

# spotlight

Sophie van der Stap turned serious illness into nine new versions of herself. By Victoria Woodhall

## POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT

Sophie was only 21 when she learned that she wouldn't be heading to lectures again after the Christmas break, but rather to hospital to begin 54 weeks of chemotherapy for a rare form of cancer around her lungs. Her frank and funny memoir of her year with cancer, *The Girl With Nine Wigs*, is published this month.

The wigs represent different characters, but also 'a little bit of Sophie', and she wears them so as not to be defined or defeated by her illness. There's mischievous Daisy, sexy Blondie and sultry Uma (after Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*, when Sophie needed a fringe to mask her lack of eyebrows).

'My wigs help me hide what I want to hide and emphasise what I want to show off,' she explains. 'The wig I choose creates the space I need for the mood I'm in... Wearing my illness on the outside makes the situation easier for others and for me. I can't think of a better way to show my vulnerability, and myself, than by wearing a different wig every day.'

She is unsparing in her detail of dating with a wig - 'What if he wants to touch my hair?'; 'Am I brave enough to take my wig off in bed?'

It's a wig that comes to her rescue when her boyfriend leaves her. *Bebé*, a platinum blonde waist-length mane, is her 'breakover' hair - 'a little bit exotic, a lot sexy: perfect for my new single status'.

Today Sophie is 32, cancer-free and living in Paris where she works as a writer. Her book is already a bestseller in her native Netherlands and has been made into a movie in Germany. Her TED Talk, in which she introduces her nine wigs, describes wearing them as her 'cancer holiday'; there's nothing medically approved about them, she says, but Sue, Lydia, Platina and co saw her through.

■ *The Girl With Nine Wigs* by Sophie van der Stap is published by *Vie*, £8.99



Sophie today and, below, with five of her nine wigs, from left: Platina, Daisy, Lydia, Sue and *Bebé*



JANEY VAN IERLAND, REINIER RYDA