

Jasminka Petrovic

YOU CANNOT NOT LOVE ME

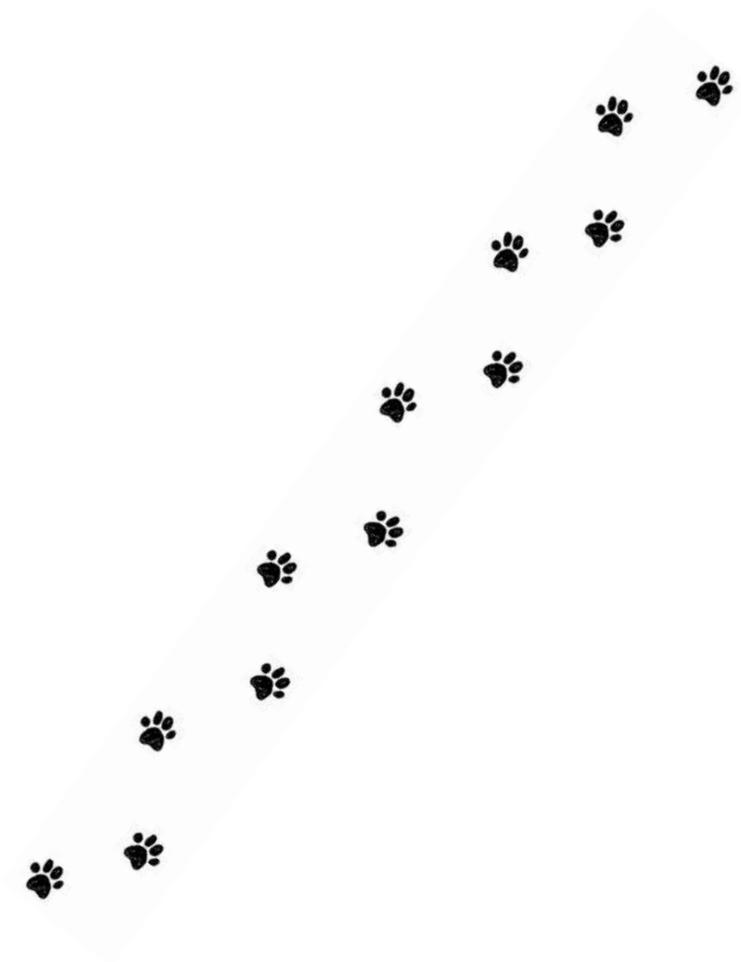
Translated by Zorana Popovic

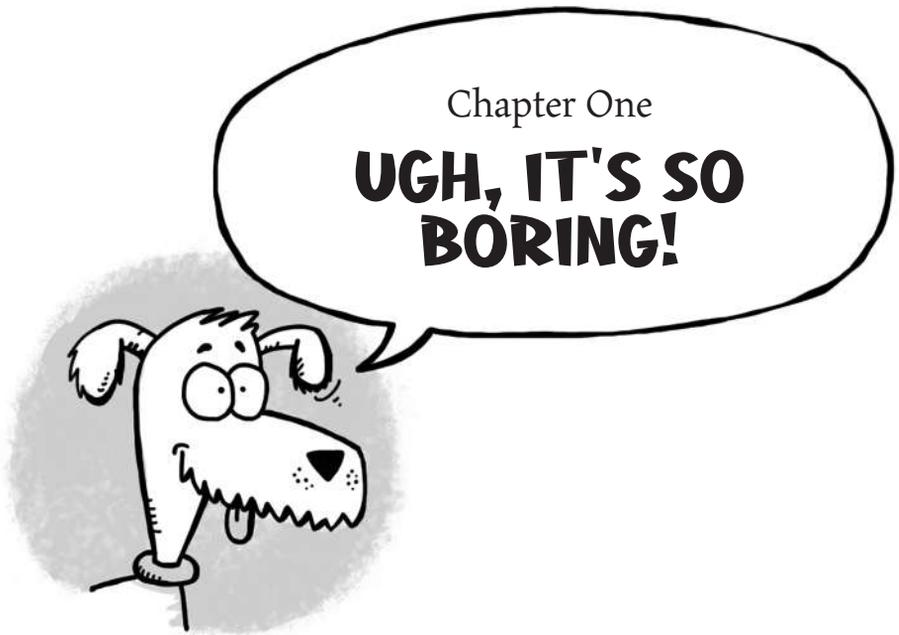
Illustrated by Ana Petrovic

Odiseja
Belgrade, 2020.

For Ziggy, Mags, Bucky
and all the other mutts







Life is as empty as an empty kibble bowl, when Nina is not here. If only the window were opened, I could bark at the passers-by. But it's not.

Slippers! A great idea! Chewing the slippers is always ultraconvenient. Hm... but there isn't a single one in the hall. Mum P must have pushed them inside that small cabinet. She is constantly cleaning or washing things and tidying up the house.

The bathroom doors are shut, hence I cannot even drag the toilet paper roll through the house. Grrr!

The salami is in the fridge... socks in the drawer... cushions hidden somewhere... So, what am I supposed to do now? What?

Ugh, it's so boring! If only I could nibble on the remote control but dad P keeps it in the car. Says that that's the safest place where the Pest cannot get to it. The Pest, that's me. He is the only one to call me that, everybody else calls me Chewy. Dad P is peculiar whichever way you look at him.

The ball! Where is my ball? Under the kitchen table? Nope. In the armchair? Nope. Inside the toolbox? Not there. Must be in Nina's room... In the pyjama pocket? Nope. Behind the doors? Nope. Under the bed? Nope. Hey, what's this? Some magazine... Well, that's a lot more interesting than the ball. A hundred times more. A thousand times.

Hooray! Am holding the magazine in my jaws and running through the house. This is so crazy! But it can always get even crazier! I shake my head from left to right and the pages are flying all over the room. I'm holding only the front page in my jaws. I can tear it if I want to. And I do. Why wouldn't i? So I hold one end with my paw and pull the other

end with my teeth. These pieces could be even smaller... and still smaller... I

turn the front page into confetti!

Into a million confetti. Yaaay for me! Is there anything more beautiful than a carpet covered in confetti? Yes, rolling on the carpet covered in confetti.

Is that the key in the lock that I hear? Yes, it is. Nina! It's Nina!

"Come on! Let's go!" – I pull her shoelace. "Come on! Hurry up! I have a surprise for you! A big surprise!"



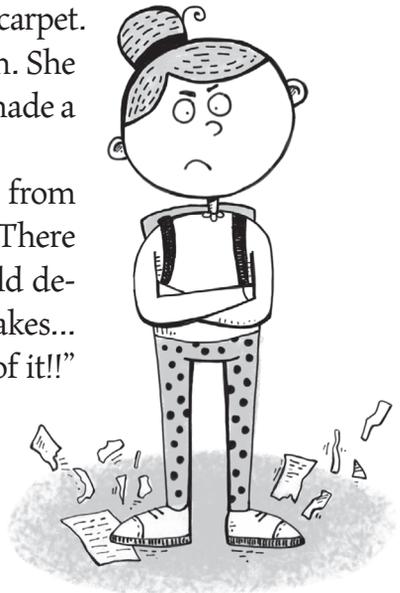
She lowers her backpack onto the floor and follows me.

“Nina, look, confetti! There are two million confetti here waiting for you to roll in them! Crazy! Totally crazy! Come on! Go on! Like this! You lie down on the carpet and you roll. This way a bit... Then onto the other side a bit... Nina, if you like it better, you can jump on the confetti, you can do that, too. Like this! And it’s not so bad even to run, then there are confetti flying all around you. Hooray! Running is the best.”

Nina stands there. She doesn’t want to play. Silly. She is frowning. She is even yelling now. She is angry. She is holding her finger in front of my nose. That’s totally stoopid. What is she trying to tell me? I don’t get it at all. Perhaps she’s unhappy because there are only two million confetti on the carpet. Rolling requires at least four million. She is right. She is completely right! I made a mistake.

“Dad brought me the magazine from Germany! It is not available here. There were snakes from all over the world described there. I am interested in snakes... And you, you destroyed it all! All of it!!”
– yells Nina.

What normal person likes snakes? I’m not even fond of worms, let alone snakes. I frown and lower my tail. How can anybody like that cold, slithering animal that resembles a belt? How? I really don’t get it!



Nina is picking up the left over pages of the magazine. I move from paw to paw, twitching my moustache. Hm... so she likes these reptiles more than she likes me! Horror! How is that even possible? Snakes are ugly. They have no legs. No ears. No hairs. They don't bark. And the worst thing, they are dangerous. They can poison you, strangle you, swallow you...

"There are so many biases about snakes – that they are ugly, dangerous, evil... It's not really like that!"

What is this now? Nina can read my mind.

"Woof-woof-woof", I grumble. I so don't agree with her, but she is so persistent. She doesn't care for my opinions.

"A lot more people die from being struck by a thunderbolt than from a snake bite, in the whole world. If you see it in outdoors, in nature,

all you have to do is remain calm, not make any sudden movements and it will leave."

No, thanks! It's enough that I have fleas jumping on my back, I do not need any reptiles.

If she likes them that much, they can walk all over her head. I don't care. If I had to choose between a snake and myself, I would, without a second thought, choose me. That's natural. First of all, I am more handsome, and second, I have a moustache.



Nina lowers herself onto the floor and starts to cry. What's happening now? I feel even more stupid. Perhaps I should not have touched that magazine. But I was bored. She locks me up, leaves for school and then she's gone for hours. Plus she does ballet every afternoon.

I bend my head and look at her surreptitiously. I'm watching her and what do I see? I see her ears peeking through her hair.

“Wow! Such a delicacy!” – I bark and wag my tail.

If there's anything in this world that I like doing, it's ear nipping. Especially hers. I jump onto her shoulders with my front paws and throw myself into action. Her ears are as soft as croissants! I'm hopping around and nipping at her ears, first one, then the other.

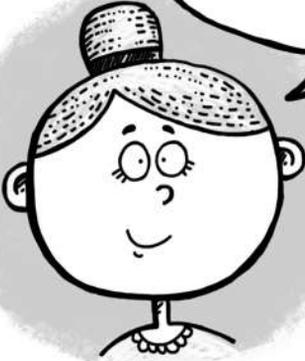
We are rolling on the floor. Nina is laughing. I can breathe now. She does indeed love me better than the snakes. Two million confetti are flying around us.

“Hooray!” – I raise my head and bark. Long live I! Long live Nina! Long live Life!”



Chapter Two

**CHEWY DIDN'T
DO IT, I DID!**



Chewy tore mum's shoes into a thousand bits and pieces. Nah, not a thousand, a million! So when mum entered the house, she almost fainted. Fragments of her shoes were scattered all over the place. She even found one of the heels in the washing machine.

Whenever we leave our house, we must shut everything that is important to us into the spare room and lock the door. And twice at that, just in case. So dad's office chair is in the spare room, my new cardigan, mum's hair rollers, a vase with the flowers in it, a tablecloth that my grandmother embroidered, dad's desk lamp, dad's books, dad's laptop, dad's... Hm, come to think of it, since Chewy came to live with us, my dad spends a lot more time in the spare room than in the lounge room.

“And what am I supposed to wear now when it’s raining?” – mum pushes the torn shoe sole under my nose. “What?”

“Well, if your shoes were so important to you, why didn’t you put them away?” – I wanted to reply, but I thought better of it. I’d better remain quiet and continue to bite my nails.

“Every time I walk into this house, I tremble! I dread to see what will be broken, torn, swallowed or scratched”, mum is continually swinging that shoe sole in the air. “I was in a hurry to get to work this morning, because I was being late, and look what happened! I am now left without my shoes.”

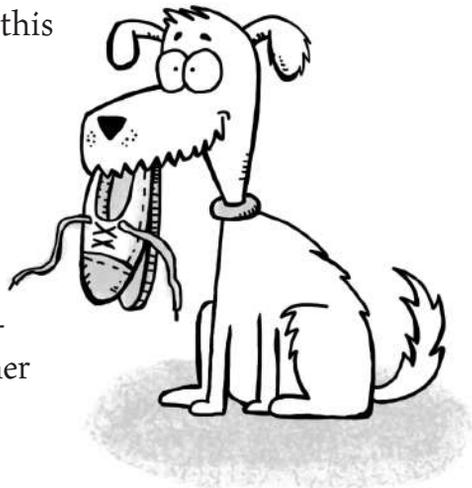
“That dog is not a normal dog! I keep saying that from his very first day here, but nobody listens to me!” – calls dad and slams the spare room door shut.

“Chewy didn’t do it!” – I lied to mum in the split of a second.

“No?” – mum raised her left brow. I have never seen her this angry.

“I did”, I swallowed and added quietly. “I wanted to see how durable is the material that the shoes are made of.”

“And? How durable is it?” – mum crossed the arms over her chest.



“Well, not very much, as you can see”, I shrugged my shoulders.

“You are sure that it hasn’t been done, by any chance, by...?” – provoked mum but I interrupted her quickly...

“It wasn’t Chewy, I told you that already! It was an experiment of mine!”

“My dear scientist, get to work!” – mum decisively pointed towards the vacuum cleaner. “And next time, do your experiments with your own shoes, please.”

The next two hours I sweated over the vacuum cleaner, vacuuming the whole house, while the gentleman in question was lounging on the balcony. I did appear totally naive. Chewy is really impossible. He does something stupid every day, and I always end up being guilty. I didn’t tell mum and dad anything about the snake magazine. They are already angry enough with him.

Yesterday, he stole dad’s schnitzel of the plate and swallowed it whole. Dad turned around to get the salt shaker from the shelf and when he went to put more salt on the meat, realised that his plate was empty. He started looking under the plate, behind the bread basket, on his lap, in mum’s sleeve, under the table, behind the shelf... And then he slowly turned his head towards Chewy. Who was sitting next to dad’s chair, innocently staring into the distance, like a shaggy lamb.

“Chewy didn’t do it, I did!” – I told dad a fib, too.

“Nina, you could have told me that you were still hungry, you shouldn’t have snatched the schnitzel off my plate!” – dad looked at me in shock across the table.

“How did you manage to eat such a big piece of meat so quickly?!” – wondered mum as well.

“And you’re sure it wasn’t...?” – dad didn’t manage to finish asking.

“It wasn’t Chewy, I told you already! It was me!” – I said quickly.

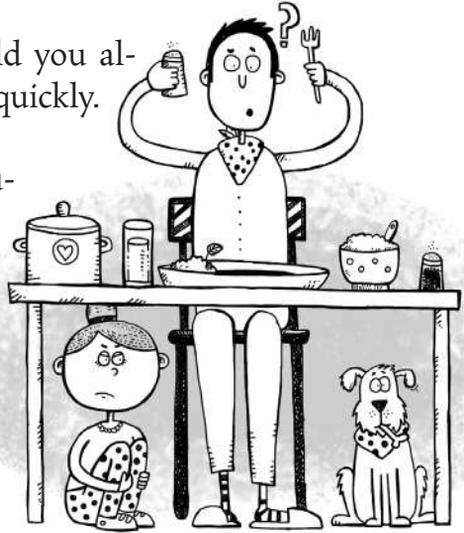
The other day I vacuumed the whole house because of the magazine, and today because of the shoes.

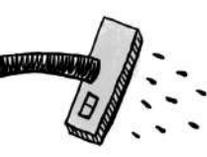
“Now I’ve had enough of it!” – I mumbled to myself.

As I was putting the vacuum cleaner back, still out of breath, sweaty and angry, I made a firm decision:

“This was the very last time I protected him. Chewy is disobedient, difficult and pig-headed. I believe I deserve to have a pet that is a bit better than that!”

Dad is right when he says that Chewy is a pest. I don’t know whether his behaviour is worse at home or outside. When I take him for a walk, he pulls, tugs, runs away, growls, jumps or he digs his paws in like a donkey and won’t move at all. Whatever he finds in the street, he swallows within seconds. He even snatched a boy’s ice cream while he was eating it. The kid screamed so much I had to get him another ice cream.





I better not remind myself of all of Chewy's escapades. I see red straightaway. And I wasn't the only one who was in a black mood this afternoon, the skies turned black as well. The curtain was hanging outside the window and rain drops started falling inside the room. Bolts of thunder were crashing closer and closer, and the flashes of lightning were getting stronger. Mum was running through the house and closing down the blinds in total panic. Dad was unplugging both the computer and the TV from the wall sockets. My job was to collect the clean laundry from the balcony. I was in such a hurry that I kept throwing the pegs wherever I could – on the floor, over the balcony, into the flower pots, on uncle Sima's balcony... In the meantime, Chewy was tangling himself up between my legs. He was so getting on my nerves because he was

slowing me down. I wanted to gather those shirts and t-shirts, go inside and close the balcony door behind me. I am not such a chicken as Chewy but I do not enjoy stormy weather.

The rain sounded the same as when a pipe bursts in the bathroom. I was sitting in the armchair, reading a book. Suddenly I heard an un-



usual noise. I looked around. Nothing. Perhaps I was imagining it. I continued to read. However, the noise was getting louder. I put my book down and started to listen... it sounded like Chewy scratching the door.

“That cannot be him for sure”, I thought. “Chewy is sleeping next to the armchair.”

However, he was not to be found next to the armchair, nor anywhere in the house. I looked into every corner. The balcony was the only place left to be checked...

“I am sorry... please!” – I was kneeling on the floor and he kept turning his head away from me.

He was as soaked as a sponge, and I felt awful. Just when I thought that he would never forgive me, he started to nip my ears. First one, then the other, and so forth.

“Chewy, you are such a nutcase! What would I do without you!”

