

BABY, BABY

CHARACTERS

PHOEBE, a ~~15-year-old~~^{18-year-old} babysitter, naïve
ASHLEY, a ~~15~~¹³-year-old Manhattanite in Phoebe's charge

SETTING

Ashley's new summer cottage in Orlando, Florida

TIME

Early evening

SYNOPSIS

Phoebe is a very serious and conservative fifteen-year-old living in a quiet suburb outside of Orlando. She has been brought up in a Fundamentalist Christian household, and this summer, she has convinced her folks to let her make some money babysitting at the nearby hotels and summer homes. She's new at it, and so far all of her charges have been around five—a fun age. But Ashley is twelve years old, the daughter of divorced parents from New York's Upper East Side, and she is very unhappy about being uprooted and moved to Orlando for the summer with her father and his new boyfriend, Rex.

(Phoebe is waving good-bye. Ashley is sitting on the floor staring at the TV.)

PHOEBE: Good-bye, Mr. Taylor! Ashley and I will have a great time together. I've got your beeper and your cell phone number, and a stack of great games. We'll brush, floss, and have lights-out at nine sharp. And, I know CPR and the Heimlich maneuver!

ASHLEY: *(Not looking up.)* She's also a forensic crime specialist.

PHOEBE: I wish! My mom doesn't even let me watch *Miami: CSI*.

ASHLEY: *(Under her breath.)* Too, too sad.

PHOEBE: Ashley, don't you want to wave good-bye to your dad and your . . . his . . . ?

ASHLEY: Boyfriend Rex?

PHOEBE: *(Confused.)* You mean his *good* buddy.

ASHLEY: Yes, his *very good* buddy, if you know what I mean.

PHOEBE: Oh my word!

ASHLEY: *(Waving.)* Good-bye, daddy dearest! Tah-tah, Rexie-poo!

PHOEBE: *(Phoebe closes the door.)* Now this is all too disrespectful, Ashley.

ASHLEY: Well, he wears khaki shorts and sandals with green socks. I ask you is that a man who respects himself? Is this the kind of guy you would choose for your father?

PHOEBE: Well, I . . . that's a bit hard to . . .

ASHLEY: It would be a lot different if he wore more Armani and looked like Rupert Everett.

(Phoebe locks and chains the doors, checking to make sure they are secure.)

ASHLEY: Wow. You paranoid or what? I thought Florida was supposed to be safer than New York.

PHOEBE: I told your dad I'd keep you safe. You can't be too careful, even here. Orlando is a city. It's not all sunshine and oranges.

ASHLEY: No, it's all Disney World and terrorists from what I can tell. Besides, I've heard that women who repeatedly check to make sure the door is locked secretly want someone to break it down. *(Raises her eyebrows at Ashley knowingly.)* Who do you hope breaks it down, *(Deliberately mispronouncing her name.)* Phoebus?

PHOEBE: *(Reinstating her authority.)* Now, Ashley. We're going to have fun together.

ASHLEY: I'm not really into "fun" anymore. Sorry, Phoebus.

PHOEBE: *(Gently corrects her.)* Phoebe. *(Going on.)* What do

you mean? Just because you're ¹³ ~~twelve~~ doesn't make you too old to have fun.

ASHLEY: Well, not all fun I suppose. Just the "fun" I think you're referring to.

PHOEBE: Well, I'm ~~fifteen and three-quarters~~ ¹⁸

ASHLEY: La-de-dah.

PHOEBE: And I remember being your age. I loved it! Reading comics, weaving friendship bracelets, singing camp fire song—

ASHLEY: Sacrificing young virgins. I get the idea. I think you confuse me with someone who gives a damn.

PHOEBE: Ashley! I'm a very accepting person. But that kind of *language* is not—

ASHLEY: What language?

PHOEBE: (*Quietly.*) The *d* word.

ASHLEY: Damn?

PHOEBE: That's a terrible, evil word. That's a word that belongs to God and Satan.

ASHLEY: How about "ass" then?

PHOEBE: Well, that's just a kind of donkey if you want to be technical.

ASHLEY: So I can say, kiss my as—

PHOEBE: Ashley, please! Now why don't we turn off the TV and play something.

ASHLEY: Now back up a minute. Did you say "comics"? Aren't those a little evil?

PHOEBE: Well, not the ones I read. There was *Bible Man*—who could save children from burning in eternal hellfire by quoting scripture. I know it sounds hokey, but it had a lot of action to it. And my favorite, *Wonder Woman*—

ASHLEY: Now *that* I recall! The rope of truth, the power cuffs, those enormous ta-ta's—

PHOEBE: No! *Wonder Woman* was full of God's wonder! She taught Sunday school in Chicago and battled the evil influence of Oprah Winfrey and major-league sports.

ASHLEY: I must have missed that issue.

PHOEBE: Now do you have to go to the "toy-toy" before we play?

ASHLEY: Did you say "toy-toy"?

PHOEBE: You know, the little girls' room, the facilities.

ASHLEY: The crapper?

PHOEBE: Oh Ashley! (*Beat.*) You really like "challenging authority," don't you?

ASHLEY: That's how you learn.

PHOEBE: Oh, I see. (*Looking through a book she brought with her.*) So how about a game of charades? That's fun and "age appropriate."

ASHLEY: I question the whole notion of "age appropriateness." What are we, robots?

PHOEBE: No, I didn't mean to suggest that—

ASHLEY: Do you really think age is the only criterion for judging a person? Are you the same as every other ~~fifteen and~~ ¹⁸ ~~three-quarters-year~~ old? Does having attained the age of ¹³ ~~twelve~~ sum up who I am?

PHOEBE: OK, OK. Forget "age appropriate." (*Looks through the book.*)

ASHLEY: Thank you. Hey, what's with the book? (*Grabs Phoebe's book.*) Ah-hah!

PHOEBE: Hey! Give that back!

ASHLEY: (*Reading the cover.*) *The Christian Babysitters' Guidebook.* (*She flips to the table of contents and reads.*) "Greeting Parents. Health and Safety. Making Friends. Age-Appropriate Games!" Ah-ha! You're a neophyte, an autodidact, a poseur!

PHOEBE: Huh?

ASHLEY: A fake! A liar!

PHOEBE: What do you mean?

ASHLEY: You presented yourself as an experienced childcare expert. And, in fact, you're winging it—with the help of a book from 1984!

PHOEBE: (*Sheepish.*) I got it from the church library.

ASHLEY: Do you know how much things have changed since

then? We grow up faster, especially if you're from Manhattan. (*Tosses book aside.*) In fact, the very word *child* is inadequate to a person like me.

PHOEBE: Please don't tell. I really do love children, and up till now, everything has gone great. It's just that you're a little older than the other kids I've sat with.

ASHLEY: So can we put aside the games and just have a friendly chat—like two semi-normal people—though, I realize the idea of “normality” is a fluid one.

PHOEBE: But my book says that games are the best way to break the ice.

ASHLEY: Oh, the book, the book. I know. We'll play Compare and Contrast.

PHOEBE: What's that?

ASHLEY: We pick a category, and then you tell me something interesting about yourself. Like maybe I say “school” or “hobbies,” and then you tell me something interesting about your life. Then I tell you something about me.

PHOEBE: Oh, this is going to be fun. (*Quietly.*) Thank you, God.

ASHLEY: OK! Now the first category will be—tah dah—“secret loves.”

PHOEBE: What? No! What happened to school and hobbies?

ASHLEY: This is a *great* icebreaker. You tell me about somebody you love who you never told anybody about.

PHOEBE: I couldn't do that. It's too personal.

ASHLEY: That's what's fun.

PHOEBE: I don't think my book would approve of this.

ASHLEY: Come on, that book's from the land of “Cosby” and Jell-O Pudding Packs. Besides, you don't want it to leak out how little actual experience you have.

PHOEBE: No, I'll go. I'll go. (*Pause.*)

ASHLEY: Come on!

PHOEBE: (*Sheepish.*) See, my parents discourage me from dating.

ASHLEY: Really?

PHOEBE: And they're right, because it's just heartache. I see it from the other girls at school. They go with this one and that one. To parties and the movies. I hear there's even drinking at those parties.

ASHLEY: And how does that make you feel?

PHOEBE: Well, my church teaches that that kind of dating is sinful. When you're ready to settle down and start a family—that's the time to begin *courting*.

ASHLEY: What's that?

PHOEBE: It's when two people get to know each other with the express purpose of finding a marriage partner.

ASHLEY: So you never get to have a secret crush on anybody? (*Phoebe shrugs.*) There's no boy you've liked? (*Phoebe gestures that there might have been.*) Any girl then?

PHOEBE: No! Of course not. That's a sin.

ASHLEY: Sin is really big in your life, huh?

PHOEBE: Well, the wolf's always at the door, as my daddy says, so you gotta keep it locked and a round of ammo ready on your side.

ASHLEY: Right. Now, tell me more about this boy.

PHOEBE: What boy? I didn't say anything about a boy. (*Ashley raises her eyebrows knowingly. Pause.*) Steve.

ASHLEY: Ah-ha! Knew it. Can you paint me a little picture of Steve? Please, Phoebe.

PHOEBE: Well . . . he has brown eyes and brown hair. About 5' 10".

ASHLEY: Excellent. He sounds cute. Does he go to your church?

PHOEBE: (*Pause.*) No.

ASHLEY: (*Sympathetically.*) I see.

PHOEBE: His name is Steve. Butler. He almost never smiles, but he has the most beautiful eyes. Very full lips. I know I shouldn't notice that, but they look so soft. His hair is soft and a little long. And even though it's against the rules, he wears shirts with the sleeves cut off. He has beautiful arms—and a tattoo.

ASHLEY: (*Can see this is troubling for Phoebe.*) Today, tattoos are pretty common.

PHOEBE: I know, but his is a skull that says “Rot in peace.”

ASHLEY: Oh, that does sound a mite troubled.

PHOEBE: Do you think? But I love him so much. He was in my math class last year, and I stared at him all through sines and cosines. I had to learn them myself at home. Luckily I’m a math whiz. But then Mr. Arbutus changed my seat. I can’t sleep some nights thinking about him. And I even go to the 7-Eleven sometimes hoping to see him. My mom doesn’t like the 7-Eleven, but I know that he loves snack foods. Sometimes him and Rory Davis will buy like two huge bags of Ho-Ho’s and chips and Slim Jims.

ASHLEY: I think it’s coming clear. Do you ever talk to Steve?

PHOEBE: Only once. In the hallway near my locker. It was really busy, and everyone was rushing, mostly to get to lunch. I didn’t see him because I was getting my stuff for lacrosse. So, I turned all of a sudden and he was right near me, because of all the crowds. And I guess I nearly got him with my lacrosse stick.

ASHLEY: And what happened?

PHOEBE: He said, real quietly: “Hey, Phoebes.” I couldn’t believe he knew my name. He said, “You almost took out my Beanie Babies.” Then he smiled the nicest smile and, well, cupped himself.

ASHLEY: Oh.

PHOEBE: And that’s it. Even when I see him now, he doesn’t seem to recognize me. He’s in a world of his own. I wave sometimes, but he just sort of nods back.

ASHLEY: Oh, he’s a stoner.

PHOEBE: What? What’s that?

ASHLEY: Someone who’s stoned all the time—all potty-headed, crazy with drugs. I’ve seen movies on HBO and the Lifetime network for women.

PHOEBE: Oh, that can’t be! He doesn’t drool or scratch himself. He looks perfectly *normal*.

ASHLEY: Well, we’re all normal—whatever that is. But he has a dependency issue, and I don’t think you can do anything.

I know it’s hard, but I think you’ll have to give him up.

PHOEBE: Give him up? But I never even had him.

ASHLEY: He’s lost to the devil named drugs, and he’s not gonna come back up until he hits rock bottom.

PHOEBE: Oh, dear God. I think you’ve said it, Ashley. It is the devil.

ASHLEY: Metaphorically speaking.

PHOEBE: I’m going to pray for him. Every day.

ASHLEY: Well, it can’t hurt.

PHOEBE: Let’s start right now. Will you help me?

ASHLEY: Huh? I’m not real big on religion, Phoebus.

PHOEBE: Please. It’s important. I’ve let so much time go by not realizing.

ASHLEY: OK, sure, whatever. Anything for a . . . well, a friend?

PHOEBE: We are friends, aren’t we?

ASHLEY: Sure. I guess.

PHOEBE: (*Gets down on knees.*) Dear Lord. This is Phoebe and Ashley. We don’t know each other well. But I think you’ve been doing your thing to bring us together. Thank you. (*Ashley waves to God awkwardly. Phoebe smiles.*) I’m calling on behalf of a friend, Steve Butler from Longfellow High, with the skull tattoo.

ASHLEY: I think he’s got the picture.

PHOEBE: Would you watch out for Steve and help him because Ashley here thinks he has a substance abuse problem. And I think she’s right. (*Her voice cracks.*)

ASHLEY: God works in mysterious ways. Isn’t that what they say?

PHOEBE: Thank you. Yes, yes, it’s true. So God, please help him. He may not have the strength to come to you himself, but he’s really sweet and cute and needs your help. I don’t want him to hit the bottom. Thank you and amen from me and Ashley. (*Phoebe looks at Ashley and nods.*)

ASHLEY: (*Gets Phoebe’s hint.*) Amen.

PHOEBE: *(Still kneeling, looks to Ashley.)* Ashley?

ASHLEY: *(Startled.)* Yeah?

PHOEBE: Well, it's your turn now.

ASHLEY: Mine? But what should I say?

PHOEBE: Anything that comes from your heart.

ASHLEY: OK. Um . . . *(Pause.)* Hi, God, this is me, Ashley, from Manhattan, 60th and Park, 14th Floor.

PHOEBE: *(Whispers.)* I think he's knows.

ASHLEY: My window faces the back toward 61st. Well, I wasn't really anxious to come to Orlando. And while I like Rex fine—I still wish things were back to normal—though, of course, I know there's really no such thing as “normal.” Anyway, I don't know what the hell—heck I'm saying.

PHOEBE: Whatever you feel.

ASHLEY: *(Gets on her knees.)* I just wanted to point out how nice it was that Phoebes over there didn't ask for anything for herself—like for Steve to fall for her or asking for that great new Kate Spade bag that she saw in the window last week. She just wants you to help her friend out. And I think that's pretty dam—darn, well, nice. I really do.

PHOEBE: Thanks.

ASHLEY: So help her to go on being a good person and a good babysitter. But mostly help her know that she's a great person just exactly as she is.

PHOEBE: *(Begins to tear up.)* Nobody's ever said that to me. It's always, “Do this, Phoebe. Do that. Study hard, go to church, do good deeds, help the poor.” But nobody's ever said I was OK just the way I am.

ASHLEY: *(Puts her arm around Phoebe.)* Didn't you ever watch *Mr. Rogers*?

PHOEBE: My parents don't trust public television. They think it's run by the godless.

ASHLEY: Well only the *Lehrer News Hour*. Anyway, I like you just because you're you. And you are special. *(Phoebe is now sobbing in Ashley's arms.)* That's OK. Everything's going to

be OK. You're my big, big girl. Aren't you my big, strong girl?

PHOEBE: *(Sniffing.)* I guess so.

ASHLEY: I know you are. You know why? Because *(Singing.)*

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Black and yellow, red and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

PHOEBE: You're right, of course. And we're all little children in his eyes.

ASHLEY: Now what do you say, we dry up those tears, get a big glass of milk and cookies, and play something, any game that you want.

PHOEBE: Really? I brought Candyland—even though I know all that sugar is unhealthy.

ASHLEY: Well, that's what we'll play. *(Takes out a handkerchief and wipes Phoebe's eyes.)* Now blow. Again. Very good. You feel better?

PHOEBE: Yeah, I do.

ASHLEY: Now why don't you run to the . . . toy-toy while I get the chocolate milk.

PHOEBE: OK, but last one back is a rotten egg.

ASHLEY: You got it. Go! *(They both run off, yelling and laughing.)*