



CHAPTER

1

It was the last day of summer vacation. I couldn't believe more than two months had sped by since the end of seventh grade. One day the weather had been fresh and cool with the promise of summer and fun, and now it was stale and hot with the promise of autumn and school. Tomorrow my friends and I would become eighth-graders. An awful lot had happened over the summer. In fact, it had been a more eventful summer than usual. Something important had happened to every single member of the Baby-sitters Club.

I guess that, first of all, I should tell you what the Baby-sitters Club is, in case you don't know. The club consists of me (I'm Mary Anne Spier) and my friends Kristy Thomas, Dawn Schafer, Claudia Kishi, and Stacey McGill. The five of us run a business, which Kristy started. We baby-sit for the kids in our neighborhoods, and we have a lot of fun — and earn pretty good money, too.

We meet three times a week to take calls from people who need baby-sitters, and also sometimes to gossip and fool around. But we're very professional about the way we run our business.

Anyway, here's what happened to us over the summer. I'll start with Kristy, since she's the president of the club, and since her event was the biggest and most exciting of all. Her mother got married again and Kristy was her bridesmaid! Honest. She wore a long dress and her first pair of shoes with heels. Claudia and Dawn and Stacey and I were guests at the wedding. And *then* Kristy and her family (her two older brothers Sam and Charlie, and her little brother David Michael) moved out of their old house, which was next door to mine, and across town to her stepfather's mansion. Kristy's really got a good deal in her new place — she has anything she wants (within reason) plus built-in baby-sitting charges. Andrew and Karen, her little stepbrother and stepsister, spend every other weekend (and some in-between time, too) at Watson's. Watson is Kristy's stepfather.

Then there's Claudia Kishi. Claudia is the vice president of our club. We always hold our meetings in her room, since she has her own phone and even her own private phone number.

Claudia's summer event was the saddest of all, but it has a happy ending. Her grandmother Mimi (who lives with the Kishis, and who's a favorite of the Baby-sitters Club) had a stroke one night in July. She had to stay in the hospital for a long time and she still has to have physical therapy, but she's getting better. She can walk and talk, and someday (maybe) she'll be able to use her right hand a little more.

Dawn Schafer is my new best friend. She's the official alternate officer of the club, which means she can take over the duties of anyone who has to miss a meeting. Her family used to live in California, but her parents got divorced, so her mother moved Dawn and her younger brother Jeff all the way across the country to Stoneybrook, Connecticut. Claudia and Kristy and I grew up here, but New England has been kind of an adjustment for Dawn. Anyway, over the summer, Dawn and Jeff got to fly to California to visit their father, and (after they'd come back) Dawn discovered a secret passage in the old farmhouse she lives in!

The fourth member of the club is Stacey McGill. She's our treasurer, and also sort of a newcomer to Stoneybrook. She moved here exactly one year ago from big, glamorous, exciting New

York City. Stacey, by the way, is sort of glamorous and exciting herself. That's why she and Claudia are best friends. They're both sophisticated and love wearing flashy clothes and weird jewelry and doing things to their hair. The two of them really stand out in a crowd, and I've always been envious of them.

Anyway, Stacey's summer excitement was mine, too. We got jobs as mother's helpers with one of the families we sit for and went with them to the beach — Sea City, New Jersey. We stayed in Sea City for two weeks and not only had a great time, but found boys we liked! I guess that wasn't such a big deal for Stacey, but it was a big deal for me. I'm kind of shy and tend to be on the quiet side. I'd never been very interested in boys, either. This wasn't because I didn't like them; it was because I was afraid of them. I used to think, What do you say to a boy? Then I realized you can talk to a boy the same way you talk to a girl. You just have to choose your topics more carefully. Obviously, with a boy, you can't talk about bras or cute guys you see on TV, but you can talk about school and movies and animals and sports (if you know anything about sports).

When Stacey and I were in Sea City, Stacey started out by being a real pain. She fell in luv (as

she always writes it) with this gorgeous lifeguard who was years too old for her, and left me on my own. With no one my age around, I started talking to this nice-looking boy who was hanging around on the beach because he was a mother's helper, too. We really hit it off. We talked about lots of things, and by the time I had to leave Sea City, we had exchanged rings with our initials on them. We bought them on the boardwalk. I don't know if we'll really write to each other (as we promised), but it's nice to know boys aren't aliens from the planet Snorzak or something.

Ding-dong. The doorbell. I wasn't sure how long I'd been lying on my bed daydreaming. I looked at my watch. It was almost time for our last Baby-sitters Club meeting of the summer.

"Coming!" I called.

I ran out of my bedroom, down the stairs, and through the hall to the front door. I peeped through the window. Dawn was standing on the steps. She sometimes comes to my house before a meeting, and then we walk over to Claudia's together.

"Hi!" she greeted me. Dawn was fussing with her hair. She has the longest hair of anyone I know. It's even longer than Claudia's. And it's pale, pale blonde. Dawn was wearing a pretty

snappy outfit — hot-pink shorts with a big, breezy island-print shirt over a white tank top.

“Hi,” I replied. “You look really terrific. Is that shirt new?”

Dawn nodded. “Dad sent it to me from California.”

“Ooh, don’t tell Kristy,” I said.

“I know. I won’t.”

Kristy never hears from her birth father. He hasn’t been very nice to her, or to her brothers. He doesn’t even send them birthday cards anymore. I’m glad she’s got Watson now. If she’ll just let herself like him a little more . . .

“We better go,” said Dawn.

“Okay, I’m ready. Let me make sure I have my house key.” I found my key and locked the front door. I’m usually the only one home during the day. My dad is a lawyer and he works long hours, I don’t have any brothers or sisters, and my mother died when I was little. I barely remember her. Sometimes it’s lonely at my house. I wish I had a cat.

Dawn and I crossed my front yard, and I stopped to check our mailbox.

“Aughh!” I shrieked when I opened the box. “It’s here! It came!”

“What did?” asked Dawn, looking over my shoulder.

“*Sixteen* magazine. Oh, no! I’m dying! Look who’s on the cover. It’s Cam Geary! Isn’t he adorable? The last issue had an article about him, but here’s his gorgeous picture —” (I gasped) “— and a poster of him, too. A free poster!”

Dawn looked at me, amazed. “You sure have changed this summer, Mary Anne,” she said. “I’ve hardly ever heard you talk so much. And I’ve *never* seen you go this crazy over a boy.”

I flinched, remembering how, not long ago, I’d been accusing Stacey of talking about boys too much. But Dawn didn’t seem annoyed.

We crossed the street and Claudia’s lawn. Dawn rang the Kishis’ bell.

“But Cam is *adorable*,” I said, hugging the magazine to me. “It’s those eyes of his. They’re so . . . so . . .”

“Hello, girls,” Mimi greeted us, speaking slowly and clearly. The Kishis are Japanese and Mimi has always spoken English with an accent, but she isn’t hard to understand. She speaks slowly now because of the stroke. “The other girls are here. They are in Claudia’s room,” she told us.

“We’re the last ones?” I cried. “We better hurry. Come on, Dawn.” I paused long enough to give Mimi a kiss. Then Dawn and I raced upstairs. As we ran by Janine’s room (Janine is Claudia’s older sister), we called hello to her, but we didn’t stop. We didn’t stop until we were in Baby-sitters Club headquarters. We closed the door behind us and flopped on the floor. The good spots were already taken — Stacey and Claudia were lying on the bed, and Kristy was sitting in the director’s chair as usual. (She loves being in charge.)

“How did you get over here so early?” Dawn asked Kristy. Now that Kristy lives across town, she depends on her big brother Charlie to drive her to and from meetings. The Baby-sitters Club pays him to do that. It’s part of running our business.

Kristy shrugged. “Charlie wanted to leave early. He was on his way to the shopping center. . . . Well, let’s get started.”

“Oh, Kristy,” said Claudia. “We don’t have to be in a rush. This is our last meeting of the summer. Nobody has to go anywhere. Let’s have some refreshments first.”

I grinned. Refreshments to Claudia are junk food. She’s addicted to the stuff and has it hidden all over her room. I watched her reach inside

her pillowcase. Then her hand emerged with two bags — one of gumdrops, one of pretzels. The pretzels were for everybody. The gumdrops were for herself and Kristy and me. Dawn won't eat them because she says they're too unhealthy, and Stacey can't eat them because she has diabetes and has to stay on a strict diet — no extra sweets.

While Claudia passed around the food, Kristy got out our club record book and our notebook. She handed the record book to me. As secretary, it's my job to keep it up-to-date. I write down our baby-sitting appointments on the calendar pages and keep track of all sorts of things, such as our clients' addresses and phone numbers. Stacey, the treasurer, is in charge of recording the money we earn.

Our other book, the notebook, is a diary in which we write up every job we go on. Each of us is responsible for reading the book once a week or so. It takes a lot of time, but it's helpful to know what's happened at the houses where our friends have baby-sat.

"Any club business?" Kristy asked.

The rest of us shook our heads.

"Have you all read the notebook?"

"Yup," we replied.

“Okay. Great. Well, we’ll just wait for the phone to ring.”

The club meets three times a week — Monday, Wednesday, and Friday — from five-thirty until six. Our clients know that they can call Claudia’s number at those times and reach the five of us. They like the arrangement because they’re bound to find a sitter.

I leaned back against Claudia’s bed, opened *Sixteen*, and gazed at the free poster.

“Who’s that? Cam Geary?” asked Stacey, peering over the edge of the bed at the picture.

I nodded. “Mr. Gorgeous.”

“You know who he goes out with?” said Claudia.

“Who?” replied Stacey.

“Corrie Lalique.”

“Corrie Lalique?” she shrieked. “The girl from ‘Once Upon a Dream’? Does he really?”

“I read it in *Young Teen*,” said Claudia.

“I read it in *Sixteen*,” I added.

“But she’s too old for him,” Stacey protested.

“No she’s not,” Kristy spoke up. “She’s fourteen.”

Now it was my turn to be surprised. “You’re kidding! Have you noticed the size of her — the size of her . . .”

“Chest?” supplied Claudia. “Well, she is kind of big, but believe me, Kristy’s right. She’s only fourteen. And she *is* going out with Cam.”

“Boy —” I began, but I was interrupted by the phone.

Dawn answered it. “Hello, Baby-sitters Club,” she said. “Oh, hi! . . . When? . . . Okay . . . Okay. I’ll call you right back. . . . Bye.”

Dawn hung up the phone. I was already holding the record book in my lap, opened to the appointment calendar.

“Mrs. Prezioso needs someone for Jenny on Saturday afternoon, from four until about six-thirty,” said Dawn.

This was met by groans. “I’ll just check my own schedule,” I replied. I’m the only one who likes Jenny at all. The others think she’s bratty. It’s a club rule that a job has to be offered to all the club members (not snapped up by the person who takes the call or something), but I didn’t even bother to see if Kristy or Stacey or Claudia or Dawn was free. They wouldn’t want the job. “Tell Mrs. Prezioso I can sit,” I said to Dawn as I noted my job in the appointment book.

Dawn called Mrs. Prezioso back. When she got off the phone, Kristy’s mother called needing a sitter for David Michael one afternoon when

Kristy had a dentist's appointment. Then Dr. Johanssen called needing a sitter for Charlotte, and Mrs. Barrett called needing a sitter for Buddy, Suzi, and Marnie. It was a busy meeting. With school starting again, business was probably going to pick up a little. Everyone's schedules seemed to become more crowded.

The meeting was supposed to be over at six, but we all kind of hung around. No one wanted to end our last summer meeting. Finally I had to leave, though. So did Kristy. "See you in . . ." (gulp) ". . . school tomorrow!" she called, and I wanted to cry. Summer was really and truly over.