Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Little Darlings

written by

Jacqueline Wilson

published by

Doubleday & Co Inc.

An imprint of Random House Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Jacqueline Wilson



DOUBLEDAY

LITTLE DARLINGS
A DOUBLEDAY BOOK 978 0 385 61443 6

Published in Great Britain by Doubleday,
an imprint of Random House Children's Books
A Random House Group company

This edition published 2010

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Jacqueline Wilson, 2010
Illustrations copyright © Nick Sharratt, 2010

The right of Jacqueline Wilson to be identified at the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

The Random House Group Limited supports the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organization. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace-appproved FSC-certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurements policy can be found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment.



Set in 13/17pt Century Schoolbook by
Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd.

RANDOM HOUSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA

www.**kids**at**randomhouse**.co.uk
www.**rbooks**.co.uk

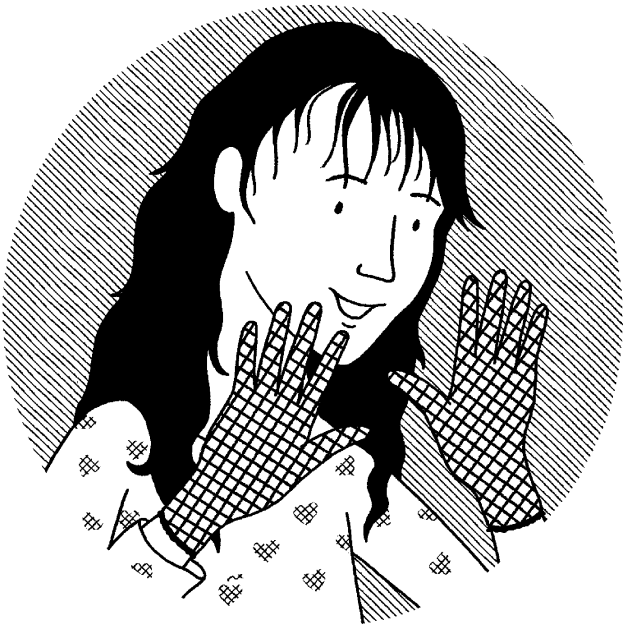
Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

THE RANDOM HOUSE GROUP Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

For Lisa and Millie



1

DESTINY

'*Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you . . .*'

I wriggle up from under my old teddy-bear duvet and prop myself on my elbows.

'Happy birthday, dear *Destiny*, happy birthday to you!'

Mum takes hold of the duvet, trying to work the two big bears' mouths like puppets, doing growly bear 'happy birthdays'. She's played this game with me ever since I can remember. I suppose I'm way too old for it now I'm eleven, but never mind, it's only Mum and me.

'Thank you, Pinky, thank you, Bluey,' I say, giving each duvet bear a kiss.

I know they're not very exciting names, but I christened them when I was only two or three. 'And thank you, Mum.'

I put my arms round her and hug her close. She feels so skinny I'm scared of snapping her in half. She doesn't diet, she just doesn't find time to eat very much. Now we've moved to Bilefield she's got *three* jobs: she has her cleaning job at the university early in the morning, then she does her home-helping all day, and then Friday and Saturday and Sunday nights she's started working the evening shift at the Dog and Fox, only that's our secret, because she has to leave me on my own when she's down the pub.

I don't mind one little bit. She leaves me pizzas and oven chips, and any fool can heat them up, I can watch whatever telly I want or play all my secret games, and when I go to bed Mum's always left me a little scribbled note. Sometimes it's a

Danny Kilman quiz – complete the last line of the chorus, silly stuff like that. Sometimes it's a message: *Night-night, my best girl. Sleep tight and hope the bugs don't bite*.

We really did have bed bugs once, when we lived on the Latchford Estate. Mum let this friend of hers and her two kids from the balcony above live at our flat for a couple of weeks after the friend left her husband, and they must have brought them with them. They moved on, but their bugs stayed – awful little black wriggly things. Mum used to catch them with a bar of carbolic soap and she'd scrub and scrub the mattress, but they kept on wriggling. So eventually we gave up on the mattress altogether and hauled it in and out of the lift and lumbered it to the waste ground behind the dustbins where everyone dumps their rubbish.

Mum went down to the Social and begged for a new mattress. It was, like, well, you live on the Latchford Estate so you're the pits. We can't help it if you're dirty, we can't go providing you with new mattresses every five minutes. So Mum said stuff them and we made do without a mattress for months, huddled up together on the sofa cushions with Mum's duvet underneath us and my teddy duvet on top. I quite liked cuddling up together but it hurt Mum's back.

I think that was the main reason she took up with Steve. We went and lived in his posh house and he bought us all sorts of stuff. He didn't just buy us both a mattress, he bought us brand-new beds. Their bed was a really fancy four-poster bed just like in a fairy story. My bed was just ordinary. Mum wanted to get me a pretty new pillowcase-and-duvet set. She had one all picked out with white lace and embroidered pink rosebuds. I'd have loved it, but I didn't want to have to fawn all over Steve, so I said I wanted to stick to my old teddy duvet. And I was glad I did. When Mum and Steve were in their fancy bed, I could curl up in mine with Pinky one side of me, Bluey the other, and we'd go into the woods and have picnics, just like that silly old song.

I often don't sleep very well, and while Steve was around I couldn't climb in beside Mum, so I had a *lot* of picnics with Pinky and Bluey. Sometimes on really bad nights we'd scoot off on holiday together, flying off to different foreign lands, sightseeing and swimming and sunbathing. I don't play all that silly kid stuff now, of course. Well, not often. And Steve's history, and his fancy house and his four-poster bed.

He started slapping Mum about and she put up with it for a bit, but then he started on me, and she

wasn't having that. So we did a runner, Mum and me, with two suitcases stuffed with our clothes and my duvet and Mum's make-up and our little CD player and all Mum's Danny Kilman albums and her big Danny scrapbook. We couldn't literally run with those cases – we could barely *drag* them along.

We ended up in a refuge where all the little kids kept crying and the big kids were fighting and one of the women tried to nick all our Danny stuff. Mum didn't half clobber her when she caught her – my little mum against this huge hippo of a woman, a good twenty stone – but *no one* messes with Mum's Danny Kilman collection. Then we got rehoused on another rubbish estate not much better than Latchford, but Mum said she'd learned her lesson, she wasn't getting mixed up with any other bloke now, not even if he lived in Buckingham Palace.

She tried to make our new flat into a proper home, painting all the walls different bright colours and making proper flowery-patterned curtains for our windows – though it was so damp the ceiling went black with mould no matter how many times she painted it and the curtains were wringing wet with condensation every morning.

But then we got our lucky break! One of Mum's

special regulars, Harry Benson, a dear old gent she cleaned for on Thursday mornings, got pneumonia and went into hospital and died. Mum was sad because she'd loved old Harry. She'd nip out to the shops for him several times a week, buying his *Sun* and his Players and a pint of milk and a packet of his favourite Jammy Dodgers, and sometimes she'd put a bet on for him down the bookies. He must have been grateful because he left her all his savings in his will.

He'd often told Mum he was going to do this as he didn't have any proper family to remember. She was very touched, but she didn't get too excited because Harry lived in a council flat like ours and all his ornaments looked like stuff left over from a jumble: an Alsatian dog with his ears broken off, little jugs with cracks saying *A present from Margate*, a faded picture of a lady with a green face, that kind of thing. But it turned out he had nearly twenty-five thousand pounds tucked away in the post office!

Maybe some of his bets paid off big-time, maybe he'd just scrimped and saved all his life, I don't know. Mum cried and cried when she found out. She took me to the crematorium with her. She knew they'd scattered his ashes in the rose garden so she went and crouched there, whispering to

Harry that she was ever so grateful, and she made me say it too, though it felt a bit weird talking out loud to a lot of red and yellow roses. I kept looking worriedly at the petals in case they had little flakes of dead people on them.

I hoped Mum would take us on a fantastic holiday, a real-life version of my night-time fantasies, but she made do with a day trip to Blackpool. (I did get to paddle in the sea, though it was freezing cold and my toes turned blue, and I had fish and chips and two ice creams and won a toy gorilla on the pier, so it was a great day out.) She used all the money as a big down payment on our very own house.

It's only a very little house, an ex-council maisonette on the Bilefield Estate. It's meant to be the best of all the council estates – hardly any druggies, a lot of the flats privately owned, and Bilefield Primary is supposed to be a good school. Mum's dead keen on me getting a good education. So we've made this brand-new start – but I can't help thinking it's a bit rubbish. I *hate* the school because I'm in Year Six and everyone's got their own little set of mates and I'm the new girl stuck without anyone. Not that I'd *want* to be friends with any of that lot.

Mum says we're much better off now, but she

can't mean financially because the mortgage uses up all her money. She hasn't ever got anything left over for treats. I can't have new clothes or a computer or an iPod, or even my own mobile like nearly all the other kids in my class. Mum says it's worth it to have our very own house. I'm not so sure, to be truthful. I particularly think this at times like Christmas. And birthdays. Like today.

'Now you sit up nicely in the bed, Birthday Girl, and I'll bring you your special birthday breakfast,' Mum says, eyes shining.

She's still in her tattered pink silky dressing gown. I look at my alarm clock.

'Mum, it's half past seven! You'll be ever so late for work!'

Mum grins and taps me on the nose. 'No, I won't. I've got Michelle and Lana to cover for me at the uni, and Louella's going to do my first old lady. Today's special – it's my best girl's birthday. Hang on!'

She dashes to the door and bends over a tray on the floor. I hear the flare of a match. Then she picks up the tray, chuckling to herself, and carries it carefully over to the bed.

'Oh, Mum!'

She's spread a slice of bread with butter and golden syrup, one of my favourite treats, and stuck eleven pink candles all over it.

‘Blow them out then, Destiny, quick! Blow them out all in one go and then you’ll get a wish!’

I blow hard and expertly, and get every candle. Then I close my eyes, wondering what to wish for. *I wish I had a best friend? I wish Mum didn’t have to work so hard? I wish I had a proper dad?*

Then I pick out my candles, sucking the syrup off the holders, and eat my birthday bread. Mum goes to make coffee, and when she comes back with it she’s also got a tray of parcels: one medium size, one a bit smaller, one tiny, plus two envelopes, one large, one small, with my name on the front in Mum’s swirly back-sloping writing: *Destiny*.

‘*Two* birthday cards, Mum?’ I say.

‘Save the smaller one till last,’ says Mum.

So I open the bigger card and it’s one Mum’s made herself. She’s cut all sorts of pictures out of magazines – dogs and cats and rabbits and ponies and sandy beaches and flowers and flash cars and great big boxes of chocolates and giant ice creams – and stuck them on a piece of paper to make a crazy picture.

‘It’s all your favourite things,’ Mum says.

I turn over the picture. Mum has inked a message in fancy lettering, pink and purple: *To my dearest darling dorter Destiny on her elevventh birthday. With lots and lots of love from Mum*.

I am ace at spelling but Mum isn't. I wouldn't point out her mistakes in a million years. I give her a great big hug.

'I do love you, Mum,' I say.

'You don't mind it not being a proper card?'

'I like your cards much more,' I say quickly.

I'm not expecting proper presents either. Mum often tries to make me stuff, or she gets things from boot fairs and cleans them up – but I'm in for a surprise. The biggest parcel is a pair of black jeans, brand new from Primark, still with the ticket on, and there's a new black T-shirt in the second parcel, really deep black and pristine under the arms, plainly never been worn or put in the wash. The only slightly weird present is the last one: a pair of little black net gloves.

'Do you like them? I found them on a market stall. I got me a pair too. They're a bit like the ones Danny wears in his early photos.'

'Oh yeah. They're cool, Mum. I love them,' I say, trying them on and turning my hands into little spiders scuttling up and down the bed.

'So, we'll have to find somewhere for you to go when you're all dressed up in your black jeans and T-shirt and your fancy gloves,' says Mum. She's fidgeting like she wants to jump up and down like a little kid. 'Open the other envelope, Destiny, go on!'

I open it up and find two train tickets – to London!

'Oh, wow!' I say.

I've only ever been to London once. That was on a weekend with Steve. At first he was in a very good mood and he showed us Buckingham Palace, where the Queen lives, and Trafalgar Square with the great big lions, and then we went to this huge great posh shop called Harrods and he bought Mum a dress, and Steve and Mum went out clubbing that evening – but the next morning Steve was in a very *bad* mood and didn't want to do anything at all.

'Where will we go, Mum?' I say. 'Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square?'

'We've seen them already,' says Mum.

'Oh great, so we can go to that shop, Harrods? Not to buy stuff, just to have a look round. We could play we're two rich Wags out on a shopping spree.'

'Yeah, well, we could do that when we get there in the afternoon, but we're going somewhere else in the evening. We're going to a *film premiere*,' says Mum.

I stare at her. She sometimes makes stuff up, just like me.

'No, we're not!' I say.

'Yes, we are! Well, we're not going to see the film itself – that's for the stars, naturally – but we'll be there looking at everyone arriving, standing on the red carpet. I've seen stuff like that on the telly. You can get really close up to the stars, even speak to them, and Destiny, guess who's going to be there – oh, guess!'

I look at Mum, shaking my head. 'I don't know,' I say, and I truly haven't a clue.

I don't know much about film stars. Mum's the one who hangs about for ages in WHSmith reading all the celebrity mags, not me. I can't quite get why she's so worked up, biting her lips, her fists clenched.

'Danny's going to be there!' she says.

'*Our* Danny?'

'Yes, yes!'

'But he's not a film star.'

'I read about it in the fan club mag. It's a film about a new band – it's called *Milky Star*—'

'Danny's got a new band?' I ask.

'No, no – oh, I *wish*! How wonderful to be able to see him play! No, according to this piece I read, Danny plays a major rock star, kind of similar to himself – but anyway, the film premiere's on Saturday and Danny will be there, it *said*. And I've been saving up for something special for your

birthday for ages, so I thought I'd get us tickets, and buy you a new outfit – because it's time you met him, Destiny. It's time you met . . . your father.'

She whispers the last two words reverently. It's such a very private secret we hardly ever talk about it. Mum's never told anyone but me, and I wouldn't ever tell anyone else, even if I had a best friend in all the world, because this is such a sacred secret.

My dad is Danny Kilman. I suppose there wouldn't be any point telling people even if it wasn't a secret, because who would believe me? Mum met Danny when she was eighteen. She'd loved him ever since she was my age. She bought all his albums and had posters of him all over her bedroom walls. She'd had a few boyfriends, but Danny was the only man she ever loved. She was thrilled when Danny and his boys were playing at the Apollo and she managed to get a ticket. She went with her friend Julie and they screamed themselves hoarse, and then they went to the Midland Hotel and hung around in the hope of seeing the band there – and they were invited in for drinks.

Mum said it was the most amazing night of her life – she simply couldn't believe it. She was

actually talking to Danny Kilman! She was sitting on his lap! She was kissing him!

She said he wasn't a bit the way she'd imagined. He was quiet, even a little bit shy, and very gentlemanly, taking such care of her.

Mum says they only had a brief relationship but it was a truly passionate love affair – my little mum and rock god Danny.

'I should have left home and given up my job and followed him to London there and then,' Mum's often said sadly. 'I should have realized you can't really have a valid long-distance relationship, not with someone like Danny. I don't really blame him for starting to go out with Suzy. I don't want to sound catty, but she practically threw herself at him, everyone knows that – it was in all the gossip columns. I decided I didn't mind him having a little fling with her. I mean, his first marriage was already over, so he was free to do what he wanted, and Suzy was already quite a famous glamour model herself then and very pretty – though I've always thought she looks a little hard. But then, just around the time I realized I was going to have a baby, my Dan's baby, there's this devastating headline – DANNY KILMAN MARRIES SUZY SWINGER IN WHIRLWIND VEGAS WEDDING – and I realized it was too late. What could I do? I couldn't tell him

and risk wrecking his brand-new marriage. It would be so unfair.'

I suppose Mum thought she would bide her time and wait. She never thought his marriage would last. But they'd only been married a few months when Suzy stopped partying with Danny half the night and started wearing loose tops and it became obvious she was going to have a baby. Danny's baby.

'Your half-sister, Destiny,' Mum said.

She's kept a separate scrapbook of the baby from the very first photos three days after she was born – 'Because she's family.'

I grew up knowing everything about this sister of mine I'd never met, Sunset.

'I bet Suzy chose the name,' said Mum, sniffing.

We have way more photos of Sunset than we have of me. I always liked the one of baby Sunset in her little white hooded playsuit with bunny ears. Mum tried to make me one, stitching ears on my tiny hoodie, only she got the shape wrong so the ears were too small and round and I ended up looking like a little white rat. Once Sunset was toddling around, Mum gave up trying to make me matching outfits because Sunset had such amazing designer clothes. When I was old enough, Mum and I would pore over them for ages,

repeating the French and Italian designer names reverently.

The photo I like best in the whole scrapbook is one of Sunset and Danny on a white beach in Barbados. Suzy is there too, in the shade in the background, her tummy swollen over her bikini bottom because she's six months pregnant with Sweetie, my next little half-sister. Danny is lying stretched out on the sand, looking really brown and fit, wearing funny long bathing trunks down to his knees, and Sunset is sitting beside him, busy burying his feet in the sand. She's got her hair in a topknot and she's wearing huge sunglasses – maybe she's borrowed them from Suzy – and a red-and-white striped swimming costume. She's grinning mischievously at her dad, so happy. I'd stare at that picture until I could feel the sun on my skin, hear the lap of the waves, feel the powdery grit of the sand as I smiled at my dad.