

THE TRUTH ABOUT Stacey

Join the Club!

*The
Baby-Sitters
Club*[®]

The Summer Before

Kristy's Great Idea

Claudia and the
Phantom Phone Calls

The Truth About Stacey

The Baby-Sitters Club[®]

THE TRUTH ABOUT STACEY

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★ Chapter ★

ONE

"As president of the Baby-sitters Club," said Kristy Thomas, "I hereby move that we figure out what to do when Mrs. Newton goes to the hospital to have her baby."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, we ought to be prepared. We've been waiting for this baby for months, and the Newtons are practically our best clients. They'll need someone to take care of Jamie while his parents are at the hospital. Smart baby-sitters would be ready for the occasion."

"I think that's a good idea," spoke up Mary Anne Spier. "I second the motion." Mary Anne usually agrees with Kristy. After all, they're best friends.

I glanced across the room at Claudia Kishi. Claudia is *my* best friend, and vice president of our club. She shrugged her shoulders at me.

There are just the four of us in the Baby-sitters

Club: Kristy, Claudia, Mary Anne (she's the secretary), and me, Stacey McGill. I'm the treasurer. We've been in business for about two months. Kristy thought up the club, which was why she got to be president. We meet three times a week from five-thirty to six o'clock in Claudia's room (Claudia has a private phone), and our clients call then to line us up as sitters. The reason the club works so well is that with four baby-sitters there at the phone, each person who calls is pretty much guaranteed to get a sitter for whatever time he or she needs. Our clients like that. They say that having to make a whole bunch of calls just to line up one sitter is a waste of time. They like us, too. We're good baby-sitters. And we worked hard to get our business going. We printed up flyers and distributed them in mailboxes, and even put an ad in *The Stoneybrook News*, the voice of Stoneybrook, Connecticut.

That's where I live now, in this teeny-weeny town in Connecticut. Let me tell you, it's quite a shock after life in New York City. New York is a big place. Stoneybrook is not. There is only one middle school here, and I go to it. We all do. (We're in seventh grade.) In New York there are about a billion middle schools. In fact, in New York there are about a billion of everything—people, cars,

buildings, stores, pigeons, friends, and things to do.

Here there's, well, there's . . . not much, really. My parents and I moved into our house in August and I didn't make a single friend until I met Claudia in school in September. Everyone here seems to have known everyone else since they were babies. Claudia, Kristy, and Mary Anne have. And they've grown up together, since Kristy and Mary Anne live next door to each other on Bradford Court and Claudia lives across the street from them. (I live two streets away.)

So, was I ever glad when Claudia told me Kristy wanted to start the club! Friends at last, I thought. And that's just what I found. Even though I'm better friends with Claudia, I don't know what I'd do without Kristy and Mary Anne. It's true that they seem younger than Claudia and me (they don't care much about clothes or boys yet—although Kristy *did* just go to her first dance), and Mary Anne is unbelievably shy, and Kristy's sort of a tomboy. But they're my friends, and I belong with them. Which is more than I can say about certain traitors I left behind in New York.

"All right, here's one plan," Kristy was saying. "It's a school afternoon. Mrs. Newton realizes that it's time to go to the hospital. She calls Mr.

Newton or a cab or whatever, then calls us, and one of us goes to stay with Jamie."

"What if we're all busy?" I asked.

"Hmm," said Kristy. "Maybe from now on, one of us should be free each afternoon so Mrs. Newton will be guaranteed a baby-sitter. It will be a special service for her, since the Newtons are such good customers."

"That seems like kind of a waste," spoke up Claudia, which was exactly what I was thinking.

"That's right," I said. "Babies can be late. Two or three weeks late. We could be giving up an awful lot of perfectly good afternoons for nothing."

"That's true," said Kristy thoughtfully.

"How about a nighttime plan?" I suggested. "Doesn't it seem that pregnant women always rush off to the hospital in the middle of the night? I was born at two-twenty-two A.M."

"I was born at four-thirty-six A.M.," said Claudia.

"I was born at four A.M. on the dot," said Kristy.

We looked at Mary Anne. She shrugged. "I don't know what time I was born." Mary Anne's mother died when Mary Anne was little, and Mary Anne is not very close to her strict father. It figures that they'd never talked about the day (or night) she was born.

A knock came on Claudia's door. Mimi, her grandmother, stuck her head in the room. "Hello, girls," she said politely.

"Hi, Mimi," we answered.

"May I offer you something to eat?" she asked. Claudia's family is Japanese, and Mimi, who didn't come to the United States until she was thirty-two years old, speaks with a gentle, rolling accent. She has lived with Claudia's family since before Claudia was born.

"No thanks, Mimi," replied Claudia, "but maybe you could help us."

"Certainly." Mimi opened the door the rest of the way and stood just inside the room.

"Do you know what time Mary Anne was born?" Claudia asked. She figured Mimi would know since Claudia's parents have been friendly with the Thomases and the Spiers for years, and Mimi had gotten to know the families, too.

Mimi looked only slightly taken aback. "Let me think for a moment, my Claudia. . . . Mary Anne, your mother and father left for the hospital around dinnertime. That I remember clearly. I believe you were born near eleven o'clock."

"Oh!" A grin lit up Mary Anne's face. "I didn't know. So I was another nighttime baby. Thank you, Mimi."

"It was my pleasure." Mimi turned to leave, and almost bumped into Janine, Claudia's sister, who had come up behind her.

"Claudia! Claudia!" cried Janine.

I looked up in alarm. Janine is this prim, not-much-fun fifteen-year-old who's a genius. To be honest, she's boring. Dull as dishwater. I'd never even heard her raise her voice, which was why, the minute I heard her cry "Claudia!" I knew something was wrong. Very wrong.

Unfortunately, I was right.

"Janine! What is it?" exclaimed Claudia.

"This." Janine was waving a paper around. She squeezed past Mimi and thrust it at Claudia.

Claudia took it, and Kristy, Mary Anne, and I crowded around. We stared at the paper in horror. This is what we saw:

Need a reliable baby-sitter?

Need one fast?

Then call:

THE BABY-SITTERS AGENCY

Liz Lewis: 555-1162

OR

Michelle Patterson: 555-7548

*And reach a whole network of responsible
baby-sitters!*

Ages: 13 and up
Available:
After school
Weekends (until midnight)
Weeknights (until 11:00)
Low rates! Years of experience!
The ultimate time-saver!
CALL NOW!

The four of us just looked at each other. Even Kristy, who has sort of a big mouth, couldn't say anything. Mary Anne's eyes grew so wide I thought they would pop right out of her head.

"What is wrong, my Claudia?" asked Mimi.

"Competition," Claudia replied stiffly.

Kristy checked her watch and saw that it was only five-forty-five, and that we still had fifteen minutes left to our Friday meeting. "I hereby change this meeting of the Baby-sitters Club to an emergency meeting," she announced.

"We will leave you alone, then," said Mimi softly. "Janine, please help me with dinner." Mimi tiptoed out, followed by Janine, who closed the door softly behind her.

I looked at my three stricken friends.

Claudia's dark eyes were troubled. She was absentmindedly playing with a strand of her

long black hair. Claudia is very fashion conscious and always dresses in the absolute latest trendy clothes, but I could tell that clothes were the last things on her mind.

Kristy, wearing her typical little-girl clothes, her brown hair pulled back into a messy ponytail, looked as troubled as Claudia did.

Mary Anne, her hair in braids as usual (her father makes her wear it that way), had put on her wire-rimmed glasses to read the flyer. When she was finished, she sighed, leaned back against the wall, and kicked off her penny loafers.

If I could have looked at myself, I would have seen a second trendy dresser and a fourth long face, more sophisticated than Kristy's or Mary Anne's but not nearly as beautiful as Claudia's.

I examined a pink-painted nail while Kristy held the dreadful flyer in her shaking hand.

"We're dead," she said to no one in particular. "The other baby-sitters are older than we are. They can stay out later than we can. We're doomed."

Not one of us disagreed with her.

In nervous desperation, Claudia took a shoe box from under her bed, reached in, and pulled out a roll of Life Savers. Claudia is a junk-food addict (although she won't admit it), and she has

candy and snacks stashed all around her bedroom, along with the Nancy Drew books her parents disapprove of because they think they're not "quality" reading. She was so upset about the Baby-sitters Agency that when she was passing around the Life Savers, she forgot and offered *me* a piece. I'm diabetic and absolutely not allowed to eat extra sweets. I used to try to keep my illness a secret from people, but Claudia, Mary Anne, and Kristy know about it, and they don't usually offer me candy.

"Who *are* Liz Lewis and Michelle Patterson?" asked Mary Anne, peering over to look at the flyer again.

I shrugged. I barely knew the kids in my homeroom, let alone in any other grade.

"Maybe they don't go to the middle school," suggested Kristy. "It says the baby-sitters are thirteen and up. Liz and Michelle probably go to the high school. I wonder if Sam or Charlie knows them." (Charlie and Sam are Kristy's older brothers. They're sixteen and fourteen. She has a little brother, too, David Michael, who's six.)

"No, they go to Stoneybrook Middle School," spoke up Claudia, in a tone of voice that indicated she was likely to expire in a few seconds. "They're eighth-graders."

"They must be pretty friendly with the high school kids," I said, "unless there are a whole bunch of really old eighth-graders that we don't know about."

Claudia snorted. "For all I know, there are. Liz and Michelle could be fourteen or fifteen. I wish you guys knew who they are. You'd faint. Those two aren't baby-sitters any more than I'm the queen of France."

"What's wrong with them?" I asked.

"For one thing, I wouldn't trust them farther than I could throw a truck," said Claudia. "They have smart mouths, they sass the teachers, they hate school, they hang around at the mall. You know, *that* kind of kid."

"It doesn't mean they're not good baby-sitters," said Mary Anne.

"I'd be surprised if they were," replied Claudia.

"I wonder how the agency works," mused Kristy. She was still holding the flyer. "There are only two names on this, but it says you can get in touch with 'a whole network of responsible baby-sitters.' I'll say one thing, Liz and Michelle know how to go after customers. Their flyer is a lot better than ours was."

"Hmph," I said.

“Hey!” cried Mary Anne. “I have an idea. Let’s call the agency and pretend we need a sitter. Maybe we can find out how those girls operate.” Mary Anne may be shy, but she sure can come up with daring ideas.

“Oh, that’s smart!” said Kristy approvingly. “I’ll make up a name and say I need a baby-sitter for my younger brother. Then I can call them back later and cancel.”

“Okay,” Claudia and I agreed.

“Competition, are you ready?” Kristy asked the phone. “Here comes the Baby-sitters Club!”