

# ANIMAL BOY

## Chapter 3

Beep! Beep! Beep! Josh's alarm startled him awake. He reached over to switch it off, feeling a lot more tired than he had done before falling asleep.

"Wake up, Josh, and get ready for school!" cried his mum from downstairs.

Josh sat up in bed and looked out of his window. The tree branch was empty in the front garden. Not a cat in sight.

He laughed and shook his head. "It must have just been a dream," he said to himself.

He quickly got changed into his school uniform and ran downstairs for breakfast. His little sister was already tucking into a bowl of cereal.

"How are you feeling today, Josh?" asked his mum, walking over with two slices of toast.

"Fine, thanks," he replied. There was no way he was going to tell his mum about the incident with the cats.

He could hear Ellie's pet hamster running in his wheel nearby. Josh had always found it a bit disgusting to have a smelly hamster cage in the kitchen but his sister insisted that Gizmo join them for breakfast *and* dinner. Although Gizmo technically belonged to Ellie, it was their mum who really looked after him.

Their mum was getting Gizmo's bowl out of his cage and filling it up with his hamster food.

"So, decided to go to school today?" Ellie asked as she looked up at Josh from her cereal bowl.

"Ellie, stop it," said her mum.

"How does it feel?" Ellie asked Josh.

Josh knew he would regret asking but he did anyway. "How does what feel?"

"To know you were only a few minutes away from turning into a brain-hungry zombie," she said, laughing.

Josh was about to shout at her when he heard a high-pitched voice.

"Oh, great! Boring hamster food again. Why can't she feed me some of those cornflakes?" the voice squeaked. "Or better yet, how about a slice of toast?"

Josh looked around the kitchen to see where the voice was coming from. The telly was switched on in the corner but it was the news. It couldn't have come from there. He stared at his sister and then at his mother. She was holding the hamster bowl in her hand, ready to place it back inside Gizmo's cage. Josh's eyes were wide and his face turned grey.

"Everything OK, Josh?" asked his mother.

"Hey, lady!" the squeaky voice shouted. "Are you going to put that bowl in here or am I going to have to come and get it myself? I'm starving in here!"



"Erm, Mum," Josh whispered. "I think Gizmo wants his food."

She turned and looked down at the little hamster. His furry face was pressed up against the side of the cage, eyeballing the bowl of food in her hand.

"Oh yes, of course," she said as she opened the cage door and placed the food bowl inside.

“Finally!” the voice squeaked. “Terrible service here. I shall have to write a bad review on TripAdvisor one day.”

Josh couldn’t believe his ears. Could he understand what the hamster was saying?

He ate the last of his breakfast and headed off to school. As he walked, he could feel the beads of sweat rolling down his forehead. He couldn’t explain it: the cats last night, the hamster this morning.

Upon reaching the end of his street, Josh felt as if someone, or something, were watching him. He heard a rustle in the bushes.

“Who’s there?” he shouted. Josh moved in closer to investigate. “I know someone is there. You don’t scare me!” Though he tried to appear strong, the fear was evident in his voice.

Suddenly, one of the cats from the night before sprang out and ran off down the street screaming, “Help, help!”



This was getting way too weird for Josh. He picked up the pace and headed straight for school. This day couldn’t get any stranger... could it?