

**Knowing
the
SCORE**

A stylized illustration of a tennis racket and three tennis balls. The racket is positioned horizontally, with its head to the right and handle to the left. The head of the racket is filled with a grid pattern. Three tennis balls are shown below the racket, arranged in a slight curve. The entire graphic is rendered in black and white.

PRAISE FOR *DIGGER AND ME*

**“A wonderful tale, told with heart,
hope and a shiny wet nose.”**

– Gill Lewis, author of *Swan Song*

“A really special book.”

– Hilary McKay, author of *The Skylarks' War*

“A story full of humanity.”

– Cath Howe, author of *Ella on the Outside*

**“Funny, touching and deeply true, it’s a story
about the ‘red thread’ that binds a family together
through illness and change, and the love of a dog.”**

– Sinéad O’Hart, author of *The Eye of the North*

**“A simply perfect book about a boy and his dog
navigating a painfully well-observed imperfect situation...
Funny and warm and ultimately leaves a glow.”**

– Perdita Cargill, author of *Waiting for Callback*

**“Heartbreakingly brilliant! Warm, funny, sad,
tender, with poetry that punches your heart.”**

– Tamsin Winter, author of *Being Miss Nobody*

**“A gorgeous uplifting story about dogs, step-families
and how they come in all shapes and sizes, and
the difference a great teacher can make.”**

– Rhian Ivory, author of *The Boy Who Drew the Future*

**“Warm, funny, kind, heartbreaking in places, but most
of all just so vivid. It’ll stay with me for ages!”**

– Nicola Penfold, author of *Where the World Turns Wild*

**“The story of a young boy who navigates his way through
the tricky territory of family changes and new relationships
with his beloved pet dog. A masterpiece in observation.**

Tender, humorous, important.”

– Rachel Delahaye, author of *Mort the Meek*

“A truly lovely book. My heart is thoroughly warmed!”

– Sharon Gosling, author of *The House of Hidden Wonders*



PRAISE FOR *EVERY CLOUD*

**"A perfect book for Year 6 and 7 readers,
and such an evocative and moving story."**

– Phoebe Demeger, CLPE Librarian

**"Every Cloud is a gently-paced read that
would be a good choice to offer children
who are facing change and are worried about it,
including moving house or transitioning to
secondary school, as it explores many of
the anxieties children might face, and how they
might deal with them. Amy's challenging home
situation will also resonate with many families."**

– ReadingZone

**"Every Cloud offers a relationship between
text and reader that builds slowly.
It will be because they feel close to the
everyday lives of Amy and her family
– perhaps echoing their own experiences
– that readers will come to care about where
Amy ends up in September. It takes
subtle storytelling to develop that
kind of relationship."**

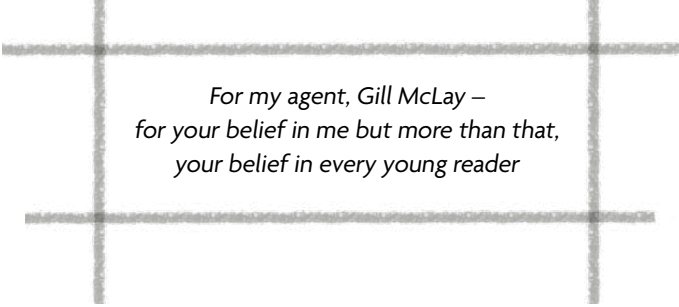
– Books4Keeps

**"Full of wisdom, empathy and hope,
this is a story that will resonate and comfort many
worried youngsters as they prepare for their own
new school adventures this autumn."**

– Lancashire Post

**"A brilliant MG read perfect for those transitioning
to high school."**

– Claire Menzies, home.read.play



*For my agent, Gill McLay –
for your belief in me but more than that,
your belief in every young reader*

LITTLE TIGER

An imprint of Little Tiger Press Limited
1 Coda Studios, 189 Munster Road, London SW6 6AW

Imported into the EEA by Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

www.littletiger.co.uk

A paperback original

First published in Great Britain in 2024
Text copyright © Ros Roberts, 2024
Illustrations copyright © Catherine Fortey, 2024

ISBN: 978-1-78895-676-5

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

Printed and bound in the UK.




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ROS ROBERTS

Knowing
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SCORE



LITTLE TIGER
LONDON



Chapter One

The coach rumbles along the motorway, bringing us closer and closer to home.

Jess nudges me and offers me a sweet. “Look!” she says, and points to a big blue sign for Chester.

I take the mint and smile.

“I can’t wait to sleep in my own bed,” she says.

I nod. “Me too.”

She pops the packet back into the white carrier bag by her feet and twists round to talk to Surinder. The bag topples to one side so I reach down to straighten it.

We each have one, filled with the things we made during the school residential. A clay pot, macramé drink mat, painting of a tree and a large piece of A3 paper with a mind map of special people in our life. I can see the edge of Jess’s map. It’s covered in names, the words

scuttling across the top of the paper and tumbling down the other side, three sisters and fourteen cousins all squeezed on.

The coach pulls off the motorway.

“Start gathering your things,” says Miss Dolan over the bus microphone.

I lift my rucksack and white carrier on to my lap. My painting of the giant oak is poking out, the branches dappled with summer leaves. I’ve tucked the mind map behind it. There’s a lot of empty space on mine.

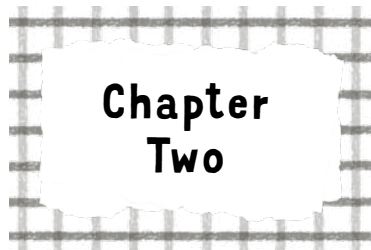
Jess sorts her bags and taps my painting. “Your tree is so cool,” she says, smoothing down one of the tissue-paper leaves.

“Thanks,” I say. I sit back and watch the fields flash by. We pass the farm and turn into the long, steep road up to school. I can see the supermarket where Mum works and the road that leads to our flat. The lady from the launderette is locking the door. The clock on the market archway says six o’clock. Everyone is heading home.

I’m so ready to see Mum.

The coach climbs the hill, passes through the traffic lights and pulls into the school car park. We all start searching for our parents. I spot Mum, standing at the back of the group on a raised bit of grass, her right hand

twisting the silver hoops on her necklace, her left hand holding on to her red sun hat as she searches for me. The coach spins round and reverses and then she spots me. I wave hard and she yells so loudly that the other parents turn round to look.



Chapter Two

“I missed you so much, Gem,” says Mum, scooping lasagne on to my plate.

“I know,” I say. “Me too.”

“What was the *best* thing about the trip?” she says.

I don’t feel like talking. I’m tired. But I know she needs to be with me, talk to me. “The kayaking. Surinder fell in.”

“Oh!” says Mum. “Poor her.”

“Jess thinks she did it on purpose.”

Mum laughs and picks up the white carrier bag sitting by the table. “Can I see?” I nod and she pulls out the painting of the tree. She strokes the leaves, follows the line of the branches, pats the strips of real bark on the trunk. “This is beautiful,” she says. “Can I frame it?” I nod again and take a piece of garlic bread.

She pulls out the clay pot and the macramé drink mat, examining them. “Gorgeous,” she says and then she takes out the special people map and lays it flat on the table, reading the names. She reads the list of friends, topped by Jess and Surinder, of course. And then she looks at the family list. *Me, Mum, Gran, Uncle Jo*. I’m not sure how she’ll feel about it. She sniffs a little and moves it to one side, pulls her plate closer and picks up her fork, picking at the edge of the pasta. “Joe has an ‘e’ on the end of his name. J-O-E.”

“Oh,” I say. “I didn’t know.”

She shrugs. “It doesn’t matter.”

We are quiet while we eat. Mum stops looking at the things in the bag, stops talking, just finishes her dinner. It’s like seeing Gran’s and Uncle Joe’s name on the map has taken her words away. But making the special people map made me think about them more.

“Jess asked me about Uncle Joe and where he lived, and I didn’t know what to say.”

“Oh,” says Mum. “He doesn’t live too far away.” She moves her plate to one side. “I got some chocolate puds.” She twists round and opens the fridge and puts them on the table. “A treat to welcome you home.”

“Thanks,” I say.

“You should have added Jerry and Sadie to the special people map.”

“They’re *your* friends, Mum,” I say.

“Yes, but they’re really like family.”

I peel the lid off my pudding and say, very quietly, “They’re not.” And then I can’t help myself. “I just wish...”

“What?” she says.

“Well, I just wish I saw Gran and Uncle Joe a bit more.”

She stirs the chocolate. “Oh ... well, you *do* see them... It’s just ... Gran...” I wait while she forms the words. But then she stops, takes a mouthful of pudding and rattles on instead about a difficult customer at the supermarket who moaned about a dodgy pineapple.

Things are tricky between Mum and Gran. They always have been. There was a big fallout years and years ago, after Mum came back from America. I don’t know what about. Mum hates talking about those days. I pick up scraps of information, scramble with tiny memories of things. But it’s like a jigsaw, all broken up, thousands of pieces that I can’t even begin to put together.

I asked her about it once. We had been at the cinema for my birthday, watching a film about a lost dog crossing America. On the bus home, I asked Mum about her trip to America, and what happened when she got home.

She looked at me, gasped a little and then stared out at the dark night and said, “America is a great place.” She didn’t talk much again that night, even though it was my birthday.

I only see Gran twice a year, at Christmas and near my birthday. We meet at the shops or the cinema or a café. She’s funny, Gran; she makes me laugh. We talk about all sorts of things: school, swimming, food. But we never talk about things that matter. We never talk about my mum or the fallout or why we hardly ever see Uncle Joe. It’s like we’ve put all that stuff in a box and shoved it away in a cupboard.

I scrape my chocolate pot clean and clear the table. Mum reaches for me and I hug her hard.

“I’m just going to finish this module,” she says, picking up her nursing books. “And then I’ll come and help you unpack.”

I pick up the white carrier bag and go to my room, lie on my bed and listen to the familiar, wonderful sounds of home. The big double deckers that pass by so close that the windows shake. Mum tapping on her laptop next door. Mrs Dawkins’ TV in the flat above ours, the voices so loud I can almost hear what they’re saying.

I reach down to the bag and pull out my special

people map. I trace my fingers over the names, reach for a pen and add a neat 'e' to the word Jo.

I might show it to Gran, next time I see her. I'm just not sure when that will be. It's a long time until Christmas or my birthday.