

Girls Under Pressure

Jacqueline Wilson

Random House Children's Publishers UK

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Chapter One: Model Girl

Chapter Two: Elephant Girl

Chapter Three: Great Art Girl

Chapter Four: Whale Girl

Chapter Five: Turkey Girl

Chapter Six: Dolly Girl

Chapter Seven: Giant Girl

Chapter Eight: Family Girl

Chapter Nine: Problem Girl

Chapter Ten: Portrait Girl

About the Illustrator

About the Author

Copyright

ABOUT THE BOOK

Magda is tall and glamorous, Nadine is willowy and 'gothic'. And Ellie ... well, Ellie is just plain normal. The three girls have been best friends forever, but now Ellie is convinced she's fat, Nadine wants to be a model, and Magda worries that her appearance is giving guys the wrong idea. The pressure is on for them to change the way they look - but can they learn to love themselves, just the way they are?

GIRLS UNDER PRESSURE

Jacqueline Wilson

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

RHCP DIGITAL

For Theano Petrou

GIRLS UNDER PRESSURE

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.

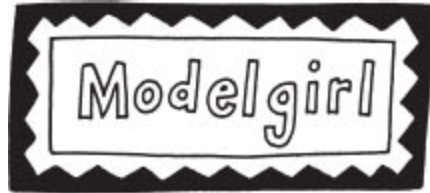
There! I had my three girls sorted out by the time I'd typed a page. I found I'd mastered the new keyboard - *and* I was all set to start my story!

There are four stories about Ellie, Magda and Nadine. *Girls under Pressure* is the second book in the series. Nadine gets a chance to be a fashion model - while Ellie starts to obsess about her weight and goes on a serious diet, with very worrying consequences ...

Jacqueline Wilson



Chapter One



IT'S ALL MY idea.

'Let's go Christmas shopping on Saturday,' I say to my two best friends, Magda and Nadine.

'Great,' says Magda, who lives to shop.

'Sure,' says Nadine, but she looks surprised. 'I thought you always made your own Christmas presents, Ellie.'

'Yes, well, I think I've grown out of that stage now,' I say hurriedly.

We've always had this silly tradition in my family. I'd think of a theme and then make everyone a present based on it. There was the year of the stripy hand-knitted scarves, the wobbly vases the year I joined the pottery class, the cross-stitched canvas purses ... I made them for everyone, friends as well as family, and because people were polite I thought they really *liked* my loopy home-made junk.

I've known Nadine since we were both five so she's endured years of fraying dresses for her Barbie dolls and lumpy little felt mice. When we started secondary school I made Nadine a black and silver friendship bracelet. I made one for Magda in pink and purple. They seemed to like them. They both wore them for a while anyway.

Last Christmas I made special boxes for all the family, studded with beads and shells. I used liquorice allsorts for Eggs's box - but he tried to lick them through the glaze and hurt his tongue. Typical. Dad and Anna act like he's an

infant prodigy but *I* think he's got the brains of a flea. I pondered long and hard over boxes for Magda and Nadine. In the end I made Nadine a silver box with a painted silver shell design. I did an identical one in gold for Magda. She opened hers as if she was expecting something inside - and then she asked if I'd be making her a gold necklace to go in it next year. She was joking - I *think*. I suddenly felt about Eggs's age.

'We'll go round the Flowerfields Shopping Centre,' I say firmly. 'We'll buy all the presents for our families, and then we'll split up for a bit and buy each other stuff.'

'And then we'll go to the Soda Fountain and have a milkshake,' says Magda, getting more enthusiastic by the minute.

The Soda Fountain recently opened up on the Flowerfields basement floor. It's like those shiny ice cream parlour places you see in old American movies. It's become the in place to hang out now - rumoured to be great for meeting boys. If there's one thing Magda likes better than shopping, it's boys. Lots of them.

Nadine sighs and raises her eyebrows at me. She's seriously off the opposite sex at the moment, ever since she got heavily involved with this creep Liam who was just using her. She doesn't want to go out with anyone else now. Magda wants to go out with a different boy every night. I'm not sure what I want. And it's not like I get that many offers anyway.

Well. There's this boy Dan I met on holiday. He's my *sort-of* boyfriend. I don't see him much because he lives in Manchester. And he's younger than me. And looks a bit weird. He is definitely not a dreamboat.

I shall have to get him a Christmas present though. Goodness knows what. I've had this sudden brilliant idea of buying Magda and Nadine underwear from Knickerbox. Red satin flowery knickers for Magda. Black lace for Nadine. And then I could get Dad a big pair of Marks and

Sparks boxer shorts and Anna some pretty prim white panties. Eggs could have Mickey Mouse knickers. I've been warming to the universal knicker present. But I can't give Dan *underpants*! Though I know exactly what sort, a wacky pair with a silly message ...

I decide I'll have a good look round on Saturday and see if I get any further inspiration. I go over to Nadine's house around ten. Her dad's outside, washing his car. He's the sort of guy who worships his car, spending hours and hours anointing it every weekend.

'Hello, Curlynob,' he calls.

I force a cheery grin and knock at the door. Nadine's mum answers, in an old jumper and leggings, with a J-cloth in her hand. She is obviously dressed for serious house-cleaning.

'Hello, dear. Nadine's in her bedroom,' she says, sniffing disapprovingly.

'Hello, Ellie. I'm helping Mummy,' says Natasha, waving a feather duster from the living room.

Natasha is still in her cutesie-pie pyjamas and fluffy slippers. She's dancing round to some silly cartoon music on the telly, flicking her feather duster as she goes.

'Isn't she a good girl?' says Nadine's mum proudly.

I try to manufacture another smile.

Natasha rushes at me.

'You look dirty, Ellie,' she says. She prances round me, poking her feathers right in my face. 'There! I'm wiping all the dust off.'

'Oh, *sweet!*' says her mum.

'Ouch! Natasha, that *hurts*,' I say, my smile now very sickly indeed.

Natasha is the only six year old in the world *worse* than my little brother Eggs. I sidle past and run up the stairs to Nadine's room. It is wonderfully black and bleak after the glaring patterns in the hall. Nadine is looking glamourously black and bleak herself, her long black hair hanging loose,

her eyes heavily outlined with black kohl, her face powdered white as chalk. She's wearing a black skimpy sweater, black jeans, black boots - and as I come into her room she pulls on her black velvet jacket.

'Hi. What are those weird red marks on your face, Ellie?'

'Your delightful sister has just been seriously assaulting me with her feather duster.'

'Oh, God. Sorry. Don't worry. She wants a new Barbie doll for Christmas. I'll customize one. How about Killer Barbie, with a special sharp little dagger that whips out of her dinky stiletto?'

'Remember all our Barbie doll games, Naddie? I liked it when we turned them all into witches best.'

'Oh yeah, you made them all those little black frocks and special hooked noses out of plasticine. Wicked.'

We both sigh nostalgically.

'I used to *love* playing with plasticine,' I say. 'I still like mucking around with Eggs's little set, though he's got all the colours mixed up.'

'OK, then. That's your Christmas present solved. Your very own pack of plasticine,' says Nadine. 'I don't know what I'm going to get Magda though. She was hinting like mad about this new Chanel nail varnish but I bet it costs a fortune.'

'I know. I'm a bit strapped for cash too, actually.'

'It's all right for Magda. Her mum and dad give her that socking great allowance. My dad gives me exactly the same as Natasha, for God's sake. In fact Natasha ends up with heaps more because they're forever buying her extra stuff. It's so lousy having a sucky little sister.'

'Just as bad with a boring little brother. That's why Magda's so lucky, because *she's* the spoilt baby of the family.'

Magda certainly shows stylish evidence of spoiling when we meet up with her at the Flowerfields Shopping Centre

entrance. She's wearing a brand new bright red furry jacket that looks wonderful.

'Is that your Christmas present, Magda?' Nadine asks.

'Of course not! No, I had a little moan to Mum that although my leather jacket is ultra hip it isn't really *warm* - so she had a word with Dad and we went on a little shopping trip and *voilà!*' She twirls round in the jacket, turning up the collar and striking poses like a fashion model.

'It looks fantastic, Magda,' I say enviously. 'Hey, what about your leather jacket then? Don't you want it any more?'

I've been longing for a leather jacket like Magda's for *months*. I've tried dropping hints at home. Hints! I've made brazen pleas. To no avail. Dad and Anna won't listen. I have to put up with my boring boring boring old coat that doesn't do a thing for me. It makes me look dumpier than ever. I *know* it's too tight over my bum. I'd have sold my soul for Magda's soft supple stylish leather - but now her furry scarlet jacket is even *better*.

Nadine fiddles at Magda's neck to have a deck at the label.

'Wow! *Whistles,*' says Nadine.

She bought her black velvet at Camden Market. It's a bit shabby and stained now, but it still looks good on her. Anything looks good on Nadine because she's so tall and thin and striking.

'Come on then, you two. Shopping time,' I say.

'Do you really want plasticine, Ellie?' Nadine asks, linking arms.

I wish *I* was made out of plasticine. Then I'd roll myself out, long and very very thin. I'd stretch my stubby fingers into elegant manicured hands, I'd narrow my neck and my ankles, I'd scrape huge great chunks off my bottom, I'd pull off all my brown wiry hair and make myself a new long blond hairstyle ...

'Ellie?' says Nadine. 'You're dreaming.'

Yes. Dream on, Ellie.

'I don't really know what I want,' I say. 'Let's look round for a bit.'

'Shall we go and see the teddy bears?' says Magda. 'I think they're really cute.'

At Christmas time the Flowerfields Centre updates its mechanical singing teddy bear display. They sprinkle fake snow over the flowers, dress the teddies in winter woollies, turn the biggest teddy into Tubby Christmas with a red robe and a cotton wool beard, add a few parcels and presents and a glittery tree and change the tapes inside the bears. *Bananas in Pyjamas* and *Teddy Bears' Picnic* get a rest. The bears let rip with *Jingle Bells*. They jingle those bells over and over and over again.

'I had to stand in front of those bloody bears for over half an hour last time I was here with Eggs,' I say. 'I can't take any more torture, Magda.'

'At least Eggs doesn't dance to the music,' says Nadine. 'Natasha waits till she's got a good audience and then points her toes and flits about. It's the most utterly emetic sight ever.'

'You're a couple of sour old bats. I want to see the teddies,' says Magda. She puts her chin down and pouts. 'Me want to see the *teddies!*'

'You *look* like a bloody teddy in your new jacket, Magda,' I say. 'Watch out the Flowerfields people don't plonk you down beside Tubby Christmas and make you sing *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer*.'

But we let Magda hover around the Bear Pit for a couple of verses just to show willing. Nadine starts yawning and wanders off.

'Hey, what's going on? Up on the top floor?'

She's looking up past the fountains and bubble lifts and the giant Christmas tree to the top-floor balcony. I peer

short-sightedly behind my glasses. There are crowds of people up there in a long queue.

‘They’ll be waiting to see Father Christmas – the real one.’

‘You believe in Father Christmas, Ellie? How sweet,’ says Magda, tapping her foot and clicking her fingers to *Jingle Bells*.

‘The guy dressed up as opposed to the singing teddy,’ I say.

‘They’re a bit old for Father Christmas, aren’t they?’ says Magda. ‘They’re girls our age. Lots and lots of them.’

A light keeps flashing up there, and an excited buzz circles the atrium.

‘Is it television?’ says Nadine.

‘Wow, I hope so,’ says Magda, adjusting her furry jacket and fluffing her hair. ‘Come on, let’s go and see for ourselves.’

There are too many people waiting for the bubble lifts so we go on the giant escalator. As we get nearer the top I start to focus. There’re hundreds of teenage girls milling about up there, and big banners everywhere with the *Spicy* logo.

‘*Spicy*, the magazine,’ says Magda. ‘Are they doing a special promotion? I hope they’re giving out free goodies. Come on, you two, let’s get in the queue quick.’

She dashes up the last stretch of the escalator, her patent boots shining.

‘Come on, Ellie,’ says Nadine, starting to run too.

‘I think *Spicy* sucks,’ I say. ‘I don’t really want any of their freebies.’

‘Then you can use them for Christmas presents, right?’ says Nadine.

So the three of us join the queue. It’s so jam-packed and jostling that we have to hang on hard to each other. It’s horribly hot at the top of the building. Magda unbuttons

her jacket and fans her face. Nadine's ghostly pallor pinkens.

'Maybe this isn't such a great idea,' I say.

I'm squashed up so close to the girl in front of me that her long silky hair veils my face. Everyone's so much taller than me. I try craning my neck but the nearer we get to the front the harder it is to see what's going on. Lights keep on flashing and every now and then there's a squeal, but they're playing such loud rock music it's hard to hear what anyone's saying.

'Magda?' I tug her furry sleeve, but she's bouncing away to the music and doesn't respond.

'Nadine?' She's tall enough to see - and she's staring, transfixed.

'*What's happening?*' I yell at her.

She shouts something about a competition.

'Do we have to go in for it?' I say, sighing.

I don't think I'll be any good at a *Spicy* competition. I don't know much about music. I don't even bother reading *NME*. Nadine will do much better than me. Or maybe it's a fashion competition. I still haven't got a clue. Magda talks designer labels like they're all personal friends of hers but I don't even know how to pronounce the Italian ones, and I can never work out what all those initials stand for.

'Let's go and shop,' I beg, but there's a little surge forward, and suddenly Magda shoves hard, tugging us along after her.

We're almost at the front. I blink in the bright lights. There are huge *Spicy* posters and lots of promotion girls in pink T-shirts rushing round taking everyone's names and addresses. Each girl goes up in turn to a backdrop and stands there looking coy while a photographer clicks his camera.

There's a very pretty girl having her photo taken now: long hair, huge eyes, skinny little figure. She poses with