



The Diamond Girls

By Jacqueline Wilson

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Now Mum's expecting yet another baby, and she's convinced this one's a boy. She insists they move to a bigger place - but it's rough, dilapidated and filthy, and before they've even unpacked, Mum's gone into labour! Can the Diamond girls pull together in time for her to come home? And will anyone spot Mum's little secret but Dixie?

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Editorial Review

Review

"Yet another fantastic contribution from Jacqueline Wilson" Bookseller "Another lovely Jacqueline Wilson story, full of high drama and gentle moments and the blinding truth. Highly recommended" Reading Matters
"A compelling mix of gritty realism and warmth where the chaos is largely redeemed by love" Independent
"Wilson writes with such humour and affection for her characters that this book is full of unexpected joy" Daily Mail

About the Author

JACQUELINE WILSON is an extremely well-known and hugely popular author who served as Children's Laureate from 2005-7. She has been awarded a number of prestigious awards, including the British Children's Book of the Year and the Guardian Children's Fiction Award (for *The Illustrated Mum*), the Smarties Prize and the Children's Book Award (for *Double Act*, for which she was also highly commended for the Carnegie Medal). In 2002 Jacqueline was given an OBE for services to literacy in schools and in 2008 she was appointed a Dame. She was the author most borrowed from British libraries in the last decade.

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‘I’ve got a surprise for you girls,’ said Mum. ‘We’re moving.’

We all stared at her. She was flopping back in her chair, slippered feet propped right up on the kitchen table amongst the cornflake bowls, tummy jutting over her skirt like a giant balloon. She didn’t look capable of moving herself as far as the front door. Her scuffed fluffy mules could barely support her weight. Maybe she needed hot air underneath her and then she’d rise gently upwards and float out of the open window.

‘Quit staring at my stomach, Dixie,’ Mum snapped.

‘How can she *help* staring?’ said Jude. ‘It’s so gross.’

‘Oh yuck, it’s *moving!*’ Rochelle squealed.

Mum cradled her tummy, patting the little bulgy bit wiggling about beneath her navel. I hoped it wouldn’t wiggle too much. Mum’s navel looked ready to pop out like a cork.

I used to think that’s how babies were born. That was weird enough. The real explanation seems worse. I’m sure I don’t want any babies myself, ever.

‘He’s giving me a real old kicking today,’ Mum said proudly. ‘Going to be a right little footballer. Aren’t you, baby David Beckham?’

She hung her head over her swollen tummy as if she was waiting for an answer. ‘Yes, *Mummy!*’ she said, in a tiny baby voice.

‘You’re nuts, Mum,’ said Jude. ‘You’ve been a bit bonkers ever since you knew the baby was a boy. What’s so special about *boys?*’ Jude threw her arms out wildly, as if she’d like to whack every boy about the head

just for being male.

‘Watch it,’ said Martine, snatching her cup of tea out of Jude’s way. ‘What are you on about anyway, Mum? We don’t want to move again. We’ve played musical chairs all round the blooming Bletchworth Estate.’

We started off in South Block. We moved there when a three-bedroom flat became vacant, but then Mum had a row with the people on our landing. We swapped to the ground floor of North Block, but it was so damp we had rotten colds and coughs all winter, so then we moved up to the top floor. It wasn’t a good idea to be right under the roof. Whenever it rained Jude and I had to squeeze into Mum’s room because we had too many leaks coming through our ceiling. The council never came to get it fixed no matter how many times we phoned.

We liked living there even so.

Martine liked living on the top floor because her boyfriend Tony lived right next door in number 113. Martine’s the oldest of us Diamond girls. She’s just sixteen. She says that makes her an adult and she can do whatever she likes. She looks exactly like Mum but she tries very hard not to. She’s got Mum’s lovely thick black hair but Martine dyes hers blonde. Mum likes to wear short skirts so Martine wears jeans, low slung so you can see the top of her thong when she bends forwards.

Jude liked living on the top floor because she knew how to get through a secret trapdoor onto the roof. She claimed it as her own private territory. Lots of the boys in our block wanted to climb up there too but Jude wouldn’t let them. She can get the better of all the boys, even though she’s smallish and only fourteen. She might be small but she’s squat and very very tough. Jude looks out for me and squashes people flat if they start teasing me. We’re not supposed to have favourites in our family but if I did have a favourite sister then it’s definitely Jude.

Rochelle liked living on the top floor because Martine was round at Tony’s so often she generally had the bedroom to herself. She could prance around pretending to be a pop singer, hairbrush for a mike, watching her-self in the wardrobe mirror. She’s always watching herself. I suppose I’d want to watch myself if I looked like Rochelle. She’s only twelve but she tries to look much older. She’s very pretty with long curly blonde hair and a heart-shaped face and pink pouty lips like one of those loveheart sweets. There is absolutely nothing else sweet about her. A lot of the time I simply can’t stick my sister Rochelle.

I liked living on the top floor because I could stare out the window and pretend Bluebell and I were flying over the rooftops, high above the tower blocks, over the ocean, all the way across the world to Bluebell’s birthplace in Australia. I knew that was where real budgerigars came from. When I made Bluebell talk she always started off saying, ‘G’day, Dixie.’ However, if you were rude enough to look up Bluebell’s bottom she had this little white label saying ‘made in china’. She didn’t talk Chinese but I sometimes fished out left-over cartons of chow mein and chop suey from the dustbins and Bluebell dug her beak in very happily.

I felt for Bluebell up my cardie sleeve. I didn’t often walk round with her perched on my finger now, even at home, because everyone acted as if I was a total nutcase. I stuffed her up my sleeve instead like a little paper hankie. I gave her feathers a secret stroke every now and then. I needed to stroke her now because Martine and Jude and Rochelle were all shouting and I knew it bothered her.

‘We want to stay here, Mum, OK?’ said Jude, sticking out her chin. ‘North Block’s much the best. South Block sucks. *And* Middle Block. North Block’s my *territory*.’

‘I’ve got my bedroom just the way I like it,’ said Rochelle. ‘It’s not fair, Mum – you never think about us.’

‘We can’t leave this flat, not now Tony helped do it up so swish,’ said Martine. He just helped her paint her and Rochelle’s bedroom but she acted like he did a complete *Changing Rooms*. ‘We’ll never get as good a flat, not on this estate.’

‘You’re right,’ said Mum. She eased her legs down onto the floor, rubbing at her big blue veins. Then she sat up as straight as she could and folded her arms across her big bosom. She gave us such a look that we all shut up, even Jude.

‘We’re not getting a better flat on this estate, OK? We’re moving, like I said. It’s all planned, in all my star charts. Every time I read the tarot cards the wheel of fortune comes up, symbolizing a new beginning. We have to act on it. It’s like our destiny.’

‘You and your stupid fortune-telling, Mum. You’re like a blooming gypsy. *My* fortune’s right here,’ said Martine.

‘There are too many bad vibes here,’ said Mum, shifting on her chair and patting her tummy protectively.

‘Yeah, and whose fault is that?’ said Jude. ‘Why did you ever have to get pregnant again?’

‘I can’t help fate, darling. It’s all in the stars.’ Mum looked up, as if the Milky Way was shining across our kitchen ceiling.

‘We did a project on the stars at school. And the planets and all their little moons. We had to draw them but my compass didn’t work so mine went all wobbly,’ I said.

‘I did that project when I was back in primary school. I got an A,’ said Rochelle.

‘Why do you always have to show off, Rochelle?’ I said. ‘Who cares about your stupid A grades?’

I cared. It was horribly unfair that Rochelle got to be very pretty *and* very clever. Jude wasn’t pretty but she was very clever, even though she didn’t try much at school. Martine was pretty but she wasn’t any good at lessons and couldn’t wait to leave.

I was plain and most people thought I was stupid.

‘Pipe down, girls. Now listen. We’re going to have a fresh start. We’re leaving this old dump altogether.’

‘No we’re not,’ said Jude, folding her arms too. ‘You can’t make us.’

‘Oh yes, we are moving,’ said Mum, and she nodded at the letter in front of her.

We’d all thought it was just another bill or some silly letter from the social. We hadn’t taken any notice when Mum was reading it, though I had wondered why she hadn’t scrumpled it up and thrown it in the rubbish bin.

Martine snatched the letter. ‘The Planet Estate?’ she read.

‘Isn’t it just perfect?’ said Mum. ‘See, Jude, it’s fate.’

‘Oh my God, it’s not even in London! We can’t go there. How can I see Tony?’

‘I think you’ve been seeing way too much of that Tony, if you must know,’ said Mum. ‘You’re too young to get serious.’

‘Oh, that’s great, coming from you! You had me when you were – what, sixteen?’

‘That’s my point, I know what I’m talking about.’

‘You’re moving us all to some weird estate in the middle of nowhere just to split Tony and me up?’ Martine wailed, starting to cry.

‘Oh for God’s sake, stop being such a drama queen! The whole world doesn’t revolve around you and your boyfriend. I’m doing this for all of us. We need a bigger place, now you’re all having a little brother.’ Mum patted her stomach.

She said it as if we’d all begged for a brother. We’d all been appalled and embarrassed when she told us she was going to have another baby.

‘You can’t *get* bigger than three-bedroom flats, not council,’ said Jude.

‘I’ve got my whole bedroom wall like this big pop collage. It’ll ruin it if I have to tear it all down,’ said Rochelle.

‘You can make another one. You’ll have more space. We’re moving to a *house*,’ said Mum. ‘A proper family house with our own garden.’

We all missed a beat, taking it in. I clutched Bluebell.

‘Will we be allowed pets?’ I asked.

‘Yes, Dixie.’

‘Real ones? Birds?’ I saw a green garden of trees with red and purple parrots and yellow canaries and blue budgerigars flying freely, cheeping and calling. Bluebell quivered, trying to stretch her faded feathers.

‘OK, if you’re having a bird I’ll have a big fluffy cat,’ said Rochelle. ‘I’ll have *lots* of those Persian cats with white fur. I’ll call them Snowy and Sugar Lump and Ice Cream and Ivory.’

Phantom cats, as big and white as polar bears, were stalking through my garden, climbing the trees, pouncing on all my helpless rainbow birds.

Jude saw me clutching my sleeve. ‘And *I’ll* get a big Rottweiler and he’ll swat those pesky cats with one blow of his big paws. Then I’ll put him on a lead and he’ll be our guard dog and he’ll always look out for you, Dixie,’ said Jude.

‘What are you on about?’ said Martine, still crying. ‘This is just crazy talk – dogs and cats and bogging budgies. It isn’t a *game*. We can’t move. I *won’t*!’

‘Yes you will,’ said Mum. ‘Stop shouting at me! I don’t want my blood pressure going up, it’s bad for the baby.’

‘That *badword* baby,’ said Martine. She said so many badwords we all blinked.

‘Stop that!’ said Mum. ‘I won’t have it, do you hear? I know you’re just upset because of Tony. You can’t really think that about your poor little baby brother.’

‘Yes I do!’ Martine shrieked. ‘You’re so selfish, Mum. You act like none of us girls matter. You’re just so obsessed with wanting a stupid boy you’re mucking up all our lives. You should hear what they say about us on the estate – what they say about *you*.’

‘Well, I won’t have to hear, because we’re moving. You can swear at me all you like but it’s settled and signed for, totally official,’ said Mum, rolling up the letter and smacking it on the table. She hit her wrist by mistake and rubbed it furiously. ‘Ouch! Now look what you made me do.’

‘Good!’ Martine shouted and she marched out, slamming the front door.

‘As if I care what those boring old bags have been saying about me,’ said Mum, having a sip of her tea. ‘Anyway, what *have* they been saying?’

I looked at Jude and Rochelle. Rochelle opened her big mouth but Jude gave her a quick nudge.

‘So, this Planet Estate . . .’ Jude said to distract Mum. ‘How did you hear about it?’

People are always saying things about her, but we don’t tell Mum, even when we’re mad at her.

‘I went down the council telling them all about the baby, wanting a swap, and this girl diddled away at her computer and the moment she mentioned the Planet Estate I had this weird tight feeling in my chest—’

‘Indigestion,’ said Jude.

‘*Intuition!* I just knew it was the place for us, especially when she said that all six blocks also had streets of houses with gardens, for big families.’

Rochelle was counting on her fingers. ‘Six blocks? There are *nine* planets – I remember from when we did them at school.’

‘Yeah, you’d better get off to school, you’re all late,’ said Mum.

‘No point going though, is there? Not if we’re moving,’ said Jude.

‘You bunk off half the time anyway, you bad girl,’ said Mum. ‘Well, you can make yourself useful going down to Tesco and bringing back as many cardboard boxes as you can manage. We’ll need them for packing.’

‘*I’m* going to school,’ said Rochelle. ‘I’m telling all my friends we’re moving. We’re really going to be living in a proper house with a garden, Mum? Can I have my very own bedroom? It’s not fair I always have to share.’

We *all* share. We started off Martine and Jude, and Rochelle and me, but it didn't work. It's better with Martine and Rochelle, and Jude and me. But it would be best if we all had our own bedrooms.

'Can I have my own bedroom too, Mum? Can all of us?' I asked.

'We'll have to see, darling. Maybe. I don't know exactly how many rooms there are, or how big they are.'

'I bags the biggest bedroom,' said Rochelle.

'No, no, I've got to have that for me and the baby. I've been thinking about taking out another loan. I hate all that cheap second-hand crap. Who wants gungy old stuff for their little baby son, eh? I saw this cot with a cute little blue bear motif—'

Mum was off on one of her baby-boy rants. She'd be talking Mothercare catalogue for the next ten minutes. Jude yawned, poured herself another bowl of cornflakes and went to watch one of her *Buffy* videos on the telly. She pulled her school tie off, rolled up her shirt sleeves and kicked off her shoes.

Rochelle packed her school bag ostentatiously, playing at being the good little girl.

I was still trying to think of nine planets. I hadn't really been concentrating when we'd studied them at school. I'd been too busy dreaming up my own planet. Bluebell and I lived there all alone in perfect peace. There'd be hardly any gravity on Planet Dixie so I could fly just like Bluebell. We shared a special mossy nest at the top of the tallest tree. It bore multi-fruit all the year round, apples on one branch, pears on another. Raspberries and blackberries and strawberries grew in leafy clumps around the trunk and grape vines dangled downwards, so that we didn't have to leave our nest to peck at breakfast.

'Dixie! Close your mouth! Stop that daydreaming, you look gormless,' Mum snapped.

'I was just trying to think of all the planets, Mum.'

'We're going to live in Mercury. Then there's Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Neptune and Saturn.'

'They've left out Pluto and Uranus,' said Rochelle.

'Yeah, well, who'd want to live in Mickey Mouse's dog or something that sounds very rude,' I said. I was still counting. 'So what's the last planet?'

'Earth, stupid. Where we live. Though you're generally on a different planet altogether, Dixie. Planet Loony.' Rochelle stuck out her tongue and made for the door.

'Hang on, Rochelle, take Dixie with you.'

'Oh Mum. I haven't got time to do a blooming school run. I'm *late*,' Rochelle said, on her way to the bathroom.

'I don't want to go to school today, Mum. Like Jude said, there's no point, not if we really *are* moving to this Planet place.'

'You'll get me into trouble,' said Mum, but she reached out for me and cuddled me into her. I leaned against

her, though I was careful not to touch her tummy.

‘OK, OK, little Dix, you can stay off school today.’

‘Hurray!’

‘Why don’t you like school, eh?’

I shrugged. There was no point getting started.

‘Who’s your teacher? Is she giving you a hard time? You tell her it’s not *your* fault you’re a bit of a dilly-dream, it’s just the way you were born.’

‘Mmm,’ I said, playing with Mum’s hair.

It wasn’t the teacher, it was the other kids. This girl had spotted me whispering into my cardie cuff and she’d pounced on Bluebell. She told all the others and they all did budgie squawks and screwed their fingers into their foreheads and called me Birdbrain.

‘Well, you’ll be at a new school soon when we’re living in Mercury. It’s the smallest planet, always associated with children – and here I’ll be, having my baby boy in Mercury. Come to that, I’ve always liked Freddie Mercury too,’ said Mum, chuckling. She sighed when I looked blank. ‘You know, the singer with all the teeth in Queen. Freddie . . . How about that for the baby’s name? Or what about Mercury?’

‘If you call the poor kid Mercury he’ll be teased rotten,’ Jude called.

‘Call him Justin,’ said Rochelle, coming out the bathroom. ‘Or Craig. Or Robbie.’

‘I want something really special. Unusual,’ said Mum.

‘What other singers do I like?’ said Rochelle. ‘I know, Baby Busted!’ She cackled with laughter and rushed off to school.

I relaxed and started plaiting Mum’s long black hair.

‘Help me think up a good name, Dixie. I tried hard with you girls. You’re all so lucky – dead individual. There aren’t any other Martines or Judes or Rochelles or Dixies round here. I’m stuck with stupid old Sue. There are *heaps* of Sues.’

‘There’s only one of you, though, Mum,’ I said. I finished one plait and tied it with a piece of string from the kitchen drawer, adding a few paperclips too as silver decoration.

‘What are you doing? Turning me into whatshername – Pocahontas?’ Mum said.

‘Hey, you could spell your name differently. S-i-o-u-x, like the native American tribe. *That’s* individual,’ I said.

‘Oh well, I’ll give it a thought. Hey, leave off now, it’s making me go all itchy. What about cowboy names for the baby?’ Mum thought. ‘Butch Cassidy?’

‘Yeah, but what if he’s a bit little and wimpy, Mum? You can’t call him Butch.’

‘The Sundance Kid? Hey, Sundance, that’s a glorious name! And the sun is a perfect symbol of male energy, right? Little baby, are you Sundance?’

Mum put her hands on her tummy, peering at it intently, as if she could see the baby inside dancing in the sun.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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