

MUM

CHAPTER ONE

He ran upstairs, opened the door and burst into his room. He scattered the pieces of paper – his homework and essays – on the desk, rummaged through all his folders, emptied the contents of the top drawer, the second drawer, the third... nothing. He crawled to the bedside table and emptied it out onto the old, greying carpet. The beloved songs he had once written, a bracelet made of small seashells his mother had given him – he put it on his arm, and for a moment he forgot about what he was looking for. He felt his eyes fill with tears at the memory of his best friend. For a long time he'd thought she was a traitor when she'd left him forever. Later he'd realised that it was the fault of the man who'd run her over, the man they were forbidden to talk about at home even now, almost five years later. How he'd love to hug her, stroke her face... her face... but he can't remember what she looked like any more. She'd had blue eyes. And long eyelashes. A pointed nose and thin red lips. Her hair was dark, curling naturally around her oval face. But how could he put all that together to make his mother's face? He didn't know. As though struck by lightning he cast aside his memories and started searching again. He found a lot of cuttings from newspapers and magazines. But otherwise... nothing. He slowly began to fear the worst. But he hadn't lost hope yet. He went into the living room, the largest and most luxurious room in the big house. He liked to sit there when he was studying; he could look out of the window at the extensive garden. This time, however, he didn't go to the window but began walking from table to table, shelf to shelf, hoping he'd left it there. But in vain. He had no luck here either. Now he was sure. His best "friend", who he confided in, who he took with him everywhere, who he knew would never let him down, never reveal his secrets, was now in the hands of his father. He imaged how his father would slowly open it and read on the first page: Diary. A simple title that was sure to thrill him, as he had long and secretly wanted to look inside and read what his son was writing. Perhaps out of curiosity, perhaps so he would understand his son better, for he had never been able to understand him well enough for the two of them to get on.

His stomach clenched and he felt the artery in his neck pulsing, as though his heart wanted to burst out of his body. Or to stop? He couldn't catch his breath. His father HAD his DIARY. His diary, his diary, his diary – it echoed in his ears. He knew exactly what that meant. It would change his entire life, from the very foundations. He tried to recall what he'd written there over the years. Words, sentences, excerpts from what he'd written during the last five years appeared before his eyes.

"I hate my mum. Why did she leave me here on my own?" "Dad's an idiot. It's not even half a year since mum died and now he's brought a woman home with him. I can't stand him!" "I hate this horrible world, I want to die!" "I cut myself with scissors, I feel wonderful!" "I want my mum..." "Dear Diary..." "I'll kill that man who took my mum away from me!" "Nothing new at school today..." "I'm worried I'm not normal" "I have to admit it: I like HIM..." "I want to get away, away, away!!!" "We played football today, I scored two goals..." "Dad's going for dinner with his tart today. Her perfume's awful." "I'm gay, oh my God, I'm queer, this isn't possible... It can't be true, oh God I loathe myself... I hate myself!!! I hate myself!" "So now I'm sixteen. I want my mum. Mummy..." "I was away, sorry I didn't get in touch for so long..." "I tried weed. I felt fantastic, like I've never felt before..." "After four years I'm going to a concert. With a boy..." "I'm a different person. On this day I've become reconciled to my orientation. Maybe I've fallen in love... no, that's nonsense... but yes, I'm gay, does he feel it too? The concert was great!" "We've started going out together. It's something new. I can't let anyone, ANYONE, find out about it" "It's

five years today, it hurts, mum, you're my best friend..."

He stood motionless, unconscious of the time, just remembering... his mother, drugs, his boyfriend, his dad and his girlfriends, his friends... and suddenly... everything went dark. He saw only black.

He didn't sleep all night. He knew that if his father read just one page, one paragraph, even just one sentence, he'd completely destroy their relationship – if they even had one...

He'd hoped he'd finally found a road he could go along without tripping up, but, as he'd now found out, he was wrong. He'd taken a hard, bad fall...

CHAPTER TWO

He thought it'd be easy, that he could just sneak into his son's room, open the drawer and take what he'd wanted for so long. Not because he didn't trust his son, but more because he didn't know what was going on with him; he felt his son was becoming more and more distant from him, and he was afraid that one day he'd disappear completely, and he'd never get him back.

When his son had left for school he opened the door to his bedroom. The first thing that occurred to him was that they would have to pick a new carpet – that old, greying carpet looked awful. Then, following his plan, he opened the drawer and saw a battered exercise book in a hard cover, covered with various pictures and quotations. He seized it, but he didn't feel the way he'd anticipated. His stomach clenched, perhaps he was even afraid...

He took the key to understanding his son into his bedroom, carefully wrapped it in a plastic bag and hid it under the bed. He felt like a little boy, hiding toys from his younger brother, or later when instead of toys he'd hidden gifts for his darling wife. How much he missed her... He was still trying to get over the pain. Other women, as much work as possible, alcohol, loneliness... He knew his son reproached him for that; they'd both have to come terms with it, each in their own way. Or maybe not?

Afterwards he went to work, his conscience not entirely clear. But he couldn't wait for the evening. He couldn't wait to read those secret lines...

When he came home from work he found chaos – pieces of paper, books strewn around, things moved off shelves. He immediately knew why. He avoided his son. They would go for days without talking anyway, so it wasn't anything unusual.

He sat down in an armchair in his study and shut his notebook – he'd had enough of work for today. He put on some of his favourite music and made a cup of tea. He took out the diary and sat down comfortably by a lamp.

He remembered his own diary. Had he written everything there? Did he still have it? Once his brother had taken it and in the dining room he'd begun reading it aloud, paragraph by paragraph, word by word. He could still remember how he'd felt then. It was a Sunday. All their relatives had gathered there. And all of them heard a detailed account of everything in his life. He'd wished he could have vanished into a hole in the ground. No one could believe what they were hearing: suddenly the boy standing before them was a stranger they didn't know. If he was now to read the diary he was holding, would he become what his brother and his family had become?

No, this was quite different. It was the only way he could get close to his beloved son. But – would he be able to look him in the eye? Of course he would. As his father he had a right to know what was going through his son's head...

He opened the exercise book on the first page and found a simple title: DIARY. He'd imagined it would be different – larger, more colourful, each letter in a different shade and outlined multiple times... He hesitated...

He looked once more at the title, the front page, and he closed the diary. When he was sure his son was asleep he tiptoed over to his desk and put down the diary on it. He looked at his son who was breathing regularly and looking so contented that he remembered how he'd held him in his arms when he'd proudly brought him home from the maternity hospital. He'd never been happier. He snapped out of his memories, looked around one last time, perhaps wondering if he'd done the right thing, and then he left as quietly as he'd come.

CHAPTER THREE

That evening he couldn't fall asleep for a long time. He was worried about how his father would react. In his head he ran through various possible scenarios. In the end, however, he did fall asleep. He often had dreams, but that night he had a rest from nocturnal stories. As though his head was completely empty...

In the morning he woke up with his eyes sore and his face swollen, and with an unpleasant feeling. He dressed, brushed his hair and cleaned his teeth. When he went over to his desk where he'd put his geography essay he discovered his diary. Instinctively he opened it at the first page and found a small, crumpled piece of paper had been inserted there, with a message: "I can't read your life. I love you. Dad."