

the screamingly funny new book by

David Walliams

RATBURGER



**FREE
BURGER**

from
Burt's Burgers*

*Inspired 1986

David Walliams

Ratburger



Illustrated by Tony Ross



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

For Frankie, the boy with the beautiful smile.

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Meet the characters in this story:



Prawn-Cocktail-Crisp Breath

The hamster was dead.

On his back.

Legs in the air.

Dead.

With tears running down her cheeks, Zoe opened the cage. Her hands were shaking and her heart was breaking. As she laid Gingernut's little furry body down on the worn carpet, she thought she would never smile again.

"Sheila!" called Zoe, as loudly as she could. Despite her father's repeated pleas, Zoe refused to call her stepmother 'Mum'. She never had, and she vowed to herself that she never would. No one could replace Zoe's mum – not that her stepmother ever even tried.

"Shut ya face. I'm watchin' TV and stuffin' meself!" came the woman's gruff voice from the lounge.

"It's Gingernut!" called Zoe. "He's not well!"

This was an understatement.

Zoe had once seen a hospital drama on the telly where a nurse tried to revive a dying old man, so she desperately attempted to give her hamster mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by blowing very gently into his open mouth. That didn't work. Neither did connecting the rodent's little heart to an AA battery with a paper clip. It was just too late.

The hamster was cold to the touch, and he was stiff.

"Sheila! Please help...!" shouted the little girl.

At first Zoe's tears came silently, before she let out a gigantic cry. Finally she heard her stepmother trudge reluctantly down the hall of the little flat, which was situated high up on the 37th floor of a leaning tower block. The woman made huge effort noises whenever she had to do anything. She was so lazy she would order Zoe to pick her nose for her, though of course Zoe always said 'no'. Sheila could even let out a groan while changing channels with the TV remote.

"Eurgh, eurgh, eurgh, eurgh..." huffed Sheila as she thundered down the hall. Zoe's stepmother was quite short, but she made up for it by being as wide as she was tall.

She was, in a word, spherical.

Soon Zoe could sense the woman standing in the doorway, blocking out the light from the hall like a lunar eclipse. What's more, Zoe could smell the sickly sweet aroma of prawn cocktail crisps. Her stepmother loved them. In fact, she boasted that from when she was a toddler she had refused to eat anything else, and spat any other food back in her mum's face. Zoe thought the crisps stank, and not even of prawns. Of course the woman's breath absolutely reeked of them too.



Even now, as she stood in the doorway, Zoe's stepmother was holding a packet of the noxious snack with one hand and feeding her face with the other while she surveyed the scene. As always, she was wearing a long grubby white T-shirt, black leggings and furry pink slippers. The bits of skin that were exposed were covered in tattoos. Her arms bore the names of her ex-husbands, all since crossed out: