

# THE ANASTASIA SYNDROME

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**THE**  
**ANASTASIA**  
**SYNDROME**

**AND OTHER  
STORIES**

**Mary Higgins Clark**

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**For Frank "Tuffy" Reeves  
with love and laughter**

*I saw their starved lips in the gloam  
With horrid warning gapèd wide,  
And I awoke and found me here  
On the cold hill's side.*

*And this is why I sojourn here  
Alone and palely loitering,  
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.*

*John Keats*  
“La Belle Dame Sans Merci”

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# THE ANASTASIA SYNDROME

**W**ith a combination of reluctance and relief, Judith closed the book she had been studying and laid her pen on top of her thick notebook. She had been working steadily for hours, and her back felt cramped as she pushed back the old-fashioned swivel chair and got up from the desk. The day was overcast. Long ago, she had turned on the powerful desk light she had bought to replace the elaborately fringed Victorian lamp which belonged in this furnished rental flat in the Knightsbridge district of London.

Flexing her arms and shoulders, Judith walked over to the window and looked down at Montpelier Street. At three-thirty, the grayness of the January day was already merging with the approaching dusk and the slight shudder of the windowpanes testified that the wind was still brisk.

Unconsciously she smiled, remembering the letter she had received in answer to her inquiry about this place:

"Dear Judith Chase,

The flat will be available from 1 September until 1 May. Your references are most satisfactory, and it is a comfort to me to know that you will be engaged in

writing your new book. The Civil War in seventeenth-century England has proved marvelously fertile to romantic writers and it is gratifying that a serious historical writer of your stature has chosen it. The flat is unpretentious but spacious and I think you will find it adequate. The lift is frequently out of order; however, three flights of stairs are not too formidable, do you think? I personally climb them by choice."

The letter ended with a precise, spidery signature: "*Beatrice Ardsley*." Judith knew from mutual friends that Lady Ardsley was eighty-three.

Her fingertips touched the windowsill and she felt the cold, raw air forcing its way through the wooden frame. Shivering, Judith decided that she would have just enough time for a hot bath, if she hurried. Outside, the street was almost empty. The few pedestrians were scurrying along rapidly, their heads bent into their necks, coat collars rolled up. As she turned away, she saw a toddler running down the street just below her window. Horrified, Judith watched as the little girl tripped and fell into the road. If a car came around the corner, the driver wouldn't see her in time. There was an elderly man halfway down the street. She pulled at the window to scream for him to help, but then a young woman appeared from nowhere, darted into the road, scooped up the child and cradled it in her arms.

"Mummy, Mummy," Judith heard it cry.

She closed her eyes and buried her face in her hands as she heard herself wailing aloud, "Mummy, Mummy." Oh God. Not again!

She forced herself to open her eyes. As she had expected, the woman and toddler had vanished. Only the old man was there, making his careful way along the sidewalk.

The phone rang as she was fastening a diamond pin to the jacket of her silk faille cocktail suit. It was Stephen.

"Darling, how did the writing go today?" he asked.

"Very well, I think." Judith felt her pulse quicken. Forty-six years old and her heart leaped like a schoolgirl's at the sound of Stephen's voice.

"Judith, there's a bloody emergency Cabinet meeting and it's running late. Do you mind terribly meeting me at Fiona's? I'll send the car."

"Don't do that. A taxi will be quicker. If you're late, it's state business. If I'm late, it's bad business."

Stephen laughed. "God, you do make my life easy!" His voice lowered. "I'm besotted with you, Judith. Let's only stay as long as we must at the party, then go off for a quiet dinner together."

"Perfect. Good-bye, Stephen. I love you."

Judith replaced the receiver, a smile playing on her lips. Two months



ago, she had been seated at a dinner party next to Sir Stephen Hallett. "Quite the biggest catch in England," her hostess, Fiona Collins, confided. "Stunning looks. Charming. Brilliant. Home Secretary. It's common knowledge that he'll be the next Prime Minister. And darling Judith, best of all, he's *eligible*."

"I met Stephen Hallett once or twice in Washington years ago," Judith said. "Kenneth and I liked him very much. But I came to England to write a book, not to get involved with a man, charming or not."

"Oh nonsense," Fiona snapped. "You've been widowed for ten years. That's quite long enough. You've made your name as an important writer. Darling, it really is nice to have a man around the house, especially if the house turns out to be 10 Downing Street. My bones tell me that you and Stephen would be perfect together. Judith, you're a beautiful woman, but you always send out signals saying 'Stay away, I'm not interested.' Don't do that tonight, please."

She had not sent out those signals. And that night Stephen had escorted her home and come up for a nightcap. They had talked till nearly dawn. When he left, he had kissed her lightly on the lips. "If I have passed a more pleasant evening in my life, I don't remember it," he had whispered.

A taxi was not quite so simple to find as she had expected. Judith waited a chilly ten minutes before one finally came along. As she stood at the curb, she tried to avoid looking into the road. This was the exact spot where, from the window, she had seen the toddler fall. Or imagined it.

Fiona's home was a Regency house in Belgravia. A Member of Parliament, Fiona took glee in being compared to the acerbic Lady Astor. Her husband, Desmond, chairman of a worldwide publishing empire, was one of the most powerful men in England.

After leaving her coat in the cloakroom, Judith slipped into the adjoining powder room. Nervously she touched her lips with gloss and patted back the tendrils that the wind had scattered around her face. Her hair was still a natural dark brown; she had not yet begun to cover the occasional strands of silver. An interviewer had once described her eyes as sapphire blue and her porcelain complexion a constant reminder that she was believed to be of English birth and heritage.

It was time to go into the drawing room, to let Fiona drag her from group to group. Fiona never failed to give an introduction that sounded like a sales pitch. "My dear, dear friend, Judith Chase. One of the most prestigious writers in America. Pulitzer prize. American Book Award. Why this beautiful creature specializes in revolutions when I could give

her so much delicious gossip, I'll never know. Nevertheless, her books on the French Revolution and the American Revolution are simply brilliant and yet manage to read like novels. Now she's working on our Civil War, Charles the First, and Cromwell. Absolutely immersed in it. I'm so afraid she'll find some nasty secrets that some of us would just as soon not know about our ancestors."

Fiona would not stop the running commentary until she'd made sure everyone was aware of who Judith was, then, when Stephen arrived, she would rush around whispering that the Home Secretary and Judith had been dinner partners right here, in this house, and now . . . she would roll her eyes and leave the rest unsaid.

At the entrance to the drawing room Judith paused for a moment to take in the scene. Fifty or sixty people, she estimated quickly, at least half the faces familiar: government leaders, her own English publisher, Fiona's titled friends, a famous playwright . . . A fleeting thought crossed her mind that no matter how often she came into this room, she was struck by the exquisite simplicity of the muted fabrics on the antique sofas, the museum-quality paintings, the understated charm of the slender draperies that framed the French doors to the garden.

"Miss Chase, isn't it?"

"Yes." Judith accepted a glass of champagne from a waiter as she gave an impersonal smile to Harley Hutchinson, the columnist and television personality who was England's leading gossipmonger. Somewhere in his early forties, he was long and lean, with inquisitive hazel eyes and lank brown hair which fell forward on his forehead.

"May I say you're looking lovely tonight?"

"Thank you." Judith smiled briefly and began to move on.

"It is always a pleasure when a beautiful woman is also blessed with an exquisite sense of fashion. That's something we don't often see at high levels in this country. How is your book going? Do you find our little Cromwellian spat as interesting as writing about the French peasants and the American colonists?"

"Oh, I think your little spat is right up there with the others." Judith felt the anxiety that had been caused by the hallucination of the toddler begin to disappear. The thinly veiled sarcasm Hutchinson used as a weapon restored her equilibrium.

"Tell me, Miss Chase. Do you hug your manuscript to yourself until it's complete, or do you share it along the way? Some writers enjoy talking over the day's work. For example, how much does Sir Stephen know about your new book?"

Judith decided it was time to ignore him. "I haven't spoken to Fiona yet. Excuse me." She did not wait for Hutchinson's response as she walked across the room. Fiona's back was to her. When Judith greeted her, Fiona turned, quickly kissed her cheek, and murmured, "Darling, just one moment. I've finally cornered Dr. Patel and do want to hear what he has to say."

Dr. Reza Patel, the world-renowned psychiatrist and neurobiologist. Judith studied him intently. About fifty years old. Intense black eyes that burned from under heavy brows. A forehead that furrowed frequently as he spoke. A good head of dark hair framing his even-featured brown face. A well-cut gray pin-striped suit. Besides Fiona, there were four or five others clustered around him. Their expressions as they listened to him ranged from skepticism to awe. Judith knew that Patel's ability to regress patients under hypnosis to very early childhood and have them accurately describe traumatic experiences was considered the greatest breakthrough in psychoanalysis in a generation. She also knew that his new theory, which he called the Anastasia Syndrome, had both shocked and alarmed the scientific world.

"I do not expect that I will be able to prove my theory for quite a time to come," Patel was saying. "But after all, ten years ago many scoffed at my belief that a combination of benign medication and hypnosis could release the blocks that the mind throws up in self-protection. Now that theory is accepted and in general use. Why should any human being be forced to undergo years of analysis to find the reason for his or her problem, when it can be uncovered in a few brief visits?"

"But the Anastasia Syndrome is quite different, surely?" Fiona protested.

"Different, yet remarkably similar." Patel waved his hands. "Look at the people in this room. Typical of the *crème de la crème* of England. Intelligent. Knowledgeable. Proven leaders. Any one of them might be an appropriate vessel to bring back the great leaders of the centuries. Think how much better off the world would be if we could have the present counsel of Socrates, for example. Look, there is Sir Stephen Hallett. In my opinion, he will be a superb Prime Minister, but wouldn't it be comforting to know that Disraeli or Gladstone was offering him counsel? Was literally part of his being?"

Stephen! Judith turned quickly, then waited as Fiona darted to greet him. Realizing that Hutchinson was watching her, she deliberately stayed with Dr. Patel when the others drifted away. "Doctor, if I understand

your theory, the woman Anna Anderson, who claimed she was Anastasia, was receiving treatment for a nervous breakdown. You believe that during a session when she was under hypnosis and had been treated with drugs, she was inadvertently regressed to that basement in Russia at the exact moment when the Grand Duchess Anastasia was murdered with the rest of the royal family."

Patel nodded. "That is exactly my theory. The spirit of the Grand Duchess as it left her body, instead of going on to the next world, entered the body of Anna Anderson. Their identities became fused. Anna Anderson in truth became the living embodiment of Anastasia, with her memories, her emotions, her intelligence."

"And what about Anna Anderson's personality?" Judith asked.

"There seems to have been no conflict. She was a very intelligent woman but willingly surrendered herself to her new position as the surviving heirless to the throne of Russia."

"But why Anastasia? Why not her mother, the Czarina, or one of her sisters?"

Patel raised his eyebrows. "A very shrewd question, Miss Chase, and by asking it you have put your finger squarely on the one problem of the Anastasia Syndrome. History tells us that Anastasia was by far the most strong-minded of the women in her family. Perhaps the others accepted their death with resignation and went on to the next plane. She was not willing to go, fought to stay in this time zone, and seized on the inadvertent presence of Anna Anderson to cling to life."

"Then you are saying that the only people you could in theory bring back would be those who died unwillingly, those who desperately wanted to live?"

"Exactly. Which is why I mention Socrates who was forced to drink hemlock, as opposed to Aristotle who died of natural causes. That is the reason why I was truly being frivolous when I suggested Sir Stephen might be an appropriate vessel to absorb the essence of Disraeli. Disraeli died peacefully, but someday I shall also have the knowledge to recall the peaceful dead whose moral leadership is needed again. And now Sir Stephen is making his way to you." Patel smiled. "May I say I admire your books tremendously. Your scholarship is a pleasure."

"Thank you." She had to ask him. "Dr. Patel," she said hurriedly, "you have been able to help people retrieve memories of very early childhood, haven't you?"

"Yes." His expression became intent. "That is not an idle question."

"No, it isn't."

Patel reached into his pocket and handed her his card. "If you ever wish to talk to me, please call."

Judith felt a hand on her arm and looked up into Stephen's face. She tried to keep her voice impersonal. "Stephen, how good to see you. Do you know Dr. Patel?"

Stephen nodded curtly to Patel and linking her arm in his, steered her to the far end of the room. "Darling," he murmured, "why in the name of heaven are you wasting your breath on that charlatan?"

"He's not—" Judith stopped. Of all people, Stephen Hallett was the last man who could be expected to endorse Dr. Patel's theories. The newspapers had already printed Patel's suggestion that Stephen would be a likely candidate to become infused with the spirit of Disraeli. She smiled up at him, not caring for the moment that they were being observed by almost everyone in the room.

There was a stir as the Prime Minister was greeted at the door by her hostess. "I don't usually do many of these cocktail parties, but for your sake, my dear," she said to Fiona.

Stephen put his arm around Judith. "It's about time you met the Prime Minister, darling."

They went to Brown's Hotel for dinner. Over salad and sole Véronique, Stephen told her about his day. "Perhaps the most frustrating in at least a week. Damn it, Judith, the P.M. has got to end the speculation soon. The mood of the country demands an election. We need a mandate and she knows it. Labour knows it and we're at a stalemate. And yet I understand. If she doesn't stand for reelection, then of course that's it. When my time comes, I shall find it very hard to retire from public life."

Judith toyed with her salad. "Public life is your entire life, isn't it, Stephen?"

"Through all the years when Jane was ill, it was my salvation. It occupied my time and my mind and my energies. In the three years since her death, I can't tell you how many women I've been introduced to. I went out with a few of them, and I realized their faces and names all blended together. You want to know an interesting test of a woman? When she makes plans that include you, is she visibly annoyed when you're unavoidably late? Then one night, on a cold November evening, I met you at Fiona's, and life has been different. Now when the problems pile up, a quiet voice whispers, 'You'll be seeing Judith in a few hours.'"

His hand reached across the table and touched hers. "Now let me ask the question. You've created a very successful career. You've told me that

sometimes you work through the night or hole up for days at a stretch when you have a deadline. I would respect your work as you respect mine, but there would be times, many times, when I'd need you to attend affairs with me or accompany me on trips abroad. Would that be a burden, Judith?"

Judith stared into her glass. In the ten years since Kenneth's death, she had managed to create a new life for herself. She'd been a journalist at the *Washington Post* when Kenneth, the White House correspondent of the Potomac Cable Network, was killed in a plane crash. She had enough insurance money to give up her job and begin the project that had been haunting her since the first time she had read a Barbara Tuchman book. She was determined to become a serious historical writer.

The thousands of hours of tedious research, the long nights at the typewriter, the rewriting and editing, had all paid off. Her first book, *The World Is Upside Down*, about the American Revolution, won a Pulitzer prize and became a best-seller. Her second book, published two years ago, about the French Revolution, *Darkness at Versailles*, had been equally successful and received an American Book Award. Critics hailed her as "a spellbinding storyteller who writes with the scholarship of an Oxford don."

Judith looked directly at Stephen. The soft lighting from the shaded wall sconces and the glass-enclosed candle that flickered on the table softened the stern lines of his aristocratic features and emphasized the deep blue-gray tones of his eyes. "I think that like you, I've both loved my work and immersed myself in it to escape the fact that in the true sense of the word I haven't had a personal life since Kenneth died. There was a time when I could meet deadlines and still happily juggle all the commitments that come with being married to a White House correspondent. I think the rewards of being a woman as well as a writer are marvelous."

Stephen smiled and reached for her hand. "You see, we do think alike, don't we?"

Judith withdrew her hand. "Stephen, there's one thing you should consider. At fifty-four you're not too old to marry a woman who can give you a child. I'd always hoped to have a family and it simply didn't happen. At forty-six it certainly won't happen."

"My nephew is a splendid young man and has always loved Edge Barton Manor. I shall be glad for him to have it and the title when the time comes. My energies at this age simply do not extend to fatherhood."

Stephen came up to the flat for a brandy. They toasted each other solemnly as they agreed that neither one wanted to attract publicity about

their personal life. Judith did not need the distraction of gossip columnists pestering her while she was writing her book. When the election came, Stephen wanted to answer questions about the issues, not about his courtship. "Although of course they'll love you," he commented. "Beautiful, talented, and a British war orphan. Can you imagine the field day they'll have when they connect us?"

She had a sudden vivid recollection of the incident this afternoon. The toddler. "*Mummy, Mummy!*" Last week, when she'd been near the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens she had been torn by the haunting memory of having been there before. Ten days ago she had almost fainted in Waterloo station, sure that she'd heard the sound of an explosion, felt pieces of debris falling around her . . . "Stephen," she said, "there is *one* thing that *is* becoming very important to me. I know no one came forward to claim me when I was found in Salisbury, but I *was* well dressed, obviously had been well cared for. Is there any way I might be able to track down my birth family? Will you help me?"

She could feel Stephen's arms tense. "Good God, Judith, don't even think about it! You've told me every effort was made to trace your relatives and not one single clue was turned up. Your immediate family was probably wiped out in the raids. And even if it were possible, all we need is to unearth some obscure cousin who turns out to be a drug dealer or a terrorist. Please, for my sake, don't even consider it, at least not while I'm in public life. After that, I'll help you, I promise."

"Caesar's wife must be above reproach?"

He drew her to him. She felt the fine wool of his suit jacket against her cheek, felt the strength of his arms around her. His kiss, deep and demanding, quickened her senses, awoke in her feelings and desires she had resolutely put away when she lost Kenneth. But even so, she knew she could not wait indefinitely to search for her birth family.

It was she who broke the embrace. "You told me you have a very early meeting," she reminded him. "And I'm going to try to get another chapter written tonight."

Stephen's lips brushed her cheek. "Hoist on my own petard, I see. But you're right, at least for the immediate future."

Judith watched from the window as Stephen's chauffeur opened the door of the Rolls for him. An election was inevitable. In the near future, would she be riding in that Rolls as the wife of the Prime Minister of Great Britain? Sir Stephen and Lady Hallett . . .

She loved Stephen. Then why this anxiety? Impatiently she went into the bedroom, changed into a nightgown and warm wool robe, and went back to her desk. A few minutes later, she was deep in concentration as she

wrote the next chapter of her book about the Civil War in England. She had completed the chapters about the causes of the conflict, the destructive taxes, the dissolved Parliament, the insistence on the divine right of kings, the execution of Charles I, the Cromwellian years, the restoration of the monarchy. Now she was ready to write about the fate of the regicides, those who had planned, signed, or carried out the death warrant of Charles I and were to know the swift justice of his son, Charles II.

Her first stop the next morning was the Public Records Office at Chancery Lane. Harold Wilcox, the Assistant Keeper of Records, willingly pulled out piles of aging documents. It seemed to Judith that centuries of dust had been assumed into their pages.

Wilcox thoroughly admired Charles II. "A lad of nearly sixteen when he first had to flee the country to escape his father's impending fate. A clever one he was. The Prince slipped through the Roundhead lines at Truro and sailed to Jersey and on to France. He came back to lead the Royalists, escaped again to France and remained there and in Holland until England came to its senses and begged his return."

"He stayed near Breda. I've been there," Judith remarked.

"An interesting place, isn't it? And if you look about, you'll see many in town with traces of the Stuart features. Charles the Second loved the women. It was at Breda that he signed the famous declaration promising amnesty to his father's executioners."

"He didn't keep his promise. In effect that declaration was a carefully-worded lie."

"What he wrote is that he extended mercy where it was *wanted* and *deserved*. But neither he nor his advisers believed that everyone deserved that mercy. Twenty-nine men were tried for regicide—the killing of a king. Others turned themselves in and were sent to prison. Those found guilty were hanged, drawn, and quartered."

Judith nodded. "Yes. But there was never a clear explanation for the fact that the King also attended the beheading of a woman, Lady Margaret Carew, who was married to one of the regicides. What crime did she commit?"

Harold Wilcox frowned. "There are always rumors that surround historical events," he said. "I do not deal in rumors."

The raw wintry cold of the past few days had given way to brilliant sunshine and an almost balmy breeze. When she left the Records Office Judith walked the mile to Cecil Court and spent the rest of the morning browsing through old bookshops in the area. The tourists were out in full



force, and she decided that tourist season was now twelve months long. And then realized that in British eyes she too was a tourist.

Her arms filled with books, she decided to have a quick lunch in one of the little tea shops near Covent Garden. As she cut through the busy marketplace, she stopped to watch the jugglers and clog dancers, who seemed to be especially festive in the unexpected reprieve of the pleasant day.

And then it happened. The steady, piercing wail of the air raid sirens shattered the air. The bombs blotted out the sun, racing toward her; the building beyond the jugglers dissolved into a crumbled mass of broken bricks and fire. She was choking. The heat of the smoke was searing her face, closing her lungs. Her arms went limp and the books fell to the ground.

Frantically she reached out, groping for a hand. "Mummy," she whispered. "Mummy, I can't find you." A sob rose in her throat as the sirens receded, the sun returned, the smoke cleared away. As her eyes refocused, she realized she was clinging to the sleeve of a shabbily-dressed woman who was carrying a tray of plastic flowers. "You all right, luv?" the woman was asking. "Not going to faint, are you now?"

"No. No. I'll be fine." Somehow she managed to collect the books, to make her way to a tearoom. Not bothering with the menu the waitress offered, she ordered tea and toast. When the tea came, her hands were still trembling so violently she could barely hold the cup.

When she paid her bill, she extracted from her wallet the card Dr. Patel had given her at Fiona's party. She had noticed a phone box in Covent Garden. She would call him from there.

Let him be in, she prayed as she dialed the number.

The receptionist did not want to put her through. "Dr. Patel has just finished his last patient. He does not have afternoon hours. I can arrange an appointment for next week."

"Just give him my name. Tell him it's an emergency." Judith closed her eyes. The whine of the air raid sirens. It was going to happen again.

And then she heard Dr. Patel's voice. "You have my address, Miss Chase. Come over immediately."

By the time she reached his office on Welbeck Street, she had recovered some measure of control. A thin, fortyish woman, dressed in a white lab coat, her blond hair pulled back into a severe bun, admitted her. "I'm Rebecca Wadley," she said, "Dr. Patel's assistant. The doctor is waiting for you."

The reception room was small, his office quite large. Cherry-paneled, with a wall of books, a massive oak desk, several comfortable easy chairs,