

ASO READER'S NOTES

Title:	My Side of the Diamond
Author:	Sally Gardner
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Audience:	14+
Reader:	Jenny Jacoby, Hot Key Books

SYNOPSIS:

Jazmin and Becky became best friends at their comprehensive school in Camden, London. With nothing much in common at first glance (Jazmin coming from an unsupportive home life with low prospects; Becky from a privileged, intellectual background) the two bond when Jazmin discovers Becky's talent for writing. With Jaz's encouragement Becky writes a novel that becomes a huge bestseller. Becky never wanted the book published though, and resents her success and fame, and her parents, who she sees as pushing her only to make themselves look good.

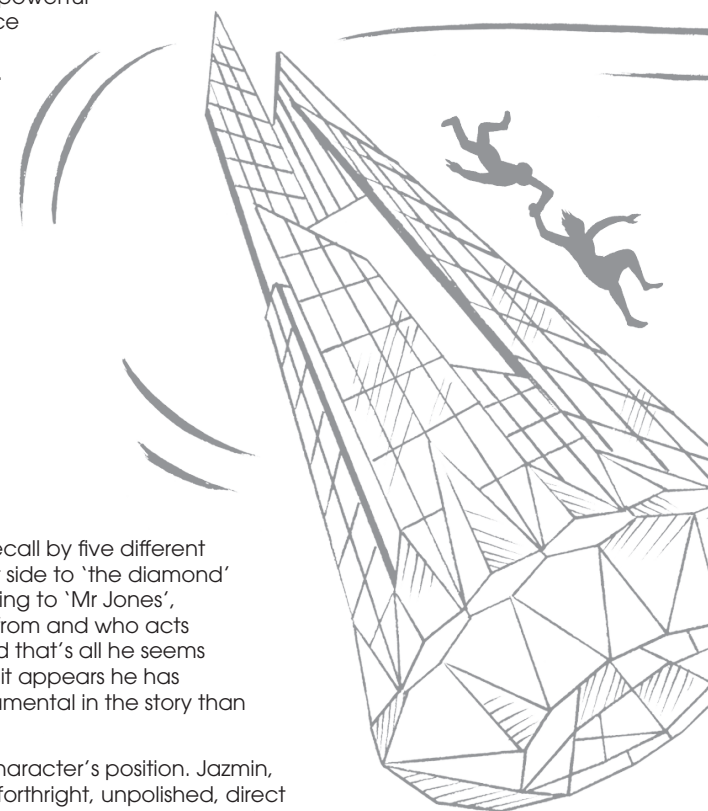
The summer after GCSEs, aged sixteen, Becky asks Jaz to spend the summer with her at their family home in Orford, Suffolk. Jaz is shocked to find Becky stick-thin and anorexic. Becky is supposed to be working on her next book, but is moody and sullen. Inspiration strikes, though, when a chance conversation with a chimney sweep brings up the topic of Icarus – a man who supposedly pushed two teenagers off the roof of St Pauls, but whose bodies were never found. Becky arranges to meet Icarus at his open prison near Orford – and when she emerges from their brief meeting she is transformed: suddenly happy and able to eat again.

While Becky and Icarus appear to be falling in love, so do Jaz and Becky's brother, Alex. But there are no idyllic days of summer romance once Becky and Jazmin discover Doubleday, a terrifying, super-powerful human/cyborg whose existence is being covered up by the secretive Darkstar Programme. Their lives are threatened – and because of the secrecy nobody believes them. As they try to uncover the truth, the threads connecting everyone with Icarus and some of Orford's other residents pull tighter – and yet nobody believes that the girls are innocent themselves. Icarus might be their only protection – or is he another threat himself?

STYLE:

The story is told in first-person recall by five different voices, all providing a different side to 'the diamond' of the story. Each person is talking to 'Mr Jones', whom we never directly hear from and who acts as a foil for others' voices – and that's all he seems to do, until the very end when it appears he has been much more deeply instrumental in the story than anyone had supposed.

Each voice represents each character's position. Jazmin, the dominant voice, shines as forthright, unpolished, direct and defensive, with her own particular creative turns of phrase.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sally Gardner is a multi-award-winning novelist whose work has been translated into more than twenty-two languages. Her novel *Maggot Moon* (Hot Key Books) won both the Costa Children's Book Prize and the Carnegie Medal in 2013, and was followed by *The Door that Led to Where*. Sally's genre-defying novel *The Double Shadow* (Orion) received great critical acclaim and was also longlisted for the Carnegie Medal in 2013. *The Red Necklace* (shortlisted for the 2007 Guardian Book Prize) and *The Silver Blade* are set during the French Revolution, the film rights for which have been purchased by Dominic West. Sally also won the 2005 Nestle Children's Book Prize for her debut novel *I, Coriander*. She is also author of the popular *Wings & Co* Fairy Detective Agency series and *Tinder*, illustrated by David Roberts (Orion). Most recently she has published a novel for adults, *An Almond for a Parrot*. Follow Sally at www.sallygardner.net or on Twitter: @TheSallyGardner

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

I had been staying in Suffolk in a place called Shingle Street, where a friend of mine has a house. Those amongst you who love reading might know her well – Meg Rosoff. One day I went with her husband Paul on a walk to Rendlesham Forest. I wanted to see where the supposed UFO landing had taken place. We became incredibly lost and managed not to follow the trail but to walk in a different direction and both of us got very spooked out. I had with me my little dog Lottie, a dachshund with very small legs. By the time we had walked in circles for about two hours, the sun was setting. We managed to find a road and a Land Rover stopped to give us a lift. In it was an American family. They asked us where we had been and what we were doing. I said I was very interested in the Rendlesham Forest UFO incident. Whereupon the grandmother said, 'I was there and what I saw that day I will never talk about, never. Those that did got into a lot of trouble.'

I ask, 'Do you believe it was real?'

She replied, 'As I said, I will not talk about those strange things.'

Stories come to you and just sit on your shoulder and if you're lucky enough they begin to whisper in your ear. Shortly after this incident I got into a taxi going to Woodbridge and the driver said, 'You'll never guess who I had in my cab.' He mentioned the American who had been in charge of the airbase at Woodbridge when the UFO incident happened in 1980. What he saw that day ruined his career and he was brave enough to speak out about it. He had come back to give a lecture about Rendlesham. The taxi driver had asked him if he believed it had happened, to which the gentleman said, 'I know it. I saw it.'

My Side of the Diamond is a story about love. The question really is, what makes us human? I wondered what would happen if you had an alien planet where the inhabitants were perfectly kind and respectable to one another, had no desire to kill or to love, believed in no god in particular. They brought up their children well, with respect, but they had no love for them. That got me thinking about what the essence of love is, not just the love between two people or the love of family. Out of love springs great creativity that has given us music, words, paintings. You could argue that it is the cornerstone of all creativity.

So how would you take love back to your planet? What are the risks involved in doing so?

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION:

Themes include friendship, the search for love; perspective and trying to access the truth by hearing different sides to a story.

- Jazmin and Becky meet at the same secondary school and although they come from the same area, their backgrounds are quite different. What do you think brought the two girls together as friends and what do you think they value in each other's friendship?
- The story is told through different characters talking to a mysterious 'Mr Jones'. None of the characters are quite sure what Mr Jones is researching for. What do you think Mr Jones was going to do with the information? Write the report you imagine Mr Jones could write after all the interviews.
- Why do you think Sally Gardner used the phrase 'My Side of the Diamond' for the title?
- Retell a story you know well, perhaps a fairy story, by pretending to be Mr Jones interviewing five of the characters of the story. How would each character tell their side of the 'diamond'?
- We hear the story of Becky's relationship with Icarus through Jazmin. How do you think Becky would tell the story? Write a passage in Becky's voice describing the group's night at the pub when they were joined by Icarus.
- When Doubleday broke into the Burnses' house Becky, Jaz and Alex had no memory of anything from the sound of someone coming up the stairs to two days later. Police thought they had taken drugs and trashed the house themselves. What do you think happened? Write a short extra chapter to explain what happened. Whose perspective will you tell the story from?
- Icarus told Mari he had come to Earth to understand and find love. Do you think he succeeded? And if so, when?
- Imagine you are helping Icarus to understand what love is. Using examples from the book, write a list of ways people might feel when they are in love.
- If you were Becky and had fallen in love with Icarus, would you jump with him? Write a list of reasons to stay and reasons to go.