

Please Write: A Novel in Letters

J. Wynn Rousuck

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An exercise in ongoing, good-natured warmth, Please Write showcases the special bonds shared by dogs and their owners.

J. Wynn Rousuck's whimsical and waggish epistolary novel *Please Write* presents a conversation in letters between a doting grandma, a longtime loyal pet, and a rambunctious puppy who's away at canine camp.

The book kicks off with Zippy's arrival at the home of Pamela, a harried journalist, and her husband Frank. Vivienne, Pamela's mother, and Pamela's refined dog Winslow have long traded letters. They loop in Zippy after she joins the family; she is a mischievous ragamuffin who is sent off for training. As widowed Vivienne goes off on a cruise, the three-way correspondence explores their relationships, lives, family members' book projects, and Zippy's varied scampish adventures as a nurse, taste-tester, research assistant, therapy dog, and guard dog.

Vivienne tries to explain everything in terms a dog would understand, for instance characterizing a six-month quarantine as a "long timeout," comparing baseball to a game of fetch, and recognizing that a puppy would not understand concepts like fiction. Winslow writes with a formality befitting his breed—as a Boston Terrier, "he always wears a tuxedo," and he signs off each letter with a different title, including "the deeply frustrated" or "esteemed book critic."

Meanwhile, Zippy's voice comes in glorified baby talk, stylized with random capitalization, triple exclamation points, phonetic spellings, and a string of sentence fragments that reflect her peppy personality. Though at first her speech patterns sound contrived, once her rhythms and tones are established, they are humorous. And canine wordplay runs throughout: characters display "dogged" determination; RNT is an acronym for registered nursing terrier. The book's dog trivia is a bonus, as with the revelation that no Boston Terriers have lived in the White House.

The canine camp thread is somewhat loose against the letters' meanderings through the vagaries of everyday life. But the book is focused more on charm than it is on developing its plot in the first place; its narrative is an exercise in ongoing, good-natured warmth. It sustains the central conceit of human-pooch missives well. Still, despite its lighthearted tone, it also touches upon serious subjects including illness, grief, and alcoholism, with Vivienne often sugarcoating such matters for the dogs. Its heartbreaking ending is well foreshadowed but still surprising and poignant.

The creative and fun epistolary novel *Please Write* shows the special bonds shared by dogs and their owners, delving into the hearts of each.

JOSEPH S. PETE (October 17, 2023)

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