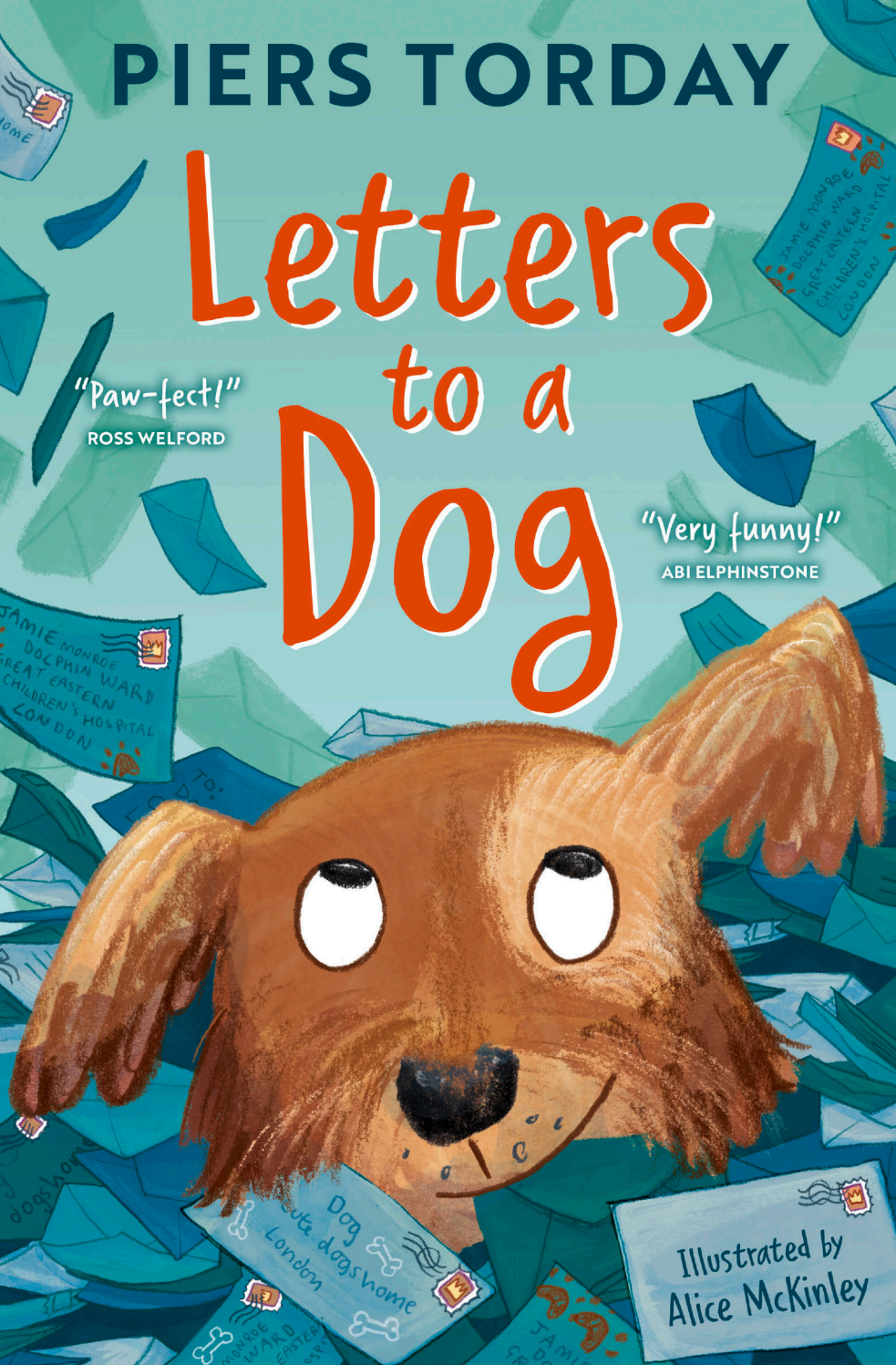

PIERS TORDAY
Letters to a Dog
"Paw-fect!"
ROSS WELFORD
"Very funny!"
ABI ELPHINSTONE
Illustrated by Alice McKinley

Letters to a Dog

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Alice McKinley

Barrington Stoke

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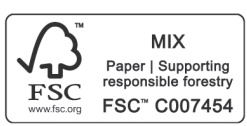
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To Huxley, our dog
(Just in case he ever learns to read)


JAMIE MONROE
DOLPHIN WARD
GREAT EASTERN
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
LONDON
Dog
cute dogs home
London

Dear Dog,

I cannot believe I am writing a letter to a dog. Will you promise not to ever, EVER tell any of my friends?

EVER.

Don't take this personally, but I would be dead if Ravi or Anand ever found out that I, for real, sat down to write a letter to a DOG. But you're not just any dog – you're a little brown-and-white terrier. With short legs and a wagging tail. And the softest, gentlest eyes. I don't even know your name, but when I saw you at the dog home last week, I just knew we were going to be friends.

Shirley has given me a pen and some paper from the ward office so I can write a "proper" old-fashioned letter because she said surely such a beautiful dog deserves one rather than



a DM. And obviously, you're a dog, living in a dog home, so you don't have a phone anyway.

Let me explain why I am writing a letter to you, a dog.

My name is Jamie Monroe, and I live on the Halton Court Estate with my dad, Winston.

Except I don't at the moment because I am in hospital, which I will tell you more about later.

Dad and I are not speaking right now. At all. We didn't talk much after Mum died. I didn't know what to say, and neither did Dad. We crept around each other in the flat, more like cats than dogs. (I hope it's OK that I like cats too. I know what dogs can be like!)

Dad cried in *his* room. I cried in *my* room. We hugged in the kitchen. But he changed the subject every time I tried to talk to him about my feelings about Mum passing away. Or he

talked about what we were watching on the TV. Or he went for a walk. (Without a dog! Who goes for a walk *without* a dog?)

Dog, did you know that at my school, we are encouraged to talk about our feelings? Our teacher, Miss Carey, gets us to point to different emojis on a poster to explain our mood and then talk about it.

I think Dad went to a very different school. About a hundred years ago.

The other week, we even fought over the fact that we weren't speaking. Dad said we were talking, and I said we weren't. Not properly, like how we are taught in school. We argued for a whole weekend without ACTUALLY SAYING ANYTHING. It was a fight with words where nothing was said about the most important thing.

How mad is that?

I bet dogs don't bark at each other for hours for no good reason. Or do they?

And now Dad and I are not speaking at all. It would be good to talk to him again properly before my operation, which is in just SEVEN DAYS.



Anyhoo, that's TMI, Jamie, as my dad used to say when we *were* speaking. Stick to the point.

A week ago, I came to visit the Cute Dogs Home. (I know this is not the real name, as a proper dog charity owns it, but this is our family name for it because it is full of nothing but cute dogs. Like when I first started at school, we called the lollipop lady Mrs Lollipop until one day I asked her real name, and guess what it was? Sheila! She used to work at Boots.)

The dog home let me in because I lied and said Dad had sent me. I have been asking for ages to have a dog. I checked in my journal and counted that I have asked 64 times! The answer has always been no – even when Mum was still here.

Dad has never wanted a dog. He doesn't mind pets, but he is not a dog person. I think he worries a dog would take up too much time that could be better spent watching football – or doing schoolwork, in my case.

But what would be a better use of my time than looking after an animal? Especially a dog.

To begin with, I wanted a tarantula, but Dad said it was dangerous. So Mum suggested we get a stick insect instead, which we called Woody. Dad said a stick insect was low maintenance and allowed.

Woody lived in a glass tank. We got on great until the afternoon I took Woody to the trees on the edge of our local park to play Uno. She wandered off when it was her go. I called her name out, but stick insects don't respond to recall like dogs can.



Have you ever looked for a stick insect in a wood? It is sooo hard.

The one other insect I wanted really badly was a fire ant. Did you know a bite from one can KILL you? And they can also run so fast! I told Mum and Dad about my plan to leave it on Miss Carey's chair at school, as revenge for Maths lessons and also to post for likes. But Mum said that firstly, Miss Carey didn't invent Maths, and secondly, people who did mean pranks like that got turned into cockroaches.

That was such a Mum thing to say.

I miss my mum. Are you still in contact with your mum, Dog?

Have a nice day,

Jamie Monroe

Dolphin Ward,
Great Eastern Children's Hospital
London