

# CAN YOU SEE ME?

Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott



SCHOLASTIC PRESS

*New York*

Text copyright © 2019 by Rebecca Westcott

Diary entries copyright © 2019 by Libby Scott

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

First published in the UK by Scholastic Children's Books, an imprint of Scholastic Ltd., Euston House, 24 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1DB, UK.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

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 written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Scott, Libby, author. | Westcott, Rebecca, author.

Title: Can you see me? / Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott.

Description: New York: Scholastic Press, 2020. | Audience: Ages 9–11. |

Audience: Grades 4–6. | Summary: Eleven-year-old Tally is starting sixth grade at Kingswood Academy and she really wants to fit in, which means somehow hiding her autism, hypersensitivity to touch, and true self, and trying to act “normal” like her former best friend, Layla, who is distancing herself from Tally, and her fourteen-year-old sister, Nell, who is always angry with Tally for being different; but as she records her thoughts and anxieties in her coping diary, Tally begins to wonder—what is “normal” anyway?

Identifiers: LCCN 2019033551 (print) | LCCN 2019033552 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781338608915 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781338608922 (ebk)

Subjects: LCSH: Autistic girls—Juvenile fiction. | Identity (Psychology)—Juvenile fiction. | Sisters—Juvenile fiction. | Best friends—Juvenile fiction. |

Diaries—Juvenile fiction. | Secrecy—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Autism—

Fiction. | Identity—Fiction. | Sisters—Fiction. | Best friends—Fiction. |

Friendship—Fiction. | Diaries—Fiction. | Secrets—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.S336849 Can 220 (print) |

LCC PZ7.1.S336849 (ebook) | DDC 813.6 [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019033551>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 20 21 22 23 24

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First US edition, March 2020

Book design by Abby Denning and Elizabeth B. Parisi

# Chapter 1

---

**L**ook up. Go on, do it now. Stretch back your neck and stare up, as far as you can. And then a little bit more. That's where you're going to have to look if you want to find Tally Olivia Adams. Up where the sky begins. Up where the only rule is gravity. Up where the world seems small and not so important. Up where the possibilities are endless.

It is a final-days-of-summer kind of afternoon. Fluffy white clouds are scudding across the pale blue sky and the air has a hint of something fresh, something new. A normal day on a normal street in the backyard of a normal house belonging to a completely normal family. Read that last sentence again, out loud to yourself. It's funny how if you say it enough times, the word *normal* sounds anything but.

So, a normal day. But the girl standing on the roof of the shed in the backyard is not normal in the slightest. She is a warrior, fierce and brave, surveying the land before her. She's a mountain climber, pausing for breath after scaling the heady heights of Everest. She is a trapeze artist, about to step out onto the wire and dazzle the crowds beneath her.

Her right foot rises in the air, shaking slightly as she contemplates the drop. One wrong move and it will all be over.

“Hey! Get down!”

The shout makes Tally wobble and for a split second it seems as if she will tumble to earth. But then her foot makes contact with the roof and she lowers herself to the ridge, sitting with her legs dangling out in front of her.

“You nearly made me fall.” Tally glares at Nell accusingly. “Are you trying to kill me?”

Nell puts her hands on her hips. “You seem to be doing a good enough job of that by yourself. What are you doing? You know Mom and Dad said that you aren't allowed to go up there anymore. Not after last time.”

Tally shrugs. “It's my place. I'm practicing the things I learned in circus school last week. And I can't think anywhere else.”

“It’s summer vacation.” Nell taps her foot impatiently. “There isn’t anything *to* think about, so just get down.”

Tally wonders if her sister has always been this unimaginative or if it’s something that happens when you start high school. If that’s the case, then she’s even less eager for this week to be over and September to begin.

“Is it true that people flush your head down the toilet when you’re in sixth grade?” she asks Nell. “Because if it is, then I won’t be able to drink anything all day in case it makes me need to use the bathroom, which means that I will be seriously dehydrated and my brain won’t work very effectively and I’m probably going to fail every single test. And it won’t even be my fault because all I’ll be trying to do is stay as far away from the school bathrooms as humanly possible.”

Nell snorts. “Only the mouthy kids that don’t know when to shut up.”

A warm breeze flutters through the yard, picking up the leaves that have fallen onto the lawn. They weren’t there last week and their russet-red shine against the long green grass is a reminder that the summer can’t last forever. Her days at home are numbered.

“What happens if I get lost?” Tally’s voice is quiet.

Nell pushes her hair out of her eyes and squints up at the roof.

“Then the two-headed monster that lives in the janitor’s closet will find you,” she says as menacingly as she possibly can. “And it will drag you in and keep you hostage among the brooms and mops and buckets. And you will have to stay at school for the rest of your life.”

Tally doesn’t even blink. She isn’t afraid of made-up monsters. There are far scarier things roaming the school corridors than two-headed beasts, she’s very sure of that.

“Come on, Tally.” Nell is impatient now. “Get down from there. I’m totally not in the mood for Mom and Dad giving me another lecture about how I should be keeping an eye on you. Like you’re some kind of baby or something.”

“I’m not a baby. And I didn’t ask you to come out here.” Tally glares down at Nell. “Just go away and pretend that you didn’t see me.”

“Well, you’re lucky it was me that caught you and not them.” Nell frowns, imagining the argument that would have followed if her parents had spotted their youngest daughter on top of the shed.

Tally shakes her head. She doesn’t feel very lucky to have moaning, nagging, boring Nell ruining her thinking time.

“You’ll be grounded for a week if they see you up there,” warns Nell. “They won’t even let you into the backyard if they think they can’t trust you.”

Tally looks away from her big sister and across the fence toward the street. She knows that if she stands up, she can see between the houses and as far as the park. She can see farther than Nell can. Up here she is weightless and free. The opposite of grounded.

“Where are they?” she asks Nell. “Mom and Dad.”

Nell glances back toward the house, which is almost hidden by the old apple tree, sagging under the weight of all the unpicked fruit. The entire yard has turned into a jungle this summer.

“They’re out by the front gate, talking to Mrs. Jessop and her gross dog,” she tells Tally. “I don’t know how she can take it for walks when it looks like that. It’s embarrassing.”

“It’s not Rupert’s fault that he’s got three legs.” Tally is unimpressed with Nell’s attitude. “Don’t be so horrible. Think about how you’d feel if you had three legs. You wouldn’t like it if people thought you looked gross, would you?”

Nell rolls her eyes. “Whatever. Now get down before they come out here and see you.”

She waits for a response but Tally isn’t listening. Instead, she is clambering to her feet and balancing on the roof,

shading her eyes with one hand as she peers into the distance.

“I think there’s a fair going up in the park. There’s a load of people and trailers and I can see a big truck that looks like it has bumper cars on the back.”

“What?” Nell squints up at Tally. “That can’t be right. The fair isn’t coming for months. And will you please get down before you fall off and I get the blame?”

“I’m not going to fall off. And I *can* see the fair, actually.”

“Are you sure?” Nell strains to stand on her tiptoes and look in the direction of the park, but she can’t see a thing.

The fair is one of the few things that they both agree is a *good thing*. It doesn’t matter that Nell is fourteen and Tally is only eleven—when the fair is in town they are both equally excited.

Tally plants her feet more firmly and leans forward, trying to identify the different trucks and vans. “I think I can see the Twirler. And there’s something that could be part of the carousel—it looks like one of the horses, anyway!”

There’s the sound of scrambling beneath her and suddenly Nell’s head pops up from the top of the ladder.

“Where? Are you sure it’s actually setting up in our park?” Her voice is eager with an added tinge of apprehension. This wouldn’t be the first time that Tally has gotten things wrong.



“See for yourself.” Tally waves her hand toward the distance. “If you don’t believe me.”

There’s a moment of hesitation and then Nell climbs the last few rungs and crawls her way up the roof to where Tally is standing.

“I still can’t see anything.”

“I can see the haunted house!” Tally looks down at Nell, a huge beaming smile spreading across her face. “I really can!”

It’s too much for Nell. She pulls herself to her feet and balances alongside Tally on the ridge of the shed, her hand reaching out and gripping Tally’s so tightly that the blood throbs and hums in her fingers.

“You’re right! It *is* the fair!”

“I told you.” Tally doesn’t mind her sister’s lack of faith. She knew that she was right all along.

Together, they watch as the trucks are opened and machinery is pulled out and assembled. It’s almost magic, the way that the ordinary, clunky bits of metal fit together to create something brilliant.

“I’m sorry that I was being stupid about you starting sixth grade,” murmurs Nell. “You don’t need to worry, Tally. I’ll be right there if you need me, and it’s not that scary. Nobody is going to flush your head down the toilet, I promise. You’ll be

fine—school is way less frightening than the haunted house and you can handle that!”

Tally doesn't reply because this is a very ignorant thing for Nell to have said and, sometimes, ignorant comments are best ignored. You can't compare the haunted house to Kingswood Academy. It just doesn't work.

The haunted house is Tally and Nell's thing and they always go together. Tally loves the delicious thrill of the spooky music and weird sound effects and the way that, no matter how many times she's been on the ride, she always jumps in her seat when the sinister rattling skeleton lurches out at them toward the end. But most of all, she loves the rules that are written down on the board at the entrance.

*Do not get out of the vehicle.*

*Keep your hands inside the vehicle at all times.*

*Do not eat or drink on the ride.*

Tally doesn't usually like rules, especially if they've come from other people, but these rules are different. They feel helpful and they keep her safe. And anyway, the haunted house is just pretend.

But Kingswood Academy is real. And she knows that while there are plenty of rules, the ones that really matter aren't written down anywhere.