

Girls Out Late

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Random House Children's Publishers UK

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About the Illustrator

Also by Jacqueline Wilson

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About the Book

How late can you stay out?

Nine o'clock. That's when I have to be home. Dad thinks it's not SAFE any later. But then the most amazing, magical thing happens. Out with my best friends, drop-dead gorgeous Magda and super-cool Nadine, I meet a boy. And it's ME he's interested in! ME! Plain, plump Ellie. But will Russell STAY interested in a girl who has to be at home by nine ...?

Stay out later than late with Ellie and the girls in the third story in Jacqueline Wilson's fabulous, best-selling series for teenagers. Now with a new introduction!

FOR TEENAGE READERS

GIRLS



OUT

LATE

Jacqueline Wilson

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

RHCP DIGITAL

To Meetal Malhi and Harriet, Polina and Rebecca

GIRLS OUT LATE

It's great when you have a best friend. It can be even better when you have *two* best friends. Ellie, Magda and Nadine are in Year Nine and they make a fantastic threesome. I invented them in the space of half an hour! I was staying at my daughter, Emma's flat, and she was patiently teaching me how to use her computer. I am a total technophobe and a very slow learner. I found myself getting very upset and irritable as I struggled with her unfamiliar keyboard, making all sorts of silly mistakes.

I decided to distract myself by making up a new story. I wanted to write about teenagers for a change. I typed *Three girls* on Emma's computer. I thought about my first girl. I liked the name Ellie so I typed that too. I decided she would tell the story. I wanted her to be lively and creative and very good at art. I didn't want her to be a super-girl with a fabulous figure and absolutely everything going for her. I decided she'd be an ordinary comfy girl size - so she'd worry a bit about getting fat. I gave her little round glasses and a lot of wild, curly dark hair. I liked her a lot.

I felt that Ellie might have a weird, cool gothic girl as one of her friends. I found my fingers typing the name Nadine. She'd be into alternative music and wear black all the time and be much more daring than Ellie. She'd also be one of those irritating girls who could stuff Mars bars all day and still stay as thin as a pin.

I wanted my third girl to be a bright, blonde, bubbly girl, full of fun. I called her Magda. I thought she'd be boy-mad,

a little bit spoilt, but basically a great friend to Ellie and Nadine.

There! I had my three girls sorted out by the time I'd typed a page. I found I'd mastered the new keyboard - *and* I was all set to start my story!

There are four stories about Ellie, Magda and Nadine. *Girls out Late* is the third book in the series. Ellie, Magda and Nadine tell a little white lie to their parents and go off to a concert together - and end up staying out very late indeed ...

Jacqueline Wilson

Chapter One



Girl Time



Chapter One

WE'RE GOING OUT tonight, Nadine and Magda and me. It's not a Big Night Out. We're certainly not going to stay out late. We're just going on this little after-school shopping trip. No big deal at all. We'll meet at half past six at the Flowerfields Centre. Wander round the shops on their late night. We'll eat in McDonald's, then home by nine like good girls.

I don't bother to dress up or anything. I change out of my school uniform, obviously, but just into my black baggy trousers. They've been in the washing-machine one spin too many times so that they're now technically not black at all, more a murky grey. Still, they're just about the only trousers in the whole world that are big without making me look enormous. They almost give the illusion that there's a weeny little bum and long lean legs hiding under all that bunched material.

I try my newest stripy pink top but I'm not too sure about it now. It's a little too bright to be becoming. It makes my own cheeks glow positively peony. I wish I looked deathly pale and ethereal like my best friend Nadine. I'm stuck with permanently rosy cheeks - and *dimples*.

I search the airing cupboard for something dark and plain and end up purloining a dark grey V-necked school

sweater belonging to my little brother, Eggs. It fits a little too snugly. I peer long and hard in my mirror, worrying about the prominence of my chest. No matter how I hunch up it still sticks out alarmingly. I'm not like my other best friend, Magda, who deliberately tightens the straps of her Wonderbra until she can practically rest her chin on her chest. My own bras seem to be a bit too revealing. I try tucking a tissue in each cup so that I am not outlined too outrageously.

Then I attack my hair with a bristle brush, trying to tame it into submission. It's as if my entire body is trying to get out of control. My hair is the wildest of all. It's longish but so tightly curly it grows up and out as well as down. Nadine is so lucky. Her long liquorice-black hair falls straight past her shoulders, no kinks at all. Magda's hair looks incredible too, very short and stylish and bright red (dyed). It looks really great on her but if my hair was that short it would emphasize my chubby cheeks. Anyway, with my bright pink face I'd be mad to dye my hair scarlet. Not that my stepmum Anna would let me. She even gets a bit fussed when I use henna shampoo, for God's sake.

Anna eyes me now as I clatter into the kitchen to beg for some spare cash. Eggs is sitting at the table playing with the hands of my old alarm clock, muttering, 'Four o'clock, telly time, fun. Five o'clock, more telly time, fun fun. Six o'clock, teatime, yum yum.'

'That's my alarm clock,' I say indignantly.

'But it's been broken for ages, Ellie. I thought it might help him learn the time. Do the big hand thing, Eggs,' says Anna.

'Honestly, it's embarrassing having such a moron for a brother. And he was the one who broke it, fiddling around with the hands.'

'Twelve o'clock, midnight, big sister turns into a pumpkin!' says Eggs and shrieks with laughter.

'Are you off out, Ellie?'

'I'm just meeting Nadine and Magda to go late-night shopping.'

'Seven o'clock, bathtime, splashy splashy. Eight o'clock, bedtime, yuck yuck.'

'What about your homework?'

'I did it when I came home from school.'

'No you didn't.'

'I did, honestly.'

'You were watching television.'

'I did it *while* I was watching television.'

I don't usually watch kids' TV but there's this new art programme that has some amazingly cool ideas. I'm going to be a graphic artist when I grow up. I'm definitely not going to the Art College where my dad lectures though. I'm certainly not cut out to be one of his adoring students. It's weird to think that Anna was once. And my mum. She died when I was little but I still miss her a lot. Eggs isn't my whole brother, he's just a half.

'Thief!' Eggs suddenly screams, pointing at me. 'That's my school jumper, take it *off!*'

'I'm just borrowing it for the evening.'

He doesn't even like this school jumper. Anna has to sweet-talk him into it every morning. He prefers the weird, wacky, rainbow-coloured concoctions that Anna knits for him. When he was going through his Teletubby phase he had four - purple, green, yellow and red - so he could be Tinky Winky, Dipsy, La La or Po as the mood took him. Today Eggs is wearing his magenta Barney-the-Dinosaur jumper. I am immensely glad I am way past the stage of Anna making me natty knitted jumpers.

'But you'll muck it up,' Eggs wails.

'*I'll* muck it up?'

Eggs is such a slurpy, splashy eater his clothes are permanently splattered orange (baked beans), yellow (egg yolk) and purple (Ribena). I examined his sweater for spots and stains very carefully indeed before putting it on.

'You'll make it smell.'

'I won't! How dare you! I don't smell.'

'You do, you do, doesn't she, Mum?' says Eggs.

'I *don't*,' I say, but I'm starting to get panicky. I don't really smell, do I? Has my deodorant stopped working? Oh God, does everyone back away from me with wary expressions and pinched nostrils and I just haven't noticed?

'Ellie doesn't smell,' says Anna.

'She does, of that yucky powdery sweet scenty stuff. I don't want my school sweater ponging like a girl,' Egg insists, tugging at the jumper. I swat his hands away as best I can.

'Stop him, Anna, he'll rip it!'

'Yes, give over, Eggs. Though it is *his* sweater. Honestly, for years and years you wore your dad's extra large T-shirts that came way past your knees. Now you want to wear Eggs's teeny weeny little sweaters. When are you going to wear anything that fits?'

I don't ever borrow Anna's clothes. We have a very different style, even though she's only fourteen years older than me. And we're a very different shape too. She's skinny, I'm not. But I've decided I'm not going to let that bug me any more. I went on a seriously intense diet last term and started to get obsessed about my weight. But now I'm getting back to normal.

To prove it I eat a toasted cheese sandwich with Anna and Eggs even though I'll be munching at McDonald's later.

'What time shall I get Dad to come and pick you up?' says Anna.

'I don't need Dad to pick me up, I'll get the bus back.'

'Are you sure? I don't like the idea of you coming back on your own when it's getting dark.'

'I won't *be* on my own. I'll be with Nadine all the way on the bus, and as far as Park Hill Road.'

'Tell you what, you travel back to Nadine's house and give us a ring when you get back there. Then Dad can drive

round and give you a lift, OK?’

‘OK, OK.’

I smile at Anna and she smiles back as we acknowledge our compromise. We never used to get on, but it’s weird, now we’re kind of friends.

‘It’s not OK. Tell her to give me back my school jumper, Mum!’ Eggs yells, kicking at me.

I will never be friends with Eggs. He’s still wearing his school lace-ups and he’s really hurting my shins. I might be wearing combat trousers but they’re totally ineffective against weapons of war.

‘Don’t get me all hot and bothered, Eggs, or I might have to go and spray myself with perfume to cool down,’ I say. ‘I *might* accidentally dowse your dopey old sweater.’

‘No, no, no! Don’t you dare!’

‘Stop teasing him, Ellie,’ says Anna, sighing. She’s digging in her handbag. ‘How much pocket money have you got left?’

‘Absolutely zilch. In fact I owe Magda, she paid for me to go swimming last Sunday.’

‘And you already owe me for that pair of tights from Sock Shop.’

‘Oh God, yes. Help, I’m bound for the debtors’ prison.’

‘Can’t you kind of – budget?’ says Anna, unzipping her purse.

‘I try, but Dad’s such a meany. Magda gets twice what I get for her allowance.’

‘Don’t start, Ellie.’

‘But it’s not fair.’

‘*Life* isn’t fair.’

I’ll say. Still, the minute I’m fourteen, I’m all set to get *some* kind of paid work – you name it, I’ll do it – then I’ll be able to keep up with Magda and Nadine. Well, halfway up.

‘Here you are.’ Anna hands me a fiver.

I feel a bit mean. Anna hasn’t got a job either. She’s been looking hard since Eggs started school but there’s

nothing going. She has to cadge cash from Dad too. Marriage certainly isn't fair. Catch me ever getting married. In fact I'm not too sure I want anything to do with boys at all.

Magda is totally boy mad. Nadine isn't quite as crazy, although last year she went out with this total creep called Liam who treated her like dirt. I had a sort of boyfriend then too. Well, a boy who was a friend, rather than a *boyfriend*. He certainly wasn't a dreamboat but he seemed to be dead keen on me. He wrote me all these love letters and couldn't wait to see me. He declared true love for ever and ever. But then his letters fizzled out and it turned out he had met this other girl and now he's declared true love for ever and ever to her. As if I care. She's welcome to him. I don't want him any more. I don't want a boyfriend at all. Really.

So anyway, I rush round to Nadine's place and she is in the middle of an argument with her mum. She's mad at Nadine because she wants her to go to this line dancing class with her and Natasha. It's a truly sad session where lots of mums go with their daughters. Nadine's mum is dead keen on line dancing and has made herself a denim skirt with matching waistcoat and she wears a pair of white fringed cowboy boots. Natasha adores her baby cowgirl outfit. She loves line dancing too and is already the little star of the class. Nadine's mum bought enough blue denim to make another matching set for Nadine. She would willingly pay for another pair of white cowgirl boots. Nadine would rather *die* than go line dancing in a blue denim outfit and white cowgirl boots - especially with her mum and her loathsome little sister.

'I sometimes feel you're not part of this family at all,' says Nadine's mum.

'I sometimes wish I *wasn't* part of this family,' Nadine says defiantly. 'I'm going down to Flowerfields with Ellie.'

'Flowerfields! What's the matter with you? Only this Saturday you made such a fuss because I wanted you to come shopping in the Flowerfields Centre with Natasha and me and what did you say? Only that you couldn't stick going shopping, *especially* in the Flowerfields Shopping Centre.'

Nadine rolls her eyes, already extra expressive with their thick outline of black kohl.

Nadine's mum sighs. 'Are you as insolent to your mother, Ellie?'

'Well, it's different,' I say diplomatically. 'I mean, Anna's my stepmother but she's more my age. We're more like sisters. It's not like she's really a mum figure.'

'I wish I didn't have a mum figure,' says Nadine when we finally escape. 'God, she doesn't half go on. And Natasha's driving me nuts too. Just think, I've got four or five more years before there's a chance of breaking free. How am I going to survive?' She clenches her fist dramatically then wails, 'Oh *bum*, my nail!'

Nadine spends the next five minutes mourning her broken nail. I eventually divert her by planning out our blissful life in the future when we're eighteen and have fully served our life sentences with our families. We'll both go to Art College, me to do graphics, Nadine to do fashion. We'll get our own little flat. We'll get up when we want and eat when we want and go out when we want and hold a party every single Saturday.

We plan it all out on the bus into town and we're still busy negotiating over the interior decorating when we meet up with Magda at the Flowerfields entrance. We're momentarily diverted. Magda looks stunning in a skimpy little pink lacy top that shows off every single *pore*. My heart beats enviously under its pad of paper tissue. If only I had Magda's confidence!

'You've got that new top!'

'And new trousers,' says Nadine, eyeing them up and down. She darts round Magda's back and pulls at the waistband. 'Wow, DKNY! Where did you get them?'

'Oh, my Auntie Cath came round at the weekend. She bought the trousers in Bond Street weeks ago, meaning to go on a diet to fit into them but she hasn't lost a pound, so guess what, I got lucky.'

'Why haven't I got a lovely auntie?' says Nadine. 'Did she give you the top too?' She fingers it enviously with her one-tenth defective long nails.

'She bought it for me as a present, yeah. Do you like the colour? You don't think it clashes with my hair?'

'Everything clashes with your hair,' I say, ruffling her amazing crimson curls.

'I want to get a lipstick the same pearly pink,' says Magda. 'Come on, girls. *Shopping* time!'

We spend hours and hours and hours circling the make-up stands in Boots while Magda anoints her wrists with pink stripes in her attempt to find the perfect pink. Nadine is happy enough playing with make-up samples and experimenting with black lipstick and silver blusher but I get a bit fed up. I'm not really into make-up actually. I mean, I've got some and I shove it on if I'm going out anywhere special, but I always forget and dab my eyes and smear it or wipe my mouth and end up with lipstick on my chin.

Then we spend hours and hours and hours at the nail varnish stands. Nadine ends up buying a nail lengthening kit, one of those fun sets where you can paint on false nails all different patterns and add little sequins and beads and stuff. Magda buys one too but I know I'd forget and nibble mine off. I'm going to stop biting my nails *one* day, but at the moment my teeth have a beaver-like will of their own and gnaw my fingers ferociously.

'Come on, you guys, the shops will be shutting soon,' I moan - and eventually they let me drag them up to this art

shop on the top floor. They get fed up after the first few seconds and hang around outside while I finger the fat white sketchpads and lust after the huge shiny tins of rainbow felt-tips. I'm only in there a minute but Magda and Nadine keep putting their heads round the door and yelling at me. I try out the pens, writing 'I am Ellie and I like to draw'. I do so, squiggling a little elephant with a wavy trunk with an 07 point and a weeny 03 point and a mean green and a flamboyant pink and after *more* moans from outside I end up buying the 05 black pen I always choose and a little square black sketchbook that I simply can't resist. I haven't got too much money left. I'm going to have to beg a few chips off Magda and Nadine or go hungry - but I'm happy.

The three of us link arms and wander round the rest of the shops, trying on high heels in Office and staggering around like drunks, and then we spend ages in the HMV store listening to the latest Claudie Coleman album. Magda, Nadine and I have entirely different musical tastes but we are all united in our admiration for Claudie. Magda likes her because she sings songs with very powerful, positive lyrics. Nadine likes her because her music is very cool and hip. I like her because she's got long, wild curly hair a bit like mine but much lovelier and she's not a bit fat but she is much curvier than your average rock chick. So she's kind of my role model.

The HMV store is crowded. Magda automatically stands wherever there's a clump of likely looking boys. They all stare at her appreciatively and three of them start chatting her up. Nadine and I sigh and slope off. This is a familiar situation and it sucks.

'Three boys, three girls, and all three want to be the one who gets Magda,' says Nadine. She is too nice to point out that she is always second choice. It's easy enough to work out where I come - last!