

Dear Leo,

Welcome to Apartment 10B! Welcome to your new home! You are now an official member of the Rossi family . . . and guess what? You are the first ever Rossi DOG. So congratulations. You made it.

Annie Rossi loves writing letters about her life and reading them to her new dog, Leo. Through the ups and downs of her fourth-grade year, Annie has lots of stories to tell – and Leo is the perfect listener.

★ “Upbeat and chirpy. . . . Leo evokes empathy with a light touch.” – *School Library Journal* (starred review)

“Infectiously exuberant.” – *Kirkus Reviews*



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Ages 8–12



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Amy Hest

Letters
To
LEO

illustrated by Julia Denos



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Model Citizen LEO.

November 13

Dear Leo,

Welcome to apartment 10B! Welcome to your new home! You are now an official member of the Rossi family . . . and guess what? You are the first ever Rossi DOG. So, congratulations. You made it.

We weren't going to get a dog. Ever. Because of my father. All my life, I kept saying, I WANT A DOG! I WANT A DOG! But no dog. Because of my father.

HE DOES NOT LOVE DOGS.

I finally figured out why he doesn't love dogs. It has to do with being brave. See, some fathers are BIG and BRAVE. My father is TALL, but he isn't that brave. Sometimes he pretends to be. But I know the truth. I know he is secretly afraid of things. All kinds of things. Such as bugs and tall ladders and the ocean when the waves are too high. And large dogs.

HE MIGHT EVEN BE AFRAID OF **ALL** DOGS.
EVEN LITTLE CUTIES LIKE **YOU**.

That's why you have to be a good boy, Leo. A nice, little perfect Rossi, okay? Chin up, baby! It's not that hard! Just do everything I say every single day, and presto change-o . . . my father isn't afraid of dogs anymore! We all live happily ever after.

~~Very truly yours,~~

~~Yours very truly,~~

~~Your truest friend,~~

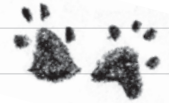
Love you, Leo!

Annie

*Also. I made you a merry little workbook. WE SHALL READ YOUR WORKBOOK EVERY DAY.

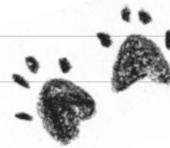
Try, try, try. It's important to try hard.

LEO'S WORKBOOK



HOW TO BE A GOOD DOG
AND PERFECT LITTLE ROSSI

1. Wag a lot. Be cheerful, not grumpy.
2. Pretend my father is your best friend, even though your best friend is ME.
3. Be a good eater and don't waste food and don't make faces if you don't like the food.
4. Watch baseball on TV with my father. Root for the Yankees. It's important.
5. Be polite to all the neighbors, and no jumping on the neighbors.
6. No loud barking in apartment 10B. *In case of EMERGENCY (such as a big bad robber in the house), you may bark a lot. You may BITE the robber.



This is the longest letter I ever wrote and my hand is falling off! But don't worry, Leo, I promise to write you more great letters. Short ones, ha! With lots of secrets, ha! And I will read you all my letters late at night and nobody knows. Just you! Just me!

A

November 15

Dear Leo,

Well, of course I'm not supposed to do things that are sneaky . . . but too bad.

I love sneaking you in my bed!
And yo ho ho!
My father doesn't know!

Poor Leo, you were cold on the cold floor. You were lonely in the lonely night. *Someone* had to save you. So I put you in my bed . . . and saved you.

LEO'S LULLABY

Good night, Leo!

Sleep tight, Leo!

Don't snore, Leo!

And don't get caught!

Signed,

Miss Sneaky

November 16

Dear Leo,

Don't be sad, okay? And don't blame me. Because it's not my fault. Sure, I want to stay home with you, but I *have* to go to school tomorrow. All kids do. It's the LAW and my father won't let me break the LAW. Ever. Which is a big shame. Because fourth grade is a lot of *hard work*. Especially if your teacher is Mrs. No-Fun Bailey. In room 245 you have to be serious at all times. And *follow directions* at all times, etc. If you're 100% *perfect* at all times, then you're a *model citizen*, and Mrs. B puts your name on the bulletin board, and your picture, and a story about *you* and all your good deeds, etc. Last week, Pauline was *model citizen*. That's her second time this year, so let's not like Pauline, ha!

You know who's lucky? Third graders. Especially if your teacher is Miss Meadows. Sometimes after school I go back to third grade again, to room 107 and Miss Meadows all over again. I always say, HI, MISS MEADOWS! And she always says, WELCOME

BACK TO ROOM 107, ANNIE! I look around for a while. Then I go home, good-bye.

Well, try not to miss me too much when I'm in school. Mrs. Peterman promised to take you for walks. She's good at taking care of me (when my father's at work), but she doesn't know too much about how to walk my little dog. So behave yourself.

Love,

Annie

I know!
Just look at
my picture
all day.
Then you'll
be happy,
not sad!



November 20

Dear Leo,

You probably don't care about poetry. Neither do I. Mrs. Bailey cares, and now we have to be gifted fourth-grade poets. WE ARE ALL GIFTED POETS, BOYS AND GIRLS . . . Blaaahhh! Today she made us write *a short poem with a dash of humor*. I tried and tried. Nothing. I went up to Mrs. B and whispered, I CAN'T WRITE A POEM, MRS. B. She wasn't that nice. GO BACK TO YOUR SEAT, ANNIE. . . . KEEP TRYING, ANNIE. . . . CLOSE YOUR EYES AND PICTURE SOMETHING YOU LIKE, ANNIE. I was mad. I pictured things I *don't* like: (1) Mrs. Bailey, (2) poetry, (3) dividing fractions, (4) Reptiles.

Still no poem. Still mad. Then a picture of a great big *cupcake* popped into my head! Mmnnn, *cupcakes!!* Then I wrote *a short poem with a dash of humor*. Even the title is funny! "Cupcakes in the Rain." But here comes the *sad* part of the story. Nobody laughed when I read it out loud. Not even Mrs. Bailey. Not even Jean-Marie, my so-called best friend in my class. Then Edward Noble read his

stupid poem, "The Goldfish Ate My Homework," and everyone laughed and Mrs. B said, WHY, EDWARD, WHAT A CHARMING, FUNNY POEM! Which it was NOT.

I threw my poem in the garbage after school, but now I want it back to show my father. He always loves everything I write.

Show-off + Bad Poet = Edward Noble

No more poetry.

Annie

