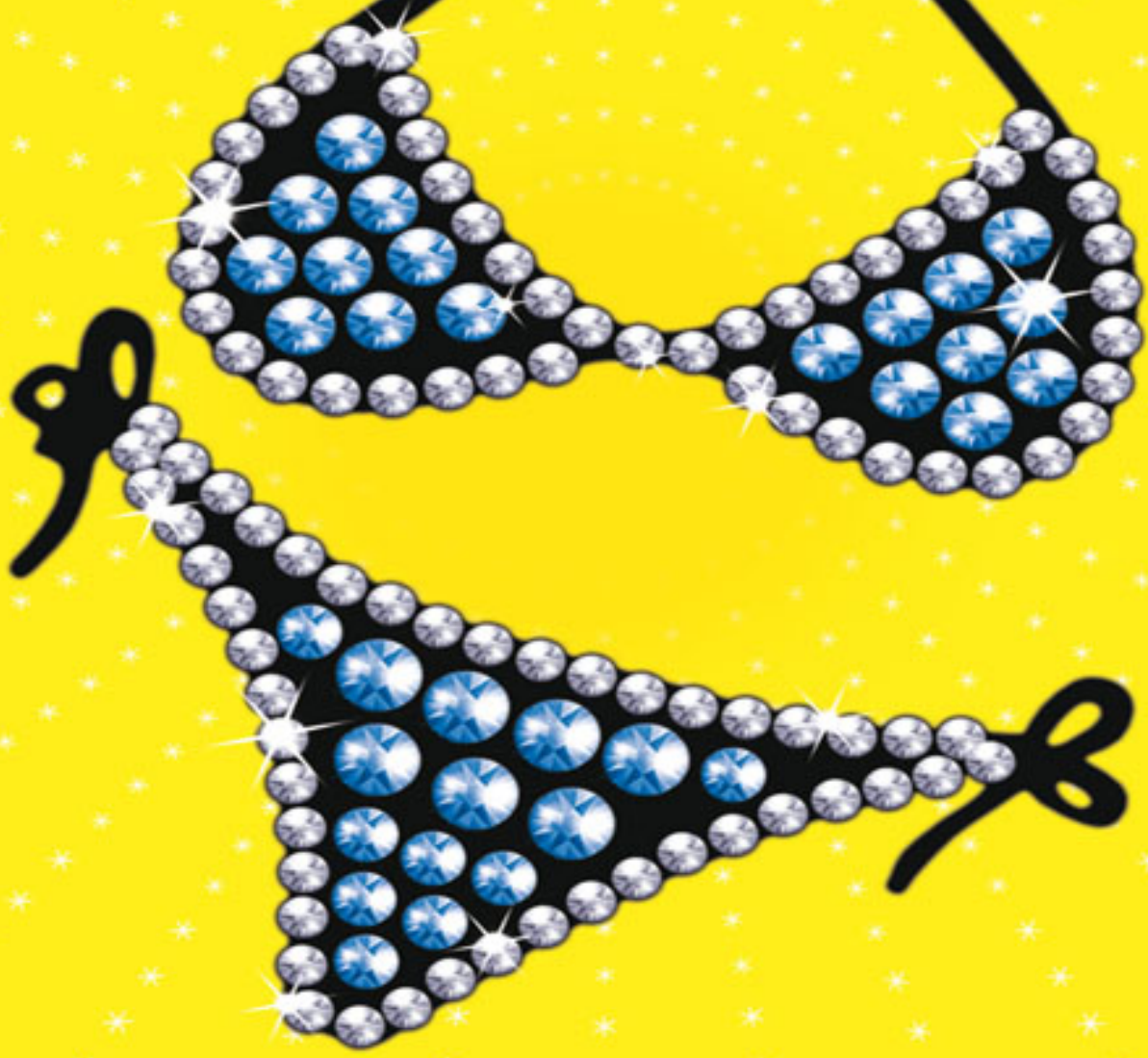




SUNSHINE GIRL



Carmen Reid

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Meet the Author ...

Also by Carmen Reid

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About the Book

It's time to inject some sunshine into St Jude's this term!
But unfortunately for the Upper Fifts, hot holiday glamour
is in short supply ...

Gina's facing a break-up that might just break her.

Amy's Saturday job is definitely not what she had in mind
when she pictured a career in fashion.

Niffy's preoccupation with The Neb's love-life is reaching
unhealthy levels.

And Min is literally bugging her dorm-mates to distraction.

Maybe a trip to the Sunshine State is just what the girls
need?

Goodbye Scotland, hello LA!



Carmen Reid

CORGI BOOKS

MEET THE ST JUDE'S GIRLS ...

GINA

Full name: Gina Louise Winkelmann-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, Dermot O'Hagan ... and Callum Cormack

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: Recently forced to downsize from 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

Chapter One

'When does this film finish?' Gina hissed against the ear of the very handsome boy sitting next to her.

'I don't know,' he whispered back right against her ear, sending a little shiver down her neck.

'But I have to be somewhere else by four!'

'*Shhh!*' Again, he leaned across the small space which separated them and kissed her right on the mouth.

Gina closed her eyes and forgot all about the film they were supposed to be watching, and the other place she was supposed to be in twenty minutes. She kissed him back. Kissed and kissed. No one that she'd ever kissed before kissed quite the way that Callum did.

When his kisses started, she didn't want them to stop. In fact she wanted them to go further and deeper, she wanted to wrap her arms around him and let him kiss, kiss, kiss her for ever.

But all of a sudden, the kiss stopped abruptly and he let her go. He glanced briefly at the screen, then slipped off his leather jacket and pulled his T-shirt right up over his head and off! Now he was sitting bare-chested in his seat.

Gina looked at him, mouth open with astonishment. 'What are you doing?'

'Trying to give you ideas,' he replied.

This made her giggle and she couldn't help herself from taking a good look at the parts he'd just revealed. His chest was smooth, with solid-looking pecs, and now she was

checking out his narrow waist and the fuzzy skin just beneath his tummy button.

'I'm not taking my top off in the cinema,' she whispered.

He leaned over again. He was going to kiss her, and she was almost dizzy at the thought of feeling his bare skin pressed right up against her.

'Go on,' he urged, his lips just about touching hers. 'It's pitch-black, no one else will see. We'll just sit here without any clothes on until the credits run and then we'll get dressed again. Think how much fun we'll have. And no one will know a thing.'

Gina pointed her finger and tapped it against her head to let him know that he was completely nuts.

He reached down and began to take off his shoes and then his socks. The cinema wasn't exactly full, because it was a sunny Saturday afternoon, but the handful of other people in their row were now turning their heads to look.

'Callum!' Gina protested, as he began to make a start on the waistband button of his jeans. 'You'll get us thrown out. You might even get arrested.'

Callum just smiled. 'C'mon,' he said, reaching for the place where her top met her skirt. 'Dare you to sit in the cinema in your underwear.'

'No!' she squeaked, hearing the buzz of his jeans zipper being undone despite the loud bangs, gunfire and screams coming from the film.

But this, Gina was learning, was the thrill of being out with Callum. Anything could happen. Anything *did* happen!

Now he was shuffling about in his chair, trying to pull down his jeans.

Gina part wanted to stop him, part couldn't bear to tear her eyes away. Was he really, really going to do this? Sit in the audience in his smalls?! Was he going to get away with this? Her eyes scanned the room to see if anyone was marching down the aisle to tell him off yet.

What kind of underwear would he have on? She suddenly had a burning urge to know.

Still she managed to whisper to him: 'Callum, put your clothes on!' But then she was caught in a bare-chested kiss once again and so wound up by it she was almost forgetting to breathe.

'Shall I take my jeans off?' he whispered against her ear. 'Do you dare me? Would you still kiss a guy who was only wearing boxers? Would you risk it?'

Music had struck up. Gina opened her eyes and saw that the film was over.

'Credits ...' she warned him. 'Any moment now and—'
It had already happened.

'Lights,' she pointed out with a smile.

'Uh-oh ...' Callum zipped up the jeans, but sat back in his seat, bare-chested and smiling happily, as other cinema-goers began to stand up and walk out of the row, stepping over his shoes and socks as they did so. 'Hi ... hello there ... hot in here today, isn't it?' he asked one passing girl.

This was making Gina laugh. He was completely outrageous: an ever-smiling, cheeky, naughty boy. She could not get enough of him.

'Where are we going next?' he asked, a grin breaking out across his face.

Gina took a look at her slim wristwatch - a present from her mom when Gina was about to leave California and travel all the way to Edinburgh, Scotland, to become a boarder at St Jude's School for Girls.

'Oh! It's five to four already!' she exclaimed. 'I have to go! I'm going to be late. And you know you can't come with me.'

'Is *he* going to be there?' Callum asked, big emphasis on the 'he'.

'Yes, he is definitely going to be there.'

'What I want to know, Gina,' Callum began, throwing his bare arm round her shoulders, 'is just exactly when is *he*

going to be out of the picture? Because I want to have you
all to myself.'

Chapter Two

'Are you sure it's OK for us to be here today?' Amy flicked her long blonde hair from her face and shot Dermot a smile. 'I mean, not that long ago we got thrown out of here and your dad told us never, ever to come back again.'

Dermot, a very friendly looking guy with sandy-brown hair, blue eyes, a bright blue shirt and waiter's apron, grinned at this.

'It's OK. Dad isn't in this afternoon and anyway, haven't I always told you that his bark is worse than his bite? If he saw the three of you, sitting there looking all sweet and proper, good little Saint Jude's girls that you are, he'd be totally delighted that you're his customers.'

This made Amy laugh, along with Niffy and Min, her best friends and dorm-mates. The trio had been sharing a dorm at St Jude's ever since they'd arrived. Gina, who'd only started last year, was the newest member of the dorm, the latest best friend and she was supposed to be here by now.

Dermot served them in order. First came sophisticated Amy, the one with the pretty face, groomed blonde hair and carefully chosen clothes. She got a skinny latte and a low-fat, wholemeal, pineapple and carrot muffin.

'Thank you,' she said, picking up her fork and considering which corner of the muffin she was going to dig into first.

'Min,' Dermot continued, looking at the Asian girl with the long dark ponytail and studious-looking brown eyes,

'you're a soya hot chocolate, because you don't get on with milk ... and a blueberry muffin.'

'Thanks.' Min smiled. She had a big soft spot for Dermot. Until she'd met him and he'd been so friendly and chatty to her, she'd been terrified of boys. In fact, if it weren't for Dermot, she'd probably never, ever have even dreamed of going out with her lovely Greg.

'And this has got to be for you,' Dermot said to Niffy, as he put one huge, foamy cappuccino and a chocolate cupcake smothered in chocolate icing down in front of the tall and lanky, short-haired and scruffily dressed girl sitting between the other two.

Min looked a little longingly at the cupcake.

'It's not too late to change your mind,' Dermot told her. 'I'm willing and able. I can take the blueberry back to the counter and bring you a chocolate cupcake too.'

'No. No, it's OK,' Min decided. 'Niffy can eat all the chocolate cakes that she wants to because she played hockey all morning.'

'Too right,' Niffy declared, picking up her fork and diving in.

Dermot looked at his watch. 'Four o'clock already. Gina's late. Where is she, by the way? Did she not leave the boarding house with you today, then?'

'No ... she had something to do in town. Maybe it was ordering up a new bit of games kit or something ... I can't exactly remember.' Amy added carefully, 'You'll have to ask her when you see her.'

'She will be here, then?'

'Of course she'll be here,' Niffy added, voice thick with chocolate icing. 'Unless she gets run over by a bus, she'll be here.'

When Min saw the worried look on Dermot's face, she added soothingly, 'Gina has not been run over by a bus. She's just a bit late. She'll be here soon. Why don't you text her, see if she's on her way?'

'Maybe ... right ... I need to see to table seven. Catch you later.'

As soon as Dermot was out of earshot, all three girls looked at each other anxiously.

'I don't like covering up for her,' Niffy said.

'I hate it,' Min agreed.

'We told her today was the last day we'd do it. She's got to decide who she's going to go out with *today*,' Amy added. 'Lucky old Gina: struggling to decide between two guys, when I can't even find one.'

Both Niffy and Min looked at her sympathetically.

'It's OK for you two,' Amy continued.

'True for Min ... but more complicated in my case,' Niffy said, then took a large slurp of cappuccino.

'Really ... how are things?' Amy prompted, hoping to hear just a little bit more about Niffy and her occasional boyfriend Angus.

'Well ... there's nothing wrong. But you know, when I see him it's great. When we're away at school, it's different. I don't want to do all that phoning and emailing and lovey-dovey stuff. I really can't be bothered. I think I liked it more when he was in France and hardly ever got in touch. I mean, I'm busy!'

Amy couldn't help laughing at this.

'What does Angus think?' Min asked.

'I dunno ...' Niffy put the remains of the cupcake in her mouth. 'He probably feels the same.'

'So you're perfectly suited,' Amy said. 'Maybe you should just leave it like that. When you can see each other, have a great time. When you're apart, just ... let it be. If it suits you both: fine. In fact, you and Angus are scarily suited. You'll probably end up getting married.'

'Amy!' Niffy protested. But she grinned anyway. It was quite nice to be told that she and Angus were perfectly suited.

'And here she is.' Amy was the first to spot Gina hurrying into the café with an expression of barely suppressed guilt across her face.

Gina rushed straight up to her friends first, without even looking around for Dermot. 'Where did you say I was?' she hissed at them.

'We told Dermot you were snogging the face off his best friend at the cinema,' Niffy teased.

Gina squeaked with horror at this.

'Adjust lipstick,' Amy advised, pointing to Gina's face where Mac's Lickable had been smudged all over the outline of Gina's shapely lips.

Gina gave another little scream and fled in the direction of the bathroom.

'There's a rash all over her chin,' Min added.

'Stubble burn,' was Niffy's verdict.

'How's she going to explain that away?' Amy wondered.

'We'll have to wait and see,' Niffy added, scraping a few remaining crumbs from her plate.

'Was that her?' asked Dermot, appearing at their table again. 'Where's she gone now?'

'Just making a trip to the little girls' room. Don't panic,' Amy told him.

'Well ... not yet,' Niffy added in a low voice, but Dermot still caught it.

'What do you mean?'

'Hi, Dermot!' Gina hurried towards the table in a cloud of citrusy scent to cut off this line of talk.

She walked towards the four of them with a big smile across her face. Whatever she'd done in the bathroom in thirty seconds flat, it had worked: her smile was pink and perky once again, her red chin disguised with concealer. Any hint of another guy had been completely obliterated with a hefty dose of Gucci perfume.

The two-date outfit she'd so carefully considered this morning was still looking good: short orange miniskirt over

black leggings and black ankle boots, with a shiny patent leather jacket on top.

Just like Amy's, Gina's hair was a bright, highlighted blonde, but whereas Amy usually wore her locks in a ponytail, Gina liked her hair to fall straight and loose down past her shoulders. Both girls had a strong sense of how pretty they were and they knew best how to work their looks.

'Dermot! I'm sorry I'm late, but it's OK, isn't it?'

Then, despite the crowded café tables, Gina and Dermot were kissing on the lips, maybe even with tongues - it was tricky to see from Niffy's angle, but she still couldn't help rolling her eyes at Amy.

Gina pulled back from Dermot to take a look at him. She'd been his girlfriend since last summer and now it was March. Nine whole months. Their eyes held each other's.

Gina really did like so many things about Dermot. He was funny. He was kind. He worked hard. He studied hard. He was super cute-looking too.

There was something between them. She felt the little buzz and tingle of attraction. There was definitely something there. But she knew now for sure that it was nothing compared to the electrifying jolt of being with Callum.

But Dermot was so nice. She hated that she had to let go of him.

'Hi,' he said, with his arm still on her shoulder. 'I was supposed to be free by four, but the girl doing the evening shift still hasn't made it here.'

'Oh no!'

Dermot reached over and kissed her on the lips again. 'I've phoned her and she'll be here soon. So, where are we going to go?'

'I was going to ask you the same thing.'

'Cinema?'

‘No. I’m good,’ Gina replied, just a little too quickly. ‘I mean ... I don’t think there’s much on that I want to go see right now.’

‘Ermm ... it’s a bit early for something to eat ... and I’ve had enough of cafés for one day ... and it’s too late to go to an exhibition or anything like that ... ermm ... do you want to come back to my house?’

Gina kept on looking at Dermot. Really, she knew she should tell him just as soon as she could that they were through. She was seeing someone else and not just any old someone else, but someone Dermot knew.

Callum and Dermot weren’t best friends like Niffy had said. Whatever kind of friendship they’d once had had been destroyed when Gina had gone on a secret date with Callum the first time, and Callum just hadn’t been able to stop himself from mentioning it to Dermot.

Gina had promised, sworn, absolutely insisted to Dermot that it was a complete mistake and it was all over. But that was no longer true.

With flirty emails and sweet-talking on the phone, Callum had won Gina over ... because he was daring, he was fun, he was slightly outrageous and exciting to be with. Now, after her secret cinema date with Callum, Gina knew she had to finish with Dermot, no matter how awkward and upsetting it was going to be.

‘I don’t know ...’ she began. ‘Hey, can we step outside for a couple of minutes?’

‘Of course,’ Dermot answered, and she saw the flicker of worry cross his face.

The café was up on the first floor above an art gallery, so once Gina and Dermot had gone out of the front door they were standing in a bright, white landing with stairs leading both up to the higher floors and down.

As Dermot pulled her close to him for another kiss, Gina said, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t ... I’m really sorry, Dermot, but ...’

She wanted to just say it straight off. Break up with him. Tell him it was over. Well ... she thought she did. But when she looked into his face, then it was different. Then she couldn't tell him, because she just wasn't sure anymore.

'I don't think I can come over to your house tonight,' she said instead.

'Why not?'

'Well ... I'm supposed to be back at the boarding house by six-thirty. I don't have a late pass tonight and I have an English essay that's due in on Monday morning, so I'm going to be busy with that tonight and tomorrow ...'

This was to put him off asking her out again on Sunday.

'Oh no ...' Dermot repeated. 'We're not exactly having much fun, are we? I mean, when did we last go on a date?' Then, as they remembered the row about Callum, he added quickly, 'One which didn't go horribly wrong, Gina?'

She looked into his face and felt a fresh clench of anxiety in her stomach ... Surely he didn't know about Callum? He hadn't found anything out?

Somehow the thought of Dermot knowing about her and Callum was even worse than the thought of breaking up with him.

'You do still want to go out with me, don't you?' He looked at her with a very serious face.

'Yes! Yes, of course,' Gina heard herself telling him, because she just couldn't bear to let him down. 'How can you say that after everything we've been through?'

'Phew! That's the best thing I've heard all day. All week, even.'