

KEEPING MUM

His words are ringing in my ears 'No one's going to get hurt, big companies can afford to lose a bit' sounds like a mate trying to convince you to shoplift a bag of sweets or a vape, doesn't it?

But no, this is my dad. The man that I have looked up to for years. My dad trying to convince me that he is doing nothing wrong.

'My workmates are all doing it, it's harmless, and it saves people a few quid so what's the big deal?'

He didn't look so sure of himself last week when the police were hammering on the door at 5am. I woke up with a start, my heart felt as if it was pounding out of my chest. My mum was screaming and my little sister crying. 'What on earth is going on?' My voice sounded so calm that I didn't even realise it was me speaking to begin with.

'Nothing to worry about lad, we just want to take your dad to the station to ask him a few questions.'

'Mum, what's happening?' She silently shook her head and poured herself a glass of wine. Typical. For her wine is the answer to every question.

School was harder than normal that day. I was tired, my head was pounding and full of negative questions and thoughts. Would my dad go to prison? How was my mum going to cope? But mostly how was I going to keep all this quiet?

Just before lunch, my maths teacher held me back in class. 'Jake, you don't look well, what's wrong?' I explained that I just had a headache. 'You often look unwell lately; I think you should go to the nurse's office and see what she has to say'.

Oh great, that's all I needed. But still, best to do as I am told. I'm good at that, keeping quiet and getting on with things.

I must admit, sitting in the nurse's room with a cup of tea felt quite calming. Smooth Radio was playing quietly in the background. Not my normal choice of music but somehow it seemed to fit the occasion.

'You just sit and rest for a while, try taking some deep calming breaths'

I was expecting a load of questions, but no, she left me in peace to gather my thoughts. I began to pay more attention to my surroundings. Directly opposite me on the door was a brightly coloured poster.

'Are you 12-17 years old?

Is someone's drinking affecting you?

You are not alone.

Alateen is for young people who's lives have been affected by someone else's drinking.

<https://al-anonuk.org.uk/alateen/> 0800 008 6811

A quiet knock on the door disturbed by thoughts.

The pretty girl who came in was a year below me. I had noticed her around, she seemed very quiet and was usually alone. She had bright dyed red hair. It seemed strange that someone so shy would have such eye-catching hair. I thought of my dad's awful joke, 'I dated a red head once, no hair, just a red head.' Awful.

'I was looking for the nurse, I'll come back later.'

Just as well because I didn't have a clue what to say to her.

I got home from school to find my mum in her usual position, sleeping on the sofa, empty bottle on the floor. my little sister was watching The Disney Channel, courtesy of one of Dad's dodgy firesticks.

There was no sign of mum waking up, so I got myself and Jodie a bowl of cornflakes.

Dad still wasn't home that night, and mum wouldn't tell me anything, other than pointing to a notice on the table which said, 'Providing illegal

streaming of content not licenced or owned by you.' I tried to ask more but she shouted at me to mind my own business and get to bed.

It turned out that there was an Alateen meeting in the next town on Saturday. I had nothing to lose. No one would know me, it was totally anonymous, it was free - so I went.

'Welcome to Alateen' said the sign on the door. A boy a few years older invited me to sit down. It felt calm, around ten teenagers were quietly chatting.

'Ok, let's get started. Welcome to this Alateen group. We hope you will find here help and friendship. You will discover that no situation is really hopeless, and that it is possible for us to find contentment, whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not.'

The door flies open with a bang 'Sorry I'm late' And there she is, the girl with the red hair. I don't know whether to laugh or cry, so I look down in dread, hoping to find a big hole to fall in to.