—she would complain that I threw just like a girl.

What did that mean? I wondered. I *was* a girl.

Board games were my specialty. I could give her a challenge at checkers or backgammon, but she never had the patience to sit for hours playing board games. Through rain and snow, wind and gray skies, Brenda would be outside shooting baskets, practicing her putt for golf, or just running to stay in shape. She was driven. Daddy used to say proudly, "That girl has drive. She loves competition."

Brenda did love competition, and she loved winning the most. She never played for the fun of it. When she and Daddy played basketball, she would work hard at defeating him. He was good, too, so it was always a battle. If he so much as seemed to let her win, she

would rant at him and tell him she didn't need his charity. That would get him angry.

"Charity, huh?" he would puff, and they would play harder, play for keeps, and if she beat him, which she often did, her face would fill with a satisfied glow that made him shake his head as if he didn't understand her at all, as if she weren't his daughter but some stranger.

Daddy had been a very good athlete in both high school and college. He had his certificates and his trophies, and staying in good health was very important to him. He was always exercising, claiming the physical activity helped him to be a sharper thinker and gave him more energy when others were faltering. In that regard, he was far closer to Brenda than he was to me, but when I was younger, he did think I was cuter, more lovable. He called me his panda bear, because I had Mama's coal-black hair and alabaster complexion, with ebony eyes he said were panda bear button eyes. One of the first stuffed toys he bought me was a panda bear. I kept it with me in bed, lying against the pillows when the bed was made. I kept it under the blanket with me when I went to sleep. I called it Mr. Panda and often carried on long conversations with it, rattling away as if I really expected the stuffed toy would suddenly come to life, like toys in the movies, and reply.

Brenda made fun of that when she heard me. Mama thought it was cute, and at one time, so did Daddy, but when he became Mr. Hyde, he mocked it and told me I should put my panda bear in a carton in a closet or give it to a younger girl.

"Where are your *real* friends?" he would demand. "You don't get invited to parties or anyone's house, and do you know why, April? I'll tell you why. You're

too overweight. You won't have any social life. Go on a diet," he ordered.

He wasn't wrong. I didn't have any social life. I had never had a boyfriend, and the only friends I had at school were other girls who had never had boyfriends and had none now. No one asked us to dances or parties, and what bothered me a little was the fact that I had never had a heart-throbbing crush on any boy, either. It was a sensitive area for Brenda as well, and she was quick to come to my defense.

"People should be friends with her because of who she is, not because of what she looks like," Brenda told Daddy when he criticized me.

"Oh? And who is she?" he countered. "Mrs. Panda Bear?"

I could hardly breathe. My throat tightened, and my chest constricted. *Could a girl my age get a heart attack?* I wondered.

I quickly retreated to my room and closed the door. I wanted to be like Brenda and never cry in front of him, but it was harder for me. Maybe I just had more tears inside me than she had. Thank goodness I had my own room, my own sanctuary. He had stopped barging in on me after I was about ten. Mama had told him I was a young lady and that he had to recognize the fact. He wasn't upset about it.

In fact, his face lit up with happiness at the time, and he nodded at the three of us around the dinner table, declaring he had three beautiful women in his home. How could he go so quickly from that sort of a daddy to Mr. Hyde?

I imagined all sorts of fantastic answers. His body had become inhabited by some evil spirit, a poltergeist, or maybe even an extraterrestrial. Someone had cloned him, and the clone had an entirely different personal-



ity. Or maybe it was just as Mama had told us when it all began. "He is being this way now because he is afraid you will be too weak or we won't be perfect enough. He doesn't mean to be so cruel. It's just tough love."

Brenda smirked at that.

"Yeah, right," she said, which was always her way of saying *That's stupid*.

Her room was right next to mine. We lived in a sprawling ranch-style home with bay windows in the dining room and large picture windows in the living room. Brenda's and my bedrooms were on one side, and Daddy and Mama's master bedroom was on the other. Daddy had a small wood-paneled office off his bedroom, the living room was large, and the dining room was right next to the kitchen so that Mama had a pass-through window. Our furnishings were all contemporary. Mama liked what she called the clean, simple look. None of it was inexpensive, but in those days, Daddy rarely, if ever, complained about anything she bought. After he became Mr. Hyde, nothing she bought was right or sensible, even down to the brand of milk.

When Brenda and I were growing up, money was never a concern. However, neither she nor I was wasteful or ungrateful for the things we had. We never took anything for granted or whined for expensive toys or clothes. Brenda never even asked Daddy to get her a car when she was sixteen, even though most of her friends and teammates had their own cars, even ones who came from families far less wealthy than ours. She passed her driving test, got her license, and drove Mama's car whenever Mama told her she could. She rarely, if ever, asked Daddy for his car. He used to offer it to her, but when he became Mr. Hyde, he

wouldn't, even if he had no use for it and it meant Brenda had to beg someone to pick her up for a special practice or a game. A few times, she had to take the bus.

Because our house was bigger than most nearby and we had a larger lot in an upscale neighborhood of Hickory, a suburban community ninety miles from downtown Memphis, people and our classmates assumed we were very rich. Daddy was a successful business attorney, as his father had been. I couldn't remember my paternal grandfather, because he died of heart failure before I was two, and my paternal grandmother had died four years before that of cancer. Daddy lost his older sister, Marissa, to cancer as well. I was too young at the time to remember much detail, and Mama shielded me more from the sadness, but Brenda could recall how our aunt grew gaunt and pale. She said she was like a room full of light darkening and darkening.

"Every time I saw her, she looked smaller, but her eyes grew bigger. It was like her body was becoming more and more surprised by what was happening to it. It was very weird," she told me. "It got so I was afraid of going to visit her with Daddy and Mama. I envied you because you were so oblivious and protected. Daddy wouldn't take you along to visit like he took me, so you didn't see firsthand how very sad he was about it all. He tried not to be sad. He told me sadness hardens like tar on your soul, and you carry the weight of it forever."

Aunt Marissa was married but had never had children, and we had little contact now with her husband, my uncle Granger. He had left our area and moved to Oregon, where he met another woman and remarried.