



**Claudia and the Sad
Good-bye**

ANN M. MARTIN

SCHOLASTIC INC.

*This book is for Margaret Martin Vinsel
With Love*

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CHAPTER

1

“Mimi! I’m home! I’m home, Mimi!”

“Hello, my Claudia.”

My grandmother greeted me at the door when I got home from school. She kissed my forehead and smiled crookedly at me. Mimi is one of my favorite people. She is a second mother to me.

I dropped my book bag and gym shoes on the floor in the hall. Mom or Dad or even my big sister, Janine, would have looked from my stuff to the stairs, as a silent reminder to take the things up to my bedroom instead of leaving them lying around. If that had happened, I would have left the things for ten minutes or so before I took them to my room, to show my family that they can’t all boss me around just because I’m the youngest and not a very good student.

But Mimi didn’t say anything about dropping my school stuff on the floor. She didn’t even look at it. So I immediately picked it up and ran to my

room. When I came downstairs again, I found Mimi in the kitchen, fiddling with cups and a tin of tea leaves.

“Special tea, my Claudia?” she asked me.

“Oh, *yes!*” The day was perfect for special tea. For one thing, it was raining. Outside the window there was nothing but drizzle and dreariness, which I don’t mind at all. I love mysteries — and drizzle and dreariness are a good backdrop for any mystery. Also, I didn’t have any after-school activities planned. Usually I have a baby-sitting job or an art class, but that afternoon I was free. Most important, special tea with Mimi is wonderful any time.

What is special tea? Special tea is when my grandmother prepares Japanese tea and serves it in cups with no handles that she brought with her when she moved from Japan to America. Then she and I sip the tea and talk, just the two of us.

Mimi likes to prepare special tea completely by herself, even though this is difficult for her now, since she had a stroke last summer and can’t move around as easily as she used to. In fact, she can’t use her right hand at all. Speech is difficult for her, too. Plus, she’s been just plain forgetful lately, and has said and done some pretty weird

things. But this day seemed to be a good one, and special tea went smoothly.

It is usually as soothing as Mimi herself.

“So, my Claudia,” Mimi began (and I should tell you that I am the only one Mimi calls *her* someone), “how school was?”

“Oh, okay. I didn’t do so well on that math test.”

“How not so well?”

“A C-minus?” I answered with a question, as if I weren’t *sure* that was the grade I’d gotten. But it was. One point lower and it would have been a D-plus.

“Oh,” said Mimi. “Well. Studied. Studied hard. I remember. Next better time.” That garbled message meant that Mimi remembered that I had studied hard with the help of my dad and my big sister, Janine, who is a genius, and that no doubt I would do better on my next test.

“Thanks, Mimi,” I replied, smiling. “Guess what I *did* get a good grade on. That history composition,” I answered for her.

“The one I help?”

“Yup. The one you helped me with.”

“What grade?”

“B . . . plus!” I said grandly.

Mimi beamed. She had given me the idea to write a composition on a period in Japanese

history, but she had really helped only a little. I had done most of the work myself.

I sipped my tea.

I looked at my hands holding my cup, and at Mimi's hands holding her cup. My hands were smooth and creamy-colored and steady. Mimi's were wrinkled and brown like walnuts, and they shook. Mimi is my mother's mother and she's getting pretty old.

As you have probably guessed, Mimi is Japanese. She came to the United States a long time ago, when she was thirty-two. Her husband was Japanese, too, so of course my mom is Japanese. And so is my dad. Janine and I consider ourselves not just Japanese, but Japanese American, meaning that we're full-blooded Asian but we've lived all our lives in the US. Actually, we've lived all our lives here in Stoneybrook, Connecticut. And Mimi has lived all of *my* life in Stoneybrook, because her husband died after Mom and Dad got married, so she moved in with them. Both of my parents were working. They were doing different things then, but now Dad is a partner in an investment firm in Stamford, Connecticut, which is nearby, and Mom is the head librarian at our public library. Anyway, when my grandfather died, Janine the genius had

just been born, so Mimi's moving in seemed like the perfect arrangement. My parents could work, and Mimi could help with the house, watch Janine, and not miss her husband quite so much. Three years later, I was born, and there was Mimi to help raise me. Mimi is my friend and the person who understands me the best in the world, even better than my friends.

I smiled at Mimi over our tea cups and she set hers shakily on the table. "No more talking of school," she said. "Tell me art. Sitting for babies." (She meant baby-sitting.)

So we talked about my art and baby-sitting. And I poured the tea when Mimi's hands shook too much, and helped her with words she couldn't remember.

At last Mimi said, "I start dinner. Now. What do you?"

"I think I'll go upstairs and work on my painting."

Mimi nodded. I left her in the kitchen and went to my room.

I hate school. But here is what I love: reading mysteries, especially Nancy Drews; baby-sitting; art. Not only do I love art, I'm good at it. Really good at it. And thank heavens for that. I better be good at something since Janine is so smart in

school. How smart is she? She's smart enough to be a high school junior who takes courses at a college in Stoneybrook. That's right, a *college*. When I say she's a genius, I mean it. Her IQ is, like, nine million or something. We used to sort of hate each other, but as we grow up, we get along much better. For one thing, we've been worried about Mimi a lot lately, and that's brought us closer together. Worry and fear can do that.

I looked around my messy room. My room is only messy because I have to keep so many art materials stored in it. I like painting, drawing, pottery, sculpture, crafts, and more. So I've got an easel and paints and charcoals, and boxes and boxes of stuff *everywhere*. My current project is a painting. I'm trying something new. I think of it as "stop-action." Imagine that you're watching a movie on a TV — a movie with a lot of action — and in the middle of a really exciting scene, you press the pause button. That's how I wanted this picture to look — as if time had halted and people had been stopped with spoons halfway to their mouths, or a dropped object in midair, or a bird about to land on a branch, its feet just inches above it, its wings still outstretched.

I paused in my painting and looked out the window and across the street. I could see Mary

Anne's house clearly. Mary Anne Spier is one of a group of my friends who have formed a business called the Baby-sitters Club. I'm the vice-president of the club. Mary Anne is the secretary, and our president is Kristy Thomas. Besides us, there are three other members, plus two associate members (I'll explain about them in a minute), and one member in New York City. (I'll explain about her, too.)

Our club meets three afternoons a week, and although our members are *very, very* different people, we get along well. We're like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Put us all together and we make a great picture.

Let me tell you about my friends, beginning with Kristy, since she's the president. Kristy started the club herself. It was her idea. That's an important thing about Kristy. She's full of ideas. She's also outgoing, sort of bossy, a tomboy, and has a big mouth. Okay, a huge mouth. She's thirteen and in eighth grade, like me and most of the club members. She doesn't care much about clothes or makeup yet. *Sometimes*, she'll put on a little mascara, but that's it. And she always wears the same kind of outfit: jeans, a turtleneck, a sweater, and running shoes. Kristy has brown hair (longish), brown eyes, and is the shortest kid

in our class. Her family is pretty unusual. Her mom and dad got divorced a long time ago. She has three brothers — two big ones in high school, and David Michael, who is seven. Then her mom married this millionaire (no joke). Watson has two little kids of his own, Karen, who's six, and Andrew, who's four. *And* recently her family adopted Emily Michelle, a two-year-old Vietnamese girl. Then there's Kristy's Nannie, her grandma, who's really neat and decided to move in with them and help care for Emily. The whole family lives in Watson's mansion on the other side of Stoneybrook. (Well, Karen and Andrew only live there every other weekend and for two weeks during the summer. The rest of the time they live with their mom and stepfather, not too far away.)

As I mentioned before, I'm the vice-president of the club. You already know a lot about me, except for a few things. I'm addicted to junk food. Mom and Dad don't really like me to have it, so I have to buy it secretly and hide it around my room. It's everywhere. Despite all the junk I eat, my complexion is pretty nice. Smooth. My friends are always saying I'm so lucky because I don't get pimples. Here's what I look like besides my complexion: dark, almond-shaped eyes and long, *long*

silky, black hair that I wear all different ways. And I dress on the wild side. Kristy's outfits and mine are like night and day. Here's an example: At the moment I'm wearing lavender plaid cuffed pants with suspenders over a green shirt with buttons down the front, a matching lavender beret (and *not* just because I'm at my easel), and fleece-lined, high-top sneakers which I must admit are uncomfortably hot, but they *look great*. Also, I've got on earrings shaped like Christmas tree lights that actually blink on and off. I'm not sure why I chose to wear them, since it's nowhere near Christmas, but I love jewelry, like to make my own sometimes, and have pierced ears. (Kristy doesn't. Doesn't have pierced ears, that is.) But I have three — two holes in one ear, and one in the other.

Our club secretary is Mary Anne, who lives across the street. Kristy is one of her best friends. They used to live next door to each other, until Kristy's family moved to Watson's house. Mary Anne is not much like Kristy at all. They sort of illustrate the saying about opposites attracting. Mary Anne is shy and reserved. She's very romantic, cries easily, and hates sports. She's also the only one of *any* of us club members to have a steady boyfriend. His name is Logan Bruno, and

he's one of the associate members of the Babysitters Club. Mary Anne and Kristy *do* look a little alike, though. Mary Anne also has brown hair and eyes and is on the short side. She used to dress kind of like Kristy, too, but lately her outfits have become trendier. However, Mary Anne doesn't have, and never will have, pierced ears. Mary Anne's family is the smallest of any of the club members. It's just her and her dad. Mrs. Spier died a long time ago. Mary Anne has no brothers or sisters, but she does have a gray kitten named Tigger.

Dawn Schafer is the treasurer of our club. Dawn moved to Stoneybrook with her mother and younger brother, Jeff, about a year ago when her parents got divorced. Mrs. Schafer chose Stoneybrook because she grew up here and her parents still live here, but the move was a shock to Dawn and Jeff since *they* grew up in California. In fact, it was so much of a shock to Jeff that eventually he moved back to California to live with his dad. So now half of Dawn's family lives here, and the other half lives three thousand miles away. Thank goodness Dawn's grandparents are in Stoneybrook. Dawn is the most independent person I know. She's reliable and responsible and organized, but she does things her own way. She

never gets swayed by what anyone (or everyone) else is doing. She has her own style of dress, which we call California casual, and she sticks to a total health-food diet, even though some of the kids at school tease her about the weird stuff she eats, and the fact that she won't touch candy or junk food. Dawn lives in an old farmhouse with a secret passage (and maybe a ghost) in it, she has the longest, blondest hair and the bluest eyes I've ever seen, and she's Mary Anne's other best friend. (Her mom and Mr. Spier go out on dates sometimes!)

Our club has two junior officers, Jessi Ramsey and Mallory Pike. While the rest of us are in eighth grade, Jessi and Mal are eleven and in sixth grade. That's why they're junior officers. They're only allowed to baby-sit after school or on weekends; not at night unless they're sitting for their own brothers and sisters. Jessi and Mal are best friends. Like Kristy and Mary Anne, they're similar in some ways and different in some ways. The biggest difference is that Jessi is Black and Mallory is white. Also, Jessi has just one younger sister and brother, and Mal has *seven* younger sisters and brothers — and three of the boys are identical triplets! Both girls like to read, especially horse stories, and both feel that their parents

aren't letting them grow up fast enough. But Mal loves to write and draw and might want to become a children's book author, while Jessi is a talented, and I mean *talented*, ballet dancer. They're really neat, even if they are a little less mature than the rest of us club members.

Our associate officers are Shannon Kilbourne and Logan Bruno. They don't come to our meetings and no one except Kristy knows Shannon very well because she lives way across town in Kristy's ritzy neighborhood, and doesn't go to Stoneybrook Middle School with the rest of us. We do know Logan, though, and if you were to ask Mary Anne to describe him, all she'd say is, "Incredible." She would mean good-looking, nice, thoughtful, funny, etc., and he is those things. I like him a lot, but no one knows him better than Mary Anne does.

There's one other person I feel I should tell you about. She's only sort of a club member, but she *is* my best friend. Her name is Stacey McGill, and she lived in Stoneybrook for just about one year. She and her parents had lived in New York City, then her dad's company transferred him here, then, after one year, back to New York. Weird, huh? But it was lucky for me, because if none of that had happened, I'd never have met

my first and only best friend. Stacey was a club member, of course. And she and I are *so* much alike. We couldn't look more different, but we both love wild clothes and I guess we're a little boy-crazy. Stacey has diabetes, which is a huge drag, but she copes with it pretty well. Now that she's back in New York, she calls herself the New York branch of the Baby-sitters Club, but it isn't the same, and I miss her a *lot*.

I stopped staring out the window and day-dreaming about the Baby-sitters Club and my friends, and went back to work on my painting again. A few minutes later, Mimi came into my room. For someone with a limp, she manages the stairs pretty well — but only sometimes. Other times, they frighten her.

My grandmother stood behind me and studied the painting.

"A beautiful," she said at last.

"Thanks, Mimi," I replied.

Mimi put her arm around me. "Start dinner?" she asked.

Hadn't she started an hour ago? I wondered. But all I said was, "Do you want me to give you a hand?" (I'm used to Mimi's forgetfulness.)

Mimi nodded.

Arm in arm, we walked slowly to the top of

the stairs. We walked even more slowly down them. When we reached the kitchen Mimi discovered that she'd forgotten what she'd planned for dinner, so I helped her start over.

Mimi needs lots of help these days.

It's a little bit hard on our family.