



## Ballad for a Mad Girl

*Vikki Wakefield*

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## **Ballad for a Mad Girl** Vikki Wakefield

Everyone knows seventeen-year-old Grace Foley is a bit mad. She's a prankster and a risk-taker, and she's not afraid of anything—except losing. As part of the long-running feud between two local schools in Swanston, Grace accepts a challenge to walk the pipe.

That night she experiences something she can't explain. The funny girl isn't laughing anymore. She's haunted by voices and visions—but nobody believes a girl who cries wolf.

As she's drawn deeper into a twenty-year-old mystery surrounding missing girl Hannah Holt, the thin veil between this world and the next begins to slip. She can no longer tell what's real or imagined—all she knows is the ghosts of Swanston, including that of her own mother, are restless. It seems one of them has granted her an extraordinary gift at a terrible price.

Everything about her is changing—her body, her thoughts, even her actions seem to belong to a stranger. Grace is losing herself, and her friends don't understand. Is she moving closer to the truth? Or is she heading for madness?

## **Ballad for a Mad Girl Details**

Date : Published May 29th 2017 by Text Publishing

ISBN : 9781925355291

Author : Vikki Wakefield

Format : Paperback 309 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Mystery, Contemporary, Fantasy, Paranormal

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## From Reader Review *Ballad for a Mad Girl* for online ebook

### Text Publishing says

*'The touch of magical realism—or is it psychic ability that Grace inherited from her mother?—is key to making the plot work... Give this to readers who enjoy a bit of supernatural ambiguity in their crime dramas.'*

### Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

*'Wakefield's bone-chilling supernatural thriller... blurs the line between perception and reality, often folding in shrewd discussions of mental illness along the way. With whirlwind pacing, dynamic characterizations, and out-of-this-world spook appeal, Wakefield's writing is a possessive force of its own. Readers, ready your nightlights.'*

### Booklist

*'Evocative descriptions will make readers feel Grace's fear, frustration, and confusion, with sights, sounds, and scents that are as palpable as word on a page can be. Mesmerising, haunting, and hopeful.'*

### Kirkus Reviews

*'Fans of intelligent, unflinching, spine-crawling thrillers... will love *Ballad for a Mad Girl*.'*

### Books + Publishing

*'I'm obsessed with Vikki Wakefield's words. Seriously—I'd be happy reading her grocery list.'*

### Alpha Reader

*'Vikki Wakefield... proves again that she's the mistress of YA twisted relationships and disturbed characters, all memorable, all sketched with compassion, wit and insight, the adults as well as teens.'*

### Ruth Starke, Australian Book Review, Books of the Year 2015

*'Vikki Wakefield writes stories that will break your heart.'*

### Readings

*'[Wakefield's] characters are believable flawed and memorable and there are some good life lessons for young players.'*

### Otago Daily Times

*'Everything you already love about Vikki Wakefield—plus a spine-tingling supernatural mystery. *Ballad for a Mad Girl* is brilliantly creepy and thrilling.'*

### Fiona Wood

*'There's a dark side to being the funny one in the group. This is a piercing, creepy tale about a wild girl who could lose herself to a ghost. Vikki Wakefield's writing never fails to give me chills.'*

### Emily Gale

*'*Ballad for a Mad Girl* is brilliant, edgy and unsettling. Grace is a tough and sympathetic anti-heroine. I felt her grief and, even when I cursed her curiosity, was compelled to follow her to the story's satisfying, cinematic end.'*

### Simmone Howell

*'Vikki Wakefield is one of Australia's best YA writers. I couldn't put down *Ballad for a Mad Girl*.'*

### **Cath Crowley**

*'Vikki Wakefield is one of the most creative and daring authors writing for young adults today. Ballad for a Mad Girl is an Aussie YA Gothic tale that smartly uses the supernatural to explore the depths of grief and growing up, and the pain to be found in both. This is a caring and keening novel, creepy but tender and wholly marvellous.'*

### **Danielle Binks**

*'Ballad for a Mad Girl is an intense, unsettling read...Every page is charged with emotion.'*

### **Loony Literate**

*'Ballad for a Mad Girl is about the living, the dead, the long journey of grief, and what happens when the lines between them blur. A spooky, gripping rollercoaster ride!'*

### **Nadia L King**

*'In Ballad for a Mad Girl, Vikki Wakefield does it again, this time raising the bar with a riveting, beautifully told ghost story that draws you in until the very last page.'*

### **Kids' Book Review**

*'Vikki Wakefield is one of the most creative and daring authors writing for young adults today. Ballad for a Mad Girl is an Aussie YA Gothic tale that smartly uses the supernatural to explore the depths of grief and growing up, and the pain to be found in both. This is a caring and keening novel, creepy but tender and wholly marvellous.'*

### **ALPHA Reader**

*'Talented author Vikki Wakefield produced another gripping novel for YA readers...A clever mystery and insightful working out of newly adult relationships among characters as real and nuanced as ourselves.'*

### **Adelaide Advertiser**

*'A beautifully creepy book.'*

### **Booktopia**

*'With complex and genuine characters, a captivating narrative and the authenticity of a small-town setting, Ballad for a Mad Girl is the epitome of great Aussie YA.'*

### **Written Word Worlds**

*'Beautifully written, chilling and atmospheric, Ballad for a Mad Girl is a story with heart, horror, and hope.'*

### **Bookish Manicurist**

*'Ballad for a Mad Girl is a real page turner...Beautifully written. The gothic, literary tone adds to the creepy atmosphere.'*

### **Reading Time**

*'Ballad for a Mad Girl has all the features to appeal to its intended audience, with its tight plot, its claustrophobic country town atmosphere and a group of longtime friends growing up and sometimes growing apart. Many are sure to enjoy the tension and edginess of Vikki Wakefield's novel.'*

### **Magpies**

*'A tightly drawn story of compulsion...I could picture the landscapes so carefully created by Wakefield. The striking cover will impel young adults to choose to read it and they will be stunned by the extraordinary'*

*thriller within.'*

### **ReadPlus**

*'This is another great young adult novel by Vikki Wakefield that looks at the real world of a teenager, and what might be happening on the other side.'*

### **Big Book Club**

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## **K. says**

Trigger warnings: abuse, death of a parent (in the past), mental health issues.

My thoughts on this book can basically be summed up in one word: Que???

Like...the whole time I was reading this book, I just wasn't sure what the fuck I was reading. Was Grace dealing with mental health problems? Was she an unreliable narrator? Was there genuinely weird paranormal shit going on? I STILL DON'T KNOW.

I liked the writing. I liked Grace. I liked her friends and her family members and her stolen axolotls. And yet, I spent the duration of the book staring at the page in complete confusion.

I strongly suspect that this is a Me Problem and not a Book Problem. Buuuut the fact remains, this was super confusing.

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## **Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says**

Grace Foley is an adventurer, creating mischief and mayhem in the rural town of Swanston while continuing to endure the loss of her mother, the causality of a pedestrian accident. Swanston is acquainted with despair when Hannah Holt disappeared over twenty years ago, a presumed casualty of local teen William Dean who was then ostracised from the Swanston community, committing suicide and plunging from the quarry. Now Swanston adolescents are descending on the abandoned quarry including seventeen year old Grace. A night of frivolity is interrupted as Grace begins to hallucinate.

At home Grace is barely surviving, her father and brother Cody continue to mourn while Grace is increasingly isolated. Best friend Kenzie has become estranged and tiring of Grace and her antics, preferring the company of boyfriend Mitchell. While her friends have matured, frustratingly Grace believes they have abandoned her, except for her delightfully freeloading friend Gummer. Her terror is palpable as Grace begins to experience an apparition, believing Hannah Holt has materialised seeing Hannah's body has never been found. Authorities believe William Dean's unrequited love for Hannah lead to the young woman's demise, fascinating and incredibly disturbing.

Grace is an unreliable narrator compensating for her anguish with exhilaration. As children, Grace created bilateral friendships with other remnant children, those who were ostracised. On the verge of becoming adults, Grace displays an incredible amount of resentment especially towards best friend Kenzie, her relationship with Mitchell and popular friend Amber. Although Grace often appears conceited and obnoxious, Kenzie had already begun to distance herself from Grace's destructive behaviour. The circumstances of Hannah Holt and William Dean are sobering for Grace as she withstands an incredible character transformation.

*Ballad For A Mad Girl* may become a point of contention for readers, is Grace psychologically unwell or spiritual, a contemporary novel or paranormal. Determined by the disposition of the reader. Vikki Wakefield is a formidable author, the ambiguous narrative is intriguing and captivating. Absolutely phenomenal.

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### **chloe ???? ?? ?????.\*? says**

*I received an ARC of this from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.*

#### **Overall rating: 2.5 stars**

Soo... I got creeped out. \*cue creepy murder music\*

(ALSO I'M SO PROUD OF MYSELF I'M FINALLY REVIEWING BOOKS I SHOULD HAVE REVIEWED WEEKS AGO.)

I didn't know anything about the book before I started reading it. I liked the cover, so I requested for it. (Oh my goodness I sound so shallow.) When I started reading it I was kind of confused.

I don't understand what Grace is doing, and she has TERRIBLE friends. They don't believe in her when she confides in them, and even abandon her to deal with her own problems.

+ I HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS GOING ON??!! Is Grace insane, or is there a ghost trying to drive her crazy? I was so creeped out! It was very confusing, like in *We Were Liars*, I had no idea if Cadence went mad, or if she was dead. I HATE THAT FEELING. IT MAKES NO SENSE. AT ALL.

And Diesel is the worst pet ever. Instead of making Grace feel better (like a normal dog), he attacks her and spooks her out more when she's feeling scared.

Also, umm, the book keeps describing Grace as a funny prankster but SHE ISN'T FUNNY AT ALL? She made me laugh approximately 0 times. Her dad cares about her but she disobeys him all the time and arrrgh I just hate it so much.

The only thing I liked about this book was the mystery. I SO DESPERATELY NEEDED TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT HANNAH HOLT'S DEATH. The book was very gripping and I couldn't stop reading because OH, THE SUSPENSE.

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### **rachel says**

- Wakefield's writing style rubbed me the wrong way. I found it physically painful to read like someone was rubbing a grater over my eyeballs with every sentence. I have no patience for lyrical metaphors that try to subtly suggest what is happening. You can be poetic and clear at the same time.
- Grace was unlikable, completely and utterly unlikeable. I had no sympathy for her. She was an awful friend. She was not funny, and it is constantly said that she was meant to be. I literally did not even crack a smile once reading this book. Some humour or lighthearted moments would definitely have been appreciated. Grace was also judgemental and reckless and I wanted to shake her.

- I did not think the mystery element was engaging. It was rushed and messy. Elements of it were largely predictable, especially (view spoiler). I could just not get into it.
  - The pranks made me nauseated. I know this is a personal thing, but I do not find pranks amusing. At all. Ever. Embarrassing someone publically? Vandalism? That shit is not funny to me and never will be. All of Grace's antics were wasted on me.
  - Gummer was the reason I kept reading this book. I adored him. He looked out for Grace, even when she was shitty with him. I am so sad that he was brushed over in the end.
  - The lack of romance was refreshing. That is literally the only saving grace of this entire book.
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## ALPHAreader says

Vikki Wakefield is one of the most creative and daring authors writing for young adults today. *Ballad for a Mad Girl* is an Aussie YA Gothic tale that smartly uses the supernatural to explore the depths of grief and growing up, and the pain to be found in both. This is a caring and keening novel, creepy but tender and wholly marvellous.

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## jesse says

*"My heart is a room with an unwelcome visitor."*

This is Vikki Wakefield's fourth novel and we 'clicked' right away. Since I've admired and enjoyed her previous work, I knew I would love her newest addition.

It's gritty, it's raw and oh-so gripping. Even though I'm a big scaredy-cat, I adore the thrill just the same and the novel delivers on all accounts. But it's more than a mystery with elements of horror. The author excels at writing about the human condition and character study. Moreover, the writing shines the most when she peels back the wonderfully onion-layered characters and the readers get to see them in all their complexity. There are no heroes without a touch of darkness, there are no villains without good intentions. Because we're all messy, complex and sometimes fucked-up creatures.

Our story picks up with the protagonist, seventeen-year-old Grace Foley competing in a dare, one amongst many in a long-running feud between two local schools in Swanston. She's so good at fooling others and pulling pranks that no one believes her, not even her friends when she sees something strange while balancing on top of a pipe.

"Ballad for a Mad Girl" differs from what Wakefield has written insofar as it straddles the line between gritty reality and the paranormal. The reality here gets stretched to a breaking point and sometimes even snaps, only to fall back in place. The reader gets to cross it and experience a new, unexplainable dimension with creepy horror elements. In fact, I found the delicious creep factor to be right my alley, making my toes curl and heart pound but not shit my pants:

xxx

I look down. I'm standing in a puddle.

In the corner, the lamp flickers and fades, only to burn again with a hot brightness - too bright for a forty-watt globe. I launch myself across the room and onto the bed, shuddering and

panting. I clutch my pillow for protection and watch as the puddle grows, creeping in a perfect circle, as if the water is being drawn from beneath the floorboards. It's bottomless as a well and inky, like old blood. The patch of light on the floor begins to move as if time is in fast motion; the reflection travels metres in seconds, coming to rest in the centre of the puddle. Time stops. The water is no longer black but illuminated, with the rippling image of a white-painted window. (...)

The light from the lamp takes the edge off the darkness, but not enough to carry to the top of the stairwell. I press up against the headboard. Whatever it is, its breathing is deep and laboured, and it's getting closer. Now I can see a pixelated shadow, low, crawling, and an arm flung wide, slapping down with a thud, fingers grasping at the carpet. (...)

I let out a hysterical shriek. The thing stops moving. Downstairs, Diesel barks, and the thing lifts its head. In the darkness it looks at me; faceless, it looks *right at me*.

- ch11, p109

xxx

After the unexpected death of her mother, Grace along with her sad, embittered father and gruff, older brother have all been struggling to cope with the big blank she left behind. They awkwardly circle each other, talking but not really talking.

A tragedy that took place more than twenty years ago is somehow connected to her becoming unhinged and Grace is desperately trying to connect them, hoping it will help put her broken pieces together.

With Grace Foley, the author once again created a character so magnetic and deeply flawed, she feels real. She's so full of rage, cheekiness and grief she keeps everyone at a distance. Her once close circle of friends is slowly drifting apart, latching onto new friends. Grace can't distinguish what's real and not anymore, which makes this an engrossing read with her as the unreliable narrator. We see Grace falling apart, losing herself and putting herself back together. The story's focus switches between Grace's unraveling, the twenty-year-old mystery, her friendships, family and the death of her mother.

If you prefer to read novels with a clean, distinct style that seems effortless in itself, you'll love this one. The visuals, Wakefield put into my head making mundane things poetic and extraordinary through the smallest of details is sheer magic:

xxx

Ruby's is exactly as I remember it: eighties decor with faded plates and scratched cutlery, but filled with warm light and amazing smells. Dad's wearing a dress shirt. It's as creased as his face, but it's a revelation to see him wearing something other than hi-vis workwear.

ch9, p90

xxx

I dip my fingertips in the dust in the bottom of the charcoal box and paint cloudy smears, leaving a ghostly white silhouette in the centre. The dots still dance. If I squint they look like a line of marching ants. Or tiny numbers. All I have to do is play connect the dots. I pick up the tick and follow the numbers: hard, black lines. The charcoal shatters, but I go on, trying not to let the numbers get too far ahead or I'll lose them. I grind each piece to a nub, and when I run out I use my fingers and the corner of an eraser, working the dust, smudging: light here, dark there. An eye. Lashes. A bridge of nose and one slender arm, reaching.

ch6, p63

xxx

"Ballad for a Mad Girl" hits the ground running and kept me at the edge of my seat throughout the whole book. I don't know what else to say except that you should try and read for yourself!

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### **Tilly Booth says**

ALRIGHT LISTEN UP BOOK NERDS. This book is fucking fantastic and if you want to read something that is YA, Australia, a little spooky and wholly emotional then for the love of all bookish gods, PICK THIS BOOK UP. You will not regret it, trust me.

Vikki Wakefield is an auto-buy author for me. She's fantastic. Her writing style is one of the greatest I've had the pleasure of reading and her characters are relatable and real. I can honestly and proudly say that *Ballad for a Mad Girl* is my new favourite book of hers. I had no idea what to expect going into this book and considering I've been suffering a reading slump, this book as a godsend.

Haven't convinced you just yet? WELL JUST YOU WAIT PAL.

This book centres around, Grace Foley who is suffering from losing her mother. It follows her as she tries to continue on with life, her friendships and her relationships with her dad and brother. Already, shits going to be emotional. It's a journey of healing and you're inside this girls head as she tries to figure things out. Things aren't going to be easy for her though when some supernatural shit starts to go down. I kind of got a *Stranger Things* vibe from this book and I recommend if you're looking for something that has a spine-chilling feel then READ IT. Grace becomes haunted by an old mystery in her town. A girl who's body was never found and a boy's suicide a year later. She not only has to face the haunting of the mystery but her own ghosts as well.

"My heart is a room with an unwelcome visitor. . ."

HOLY CRAP. DID I MENTION. NO ROMANCE. I really, really have so much more to say about this book but i feel like this would become SPOILER CENTRAL and that's not my aim. My aim here is to convince you guys to read this book and then join me in the dark room, slowly going crazy about how good this book is. I'll be rambling about the characters, including all of the amazing, well thought out side characters and mumbling about the fantastic style that is Vikki Wakefield.

READ IT. READ IT. READIT.

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### **Amanda says**

*Ballad for a Mad Girl* is Vikki Wakefield's fourth YA novel. Set in the small, rural town of Swanston (nicknamed Swamp Town), we meet seventeen-year-old Grace Foley. Grace grew up on the family farm but after the death of her mother, her father moved Grace and her older brother to a house in town. Since then they just coexist. Grace feels suffocated by her father's rules, and breaks free by entertaining her friends with pranks and stunts, many involving the local gorge.

Grace's personality is so clear, right from the first page. She's mad, she's hurt, she's fed up with the life her father is trying to make them live. She doesn't want to live in a small house, she wants her life to go back to the way it was. Back when her mother was alive. To take her mind off things, Grace spends as much time with her friends as possible, but even then, things are changing. Her best friend Kenzie is dating Mitch and Grace won't accept being third wheel. She feels rejected, left out, left behind.

There is a horror element to this story, but it's just the right amount for someone like me who doesn't really do horror (unless it's reading a Stephen King novel during daylight hours.) The opening scene gave a subtle nod to King's novel, *Carrie*, and from then Vikki Wakefield wove the atmosphere in a way only she can do. There was a growing sense of unease and suspicion. There was a touch of unreliability, mystery, and an ominous history. All of this building to a climax I could not predict. The story was so intriguing I found it easy to immerse myself in Grace's life, to go along on her journey for the truth.

Vikki Wakefield excels at writing about loneliness and small towns, two things that are a major component of this new book. She also tackles grief in a sensitive way, showing how much Grace hurts and the lengths she'll go to to avoid her feelings.

Beautifully written, chilling and atmospheric, *Ballad for a Mad Girl* is a story with heart, horror, and hope.

Thank you to Text Publishing for my copy.

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## **Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says**

This review was originally posted on Happy Indulgence Books. Check it out for more reviews!

### **3.5 stars**

It's been a while since I've read a truly creepy book, but *Ballad for a Mad Girl* definitely satisfied when it came to the horror moments – a girl covered in blood, creepy visions, hauntings and an unreliable narrator.

Grace is still trying to cope with the death of her mother, but in the process, she fixates herself on a murder mystery that happened to a teenage girl 20 years ago. From the start, it's pretty obvious that she's already lost her grip on reality – she sees and hears things that aren't there which has begun to creep into her everyday life. Her friends and family are concerned about her and the relationship with her friendship group is already waning as they've distanced themselves from her.

Her perspective as an unreliable narrator is crucial to the story – crows would start dying, her dog would attack her, and she'd be talking to someone or seeing things that aren't really there. It almost feels as if we are experiencing things from Grace's perspective, as we aren't really told what is real or imagined and it is simply her version of reality. Because of this, the book can be quite confusing, particularly since we aren't told whether Grace was schizophrenic, whether she was being possessed or she was simply seeing things or making them up.

On top of all of this, Grace is dealing with the loss of her mother and she doesn't know how to get the help she needs. Instead, she fixates on the murder of Hannah Holt and finding the truth behind her death. The relationship with her father is strained and she can no longer relate to her friendship group, who have no idea how to help her. You don't really blame them, because Grace isn't really the warmest of people. There's an eerie, disconnected feeling with Grace's perspective and how she continued to lose her grip on reality which added to the horror of the story.

While I was really interested in what happened to Hannah Holt and her mother, I felt like the ending was too open-ended and I didn't get a sense of closure from the story. I really wanted to know what Grace was actually experiencing and her therapist was no help.

If you're looking for a creepy Aussie psychological thriller to add to your TBR, *Ballad for a Mad Girl* should definitely be on your list. It captures the feeling of a small town perfectly, along with a murder mystery, a mental health disorder and Carrie-like horror scenes.

*I received a review copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.*

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## C.G. Drews says

**So it's always exciting to find an Aussie book that isn't a flat out contemporary!** And I had nooooo idea what this was when I attempted to gnaw on the cover -- turns out it's a paranormal murder mystery. Ghost possession, hallucinations, teenagers with greasy hair. The whole kaboodle. **However the reason I wasn't particularly keen on it in the end is just that: I found the writing rather unemotional.** And I harbour this secret sneaky feeling that solving a murder mystery by ghost possession is cheating, dude. I mean. Sherlock would not be proud.

### THINGS I LIKED:

- Set in 'STRAYA, MATE. And I always appreciate the Aussie vibe because: mine.
- It was only 300 pages so a nice light read for the evening if you don't mind people bleeding out their eyes. (HAHA JUST KIDDING...but that kind of thing.)
- It contains pizza.
- I was really really interested to know what the heckin' hop was going on. A mystery is a solid win when it has you turning pages.
- It was creepily bizarre with Grace kind of "dying" while trying to figure out why she's hallucinating about this dead girl, Hannah Holt. Her body is all falling apart with these mysterious bruises and she has manic episodes and just woah. I WANTED ANSWERS.
- Nooooo romance!! I was super pleased! Grace was messed up enough with all these hallucinations without adding in smooching, thanks.

### THINGS I LIKED NOT SO MUCH AT ALL:

- Grace, unfortunately, is kind of a selfish brat. She's been through a lot (lost her mother/childhood home) but like the second circumstances give you liability to be rude/mean to people = the second you lose my respect.
- The book keeps *telling* me Grace is hilarious and a jolly joker. Did I laugh? My mouth did not even twitch. There wasn't any funny moments on page??
- I am just personally really opposed to "pranks". They scare me, ok. And the stuff people do for "a laugh" has always been terrifying in my opinion, even when I was a smol teen. I also can't ever help but think of how pranks affect people with anxiety or other disorders. So this is just a personal thing but...I never am onboard with prank storylines.
- The writing just felt unemotional. I didn't connect to anyone and I think it could've used more explosive writing to tell such a potentially creepy story?? Like at one point Grace falls down an open hole in a graveyard...but she's like "and now I am down a hole". It didn't even say what her emotion was...
- The book got to eat pizza and I did not. #rude

**ALL IN ALL: It was definitely an interesting story and I wanted answers. ALL THE ANSWERS, WATSON.** However it didn't pack an emotional punch, I didn't really care about the protagonist, and I didn't think the murder-mystery reveal was altogether unique. But c'mon. There's only so many options you have when writing about dead people. Either their dead or only mostly dead, and then WESTLEY WILL SAVE YOU.

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### **Alice-Elizabeth (marriedtobooks) says**

I recieved a digital copy of this for review via NetGalley!

*Ballad for a Mad Girl* is a lovezya novel about a girl called Grace. She's in her final year of high school and always up for playing pranks on students from another high school that sits next door to her own. After one challenge goes horribly wrong, Grace starts to experience something very creepy, a strange fixation towards an unsolved twenty year missing persons case of a young girl from the area called Hannah Holt. In a short matter of time, everything starts to change and friendships with friends start to crumble as Grace is keen to solve the mystery as well as deal with the ghostly encounters that plague her mind constantly. Although I really liked the mystery and paranormal aspects, I found the pacing to be a little choppy. The ending did feel rushed and some of the friends that Grace had I didn't like as characters. I would have liked to see some more thrilling moments with Grace trying to track down the supposed murderer of Hannah Holt rather than arguments with others.

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### **Carolyn says**

*"The gully looks bottomless tonight. Some say Hannah Holt is buried in the gully, her uneasy spirit slipping from crevice to shadow, sniffing for fear, and when she smells it she'll pull you down by the ankles with her teeth."*

Grace Foley is a teenager hoarding a lot of rage and grief. She's never got over the death of her mother or her father subsequently leasing out their farm and moving Grace and her brother to town. She's known for the pranks she plays, particularly on the kids at the catholic school next door to her government high school. She also thinks she's fearless and to prove it has the record for walking along the 40m pipe crossing the gully in the old quarry just outside of town and with a drop of 15 m to the bottom it's certainly not for the faint-hearted. But this time she finds herself thinking about Hannah Holt, the girl who went missing 23 years ago and William Dean, Hannah's boyfriend who jumped to his death from the pipe. Grace manages the test run across the pipe but on the way back, attempting to defend her record something strange happens, the world turns dark and scary and she freezes half way across the pipe, unable to move any further.

So starts Grace's quest to find out what happened to Hannah and William. She starts to feel their presence, imagining strange, almost supernatural events or is she just going mad? As her body and mind spiral into decay, her family and friends worry about her and her school work suffers and even she does not understand her relentless urge to find Hannah.

This is such a good book on so many levels. The writing is gritty and honest and the feel of life for teenagers in a small community is perfectly depicted. Grace's group of misfit friends are all interesting characters, learning to step out of their shadows in their last year at school in a small rural town to become independent adults. Although they care about Grace, they are already growing apart as they plan for the future and discover life outside of school. In contrast, Grace feels held back and out of touch as she struggles with the

ghosts and demons surrounding her mother's death and the need to resolve Hannah's disappearance. I would have liked to know a little bit more about Grace as the fun-loving, prankster she's described as before the pipe incident changed her into an obsessed, somewhat selfish creature as it was difficult to see this side of her and connect with her as her world starts to fall apart. The ending was a surprise and perhaps would have felt less rushed with a few more hints along the way, but was nonetheless very satisfying. Highly recommended for all YA and adult readers who enjoy good writing and an intriguing plot.

*With thanks to Netgalley and the publisher Text Publishing for a copy of the book to read and review.*

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### **Kirsty &#x1f4da;&#x1f4d6;♥? says**

I've read some really rubbish books lately so it was nice to finally read a good, creepy, spooky book. It's an Australian young adult book with a murder mystery, ghosts, teenage angst, grief, mental health issues and probably a whole host more things.

There are so many twists that turn then twist again although not to the point where you can't keep up. I enjoyed all the relationships; both teenage groups that love each other, fall out, make up and rinse and repeat. I liked the tone of the book. There's a good mix of creepy and the struggle with mental health. And my favourite teenage bug bear was avoided as there's no romance! It was nice to just have a good ghosts story.

Overall I just really enjoyed it and would recommend a read

Free arc from netgalley

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### **Marianne says**

*Ballad For A Mad Girl* is the fourth novel by Australian author, Vikki Wakefield. Seventeen-year-old Grace Foley's dad has grounded her (again) for a stupid prank (and yeah, she probably deserved it). But tonight, there's a pipe challenge on: all her friends will be there; her daredevil reputation and her record are at stake; she's got to show those Sacred Heart kids who's the champion, so of course she's going to sneak out. But at the quarry, when she's on the pipe running across the gully, something strange happens. She freezes, and later doesn't even remember how she got off the pipe.

Twenty-three years ago, seventeen-year-old Hannah Holt went missing, and the gully is where locals believe that William Dean put her body. The gully is where, a year later, he jumped to his death, many say from guilt. Maybe there are ghosts there, and maybe they're haunting Grace, because now, everything in her life has gotten weird: Diesel the dog is acting spooked around her; she's seeing strange things in corners; she drew something in art class she just can't explain; the TV and the clock radio are acting up; and something's not right with the friends she's had since third class (although maybe that's not so recent).

What a great tale Wakefield gives the reader. An original plot with a twist or two and a good dose of the paranormal to keep it interesting. Wakefield's characters are quirky but credible, their dialogue is authentic, and she perfectly captures the feel of a small town. As Grace and her friends deal with growing up while trying to remain loyal to each other, they encounter all the usual adolescent afflictions including raging hormones and peer pressure, but also grief. Domestic violence also features. This is a brilliant coming-of-age tale that will certainly have wider appeal than the Young Adult genre in which it sits. Recommended.

