



Dawn on the Coast

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

*The author would like to thank
Jan Carr for her help in writing this book.*

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ISBN 978-1-338-81497-2

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

CHAPTER 1

Dear Sunshine,

The countdown is on. Only a few days left until you get on that plane and land in beautiful, sunny California. I can't wait to see you, sweetie. And Jeff is so excited, you'd think it was Christmas morning. California, here you come! See you Sunday night at the airport.

*Love and a big hug,
Dad*

A trip to the West Coast. It was the highlight of my spring, that's for sure. When I got to California, I had an absolutely fantastic time. So how come I ended up feeling so confused? Believe me, there's

a lot to tell. And I might as well start at the beginning.

First off, you're probably wondering who Sunshine is. Well, that's me. Of course nobody around here calls me Sunshine. Here in Connecticut they call me by my regular name, Dawn Schafer. But not my dad. He started calling me Sunshine when I was little and, unfortunately, it stuck. Maybe he gave me the name because of my long blonde hair. My hair is so light it's almost the color of cornsilk, and it reaches all the way past my waist. Or maybe Dad gave me the name because I love the sun so much. I really do. I love warm weather and the beach.

I guess I'm just a California girl at heart. After all, that's where I came from. And that Sunday, I was getting to go back for a visit!

I got the postcard from Dad when I came home from school that Thursday afternoon. I still had so much to do, so much to get ready. I dragged my suitcase out of the closet, threw it on the bed, and started to lay out my clothes. I decided to bring my white cotton skirt — I could wear that with anything. And, of course, my bathing suit (a bikini) and my jeans and sneakers. I wasn't sure about my yellow cotton overalls. And would I really need *three* sundresses?

Maybe you're wondering why my dad lives in California and I live in Connecticut. Well, sometimes I wonder, too. Believe me, it's not the way I would've arranged it. But even so, things are working out okay. You see, about a year and a half ago, Mom and Dad got divorced. Dad stayed in our house in California and Mom moved me and my brother, Jeff, here to Stoneybrook, Connecticut. I think Mom wanted to come here because my grandparents live here and it's the town where she grew up. To tell the truth, at first I wasn't the happiest, but then I adjusted. I found myself a best friend, Mary Anne Spier, and I got invited to join the Baby-sitters Club, which is just about the most fun club in the whole wide world.

My brother, Jeff, though, didn't adjust so easily. In fact, he didn't adjust at all. He started getting kind of nasty with me and Mom, and he even started to get in fights at school. It was pretty bad. His teacher kept calling up Mom and I don't think Mom knew what to do. Finally we decided to let Jeff go back to California for awhile. He really just wanted to be back with his friends and live with Dad. I don't think Mom was thrilled with the idea, but she figured she had to let Jeff try it for six months.

Me, I didn't like the idea at all. It was bad enough that Mom and Dad had to get divorced. Already our family was split. But when Jeff left Mom and me, too, it felt like Jeff was up and deserting us. And then another part of me thought, hey, why couldn't *I* be the one to get to move back to California?

Now I'm kind of used to the idea. In my head I understand all the reasons why things are the way they are. But sometimes it does seem strange the way the family has divided up. Boys against the girls. Or West Coast against the East Coast. I love Mom, and she and I get to stay together, but of course I love Dad and Jeff, and I miss them sometimes. And I know they miss us, too.

But Mom is the greatest. She and I have gotten a lot closer through all of this and we've made a whole new life for ourselves. We live in an old, old farmhouse that was built in 1795. No kidding. The rooms are really small and the doorways are so short that tall people have to stoop to get through them. Mom says people used to be shorter in the 1700s.

The best thing about our house, though, is that it has a secret trapdoor in our barn that leads into a long, dark tunnel. You need a flashlight to walk through. The tunnel leads up into our house and

comes out . . . right at the wall to my bedroom! The wall has a special latch that springs open to the touch. Talk about exciting. You should've seen the faces on my friends in the Baby-sitters Club when I showed them.

Maybe I should tell you a little bit about the club. There're six of us in it now, and we also have two associate members. What it is is just what it says, a club for baby-sitters. It was Kristy Thomas's great idea. She's our president. She figured that it would be great if there was a club that all the parents in the neighborhood could use whenever they needed a sitter. That way, they'd be pretty sure of getting someone for the job and they'd only have to make one call. Great for them, and great for us, too, since we're all super sitters and we love the work. Leave it to Kristy to come up with a good business idea. And leave it to Kristy to organize the whole thing.

What we do is this: Three times a week we have meetings in the afternoon. We meet at Claudia's house because she has a phone in her room . . . with her very own number! Claudia is Claudia Kishi and she's our vice-president. Claudia is about as different from Kristy as you can get. Kristy is kind of small for her age and is a real tomboy. She always wears the same thing — jeans,

a turtle neck, and sneakers. But not Claudia. You can always count on Claudia to be wearing some really unusual outfit, like a white jumpsuit with a wide purple belt and purple high-top sneakers. Claudia's Japanese American and she's got beautiful, long, shiny black hair that she fixes differently practically every day. She loves art, too, so she has a really interesting sense of style.

After those two, there's Mary Anne Spier, our club secretary, and, as I said, she's my best friend in Stoneybrook. Mary Anne lives alone with her father because her mother died when she was a baby. Her father's been kind of strict with her and a lot of people think Mary Anne's quiet. It's true, she can be shy sometimes. But wouldn't you know it, she was the first one of us to get a boyfriend!

Speaking of boyfriends, when I first moved to Stoneybrook and became friends with Mary Anne, we found out something really exciting — my mom and Mary Anne's dad used to go out together in high school! Then, for a while, they even started going out together again! Imagine. My mom going with my best friend's dad. Mary Anne and I were in seventh heaven. We were hoping our parents might even get *married* to each other. That would've made Mary Anne and

me sisters! Now things have cooled off a little, but as Mary Anne says, you never know. . . .

So that's part of the club. Kristy, Claudia, Mary Anne, and I are all in eighth grade, so we are *very* experienced sitters. We used to have another eighth-grade member, Stacey, but she moved back to New York City, which was really sad, so we had to get someone to fill Stacey's place in the club. That's where Mallory and Jessi come in. Mallory and Jessi are our sixth-grade members. They can't sit at nighttime, except for their own brothers and sisters, but both of them are really good. We know Mallory really well because we baby-sit for her family, the Pikes. The Pikes have eight kids, and since Mallory is the oldest, she used to help us out.

Jessi is Mallory's friend and she's a newcomer to Stoneybrook. Her family is one of the first Black families in the neighborhood, so I think that in the beginning, Jessi felt a little strange. When she first moved here, she wasn't even sure she wanted to continue with her ballet lessons, and she is a really talented ballet dancer — long-legged and graceful.

Wow! When I think about it, I do have a nice bunch of friends in Stoneybrook. As I was packing that day, I also started thinking about my

friends in California. Clover and Daffodil (those are the kids I used to baby-sit for) and, of course, Sunny, who had been my best friend in California since second grade. That reminded me — I'd better stick suntan lotion in my suitcase. Sunny and I would probably want to go to the beach one day. Then I started making a list of all the other cosmetics and things I would need.

Just then my mom came home. She usually doesn't get home from work until 5:45 or so, but that day she was early.

"Hi, Dawn!" she called up the stairs.

I could hear her kick off her shoes in the living room, drop her purse on the couch and her keys on the kitchen table. That's my mom, all right. I love her, but she is a little on the disorganized side. Mom padded up the stairs and plunked herself down on the one corner of my bed that wasn't covered with stuff.

"What's this?" she said, picking up my list. When she saw what it was, she laughed. "I guess you didn't learn that from your old mother," she said.

It's true. If Mom ever bothered to make a list, she'd probably just lose it.

"How was work today?" I asked her.

Mom sighed and looked vaguely across the bed at all my things.

"You're going to have such a good time," she said.

I suddenly realized that when I went off to California, Mom was going to be left all alone in Stoneybrook.

"Mom, are you going to be all right?" I asked. "I mean, all alone?"

She tucked her legs under her, like she had so many times lately when we found ourselves sitting in my room talking.

"Of course I am, sweetie," she said. "What? Are you worried about me? Don't worry. I've got Granny and Pop-Pop while you're gone. And Trip's already asked me out to dinner. . . ."

"The Trip-Man!" I groaned. Trip is a man who was dating my mother. I call him the Trip-Man. He's a real conservative type. Tortoiseshell glasses, you know what I mean. How could I leave Mom alone with *him*?

"Mom," I said, "I feel kind of funny going off to be with Dad and Jeff, and you having to stay here."

"It's only for your spring vacation," she said. "Besides, think of what an adventure I'm

going to have without you. I'll probably misplace my keys and not find them the whole time you're away. And when I go out with Trip, I'll probably end up wearing one brown shoe and one red."

I threw my arms around Mom and gave her a quick kiss.

"Oh, Mom," I said. "I'm so glad that you and I stuck together. What if you were here and I was there? What if the family was even more split up than it is now? I'll never leave you. Never."

Mom didn't answer me, she just stared across my bed at the suitcase and all my clothes. Her eyes got a little misty, but right away she turned to me and said, "You didn't start anything for dinner yet, did you?"

Weekday dinners are usually my job.

"Not yet," I said. "I was thinking maybe barley casserole . . ."

"Let's go out," Mom said suddenly. "What do you say? We'll go to Cabbages and Kings and have one of those wonderful tofu dinners."

"Or the avocado salad," I said.

"Aaaah, avocado . . ." My mother closed her eyes at the thought. "Think of all those wonderful California avocados you're going to be gobbling

down soon. Come on. Let's go celebrate. Avocados, here we come."

I grabbed my sweater and Mom stood up, puzzled, and glanced around the floor.

"Where're my shoes?" she said.

"Living room," I answered.

Mom fumbled in her pockets for her keys.

"Your keys are on the kitchen table," I said.

"And your purse is on the couch."

Mom looked a little sheepish.

"What am I going to do without you?" she laughed. "You have to admit. We make a good team."

We walked down the stairs, gathered up Mom's things, and headed out the door. When I got home that night I would have to finish packing my things. But, for then, I left them strewn across my bed. It wasn't every night that Mom and I could decide to drop everything and go to Cabbages and Kings for a close, warm mother-daughter meal. And besides, on Sunday I'd be leaving Stoneybrook for two whole weeks.