

# Secrets at St Jude's Drama Girl

Carmen Reid

*Random House Children's Publishers UK*

## **Contents**

About the Book

Title Page

Meet the St Jude's Girls ...

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-Two  
Chapter Twenty-Three  
Chapter Twenty-Four  
Chapter Twenty-Five  
Chapter Twenty-Six  
Chapter Twenty-Seven  
Chapter Twenty-Eight  
Chapter Twenty-Nine  
Chapter Thirty  
Chapter Thirty-One  
Chapter Thirty-Two  
Chapter Thirty-Three  
Chapter Thirty-Four  
Chapter Thirty-Five

About the Author  
Also by Carmen Reid  
Praise  
Copyright

## About the Book

**St Jude's - stuffy, dreary, and *dull*? So wrong! This term the dorm girls are in for some serious *drama*!**

Gina can't wait for her friends and her Mom to visit. But she's about to find out that mixing two sets of best friends is *trouble*.

Niffy's brother wants to date Amy, but if that happens Niffy's *never* going to talk to her again! Min wonders if she will ever have the nerve to *kiss* her first boyfriend. Meanwhile, Amy will do anything to look *fabulous* for the school play, but she may be going too far.

Can the girls sort out their problems before something *really* dramatic happens?

## MEET THE ST JUDE'S GIRLS . . .

### GINA

*Full name:* Gina Louise Winkleman-Peterson

*Home:* A fabulous white and glass, architect-designed beach house with pool on the Californian coast

*Likes:* Sunshine (sadly not often found in Edinburgh), swimming, Halloween, pointy ankle boots, Prada or anything Prada-esque, Reece's Pieces, her cell phone, her little brother Menzie (sometimes), coffee, a certain charming part-time waiter at the Arts Café called Dermot O'Hagan

*Dislikes:* Slithery octopus-type kisses, the totally gross sludge-green St Jude's school uniform, deadly dull history lessons, Charlie Fotherington-whatsit, boiled vegetables of any kind (I mean, guys, like, haven't you heard of stir-fry?)

*Would like to be:* A screenwriter - but absolutely no one in the whole world knows about that

*Fascinating fact:* Gina has three other best friends at her old school in California - Paula, Ria and Maddison. They still can't believe she goes to boarding school in Scotland

## **NIFFY**

*Full name:* Luella Edith Millicent Pethurer Nairn-Bassett (no wonder she's called either 'Niffy' or 'Lou')

*Home:* The ancient, crumbling, ancestral mansion Blacklough Hall in Cumbria, England

*Likes:* Playing pranks, enormous horses and slobbery dogs, all team games, (especially hockey - she's really good), the St J's assembly game Banshee Buzzword Bingo (which she invented), her big brother Finn, the odd sneaked glass of expensive red wine, all school food, but especially pudding

*Dislikes:* Dresses, dressing up, poncy shoes and fussy clothes of any description, make-up, fussing with her hair, fussing about anything at all, her real name

*Would like to be:* A professional rider - an international show-jumper, or maybe a three-day eventer - that way she could do show jumping, dressage and her favourite, cross-country jumping

*Fascinating fact:* She can be fully dressed in all her riding clothes and hat in twenty-five seconds flat

## **MIN**

*Full name:* Asimina Singupta

*Home:* A big family house with a huge garden in a suburb of Durban, South Africa

*Likes:* Running really, really fast and winning, being top of the class in every single subject, doing homework (it's so interesting when you really get into it), mango lassis, gold bracelets, reading science books, borrowing Amy's clothes, her mum's home-made curries

*Dislikes:* The sight of blood, Biology lessons, babysitting her little brothers and sisters, the food at St J's, wearing her hair in plaits, Scottish grey skies

*Would like to be:* A medical researcher or medical physicist. She has to do something medical because of her doctor parents but it can't involve blood!

*Fascinating fact:* Min's mother taught herself Italian and went all the way to Pisa to get her medical degree

## **AMY**

*Full name:* Amy Margaret McCorquodale

*Home:* An amazing penthouse flat in Glasgow, Scotland, with a terrace and panoramic view of the city

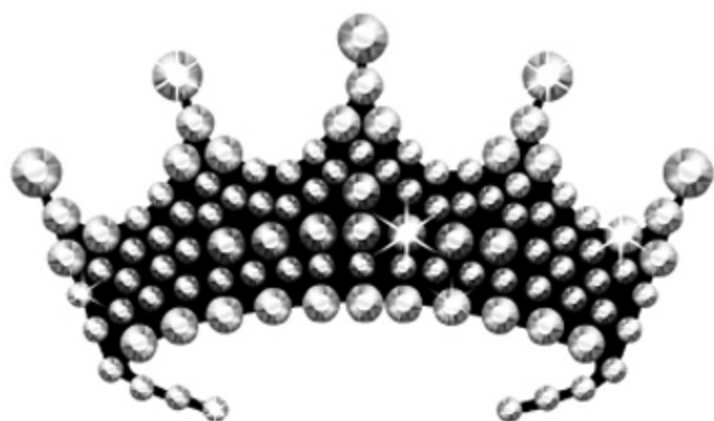
*Likes:* Designer jeans (Iceberg), designer bags (Marc Jacobs), designer boots (Jimmy Choo, but only when her dad is feeling incredibly generous), Edinburgh's Harvey Nichols (obviously), very handsome boys, diamonds, champagne, dance music, dressing up and going out, her gran's mince and tatties

*Dislikes:* Penny Boswell-Hackett, Mrs Norah 'the Neb' Knebworth, everything in Niffy's wardrobe, French lessons, people teasing her about her Glaswegian accent, oh and Penny Boswell-Hackett (have you got that?)

*Would like to be:* Officially, she's going to do a law degree, then join her dad's nightclub business. Secretly, she'd like to be a famous and fabulous actress

*Fascinating fact:* Amy's mum and dad were teenagers when she . . . er . . . arrived. She was brought up by her dad, her gran and her grandpa. She hasn't seen her real mum for years





*Carmen  
Reid*

**RHCP DIGITAL**

# Chapter One

'MOM!' GINA PETERSON exclaimed, holding her arms wide for a hug.

She'd already galloped down the many stairs from her dorm in the St Jude's boarding house, hurtled through the long corridor and had just burst out into the entrance hall.

It had been seven whole weeks since she'd last seen her mother, and that had been back at the family home in California. It was so strange and exciting to be meeting her *here*, in Scotland, in Edinburgh, in the red and gold wallpapered entrance hall - half a world away from sunshine-soaked LA.

'Gina!' Lorelei Winkelmann exclaimed, and held out her long, slim arms in welcome. Mother and daughter hugged tightly, then let go, took a little step back and looked carefully at each other.

'You've grown - your hair looks different - and it's only been a few weeks!' Lorelei said in surprise, studying the still tanned teenager with her straight blonde hair and heart-shaped face.

'You look great,' Gina told her mom with a grin. 'How come you look so great when you've been on a plane, like, for ever?'

This was true. Lorelei's hair was pulled up into an elegant chignon; her coat, scarf and high-heeled boots all looked chic, unruffled, uncrumpled.

Somehow, Gina immediately felt too slouchy, too casual and too under-dressed - a feeling that her mother could transmit to everyone standing within a half-mile radius.

As Lorelei shrugged the compliment off, Gina's next excited question was: 'Where are Paula and Maddison? They did come, didn't they?! They are here . . .?' She started feeling almost panicky.

Paula and Maddison were two of her best friends from California. Back when she was at regular day school in the US, these had been the girls she'd seen almost every single day - not just at school, but during the holidays, at weekends, even at night on their regular sleepovers. Along with Ria, the fourth member of the gang, these had once been her best friends in the whole world.

Now Paula and Maddison had flown all the way from California to see Gina, her new school and her new friends. Ria hadn't been able to come on this trip because her sister was in hospital.

'They're in the cab,' Gina's mother told her. 'I didn't know if it would be OK for us all to come in and look around the boarding house.'

'Of course it's OK. I'll go get them!' Gina exclaimed.

She pulled open the front door and ran down the stone steps into the driveway.

In another half-hour or so, this driveway would be full of cars as parents arrived to collect their daughters for the half-term holiday. But Lorelei was early, so right now, only a black cab was parked there, engine idling.

The two girls in the back seat were already waving frantically as Gina ran down the steps towards them.

'I can't believe it!' she called out in excitement. 'I can't believe you're here!'

The cab door swung open, and Maddison stepped out: a tall, tanned Californian teenager, complete with pink jewelled braces on her strong white teeth.

The two girls screamed in delight and ran to hug one another. Then, from the other side of the cab, Paula emerged. She was shorter, strong and wiry-looking, with

walnut-brown skin and a wild mane of crinkly, all-natural, black-girl hair.

If Gina was honest, in her heart of hearts, she would say that Paula was her best friend in the whole world. She loved Maddison, Ria and the girls she'd grown so close to at St Jude's - but Paula was special. Paula had been there for her ever since kindergarten, when they'd both spent sunny mornings in the yard, teaching each other how to make the swings fly.

'I can't believe you're here!' Gina whispered into her friend's ear as they flung their arms around each other.

'Of course I'm here!' Paula told her. 'I am *dying* to see this place and meet your new friends and your boyfriend . . . Woo-hoo!' She gave a little shriek of excitement. 'He *so* better be part of our *Edinburrow* sightseeing tour, or else, Gina-wina, I am getting straight back on that plane and going home!'

'No way!' Maddison interrupted. 'At least give them time to change the in-flight movies. If I have to sit through another Anne Hathaway moment, I'm gonna die!'

'Are we coming in?' Paula asked. 'Shall I pay the fare?'

'Yeah, but Mom will pay you back,' Gina insisted. 'You're definitely coming in - I have to show you round. Plus, I think my mom is desperate to see round her old boarding house - not that it's changed much since she was here, believe me - and the girls in my dorm can't wait to meet you.'

'Your dorm?' Paula repeated. 'It is just so weird that you sleep in a dorm every night, Gina. I can't imagine it. So remind me: you share with Amy, Min and . . . Niffy?' she asked uncertainly.

Gina nodded. 'Yeah, they're all really, really nice. You're going to love them. C'mon!'

'Let me get my camera,' Maddison said, unzipping her handbag. Within seconds, she had her slick, silvery gadget out and was snapping Paula and Gina on the front steps of the boarding house.

‘That’s enough!’ Gina insisted. ‘Let’s go in.’

As they opened the front door, they saw that Lorelei was still in the entrance hall, talking to the formidable-looking housemistress.

Mrs Knebworth, known to all the girls, behind her back, as ‘the Neb’, was the kind of proper, solid, more than slightly fierce woman of fifty-something who made girls nervous even when they hadn’t done anything wrong; even when they hadn’t even *thought* of doing anything wrong. It was the habit she had of fixing her steely blue eyes on you – as if she was trying to catch you out; trying, somehow, to read your guilty thoughts.

‘Take a look at this place!’ Lorelei exclaimed as the girls came in. ‘I can’t believe how well I remember it.’

‘Well, we’ve obviously redecorated over the years, Ms Winkelmann, but maybe always in similar shades. Feel free to take a look round. Gina, you’ll be tour guide for your Californian friends, won’t you?’ Mrs Knebworth said in her firm, no-nonsense Edinburgh voice.

Maddison risked a reply: ‘Yeah, Gina’ – she nudged her friend – ‘and after we see round here we want to see all round *Edinboro*. It looks so old and so way cool.’

‘Quite. But it’s *Edinburrrrragh*,’ the Neb couldn’t help correcting Maddison. She sounded as if she was clearing her throat.

Gina and Maddison exchanged a glance. Maddison’s said: *Who is this strange lady?*

Gina, with a twitch of her eyebrows, hoped she was conveying: *Yes, I know, but I have to put up with her on a daily basis, so just let it go.*

‘Gina’s really enjoying her second term at St Jude’s, I believe,’ the Neb said with a satisfied smile. ‘She’s settled in now and getting on very well at school.’

‘That’s great, Gina,’ Lorelei replied, putting her arm around Gina’s shoulders. ‘I can’t wait to meet your new friends.’

‘Cool!’ Paula chipped in. ‘Plus we are all desperate to meet your new guy, Gina.’

*Oh.Good.Grief!* Gina thought to herself. Did Paula *have* to mention him now? In front of the housemistress? This was about to cause a major headache.

‘Aha!’ Mrs Knebworth began, raising her eyebrows. ‘You don’t need to worry, Ms Winkelmann. I’ve met Oliver Hughes and he is a charming young man from St Lennox’s. I’m sure you remember the St Lennox boys from your time at St Jude’s . . .?’

‘Well, yes,’ Lorelei began, a look of confusion on her face, ‘but I thought . . .’

Gina’s boyfriend was indeed charming, but he wasn’t called Oliver Hughes, nor did he attend the posh and private St Lennox’s. He was called Dermot O’Hagan, he went to Burnside Academy, a comprehensive, and he worked in his dad’s café at the weekends – which is how Gina had got to know him.

But due to very complicated events at the Halloween party the previous night . . . Well, in a nutshell, the Neb had met Dermot but she thought he was a St Lennox boy called Oliver Hughes.

Gina had no idea how to unravel this situation. She couldn’t just say: *I know his name’s Oliver Hughes, but actually he prefers to be called Dermot O’Hagan – it’s sort of like a nickname. And yes, I know he said he went to St Lennox’s, but that was just a bit of a joke really.*

No. She didn’t think that would work.

‘I thought there was some boy you were seeing called Dermot, Gina? And he works in a café?’ Lorelei asked.

Gina couldn’t think of anything helpful to say. She just felt a blush of meltdown proportions rushing up her face.

‘Mrs Knebworth’ – Lorelei threw an accusing look at the housemistress – ‘just what is Gina getting up to over here?’

‘A café?’ the Neb spluttered.

‘Can I try and explain?’ Gina asked nervously.

Maddison held up her camera and took a picture of Mrs Knebworth's face. She couldn't help it - she'd never seen anyone turn purple like that before.

## Chapter Two

'OH MY GOODNESS! Look at this place!' Gina's mother kept repeating over and over again as she was led through the boarding house. 'Look at the dining room! It's just the way I remember it!' she exclaimed as she walked into the large room with its Victorian bay window and dark marble fireplace.

The long wooden tables and benches were bare - no meals were going to be served here for five days. All eighty boarders were either heading home or to friends' houses for the half-term holiday.

The Upper Fifth sitting room and the open-plan study where all the girls had a desk were both judged to be 'almost exactly the same' by Lorelei. But what really startled her was the quaint laundry and drying rooms.

'Look at those!' she cried, pointing at the ancient porcelain double sinks, all worn and cracked by the washing efforts of thousands and thousands of girls.

It had never occurred to Gina before, as she'd swirled her bras around the sinks, or hung up her wet washing in the boiler rooms fitted with ancient wooden shelves and pulleys, that this was all exactly as it had been twenty-six years ago when her own mom was at school here.

'Ooooh . . .' Maddison rolled her eyes, took a quick snap, and asked in horror, 'Do you have to wash *everything* by hand, Gina? In these old sinks?'

'No, there are washing machines too,' Gina told her.

'My goodness, Gina, how do you cope?' Lorelei wondered. 'At home Dominique does everything for you.'



‘And you!’ Gina retorted. ‘It isn’t such a big deal,’ she added. ‘My friends showed me what to do.’

Apparently girls who were used to maids and didn’t know how to deal with their laundry were not so unusual at St Jude’s.

*I am the queen of washing wool,* Gina remembered Niffy telling her. *Bring your jumpers to me and I will show you what to do with them. Bet you’ve never wrapped anything in a towel and walloped it against the floor before!*

But then Niffy could turn anything into a game or a prank or fun of one kind or another. It was her talent. Because her mother wasn’t well, Niffy had missed the first half of term, but she was upstairs right now; she’d come to take Amy home with her for half term because Amy’s dad was on business abroad.

‘C’mon – you must have enough photos of sinks by now, Maddison,’ Gina teased. ‘Let’s go upstairs.’

She watched as Lorelei, Maddison and Paula walked ahead of her along the corridor leading to the staircase. They seemed so bright in their Californian clothes. Maddison’s jeans were lemon yellow, Paula’s vivid green. Both girls wore vibrant cotton jumpers. Cotton! As if *cotton* was going to be enough to keep out the damp chill of November in Edinburgh!

Gina could almost see the boarding house through their eyes: she remembered how dark and gloomy and crustily old-fashioned it had seemed to her when she first arrived. She’d come for the summer term, all tanned and dazzled with Californian sunshine. It had taken time to adjust to the grey dampness of a Scottish May. She’d come at first because her mother, fed up with Gina’s low grades and bad attitude, had made her. She’d come back this term because she’d wanted to. For Gina, St Jude’s was so different, so adventurous and new – plus she really loved her new friends and hoped her old friends were going to love them too.

‘Look at the stair rail!’ Maddison exclaimed, with her hand on the ornate wooden banister. ‘It’s sooooo old.’ *Snap*. She took another picture.

‘Is it always so dark up here?’ Paula wanted to know as they took the staircase up and up to the second-floor bedrooms; the little ones tucked up in the attic of the cavernous Victorian house.

‘Yeah, compared to back home, everything seems much darker and greyer,’ Gina had to admit. ‘But you get used to it. When the weather’s bad, dark rooms feel cosy, I guess.’

‘Cosy?’ Maddison asked – she didn’t think she’d heard the word before.

‘Warm,’ Gina explained. ‘Nesty.’

‘So who do you share a room with?’ Lorelei asked, needing a reminder.

‘OK,’ Gina said, a little exasperated. ‘Once again . . . try and take it in this time, Mom.’

‘Sorry,’ Lorelei said, ‘but I’m busy. I have to remember a lot of stuff.’

But that just made it worse; that made it sound like: *I have to remember so many other things, I can’t be expected to remember the names of your closest friends in Scotland.*

‘There’s Amy,’ Gina began. ‘She’s really friendly and pretty, and she’s from Glasgow in Scotland. She lives there with her dad – when she’s not here, obviously.’

‘So no mom at home?’ Lorelei asked.

‘No,’ Gina said, and left it there. It was too soon to go into the story of how Amy’s parents were teenagers when she arrived, and how her dad and her grandparents brought her up . . . Then there was the interesting fact that Amy’s dad now had a boyfriend.

‘Then there’s Min,’ Gina went on. ‘She’s Asian, she has this big family – four little brothers and sisters – and they all live in this huge house, close to the beach in Durban.’

‘Where’s that?’ Maddison asked.

‘South Africa.’

‘An Asian girl from South Africa? That’s complicated,’ Paula added.

Gina smiled. ‘Get used to it! There are people from all over the world here. Take me: I’m from California, but my mum’s half Scottish and half German; I have a stepdad and a half-brother – that’s complicated too!’

‘Suppose,’ Paula had to admit.

‘Min’s really, really nice,’ Gina continued, ‘and she’s sooo clever. Her parents are both doctors and they want her to be a doctor too.’

Again, it seemed too soon to tell them that Min always fainted at the sight of blood and was planning on going into medical research instead.

‘Then there’s Niffy,’ Maddison chipped in as they took the final, narrow flight of stairs. ‘I always remember her name.’

Gina told them the joke: ‘She’s called Niffy because her real name’s Luella and she thinks it stinks. She’s great. She’s not been here this term – she stayed at home because her mom isn’t well. Amy’s going to visit with her for half-term, and then I think Niffy’s coming back to school because her mom’s getting better.’

By now, Gina’s hand was on the doorknob of her dorm. She looked at the faces of the three people who’d travelled all this way to see her, her new school and her new friends. It was kind of exciting to get these two groups of people together.

Pushing open the door, she announced: ‘*Ta-dah.*’

‘Hi!’

‘Come on in . . .’

‘Welcome to the Iris dorm,’ the voices inside the room chorused.

The Californians squeezed themselves through into the cramped room.

Three beds, three chests of drawers and a wardrobe had been shoe-horned into the room, leaving hardly any floor

space for anything else. If Niffy was coming back after half-term, a bunk bed would have to be installed.

Maddison's camera flashed several times, making the dorm girls blink with surprise.

'Whoa!' Amy said, and held her hand up in front of her face. She hated having her photo taken - well, unless she'd spent hours arranging her hair and make-up beforehand.

Hurried, last-minute packing was in progress: Amy's suitcase was wide open on her bed as she tried to decide which of her many wonderful outfits should come with her to Niffy's threadbare ancestral home, Blacklough Hall.

Lorelei, Maddison and Ria shook hands with everyone and said friendly hellos.

'What lovely clothes!' Paula exclaimed as she cast a practised eye over the expensive jeans, cute tops and label-laden little skirts Amy had spread out over her bed.

'Thanks!' Amy replied. 'Gina says there are some great shops in California. I must come and visit some time.'

'Definitely!' Gina said, thrilled at the idea.

Lorelei was shaking Niffy's hand. She wouldn't be shaking it quite so hard, or smiling in quite such a friendly way, thought Gina, if she knew that this was the girl who'd helped Gina break into the school records office last term to find out all about her mother's time at St Jude's.

'Hi, Ms Winkelmann, it's so nice to finally meet you,' Amy gushed. 'I'm sorry about the mess in here. It's just, I'm going to Niffy's place - the coldest house in the known universe - so I have to take a lot of clothes.'

'Not that *that's* going to keep you very warm,' Niffy pointed out, picking up a vibrant pink mini-dress and holding it against her tall, long-limbed frame.

'It's a layer,' Amy insisted. 'Aren't you supposed to wear lots of layers in sub-zero temperatures?'

'It's not that bad at Blacklough!' Niffy protested.

Amy looked up, caught Gina's eye and gave a little laugh. 'Yes it is! It is pure, dead frrrrreezing!' she insisted, rolling