

## CHAPTER 1

We were watching the telly when we decided to rob the dentist.

“The dentist?” I asked my brother.

“Sure, why not?” was his reply. “Do you know how much money goes through a dental surgery in a day? It’s obscene. If the prime minister was a dentist, the country wouldn’t be in the state it’s in right now, I can tell you. There’d be no unemployment, no racism, no sexism. Just money.”

“Yeah.”

I agreed with my brother Ruben only to keep him happy. The truth was that he was just grandstanding again. It was one of his worst habits.

That was the first truth, of two.

The second was that even though we had decided to knock over our local dentist, we were never going to do it. So far this year we’d promised to rob the bakery, the fruit shop, the hardware, the fish ’n’ chip shop, and the optometrist. It never happened.

“And this time I’m serious.” Rube sat forward on the couch. He must have been seeing what I was thinking.

We weren’t robbing anything.

We were hopeless.

## MARKUS ZUSAK

Hopeless, pitiful, and a shake-your-head kind of pathetic.

I myself had a job twice a week delivering newspapers but I got sacked after I broke some guy's kitchen window. It wasn't even a hard throw. It just happened. The window was there half open, I threw the paper, and *Smack!* It went through the glass. The bloke came running out and went berserk and hurled abuse at me as I stood there with a pile of ridiculous tears in my eyes. The job was gone — cursed from the start.

My name's Cameron Wolfe.

I live in the city.

I go to school.

I'm not popular with the girls.

I have a little bit of sense.

I don't have much sense.

I have thick, furry hair that isn't long but always looks messy and always sticks up, no matter how hard I try keeping it down.

My older brother Ruben gets me into plenty of trouble.

I get Rube into as much trouble as he gets me into.

I have another brother named Steve who's the oldest and is the winner of the family. He's had quite a few girls and has a good job and he's the one a lot of people like. He's also some kind of good footballer on top of it.

I have a sister named Sarah who sits on the couch with her boyfriend and has him stick his tongue

## THE UNDERDOG

down her throat whenever possible. Sarah's second oldest.

I have a father who constantly tells Rube and me to wash ourselves because he reckons we look filthy and stink like jungle animals crawling out of the mud.

("I don't bloody stink!" I argue with him. "And I have a shower quite bloody regularly!")

"Well have you heard of soap? . . . I was once your age myself y' know, and I know how filthy guys your age are."

"Is that right?"

"Of course it is. I wouldn't say it otherwise."

No point arguing on.)

I have a mother who says very little but is the toughest thing in our house.

I have a family, yes, that doesn't really function without tomato sauce.

I like winter.

That's me.

Oh, and yeah, at the point in time I'm talking about, I had never, not even once, robbed a single thing in my life. I just talked about it with Rube, exactly like that day in the lounge room.