



## The Year My Life Turned Upside Down

**Stéphanie Lapointe**

**Marianne Ferrer, Illustrator**

**Ann Marie Boulanger, Translator**

Arctis Books (Nov 14, 2023)

Softcover \$18.00 (370pp)

978-1-64690-024-4

Told in the form of a fourteen-year-old's diary, Stéphanie Lapointe's stimulating bildungsroman *The Year My Life Turned Upside Down* is about grief and change.

Franny's mother died in a boating accident years ago. When her father is invited to Kyoto for an inventor's contest, he sends Franny from Montreal to St. Lorette to stay with relatives who she does not care for. She attends a new school with a strict homeroom teacher, sexist bullies, and an awkward first crush. Through a series of misadventures, she uncovers the truth about her mother's death—a mystery that dangles, chapter after chapter.

Franny is a tempestuous and self-deprecating girl for the first two-thirds of the story. Her voice is troubled; she often writes in all caps ("I DON'T EVEN HAVE A SUBSTITUTE MOTHER"). Though her outbursts are draining, they are also understandable given her circumstances, and she manages to make friends who help her find some answers. The book's big reveal is delayed in service of a romantic subplot; in time, Franny is able to listen to her father's side of the story and repair her relationship with him.

The evocative illustrations of Franny's romantic frustrations take unexpected turns. For example, just after Franny learns that her favorite new French literature teacher has a girlfriend, she writes, "Franny, you've set a record. Being heartbroken for longer than you were in love," and happy, warm colors, including orange, are used to convey her broken heart and teardrops. The constant contrast between content and color reveals Franny's vulnerability despite her drawing herself as a robot.

In the pensive novel *The Year My Life Turned Upside Down*, a grieving teenager pursues the closure that's eluded her for years.

STEPHANIE MARRIE (November / December 2023)

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