



TEN

RULES 

 for Living with

my **SISTER**

  
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Feiwel & Friends



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Half an hour ago my sister locked me out of her room. Then she opened her door long enough to hang this sign on it:



Then she closed the door again. It was the sixth time Lexie had hung the NO PEARL sign this month.

When I saw the sign, I went to my own room, put on

my pirate costume, and made a sign that said MY FEET SMELL. I hung it on Lexie's door underneath the NO PEARL sign and waited for my sister to come out.

I had to wait a long time, and I got a little bored. This was nothing new. I never know what to do with myself. Which is one of the differences between Lexie and me. Here are some others:

	☹ Lexie	😊 Pearl
Age	13 going on 14	9 (just barely)
Full Name	Alexandria	Pearl
Interests	violin ballay gymnastics soccer knitting school baby sitting	stuffed animals
Room	neat	sloppy
Friends ♡	Valerie (best friend) Sophia, Polly Chloe, Emma B. Emma F.	Justine (neighbor/ first-grader)
Boyfriend	Dallas	Bitey (cat) 🐱
Lipstick	yes	no

	☹ Lexie	☺ Pearl
Awards	yes	no
Chews Gum	no	yes
Pest	no	yes
Wears a Bra	yes	no
Has Had Appendix Out	no	yes
Has Thrown Up in a Taxicab	no	yes ☹
Has Own Key to Apartment	🔑 yes	no

First I waited for Lexie standing up. When my feet got tired, I sat down in the hallway. Bitey came along and crawled in my lap. Bitey's full name is Dr. Bitey McCrabby. He doesn't bite very often, and he's only crabby sometimes, which is why I let him be my boyfriend. I don't know where the doctor part of his name came from. A lot of things happened before I was born. One of them was naming Bitey. Lexie was three when she heard him meowing in the alley next to our apartment building. The vet figured Bitey was five months old

then, which means he's ten now, which means I'm the youngest person in our family.

Lexie suddenly opened the door to her room and found Bitey and me sitting in the hall. The moment she saw us, she crossed her arms. "Pearl," she said, "do you know why I hung the sign? It's because if you are going to come in my room, I insist that you wear clothes. No more underwear visits. And I have to invite you first."

I shooed Bitey out of my lap, stood up, and removed my eye patch so I could see Lexie better. "How about if I wear my *new* underwear?" I asked. "It doesn't have any holes."

"No."

"What if *you're* in your underwear?"

"That will never happen."

My sister has a lot of rules these days, and many of them involve privacy.

Lexie turned around and noticed the MY FEET SMELL sign. She snorted, pulled it off of her door, walked down the hall, and stuck it on my door. Then she went back in her room and closed the door again. The NO PEARL sign was still hanging. I considered removing it, but the last time I did that, Lexie just made another one.

I threw away the MY FEET SMELL sign and changed out of my pirate costume and into a sweatshirt and a pair of jeans.

The doorbell rang, and I ran to answer it. No one

was in the hallway outside our apartment, which is #7F, which means it's the F apartment on the seventh floor.

“Justine!” I called. “I know you did that!”

Justine peeked out from where she'd been hiding behind the door to the service elevator. There are two elevators in our building, the regular one, which is in the hall, and the service elevator, which is behind a door marked SERVICE and is for delivery people and people who are walking their dogs. Almost everybody in our building who has a dog forgets to take the dogs up and down in the service elevator. No one cares about this except for Mrs. Mott, who lives on the tenth floor and is crabby and hates children in addition to dogs.

Justine was giggling. She jumped into the hall, letting the SERVICE door slam behind her. She plays this trick on me about 5x a week. It was funny the first 60x. Now it isn't so funny.

Justine Lebarro is seven years old and my best friend. She's in first grade at Emily Dickinson Elementary School, which is a few blocks away from our apartment building in the West Village, which is a neighborhood in New York City. Emily Dickinson was a poet. I'm in fourth grade at Emily Dickinson. (Lexie goes to a middle school, since she's thirteen-going-on-fourteen and is in eighth grade.)

One interesting thing is Justine is in first grade but

she's supposed to be in second, and I'm in fourth grade but I wish I were in third. Justine is on her second round of first grade since she hasn't exactly learned to read yet. All her last-year first-grade friends went on to second grade and she misses them. If I were Justine I would be thrilled. I would love to have gotten rid of Jill and Rachel and Katie and the rest of my last-year third-grade friends, but unfortunately we all went on to fourth grade together where, once again, I am the youngest kid in my class.

Justine lives down the hall in apartment #7D.

I held my finger to my lips. I had just had a great idea. "Shhh," I said to Justine. "Come on in."

"Why are you whispering?" she asked.

I shook my head and motioned for her to follow me.

We tiptoed past the kitchen and the family room and down the hall with the bedrooms and bathrooms and Mom's office. My bedroom is the smallest of all and it's at the very end of the hall. I closed my door quietly.

"Did you notice anything as we passed Lexie's room?" I asked Justine when we were sitting on my bed. Bitey had crawled into my lap, so Justine had moved to the exact opposite end of the bed since Bitey once almost bit her.

"No. I couldn't see in. Her door was closed."

"Exactly. Did you see what was on her door?"

"Oh. Is the NO PEARL sign up again?"

I nodded. "So I think we should scare Lexie."

Justine brightened. "Okay!"

“All right. You go back out in the hall and stand there and call, ‘Lexie! Lexie!’ I’ll be right outside her door, and when she opens it to see what’s wrong with you, I’ll jump at her and go, ‘Boo!’ She hates that.”

“Hates it,” agreed Justine.

I opened my door and gave Justine a little push. She walked a few steps down the hall and said, “Lexie?”

I flattened myself against the wall by Lexie’s door.

“Lexie?” said Justine again.

“Louder,” I whispered.

“Lexie!!”

Lexie flung her door open. “What?”

“*Boo!*” I shouted.

Lexie jumped straight up in the air, as if her legs had cartoon springs attached to them. “Aughhh!” she shrieked.

Down the hall another door opened. My mother stuck her head out of her office. “Girls? What on earth is going on? Oh, hi, Justine.”

“Hi, Mrs. Littlefield.”

“Lexie? Pearl? What’s the matter? I’m trying to work.”

My mother, whose complete name is Adrienne Read Blackburn Littlefield, is a writer. She writes books for children. But all the books just say “By A. Littlefield.” We are not supposed to disturb Mom unless it is an emergency.

Scaring Lexie was not an emergency. But that didn’t

stop her from saying, “Pearl is being a giant pest. As usual.”

“Do you think you can work this out yourselves, girls?”

Lexie glared at me. “Do not,” she said, “I repeat, do *not* bother me again. Can’t you see the sign?”

“I thought the NO PEARL sign meant I’m supposed to be dressed when I go in your room.” Or was it that Lexie was supposed to invite me in? I wasn’t sure. Sometimes Lexie’s rules were confusing.

I looked at my mother, but she had already ducked back into her office. Before I was born, my bedroom was Mom’s office, but then I came along and she had to move into a closet.

Lexie closed her door again, so Justine and I went back to my room and I found the game of Sorry! and got prepared to play the way I have to play when my opponent is Justine. In other words, I got prepared to remind her what every card means, and to help her figure out every move to make. I don’t mind doing this. If I had trouble remembering rules, I would still want someone to play Sorry! nicely with me. We had barely started the game, though, when I realized that I hadn’t done my chore for the day.

“Uh-oh,” I said. “I forgot to get the mail. Want to come downstairs with me?”

Justine was on her feet in a flash. She likes to ride the

elevator without adults so that she can pretend she's nine years old and we're twins.

“Going to the lobby!” I called as I passed Lexie's room. “I have to get the mail.” I grabbed the mailbox key and the spare key to #7F, which hang on a hook next to the bulletin board in the kitchen. Those are the only keys I ever get to use. Lexie has her own key to the apartment, Mom has a key to the apartment and six other keys, and Dad has a key to the apartment and five other keys. I have absolutely no keys of my own.

Justine and I rode the elevator to the lobby with Mrs. Mott, who was coming down from the tenth floor and who spoiled Justine's twin game by saying, “Justine Leb-arro, where are your parents?”

Justine didn't answer her, and Mrs. Mott huffed away through the lobby and out onto Twelfth Street.

John was standing by the doorman's desk. “Hello, Pearl! Hello, Justine!” He's our favorite doorman. When Justine's balloon from the street fair slipped off her wrist and floated to the lobby ceiling, John got a ladder and rescued it.

“Hi, John,” we said.

Just then Mr. Thompson, who is wrinkled and old and reminds me of my grandfather, Daddy Bo, came in from outside, walking his dog, Hammer, and got on the regular elevator, not the service one.

“It's a good thing Mrs. Mott didn't see that,” I said to

John. Then I led Justine into the mailroom, found the box with 7F on it, opened it with the key, and took out three magazines and a handful of envelopes.

We rode the elevator back to the seventh floor and I looked through the mail while Justine said things like, “I am so excited about trying out for the fourth-grade play” and “Tomorrow let’s go shopping for matching dresses, okay, twin?”

I let us back into my apartment with the spare key and returned both keys to the hook in the kitchen. I looked longingly at that hook and wished it were a key chain instead. One that was pink and had PEARL spelled out in blue and green gems from the crafts store. Then I sorted the mail into three piles: a pile of magazines for my parents, a little pile of envelopes for Dad, and another little pile of envelopes for Mom.

“Hey!” I exclaimed. “I got a postcard!”

Justine jumped up and down 3x. “Who’s it from?” she asked.

“Daddy Bo.” I looked at the postmark. New Jersey, so he wasn’t on vacation or anything. “Here, I’ll read it out loud. ‘Dear Pearl, Hi! How are you? Yesterday Will Henderson and I went on a bus trip to Philadelphia.’ Mr. Henderson is Daddy Bo’s next-door neighbor,” I told Justine. I turned back to the postcard. “‘We saw the Liberty Bell and the Betsy Ross House.’”

“They went on a field trip?” asked Justine.

“A grown-up one, I guess. Anyway, then he writes, ‘We didn’t get home until ten at night! Love, Daddy Bo.’”

“Ten!” exclaimed Justine. “That’s almost midnight.”

I love Daddy Bo. He never asks how school is or who my friends are (besides Justine). And when he sees me, he never says how much I’ve grown. Three other things I like about Daddy Bo are:

1. He chews gum, the good kind, not sugarless
2. On my birthday he always gives me \$5 in addition to a present
3. One time he went to Egypt and he rode a camel, which is a desert animal that has a hump and can spit

There was a knock on the door then, and Mrs. Lebarro called from the hallway, “Justine! Time to come home!”

At the same moment, my mother poked her head out of her office and called, “Pearl! Please start your homework.”

Justine groaned and left. And I groaned and went to my room. I absolutely hate doing homework.

One good thing was that Lexie had taken down the NO PEARL sign.



Here's a fact about my father: He's punctual, which means he's always on time. Daddy Bo says you could set your clock by him. So when I heard the door to our apartment open I knew it must be 6:15, since that is the time Dad comes home from work. I looked at my clock. It said 6:14. I was about to call, "Dad, you're early!" but then the clock numbers changed to 6:15.

I had not finished my homework. In fact, I had not started it. I had looked out my window instead. That is how disgusting my homework was. I would rather have just stared out the window. My window faces into an airshaft. I have a view of bricks and pigeons.

What's too bad is that at the end of my second year of preschool, Lexie was starting to attract the attention of her teachers, who thought she was practically brilliant.

So Mom said, “Let’s test Pearl!” like I was a new game at Toys “R” Us. They found someone to give me a test and it turns out I’m practically brilliant too, which is why my parents decided to start me in kindergarten then, which, if you ask me, was not a good idea. I think I could have used another year of preschool. For one thing, I would still be getting third-grade homework this year, and believe me, there is a LOT less homework in third grade than in fourth grade. For another thing, I would be the oldest in my class, not the youngest. And for a third thing, I would not have wound up in the same grade as Jill and Rachel and Katie.

I walked casually into the kitchen, trying to look like someone who had done all her homework.

“Hey, Dad,” I said, all cool.

“Hi, pumpkin.” My father is a university professor. He teaches economics, which is the serious study of money and taxes, etc., etc., etc.

“Did you finish your homework?” asked my mother.

“Well . . .”

“Did you *start* it?” asked Lexie from behind me.

I knew Lexie had been doing her own homework all afternoon and not even talking on the phone to her best friend, Valerie, or her new boyfriend, Dallas.

“Well . . .,” I said again.

My parents glanced at each other. “Pearl,” said Mom, “do you remember our agreement?”

I did, since this was the first time my parents had had to make an agreement with me about homework. But I didn't want to admit it.

Luckily, just at this very moment, Bitey threw up in his water dish, so Dad hurried to clean it up and Lexie said, "Now *I'm* going to puke," and Mom said, "No, you're not. Go sit at the table." And my homework was forgotten.

The table my mother was referring to is in the big room that is the living room, family room, and dining room all rolled into one. While we eat dinner, we talk about our days. It's supposed to foster close family relationships.

My mother said, "I'm mad at one of my characters." This happens sometimes. She starts writing and then she gets stuck and blames it on a character. But I know she straightens things out, because her stories always get published.

"Which character?" I asked.

"Fiddle," Mom replied.

We had been hearing about Fiddle for quite some time. Fiddle was a horse with one blue eye and one red eye, which readers were supposed to find puzzling until they learned he was a stuffed animal horse and his eyes were buttons.

"Why are you mad at him?" Lexie wanted to know.

"I've written him into a corner," replied my mother.

“Then shouldn’t you be mad at yourself?” I asked.

My mother smiled. “That’s an excellent point, Pearl.”

This was nice to hear since Lexie is usually the one who makes excellent points.

“Now that you’ve recognized that you’re actually mad at yourself,” Lexie said to Mom, “maybe you’ll find a solution to your problem.”

“Very astute,” Mom replied.

Next my father said, “Well, the new school year is underway and I can safely say that this year’s freshmen are more prepared for my introductory course than any of the freshmen before them.”

I tried hard to appear interested, but the truth is that I don’t really care about economics except for how much money is in my piggy bank, which is actually an elephant bank, which at that exact moment contained \$8.91.

“That’s a nice change, isn’t it?” said Mom.

And Lexie said, “I wish we could take economics in middle school.”

“Pearl? How was your day?” asked Dad.

I shrugged. “You know. Fine.”

“Anything interesting happen?”

I thought for a moment. “No.”

My parents looked at each other and sighed.

I sighed too. “I’m sorry,” I said, “but I just went to school and came back. That was it.”

I knew my parents wanted to hear me say that I had

gotten the highest score in my class on a math test, or that Jill and Rachel and Katie had invited me to do something with them. I couldn't even imagine what that something would be. Getting the highest math score was at least possible if I studied, but being invited somewhere by any one of my sworn enemies (let alone all three of them together) was about as likely as my suddenly needing a bra.

"I had an interesting day," Lexie spoke up. "Valerie decided to have a sleepover on Saturday night and she's inviting me and four other girls."

"Polly and the Emmas and who else?" I asked with interest.

"Gillian Meyer. You don't know her." Lexie turned back to Mom and Dad. "Valerie's parents are going to take us bowling."

"How nice," said Mom.

"And then also? After English class this morning?" said Lexie. "Dallas waited for me in the hall, so—"

"I thought Dallas was *in* your English class," I interrupted.

"He is."

"Then why did he have to wait in the hall? Why didn't he just talk to you in your classroom?"

"He wanted a little privacy," said Lexie.

"In the *hall*? You said the halls are always crowded."

"Pearl. Would you please let me finish speaking?"

Lexie turned back to our parents and rolled her eyes. “Anyway, Dallas is going to come over on Saturday. Is that okay? We’re just going to watch a movie or some—”

“Lexie hung the NO PEARL sign this afternoon,” I announced. “Again.”

“Pearl! *Please!* Let me *finish.*”

I looked first at Mom, then at Dad, with my saddest expression. “It was because of an underwear visit.”

“Pearl!” cried my sister.

“She never put it up for an underwear visit before.”

“Pearl came in wearing nothing but holey old underwear,” exclaimed Lexie. “It was disgusting. I don’t need that in my room.”

“Girls,” my father started to say.

“And anyway, I can put up the NO PEARL sign whenever I want, and for whatever reason.” Lexie paused long enough to take a drink of water. “I was attempting to do my homework. ‘Attempting’ being the operative word,” she added, which I have no idea what that meant except that it didn’t sound good.

I stuck out my tongue at Lexie.

“Do you see this? Do you see this?” said Lexie, springing up from her chair and pointing at my tongue. “Look what I have to put up with!”

“Lexie, please sit down,” said my father. Sometimes he says, “Lexie, resume yourself,” but he knew Lexie wasn’t in a mood for humor.

Lexie plunked herself back down in her seat. “Dad. Mom. Pearl is such a baby sometimes. She and Justine played a stupid trick on me this afternoon. And Pearl walks around wearing that pirate costume—”

“At least I was dressed,” I said.

“And she interrupts me *all the time!* Like right now!”

I slumped in my chair and stopped listening to Lexie. There was no point. Instead, I made a little list in my head.

### Five Reasons Lexie Thinks She's So Great

1. She almost gets straight A's.
2. She has a boyfriend and his name is Dallas, which is not a plain name like Bob or Jim.
3. She has a best friend who is her own age, plus more friends, including the two Emmas.
4. She is allowed to go places without a grown-up. Of course, she has to stay in our neighborhood, but she can still go to the movies and to stores and over to her friends' apartments, where they put on nail polish.
5. She has her own cell phone and her own computer and her own **KEY TO THE APARTMENT.**

It took a long time to think up that list but when I was finished, Lexie was *still* talking about her day. When you have a lot of friends and a lot of interests, you also have a lot to say.

Lexie was talking and talking and talking. What I heard was blah, blah, blah-dy, blah, blah.

I pretended to drop my napkin. I mean, I actually did drop it, but I dropped it on purpose, not by accident. When I leaned down to pick it up, I looked under the table and saw that Lexie had slipped off her shoes, the new purple ones she had bought the day before. She had said they were expensive but that she had been saving and saving her money until she had enough to pay for them without borrowing anything from Mom and Dad. (Good economics.) She added that they were *sheek*, which I don't know what that means, and that Valerie and Emma B. were each going to get a pair too. Lexie had worn her new shoes nonstop since she bought them, except for when she was in bed last night. And except for right now.

I straightened up in my chair and made a great show of refolding my napkin. Then I wiggled my right foot around under the table until I felt Lexie's shoes, and I slid them under my chair. I watched Lexie's face and Mom's face and Dad's face very carefully. I smiled as if I were really enjoying Lexie's story about how Dallas was so smart that he had to take a math test 2x, just to prove

that he hadn't cheated the first time, when he got a 100% plus extra credit.

No one saw what I was doing. I pretended to drop my napkin again, and this time I shoved the shoes in back of the floor-length curtains behind me.

I waited.

It wasn't until dinner was finally over and we were clearing our places that Lexie suddenly leaned down and exclaimed, "They're gone!"

"What?" said Mom. "What are gone?"

"My new shoes!"

"They're gone off your feet?" I asked.

"No! I mean, yes. I mean, I was wearing them and I took them off during dinner, and now they aren't under the table."

My parents got down on their hands and knees and peered around with Lexie.

"The only thing down here is Bitey," said my father.

"Are you *sure* you were wearing them when dinner began?" asked my mother.

"Yes!"

"Maybe you took them off when Bitey barfed," I suggested. "To keep them clean. Maybe you should go look in your room."

Lexie shook her head. "That would be pointless."

"Well, go check your room anyway. They couldn't have just disappeared," said my father sensibly.

My lips formed themselves into a tiny smile. “No. That would be impossible,” I said. “They couldn’t have just disappeared.”

Everyone looked at my small smile.

“Pearl? Do you know anything about this?” asked Mom, and I heard a tone in her voice. It was the You’re-Walking-on-Thin-Ice tone, which, well, to be honest, sometimes I think it would be exciting to actually fall through the ice and see what’s underneath.

My smile grew a teensy bit larger.

“What did you do with my shoes?” Lexie demanded. She thumped her fist on the table, which made the silverware jump, but my parents did not say one word about this.

“Pearl?” said my father, and now *his* voice had a tone, only this one was the I’ve-Almost-Reached-the-End-of-My-Rope tone, and so since I knew what would happen if he did reach the end of his rope and I didn’t want my art supplies confiscated again, I paid attention when he continued by saying, “Please give Lexie’s shoes back to her.”

I pulled the curtains aside. There were the shoes. Lexie pounced on them and jammed them back on her feet. She glared at me. “I am no longer speaking to you,” she announced.

Then she stomped off down the hall and slammed the door to her room.

P.S. Confiscated = Taken Away