

CHAPTER 1

“Order! Order, please. Order!” Kristy Thomas rapped on Claudia Kishi’s desk with the eraser end of a pencil. “This meeting of the Baby-sitters Club will now come to order — and I mean it!”

Kristy was having trouble getting our attention. The members of the Baby-sitters Club were kind of wound up. We were getting two new official members that afternoon, Mallory Pike and Jessi Ramsey, and besides, we’d had a half-day off from school because of teachers’ meetings.

Mary Anne Spier, Claudia, Jessi, Mal, and I (Dawn Schafer) were all sprawled around Claudia’s room, talking and laughing. Kristy was looking down on us from the director’s chair she always sits in, and she didn’t seem too happy.

Before I go any further, maybe I should explain who the club members are, and what the Baby-sitters Club is. I’ll start with the club, which was Kristy’s idea. She and Mary Anne used to do a lot

of baby-sitting in their neighborhood, and Kristy realized that any time a parent needed a sitter, he or she had to make about a zillion phone calls trying to find someone who was free. She thought, Wouldn't it be great if a parent could make one call and reach a whole bunch of sitters at once? So she got a group of friends together to form the club, and now we meet three times a week — Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons from 5:30 until 6:00. Our clients know about our meetings (we advertise), and they call us while we're holding them. There are six members of the club now, and usually at least one of us is free and can take any job that comes in. Great for the parent (only one call to make, plus we are responsible, trustworthy sitters). And great for us (we each get lots of jobs, have fun, and earn money).

We run our club very professionally. We sitters are always on time, we make sure we know important information, such as where the parents will be and when the children should go to bed, and we're just plain great with kids. We love them! We have a club record book in which Mary Anne keeps track of our clients and appointments (she's the secretary), and I keep track of the money we earn (I'm the treasurer). We also have a club notebook, which is like a diary. (Kristy makes us

keep it up-to-date.) In it, we each write up every job we go on, and then we're supposed to read the entries about once a week. That way, we know what's going on with the kids the other club members have taken care of.

And we have club officers. Kristy is the president, of course, since she thought up the club. She's outgoing and, well, okay, she's a little loud. As she says, her mouth gets her in trouble sometimes. When Kristy first started the club she lived right across the street from Claudia and next door to Mary Anne. She and Mary Anne had been best friends all their lives. Then last summer Kristy's mom, who had been divorced, married Watson Brewer, a really rich guy. Watson moved Kristy and her family across town to his mansion. Kristy has three brothers — Charlie, who's seventeen; Sam, who's fifteen; and David Michael, who's just seven. Now she also has a stepsister and stepbrother. They're Watson's kids. Karen is six and Andrew is four. Kristy likes her new family, but it represents a big change for her and she has a lot to get used to. Luckily, Charlie drives her to and from club meetings (we pay him out of the dues money we put in our treasury each week), so Kristy doesn't have to miss out on anything just because she moved.

Claudia is our vice president. This is mostly because she's the only one of us with her own personal phone and a private number, so her room is the best place to hold our meetings. Claudia is as different from Kristy as it's possible for two people to be. Claud and Kristy are both thirteen (so are Mary Anne and I), but Claudia is a hundred times more sophisticated. Kristy couldn't care less about clothes; Claudia is a fashion nut who is always wearing the latest fad thing and looks great. She's Japanese-American and has this long, silky, jet-black hair; dark, beautiful eyes; and a creamy, clear complexion. She loves art and reading mysteries, but she's not a very good student. Which is too bad because her older sister, Janine, is a genius. Claudia and Janine live with their parents and Mimi, their grandmother, who is the best grandmother you can imagine.

Our secretary, as I've mentioned, is Mary Anne. She and Kristy are pretty different, too — opposites, almost — but they're best friends anyway. Kristy is loud, Mary Anne is quiet and shy. She's also sensitive (prone to crying) and a good listener. Kristy thinks boys were put on this planet to torture her, Mary Anne is the only one of us with a steady boyfriend. (Her boyfriend, by

the way, is Logan Bruno, one of our club's associate members. That means that Logan is someone we can call on if a job comes in that none of us is free to take. Our other associate member is a girl named Shannon Kilbourne, who lives across the street from Kristy.) Although Mary Anne didn't used to care about clothes, lately she's been taking more of an interest in them and she's been looking good. One thing about the two best friends that's the same is their appearance. They're both small for their age and have brown hair and brown eyes. Mary Anne lives with her dad and her kitten, Tigger. (Her mom died a long time ago.)

Then there's me. I'm the new club treasurer. We used to have another treasurer, Stacey McGill, who was one of the original members of the club, but she moved to New York City, which was really sad. We all miss Stacey, Claudia especially. Claudia and Stacey were best friends. Anyway, when Stacey left, I became the new treasurer. I was not an original member of the club. That's because I moved to Stoneybrook, Connecticut, just last January. Less than a year ago. Until then, I'd lived in California with my parents and my younger brother, Jeff. But then Mom and Dad got divorced, so Mom moved Jeff and me all the

way across the country to this little town, which is where she grew up. I like Stoneybrook, but I'm a California girl at heart. I like hot weather, not cold, and health food, not junk. And I dress with style, but it's my own style. I'm very independent. Maybe you're wondering what I look like. Well, I have long, long (waist-length) pale blonde hair and blue eyes. I get freckles if I stay out in the sun too long. And here's something else you should know. Our house in Stoneybrook is almost two hundred years old and has a *secret passage*. That's the truth.

Okay. Our new members are Mallory and Jessi. They're younger than the rest of us — eleven years old — and for that reason they are junior officers. (They haven't even been made official club members. That will happen today.) Mallory is the oldest of eight kids, so she knows a lot about handling children. She has dark curly hair, wears glasses, and is getting braces. She desperately wants pierced ears, but her mother says no. She and Jessi (Jessica) are alike in a lot of ways, except that Jessi is black. Jessi also wears glasses (just for reading) and thinks her parents treat her like a kid. (She's not allowed to have her ears pierced yet, either.) Like me, Jessi is new to Stoneybrook. She and her parents; her eight-year-old sister,

Becca (short for Rebecca); and her baby brother, Squirt (nickname for John Philip Ramsey, Jr.); have only lived in Stoneybrook for a few weeks. Jessi is a super-talented ballet dancer. (She has these incredibly long legs and a thin, graceful body.) She and Mallory both like horses and reading.

Now you know about us club members, so let's get back to the meeting.

After a lot of pencil-rapping and ahem-ing, Kristy finally got our attention and we quieted down.

Kristy sat up very straight in the director's chair. She adjusted her visor. "As you know," she said, "today we are going to induct two new members into the club."

Jessi and Mal grinned at each other, but I thought, *Induct?* Who's Kristy kidding? First she comes up with this fancy word, which just means to introduce them into the club officially. Furthermore, she didn't induct *me* when *I* joined the club. She just nodded to Mary Anne, and Mary Anne asked me if I wanted to be a member. Later, we did say a toast over pizza, but there was no actual *induction*. Exactly what did Kristy have in mind? I could guess. A speech and fanfare. Kristy likes to make a big deal out of things. Why hadn't she made a big deal when I joined the club? Because

she was jealous of me, that's why. She was jealous that Mary Anne and I got to be good friends almost as soon as I moved to Stoneybrook. Kristy was used to being Mary Anne's only good friend. Well, she's gotten over that jealousy, I think, but she never bothered to *induct* me, so I minded (just a little) that she was going all out for our new members today.

Before she could get started, though, the phone rang.

"I'll get it!" Claudia, Kristy, Mary Anne, and I shrieked.

Kristy was closest to the phone, so she reached it first. "Hello, Baby-sitters Club," she said. "Hi, Dr. Johanssen . . . Yes, she's here. Hold on." Kristy handed the phone to Claudia. "She wants to speak to *you*," she said.

The rest of us frowned. That's not how our club operates. Whoever answers the phone is supposed to find out the details of the job, hang up, offer the job to all of us, and then call the client back to say which one of us will be sitting. Often, only one of us is free since we're pretty busy, so there isn't any fighting over who gets the jobs.

And our clients know this. So why was Dr. Johanssen asking to speak to Claudia?

We found out soon enough.

When Claudia hung up the phone, she said to Mary Anne, "Put me down for Tuesday, three-thirty until six."

"Why?" Kristy demanded to know. She paused, then said vehemently, "Claudia, you can't do that!"

"How come?" asked Mallory.

"How come? Because the Baby-sitters Club doesn't work that way, that's how come," I exploded.

Mal blushed. She looked at Jessi in embarrassment. "Sorry. I didn't know," she said.

"Oh, Mal, I didn't mean to yell at you," I told her. "It's just that this is practically our most important club rule. And Claudia just broke it." I looked at Claudia. "Why?" I asked.

Claudia sighed. "Dr. Johanssen said Charlotte especially asked for me to be her sitter." (Charlotte is the Johanssens' eight-year-old daughter.) "She said Charlotte really misses Stacey and she knows I'm Stacey's best friend. This isn't my fault. I guess Charlotte just feels connected to me." Claudia shrugged and looked uncomfortable.

This *never* happened. I wished Charlotte had asked for me. It made me feel like I wasn't a good sitter or something, even though I knew that wasn't really true.

“Well,” said Kristy huffily, “if that’s what Charlotte wants.” Kristy must have felt the way I did.

“I guess she does,” agreed Claudia, still looking uncomfortable.

“I mean, it’s not as if the rest of us haven’t done some pretty great baby-sitting stuff,” Kristy went on. “I was the one who thought up the Kid-Kits Charlotte likes so much.” (Kid-Kits are boxes that we fill with toys and games, puzzles and books, and sometimes bring with us on sitting jobs.)

“I was the one who got Jenny Prezzioso to the hospital that time she got sick,” said Mary Anne.

“I once saved two kids from a fire when I was sitting in California,” I pointed out.

“Oh, you’re all good sitters,” Claudia jumped in. “Really.” (Then how come I didn’t feel like one?) “Char just misses Stacey, that’s all. This is a special job.”

Kristy tried to start up her induction ceremony again then, but the phone kept ringing. We lined up three jobs — for me, for Kristy, and for Mal and Jessi together at Mallory’s house. (The Pikes always require two sitters because of all those kids.)

“See that?” said Claudia. “What are you guys worried about? You’re great sitters. You’re getting jobs. Forget about Charlotte.”

We did. At least long enough for Kristy to cram in her induction ceremony before the meeting ended.

The ceremony went like this:

Kristy slid out of the director's chair. She picked up the club notebook and held it in front of her. Then she asked Mallory to stand on her left and Jessi on her right.

"Now," she said, "face me, and put your right hands on the notebook."

Jessi and Mal did as they were told.

(I looked at Claudia and we rolled our eyes.)

"Repeat after me," Kristy continued. "I promise to be a good, reliable, and safe sitter, and to be true to the Baby-sitters Club forevermore."

Mal and Jessi repeated this oath (which I'm sure Kristy had made up on the spur of the moment).

"I now pronounce you junior officers in the Baby-sitters Club," said Kristy.

Mary Anne burst into tears. "Oh, that is so beautiful!" she said.

Claudia and I rolled our eyes again.

"Well, six o'clock," announced Kristy. "Time to go home."

The meeting ended.

Later, I wished it never had.