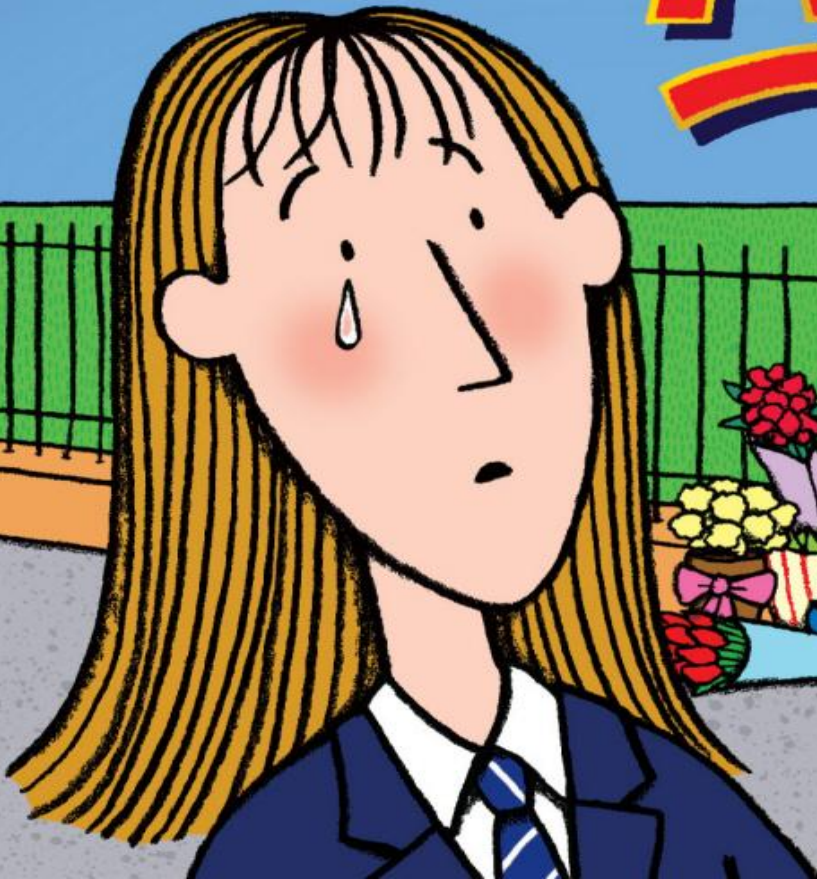


Jacqueline Wilson

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

Vicky Angel

Vicky has always been
full of life – and being dead
won't change that . . .



Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Things to Think About

Read on for the first chapter of *LOLA ROSE*

About the Author

About the Illustrator

Also by Jacqueline Wilson

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About the Book

Dear Vicky,

I still can't believe you're gone. I'm so lonely without you. It's impossible to know what to do without you here – you were always the one who made all the decisions for us both.

I keep thinking about you, and about that accident. My memory is so blurry already – but I have such a horrible feeling that it might all have been my fault.

I can't help wondering what I'd say to you, if I could see you again . . .

Love from your best friend always,
Jade xxx

Jacqueline Wilson

Illustrated by Nick Sharratt

Vicky Angel



For Elizabeth Sharma



People often ask me if there are any subjects I feel I can't tackle in a children's book. Death doesn't often get written into modern books for young people - though curiously it was a staple of nineteenth century children's literature. I remember sniffing over the death of Beth in the *Little Women* books! But you don't get many sad and sentimental deathbed scenes nowadays, especially not the Victorian sort where the dying child raises her head and gazes into the far distance, declaring that she can see beautiful angels reaching out for her.

We're not so sure about the afterlife nowadays. Some people firmly believe in a white cloud Heaven with a host of angels blowing their celestial trumpets. Some people feel you are simply born again after you've died, endlessly becoming new people throughout the centuries. Some people feel that death is the end, and there is nothing else to experience - it's as if you're sleeping for ever. Some people believe the dead live on in people's memories.

I'm not sure what I believe. In *Vicky Angel* I try to show what *Jade* believes. Her best friend Vicky has died dramatically in a road accident and poor Jade thinks it might be all her fault. Jade feels desperate and despairing at the thought of never seeing her best friend again - but then Vicky appears to her.

Vicky is a ghost, but she's not the white wafting spirit sort. She's as vital and funny and naughty as always, and Jade is overjoyed that she's come back. No one else seems aware of her, but that makes her all the more special. Jade doesn't want to talk to her parents or the people at school – she just wants to concentrate on Vicky. But gradually Vicky's presence becomes obtrusive, oppressive. Jade wants to lead her own life, not be lost with Vicky in a half life.

Sometimes people ask me if Vicky is a real ghost, or whether Jade is just imagining her. I think you'll have to make up your own mind!

I got the original idea from seeing wilting bunches of flowers and rain-streaked photos and drooping teddy bears hung up on railings at the scene of a child's fatal road accident. My eyes always well up and I find those little memorial offerings unbearably sad. I hope you don't find *my* story too sad. It has a kind of happy ending, I promise.

Jacqueline Wilson



VICKY'S MY BEST friend. We're closer than sisters. They call us The Twins at school because we're so inseparable. We've been best friends ever since we were at nursery school together and I crept up to Vicky at the water trough and she pulled a funny face and then tipped her red plastic teapot and started watering me. Vicky got told off for being mean to me but I didn't mind a bit. I just stood still in the sudden downpour, honoured at her attention. Mum was cross because my gilt hairslides went rusty but I didn't care. Vicky hadn't said anything but I knew we were now friends.

We stayed friends all the way through primary school and then we both went on to Downfield. Even Vicky was a bit quiet that first day in Year Seven when we didn't know anyone else. We know everyone now in Year Nine and they're all desperate to be Vicky's friend but we mostly just stick together, the two of us. We're going to be best friends for ever and ever and ever, through school, through college, through work. It doesn't matter about falling in love. Vicky's already had heaps of boyfriends but no-one can ever mean as much to us as each other.

We walk to school together, we sit next to each other all day, and after school I either hang out at Vicky's or she comes home with me. I hope Vicky asks me round to her place today. I like her home far more than mine.

It's time to go home now but we're checking out this big notice on the cloakroom door about after-school clubs.

We've got a new head teacher who's fussed because Downfield is considered a bit of a dump and so he's determined we're all going to do better in our exams and get involved with all these extra-curricular activities.

'It's bad enough having to go to school,' Vicky says. 'So who's sad enough to want to stay *after* – like, voluntarily?'

I nod out of habit. I always agree with Vicky. But I've just read a piece about a new drama club and I can't help feeling wistful. Ever since I was little I've wanted to be an actress. I know it's mad. I'm not anyone special. No-one from our estate ever gets to do anything glamorous or famous, and anyway, even the richest, prettiest, most talented kids can't make a living out of acting. But I just want to act so *much*. I've never been in anything at all, apart from school stuff. I was an angel in the Nativity play way back in Year Two. Vicky got to be Mary.

Miss Gilmore, who's head of English and Drama, had us all in *Toad of Toad Hall* when we were in Year Seven. I *so* wanted to be Toad, but Miss Gilmore chose Fatboy Sam. Typecasting. Though he *was* good. Very good. But I have this mad, totally secret idea that I could have been better.

Vicky and I were just woodland creatures. Vicky was a very cute squirrel with an extra-fluffy tail. She did little hops everywhere and nibbled nuts very neatly. She got a special cheer and clap at the end. I was a stoat. You can't be cute if you're a stoat. I tried to be a very sly sinister stoat, lurking in the shadows, but Miss Gilmore pushed me forward and said, 'Come on, Jade, no need to be shy.'

I didn't get a chance to explain I was being sly, not shy. I tried not to mind too much. Even Dame Judi Dench would find it hard to get a special cheer if she had to play a stoat.

I didn't want to be an animal. I wanted to play a person. When I'm at home on my own – when Vicky's busy and Mum's at work and Dad's asleep – I parade round the living room and act out all the soaps or I'll do Clare Danes' lines in *Romeo and Juliet* or I'll just make up my own plays.

Sometimes I'll act people I know. I always end up acting Vicky. I close my eyes and think about her voice and when I start saying something I sound just like her. I stay Vicky even when I open my eyes. I can feel her long thick bright hair bouncing about my shoulders and my green eyes are glittering and I'm smiling Vicky's wicked grin. I dance up and down the room until I catch sight of myself in the big mirror above the fireplace and see my own sad pale skinny self. A ghost girl. I always feel much more alive when I'm being Vicky.

'Come *on*, Jade,' Vicky says, tugging at me.

I'm reading the Drama Club notice one more time. Vicky's getting impatient.

'You're not interested in that weirdo club, are you?'

'No! No, of course not,' I say, although I'm extremely interested and Vicky knows I am. There's a little gleam in her green eyes like she's laughing at me.

I take a deep breath.

'Well, maybe I *am* interested,' I say. I know I shouldn't always let her walk all over me. I should try standing up for myself for once. But it's hard when I'm so used to doing what Vicky wants. 'You wouldn't join with me, would you?' I ask.

'You've got to be joking!' says Vicky. 'Miss Gilmore's running it. I can't stick her.'

Nearly all the teachers think Vicky wonderful, even when she's cheeky to them, but Miss Gilmore is often a bit brisk with Vicky, almost as if she irritates her.

'I know Miss Gilmore's dead boring,' I agree tactfully. 'But it could be fun, Vicky. A real laugh. Go on, please, let's. I bet you'd get all the best parts.'

'No. I wouldn't. Not necessarily,' says Vicky. 'I don't like acting anyway. I don't see the point. It's just like playing a silly kid's game. I don't get why you're so keen, Jade.'

‘Well . . . it’s just . . . Oh, Vicky, you know I want to be an actress.’ I feel my face flooding scarlet. I want it so badly I always blush when I talk about it. I look awful when I go red. I’m usually so white that the sudden rush of blood is alarming, and a terrible contrast to my pale hair.

‘I quite fancy being on television – but as myself. Can you see me as a TV presenter, eh?’ Vicky starts a wacky telly routine, using the end of her tie first as a mike and then turning it into a little kid’s puppet, making it droop when she tells it off for being naughty.

I can’t help laughing. Vicky’s so good at everything. I think she really could get on television. She could do anything she wants. She’d have no trouble at all making it as an actress.

‘Please, Vicky. Let’s join the Drama Club,’ I say.

‘*You* join the silly old Drama Club.’

‘I don’t want to join by myself.’

I always do everything with Vicky. I can’t imagine joining anything independently. It wouldn’t be the same.

‘Don’t be so *wet*, Jade,’ says Vicky. ‘You go. We don’t always have to be joined at the hip.’ She gives her own hip a little slap. ‘Stop growing, you guys,’ she says. ‘I’m curvy enough now, right? And as for you, Big Bum!’ She reaches round and gives her bottom a punch. ‘Start shrinking straight away, do you hear me?’

‘You’ve got an absolutely perfect figure and you know it, so stop showing off,’ I say, giving her a nudge. Then I slip my hand through the crook of her elbow so we’re linked. ‘Please please pretty please join the Drama Club with me?’

‘*No!* Look, you wouldn’t automatically join anything I wanted to go to, would you?’ says Vicky, tossing her hair so that it tickles my face.

‘Yes I would. You know I would. I’d join anything for you,’ I say.

Vicky’s eyes gleam emerald.

‘Right!’ She looks up at all the notices for clubs. OK, OK. I’ll go to the dopey old Drama Club with you if . . . you’ll join

the Fun Run Friday Club with me.'

'What?'

'There! That's settled. So it's Drama on Wednesdays after school and Fun Running on Fridays. What a starry new social life!' says Vicky.

'You are joking, aren't you?'

'Nope. Deadly serious,' says Vicky, and she whips out her felt pen and writes her name and mine on the drama club list and for the fun run too.

'But I can't run. You know I can't run,' I wail.

I've always been useless at all sports. I especially hate running. I get a stitch the second I've started and my heart starts banging and I get terribly out of breath and I can't keep up with the others. I've always been last in every race.

Vicky is good at running. She wins races when she wants but once or twice hangs back and jogs on the spot to keep me company. Sometimes she even takes my hand and pulls me along.

She takes my hand now, tugging me after her.

'Come on, let's get out of this dump,' she says.

'Vicky! Look, I've got to cross my name off. I can't run to save my life and you know it.'

'Don't get in such a state, Jade,' Vicky says, and she flicks her finger under my chin. It's only play but it stings quite sharply. 'This is *fun* running. Fun – like you're not meant to take it so seriously.'

I can't help taking it seriously. I see a picture of myself lumbering along last, beetroot-red and sweaty, while Vicky bobs about at the front with all these boys who really fancy themselves and keep flexing their muscles and flicking back their hair.

'I'm *not* going fun running,' I say, and I pull my hand away. I scratch our names off both lists and then stomp out of school and across the playground. Vicky dances round me, mocking. I hate it when she's like this.

'Lighten up, Jade,' says Vicky.

I don't feel light. I feel truly dark. Why does it always have to end up like this? Vicky always has to get her own way. If we do anything for me then somehow it gets twisted round so that Vicky still wins.

She's being especially annoying now, tickling me here and there, tweaking my hair, poking my mouth to try to make me smile.

'Don't go all moody on me,' she says, as we go out the school gate.

'Oh Vicky, give it a rest,' I snap.

She takes her schoolbag and swings it at me. She's intending to miss, we both know that, but I deliberately don't dodge out the way so it catches me hard on the hip. It really hurts.

'Oh Jade! Why didn't you get out the way?' says Vicky, rubbing my hip.

'Get off,' I say, slapping her hands away. 'I see. You hit me with your schoolbag and it's *my* fault?'

'God, I'll take a swing at your head in a minute. You've no idea how pompous you sound,' says Vicky, laughing at me.

I can't laugh at myself. Not even when Vicky pulls a silly face, crossing her eyes and sticking out her pink pointy tongue.

'Grow *up*, Vicky!'

'Who wants to grow up?' she cries

and she's in the road

and then

and then

a car

a squeal of brakes

a scream

a S C R E A M

silence.



I CAN'T TAKE it in. It's not happening. It's some crazy dream. All I need do is blink and I'll wake up in bed and I'll tell Vicky.

Vicky Vicky Vicky Vicky Vicky

I'm running to her.

She's lying in front of the car, face down. Her long red hair is hiding her. I kneel beside her and touch her hand.

'Vicky?'

'Do you know her? Oh God, is she . . .?'

It's the driver, a man in a grey suit with a grey face. He's sweating with shock. He bends too, and then tries to lift her.

'Don't touch her!' I can't bear his hands on her but he misunderstands.

'Yes, of course, she might have spinal injuries. Oh God, I can't believe it. I was just driving along - I was going slowly, only about thirty, if that, but she just ran straight in front of me—'

'Call an ambulance!'

'Yes! Yes, a phone—' he looks round wildly. 'My mobile's in the car—'

'It's all right, we've dialled 999,' says a woman, running out of a house. She puts her arm round me.

'Are you all right, dear? Come in the house with me—'

'No, I have to stay with Vicky.' I can't talk properly. My teeth are chattering. Why is it so cold? I look down at Vicky.