

BRITTANY

GERAGOTELIS



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THE INFAMOUS

Frankie Lorde

STEALING
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THE INFAMOUS
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Entry One

People say writing in journals can be therapeutic. Well, at least that's what my therapist says. I just think it's an easy way for other people to find out all your secrets.

And seriously, who wants that?

But alas, my therapist, Dr. Janine Deerchuck—yep, that's really her name—thinks it would be “beneficial” to me if I kept one, so here we are.

She's suggested that I use this journal to write down all my hopes, and dreams, and fears, and blah, blah, blah . . . I figure if I'm going to do this, I'll use it as a record of every awesome thing I've ever done. And when I'm finished filling up every last lined page in this black-and-white notebook, I'll send it to my dad to let him know what I've been up to since he went away.

And that's what brings us to Dr. Deerchuck and this journal in the first place:

Dear old Dad.

Don't get me wrong, my dad is *awesome*. He's one of the smartest, coolest, greatest dads on the planet. He's practically raised me all on his own, and has taken me to places that other kids don't even know exist—like Tanzania and Cat Island. He lets me stay up late, his favorite food

is pancakes, and he doesn't even care if I occasionally sneak-watch *Game of Thrones*.

He should be in the Hall of Fame of dads, right?

In reality? Not so much.

But he *is* famous. Just not for his mad dad skills.

Let me draw you a picture of my life with Dad. This is what happened during our last daddy/daughter outing:

Dad and I were in Paris, hanging out at a hip local spot, drinking *café crèmes*—a fancy term for milky coffee, in case you didn't know—and people-watching. It's one of our favorite things to do. We take turns coming up with backgrounds and stories for strangers who walk by.

Trust me, it's a lot more entertaining than it sounds.

I'd just dug into the most delicious chocolate croissant when Dad discreetly pointed to a lady crossing the street. She was wearing a smart-looking trench coat and sporting a short, boyish haircut.

"So, Frankie, what's her deal?" Dad asked me.

I studied her like she was a work of art, noting her appearance and the way she moved and then taking in any other details she was giving away. If you know what to look for, it's easy to tell exactly who a person is within the first fifteen seconds of meeting them.

And who taught me this cool superpower? My dad.

See, I told you he's awesome.

"She's American. That's obvious. Look at her shoes," I said, gesturing at the boringly practical black flats the woman was wearing. "She's trying to act like she's not

in a rush, but she is. And she's nervous about something. Maybe she's meeting someone for the first time? Her trench coat isn't a fashion statement. It's there to hide what's underneath, which appears to be . . .”

I squinted in the midmorning sun in an attempt to see better.

“ . . . very unstylish and poorly fitting pants,” I finished. “She's a professional of some kind, though her appearance doesn't seem to be a concern of hers, so I'd guess she's not in media or entertainment, or any field where she has to sell things to people, for that matter.”

The woman's eyes flitted from side to side furtively as if she was looking for someone. And that's when it happened.

Her gaze fell on me and we locked eyes.

It was only for a few seconds, but there was a recognition there that I could see right away. Almost immediately, she was lifting her hand up to her ear, and I watched as her lips moved soundlessly.

“She's a cop,” I said bluntly, realizing I should've figured it out earlier. My dad probably had her pegged when he first picked her out of the crowd. He'd just been testing me.

And I'd failed.

“Dad—” I started.

“Play it cool, Frankie,” my dad said calmly as he picked up his still-steaming *café crème* and took a long sip.

“What's the plan?” I asked almost immediately, having played out this scenario a million times in my head.

I looked around the square to try to suss out all possible escape routes. Within a few seconds I already knew of five different ways we could get out of there before the trench coat lady even reached us.

“I’ll spill my drink, you go inside to get napkins,” I said, thinking out loud. “Head out the back and down the alley and I’ll meet you at our rendezvous point—”

“It’s over, Frankie,” my dad said, smiling at me.

“It’s not,” I said, confused. “She won’t even get here for another ten seconds.”

“She’s the last one to the party,” Dad said, gesturing over his shoulder to the table directly behind us. “There’s nothing to do.”

I swiveled my gaze without moving my head and immediately saw what he was talking about. Two serious-looking guys in suits sat at a tiny round table nearby, staring straight at us. Cups of coffee sat in front of them, but there was no steam, which meant the coffee had long since gone cold. Or possibly, there hadn’t been anything in there to begin with.

Another detail I’d missed earlier. Man, I was off my game.

But Dad wasn’t. Per usual, he knew everything that was going on around him.

And now he was telling me the jig was up.

“But, Dad,” I argued, my voice coming out all squeaky and high like I hated. “You said there’s always a plan B.”

“There is,” he answered, patting my hand reassuringly. “We’re just not using it *today*.”

An arm reached in between us then and I looked up to see one of the men from the next table helping Dad to his feet and pulling his arms behind his back.

Trench Coat Lady finally reached us, slightly out of breath from her walk but prickling with excitement.

“Tom Lorde, you’re under arrest for fraud, forgery, swindling, grand larceny . . . ,” she began as she listed off all his offenses from memory. I wondered how long she’d been practicing the speech. Hours? Days? Years?

And without another word to me, she swept Dad away and into a waiting car.

Entry Two

So, yeah. My dad's sort of a thief.

Well, not just *any* thief. I believe after his arrest and subsequent trial, the papers called him “the most infamous international thief in modern history.” Which, of course, made me roll my eyes, but I was also secretly a little proud. I knew Dad was good. I just hadn't realized he was *infamous* good.

After that day, my life turned completely upside down. This is the reason I have to see Dr. Deerchuck and write in this stupid journal.

Make more sense now?

Anyway, the journal is kind of the least of my worries right now. Because now that my dad is living out his infamy in a prison in Virginia and the law says I have to have an adult watching my every move, I'm being sent to live with my uncle Scotty.

Uncle Scotty is my dad's brother. He's younger than my dad by, well, a lot, and I haven't seen him in over five years. Since before Dad decided to take our show on the road and travel the world.

I don't remember a lot about him, but from what I *do* recall, he's not all that bad. Whenever we visited, he'd always order pizza or Chinese takeout for dinner

and tell me embarrassing stories about my dad when he was a kid.

And my dad liked Uncle Scotty, too. Once he confessed that as far as younger brothers went, Uncle Scotty wasn't all that annoying. And for someone like my dad, who didn't actually like all that many people—and trusted even fewer—that was high praise.

But as cool as Uncle Scotty may be, there's still one big, glaring, red-alert problem with going to live with him.

He's a cop.

And as you can probably guess . . . thieves and cops don't exactly mix.

Entry Three

So you can see my dilemma, right?

Recently caught thief going to live with the right hand of the law? The whole situation could practically be a Shakespearean play. In fact, I'm not entirely sure it isn't. Dad and I only made it through half of Willy's work before my studies were cut short by the FBI.

What I'm trying to say is that me going to live with my cop uncle is definitely a recipe for disaster.

Not everyone agrees with me, though.

"I really think this will be good for you, Frankie," Dr. Deerchuck said as we sat on the commuter train headed north.

I'd been in New York City the past week, participating in daily mandatory intensive therapy with Dr. Deerchuck, meant to prepare me for my new life with Uncle Scotty.

But how were you supposed to prepare for something like that?

Well, apparently it involved a *lot* of talking. And then more talking. And yep, more talking.

Now all I wanted to do on our trip up to Connecticut was *not* talk.

Dr. Deerchuck, however, hadn't stopped talking since we'd sat down.

“Frankie? Are you listening to me?” she asked, forcing her face in front of mine so I’d have to make eye contact with her. “I *do* think this will be good for you.”

“I’m glad you think so,” I said under my breath as I evaded her gaze, looking around the rest of the train car instead.

“What was that?” Dr. Deerchuck asked, not quite hearing what I’d said.

I forced myself to brighten. “I said, ‘I should think so.’”

Dr. Deerchuck beamed, seeming happy to have gotten through to another one of her patients.

“Now, I understand you and your uncle haven’t seen each other in quite some time, so things might not click into place right away,” she continued. “But I promise, if you just keep an open mind and are willing to adapt to your new situation, things will get back to normal in no time.”

I nodded as I looked out the window at the buildings and houses we were zipping by. I knew this was what she wanted from me and the sooner I complied, the sooner the torture would be over.

“And of course, if anything comes up, you always have this . . . ,” she said, handing over my journal.

I frowned as I saw the familiar black-and-white cover.

I’d hidden the journal under my mattress in New York, hoping to leave it behind, along with Dr. Deerchuck’s other useless suggestions. But it looked like someone had gone mattress diving earlier that day.

“Oh, good,” I said, unenthused. “You found it.”

“You should find a better hiding spot next time,” Dr. Deerchuck said, and winked at me conspiratorially.

“I’ll definitely be doing that,” I responded, shoving the journal into my backpack and going back to staring out the window.

Thankfully, Dr. Deerchuck got a phone call from some other hysterical patient just then and spent the rest of the ride trying to calm them down. Which meant that for the first time in over a week, I had some time to just think.

Think about how messed up my life had become.

How bizarre it was going to be to live with Uncle Scotty.

How much I missed my dad and our old life.

“Next stop, Greenwich, Connecticut,” a man’s voice called out dully over the loudspeaker.

“That’s us!” Dr. Deerchuck said, clapping her hands down onto her lap enthusiastically.

I stood up on shaky legs, slinging my backpack over my shoulder. As I followed Dr. Deerchuck to the exit, I reached up and played with my bangs nervously.

In preparation for trying to fit into my new hometown, I’d dyed my previously platinum-blond hair a flat brown and had it cut it into a bob with short bangs.

I’ve never had bangs before. At least on my *real* hair. I’ve had wigs with bangs, but I’ve only ever worn them until the end of a con. I haven’t had to *live* with the actual unpredictability of shorn locks. And I pretty much regret-

ted the decision immediately following that first snip. The hairdresser had cut them so short, I now had nothing to hide behind, which made me feel even more noticeable than before.

The whole decision had been pretty much one big, epic fail.

At least it seemed to match my life at the moment.

“Do you think you’ll recognize your uncle?” Dr. Deerchuck asked as we stepped off the train and into the midafternoon sun.

The station looked like one of those old-school train stops. Sort of like the one at Disneyland. All bright and shiny and happy. Like you were stepping off into a completely different world.

Which, well, we sort of were.

“Well, hello, ma’am.” A middle-aged man with light blue eyes stopped us as the train pulled away behind us. “May I help you and your . . . daughter get a ride into town?”

I frowned. People don’t do something for nothing. This guy wanted something, and I wasn’t going to fall for it just because he was flashing a perfect set of teeth and kind eyes.

I started to tell him to shove off, but Dr. Deerchuck cut in.

“Well, that’s very kind of you, but we’re meeting someone,” she responded politely.

“Of course,” the man replied. “Well, let me know if you need any help with anything.”

As the man walked away, Dr. Deerchuck looked sideways at me. “I know it’s hard given your past, but not everyone is out to con you,” she said to me, gently. “This is a nice town. Full of nice people. My hope is that you’ll be able to let your guard down eventually, Frankie.”

When I didn’t respond, Dr. Deerchuck adjusted her purse back onto her shoulder and started to look around.

“So do you recognize anyone?” she asked, sounding hopeful.

I scanned the platform and then looked beyond it to the parking lot. There were around thirty people bustling around, which seemed busy for a small town in the middle of the day, but what did I know about this place?

Still, I picked Uncle Scotty out almost immediately.

I couldn’t see his features from so far away, but my instincts told me it was him. He was the only person standing still, and he was leaning back against an enormous red Ford truck. And his slouch was exactly like Dad’s.

And mine.

So I guess we had *something* in common.

He was wearing fitted jeans and what appeared to be a suit jacket, even though it was in the mid-70s in September. His sunglasses reflected the sun and nearly blinded me as he turned to look in our direction.

As soon as he saw me, he lifted his hand in hello, and I did the same.

“Ah, is that your uncle then?” Dr. Deerchuck asked, squinting as she tried to get a better look at the guy who would be taking care of me for the foreseeable future. “He’s not quite what I expected, I must admit.”

I nodded.

“Funny, none of this is what I expected, either,” I said, and started off toward Uncle Scotty.

Entry Four

Standing there in front of Uncle Scotty was surreal.

It was like looking at a younger, fitter, darker-haired version of my dad. Like what I imagined Dad looked like when he first met my mom. Before he realized that in his line of work, it was better to go unnoticed than to stand out. People remember good-looking.

They do *not* remember unremarkable.

At least, that's what Dad told me whenever I'd make fun of the fact that his gut was starting to hang out over his pants and his disheveled blond hair made him look like Justin Bieber during his breakdown.

"It doesn't pay to be handsome, Frankie," he said once. Then he patted his slightly doughy stomach and ran his hands through his hair. "Don't underestimate the power of plain."

"So *this* . . . ," I said, gesturing grandly to him, "is a *conscious* choice you're making?"

"Hey, I've worked really hard to cultivate a disguise that allows me to remain unnoticed wherever I go," he said, giving me an impish smile. "You, on the other hand . . . you got your mother's devastating looks. That means you're going to have to work extra hard to hide the fact that you're absolutely extraordinary."

“I don’t look *that* much like her,” I said, waving off the compliment, though I wished it were true.

Because the truth is, my mom was stunning. Like, movie star beautiful. With her long blond hair that swished around the middle of her back and a figure that would make a supermodel jealous, her beauty was only surpassed by her cool-chick attitude. Of course, I don’t know this from experience. I was really young when she went away. But everyone who knew her said the same thing: Laney Lorde was a force to be reckoned with.

Over the years, I’ve often wondered how my mom managed to be as good at the con as she was. If what Dad said is true, people stopped whatever they were doing to stare at her whenever she entered a room. And after years on the job with Dad, I know it’s nearly impossible to get away with anything when all eyes are on you.

Then again, I guess that’s why Dad insists that Mom was the best in the biz. Her looks had forced her to work even harder at her craft, which made her better than the average thief.

Whenever Dad said I reminded him of her, we both knew he was exaggerating or saying it to make me feel better about myself. Because, while I inherited Mom’s blond hair and cheeky attitude, my body still looks like a boy’s. I’m all angles and bones. Let’s just say I’ve been wearing a training bra for years now, but the *training* has *not* helped.

Still, the features my mom *did* pass on to me are unusual enough to get me noticed. Thus, the reason I'd opted for a mousy-brown dye job and an Anna Wintour-like haircut for my move to Connecticut. At least it dulled me down enough to ensure that I'd fit in.

Because I had no interest in standing out here. In fact, I planned on doing my time quietly until Dad either got out on parole or broke out—whichever came first—and we could resume our perfect lifestyle of traveling and conning.

Uncle Scotty suddenly cleared his throat, and I startled, the reaction snapping me back to reality. I hadn't realized how long I'd been standing there just staring at him until it was glaringly obvious that I'd been doing so.

"You okay?" he asked me, since I still hadn't said anything.

I shook my head to make the memory fade and cleared the expression from my face.

"Sure, yeah," I said, and then added quickly, "You look the same."

I knew it was a silly statement. Of course he'd changed over the past five years. Everyone changes. But it was also sort of true. Uncle Scotty looked exactly how I remembered him.

"I had a beard for a while," he offered, reaching up to touch his currently smooth face absently. "But I shaved it when it started to get warm out. It was . . . itchy."

“Oh,” I said, nodding as if I could picture it. But the truth was, I couldn’t. I just kept picturing a deranged mountain man with a grizzly beard. Which was so not the clean-cut young cop in front of me.

“Well, *you’ve* certainly changed,” Uncle Scotty said, reaching out and tousling my short bangs awkwardly.

I instantly began to brush them back into place self-consciously, then realized I was fidgeting again and stopped abruptly. It was a new tell for me, and one I wanted to nip in the bud as soon as possible. Tells—things that people unconsciously do that clue others in to what they’re thinking and feeling—can give you away. And if Dad taught me one thing, it was to hold all my cards close to the vest.

“Yeah,” I said, standing up straighter. “New look for my new life, I guess.”

I said this last part mostly for Dr. Deerchuck’s benefit, since she was standing right there and probably analyzing our every move. A quick peek out of the corner of my eye proved me right.

Dr. Deerchuck’s tell is that she can’t hide her emotions. She was currently beaming at me, like I’d just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize or something. And I knew she was silently congratulating herself on another job well done. I would’ve rolled my eyes at how easy she was to read, but then I’d be giving myself away, too.

And I just wanted to get out of there.

“Well, it looks like everything’s going to work out just

fine here,” Dr. Deerchuck said, clapping her hands together. “Frankie, what do you think? I can stick around for a while—”

“No!” I said, a little too quickly, before relaxing into a shy smile. This family reunion was going to be awkward enough without having my therapist chiming in on everything we said. “I mean, I think we’ll be okay. After we catch up and stuff.”

“Okay,” she conceded happily. “Well, I’ll be talking to you on Tuesdays for our mandatory sessions, but if you need anything before then, you have my number.”

I pulled her business card out of my back pocket and held it up for her to see.

“Very well,” she said, and turned to Uncle Scotty. “Nice meeting you. Please feel free to reach out with . . . anything that might come up.”

“Will do,” Uncle Scotty said, shaking her hand in a businesslike way.

I beelined for Uncle Scotty’s truck and tossed my bag up onto the seat before Deerchuck could change her mind.

“Is that all you’ve got?” he asked me as the engine roared to life.

“It’s all I need,” I said instinctively.

“Right,” Uncle Scotty said with a wry smile. “I forgot how much like your dad you are.”

I raised my eyebrow at him curiously.

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” I asked, figur-

ing his answer would give me some insight into what he was thinking.

Uncle Scotty remained silent for a moment as he put the truck into gear and pulled away from the train station. Just when I thought he wasn't going to answer me at all, he glanced over and gave me a smile.

"I guess it depends on who you ask," he said finally, and pulled out into traffic.

Entry Five

“You hungry?” Uncle Scotty asked me as we drove.

“I could eat,” I said, thinking maybe we wouldn’t have to talk all that much if we were busy stuffing our faces. “I could use a coffee, too.”

Now it was Uncle Scotty’s turn to raise his eyebrow.

“You drink coffee?” he asked.

“Dad says—” I started, but stopped when Uncle Scotty began to chuckle.

“Of *course* your dad would let you drink coffee,” he said.

I couldn’t tell if the comment was meant as a judgment or just a matter of fact. The truth is, I’ve always kind of wondered what Uncle Scotty really thinks of my dad and our lifestyle, considering we’re probably the epitome of everything he despises. Well, maybe not *despises*. But let’s be honest, our values sort of fly in the face of everything he believes in.

Case in point: Uncle Scotty is a cop, so he must have pretty strong feelings and opinions about staying within the bounds of the law. And while our side of the family is a little more . . . relaxed on the boundaries of right and wrong, it would make sense that Uncle Scotty would be more black-and-white about things.

At least, that's what I've assumed.

Since he's a cop and all.

"It's a myth that coffee stunts your growth, you know," I said, matter-of-fact. "It's true that it contains caffeine, which stimulates the central nervous system and in high doses can cause anxiety and dizziness and interfere with normal sleep patterns, which can lead to other health issues. But soda and tea have caffeine in them, too. So does chocolate. Dad believes in making informed decisions and always thought it was important to let me ultimately choose what went into my own body."

Uncle Scotty looked over at me as I finished my mini-lecture, his mouth hanging open slightly.

I smiled proudly. I love dropping knowledge bombs on people. Especially when they don't see them coming.

"But don't worry, Uncle Scotty," I added before looking out the window again. "I only drink decaf. A girl needs her beauty sleep, you know."

I stared at the scenery as we drove by, taking in every building and house and store I saw along the way. We'd left the train station in one direction, but after a few minutes, I noticed that Uncle Scotty had made a turn and was heading back the way we'd just come.

I notice things like this. Directions we take in cars, paths we go down, addresses and streets we're near at any given moment. It's a tactic that comes in handy, in case you need a quick getaway or have to retrace your steps.

I did it now without even thinking about it. And I

have to admit, the habit serves me well more often than you'd think.

As soon as I realized we were backtracking, there was a small part of me—a part I'd never admit to anyone else—that wondered if Uncle Scotty was taking me back to the train station. Like, he'd already decided I was going to be too much trouble for him and he was cutting his losses early.

Nope, sorry, kid. You're too messed up to fit in with my law-abiding lifestyle. Good luck and see you in another five years, I imagined him saying to me before peeling out and disappearing forever.

But, of course, this wasn't what happened.

Instead, we pulled onto Greenwich.

And it was like arriving in Narnia.

Okay, that's a total exaggeration. It was more like finding myself on the set of *Pleasantville* or *The Stepford Wives*, or in some sort of idyllic buttoned-up town like that. The point was, Greenwich was unlike anywhere I'd ever been before.

And I'd been a lot of places.

Let me set the scene for you: Greenwich Avenue is an interesting mixture of old-school elegance and modern wealth. The one-way street is lined with deep green trees and brightly colored plants hanging from old-school-looking streetlamps. People waved hello to each other as they walked their Labradoodles and Yorkies and Maltipoos, or other equally fancy dogs, and browsed the shops

along the way. The aforementioned shops ranged from high-end places like Saks Fifth Avenue to Starbucks and stood just a few stories high.

And everything was so . . . *clean*.

Like, I wouldn't have been at all surprised to find men running out of their hiding places to pick up the stray garbage people dropped on their jaunts down the avenue. Then again, I couldn't actually imagine people who lived in this town littering, so perhaps that was the real reason for the strip's pristine appearance.

After a few blocks of this, Uncle Scotty pulled into one of the empty parking spots along the street and turned off the truck.

"You should like this place," he said, pointing to the little café in front of us. "It's worldly, just like you—and it even has coffee!"

I looked over at him to see if he was serious but could tell instantly that he was teasing me.

"Har, har," I responded, rolling my eyes.

"Just want you to feel at home," he said, winking at me.

"Here?" I said before I could help myself. "Not a chance."

The look was only there on his face for a split second, but I caught it anyway: mild disappointment. Or maybe it was sadness?

I couldn't really tell with him yet, and before I could analyze the look any further, he'd replaced it with an easy smile and held the café door open for me.



As soon as I walked through the doors of Méli-Mélo, the sweet smell of dough and sugar filled my senses and I immediately began to drool. Not noticeably, of course, but enough to make me swallow hard and look around to see what was making me suddenly so hungry.

“Crepes,” I breathed as I spied the menu on a nearby chalkboard.

“Did I do good?” Uncle Scotty asked, sounding slightly relieved.

“Very,” I answered, nodding as I ventured farther inside the café.

It was obvious that the place was meant to resemble a French bistro, with lots of single tables lining both sides. The walls were painted bright yellow and adorned with colorfully painted canvas. Oversized windows at the front of the store were opened up to let in the fresh air, and a few people sat at the tables and the stools at the counter.

The place wasn't *authentic* French. It couldn't be, since we were in the states, of course. But it did make me a bit nostalgic for the real thing. And the real France was somehow both romantically intimate and completely autonomous at the same time. The buildings all held an old-school feel to them, like they hadn't been changed since the day they'd been built, and no detail was left untouched. For instance, every single door was unique and authentic, complete with different designs, shapes, colors, and materials. It sounds like a weird thing to

notice—like, who cares about a door, right?—but it really embodied the city itself. No two things were the same in Paris, and nothing was quite what it seemed. I suppose that’s the reason I felt so at ease there. Nowhere in the States could compare to that kind of atmosphere—but this café was certainly trying, which made me a bit nostalgic.

And it didn’t hurt that it smelled fantastic.

Perusing the menu, I could see that they had a little bit of everything. Soups, salads, sandwiches and crepes—oh, the crepes! Savory, sweet, and everything in between.

I wanted them all.

To be honest, anything would’ve been preferable to the bland cafeteria-style food we’d been forced to eat at the residential treatment facility I’d been stuck in while my dad was on trial. The sad thing was that the repeat lodgers—i.e. kids who’d been separated from their parents before because of prison stints or trials, and didn’t have any other relatives willing to take them in—swore the food where we were staying was better than at child services or most foster homes.

I couldn’t see how that was true, but then again, I was a newbie.

Plus, the food was no doubt better than the prison food my dad had been getting. But when you’re international foodies like we are, being forced to eat plain chicken, white rice, and a vegetable five nights a week is practically torture.

Uncle Scotty and I sat down at one of the tables near the open windows a few minutes later, our black-and-white number card there to tell our waiter where to bring our food.

“So . . . ,” he said once we were settled.

“So . . . ,” I answered, because I didn’t want to be the one to start this conversation.

“How are you doing?” he asked finally, broaching the subject with what seemed like caution.

“Fine,” I answered. “Hungry.”

This was what I assumed he wanted to hear. That although all these crazy things had happened to me over the past months and my whole world had pretty much fallen apart, I was holding it together and ready to get on with my life. He didn’t *really* want to know about the hard parts. The down-and-dirty details that would make him feel like he had to fix me.

Nobody *really* wanted to know that.

Except for maybe Dr. Deerchuck. But that’s her job.

“You know that’s not what I meant,” Uncle Scotty said softly. “I meant, how are you dealing with all this stuff with your dad?”

Or maybe he *did* want to know all the dirty details?

I hadn’t been prepared for that and squirmed in my seat a little.

“I don’t know,” I said, not really interested in elaborating. “It sucks.”

“Yeah,” Uncle Scotty said, and ran his hand down his face. “It does.”

Suddenly he looked tired and stressed. And I started to feel guilty, because I knew at least part of it was my fault.

“Hey, I didn’t ask to come here and interrupt your life or anything,” I said defensively.

He stared at me, a confused look on his face.

“You’re not interrupting my life, Frankie,” he explained clearly. “I’m *glad* you’re here. I just meant . . . God, this is all so messed up.”

I studied him for a few seconds before looking down at the table and laughing out loud.

“You can say that again,” I said, nodding in agreement, as our food arrived. I’d ordered both sweet and savory—a crepe with ham and cheese and another with brown sugar, cinnamon, and a whopping dollop of frosting on top. I did a little happy dance in my seat before digging in.

“How’s your dad doing?” Uncle Scotty asked, as if the question were a normal one.

I paused, the big bite of ham and cheese filling every inch of my mouth, making it nearly impossible for me to answer. I chewed the best I could and then swallowed, the food burning my throat as it went down.

“He’s in prison,” I answered bluntly. “How do you think he’s doing?”

“Fair enough,” Uncle Scotty said evenly. “But are they treating him okay?”

I could hear the concern in his voice, so I held back the response I really wanted to give, which was some-

thing to the effect of *He's doing great! They have five-course meals and thousand-thread-count sheets. Prison's like a regular old Club Med!*

"I guess," I said instead, shrugging noncommittally. Then, turning the tables on him, I added, "You haven't talked to him yet?"

"I have," Uncle Scotty admitted. "But he only wanted to talk about you. Wouldn't really give me any details. You know your dad. He's not exactly a talker."

"Mmmm," I answered, and took another bite so I wouldn't have to say more.

"Clearly another trait you got from him," Uncle Scotty answered with a laugh. I knew he meant it as a joke, but it still managed to feel like a dig.

"Maybe he doesn't like to be interrogated," I said.

Another pause.

"Frankie, I'm not trying to interrogate you . . . ," Uncle Scotty began, then trailed off. "I'm just trying to . . . understand what happened."

I'd been waiting for this question from the beginning and still didn't have a good answer for him. But I could tell he wanted one anyway, so I gave him the best explanation I could.

"What happened is, he got caught," I said before getting up and walking away.