

Dog

Beloved Chanan (who is more loved than you know), you did not grasp Ani, the beautiful Canaanite herding dog, her meaning to us, to my son and to me. You thought her a burden, a chore to me, as indeed she was (an aid to expiate my guilt). But you could not understand why we needed her. And, when she lept to our roof and remained there three days, refusing my entreaties, and when you saw me scramble up the red slick tiles, slipping, grasping, failing to retrieve her, you entreated me to release her to the wild. I resisted. Until she went into heat and we were surrounded day and especially night, by howling dog packs, dogged Romeos, serenading Juliet to descend from her balcony. Then, I called you in the U. S. of A. to tell you about how I freed her and left part of my heart go with her.

How she entered our lives told you some -- not all from my soul, as I now can, as I am now purely soul.

When we left the Yishuv, my head shorn, we were alone. A boy and a woman in the Heights of Golan, among the Jewish gauchos, cowboys, the cattle-herders, and my downstairs army officer, who “guarded’ our electric meter and ,around the corner, the evangelical family of three from Dubuque, Iowa, the U. S. of A., who spent “twenty-four/seven” (as they said) praying for Jews to see their light.

A woman alone, I needed a guardian. And my kid insisted on a dog. From a Bedouin shepherd, we received this puppy, a girl. White spots on white, short-haired, ebullient. He, the herder, insisted she was pure Canaanite dog, protective, would guard us. I did not know how she would

grow in a year, soon greeting me with forepaws astride my shoulders, nuzzle to my face. Like some unintended measure of her growth, she left paw prints increasing in size and ever higher on the white-washed walls.

For me, she was the ghost of my Benjamin, here to shadow his little brother, to guard us.

As she grew, she walked me, not I her. Dragged me lurching behind, until I unleashed her in the humpy fields abutting the house. It was she who protected me from the wild boars in that field. I, frozen in fear, my Armani dun-colored suede coat flapping behind; she circling the boars, barking, nipping at their hind parts, dodging their tusks, until they retreated to the woods.

I do believe she retreated to the roof to protest you. You bemoaned my leathery palms, coarsened by wall-scrubbing each night, erasing Ani's paw prints that climbed ever higher with her growth. One night, as I caressed your face, you flinched, startled at the roughness of my hands. And you saw the bite of her leash into my skin. (I saw the startle in your face from the moonlight through the shutters, slanting onto your pillow.)

The next day, you diverted Ani up the stairs, to the right, onto the balcony. She protested, whined, mounted the screen, pawed. When you closed the glass door, she retreated to the corner, refused food, water. The next day, she mounted the roof.

We saw her as we drove home from taking my boy to school. You began a new ritual; we would drive or, better yet, walk T. to school, then into town

for a coffee (always espresso; coffee for me is espresso, like the espressos of the many cafes in Napoli). Perhaps some shopping, then home.

I felt proud to be seen with you in town. (Until the gossip began -- that I was a kept woman, consorting with a visiting American.)

But, that day, I saw with fear and pride, Ani astride the roof, facing south, eyes on horizon, as if waiting for us. She had then the conformation of a mature dog: hind legs splayed back a bit, nose aloft, ears pricked up.

First you tried enticing with food. She stayed aloof, too proud to be fobbed off with provender. Then I implored. When you went inside, I scrambled up the tiles, alarming you and failing to reach her.

So, she remained three days, astride roof, like prow to our ship. Until you left for the U.S of A. That eve, when I climbed the roof, she came to me, as if she knew you were gone, would be gone. My boy alone each night when you and I were together, snuck her back into his bedroom.

I waited weeks to follow your suggestion: that this wild dog be granted her freedom (even as she also loved us), be returned to the wild. I called you after the deed done. I could not tell you directly. I told you I had done something. On her birthday, I took her far, along the Kinneret, near the place I finally brought myself to rest. I brought her to the forest below the Heights. She chased rabbits, pursued gazelle, discovered other dogs, but frequently came back to me as I sat on the car sill, tearful. Like a toddler, she ran off to play, came back to check, and off again. But she ran further away each time to join the dogs. And further.

And, when I saw she did not look back, as I saw her hindparts flying after her cohort, I slipped the car into gear and drove the snaky path up to the Heights, and I cried. I think now I did right, that you were right.

But, it is not so simple in life, rightness. For this was another loss for me, after Benjamin, and I think of losing you.

(My other son, the living one, protested my time with you). He did not sense that, losing you, I would lose my self. In Hebrew, the word for “suicide” is to lose oneself, to lose one’s way. So it seems to those alive. You tell me to abandon Ani; and my son tells me to abandon you. I lost both, and then myself.

Know that for me, it was a release into freedom, the freedom to breathe.