

A RIGHT PICKLE!

'FRANKIE!'

I jolted awake with a yelp, flailing my arms about like an upturned tortoise. The scream was so loud it echoed round my bedroom and knocked my framed portrait of Great-Great-Great-Grandad Abraham off the wall.

'FRANKIE, COME QUICK!'

Sitting up in bed, I rubbed the sleep from my groggy eyes and glanced about, not sure if I was dreaming.

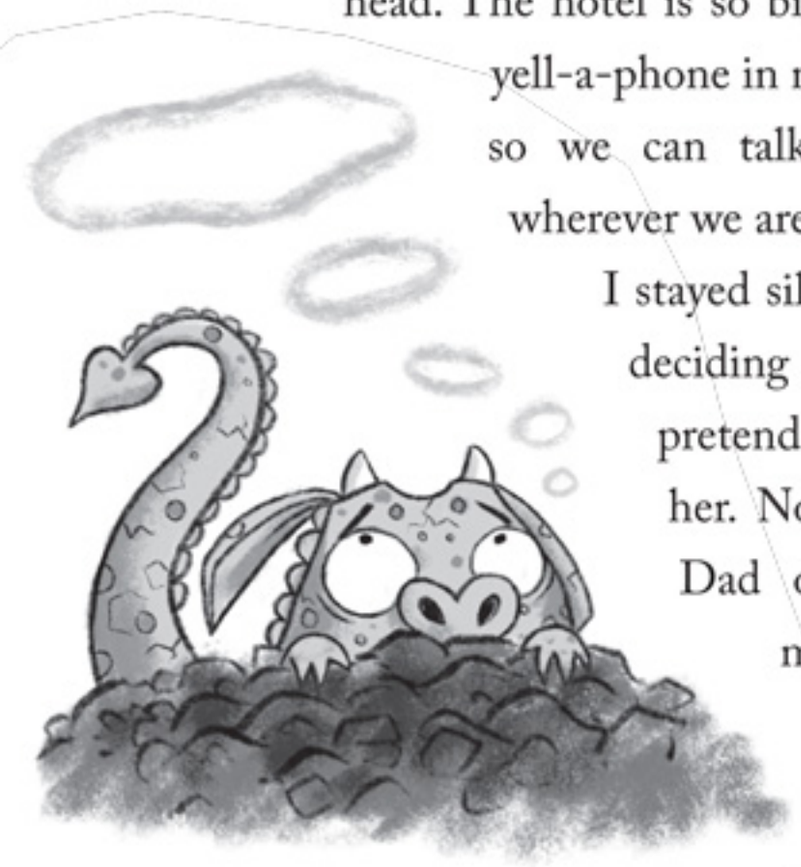
I'd been up late last night, helping Mum with an incident in the garden. Lady Leonora Grey, one of our ghost guests, had got so excited about winning a game of croquet that she'd accidentally exploded

ectoplasm all over a family of hobyahs enjoying an evening outside. It was slime central! The Lawn was furious …

Hoggit, my pet pygmy soot-dragon, whimpered at me from the fireplace. All the yelling had made the orange glow between his scales turn to a pale grey, and he puffed out a chain of tiny smoke rings … a sure sign he was feeling nervous.

'FRANKIE! IT'S URGENT!'

It was Nancy, our hotel cook, speaking to me through the yell-a-phone, a trumpet-shaped contraption sticking out of the wall just above my head. The hotel is so big that we have a yell-a-phone in nearly every room so we can talk to each other wherever we are.



I stayed silent for a minute, deciding whether to pretend I hadn't heard her. Normally, if Mum, Dad or Nancy called me on the yell-a-phone in the morning, it was because they wanted me to help out with MEGA-BORING chores around the hotel, and I wasn't about to do that. I'm not noggin-bonked after all!

'ANSWER ME, DEAR, PLEASE!'

I pricked up my pointy ears. Nancy's voice sounded high-pitched and panicked.

'WE'RE IN A RIGHT PICKLE!'

'A RIGHT PICKLE!?' I gasped, then threw back the blankets and jumped out of bed. If you'd spent any time at all in our hotel, you'd know that 'a right pickle' could mean any sort of disaster!

We'd had a 'right pickle' just last week when a Madagascan muskrumple smashed through the kitchen wall and demolished half the cupboards after he found out we'd run out of bread rolls to go with the seagull-snot soup!

OH! Hang on a second! I've just realised that if you haven't read any of my books before, you're probably wrinkling up your forehead and saying, 'WHAT ON EARTH IS HE TALKING ABOUT?'

Well, don't panic! There are definitely one or two things you need to know before we carry on, but it'll only take me a moment. I'm super good at telling stories. Madam McCreedie, one of our banshee guests, said so … and banshees are NEVER wrong.

I should probably start with an introduction. HELLO! My name is Frankie Banister and I live in the Nothing To See Here Hotel.



Ever been to stay here for your holidays?

Ha! Of course you haven't! It's the best holiday destination for magical creatures in the whole of the UK and we have a STRICTLY NO HUMANS rule.

Well … no humans unless you're married to a

magical, like my mum. She's completely human and my dad is what's known as a halfling, which makes me a quarterling, I suppose. Yep, I'm one thirty-sixth troll and proud of it.

Ever since my great-great-great-human-grandad, Abraham Banister, married my great-great-great-troll-granny, Regurgita Glump, about a hundred years ago, my family tree has been a proper muddle. It's full of trolls and humans, witches, bogrunts, puddle nymphs and just about every other type of magical creature you can think of. Brilliant, huh?

Let's not worry too much about all that family stuff now though. I'll fill you in on the details as we go, I promise, plus I've stuck a picture of my family tree at the beginning of this book for you to have a peek at.

Now, I know it all seems a bit impossible – I'm sure this sounds like a bunch of silly nonkumbumps – but I'm not even kidding. If you've read my first book, you'll know that Frankie Banister NEVER tells lies.

My name really IS Frankie Banister, I really DO

live with my mum and dad, Rani and Bargeous, in a hotel for magical creatures on Brighton's seafront, and Nancy the giant spider (ooops! I forgot to mention that part) had just ruined my sleep, warning me about a right pickle.

So, before you throw this book in the bin, shouting, 'I'M NOT READING THIS! FRANKIE BANISTER HAS POPPED HIS CLONKERS! THIS IS GOING TO BE THE WEIRDEST TALE EVER!', read on just a teensy bit more …

You'll be hooked in no time, I just know it.

'Nancy?' I barked into the metal trumpet of the yell-a-phone. 'I'm here!'

'Ooooh! Frankie! I've been calling you for yonks and yonkers!'

'What's happened?' I shouted, suddenly feeling a queasy mix of excitement and fear bubble up in my tummy. 'A plague of gurnips? A Kraken in the swimming pool? A coachload of Stink Demons?'



'No, my dearie,' Nancy wailed. 'It's much, **MUCH** worse than that. Get down here as quick as you can! **IT'S RUINED! THE DAY'S RUINED!!!**'

I didn't need telling twice. I scooped Hoggit out of the fireplace, jumped into the armchair in the corner of my room, clicked the dial on its arm to the correct position and impatiently waited as it juddered down through my bedroom floor to the library below.

MAGICALS WELCOME! THE NOTHING (HERE) HOTEL BRIGHTON, UK



TROGMA-WHAT?!

It was obvious something was wrong as I reached the ground floor with a bump.

I'd only just clambered out of the chairlift when I heard the library wallpaper grumbling.

Yep! I told you our hotel was weird. It's our version of normal around here, I suppose.

Anyway … it doesn't take long for juicy news to spread when you're living in a magical hotel. The walls have ears – quite literally! Nothing in the whole world loves to gossip quite as much as our enchanted wallpaper does. It's covered in nattering clamshells and painted vines that blossom and wilt as the seasons change, and everyone knows that rumours travel quickest by vine. I swear – keeping a

secret in this place is nearly impossible.

My heart started to race. It wouldn't be long before the whispers had snaked from room to room and all of our guests knew about the right pickle before I did and there was NO WAY I was going to let that happen.

Carrying Hoggit under my arm, I raced out of the library to the grand foyer of the hotel and nearly fell backwards in surprise …

In all my sleepiness, I'd completely forgotten that today was TROGMANAY! It's the last day of the magical calendar and later that evening we'd be throwing the most amazerous, tummy-tinkling party imaginable. It's the biggest shindig we have all year and is always our busiest time, with hundreds of magicals travelling to the hotel from all over the world to feast and celebrate together.

You humans have your New Year celebrations at the end of December, I know, but we enchanted types have ours in June on the longest day of summer. It's an extra-special time and we always throw a tremendous garden party with fireworks and music and mountains of food.

'Happy Trogmanay, young Francis!' an overexcited impolump chuckled at me as I

stood gawping in the doorway. I HATE it when people call me Francis, but I smiled and nodded regardless as the impolump waddled away, carrying an armful of gifts, grinning from ear to ear. 'A jolly trolliday to you!'

I glanced around for a moment and almost forgot about finding Nancy as quickly as possible. Reception was already crowded and bustling with cheerful guests, waving and nattering, and everything had been decorated for our big summer celebration. It looked TERRIFIC!

Mr Croakum, the hotel gardener, had decked the chandeliers with bunches of bizarre flowers that changed colour from yellow, to blue, to purple, to pink, and there were enchanted garlands of bright orange marigolds all around the spiral staircase that wept a constant rainfall of petals down on the happy holidaymakers below.

Gladys Potts, the werepoodle, was howling her favourite trolliday songs from the first-floor balcony and Madam McCreedie was reading a book of Trogmanay ghost stories to a group of nervously

giggling grumplings at the bottom of the stairs.

'That's not how I remember it,' Lady Leonora Grey scoffed, plucking a ghostly fan from the air and wafting herself with it when McCreedie got to an especially spooky part of her story. 'Do you, Norris?' She turned to where Wailing Norris, another of our ghost guests, had been floating, but he'd already screamed and run away.

'It'th all tho fethtive!' said one of the Molar Sisters (triplet tooth fairies called Dentina, Gingiva and Fluora) as the trio spun round the floor, performing a traditional celebration jig. They wobbled and shimmied about like three Trogmanay trifles, gnashing their rotten teeth merrily. 'Happy dayth indeed!'

I spotted Mum at the stone reception desk. She was busily checking a line of moss gremlins in for the weekend, and fussing at the same time about a vase of dead flowers Mr Croakum had left behind on the counter.

The hotel handyogre, Ooof, was next to Mum, holding a tray filled with glasses of fizzy

trog-ma-grog cocktails.

'HELLO, FRANKIE!' Ooof yelled, waving a massive green arm and accidentally throwing the tray of drinks right across the room. It smashed through one of the windows next to the front door and vanished out of sight down the garden path. 'OOOPS!'



That was when Mum looked up and saw me.

'JOLLY TROLLIDAYS!' she beamed. 'Morning, sleepyhead! Look at you, still in your pyjamas.'

Mum always loves magical celebrations. I mean really, REALLY LOVES THEM! I think it's



because she's completely human so it all seems extra brilliant to her.

I headed round the fountain in the middle of the black and white tiled floor, reached the reception desk and was just about to open my mouth when—

'I'm so excited!' Mum said, clapping her hands. 'This Trogmanay is going to be the best one we've ever had … I can feel it!' She looked so happy that I wouldn't have been surprised if her head had floated off her shoulders.

'Mum, I—'

'I can't wait to see what Nancy's rustling up for our festive feast,' she said, practically giggling. 'I hope there's plenty of scrambled unicorn eggs.'

Nancy!!! I was wasting time. I had to go and find out about the RIGHT PICKLE…

Whatever had happened, it was obvious that Mum didn't know … and that was a good thing.

Mum would have thrown a serious wobbler if she knew we were in the middle of a yet another drama … especially on Trogmanay

'GROOOAAAARRR!' Hoggit wriggled in my

MAGICALS WELCOME! THE NOTHING HERE HOTEL BRIGHTON, UK

arms and blew out more little smoke rings. Mum spotted it immediately.

'What's wrong with Hoggit?'

'I … ummm … no … I … nothing.'

'Francis!' Mum's face fell into a frown. 'What's going on?'

'Nothing,' I said again, pulling my best happy face. I felt like my heart was about to play a tune on the inside of my ribs and give me away. 'Hoggit's just filled with Trogmanay cheer, aren't you, boy?'

Mum stared for a second. 'Something's wrong, I can te—'

'See you, Mum!' I shouted, far too loudly. 'Happy Trogmanay!' And, before she could say another word, I spun on my heels and raced out of reception.