

Queller is facing her future with courage.

# Choosing survival

*Wit and hope infuse an inspirational memoir about a harrowing situation*

**PRETTY IS WHAT CHANGES**  
JESSICA QUELLER (VINTAGE)

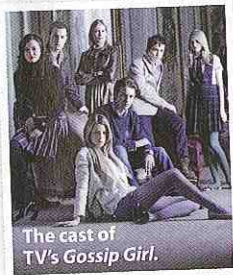
Jessica Queller was 34 and single when she discovered that, as she now puts it, "my own body could kill me." Less than a year after her mother, a breast-cancer survivor, died of ovarian cancer, Queller tested positive for the BRCA1 gene mutation, an indication that she was at high risk of contracting breast or ovarian cancer. "This truth," she writes, "would change the course of my life."

That altered course is chronicled in *Pretty Is What Changes*, an affecting memoir about a decision more women will face in this era of genetic prophecy: whether

to undergo a preventive double mastectomy. "I stumbled around in a fog, brooding over my existential dilemma," she writes. "To cut my breasts off, or not ... that is the question."

Queller grapples with body-image fears and her longing to be a mother, admires a mastectomy patient's new breasts and finally opts for surgery, choosing implants that reduce her D-cup to a B. She balances bleak moments

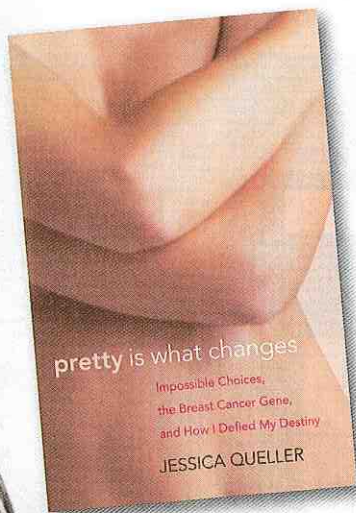
with wit and maintains a fierce independence: knowing she'll have her ovaries removed at 40, the author—now 38 and a *Gossip Girl* writer who divides her time between Los Angeles and New York—decides she will try to have a baby on her own. Her brave, inspiring journey lends credence to her message: "Scientific advances give us new opportunities to *live*," she writes. "Seize them." ★★★★★ —B.P.



The cast of TV's *Gossip Girl*.

## BACK STORY

■ "My own life was so heavy that writing for TV was an escape," said Jessica Queller, who was a writer on the sitcom *Gilmore Girls* when she discovered she carried the BRCA1 gene. Queller, who also worked on *Felicity*, is now producing and writing for the hit series *Gossip Girl*.



## BOOKS OUT NOW



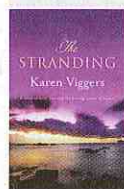
**THE STEELE DIARIES**  
WENDY JAMES  
(VINTAGE AUSTRALIA)

As a fan of *Out of the Silence*, the author's award-winning debut, I had high hopes for this second effort—and it didn't disappoint. Zelda Steele is the only child of famous and feted artists, who adopt her out to their wealthy patrons. Zelda begins keeping a diary, which her own daughter discovers decades later and gingerly delves into, eventually unravelling a startling truth. Reminiscent of Patrick Gale's *Notes from an Exhibition*, *Diaries* is a wonderful exploration of the tricky relationship between motherhood and art. ★★★★★



**THE SEANCE**  
JOHN HARWOOD  
(JONATHAN CAPE)

Fans of Sarah Waters (*Fingersmith*) will relish Tasmanian author Harwood's picture perfect rendering of Victorian England in *The Seance*, a brilliant follow-up to his similarly chilling and elegant debut, *The Ghost Writer*. This time, Harwood deftly handles a multi-layered narrative about the murky heyday of spiritualism, complete with manifestations, "ectoplasm" and entranced mediums, that challenges—but never tires—the reader. Lose yourself in this by the fire on a cold and stormy night. ★★★★★



**THE STRANDING**  
KAREN VIGGERS  
(ALLEN & UNWIN)

This story of coastal NSW, whales, love and loss is Viggers's first novel. It's always terrific to see a new Australian writer hit the shelves, so there is no pleasure in saying *The Stranding* mines every stereotype and cliché in the book. Country folk are suspicious and gossipy. City slickers are superficial and pretentious. Demonstrators have dreadlocks. Old people know things. Viggers has clearly researched whaling, but repeating what she knows never succeeds in making us care. ★★★★★