



Mary Anne in the Middle

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Mallory is going away to boarding school, but her best friend Jessi doesn't want her to go. It's the biggest fight in BSC history--and Mary Anne is caught in the middle!

Mary Anne in the Middle Details

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From Reader Review *Mary Anne in the Middle* for online ebook

Nerija says

One of my neighbors recently set up a Little Free Library in her front yard, and there were some fun nostalgic titles in there -- including a few BSC books.

And it was definitely fun and nostalgic, and I'm going back for the other BSCs. I have to say, this is the one time I was actually glad for the kind of exposition-o-rama *Mary Anne* gives us in the first few chapters, because I really did need a refresher on who all these characters are and what's happened to them up to this point.

My two-star rating isn't really a reflection of the story quality; it's a very quick, feel-good read. It's just that I'm no longer in the age range when I would've been totally into all the drama -- i.e. how characters react to things (though, at least these pre-teens feel more real than the Sweet Valley gang). When I was +/- 11-13, everything *was* that big of a deal, both in my real life and in my favorite fictional worlds. When *Animorphs* #19 (wow, I actually remembered which number it was, before looking it up...that's how big a deal it was) was released, I wrote in my diary: (view spoiler) (only imagine that in even larger All-Caps and in a 12-year-old's handwriting).

And at that age, I probably would've written a poem exactly like Vanessa's if I had an older sister who was considering going to school in another state. Heck, when I was 16, I cried myself to sleep when I heard my favorite teacher was leaving, even though I was super happy for her (she was having a baby).

And to be fair, I can still very much relate to *Mary Anne's* overall sensitive nature. Hello, my name is Nerija ("Hello, Nerija"), and I am also a "champion crier."

Jessi, on the other hand... seriously? I can absolutely understand being upset at the thought of your best friend moving away, but calling her a coward for even considering leaving a school where she's constantly bullied? Or for wanting to go to a school with a better writing program -- the thing she loves as much as you love dancing? And you're calling *her* selfish? If I were *Mary Anne* I'd have had a much harder time staying impartial and not telling you off.

Phew! Got that out of my system ^_^;;

But anyway, like I said, I'm definitely going back for more *Stonybrook* shenanigans.

Amy Holcomb says

The *Baby-sitters Club* series was my favorite growing up! :)

Tiffany says

I originally read this book back when it was first published. (I feel old. Sigh...) Anyway, I remember being

really shocked by the turn of events in this book. To recap, Mallory is being bullied at school. She is so desperately unhappy that she applies for admission to a boarding school. Yikes!! An 11-year-old takes the initiative to apply to a boarding school because of bullying! Where are the teachers? Where are Mr. & Mrs. Pike? Why is an 11-year-old kid shouldering the responsibility of finding a solution to her troubles at school?

Ann Martin must have been really desperate and eager to write Mallory out of the series. This bullying/boarding school plot seems really over-the-top.

Logan Hughes says

Mallory has applied to Riverbend, a boarding school in rural Massachusetts, after becoming increasingly alienated at Stoneybrook Middle School due to bullying (Kristy in Charge). She is accepted on a full scholarship for promising young writers, and she accepts. Jessi is angry, feeling that Mallory is abandoning her, and that she is running away from her problems rather than facing them. Mallory insists that she is not running from something so much as she running to something great, and she has to follow her dreams. Note that I have not mentioned Mary Anne yet. Despite Mary Anne's narrator status, she does basically nothing except watch this train wreck.

Mallory and Jessi each complain about each other to Mary Anne. After a few failed attempts to get them to work it out by co-assigning them BSC jobs and inviting Mallory to Jessi's party, Mary Anne finally brings them both over to her house and forces them to have it out with each other, acting as mediator.

In the kid-oriented subplots, Jessi encourages the Pike siblings' feelings that Mallory is abandoning them, and Kristy and the others organize a holiday party for the residents of the nursing home Stoneybrook Manor.

Lingering Questions: 1. The question that leaps out on every page of this book is: Why is this is a Mary Anne book? I see why this isn't Mallory's book--she's going to narrate the next one, in which she starts Riverbend, and you can't have the same person narrate two books in a row--but why not Jessi? She hasn't had a book since #115 (Jessi's Big Break), and she won't get another before the end of the series. Mary Anne, meanwhile, will get the final book, *The Fire at Mary Anne's House*, just six books from now.

I understand that Mary Anne is a good listener, so if you're going to deal with this dispute from the perspective of an outsider, she's a logical choice, but this book says absolutely nothing about Mary Anne or her arc. There's a little of her feeling awkward about her position in the middle, and she reacts to everything that happens, but overall her feelings about the proceedings are no more acute or unusual than anyone else's. I like her being the catalyst of the girls' make-up, but that could have happened in a Mallory or a Jessi book. I can't tell if the complete focus on Mallory and Jessi over Mary Anne is laziness (the writer didn't bother giving Mary Anne much to do) or realistic (a truly other-focused good listener would see the situation as being all about X or Y, and not herself). Maybe it would have been interesting if the author had run with Mary Anne's other-focused-ness and made it turn from a book about two other people to a book about Mary Anne's inability to deal with her own life when her friends are in a crisis, or her overbearing attempts to make everyone get along even when her interventions makes the problem worse? But it doesn't really go there.

2. Why is Jessi so unsympathetic when she just went through the exact same thing? I read this book right after Jessi's Big Break, so the about-face in Jessi's feelings about leaving town to live your dreams was particularly jarring. Jessi's month in New York is referenced several times in this text, including a scene

where Jessi's NYC friends come to Stoneybrook for a party and show sympathy for Mallory's situation (to Jessi's dismay). I'm glad the author remembers that this happened, but it seems weird that Jessi is so dead-set against Mallory leaving to pursue her dreams/career when not only was Jessi tempted to do the same just a few books ago, but she didn't even seem to care that much that (1) Mallory wasn't around and (2) Mallory was back home, missing her. Jessi insists that Mallory's departure is "different", but she doesn't give reasons why. I feel like there are a couple of missing steps here.

Let's try to draw them. Jessi didn't miss Mallory when she was away. Conclusion: she assumes Mallory won't miss her. Out of sight, out of mind, except when you're the one back home, bored, and constantly reminded of the things you used to do together. Also: Jessi ultimately chose not to go away to school. Why not? That's something else that wasn't explained to my satisfaction, I surmised in my review for #115 that it was partly guilt. She wanted to go, but she felt guilty about how much her family/friends had missed her (and how little she missed them), and she decided she had responsibilities at home and ought to put off her dreams for awhile. Mallory isn't making that choice. Jessi resents Mallory because she gets what Jessi wanted, and because her own guilt is not enough to stop her--therefore, she seems to love Jessi less than Jessi loves her.

It would have been nice if any of this was in the book.

3. Why are the eleven-year-olds always the ones to get the career breaks?

Weird BSC Rules: Mallory laments her lack of a place at home--school problems, getting lost in the shuffle of eight kids, an unimportant role even in the BSC. "I won't be thirteen for two more years [ed. note: ha!]. Until then I'll be a junior officer." But the original four started the BSC when they were 12, and they had their offices right from book #1. If thirteen is the official BSC start age for officership, it's certainly a hypocritical and ret-conny policy (and I wouldn't be surprised if they changed it every year to their current age).

In a similar weird oversight of the existence of twelve-year-olds, Kristy decides not to hire a replacement for Mallory because the eighth grade at SMS is tapped out and they can't think of any sixth-graders as mature as Mallory and Jessi. Leaving aside the two other middle schools in Stoneybrook, why doesn't Claudia nominate some of her seventh-grade friends?

Adult Watch: Mrs. Pike has a full-time temp job as a salesperson at Bellair's for the holiday rush. Her friend Maureen McGill must have gotten her the job.

Timing: December. Mallory is going to start her new school in the spring semester. The book ends before the holidays, but goes far enough into December to include a pre-Christmas holiday party. Riverbend sure doesn't mind about last-minute decisions, huh?

Revised Timeline: Riverbend is just 100% college (the next book will remove all doubt). In an ideal world, this plot development would have happened when my revised timeline indicated that Mallory was a rising college freshman, but we missed that signpost a long time ago. She's still in college by my revised timeline, but she's in her senior year, so it seems weird to be transferring for just one semester. Maybe she is actually graduating early and going directly into a geographically distant postgrad program. Jessi doesn't have a leg to stand on expecting them to stay together much longer, though, especially since she's almost certainly moving to NYC after graduation, and Mallory stated in #115 that she could never live there.

Nate says

This one was the one of the maybe 7 or 8 that I read when I was younger and I recently wanted to see if they were as good as I remembered. Honestly, I never really liked this one because it was so dramatic. I understand that is how people are, but I couldn't handle 120 simple pages of it with very little subplot or side plot

Hezekiah says

This is one of the few BSC books where Jessi and Mallory are written in a way that makes sense to me as 11 year olds. In most books, they are written like they are just starting high school, and the other sitters seem 16.

Ciara says

you may recall that in kristy in charge, mallory was drafted to teach an eighth grade english class & it didn't go so well. the eighth graders teased her a lot & called her spaz girl. her life at stoneybrook middle school has deteriorated to the point that she is contemplating transferring to boarding school. she found one she likes a lot in the berkshires. it's called riverbend hall & it seems academically challenging & has a strong creative writing component. mallory has applied & in this book, she is accepted. mary anne happens to be at the pikes' house babysitting when mallory gets her acceptance letter. she tells mary anne that she has decided to go, but she's not looking forward to breaking the news to the other babysitters--especially jessi. jessi has not been especially accepting of mallory's decision to leave stoneybrook...& who can blame her after the way mallory reacted when jessi was invited to enroll in dance new york in jessi's big break? it seems that a big reason why jessi chose to defer enrollment at dance new york was because she didn't want to leave mallory, but now mallory is leaving her. mallory is not sure how to proceed & vents a lot of her concerns & frustrations to mary anne, because mary anne is such a great listener.

but jessi is also using mary anne as a sounding board. jessi just knows that mallory is going to accept riverbend if they invite her to go to school there, & jessi is really frustrated. she can't understand why mallory can't just pull it together & deal with the teasing at school, nor can she comprehend how mallory can be okay leaving her family & the babysitters club. but jessi doesn't know that mallory has been accepted & is planning to attend starting in january.

mary anne feels caught in the middle. she doesn't feel that it's her place to tell jessi that mallory has already been accepted (& i agree with her on that), so she is forced to try to assuage jessi's feelings without letting the cat out of the bag. & while she is sad to see mallory go, she wants to be supportive of mallory's decision.

the younger pike kids are also having a tough time with mallory's decision. i guess they feel abandoned. they give mallory the cold shoulder & tell her that they're practicing for after she leaves. mallory is really frustrated with everyone because she feels that no one really understands how difficult it has become for her to get along at SMS. jessi doesn't help matters by accusing mallory of abandoning her siblings, right in front of them.

things come to a head at a babysitters club meeting when jessi demands to know mallory's decision, framing it as crucial information the babysitters club needs in order to move forward as an organization. she says that

they need to start looking now if they're going to have to replace mallory. mallory explodes & admits that she's been accepted & is going. everyone is shocked, but jessi is especially pissed because she can tell from the look on mary anne's face that she already knew. jessi storms out, & is mad at both mallory & mary anne.

to try to smooth things over, mary anne signs both mallory & jessi up for a joint sitting job at the barrett/dewitt's place. the babysitters are doing another one of their dumb projects that involve the whole town, making new holiday decorations for the old folks' home. has there been a single holiday season in the last twenty years at the old folks' home that the babysitters haven't had their part in? jesus. mallory & jessi both bring art supplies to the sitting job so the kids can make decorations, but they get into a fight when suzi wants to make a snowman instead of a kinara. mallory says that's fine, but jessi says she brought the clay & she'll decide how it gets used. she wants suzi to make clay fruit instead, in keeping with a kwanzaa theme. suzi is okay with this, but mallory doesn't see why the kids can't make what they want. jessi doesn't think it's right for mallory to give the kids permission to do stuff without jessi's input.

both girls call mary anne when they get home & rant to her. she has to keep switching from one call to the other. she finally loses patience & tells them both to come over. she hopes that forcing them to be in the same room & express their feelings to each other with result in a truce, & that mallory & jessi can then appreciate their last few weeks together as friends.

mary anne's plan works. jessi explains that she's hurt that mary anne knew about mallory's decision before jessi did. mallory explains that jessi was the hardest person to tell because she is going to be the hardest person to leave behind. everyone cries & makes up. mallory also patches things up with her siblings. the kids all write her nice poems about how much they're going to miss her.

i kind of think mallory was in the wrong on this one. while it may have been difficult to tell jessi that she's leaving for boarding school, that really is the kind of thing that you just have to do. i guess it's unrealistic to expect mature adult perspective from an eleven-year-old, & jessi didn't help matters by being so passive-aggressive about mallory's decision. i don't know.

hilariously, the little girl who once owned this book filled out the weird little reading comprehension sheets in the back of the book. under, "which babysitter are you most like & why?" she wrote, "mallory because she is cool." it's weird to remember that a lot of girls thought mallory was cool when they were elementary school-ages (me included), when she is now seen as a huge dork by nostalgic adult readers.

Nancy says

In which Mary Anne, once again, is a buttinski. Mel-ry is going to Riverbend and Jessi is pissed. Jessi is a total ass in this one. I hate Jessi.

Kara says

Mauha is there anything better than the books dealing with juvenile fights amongst the BSC?

Samantha says

I don't know why, but I always really liked this one. I think I'm just excited to gear up to Mallory Pike FINALLY being free of Stoneybrook!

Maria Camp says

Annoying. Did not ring true to the characters, especially Jessi.

I recently read #115 where Jessi stays in New York City for a month for a special ballet program. If you haven't read this book, you should, and then you will understand how Jessi's reaction makes no sense.

I also expected a better reaction from Mary Anne; however, it was certainly more sensible than Jessi's.

This scenario could have been handled much better.

Shivers says

I love most of the babysitter's club books but this one was quite boring.
