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Opening extract from

The Name of this Book is Secret

Written by

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WARNING:

DO NOT READ BEYOND
THIS PAGE



Good.

Now I know I can trust you.

You're curious. You're brave. And you're not afraid to lead a life of crime.

But let's get something straight: if, despite my warning, you insist on reading this book, you can't hold me responsible for the consequences.

And, make no bones about it, this is a very dangerous book.

No, it won't blow up in your face. Or bite your head off. Or tear you limb from limb.

It probably won't injure you at all. Unless somebody throws it at you, which is a possibility that should never be discounted.

Generally speaking, books don't cause much harm. Except when you read them, that is. Then they cause all kinds of problems.

Books can, for example, give you ideas. I don't know if you've ever had an idea before, but, if you have, you know how much trouble an idea can get you into.

Books can also provoke emotions. And emotions sometimes are even more troublesome than ideas. Emotions have led people to do all sorts of things they later regret – like, oh, throwing a book at someone else.

But the main reason this book is so dangerous is that it concerns a secret.

A *big* secret.

It's funny the way secrets work. If you don't know about a secret, it doesn't bother you. You go about your business without a care in the world.

La la la, you sing. Everything's fine and dandy. (Maybe you don't actually sing "la la la", but you know what I mean.)

But as soon as you hear about the secret, it starts to nag at you. *What is this secret?* you wonder. *Why am I not supposed to know about it? Why is it so important?*

Suddenly, you're dying to know what the secret is.

You beg. You plead. You threaten. You cajole. You promise never to tell anyone else. You try anything and everything. You dig into the secret-keeper's belongings. You pull his or her hair. And when that doesn't work, you pull your own.

Not knowing a secret is just about the worst thing in the world.

No, I can think of one thing worse.

Knowing a secret.

Read on, if you must.

But, remember, I warned you.


CHAPTER
ONE

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Apologia*



* An apologia, if you're wondering, is not a variety of insect. Neither is it a type of tropical disease. It's an apology. In other words, it's not worth the paper it's written on.

I'm sorry I couldn't let you read Chapter One.

That was where you would have learned the names of the characters in this story. You also would have learned where it takes place. And when. You would have learned all the things you usually learn at the beginning of a book.

Unfortunately, I can't tell you any of those things.

Yes, this is a story *about* a secret. But it's also a *secret story*.

I shouldn't even be telling you that I shouldn't be telling you the story. That's how much of a secret it is.

Not only can't I tell you the names of the people involved, I can't even tell you what they've done or why.

I can't tell you what kind of pets they have. Or how many annoying little brothers. Or how many bossy big sisters. Or whether they like their ice cream plain or with sprinkles.

I can't tell you about their schools or their friends or their favourite television shows. Or if they ride skateboards. Or if they are champion chess players. Or if they compete in fencing competitions. Or even if they wear braces.

In short, I can't tell you anything that would help you identify the people involved in this story if you

were to meet them at your orthodontist's office. (Teeth, as you may know from watching television, are very useful when detectives are identifying cadavers.)

This is for your own protection as well as mine. And for the protection of your friends. And even of your enemies. (You know, those ones you say you want to kill but in the end you'd rather keep alive.)

Still, you must find my silence very frustrating.

How can you follow a story if you don't know whom it's about? *Somebody* has got to be getting lost in the woods, or slaying dragons, or travelling in time, or whatever it is that happens in the story.

I'll tell you what – I'll make you a deal.

To help you follow my story, I'm going to break my own rule – already! – and I'm going to give my characters names and faces. But remember these aren't their *real* names and faces. They're more like code names or cover identities, like a spy or a criminal would have.

If you don't like a name I choose, change it. If I write "*Tim* loved to pick his nose", and you prefer the name Tom to Tim, then read the line as "*Tom* loved to pick his nose". I won't take offence. You can do that with all the names in this book if you like.

Or keep my names. It's up to you.

Now, just as it's hard to read a story without

knowing whom the story's about, it's also hard to read a story without knowing where the story takes place. Even if you were reading about extraterrestrials from another dimension, you'd want to imagine something about their surroundings. Like that they lived in a murky green miasma. Or in some place really hot.

Although the real location of this story will have to remain a mystery, to make it easier for all of us, why don't we say the story takes place in *a place you know very well*?

We'll call it Your Hometown.

When you read about the town the characters live in, just think of the town you live in. Is the town big or little? By the sea or by a lake? Or is your town all asphalt and shopping malls? You tell me.

When you read about the characters' school, think of Your School. Is it in an old one-room schoolhouse or in a bunch of double wide mobile homes? You decide.

When they go home, imagine they live on Your Street, maybe even in a house right across from yours.

Who knows, maybe Your Street is where the story really takes place. I wouldn't tell you if it was. But I couldn't tell you for certain that it's not.

In return for all the freedom I'm giving you, I ask

only one favour: if I ever slip and reveal something that I shouldn't – and I will! – please forget what I've said as soon as possible.

In fact, when you're reading this book, it's a good idea to forget everything you read as soon as you read it. If you're one of those people who can read with their eyes closed, I urge you to do so. And, if you're blind and reading this in braille, keep your hands off the page!

Why do I write under such awful circumstances? Wouldn't it be better to scrap this book altogether and do something else?

Oh, I could give you all kinds of reasons.

I could tell you that I write this book so you will learn from the mistakes of others. I could tell you that, as dangerous as writing this book is, it would be even more dangerous not to write it.

But the real reason is nothing so glorious. It's very simple.

I can't keep a secret. Never could.

I hope you have better luck.