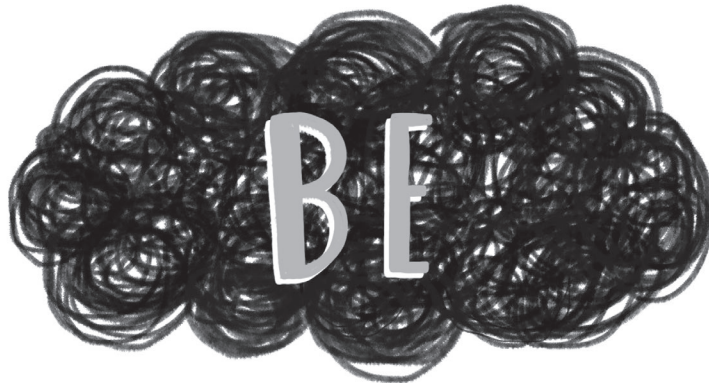


LIBBY SCOTT & REBECCA WESTCOTT



to



me

 SCHOLASTIC

Published in the UK by Scholastic, 2021
Euston House, 24 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1DB
Scholastic Ireland, 89E Lagan Road, Dublin Industrial Estate,
Glasnevin, Dublin, D11 HP5F

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or
registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

Text © Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott, 2021
Cover lettering by Aaron Cushley, 2021

The rights of Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott to be identified as the authors of this
work have been asserted by them under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978 0702 30835 2

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

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in
any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No
part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted in any form or by any other means (electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise) without prior
written permission of Scholastic Limited.

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY
Paper made from wood grown in sustainable forests
and other controlled sources.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, incidents
and dialogues are products of the author's imagination or are used
fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead,
events or locales is entirely coincidental.

www.scholastic.co.uk

*

*To Marnie and Frankie, thank you for letting me be your
big sister.*

*To Louie, who unlocked the love I never thought I could feel
again for another dog.*

Libby

For everyone doing their best to figure out who they are.

Rebecca

PROLOGUE

Three words.

Imagine that's all you've been given to describe yourself. What would you choose?

Loud, tall, arty?

Quiet, small, sporty?

Or perhaps you'd go a little further and really think about what makes you *you*.

Loyal, kind, brave?

Funny, honest, hard-working?

Or, maybe you'd take a really long look at the person you are and go even deeper.

Impulsive, determined, principled?

Solitary, unpredictable, curious?

If Tally Olivia Adams were asked to describe herself in just three words, she'd have somewhat of a problem.

In fact, she would struggle if she were allowed five words or ten words or even the huge classroom dictionary that sits on Miss Balogun's desk.

She could possess all the words in the world, but it wouldn't help. Because it's almost impossible to describe yourself when you haven't figured out who you are yet.

ALL ABOUT ME

NAME: Natalia Adams (but everyone calls me Tally)

AGE: Ten years old

THINGS I AM GOOD AT:

1. I can speak Spanish (a bit, anyway).
2. I'm pretty good on my skateboard even if I do sometimes fall off.
3. I've taught myself to play Taylor Swift songs on the ukulele and I can sing really high notes, which will be good if I ever need to communicate with a dolphin.
4. I can also hold my breath underwater for one whole minute.

THINGS I AM BAD AT:

1. Being interrupted, especially by my horrible big sister Nell, who hardly lets me say two words without shouting over me.
2. Making mistakes. I mean, don't get me wrong - I make mistakes all the time. But I hate it and I'll do anything not to get something wrong which often means that I won't even try something, just in case I mess it up. Making mistakes makes me feel horrible inside.
3. Being told what to do - which is hard when I have to go to school because that's all that teachers seem to want to do all day. They tell me where I have to sit and when I'm allowed to talk and even what colours I have to use when painting a tree (apparently blue isn't OK - try telling Picasso that!).

CHAPTER 1

It's all Granny Lola's fault. If she had never created her so-called *famous* recipe, then there's a chance that Tally's day might have improved. A *tiny* chance, but a chance all the same. But the steaming portion of beef chilli that Mum has just placed in front of her has put an end to any hope that today is going to end well.

"No." Tally drops her head and stares at the table. "I can't eat that."

Mum sits down next to Dad, who gives a big sigh.

"Don't start, Tally. Not today."

Mum pats him on the arm in the same way that she does when she's trying to tell him to stop talking, and then looks at Tally with her special *I am very calm* smile plastered to her face.

"Nobody's starting anything. I've got a lot on my plate

right now, and I just want us all to enjoy the nice meal that I've cooked and have a peaceful evening."

Tally narrows her eyes and scowls. Mum isn't the only one with a lot on her plate – there's so much beef chilli on Tally's plate that it's almost oozing over the sides. Which is disgusting, and also one of the problems.

Not that Mum is going to listen to her.

"How was your visit to the gallery?" asks Dad, scooping up some rice. Tally watches as a few of the grains drop from the fork and land in the chilli sauce where they float like tiny maggots.

Mum nods. "It was good, actually. They want to take two of my larger canvases and eight of the smaller ones, so I'm going to be busy for the next few weeks." She looks across the table at Tally and Nell. "You two are going to have to help out a bit more around the house while I get my paintings finished. I'm going to need you to sort the laundry and a few other things."

Nell makes a grunting sound. "Well, I've got a ton of homework due in, and you already said that I could stay over at Rosa's house this weekend." She jerks her head towards Tally. "She'll have to do some chores for a change."

Tally blinks as everything seems to change colour, as

if someone has just taken the lid off one of Mum's paint pots and thrown it wildly around the room. She tries to see past the red mist that clouds the air for her.

"I'm sure we're all happy to do our bit," Dad tells Nell pointedly. "Especially if we want a lift to Rosa's house on Saturday."

Tally's shoulders relax and she leans back in her chair, balancing on the back two legs. She has no intention of touching anyone's dirty pants and socks, but it's OK because she most definitely does not want to go to Rosa's house at the weekend, so she doesn't need to do any chores.

"Don't rock on your chair," says Mum, automatically. "And eat up. We've got blackberry crumble for pudding."

"I can't eat it," Tally tells her, wobbling precariously on the chair. "I already told you."

Mum slowly and deliberately puts her fork down on to the plate, and even though it hardly makes a sound, in Tally's head it's as loud as a gunshot.

"I spent ages making this and you're going to eat it."

Tally slams the chair legs down and glares at Mum. "I *can't*."

"Oh, deepest joy," drawls Nell in the irritating voice that she woke up with on her fourteenth birthday last

month. “Another wonderful Adams family mealtime where Tally has a strop and makes everything about her.”

Tally can feel her heart pounding, as if she’s running a race and not sitting quietly in the kitchen. “I do *not* make everything about me! Nothing is ever about me, actually. If it was then I wouldn’t be forced to eat disgusting food that I hate.”

“Don’t be so rude, Tally,” says Dad. “And you love Granny Lola’s famous beef chilli. We had it a couple of weeks ago and you ate it then.”

“It was right last time, but it isn’t right today!” Tally closes her eyes and tries to find the words, but they just won’t come. Instead of words, all she can see is pictures: snapshots of the day running through her head like a film reel.

Stepping in a puddle on the way to school.

Horrible Luke calling her rude names at break-time.

The way the noise in the school hall bounced off the walls and straight into her ears at lunchtime.

“Well, it’s the same meal that it was *before*,” Mum informs her, and when Tally opens her eyes she can see that Mum’s special smile has got even bigger. “But it’s your choice. You can eat your meal and then have some

lovely crumble, or you can choose *not* to eat it and *not* have any pudding.”

Tally takes a deep breath and tries to stay calm, but it’s impossible when Mum has said something so monumentally ridiculous. It’s not Mum’s fault, Tally knows that – but it still hurts every time she tries to use one of the ridiculous strategies that she and Dad learnt on the useless parenting course they went on last year. Nell said that they should have sent Tally on a *How to Be a Better Kid* course instead, and even though Mum told her off for being unkind, Tally is pretty sure that both her parents agreed with her. Anyway, the parenting course wasn’t very good, because the only thing they seemed to learn was how to make things even worse by pretending that Tally has choices when really they’re offering her a choice between *everything*, including something that she can’t eat, or literally *nothing*, including the one thing that she *can* eat. They’re trying to make her choose between two horrible things, which isn’t a real choice at all.

Tally hears Dad ask Nell a question about school, and for a few minutes the kitchen is filled with the sound of Nell’s long, boring speech about the demands of year nine and how she really, really needs a laptop, and *blah blah blah* and *me, me, me*. Tally stops listening and stares at her

plate. The beef chilli lurks menacingly in front of her, the kidney beans all slimy and soft, and she gulps, trying to swallow the lump that has appeared in her throat. What Mum and Dad said is true – she *did* eat this meal a few weeks ago, and it *is* the same meal that it was before.

But she could cope with it last time. She can't cope today. And there is no way that she can eat it. She extends one finger and pushes the plate, just a tiny bit.

"I only want to eat the crumble," she says quietly.

"No chilli, no crumble," says Dad.

The plate moves a little further.

"Just eat it," snaps Mum, apparently forgetting that she is trying to be the *calm parent*. "I haven't got time for this."

Tally's hand twitches.

"Can we please get back to talking about my new laptop?" whines Nell. "And not Tally's latest fussy food fad. God – I'm glad Rosa didn't come for supper tonight. Her little sister is really cute – not a brat like Tally. She'd think you're a right pain if she was here."

And then she yelps as Granny Lola's famous beef chilli lands on the floor, splashing tomato sauce all over her socks.

"I'm not being fussy and I'm not a brat!" screeches Tally. "And I don't care what other people think!"

“Tally!” Mum and Dad shout in unison, staring at the horror before them. “What on earth is wrong with you?”

The horror pushes her chair back and heads to the back door, ripping it open and then hurtling down the garden path to the safety of her den under the willow tree.

“There’s nothing wrong with me, is there?” she mutters, picking up her favourite soft toy, who was left there to guard her secret space when Mum called her in for tea. “Except that my feet were wet and scratchy all day and I couldn’t eat my yoghurt because I didn’t have a spoon and it was too noisy to think properly and people are mean.”

She hugs Billy tightly and gazes at his face. “Why does nothing ever work out for me?”

The teddy bear stares back at her sympathetically through its one remaining button eye, but he hasn’t got the words to explain it any more than Tally does. He has to agree, though.

Everything does seem to end up going wrong when Tally is involved.

TALLY'S LOVE/HATE LIST

SOME THINGS I HATE ARE:

Change
Labels
Seams in socks
Wearing a coat
Soggy cereal
Loud noises
School
Jokes I don't get
Being told to do things - anything in fact
Being embarrassed in front of others
Having to stop doing something I'm enjoying

SOME OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS ARE:

Taylor Swift
The sound of rain (and the smell, actually)
The smell of stables
My fluffy slippers
The words "I don't see why not"
Dogs and horses
Taylor Swift again
Music, but only my music - well, only Taylor Swift, really