



CHAPTER 1

THE STRANGER

The boy approached me on the corner of Station Road and North Street.

‘Ryan,’ he said, ‘we need to talk.’

This was awkward. He seemed to know me, but I had no idea who he was. I did my best to smile.

‘Why haven’t you called?’ he asked.

This was really awkward. He really seemed to know me.

‘Er... I’m struggling a bit here,’ I said.

He was tall with short blond hair and green eyes. I would have found him sort of cute if he hadn't been so weird.

'Yeah,' he said, 'I'm struggling too. I've been struggling for the last two weeks.'

I had no idea what to say. Maybe he was disturbed and wanted my help. I'd feel bad if I walked away, but I had no idea what else to do.

'I need to go,' I said, 'but I hope you can find someone to help you soon.'

The boy grabbed my arm. I pulled back, but his grip was too strong. 'Stop playing games,' he said. 'You know what I'm trying to say.'

I managed to yank my arm free.

'I think we should get back together,' said the boy. He was blinking tears from his eyes. 'Happy now?'

I rushed away down the street. I'd been meaning to go to the shops, but the strange boy had freaked me out so much that I just wanted to get home.

Every time I glanced over my shoulder I saw him standing there and staring.

What was all that stuff about us getting back together? It was like I was his ex-boyfriend and he was trying to get me back. But I'd never had a boyfriend. I'd never even told anyone I was gay, except Mum and Dad. And that didn't exactly go brilliantly.

I spent the rest of the day lying in bed and wondering about the boy. Was that his way of meeting new guys? It was a really weird one.

The most likely explanation was that I really looked like his ex. I wondered if I'd ever run into this mysterious double of mine.

I was still thinking about the stranger when a text came through:

Adam here. So why did you act like that today?

I didn't know anyone with that name, so I guessed it was a wrong number. It must have been my day to be mistaken for random strangers.

But then I got another one:

I meant what I said about us getting back together... Adam.

Now I was worried. This was the same guy. He knew my number. What else did he know about me?

I'd heard about stalkers. They're convinced they know you and they turn violent if you say otherwise.

The obvious thing to do next was go to the police, but what had this Adam guy actually done? He hadn't attacked me, or even threatened me.

On the other hand, I wouldn't feel safe as long as he was sending these crazy texts.

I sent a message back:

Stop hassling me. I don't know who you are but I'll go to the police.

He got back to me right away:

I know things didn't end well between us, but that's insane.

I was insane? He was the one who'd approached a stranger in the street and told him he wanted to get back together.

I didn't want to engage with this Adam guy. I told myself it would be safer to just shut down the conversation.

I sent him a final text:

Don't contact me again.

It didn't work. He kept sending messages, all based around his fantasy that we were once an item.

When I ignored them, he started calling. Over and over again. My battery died and by the time I'd found my charger I had 12 missed calls.

I wondered if I should tell Mum and Dad, but I hate talking to them about personal stuff. The night I came out to them they were both so quiet that I had to mute the TV and tell them again because I thought they hadn't heard. Dad told me I was still too young to worry about any of that stuff, then he grabbed the remote and turned the sound back up.

Never mind congratulating me or telling me it was all fine, they just went straight back to their quiz show and kept on muttering the answers under their breath.

I was about to take one of Adam's calls and tell him again to stop hassling me when he changed tactic. He sent a photo instead.

I stared at it in disbelief.

It was a picture of us together. We were in my bedroom, perched on the edge of my bed.

Adam had his right arm stretched out to take the picture and he was grinning into the lens. I was next to him, smiling too, with my arm around his shoulders.

It wasn't fake. It was a real photo, taken in the very room I was sitting in. And yet I had no memory of it at all.