

Anastasia

A Novel by

Willard Thurston

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PRÉCIS: The story follows the careers of three sisters — identical or one-egg twins, and a step-sister — Anastasia — a Russian spy, a GRU ‘illegal’, who sadly learns of her siblings’ adventures late in the book. Her career begins with great promise, almost the match of the aura that surrounded her namesake in the Romanov family — the myth of the numinous daughter with ineffable promise. For Anastasia’s spy tutor and mentor his protégé revives such an illusive hope! His discovery of her fall poetically matches the sobering acceptance of the murdered Romanov princess. Anastasia is the second book in the Sisters’ Trilogy: *Dyad*, *Anastasia*, *Bull Dance*. The books can be read in any order.

Sample Pages follow. Download options at end of Sample Pages.

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PART ONE

Through a glass, darkly... 1 Corinthians 13:12

Vassily Sergeevich Ablesimov stared out upon the phosphorescent snow of the inner courtyard from his spare

cavernous office in the stone barrack that was rumored to have guest-housed, among other zealous orders, the last Tzarina's select hooligans, including one megalomaniacal monk. Once again the power had cut out and only the moon kept his world from darkness. An eerie light appeared to emanate from the snow itself, independent of the lone orb eyeing him in the vast dark sky beyond his small window on the second floor. It was at such times, when the noisome world waned, that reality seemed to reassert itself. Certainly the regional surveillance apparatus came briefly to a halt, and the momentary dissolution of his corpus into undifferentiated shadow conferred a tranquility he savored yet distrusted. Did he then yearn for release, for ingestion in the great fierce Death Maw the lion tamers of American psychiatry had been showcasing and taunting for decades? Was he, in these the peak years of his loyal and proficient service to the GRU, the dark jewel in the large reptilian head of Soviet Intelligence, at last having second thoughts? Why, for instance, did he seek out this rather seedy office away from one of the faceless bowel-less megaliths? He would not have been inconvenienced there as he was now. His late assignment, to ascertain the recent deeds of an exceptional 'illegal' in the United States, whom he had helped train, required his own space, he said. The skein of rumors would be less, the doubt kept muted for a specified time. Myshin agreed reluctantly, but had not officially sanctioned the change. Vassily would be on his own for the onerous period, the time needed to assess the disposition and longterm worth of the illegal. By

readily pledging to do so was he deliberately tempting the raffish, crimson fates? The fates that frequently slighted, snubbed one's sense of responsibility, incumbency, dutifulness? Such thoughts hatch out on creature-less nights, in the laden quiet of a tank helmet. Urbane habits too often swaddle the mind, memory. Were the many questing authors he'd keenly read finally demanding atonement — not for the gruesome effort but the limited excuse? The dislocating pain. The unanticipated armor piercing shell. First an inner ricochet, then a blinding evisceration...conscionable thoughts can't wifferrill or barrel roll or cut and spin. Or flee! The command turret, the sure-footed steed, left penetrable. Volatile words. They too seemed to be ganging up on him.

Years ago he lost a finger to a neglected hatch cover — the impertinent second pinkie, the inglorious Up Yours banished from the commanding right hand. Then There Were Four. Restructuring! Four lone comperes to defend the sorry legions of sullen cabbage headed clerks, conniving aparatchiks, loutish truckers and bent factory smiths, careless orderlies, lax maintenance workers and farm machine operators; onanistic mass-beguiling entertainers, wily opportunistic journalists, cagey forensic commissars, the stymied party buccaneers so distrustful of their neighbor, their cupidity electrifying narcissism. Ha! To be fingered, touched by genius — a phrase, with his own wry emphasis — which one of his exemplary operatives made note of while investigating a polymath in an American electronics' consortium. The phrase came from the polymath's high school

year book, where it likely had a more flattering connotation, referring as it did to the executive's early manifest abilities. Long ago Vassily Sergeevich believed America so 'touched', and had forfeited control of its once shining future. Now the plodding Soviet Union appeared as grandiosely possessed. The fixed grey authority, pacing the almighty stag of prosperity, reduced to scrounging in the predatory media forest. Words that had no backup...but would not take cover.