



## A bitch in Rome

**Jiannina Camillo**

**Roberto Valdimare, Illustrator**

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*Camillo is both vulnerable and humorous in her portrayal of a new pet that causes jealousy in her marriage.*

The little dog was badly hurt. What could they do but bring her into their apartment in Rome and nurse her back to health? But Nina, erstwhile queen of the castle, comes to a stark realization as her husband's nicknames for the dog progress from "Love" to "Girlfriend" to "Mrs." "It's not a draughty castle I've in common with Royals," she realizes, "it's a bloody crowded marriage!" *A bitch in Rome* is Jiannina Camillo's honest and humorous memoir of how a small dog named Judy stole her husband's heart and came to reign over their household.

Camillo, a professional actress who has appeared on stage and screen, offers up an atypical life-with-my-dog story. This is not a wonder-dog narrative à la Lassie or Rin Tin Tin, or the adorable misadventures of a Marley or Marmaduke. Even as Judy wedges her way between the author and her husband, sometimes literally, Camillo can't help but fall in love with the feisty little dog.

What makes a good memoir great is the author's ability to be vulnerable, usually with a healthy dose of self-deprecating humor. Camillo is candid about her jealousy and her sometimes petty reactions to events in her marriage: "I sat on the couch, arms tightly folded in an 'I've-a-grudge-against-the-world' pose." This honesty about her faults makes her relatable and likable, and her sarcastic wisecracks prevent the book from getting too dark, even when discussing her frustration at having a husband who is wrapped around their dog's paw. Camillo never takes her irritation out on Judy, though. She relates the ups and downs of their lives while always expressing her love for her family members, both human and animal.

The book's packaging does an excellent job of portraying the mix of emotion and wit in the story. The winsome illustrations by Roberto Valdimare add the perfect amount of visual aid here and there throughout the text. The cover illustration instantly captures the crux of the story, teasingly posing the question of who the titular character is—the dog or the woman?

Animal lovers, memoir fans, and those who enjoy a behind-the-scenes look at the life of an actor will especially enjoy this book. At times hilarious and at others bittersweet, *A bitch in Rome* is a touching portrayal of how a lost and broken dog changed one family forever.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (July 21, 2014)

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