



Mallory and the Mystery Diary

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*For Mary Dietrich and Virginia Kilbourne,
who taught me to respect children*

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CHAPTER 1

If only I were thirteen instead of eleven.
Life would be a picnic.

I closed my journal with a snap. I have been keeping a journal for some time now. The difference between a journal and a diary, as far as I can tell, is that a diary is a recording of daily events and you're supposed to write in it every day. For me, a diary entry would probably go like this (on a weekday):

Got up. Went to school. Made gum chains with Jessi during recess. Came home. Had a fight with Vanessa. Baby-sat for the Barrett kids. Went to a meeting of the Baby-sitters Club. Came home. Ate dinner. Had a fight with Mom over a pair of shoes I want that she won't let me buy. Did homework. Went to bed.

Pretty dull, huh? But a journal entry would be much more deep and sensitive and interesting. Also, I don't write in my journal every day, just whenever I feel like it. And my journal is a plain old composition book. You know, one of the ones with a mottled black-and-white cover. It's not set up with four lines for March 2nd, four lines for March 3rd, four lines for March 4th, etc. It's blank. So I can write as much or as little whenever I want. And I only write when I feel an urgency, which is often — whenever I'm angry or confused or think I haven't been treated fairly. Also when good things happen.

Yesterday I didn't write in my journal at all. Today, which is Sunday, I was feeling sort of pensive, so I wrote:

I feel as if I'm going to be eleven forever. My ninth year went by in a flash. My tenth year went by in a flash. But my eleventh year already seems a decade long. I think that's because I'm so anxious to be thirteen. I wonder if my twelfth year will seem a decade long, too. I hope not, because if it does, I'll feel thirty when I'm really only thirteen.

I hate my nose. I got it from my grandfather. I wish I could have a nose job, but my parents won't even let me get contacts so there's no hope for anything more drastic.

I wonder if other eleven-year-olds feel like this. If only I were thirteen instead of eleven. Life would be a picnic.

I hid my journal under my mattress. As far as I know, Vanessa hasn't found it there. It wouldn't be like her to go looking for it, though. Vanessa is a poet, and understands the need to keep your writing private.

Who's Vanessa? She's my sister. I have seven younger brothers and sisters in all. After me (I'm Mallory Pike) come the triplets — Byron, Adam, and Jordan. They're ten. Then there's Vanessa, who's nine; Nicky, who's eight; Margo, who's seven; and Claire, the baby of the family. Claire is five and very silly. She calls everybody a silly-billy-goo-goo. For instance, my Claire-name is Mallory-silly-billy-goo-goo.

Just as I was hiding my journal, I heard Mom call from downstairs, "Mal? Can you come here for a sec?"

“Sure,” I replied. I patted the bed to be sure the mattress didn’t look lumpy, and then dashed downstairs.

Mom was in the kitchen. She was wearing oven mitts and setting a casserole on a cooling rack.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“It’s a welcome-back present for Stacey and Mrs. McGill. I know they moved in a week ago, but I figure a casserole is always appreciated. They’ve been unpacking for a week, Mrs. McGill has been looking for a job, and Stacey’s been busy with school and the Baby-sitters Club. I know they haven’t had much time for cooking. If they don’t want to eat this now, they can freeze it and have it some other night.”

“Gosh, that’s awfully nice of you, Mom,” I said. “I know the McGills will appreciate it.”

“Do you mind taking it over?” she asked me.

“Of course not. I’d love to see Stacey.”

“Great. Just give it about fifteen minutes to cool off a little.”

“Okay,” I replied.

You may be wondering who Stacey and her mom are — and also what the Baby-sitters Club (the BSC) is. Well, while Mom’s casserole cools, I’ll tell you about the McGills and my BSC friends.

First of all, the BSC is a club that I belong to. It's really more of a business, and the other people in it are my friends Jessi Ramsey, Stacey McGill, Kristy Thomas, Dawn Schafer, Mary Anne Spier, and Claudia Kishi. What our club does is baby-sit for families here in Stoneybrook, Connecticut. It is super-fun, and I feel very cool to be allowed in it.

You see, the club was started by Kristy, Claudia, Stacey, and Mary Anne, who are all thirteen years old now and in eighth grade. Jessi and I are the only eleven-year-old sixth-graders. I am so glad the club is back together again. For quite awhile, we had to make do without Stacey. In fact, Kristy (she's the club president) asked Jessi and me to join when Stacey's family moved from Stoneybrook back to New York City, which was where they'd come from in the first place. (They'd moved both times because Mr. McGill's company kept transferring him.) Then, after they moved back to New York, Mr. and Mrs. McGill decided to get divorced. They'd been having problems for awhile. So Mr. McGill stayed in New York with his job, and Mrs. McGill and Stacey returned to Stoneybrook. Unfortunately, they couldn't move into their old house. Guess why? Jessi Ramsey's family had moved into it! But Stacey and her

mom found a nice old house that they like — and it's right behind ours. If there weren't so many trees in the way, I'd be able to look out our back windows and into Stacey's back windows. Maybe that will happen when the trees are bare. At any rate, it's nice to be able to walk out our back door, through our backyard, and right into Stacey's backyard.

On the day that Mom fixed the casserole, the McGills had been back for a week and a day. That meant that Stacey had been to three BSC meetings since her return — and, boy, were the rest of us glad to have her back.

I guess I should tell you a little about the girls in the BSC, since the club is basically the most important thing in my life. First, there's Kristy Thomas. I'm starting with her because she's the president of the club. She dreamed it up and got it going. Kristy is part of an interesting family. She has two older brothers, Sam and Charlie, who are in high school, and one much younger brother, David Michael. He's seven. Kristy's parents are divorced. They got divorced a long time ago and Kristy never sees her father. However, last summer her mother married this millionaire, Watson Brewer, who whisked the Thomases across town to his mansion. (Kristy used to live on Bradford

Court, next to her best friend, Mary Anne Spier, and across the street from Claudia Kishi. But not anymore.) Watson has two little kids, Karen and Andrew, who are six and four. They're from his first marriage and live at the Brewer mansion every other weekend. (The rest of the time they live with their mother.) Kristy adores them. It's a full household — and even fuller since Nannie, Kristy's grandmother, moved in to help run the house after the Brewers adopted Emily Michelle, a two-year-old Vietnamese girl.

Kristy is brown-haired, brown-eyed, the shortest kid in her class, and doesn't care a bit about clothes. She always wears jeans, running shoes, a turtleneck, and a sweater (well, not in the middle of summer, of course). She has a big mouth, which sometimes gets her in trouble, she can be bossy, and she loves sports. She's also *great* with children, and coaches a softball team for little kids called Kristy's Krushers. I used to be intimidated by Kristy, but now I like her.

The vice-president of the BSC is Claudia Kishi. Claud is one terrific person. She's a really talented artist and she knows how to paint, sculpt, make jewelry, sketch, draw, and do other things. She's a total junk-food nut and keeps candy and stuff hidden all over her room. (She has to hide it since

her parents do not approve of this habit.) Claud is also one of the coolest dressers I know. She would never, ever get arrested by the Fashion Police. She wears long, baggy sweaters, tight leggings, dresses with flared skirts, little ballet slippers, and wild jewelry. She makes a lot of the jewelry herself. To top things off, she is gorgeous. She's Japanese American, and has LONG, silky, jet-black hair; a perfect complexion; and dark eyes.

The one unfortunate thing about Claud is that even though she's smart, she's a terrible student. Her older sister, Janine, on the other hand, is an actual genius. Claud reads Nancy Drew books; Janine studies stuff like biogenetics and physics. Claudia and Janine live with their parents. Until recently, Claud's beloved grandmother, Mimi, lived with them, too, but Mimi died not long ago. That's been tough on Claudia.

Stacey McGill is the BSC's treasurer. I know her parents' divorce has been hard on her, but she does a pretty good job of covering up her feelings, I guess, because so far she has seemed like the old Stace to me. Stacey and Claudia are best friends, and no wonder. They share the same wild taste in clothes and are pretty sophisticated for thirteen, although neither of them has a steady boyfriend. Stacey has blue eyes and short,

fluffy, blonde hair, which is often permed. She's a pretty good student, especially in math, which is why she's our treasurer, but she has one big problem (I mean, apart from the divorce). Stacey has diabetes. Actually, she's fine as long as she sticks to her diet and gives herself daily insulin. But who wants to keep track of calories all day, avoid sugar and sweets, and monitor her insulin levels? Not me. Stacey is philosophical, though. She says she'd rather do those things than get sick.

Stacey is an only child, and I guess from now on she'll be spending vacations and certain weekends with her father in New York. Her parents have said she can live with whichever one of them she wants, whenever she wants, just as long as the back-and-forth doesn't interfere with her schoolwork.

Our club secretary is Mary Anne Spier. Mary Anne and Kristy grew up together and are best friends (although Mary Anne has another best friend — Dawn Schafer). Mary Anne is like Kristy in that she is short and also has brown hair and brown eyes, and neither of them is as sophisticated as Stacey or Claudia. But there are major differences between Kristy and Mary Anne. For starters, Mary Anne's family is as sim-

ple as Kristy's is complicated. Mary Anne lives with just her dad and her kitten, Tigger. Her mom died so long ago that Mary Anne barely remembers her. When Mr. Spier found himself raising a daughter alone, he decided that the best way to do that would be very strictly. He invented a million rules for Mary Anne about what she could wear, what she could do, and where she could go. Now that Mary Anne's growing up, though, he's relaxed his rules — and two things happened right away. One, Mary Anne began choosing her own clothes, and they are much trendier. Two, she became the first one of us to have a steady boyfriend. His name is Logan Bruno and he's *really* nice. I think Mary Anne was *meant* to have a boyfriend. She's extremely romantic, very sensitive (actually, she cries a lot), a good listener, and patient and quiet. How she and loudmouth Kristy have remained friends for so long is beyond me. Anyway, Mary Anne is a wonderful person.

Dawn Schafer is the club's alternate officer. (I'll explain what that means later.) Dawn has had a difficult year or so. Like Stacey, her parents got divorced. But her mom moved Dawn and her brother, Jeff, all the way from California to Connecticut. That's because Mrs. Schafer grew

up here and her parents still live in Stoneybrook. Dawn likes Connecticut okay, and she likes being near her grandparents, but she's a California girl at heart and misses it badly. Her brother missed it so much that he finally moved back there to live with his father, so now Dawn's family is cracked in two. But Dawn copes well.

Dawn is an individual. She's never rude, but she always does what she pleases. She stands up for what she believes in, dresses the way she likes (we call her style California casual), and eats health food while the rest of us pig out on junk food and red meat.

Dawn has the L-O-N-G-E-S-T, blondest hair I've ever seen (it's almost white), and sparkly bright blue eyes. Here's an interesting fact about her. She lives in a very old farmhouse with a *secret passage*, and that passage just might be haunted by the ghost of a long-ago crazy man named Jared Mullray. This is okay with Dawn since she *loves* ghost stories, true or made up.

Well, the only two club members left are Jessi and me. We're junior officers, and are very much alike except for two things. I come from a huge family and Jessi comes from a normal-sized one. And I'm white and Jessi is Black. These differences haven't affected us much, though. We are

the best of friends. We're both eleven and the oldest in our families, we both feel that our parents treat us like babies, we both love to baby-sit (of course), and we both like to read, especially horse stories by Marguerite Henry. Beyond that, our interests are different. I like to write and draw, and I'm thinking of becoming an author and illustrator of children's books. Jessi, though, is an amazing ballet dancer. She's taken lessons for years, and attends a fancy ballet school in Stamford, Connecticut, which isn't too far away. She has danced on stage before big audiences. She dances on toe, or as Jessi says, *en pointe*.

In Jessi's family are her parents, her shy eight-year-old sister, Becca, and her baby brother, Squirt. Squirt's real name is John Philip Ramsey, Jr., but when he was born, he was so tiny that the nurses in the hospital nicknamed him Squirt. I wish I could say that the Ramseys had an easy time moving to Stoneybrook earlier this year, but they didn't. They're one of the few Black families in town — and Jessi is the only Black student in the whole sixth grade. I'm ashamed to say that some people were not very nice to them at first, but things have gotten better for the Ramseys.

“Mallory!” my mother called then. “I think you can take the casserole over to Stacey’s now.”

“Okay,” I replied.

It was time to quit my daydreaming and get moving.