



# THE NAKED MOLE-RAT LETTERS

## MARY AMATO

Ages 8 - 12 • HC: 978-0-8234-1927-2 / PB: 978-0-8234-2098-8 / E-book available

When her father begins a long-distance romance with a Washington, D.C., zookeeper, twelve-year-old Frankie sends fabricated e-mail letters to the zookeeper in an attempt to end the relationship in this story about family, friendship, and growing up.

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### ASK THE AUTHOR—THE INSIDE SCOOP

**How much of the book is based on your personal experience?**

Although I based the book on my experience of reading my father's secret love letters to the woman who eventually became my stepmother, Frankie Wallop is not me. A work of fiction is made up of bits and pieces of an author's world, but it is a new invention. Here are some of the ways Frankie and I are different and some of the things we share in common:



- ❖ I play the dulcimer now. But I didn't grow up playing the dulcimer like Frankie.
- ❖ I am the baby of four girls whereas Frankie is the oldest and has two brothers.
- ❖ My father's secret love was a kindergarten teacher, not a zookeeper.
- ❖ I have kept a journal since the age of seven. Writing in my diary was an important way for me to express my feelings.
- ❖ I had two cooking fires in my house, but nothing was destroyed.
- ❖ Like Frankie, I auditioned for *The Miracle Worker*. I wanted to play Helen and didn't make it. My interest in Helen Keller came much earlier than Frankie's. We had a family friend who was blind. I learned Braille from her when I was in the second grade.
- ❖ I grew up in Illinois, not Indiana. But I did go to college in Bloomington, Indiana.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ❖ Sometimes Frankie tells lies. In what other ways is she dishonest? In what ways is she honest?
- ❖ Talk about other characters in the book and in what ways they are either honest or dishonest.
- ❖ When does Frankie begin to like Ayanna? Why?
- ❖ Ayanna teaches Frankie about the behavior of naked mole-rats. What else does she teach Frankie?
- ❖ How does her father change? What forces him to change?

### SPRINGBOARDS FOR YOUR OWN WRITING

- ❖ Write a story about a lie that gets your main character in trouble.
- ❖ Create two characters who have a hard time communicating with each other in person. Write a story that is entirely made up of letters that they write to each other. (Note: A story that is told in the form of letters is called an epistolary novel.)