



SUPER SPECIAL #3

Baby-sitters' Winter Vacation

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ISBN 978-1-338-87566-9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A. 40
This edition first printing 2023

Book design by Maeve Norton

Mary Anne

Sunday night

I don't believe it. They almost canceled our trip this afternoon! The principal and our teachers, I mean. That's because the weather reports for Vermont have been so bad. Lots of snow is on the way. Even here in Stoneybrook we had a little snow this weekend, which I guess is why the principal panicked.

Anyway, the rumor about the cancellation got started this morning, and by this afternoon, so many parents were calling the principal (at his home) to find out if it was true that around 6:00 he planned in an announcement to WS10 saying, "Despite weather reports, the Stoneybrook Middle

*School trip and Winter Carnival are still
on . . . ”*

Thank goodness we were still going to the lodge. I'd have died if I couldn't have finished my book for Logan. By Sunday, he had already left for Aruba, and if our trip had been canceled, not only would we have had to go to school instead of to the lodge, but the week would have seemed a year long without him. In Vermont I'd be distracted by all the new things to do. In Connecticut, I would just have moped around. Of course, the best thing would have been if Logan could have come to Vermont with us. (He's never even been on the trip because his family still lived in Kentucky last year.) But you can't have everything.

Anyway, by Sunday night the rumor had been cleared up (or put to rest, as my father would say), so despite the overcast sky and the light snow that was falling, I went to bed knowing the trip was still on.

The trip really is a pretty amazing thing. I don't think kids in many middle schools do what we get to do every year — go away for almost a week at practically no cost. Our parents are just

asked to make a donation to the Winter Carnival Fund. If we don't earn enough money, then the Leicester Lodge people cover whatever isn't raised. A nice (rich) couple owns the lodge, and they do this for lots of schools all winter long, just so students can have an away-from-home experience. It's something they like to do for kids. And, boy, do they make our experience nice. Several wings of their huge lodge are equipped as fancy dormitories. (Usually, more than one school is at the lodge at the same time, which is fun because you get to meet new people.) And all week long, they feed us terrific food, and let us use the lodge along with the skiers and other people who are vacationing there. They don't even mind our Winter War.

Before I get too much further along, I better stop and tell you who I am. I'm Mary Anne Spier. I'm thirteen and I'm in eighth grade at Stoneybrook Middle School (SMS). I don't have any brothers or sisters, just an adorable gray kitten named Tigger. I don't have a mom, either, but I do have a pretty nice dad. We live in Stoneybrook, Connecticut, and I have a lot of friends here. Most of them are my friends in the Baby-sitters Club. Plus, there's Logan (who's also part of the club). He's my boyfriend. It was a long time

before I felt brave enough to call him that, but that's what he is.

My friends in the Baby-sitters Club are Kristy Thomas, Dawn Schafer, Claudia Kishi, Stacey McGill, Jessi Ramsey, and Mallory Pike. They were all going on the trip, too. For weeks, the seven of us had been so excited we could hardly say the words "Winter Carnival" without becoming hysterical. Five of us had been on the trip before, but Mal and Jessi hadn't, since they're in sixth grade. It would be their first time.

Kristy and Dawn are my two best friends. Kristy is outgoing and has a big mouth, but I don't mind her mouth — much. She's funny and full of good ideas. She comes from a huge, mixed-up family with brothers, a stepbrother and stepsister, and even an adopted sister. Dawn is an individual. She has somehow learned not to care about what people think, and to just go her own way and do what she wants to do, without hurting anyone's feelings. Dawn has one brother, who lives in California with her father. (Her parents are divorced.)

Claudia and Stacey are best friends, but not *my* best friends, although we're all pretty close. They're both wild dressers, and definitely the most sophisticated of the club members. Stacey

even grew up in New York City. One thing you should know about Stacey is that she has diabetes, but she copes really well. Claudia is an artist and a junk-food addict. Stacey's parents are in the middle of a divorce; Claudia's aren't. Stacey is an only child; Claud has an older sister named Janine.

Then there are Jessi and Mal who, by Sunday night, were getting nervous about the trip to the lodge. It wasn't their first time away from home (we all went to Camp Moosehead for two weeks in the summer), but the sixth-graders are always the "babies" of the trip, going away with the "big kids," and that's not an easy position to be in. Anyway, Jessi and Mal are also best friends, and they're big readers, but that's where the similarities end. Mal wants to be a writer when she grows up; Jessi is a talented ballet dancer. Mal has seven younger brothers and sisters; Jessi has two. Also, Mal is white and Jessi is Black.

Those are my friends, and I was glad they were all going on the trip with me. (I would have been even happier if Logan were going, though.) At least the trip hadn't been called off. I have to admit that I was kind of surprised by that. When I woke up on Monday the sky was the color of mercury, and the air was heavy with moisture. It

was 28° outside, according to our thermometer — perfect snowing weather. And when I tuned into the weather channel on TV, the reports for Vermont were grimmer than ever.

“You better turn on the radio, Mary Anne,” Dad said to me. “If the trip is off, the cancellation will be announced.”

But there was no cancellation, just the report from the night before saying that the trip was still on.

“It’s on!” I shouted to Dad.

A good thing, too, since I was dressed, packed, and ready to go.

As soon as Dad and I had finished breakfast, I jumped up from the table and said, “Okay, are you ready to leave?”

“For school?” Dad replied. “Now?”

“Yes.”

“It’s too early. You’ll have to wait for at least half an hour once you reach the school parking lot. And it’s not even thirty degrees out.”

“I know,” I said. “Only twenty-eight. *Please* can’t we go? I don’t think I can wait a second longer.”

“Well, all right,” Dad answered. “Brush your teeth and say good-bye to Tigger.”

I refrained from reminding him that I’m not a baby. Instead, I just brushed my teeth and then

picked up Tigger. All I had to do was look into those shiny eyes of his and I wanted to cry. I could feel a huge lump in my throat.

"Mew?" said Tigger.

"I'll be back on Saturday," I told him. "That's a promise." Then I kissed him on his furry head and set him on the floor. "'Bye, Tigger."

Tigger went tearing after this plastic ball with a bell in it. He had no idea what was going on.

"Don't forget to feed him," I told Dad about twelve times as we drove through Stoneybrook to SMS. "And change his water. And put that ointment in his eyes if they start to run. And check behind the refrigerator when his toys are missing."

"Yes, ma'am," Dad said good-naturedly.

When he turned the car into the parking lot, I could see that I wasn't the only one who was excited and had wanted to arrive early. About thirty other kids were there, including Kristy, Claudia, and Jessi. I said a nervous good-bye to Dad, hauled my stuff out of the car, and joined my friends. Like me, they were each carrying two duffel bags — except for Claud. Claud was laden down with duffel bags plus all her ski equipment. She is practically a champion skier.

"Doesn't the lodge lend us skis and boots?" I

asked. (Not that I was about to go skiing. I am the world's most unathletic person.)

"Yes," Claud replied, "but I wanted to bring my own stuff this year. I ski better with it. And I plan to help lead the Red Team to victory in the Winter War."

"No way!" cried Kristy. "The Blue Team is going to win!"

The Winter War, I should explain, is the main activity of the Winter Carnival up at the lodge. The week before we left for Vermont, everyone in our school had been randomly assigned to either the Red Team or the Blue Team. The teams would compete in five events during Winter Carnival — an ice-skating contest, a snowball fight, a snow sculpture contest, a downhill skiing competition, and a cross-country skiing competition. Although going to Vermont is mandatory, participating in the war is not. (Thank heavens. I did not plan to participate — even though I wanted my team, the Blue Team, to win.) In case you couldn't tell, Kristy and Claudia were on opposite teams. Kristy was even the *captain* of her team. It was going to be a very competitive week for her.

The four of us were standing, shivering, in the parking lot when Dawn and Mallory arrived, and a few minutes later, Stacey.

"We're all here!" I said. "The Baby-sitters Club is here and ready to go."

"Ready for a week of fun," said Stacey.

"A week of contests," said Kristy.

"A week away from home," said Mal uncertainly.

"A week of relaxation," said Jessi.

"A week of reading and lounging," I said. "I am going to turn into the Leicester Lodge Lounge Lizard."

Everyone laughed. Then Dawn added, "A week of snow."

And Claudia said, "A week of junk-food opportunities. Remember those great candy machines on every floor?"

Dawn, our health-food addict, groaned. "I remember the salad bar in the dining hall."

"I'm getting nervous," Mal said suddenly.

"Me, too," agreed Jessi.

"What if we don't *like* the food?" asked Mallory.

"Or spending a week under our teachers' noses?" said Jessi.

"Forget it," answered Claud. "If you survived Camp Moosehead, you can survive any food. Plus, out of school, the teachers don't seem nearly as much like . . . teachers. They just seem like regular adults. After awhile, they sort of blend into the woodwork and you hardly notice them."

“Really?” said Jessi and Mal at the same time.

“Really,” the rest of us replied.

And at that moment, a huge cheer rose up in the parking lot.

“The buses are here!” someone shouted.

My friends and I turned to look. Good-bye, Connecticut, I thought. Hello, Vermont!