



**Jessi and the
Superbrat**

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CHAPTER 1

“Mama! Daddy! Get in here! Jessi, hurry! Come on!”

That was my little sister, Becca, calling us from the living room. If you don’t know Becca, you might’ve thought some major catastrophe had just happened, like:

A. The house was on fire.

B. A clown car had pulled up into our driveway, and now endless clowns were spilling onto our front lawn.

C. A flying saucer had crashed through our roof, and Martians were streaming down the staircase to capture us and take us off to Spacecreatureland.

So what was it? Fortunately, the answer was: None of the Above. The truth was, Becca was only calling us because of a TV show. The show had just come on and she wanted us to watch it with her.

Mama, Daddy, Squirt, and I were in the kitchen, cleaning up after dinner. Well, Squirt wasn't exactly cleaning up. He was still strapped in his high chair, gnawing on a teething biscuit, and he had as much food caked on his face as we had just washed off the dishes.

Maybe I should introduce myself and my family before I start the story. My full name is Jessica Davis Ramsey, but everybody calls me Jessi. I'm eleven years old and in sixth grade. I'm Black, and just to give you an idea of how few Black families live here in Stoneybrook, Connecticut, I'll tell you that I'm the only Black kid in my entire grade at Stoneybrook Middle School. I keep my hair long because I take ballet class two times a week and ballerinas are supposed to be able to pull their hair back. And my legs are long, long, *long*, which is great for dancing. My grandma always says they're graceful, too. And Mama says I move like a cat. I take that as a compliment.

You can tell I have a nice family. I live with my parents, eight-year-old sister Becca (that's short for Rebecca) and my baby brother, Squirt. No, his real name's not Squirt, it's John Philip Ramsey, Jr. But when he was born, he was the tiniest baby in

the hospital, so the nurses gave him a special nickname.

As I said, my family and I live in Stoneybrook, Connecticut, but we used to live in Oakley, New Jersey, and that was great because my grandparents lived on the same street as we did and so did a lot of my aunts and uncles and cousins. One of my cousins, Keisha, was my very best friend. She and I have the exact same birthday, and Keisha always seemed to know what I was feeling about things.

I'd lived in Oakley since I was a baby, but then Daddy's company transferred him to Stamford, Connecticut, so we found this house in Stoneybrook nearby. I'll tell you honestly, sometimes I still miss Oakley. It was a little easier to be myself there. And I especially miss Keisha. I mean, how many best friends have known each other since they were one day old?

Well, Stoneybrook doesn't have Keisha. And it doesn't have my wonderful grandparents or my aunts and uncles. But it does offer a lot of other things. Since we moved here, I enrolled in a very good ballet school in Stamford. To get in, I had to audition. And then Daddy built me my very own ballet barre and practice area in our basement. I

also found myself another best friend. Her name is Mallory Pike. And because of Mallory, I now belong to one of the greatest clubs in the world — the Baby-sitters Club. Maybe that's been the best thing about moving to Stoneybrook.

The club was the great idea of Kristy Thomas. She's an eighth-grader who goes to my school. Last year, when she was in seventh grade, she got together with a bunch of friends who love to baby-sit and they formed a club. They sent out flyers to all the families in the neighborhood — very professional — and pretty soon they had a booming business. Leave it to Kristy. She's a take-charge type of person. The club meets three afternoons a week — Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 5:30 until 6:00 — and families who need a baby-sitter know to call us up during club hours. The great thing is that one of us is bound to be free. So our clients are sure of getting a sitter and, meanwhile, we get plenty of jobs. *Everybody's happy!*

All the club members are eighth-graders except for Mallory and me. Mallory got in because all the Baby-sitters knew her. See, the girls had sat a lot for Mallory's family, the Pikes. Oh, I guess I forgot to tell you. Mallory is from a big family,

and I'm talking *big*. Believe it or not, there are eight kids in the Pike family. Mallory's the oldest. Mrs. Pike used to hire sitters from the club and Mallory would always help them out. Of course, being the oldest of eight, Mallory was always great with the kids. So when there was an opening in the club, Kristy decided to let her in. Lucky me, she decided to let me in at the same time!

How did I get started on all this? Wasn't I telling you about Becca and the TV show? Well, to get back to the beginning of the story, there I was in the kitchen with Mama, Daddy, and Squirt. And there was Becca in the living room, bellowing at us with the full power of her lungs. Mama looked at Daddy.

"Do you think someone wants our attention?" she said, and laughed.

"You guys!" Becca was now standing in the kitchen doorway. Her arms were crossed over her chest and she had this expression on her face that said, I can't believe you guys are just *standing* there when the best show on TV has come on.

"ABADA!" said Squirt. (He loves to be in on any conversation.)

"Okay, everybody!" Becca said. "If you hurry, you won't miss anything."

Mama lifted Squirt out of his high chair and wiped his face clean with the washcloth we keep in the kitchen for that purpose.

“So what is this five-star show we’re missing?” Daddy asked.

“*P.S. 162*,” I explained. “Becca says all the kids in her class watch it every Friday night. I think Becca has a crush on one of the kids in it.”

“I do not!” Becca cried. She was already back in the living room and settled in her seat. Mama followed her and set Squirt on the carpet. Then she and Daddy squeezed onto the couch next to Becca. I laid down on the floor on my back and lifted one of my legs toward me to stretch it out. Sometimes when I watch TV, I use the time to do stretching exercises. I’ve got my family trained. They’re completely used to seeing me sprawled all over the floor like a contortionist. Becca’s the only one who ever complains, and that’s only if I block her view of the screen.

“Where’s the popcorn?” Daddy joked, as we all settled down for the show.

“Shh!” Becca said. Her eyes were glued to the TV, even though all that was on was a commercial for toothpaste.

I’d seen this show, *P.S. 162*, a couple of times

before, and I'd liked it okay. But until that day I'd never thought it was anything special. It's about an inner city elementary school, and the class includes all different kinds of kids. The character Becca has a crush on is named Lamont. He's Black, and in the show he's the most popular kid in the class. For good reason, too — Lamont is smart, funny, *and* good-looking. In the class, there're also Latine kids, Asian kids, and white kids. One of the white characters is named Waldo, and I've got to admit, he always makes me laugh. He's got weird, spiky hair and he wears this pair of thick black glasses and he's an incredible science whiz. You know, one of those kids who lives and breathes science, but put him in the real world and he can barely tie his shoes. When he talks to the other kids, he always uses big, science-y words like "zygotes" and "ecosystem," and of course the other kids don't have a *clue* what he's talking about.

That night, finally — after what seemed like about a hundred commercials — the show came on. In the opening scene, as a joke, one of the kids swiped Lamont's homework and Lamont was looking for it everywhere. Class was about to begin. The teacher rapped on her desk to get

everyone's attention and then asked for a volunteer to write the homework on the board. She stared at Lamont. He slunk low in his desk chair, trying to avoid her gaze.

"Lamont," the teacher said.

From her seat on the couch, Becca let out a long, low wail. "Oh, no!" she cried. You would've thought *Becca* was the one caught without her homework.

Daddy started to laugh.

"I take it Lamont is the boy Becca's got a crush on," he teased.

"Shhh!" Becca said.

Just then in the show Waldo raised his hand.

"Miss Pedagogue," he said, very seriously. "I've got the correct answer. Allow me."

He strode up to the board and wrote the word "fission" in big block letters. The teacher groaned and buried her head in her hands.

"Waldo," she said, "I hate to break it to you, but this is history class. After history comes English. And *then*, after English, comes science. How about if you just hang onto your answer for a couple more periods? Believe me, when it's science, I'll let you know."

Waldo got flustered and dropped the magnifying glass that he keeps in his pocket onto the

floor. All the other kids in the class laughed. So did the voices on the laugh track.

When that scene was over, *P.S. 162* faded off for a commercial break and an ad for some gasoline company came on.

Becca stared dreamily at the screen.

"Isn't Lamont the cutest guy in the world?" she said with a sigh.

"He's pretty nice, all right," Mama agreed.

"I think Waldo's funnier," I said.

"You like *Waldo*?" Becca said. "So does everyone in my class. Charlotte Johanssen said that the kid who plays him used to go to Stoneybrook Elementary School." (Charlotte Johanssen is Becca's best friend. She's lived in Stoneybrook a lot longer than we have.)

"Is that true?" asked Mama.

"Cross my heart," said Becca. She traced an X on her chest over her heart. Then she spit on her finger and raised her hand in a sort of oath. I still didn't know whether to believe her. "Charlotte said he always used to get his picture in the paper here. But now he lives in L.P."

"L.A." I corrected her. "Los Angeles — in California."

Hmm. Well, maybe Becca *was* telling the truth. She certainly seemed to have enough details.

"The kids in my class only like the show because of Waldo," Becca went on. "But not me," she said, pouting. "I wish *Lamont* was the one who'd gone to Stoneybrook Elementary."

I was curious to find out more about this Waldo business, but it was too late to ask Becca any more questions. The commercials had finished up and the show had come back on. Lamont was back on screen, cornering the kid who had swiped his homework.

"Quiet!" Becca said.

Squirt toddled over and crawled onto my stomach. I picked him up, sat up, and plunked my little brother onto my lap. I stared at the screen and waited for Waldo to come back on. This new information made the show a lot more interesting. I tried to picture Waldo playing baseball with the kids in the schoolyard here. Or shopping for school clothes at Washington Mall. Maybe he got those weird glasses of his at the same place Mallory got her glasses.

When the show was over I ran to the telephone to call Mallory. I figured if there was any family that would know about this Waldo business, it would have to be the Pikes. I mean, out of eight kids, somebody's got to know something. That's one advantage to having a best friend from

such a large family. It's like calling Information Central.

When Mallory came to the phone, she confirmed everything Becca had said.

Yes, it was true. Waldo and his family did live in Stoneybrook, only not full-time anymore. She said that Waldo's real name is Derek Masters, and she told me that now that he had to be out in California for a chunk of the year, his family had moved with him to L.A. They would be back when he had finished taping *P.S. 162*.

"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"A star from *Stoneybrook*? Are you kidding? It's big news. Everybody knows it," said Mallory. "Anyway, Derek used to be in Nicky's class." Nicky is one of Mallory's younger brothers. He's eight years old and in the third grade.

"In Nicky's class!?" I practically shrieked. Uh-oh. I was getting star struck, and by the time this whole mess was over, I was not going to be the only one. "Put Nicky on the phone, will you?" I asked.

When Nicky got on, he told me all about Derek. He told me that Derek had been a local child model, that he'd been in a lot of magazine ads and even on one TV commercial here. Somehow, that had all led to the job on *P.S. 162*.

“Wow!” I said. I couldn’t believe that no one had told me any of this before. This was hot news, and I wanted a chance to talk about it with my friends. I couldn’t wait for the next meeting of the Baby-sitters Club.