

## ★ *Chapter* ★

### ONE

"Mom?" I said. "How do you think you're supposed to behave in a mansion?"

My mother looked up from the letter she was writing at the desk in our den. "What, Stace?" she asked.

"This is the evening we're all going over to Watson's. I mean, to Kristy's. And I want to make sure I do everything right."

"You've been to Mr. Brewer's house before, honey," replied Mom.

"I know, but not just for a regular visit. Kristy says all her neighbors are really fancy. Remember how we had to fix up Louie the day before the Thomases moved, just so he would look as nice as all the other dogs in the new neighborhood?"

My mother smiled. "Sometimes Kristy gets carried away. You know that. I think you should just go over there and behave the same way you would have in Kristy's old house."

"Really?"

"Really. When are you supposed to be there, honey?"

"In about an hour. Mr. Kishi's driving Claudia and Mary Anne and me over as soon as he gets home from work."

"And will you be—"

"Yes, Mom. I'll be careful about what I eat."

"Stacey, there's no need to be rude."

"But you know I'm always careful. And Kristy is really nice about making sure there's plain popcorn or fruit or something for me. Besides, this is just a *little* party. Just supper. And then I'll be home."

The members of the Baby-sitters Club were all going over to the new home of Kristy Thomas, our club president. She and her mother and brothers had moved there not long ago when her mother got remarried to Watson Brewer, this really nice guy who also happens to be a really rich guy. He lives in a neighborhood where the yards are big enough for swimming pools or tennis courts, and all the houses are set way back from the road. Some of them are hidden by walls or bushes.

Until she moved, though, Kristy had lived in a regular old house on regular old Bradford Court,

next door to her best friend, Mary Anne Spier, who's our club secretary, and across the street from Claudia Kishi, our vice president and *my* best friend. It was Kristy's idea to start a business doing baby-sitting for the families in our neighborhood, and it worked out really well. The four of us, plus Dawn Schafer, who lives not far away, meet for about a half an hour three afternoons a week in Claudia's bedroom. Our clients phone us looking for baby-sitters and they almost always get one, since they reach five sitters (I should say, five *qualified* sitters) at once.

We have a record book with all sorts of information, including our schedules, and Mary Anne keeps track of our jobs and who's available to sit when, and things like that. Kristy insists that we also keep the Baby-sitters Club Notebook, in which each of us has to write up every single sitting job we do. Then the book gets passed around so the others can read about what happened. It's pretty useful.

This summer, our club branched out a little. Last month, July, we did our regular baby-sitting *and* held a play group. We held it right here in my backyard. The neighborhood kids came over three mornings a week for games and stories and art projects. It worked out really well.

But July was over. It was the beginning of August. And for the first time since the club began almost a year ago, at the beginning of seventh grade, we baby-sitters were going to be scattered, split up. Before that happened, Kristy wanted to have a get-together. And she wanted to have it at her new house. That was fine with the rest of us. We love Watson's house, even though it makes us a little nervous sometimes.

I went to my bedroom and began looking through my closet. Why hadn't I done this earlier? I realized I would have to choose my outfit very carefully. I wanted to be casual enough to have fun, but sophisticated enough to look impressive in case any rich neighbors dropped by. I also wanted to be cool since it felt like it was about 150 degrees outside. I changed my mind six times before I decided on this new pink shirt I got the last time we went back to New York City to visit friends. Big, bright green and yellow birds were splashed all over it. It was gigantic, so it would be cool. I put it on with a pair of baggy shorts, looped a wide green belt around my middle, and hunted up some jewelry—silver bangle bracelets and a pair of silver earrings shaped like bells that actually ring when they dangle back and forth.

I'm working on making Mom and Dad let me

get my ears pierced a second time so I can wear two pairs of earrings at once, but so far, no luck. I pretty much grew up in New York—we just moved here to Stoneybrook, Connecticut, a year ago—and I have sort of wild taste. My parents have let me get away with a lot of things fashion-wise, but they draw the line at two earrings in each ear. They said I would look like a pirate, although I, personally, have never seen a pirate with more than exactly one earring. I pointed out that if I *did* get my ears pierced again, probably no one would mistake me for a pirate, but Mom and Dad failed to see the humor in that.

*Beep! Beep!*

I heard honking and looked out my window. The Kishis' car was in my driveway. Mr. Kishi was at the wheel; Mimi, Claudia's grandmother, was next to him; and Claudia was in the backseat with Mary Anne Spier.

"I'll be right there!" I shouted.

I thundered down the stairs. "Bye, Mom!"

"Wait, Stacey," she said, coming into the front hall.

"Mom, I have to go!"

My mother thrust a small, foil-wrapped package into my hand. "Here. Take this with you."

"What is it?"

"Apple slices."

"Mom, I promise you there will be stuff I can eat at Watson's. He's got the biggest kitchen I've ever seen. I'm sure, somewhere, there's an apple." I handed the package back to her. "Put them in the fridge, okay? I'll eat them tomorrow."

My parents worry about me constantly because I've got diabetes. That means I have to be very careful to eat a certain amount of sugar every day—not too much and not too little. If I'm not careful, my blood sugar level goes all kerflooeey and I can get really sick. My parents are always afraid I'll sneak off and eat junk food. I've been tempted, but I've never done it. Why would I want to get sick?

I dashed out the front door. "See you!" I called to Mom.

My father was gardening in one of the flower beds. It's his favorite early evening activity in the summer.

"Bye, Dad!" I called.

"Bye, honey. Be careful."

*Be careful.* I should have known. But I reminded myself that they're a lot better than they used to be. Just a little over a year earlier, my parents practically wouldn't let me go to school.

I scrambled into the backseat of the Kishis' car. "Hi, everybody! Hi, Mimi!"

Mimi eased herself around and smiled. "Hello, Stacey," she answered slowly. (Mimi had a stroke this summer and she's still recovering. She moves awkwardly and has some trouble speaking.)

I could tell that Claudia and Mary Anne were as excited as I was about going to Kristy's. The three of us were wriggling around like puppies. But we quieted down when we reached Kristy's new neighborhood. And by the time Mr. Kishi had pulled into the circular drive and Watson's house had loomed into view, we were positively silent.

I think it was the sight of Kristy that brought us back to reality. She was sprawled outside the elegant front door of Watson's house, eating a Popsicle, reading *People* magazine, and wearing cutoff jeans and a holey white T-shirt that said I ♥ MY followed by a silhouette of a collie. Her feet were bare.

The sight was refreshing. I knew then that my mother was right. No matter what Kristy's house looked like, Kristy was still Kristy. I wouldn't have to behave any differently.

Dawn arrived just as the back fender of Mr. Kishi's car was disappearing at the other end of the drive.

"Hi!" she cried, leaping out. "See you later, Mom!"

The five of us faced each other eagerly.

"Well, come on!" said Kristy.

We entered the front hall of her house and greeted her mother and Watson in the living room. Then we raced upstairs and down a hallway to the room Kristy had chosen for her bedroom. Watson's house is so big that Kristy and her three brothers each got a room of their own when they moved in. And even so, Watson's two little children from his first marriage, Karen and Andrew, who don't even live with him full-time, have their own rooms for when they visit, plus a playroom, and there are still a few guest rooms left over. It makes me sort of breathless. I mean, when I lived in New York, we had what was considered a pretty big apartment, and it only had four bedrooms, one of which was hardly big enough for a bed.

In Kristy's room, we all plopped down on the new comforter on her new bed, arranging ourselves around Louie, her collie, who was sprawled on his back.

"Where are your brothers?" I asked.

"David Michael's around somewhere," replied Kristy. (David Michael is seven.) "And Sam and



Charlie are over at a neighbor's house using the pool." (Sam and Charlie are older, in high school.)

"Are sandwiches okay for dinner?" Kristy asked us. "Mom and I made a whole stack of them this afternoon. There are a couple of plain tuna fish for you, Stace."

"Great," I said. "Thanks."

I glanced at Mary Anne Spier. As I mentioned earlier, Mary Anne is Kristy's best friend, and Claudia is mine, but it's funny the way things work out. Mary Anne and I were going to be spending the next two weeks together. I was a little nervous about it. We are *so* different. Mary Anne is really shy; I'm pretty straightforward. Mary Anne is kind of young; I'm sophisticated. Mary Anne has no interest in boys; I had a couple of boyfriends in seventh grade.

As if reading my mind, Claudia said to me, "Are you all ready for the Pikes, Stace?"

"I hope so," I replied. "I've never spent two weeks with eight kids before. At least I'll have Mary Anne to help me."

"You guys are so lucky," said Kristy wistfully. "Two weeks at the beach."

"Two weeks of chasing after Claire, Margo, Nicky, Vanessa, Byron, Jordan, Adam, and Mallory," I pointed out.

"Well, I'd go to the beach in a second, even if I had to be a mother's helper," said Kristy.

As uncertain as I was about going off with Mary Anne, I had to admit I was excited. The members of our club baby-sit for the Pikes often, and not long ago, Mrs. Pike had called to say she wanted two of us to go along with them as mother's helpers when they take their summer vacation down in Sea City, New Jersey. Mary Anne and I were the only ones available.

It was all part of why the Baby-sitters Club was going to scatter. In just a couple of days, Mary Anne and I would be off to Sea City, Claudia and her family were going on a quiet vacation to a mountain resort in New Hampshire, and Dawn and her younger brother were flying to California to visit their father. They hadn't been in California in seven months, since their parents got divorced and Mrs. Schafer decided to move back to Connecticut, where she grew up.

"I can't believe I'm stuck here in Stoneybrook while you guys get to go to all these great places," wailed Kristy.

"It is sort of ironic," spoke up Dawn. "I mean, here you are in this mansion with a rich step-father. . . ."

"I know," said Kristy, looking a little pouty.

"But Mom is determined to make our 'new' family work out. She wants us all together for a while."

Kristy's mom appeared at the door just then, carrying a big tray loaded with sodas and the sandwiches. As soon as she left, we dived into the food as if we hadn't eaten since July. When we were finished, we fooled around with new hairstyles, and I tried on some of Kristy's clip-on earrings to see how I'd look if my parents were to go crazy or something and let me pierce my ears again after all.

"Uh-oh," said Dawn suddenly, looking at her watch. "It's almost nine. My mom said she'd pick me up between nine and nine-thirty."

"My dad's coming soon, too," said Claudia.

"I won't see you guys for over *two weeks*!" cried Kristy.

"Hey," said Mary Anne, "I've got an idea. Let's exchange our vacation addresses. Then we can all write postcards to each other."

Kristy found some index cards in her desk drawer and we wrote down our addresses for each other.

"I've got an even better idea," Kristy said. "Stacey and Mary Anne, why don't you write me a postcard every day describing your job with

the Pikes? Later, we'll enter them in the notebook. That way, we'll keep it up-to-date and official."

"I might baby-sit for my old clients when I go back to California," said Dawn. "If I do, I'll send you notebook entries, too."

We talked and made plans busily. We could hardly believe it when David Michael called, "Mr. Kishi and Mrs. Schafer are here!"

We baby-sitters looked at each other. Kristy began to cry. Then Dawn. Then Mary Anne. Then Claudia and me.

"I'm going to miss you!" wailed Dawn.

"I'm going to miss you and be bored!" added Kristy.

"I've never been away from home alone before!" cried Mary Anne.

We all began hugging each other. Kristy handed out tissues. As soon as we'd calmed down, Dawn moaned, "Two whole *weeks*," and the hugging and crying started again.

A few minutes later, Claudia, Mary Anne, and I climbed into the backseat of the Kishis' car. We sniffled all the way to Bradford Court.

I was miserable . . . until I got to my room and looked at my new bikini and began thinking of sunshine and the ocean and cute boys in bathing trunks and the boardwalk the Pike kids were

always talking about. A little flutter of excitement crept into my stomach and pushed away the stone of misery. By the time I went to bed, I was so excited about Sea City, New Jersey, that I couldn't sleep.