



**Kristy and the Mother's Day
Surprise**

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For Amy Berkower

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CHAPTER 1

I've been thinking about families lately, wondering what makes one. Is a family really a mother, a father, and a kid or two? I hope not, because if that's a family, then I haven't got one. And neither do a lot of other people I know. For instance, Nannie, Mom's mother, lives all by herself. But I still think of her as a family — a one-person family. And I think of my own family as a real family . . . I guess.

What I mean is, well, my family didn't start out the way it is now. It started out as two families that split up and came together as . . . Uh-oh. I know that's confusing. I'm a little ahead of myself. I better back up and begin at the beginning.

This is the beginning: Hi! I'm Kristy Thomas. I'm thirteen years old. I'm in eighth grade. I'm the president of the Baby-sitters Club (more about

that later). I like sports, and I guess you could say I'm a tomboy. (Well, wouldn't you be one if you had a whole bunch of brothers?) I'm not the neatest person in the world. I don't care much about boys or clothes. I'm famous for coming up with big ideas.

Okay, enough about me. Let me tell you about —
Knock, knock.

Darn, I thought. Who could that be? It was a Friday evening and I didn't have any plans or even a baby-sitting job. I was in my bedroom, just messing around, enjoying my free time.

"Who's there?" I called.

"Oswald!" my little sister replied.

Oswald? *Oh. . .* "Oswald who?" I asked.

"Help! Help! Oswald my gum!"

I was laughing as I opened the door and found a very giggly Karen in the hallway.

"Pretty funny," I said, as Karen ran into my room and threw herself on my bed. "Where'd you hear that one?"

"In school. Nancy told it to me. What are you doing with the door closed?"

"Just fooling around."

"But this is our first night here."

"I'm sorry, Karen. I didn't mean to shut you out. It's just that I had a rotten week at school and

today was especially rotten, so I wanted to be by myself for awhile.”

You’re probably wondering why Karen said, “But this is our first night here.” I think now would be a good time to explain my family to you. See, Karen isn’t exactly my sister. She’s my stepsister. Her little brother Andrew is my stepbrother, and her father is my stepfather. Karen and Andrew only live with us part-time. I like when they come over because then my family consists of Mom, Watson (he’s my stepfather), Sam, Charlie, and David Michael (they’re my brothers), and Karen and Andrew. Oh, and Shannon and Boo-Boo. They’re our dog and cat, and they’re part of the family, too.

How did I get this weird family? Well, you can probably imagine. My mom and dad were divorced. They got divorced right after David Michael was born. Then, a couple of years ago, Mom met Watson and started going out with him. Watson was divorced, too. And after awhile, Mom and Watson got married, and then Mom and my brothers and I moved into Watson’s house. That’s how I got my big family. The only unusual thing is that Watson is a millionaire. Honest. That’s why we moved into his house. It’s a lot bigger than our old one. It’s huge. In fact,

it's basically a mansion. Living in a mansion here in Stoneybrook, Connecticut, is fun, but sometimes I miss my old house. It's on the other side of town, where all my friends are.

So now I'm part of a six-kid family. My brother Charlie is the oldest kid. He's seventeen, a senior in high school, and thinks he's a big shot. Sam is fifteen. He's a sophomore in high school. Then there's me, then David Michael, who's seven, and then Karen and Andrew, who are six and four. Usually, Karen and Andrew only live with us every other weekend and for two weeks during the summer. The rest of the time they live with their mother, who's not too far away — in a different neighborhood in Stoneybrook. But the night Karen bounced into my room with her knock-knock joke was the beginning of a much longer stay. Karen and Andrew were going to be with us for several weeks while their mother and stepfather went on a business trip.

"Knock, knock," said Karen again.

"Who's there?" I replied.

"Hey, Karen! Come here!" It was David Michael, yelling down the hall.

"What?" Karen yelled back.

"Come look at this bug!" (David Michael just loves bugs.)

Karen was off my bed and out of my room in a flash.

I smiled. I really like my family, especially when Karen and Andrew are here. The bigger, the better. Sometimes I think of my friends as family, too. Is that weird? I don't know. But my friends do feel like family. I guess I'm mostly talking about my friends in the Baby-sitters Club. That's a club I started myself. Actually, it's more of a business. My friends and I sit for families in Stoneybrook and we earn a lot of money.

Here's who's in the club: me, Claudia Kishi, Mary Anne Spier, Dawn Schafer, Mallory Pike, and Jessi Ramsey. We are six very different people, but we get along really well (most of the time). That's the way it is with families.

For instance, I'm pretty outgoing (some people say I have a big mouth), and as I mentioned before, I like sports and couldn't care less about clothes or boys. My best friend is Mary Anne Spier (she's our club secretary) and we are *so* different. Mary Anne is quiet and shy, hates sports, is becoming interested in clothes, has a boyfriend, and comes from a very small family. She lives with just her dad and her kitten, Tigger. Her mom died a long time ago. Mary Anne and I have always been different and have always been best

friends. We lived next door to each other until Mom married Watson, so we practically grew up together. One thing that's the same about us is our looks. We both have brown hair and brown eyes and are short for our age.

The vice-president of the Baby-sitters Club is Claudia Kishi. Claud lives across the street from Mary Anne. There is nothing, and I mean *nothing*, typical or average or ordinary about Claudia. To begin with, she's Japanese American. Her hair is silky and long and jet-black. Her eyes are dark. And her skin, well, I wish it were mine. I'm sure her skin doesn't even know what a pimple is. Which is interesting when you consider Claudia's eating habits. Claud is pretty much addicted to junk food. Her parents don't like her to eat much of it, though, so she has to resort to hiding it in her room. Everywhere you look, you find something: a package of red-hots in the pencil cup, a bag of Cheese Doodles under her bed, a box of Cracker Jacks in the closet. This makes for a crowded room because Claudia is a pack rat. She has to be. She's an artist and needs to collect things for her work, such as shells, leaves, and interesting pebbles. Plus, she has tons of supplies — paper, canvases, paints, pastels, charcoals — and most of them are stored under her bed. Claud likes Nancy Drew

mysteries and is a terrible student (even though she's smart). She lives with her parents, her grandmother, Mimi, and her older sister, Janine. It's too bad that Claud is such a poor student, because Janine is a genius. One last thing about Claudia — her clothes. They are just . . . so cool. Well, I mean Claud is. She's the coolest kid in our grade. Her clothes are wild. Claud loves trying new things and she has an incredible imagination. She wears hats, weird jewelry (she makes some of it), bright colors — anything she can get away with!

Dawn Schafer is the club's treasurer. Now *she's* got an interesting family. Dawn used to live in California. She lived there with her parents and Jeff, her younger brother. Then her parents got divorced and Mrs. Schafer moved Dawn and Jeff all the way across country to Stoneybrook. The reason she chose Stoneybrook is she grew up here, and her parents (Dawn's grandparents) still live here. We got to know Dawn and she joined the Baby-sitters Club and everything seemed great. Except that Jeff missed his father and California — a lot. Finally, he moved back there. Now Dawn's family is split in half and separated by a continent. Dawn seems to be handling the changes well, though. She's pretty mature. And

she's a real individual. She solves her own problems, makes her own decisions, and isn't too affected by what other people think of her or tell her. Plus, Dawn is neat and organized, which makes her a good treasurer. Although Dawn has been living in Connecticut for over a year now, she still looks sort of Californian. She's got long hair that is the blondest I've ever seen. It's almost white. And her eyes are sparkly and pale blue. In the summer she gets this amazing tan. (The rest of the year she just has freckles.) And her clothes are casual and as individualistic as she is. She likes to wear layers of things — a short tank top over a long tank top, or socks over tights. Dawn is pretty cool.

The two junior members of our club are Jessi Ramsey and Mallory Pike. They're junior members because they're younger than the rest of us eighth-graders. Mal and Jessi are in sixth grade. They haven't been club members as long as us older girls. Still, they're beginning to feel like family to me.

Mallory used to be someone our club sat *for*. Isn't that weird? Now she's a sitter herself. Mal is the oldest of eight kids. (Talk about big families.) The Baby-sitters Club still takes care of her younger brothers and sisters pretty often.

Anyway, Mal is a great sitter. She's levelheaded and responsible — good in an emergency. And she's the most practical person I know. Mal is struggling to grow up. Being eleven can be very difficult, and Mal thinks her parents treat her like a baby. However, they're starting to let up. Recently, they allowed Mal to get her ears pierced and her hair cut. (She had to get braces, too, though, and her parents said she's too young for contact lenses.) Mal likes reading (especially books about horses), writing, and drawing. She thinks she might want to be an author of children's books when she grows up.

Jessi (short for Jessica) Ramsey is Mal's best friend. Like Dawn, she's a newcomer to Stonybrook, Connecticut. In fact, she's a newer newcomer than Dawn is. Her family moved here from New Jersey at the beginning of the school year. They moved because Mr. Ramsey changed jobs. In many ways, Jessi and Mal are alike. Jessi also loves to read, she wears glasses (just for reading), and she thinks *her* parents treat her like a baby, although they did let her get her ears pierced when Mal had hers done. But there are some big differences between Jessi and Mal. I guess the biggest is that Jessi is Black and Mal is white. This hasn't made a bit of difference to the girls, but the

Ramseys sure had some trouble when they first moved here. Not many Black families live in Stoneybrook, and some people gave the Ramseys a hard time. Jessi says things are settling down, though. Another difference between Mal and Jessi is that Mal likes to write and Jessi likes to dance. Jessi is a ballerina. She's very talented. I've seen her dance — *on stage*. I was really impressed. The third difference is that Mal's family is huge, while Jessi's is average — Jessi; her parents; her younger sister, Becca; and her baby brother, Squirt.

And that's it. Those are the people in my family. It's a big family, when you add the members of the Baby-sitters Club. I could add a few more, too, I thought later that night as I lay in bed. There's Nannie. There's Stacey McGill, who used to be a member of the club, but who had to move to New York City. There are Shannon and Logan, whom I'll tell you about later. And there's my real father. . . . But, no, he doesn't count. Somebody who never writes, never calls, never remembers your birthday, never says he loves you, doesn't count at all.

I was growing sleepy, and I forgot about my father. Instead, I thought of my gigantic family. I fell asleep smiling.