



Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey by Margaret Peterson Haddix

Subjects: Child abuse; Fathers and daughters; Diaries

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Props: Journal



At the beginning of the school year, my English teacher, Mrs. Dunphrey gave us a stupid assignment. We had to write in a journal (*Bring out journal*) twice a week all year long. Dumb, right? But she also said that if we wanted to write something private we could mark an entry, “Do not read.” And she wouldn’t read it, she’d just check to make sure we’d written something. Well, that’s what I did. For every entry I wrote “Do not read.” (*Show page and put journal down*) At first I didn’t believe that she wouldn’t read what we wrote. So I gave her a test. I wrote down a secret. The secret was—now don’t laugh—I can crochet. I know, crocheting’s for old ladies and prissy girls. That’s why the fact that I can crochet is a secret. My reputation is not the kind that includes crocheting. I’m the kind of kid that scares a teacher the first time they see me. I have that antisocial, “I’m pissed off” look.

But the test—my teacher actually passed it. The first time she collected the journals, graded them, and returned them to us, I asked her a question. I asked her if she knew how to crochet. She looked at me so stupidly; I knew that she hadn’t read the entry. I still thought writing in the journal was dumb, but at least I felt safe. Safer, anyway. I actually started writing about important stuff. Like my mom. I wrote about how she cried a lot since Dad left. She missed him. I could not understand that. It wasn’t like anyone was happy when he was around.

For instance, one Christmas when I was about ten, it was really, really cold. My little brother Matt and I were trying to decorate the Christmas tree. (It was a fake silver one—real

ugly.) Dad came home, and he had icicles hanging from his beard, it was that cold. Matt was only about three and he ran up to Dad and started gibbering about Santa Claus coming. Dad told him, “Oh Matt, don’t you know? It’s so cold outside that all Santa’s reindeer have frozen. They are dead and there will be no presents this year.” Matt started crying, Mom glared at him and Dad stormed outside. Mom ran after him in only her slippers and robe. We could hear them outside yelling at each other and we could hear Mom crying.

The weird thing is, I remember that as a happy moment. Matt and I were cuddled up on the couch together. We were warm, and Mom and Dad yelling was something outside, like the wind, that couldn’t get to us. The lights on the silver tree were blinking on and off, all bright and shiny. I thought it was beautiful.

(*Pick up journal*) I’ve been writing in the journal all year. It hasn’t been a good year. Mom was always sad because of Dad but then she left to go find him. What was she thinking? She left Matt and me alone. I tried to make it work. I knew I couldn’t tell anyone because they would take Matt from me. But it’s hard. We’re so hungry, so tired. I’ve written it all in the journal. But I have always written “Do not read.” Has my teacher kept her promise? Or has she read my entries? Is it wrong of me to wish that she would read them?

Read the journal (*Hold up book*) *Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey* by Margaret Peterson Haddix.