

Chapter One

The credits started rolling up the screen.

The lights came on and Mrs. Fletcher walked to the front of the classroom and clicked off the monitor.

“That was quite an interesting documentary,” she said.

It was called *Stuffed*, and it was about Frankie’s, the gigantic fast-food chain. It talked about how

their food was filled with fat and chemicals and how eating it could make people overweight, unhealthy, sick and could basically kill them.

“Comments?” Mrs. Fletcher asked.

“That was disgusting,” Julia snapped. Julia was one of my best friends. “Just disgusting!”

“It was pretty gross,” Oswald agreed. He was my best friend.

Two weeks ago he might have agreed or he might have disagreed with Julia. Now he did nothing but agree with anything and everything she said. Two weeks ago he and Julia had stopped being friends and started being boyfriend and girlfriend.

“It made me hungry,” Trevor said. A chorus of laughter followed his words.

“Hungry?” Julia demanded, sounding not only surprised but offended. “How could you possibly even think about eating after what we just saw?”

“I like Frankie’s food,” Trevor said. “It’s tasty and big...really big...and I like big food.”

If there’s one thing we all knew about Trevor, it’s that he loved to eat.

Julia opened her mouth to answer, but Mrs. Fletcher cut her off. “What do other people think?” she asked.

I thought that was pretty smart on her part—cutting Julia off before she said something about Trevor that we were all probably thinking but nobody should have said.

Other people joined the debate. The documentary had certainly stirred up a lot of opinions.

The film was about some guy who lived on nothing but Frankie’s food. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, he ate nothing but Frankie’s. Sausages and coffee and hotcakes and hash browns for breakfast; burgers and fries and onion rings and cola and root beer for lunch and dinner. Every day, every meal for sixty days. By the end

he had gained a lot of weight and was sluggish and depressed.

“What was the most interesting thing you learned?” Mrs. Fletcher asked the class.

“That they put sugar in *everything*, including the French fries and onion rings,” one girl said.

“I couldn’t believe the amount of sugar that guy had eaten,” another boy said. “It was like a small mountain!”

There had been a scene in the movie where sugar—equal to all the sugar he’d eaten—was piled on a table. The amount of sugar was so massive it slipped off the edges of the table.

“What grossed me out the most was all that fat!” Julia said.

“That was sick!” Oswald agreed. “And I don’t mean that in a good way.”

After the sugar scene they had glass jars filled with greasy, slimy fat—equal to the amount he’d eaten during the two months.

“Those were both very effective visual displays. How many people are now less likely to eat at Frankie’s?” Mrs. Fletcher asked.

Three-quarters of the class put up their hands.

“Those of you who didn’t raise their hands, could you explain why it didn’t affect you in the same way?”

“Frankie’s food tastes the best,” a boy said.

“Yeah,” Trevor agreed, “especially the triple bacon cheeseburger melt.” Trevor’s eyes were closed as if he was picturing the burger in his mind. I wouldn’t have been surprised if a string of drool had come out of his mouth.

That was actually my favorite burger too—I liked it, but I thought Trevor was *in love* with it.

“And you still would eat one of those after watching the film?” Julia questioned.

“Why not?” Trevor asked.

“Did you fall asleep during the movie?” Julia demanded.

“Julia,” Mrs. Fletcher cautioned.

“But Mrs. Fletcher, that’s the very worst thing on the whole menu!” Julia protested. “Each one has over twelve hundred calories and more fat than anybody should eat in an entire day! That guy gained thirty-seven pounds because of that burger!”

“It wasn’t just the burgers,” Trevor said. “And besides, it’s not like I’m going to eat there every day.”

“Trevor has a point,” Mrs. Fletcher said. “Now, this documentary focused on just one fast-food chain, but what about the others?”

“They’re all the same,” Julia said.

“Are they?” Mrs. Fletcher asked.

“Sure they are. They all serve fried, fatty, sugary foods.”

“Yes they do, but don’t most chains offer healthy alternatives?” Mrs. Fletcher questioned.

“Well...”

“Can’t you get salads and fruit platters and yogurt, mineral water and juices at most of the other places?”

“I guess so,” Julia said.

“So at most fast-food restaurants it is possible to eat healthier, if not healthy.”

“But not at Frankie’s,” Oswald said. “They don’t have any of those things. It’s like they’re proud of being unhealthy.”

“Their commercials do brag about offering the biggest servings of fries, the largest soft drinks and the most gigantic burgers,” another person added.

“Ian,” Mrs. Fletcher said, and I startled in my seat. “What do you think about all of this?”

“Me?”

“You. You’ve been very quiet through this whole discussion.”

“Maybe I’ve learned that it’s sometimes better to keep your mouth shut,” I said.

“Sometimes it *is* better. But not in *my* class. And it’s good to have you back in class,” she said.

“It’s nice to be back.”

This was my first morning in class after a two-day suspension—I still couldn’t believe that I’d been suspended!

Disrespectful conduct is what it said on the papers. What that meant is that I had an argument with my law teacher, Mr. Phillips. I’d made the terrible mistake of pointing out to him that he had no idea what he was talking about.

The jerk thought that because he was a law teacher he knew about the law. Both my parents were lawyers. My older sister and both my older brothers were lawyers. In my house we talked about the law. My parents had hoped I’d be a lawyer too. I wasn’t sure what I was going to be, but I was pretty sure what I wasn’t going to be—I wasn’t going to be a lawyer, and I wasn’t going to be a law teacher.

In the end, even after I was suspended, the school agreed that I’d been right and Phillips had been wrong. Unfortunately, both my school and my parents agreed that I probably shouldn’t have sworn at him and told him where to go. My father had said that if I hadn’t sworn at him they would have fought the suspension.

“So, Ian, what did you think about *Stuffed*?” Mrs. Fletcher asked.

“I liked it. I mean, it made some good points. There were things he explained that I hadn’t known. I’m not going to be eating at Frankie’s...as often.”

“As often?” Julia demanded. “Don’t you mean ever again?”

“Ever again is a long time. Besides, I like the triple bacon cheeseburger melt too.”

Julia shot me a disgusted look.

“I will never eat at a Frankie’s again,” Julia pronounced. “Never, not ever.”

“How many people feel like Julia?” Mrs. Fletcher asked.

This time only five hands shot into the air. I noticed that Oswald’s hand didn’t go up. Lucky for him, Julia didn’t notice.

“So the majority of you feel you will eat at Frankie’s less often, but only a few of you think you will never eat there again,” Mrs. Fletcher said.

“Too bad it isn’t more people,” Trevor said, and everybody looked at him in surprise. “Yeah, the less people that eat there, the shorter the lineups for those of us who do.”

There was more laughter. As Mrs. Fletcher tried to settle down the students, the bell rang to signal the end of class.

“You’re all dismissed!” Mrs. Fletcher yelled out. “And please, enjoy your lunch!”

Chapter Two

I settled into my seat at our table in the cafeteria and started pulling stuff out of my lunch bag. A peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich on whole wheat, an apple, a couple of cookies and a soda. Not bad. At least nothing fried or fatty.

Julia put down her lunch bag. I knew what would be inside—salad, a cheese sandwich and