EMERALD STAR

www.randomhousechildrens.co.uk

Also available by Jacqueline Wilson

Published in Corgi Pups, for beginner readers:
THE DINOSAUR'S PACKED LUNCH
THE MONSTER STORY-TELLER

Published in Young Corgi, for newly confident readers:
LIZZIE ZIPMOUTH
SLEEPOVERS

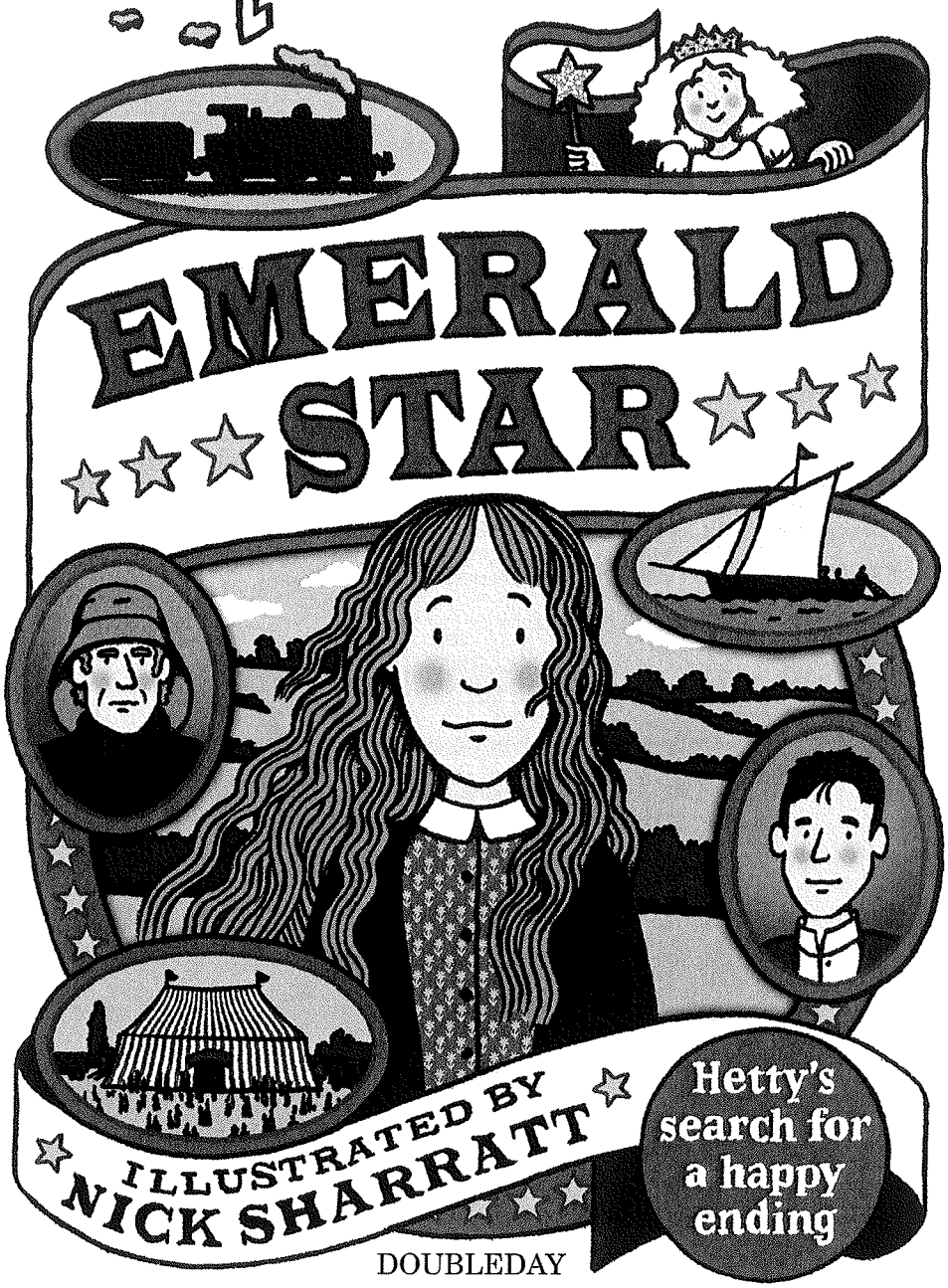
Available from Doubleday/Corgi Yearling Books:
BAD GIRLS
THE BED AND BREAKFAST STAR
BEST FRIENDS
BURIED ALIVE!
CANDYFLOSS
THE CAT MUMMY
CLEAN BREAK
CLIFFHANGER
COOKIE
THE DARE GAME
THE DIAMOND GIRLS
DOUBLE ACT
DOUBLE ACT (PLAY EDITION)
GLUBBSLYME
HETTY FEATHER
THE ILLUSTRATED MUM
JACKY DAYDREAM
LILY ALONE
LITTLE DARLINGS
THE LONGEST WHALE SONG
THE LOTTIE PROJECT
MIDNIGHT
THE MUM-MINDER
MY SECRET DIARY
MY SISTER JODIE
SAPPHIRE BATTERSEA
SECRETS
STARRING TRACY BEAKER
THE STORY OF TRACY BEAKER
THE SUITCASE KID
VICKY ANGEL
THE WORRY WEBSITE
THE WORST THING ABOUT MY SISTER

Collections:
THE JACQUELINE WILSON COLLECTION
includes THE STORY OF TRACY BEAKER *and*
THE BED AND BREAKFAST STAR
JACQUELINE WILSON'S DOUBLE-DECKER
includes BAD GIRLS *and* DOUBLE ACT
JACQUELINE WILSON'S SUPERSTARS
includes THE SUITCASE KID *and* THE LOTTIE PROJECT

Available from Doubleday/Corgi Books, for older readers:
DUSTBIN BABY
GIRLS IN LOVE
GIRLS UNDER PRESSURE
GIRLS OUT LATE
GIRLS IN TEARS
KISS
LOLA ROSE
LOVE LESSONS

Join the official Jacqueline Wilson fan club at
www.**jacquelinewilson**.co.uk

Jacqueline Wilson



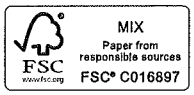
DOUBLEDAY

EMERALD STAR
A CORGI YEARLING BOOK 978 0 857 53105 6
TRADE PAPERBACK 978 0 857 53106 3

Published in Great Britain by Doubleday,
an imprint of Random House Children's Publishers UK
A Random House Group Company

This edition published 2012

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



Set in Century Schoolbook by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd.

Random House Children's Publishers UK,
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA

www.**randomhousechildrens**.co.uk
www.**totallyrandombooks**.co.uk
www.**randomhouse**.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 record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk.

For Naomi

With many thanks
and lots of love.

1

'What are you doing here, child? This is no place for a little lass like you. Come on, tell me your name.'

I drew myself up as tall as I could, standing on tiptoe in my clumpy boots.

'I'm not a child,' I said haughtily, though I knew I was so small and slight I did not look anywhere near fourteen. 'My name is . . .' But then I hesitated foolishly.

My name is Hetty Feather, but I had never felt it was my *real* name. It was a comical name chosen at random when Mama handed me to the matron at the Foundling Hospital when I was only a few days old. I had been christened Hetty Feather in the hospital chapel and people had been calling me that name in irritation and anger ever since. I was not a placid child and found it hard to stick to the rigid rules and regulations of the hospital. My hot temper and wild spirit made me stand out from all the other foundlings as clearly as my bright red hair.

I was plain, the smallest and slightest in my year, and cursed with my carrot hair – but I did have bright blue eyes, my one good feature. I fancied my mama might have called me Sapphire if she'd been able to keep me. When at last I found her, I discovered she really had wondered about naming me her little Sapphire.

I tried to call myself Sapphire Battersea when I left the hospital to go into service, proudly adopting Mama's distinctive surname. But they laughed at me in my new position and said Sapphire wasn't a servant's name. I did not *want* to be a servant. When I was dismissed in disgrace, I ran away to Mama, only to discover the dreadful truth – that she was dying of consumption. I had to earn my living all that sad summer by the sea, when I visited her daily. I could not find any respectable work at all so I chose a disreputable job instead. I fashioned my beautiful green velvet Sunday best dress into a mermaid costume and joined Mr Clarendon's Seaside Curiosities as a star attraction. I was Emerald the Amazing Pocket-Sized Mermaid. My new dear friend, Freda the Female Giant, called me Emerald every day.

'*Are you deaf or simple? What is your name?*' the innkeeper repeated.

I did not want to call myself Hetty Feather. I did not care for the name – and the governors at the

Foundling Hospital might well be trying to track me down. I longed to say that my name was Sapphire Battersea, but I had to be wary in this new strange village. This was where my dear mother had been brought up. Folk might recognize the name and run to tell my father. I wanted to seek him out myself and break my news gently.

The innkeeper tossed his head and turned to walk away.

'I am Emerald,' I blurted out.

The old men leaning on the sticky bar sniggered into their foaming pints.

'Emerald?' the innkeeper repeated. 'What sort of a name is that?'

'A fine distinctive name,' I said.

'What about a surname then?'

'I am Emerald . . . Star,' I announced, giving birth to my new self right that moment.

'Emerald Star!' said the innkeeper.

This time the old men laughed openly.

'She's cracked in the head!' he said to them, and they guffawed and drank and spat contemptuously in the sawdust at their feet.

'I'll thank you not to mock,' I said. 'Emerald Star is my stage name. I am very well known in the south. In fact people pay to come and see me.'

'What do you do then, Emerald Star?' the innkeeper asked, an unpleasant tone to his voice.

'I perform upon the stage,' I said.

I wasn't exactly lying. When I exhibited myself as Emerald the Amazing Pocket-Sized Mermaid, it was upon a sturdy plinth, so that people did not have to bend down to see me reclining there, twitching my green velvet tail on a little pile of sand.

The word 'stage' made the men's heads rock. They set down their pints and stared at me as if I were about to perform then and there. Some looked smugly disapproving.

'So she's one of they actresses,' said one, and tutted with his two teeth.

'Are you a turn at the music hall then, lass?' asked another with interest. 'I go regular on a Saturday night over at Brackenly. I've seen them all – Simon Spangles, little Dolly Daydream, Georgie and His Talking Doll, the Romulus Brothers, Lily Lark . . . Great acts, all of them. But I've never seen you.'

'I'm not a travelling player. I perform on the *London* stage,' I insisted, telling a terrible lie.

'You don't look like one of them theatricals, all painted faces and high-pitched voices,' said the innkeeper.

'More's the pity,' said one of the old men. 'What sort of a costume's *that*?' He pointed to my drab grey dress. 'You're nothing but a little maid, spinning us all fairy stories. I don't believe a word of it.'

'Believe what you want. I don't care at all. My

business is not with you.' I turned to the innkeeper. 'My business is with *you*, sir.'

'She wants her pint of porter!' said the old man, chuckling.

'I simply want a bite to eat and a room for the night,' I said. 'I have adequate funds.' I patted my full pocket. 'And you advertise both on the sign outside.'

It was the only sign I'd seen. I'd tramped the length and breadth of this bleak little Yorkshire village searching for rooms. It was a seaside of sorts, but it did not seem to have hotels and hostelries. Beautiful Bignor on the south coast had these aplenty, and every second house had lodgings. It had bathing machines along the beach, and pierrots and hokey-pokey men and all manner of amusements. This bleak village of Monksby had a small harbour and a stinking fish market and a few streets of mean dwellings. Now it was past ten o'clock, the only place with any light and life was this Fisherman's Inn.

I was desperately tired. I had been travelling all day, cooped up in the third-class railway carriage, my heart beating wildly at the thought of finding my father. I was not sure quite how I would manage this. I did not even know his last name. Mama had simply called him Bobbie. I had not liked to ask her all the hundreds of questions humming in my head

because she found it so painful talking about her past.

'Give the child a room, Tobias, and stop persecuting the poor little thing,' said the woman behind the bar. She was big and tough, with a great crooked nose like a picture of a witch in a storybook. She looked very frightening – but she was nodding at me kindly. 'Look at her – she's swaying on her feet with tiredness, and all you men can do is turn her into a little guy. You come with me, dear.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' I said meekly.

'Who are you to issue invitations, Lizzie? Do you own this inn?' said Tobias.

'No, but I own a human heart, and this girl needs food and drink and a bed for the night,' she said, and beckoned me behind the bar.

I ducked under the wooden top and Lizzie led me through a door into a gloomy kitchen at the back.

'You're shivering, child. I'd light a fire but old Tobias won't admit summer's over now. Here, put this on.' She took her own grey woollen shawl and wrapped it tight around my shoulders. I had proudly held my own when Tobias and the old men were baiting me, but Lizzie's simple little act of kindness made the tears start trickling down my face.

'There now,' she said, giving me a pat. She sat me at the table and bustled around the kitchen. She took a saucepan from the sink and tried to scrape it out. 'He had a fish stew for his supper but he's

cleared the pot. I'll have to scratch around for something cold for you.'

She found a loaf in a crock and cut me two thick slices of bread and a generous chunk of cheese. They were both a little stale but I ate them gratefully enough. Instead of a cup of tea she fetched me a pint of ale from the bar.

'There now, this will warm you up,' she said.

I did not care for the taste at all, but I drank a few sips obediently. When Lizzie saw I was leaving most of it, she downed it herself, and wiped the froth off her lips appreciatively.

'Now, I'll show you the privy. I'm afraid it's not very nice – you know what men are like, and you sound like a London lass, used to fancy ways,' she said, lighting a candle and leading me by the hand.

The privy was unspeakably disgusting. Perhaps it was as well I couldn't see it properly in the dark. Still, I had no choice but to use it and then wash my hands thoroughly at the outside pump. Lizzie led me back inside and up the stairs. I was shivering now, and so tired I could barely carry my small suitcase.

'Let me give you a hand with that,' said Lizzie, taking it from me. 'Is this all your worldly belongings? You haven't run away, have you?'

'Not exactly. I – I am running *to* someone,' I said.

'Not a sweetheart, I hope?' said Lizzie. 'Never trust a man – a shilling's your best friend.'

'No, he's family, not a sweetheart,' I whispered.

'That's better. Though how come you're looking for family round here? You don't come from these parts, do you?'

'I think my mother did,' I said. I looked hard at Lizzie, trying to gauge her age. The lines on her face were set hard and deep and she looked many years older than my dear little mama – though in the last few desperate months of her life *she* had aged visibly too.

'She was called Ida,' I said, clutching hold of Lizzie, suddenly desperate, and deciding I could trust her. 'Ida Battersea.'

I willed Lizzie's face to soften, to say, *Oh my goodness, Ida Battersea! She was my dear friend.*

But she shook her head. 'Can't say I've ever heard of her, dear. Anyway, let's find you a room. Tobias has three or four guest rooms up here, though they're seldom in use. We'll find you the best one, eh?'

The rooms all looked the same to me – bare and basic, with a stripped narrow bed and striped ticking mattress, a washstand and a cupboard, and a rag rug on the cold lino. There were stern moral pictures on all the walls. Lizzie held the candle up to a representation of a woman in the gutter guzzling from a bottle and clutching a crying baby, while an uncouth man carrying a pint pot beat his poor dog in the background. It was clearly preach-

ing against the demon drink – a strange choice for rooms in a public house.

'It's not exactly cosy up here, is it?' said Lizzie. 'Still, I promise you it's clean. I have a sweep and scrub every week or so, for Matty's sake. She was Tobias's wife and my dear friend – and now I try to keep the place decent for her. I trot up to the churchyard every Sunday, and when all the folk have gone away, their ears still ringing with the sermon, I go and sit by Matty and we have a little chat just like we did when she was alive.' She shot me a look, as if daring me to laugh. 'I know it sounds daft like.'

'It doesn't sound daft at all, it sounds lovely,' I said. 'I talk to Mama in my head and she talks back to me. Well, perhaps it's only my fancy, but it seems as if she does. She told me to come here, Lizzie.'

'Well, that's extraordinary, because this is a harsh, hard village without much comfort even for those born and bred here. Still, maybe she has her reasons. Now, I'll get you clean linen from the press and settle you down for the night.'

We made up the bed together, Lizzie nodding with approval when she saw me tucking the sheets in with precision. Years of hospital training had stood me in good stead in some ways.

'I'll come in early tomorrow and make sure you get a proper breakfast,' said Lizzie. 'Goodnight . . .

Emerald?' She gave a little snort. 'Though that's never your real name!'

'It is now,' I said.

Lizzie left me with the candle. She insisted on leaving her shawl with me too, and I certainly needed it. It was only early autumn but the north wind straight off the sea rattled the windows and I had only the thinnest of blankets. I wound the shawl tightly around me and laid out all my precious possessions on the bed: my little books of fairy tales, Mama's brush and comb and violet vase, a fairground dog, and the fat manuscript in which I'd recounted all my adventures so far. I turned the page, and put the date, *Friday September 29th 1891*, at the top of the page.

My name is Emerald Star, I wrote, in my best hospital-taught copperplate. *I am here in Monksby!!!* But in spite of the three exclamation marks I could not feel excited. Doubt made my heart thump, my stomach churn, and had me fidgeting from one side to the other in that narrow bed long after I had blown out the candle. Had Mama *really* said Monksby? Was it perhaps Monksford . . . Monkslawn . . . Monkton?

When we curled up together during those sweet stolen nights at the hospital, we had whispered the stories of our missing years. I had told Mama about the cottage in the country that had been my home

till I was five. I had told her about my dear foster brother Jem, though I found it painful talking about him then, because I thought he had forgotten me.

Mama wasn't so interested in any of my foster siblings but she asked endless questions about my foster mother Peg. I tried to give a truthful picture of that warm, work-worn woman but it was difficult remembering details. I just had an impression of her strong arms cuddling me close or giving me a royal paddling when I had been disobedient or overly fanciful. She frequently said I was more trouble than all her other children put together, but I knew she loved me dearly all the same. Mama could not see it that way when I told her tales of Peg. She sucked in her breath when I said I'd been paddled and became very agitated.

'How could any woman hit a tiny child, especially one as small and sensitive as you, Hetty,' she said fiercely, holding me close and rocking me as if the paddling had only just occurred. Poor Peg could do no right in her eyes. She asked what she'd given me to eat and poured scorn on my slices of bread and dripping.

'What sort of nourishment is there in chunks of bread and pig fat?' she said. 'No wonder you were such a little scrap of a girl with no flesh on your bones. And she was getting paid for your keep too! Didn't she ever give you any meat?'

'We had rabbit stew,' I said, licking my lips at the memory, but this didn't impress Mama either.

'Didn't she ever give you a decent plate of roast beef, or a proper chop or cutlet?'

This was unfair, because she knew they were simple country people and couldn't afford such splendid meals. Mama was totally unreasonable where I was concerned. She felt Peg had been a pretty poor mother to me – and frequently wept because she had lost the chance of mothering me herself for ten long years.

At first I had asked her many questions about her own past, but right from the start I could see she found it troubling to talk about.

She told me my father was called Bobbie and had bright red hair just like me and she'd loved him with all her heart – but he had left her to go to sea. I didn't know if he had left her because she was going to have his child, or whether he'd never known about me. It seemed cruel to question her because her voice always shook and her blue eyes filled with tears.

'He was a fine man, your father. All the girls in the village were after him, but he picked *me*,' Mama said proudly.

I wasn't so sure a truly fine man would get a young girl into trouble and then abandon her. Perhaps I wouldn't like this father at all if I ever

found him – but I was sure Mama wanted us to meet.

'Go and find your father now!' she'd said to me, her dear voice clear in my head even though she had been dead for weeks.

I had no address – I didn't even have his last name – but I knew he'd grown up in the same village as Mama. She'd said it was called Monksby – or some such name. I hadn't quizzed her because her tears spilled again when she talked of it. I knew her mother and father had turned her out when they discovered she was having a baby – they could not stand the shame. I cried too at the thought of poor Mama, destitute and sick, making the long journey to London to leave me at the Foundling Hospital.

I fancied I heard her crying now, curled up beside me in the cold bed.

'I'm here, Mama,' I said, reaching out across the bare sheet and clasping thin air. 'You mustn't cry. I will be all right. I will find my father and I will love him almost as much as I love you, and we will live happily ever after – as happily as I can ever be without you.'

I squeezed tight, imagining the pressure of Mama's thin fingers squeezing back, and I fell asleep, our hands still clasped.


4 5