Jacky Daydream

Jacqueline Wilson

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Contents

About the Book

Everybody knows Tracy Beaker, Jacqueline Wilson's best-loved character. But what do they know about Jacqueline herself?

In this fascinating book, discover . . .

. . . how Jacky dealt with an unpredictable father, like Prue in *Love Lessons*.

. . . how she chose new toys in Hamleys, like Dolphin in *The Illustrated Mum*.

. . . how she sat entrance exams, like Ruby in *Double Act*.

But most of all discover how Jacky loved reading and writing stories. From the very first story she wrote, it was very clear that this little girl had a vivid imagination. But who would've guessed that she would grow up to be a bestselling, award-winning author!

Includes previously unseen photos, Jacqueline's own school reports and a brand new chapter from Jacqueline on the response to the book, her teenage years and more!

JACQUELINE WILSON

Jacky Daydream

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

RHCP DIGITAL

For Emma, with all my love


17th December 1945

1
Birth!

I WAS MORE than a fortnight late for my own birth. I was due at the beginning of December and I didn't arrive until the seventeenth. I don't know why. It isn't at all like me. I'm always very speedy and I can't stand being late for anything.

My mum did her level best to get me going. She drank castor oil and skipped vigorously every morning. She's a small woman – five foot at most in her high heels. She was nearly as wide as she was long by this time. She must have looked like a beach ball. It's a wonder they didn't try to bounce the baby out.

When I eventually got started, I still took forty-eight hours to arrive. In fact they had to pull me out with forceps. They look like a medieval instrument of torture. It can't have been much fun for my mother – or me. The edge of the forceps caught my mouth. When I was finally yanked out into the harsh white light of the delivery room in the hospital, my mouth was lopsided and partially paralysed.

They didn't bother about mothers and babies bonding in those days. They didn't give us time to have a cuddle or even take a good look at each other. I was bundled up tightly in a blanket and taken off to the nursery.

I stayed there for four days without a glimpse of my mother. The nurses came and changed my nappy and gave me a bath and tried to feed me with a bottle, though it hurt my sore mouth.

I wonder what I thought during those long lonely first days. I'm sure babies *do* think, even though they can't actually say the words. What would I do now if I was lying all by myself, hungry and frightened? That's easy. I'd make up a story to distract myself. So maybe I started pretending right from the day I was born.

I imagined my mother bending over my cot, lifting me up and cradling her cheek against my wispy curls. Each time a nurse held me against her starched white apron I'd shut my eyes tight and pretend *she* was my mother, soft and warm and protective. I'd hope she'd keep me in her arms for ever. But she'd pop me back in my cot and after three or four hours another nurse would come and I'd have to start the whole game all over again.

So perhaps I tried a different tack. Maybe I decided I didn't need a mother. If I could only find the right spell, drink the necessary magic potion, my bendy baby legs would support me. I could haul myself out of the little metal cot, pack a bag with a spare nappy and a bottle, wrap myself up warm in my new hand-knitted matinée jacket and patter over the polished floor. I'd go out of the nursery, down the corridor, bump myself down the stairs on my padded bottom and out of the main entrance into the big wide world.

What was my mother thinking all this time? She was lying back in her bed, weepy and exhausted, wondering why they wouldn't bring her baby.

'She can't feed yet, dear. She's got a poorly mouth,' said the nurses.

My mum imagined an enormous scary wound, a great gap in my face.

'I thought I'd given birth to a monster,' my mum told me later. 'I wasn't sure I *wanted* to see you.'

But then, on the fourth day after my birth, one of the doctors discovered her weeping. He told her the monster fears were nonsense.

‘I’ll go and get your baby myself,’ he said.

He went to the nursery, scooped me out of my cot and took me to my mother. She peered at me anxiously. My mouth was back in place, just a little sore at the edge. My eyes were still baby blue and wide open because I wanted to take a good look at my mother now I had the chance. I wasn’t tomato red and damp like a newborn baby. I was now pink-and-white and powdered and my hair was fluffy.

‘She’s pretty!’ said my mum. ‘She’s just like a little doll.’

My mum had always loved dolls as a little girl. She’d played with them right up until secondary school. She loved dressing them and undressing them and getting them to sit up straight. But I was soft flesh, not hard china. My mother cradled me close.

My dad came and visited us in hospital. Fathers didn’t get involved much with babies in those days but he held me gently in his big broad hands and gave me a kiss.

My grandma caught the train from Kingston up to London, and then she got on a tube, and then she took the Paddington train to Bath, where we lived, and then a bus to the hospital, just to catch a glimpse of her new granddaughter. It must have taken her practically all day to get there because transport was slow and erratic just after the war.

She was a trained milliner, very nifty with a needle, quick at knitting, clever at crochet. She came with an enormous bag of handmade baby clothes, all white, with little embroidered rosebuds, a very special Christmas present when there was strict clothes rationing and you couldn’t find baby clothes for love nor money.

I had my first Christmas in hospital, with pastel-coloured paperchains drooping round the ward and a little troop of nurses with lanterns singing carols and a slice of chicken and a mince pie for all the patients. This was considered a feast as food was still rationed too. Luckily my milk was free and I could feed at last.

Can you think of a Jacqueline Wilson book where the main character has a little chat even though she's a newborn baby?

It’s Gemma, in my book *Best Friends*. Gemma chats a great deal, especially to Alice. They’ve been best friends ever since the day they were born. Gemma is born first, at six o’clock in the morning, and then Alice is born that afternoon. They’re tucked up next to each other that night in little cots.

I expect Alice was a bit frightened. She’d have cried. She’s actually still a bit of a crybaby now but I try not to tease her about it. I always do my best to comfort her.

I bet that first day I called to her in baby-coo language. I’d say, ‘Hi, I’m Gemma. Being born is a bit weird, isn’t it? Are you OK?’

I often write about sad and worrying things in my books, like divorce and death – though I try hard to be as reassuring as possible, and I always like to have funny parts. I want you to laugh as well as cry. One of the saddest things that can happen to you when you’re a child is losing your best friend, and yet even the kindest of adults don’t always take this seriously.

‘Never mind, you’ll quickly make a *new* best friend,’ they say.

They don’t have a clue how lonely it can be at school without a best friend and how you can ache with sadness

for many months. In *Best Friends* I tried hard to show what it's really like – but because Gemma is pretty outrageous it's also one of my funniest books too. I like Gemma and Alice a lot, but I'm particularly fond of Biscuits.

He's my all-time favourite boy character. He's so kind and gentle and full of fun, and he manages not to take life too seriously. Of course he eats too much, but I don't think this is such an enormous sin. Biscuits will get tuned in to healthy eating when he's a teenager, but meanwhile I'm glad he enjoys his food. His cakes look delicious!

2
My Mum and Dad

I WAS FINE. My mum was fine. We could go home now.

We didn't really have a *proper* home, a whole house we owned ourselves. My mum and dad had been sent to Bath during the war to work in the Admiralty. He was a draughtsman working on submarine design, she was a clerical officer. They met at a dance in the Pump Room, which sounds like part of a ship but is just a select set of rooms in the middle of the city where they had a weekly dance in wartime.

My mum and dad danced. My mum, Biddy, was twenty-one. My dad, Harry, was twenty-three. They went to the cinema and saw *Now, Voyager* on their first proper date. Biddy thought the hero very dashing and romantic when he lit two cigarettes in his mouth and then handed one to his girl. Harry didn't smoke and he wasn't one for romantic gestures either.

However, they started going out together. They went to the Admiralty club. They must have spun out a lemonade or two all evening because neither of them drank alcohol. I only ever saw them down a small glass of Harvey's Bristol Cream sherry at Christmas. They went for walks along the canal together. Then Harry proposed and Biddy said yes.

I don't think it was ever a really grand passionate true love.

'It wasn't as if you had much choice,' Biddy told me much later. 'There weren't many men around, they were all

away fighting. I'd got to twenty-one, and in those days you were starting to feel as if you were on the shelf if you weren't married by then. So I decided your father would do.'

'But what did you like about Harry?'

My mum had to think hard. 'He had a good sense of humour,' she said eventually.

I suppose they did have a laugh together. Once or twice.

Harry bought Biddy an emerald and diamond ring. They were very small stones, one emerald and two diamonds, but lovely all the same.

They didn't hang about once they were engaged. They got married in December. Biddy wore a long white lace dress and a veil, a miracle during wartime, when many brides had to make do with short dresses made out of parachute silk. She had a school friend who now lived in Belfast, where you didn't need coupons for clothes. She got the length of lace and my grandma made it up for her.

She had little white satin shoes – size three – and a bouquet of white roses. Could they have been real roses in December during the war? No wonder my mother is holding her bouquet so proudly. Harry looks touchingly proud too, with this small pretty dark-haired girl holding his arm. They'd only known each other three months and yet here they were, standing on the steps of St John's Church in Kingston, promising to love and honour each other for a lifetime.

They had a few days' honeymoon in Oxford and then they went back to Bath. They'd lived in separate digs before, so now they had to find a new home to start their married life together. They didn't have any money and there weren't any houses up for sale anyway. It was wartime.

They went to live with a friend called Vera, who had two children, but when my Mum quickly became pregnant with me, Vera said they'd have to go.

‘No offence, but there’s not room for two prams in my hall. You’ll have to find some other digs.’

They tramped the streets of Bath but my mother had started to show by this time. All the landladies looked at her swollen stomach and shook their heads.

‘No kiddies,’ each said, over and over.

They must have been getting desperate, and now they only had one wage between them, because Biddy had to resign from work when people realized she was pregnant. There was no such thing as maternity leave in those days.

Eventually they found two rooms above a hairdresser’s. The landlady folded her arms and sucked her teeth when she saw Biddy’s stomach, but said they could stay as long as she didn’t ever hear the baby crying. She didn’t want her other lodgers disturbed.

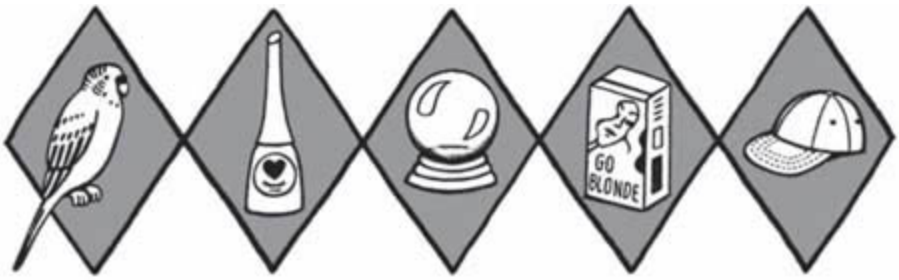
Biddy promised I’d be a very quiet baby. I was, reasonably so. Harry came to collect Biddy and me from the hospital. We went back to our two furnished rooms on the bus. We didn’t have a car. We’d have to wait sixteen years for one. But Harry did branch out and buy a motorized tandom bike and sidecar, a weird lopsided contraption. Biddy sensibly considered this too risky for a newborn baby.

I was her top priority now.

Which of my books starts with a heavily pregnant mum trying to find a new home for her daughters?

It’s *The Diamond Girls*. That mum has four daughters already: Martine, Jude, Rochelle and Dixie. She’s about to give birth to the fifth little Diamond and she’s certain this new baby will be a boy.

> ‘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.



I’m very fond of that mum, Sue Diamond, but *my* mum would probably call her Common as Muck. Sue believes in destiny and tarot cards and fortune-telling. My mum would think it a Load of Old Rubbish.

I wonder which Diamond daughter you feel I’m most like? I think it’s definitely dreamy little Dixie.

3
Babyhood

BIDDY SETTLED DOWN happily to being a mother. I was an easy baby. I woke up at night, but at the first wail my mum sat up sleepily, reached for me and started feeding me. She had a lamp on and read to keep herself awake: *Gone with the Wind; Forever Amber; Rebecca*. Maybe I craned my neck round mid-guzzle and tried to read them too. I read all three properly when I was thirteen or so but I wasn't really a girl for grand passion. Poor Biddy, reading about dashing heroes like Rhett Butler and Max de Winter with Harry snoring on his back beside her in his winceyette pyjamas.

I didn't cry much during the day. I lay in my pram, peering up at the ceiling. At the first sign of weak sunshine in late February I was parked in the strip of garden outside. All the baby books reckoned fresh air was just as vital as mother's milk. Babies were left outside in their big Silver Cross prams, sometimes for hours on end. If they cried, they were simply 'exercising their lungs'. You'd never leave a pram outside in a front garden now. You'd be terrified of strangers creeping in and wheeling the baby away. But it was the custom then, and you 'aired' your babies just like you did your washing.

There was a *lot* of washing. There were no disposable nappies in those days so all my cloth nappies had to be washed by hand. There were no washing machines either, not for ordinary families like us, anyway. There wasn't even constant hot water from the tap.

Biddy had to boil the nappies in a large copper pan, stirring them like a horrible soup, and then fishing them out with wooden tongs. Then she'd wash them again and rinse them three times, with a dab of 'bluebag' in the last rinse to make them look whiter than white. Then she'd hang them on the washing line to get them blown dry and properly aired. Then she'd pin one on me and I'd wet it and she'd have to start all over again. She had all her own clothes to wash by hand, and Harry's too – all his white office shirts, and his tennis and cricket gear come the summer – and I had a clean outfit from head to toe every single day, sometimes two or three.

I wore such a lot of clothes too. In winter there was the nappy and rubber pants, and then weird knitted knickers called a pilch, plus a vest and a liberty bodice to protect my chest, and also a binder when I was a very young baby (I think it was meant to keep my belly button in place). Then there was a petticoat, and then a long dress down past my feet, and then a hand-knitted fancy matinée jacket. Outside in winter there'd be woolly booties and matching mittens and a bonnet and several blankets and a big crocheted shawl. Perhaps it was no wonder I was a docile baby and didn't cry much. I could scarcely expand my lungs to draw breath wearing that little lot.

They were all snowy white and every single garment was immaculately ironed even though all I did was lie on them and crease them. My mother took great pride in keeping me clean. She loved it when people admired my pristine appearance when she wheeled me out shopping. She vaguely knew Patricia Dimbleby, Richard Dimbleby's sister, David and Jonathan Dimbleby's aunt (all three men are famous broadcasters), and plucked up the courage to ask her for tea.

I wonder what she gave her. Milk was rationed. Biscuits were rationed. Did she manage to make rock cakes using up her whole week's butter and sugar and egg allowance?

Still, the visit was a success, whatever the sacrifice. Sixty years later my mum's face still glows when she talks about that visit.

'She positively *gushed* over you. She said she'd never seen such a clean baby, so perfectly kept, everything just so. She said I was obviously a dab hand at washing and ironing.'

It's interesting that the one children's classic picture book my mother bought for me was Beatrix Potter's *Mrs Tiggywinkle*. My mother didn't like animals: 'Too dirty, too noisy, too smelly.' She usually turned her nose up at children's books about animals, but though Mrs Tiggywinkle was undoubtedly a hedgehog, she was also a washerwoman, and a very good one too.

Which baby in one of my books is discovered without any clothes at all on the day she is born?

It’s April, in *Dustbin Baby*. She’s abandoned by her mother, thrust into a dustbin the moment she’s born.

> I cry and cry and cry until I’m as red as a raspberry, the veins standing out on my forehead, my wisps of hair damp with effort. I am damp all over because I have no nappy. I have no clothes at all and if I stop crying I will become dangerously cold.

I’ve always wondered what it must be like not to know your own family. Imagine being told to crayon your family tree at school and not having a single name to prop on a branch. April doesn’t know who her mother is, who her father is. She doesn’t know who *she* is. So she sets out on her fourteenth birthday to find out.

4
Housewife’s Choice

BIDDY DIDN’T JUST keep me sparkling clean. She fussed around our rented flat every day after breakfast, dusting and polishing and carpet-sweeping. She didn’t wear a turban and pinny like most women doing dusty work. She thought they looked common.

She listened to the Light Programme on the big wooden radio, tuning in to *Housewife’s Choice*, singing along to its signature tune, *doobi-do do doobi-do*, though she couldn’t sing any song in tune, not even ‘Happy Birthday’.

When she was done dusting, we went off to the shops together. You couldn’t do a weekly shop in those days. We didn’t have a fridge and there was so little food in the shops, you couldn’t stock up. You had to queue everywhere, and smile and simper at the butcher, hoping he might sell you an extra kidney or a rabbit for a stew. Biddy was pert and pretty so she often got a few treats. One day, when he had no lamb chops, no neck or shoulder, he offered my mum a sheep’s head.

She went home with it wrapped in newspaper, precariously balanced on the pale green covers of my pram. She cleaned the head as best she could, holding it at arm’s length, then shoved it in the biggest saucepan she could find. She boiled it and boiled it and boiled it, then fished it out, hacked at it and served it up to Harry with a flourish when he came back from work.

He looked at the chunks of strange stuff on his plate and asked what it was. She was silly enough to tell him. He wouldn't eat a mouthful. I was very glad I still had milk for my meals.

She couldn't go back to the butcher's for a few days as she'd had more than her fair share of meat, so she tried cutting the head up small and swooshing it around with potatoes and carrots, turning it into sheep soup.

Harry wasn't fooled. There was a big row. He shouted that he wasn't ever going to eat that sort of muck. She screamed that she was doing her best – what did he expect her to do, conjure up a joint of beef out of thin air? He sulked. She wept. I curled up in my cot and sucked my thumb.

There were a lot of days like that. But in the first photos in the big black album we are smiling smiling smiling, playing Happy Families. There are snapshots of days out on the tandem, blurred pictures of me squinting in the sunlight but still smiling. I'm in my summer woollies now, still wearing several layers, but at least my legs are bare so I can kick on my rug.

There are professional photos of me lying on my tummy, stripped down to my knitted knickers, smiling obediently while Biddy and the photographer clapped and cavorted. There are pictures of me sitting up on the grass but I always have a little rug under me to keep me clean. There's even a photo of me in my tiny tin bath. What a palaver it must have been to fill it up every day and then lug it to the lavatory to empty it.

My grandma must have been stitching away as I'm always wearing natty new outfits. By the autumn I'm wearing a tailored coat with a silky lining, a neat little hood and matching buttoned leggings, with small strappy shoes even though I can't walk properly yet.

I had my first birthday. Biddy and Harry gave me a book – not a baby's board book, a proper child's history book,

though it had lots of pictures. Biddy wrote in her elaborately neat handwriting: *To our darling little Jacqueline on her first birthday, Love from Mummy and Daddy*.

I don't think I ever *read* my first book, but when I was older, I liked to look at the pictures, especially the ones of Joan of Arc and the little Princes in the Tower. I think my grandma might have made me felt toy animals because there's a photo of me sitting on the rug between Biddy and Harry, playing with a horse with a felt mane and a bug-eyed fawn.

The local paper did a feature on young married couples living in Bath and Biddy and Harry were picked for it. She's wearing a pretty wool dress embroidered with daisies and thick lisle stockings. Harry is wearing a smart suit with a waistcoat, probably his year-old wedding suit, but he's got incongruous old-man plaid slippers on his feet. Did he have to change his shoes the minute he got inside the front door in case he brought mud in?

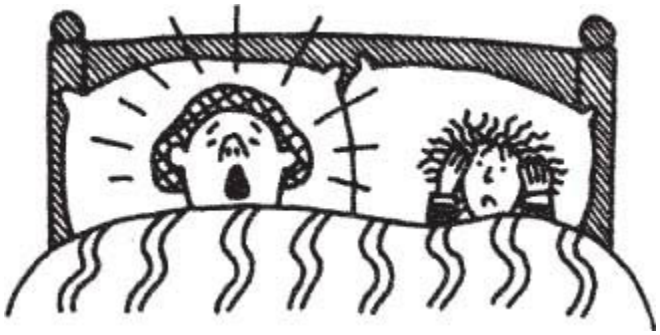
We look a happy little threesome, sitting relaxed in front of the fire. We *needed* that fire during the winter of 1946/1947. It was so cold that all the pipes froze everywhere. The outside lavatory froze up completely. There was no water, not even cold. Harry had to go up the road with a bucket and wait shivering at the standpipe. Biddy stuck it out for a few weeks, but then she packed a big suitcase for her, a little one for me, dismantled my cot, balanced the lot on my pram, and took us to stay with my grandparents in Kingston.

We stayed on, even when it was spring. Harry lived by himself in Bath until the summer, and then left the Admiralty and managed to get a job in the Civil Service in London, even though he'd left school at fourteen. They looked for a place to rent but half of London had been bombed. There were no flats anywhere, so Harry moved in with my grandparents too.

Which of my books starts with the main girl describing all the beds she's ever slept in, including her baby cot? For a little while they live with her step-gran, though it's a terrible squash – and my poor girl has to share a bed with this grandma.

It’s *The Bed and Breakfast Star*.

> I had to share it with her. There wasn’t room in her bedroom for my campbed, you see, and she said she wasn’t having it cluttering up her lounge. She liked it when I stopped cluttering up the place too. She was always wanting to whisk me away to bed early. I was generally still awake when she came in. I used to peep when she took her corset off.
>
> She wasn’t so little when those corsets were off. She took up a lot of the bed once she was in it. Sometimes I’d end up clutching the edge, hanging on for dear life. And another thing. She snored.



I love Elsa in *The Bed and Breakfast Star*. She’s so kind and cheery, though she does tell really awful old jokes that make you groan! I’m not very good at making up jokes myself, so when I was writing the book, I asked all the children I met in schools and libraries if they knew any good jokes, and then I wrote them down in a little notebook, storing them up for Elsa to use. There were a lot of very funny jokes that were unfortunately far too rude to print in a book!

There used to be several bed and breakfast hotels for the homeless in the road where I lived. I used to chat to some of the children in the sweetshop or the video shop. I knew how awful it must be to live in cramped conditions in a hotel, and many of their mums were very depressed. Still, the children themselves seemed lively and full of fun. I