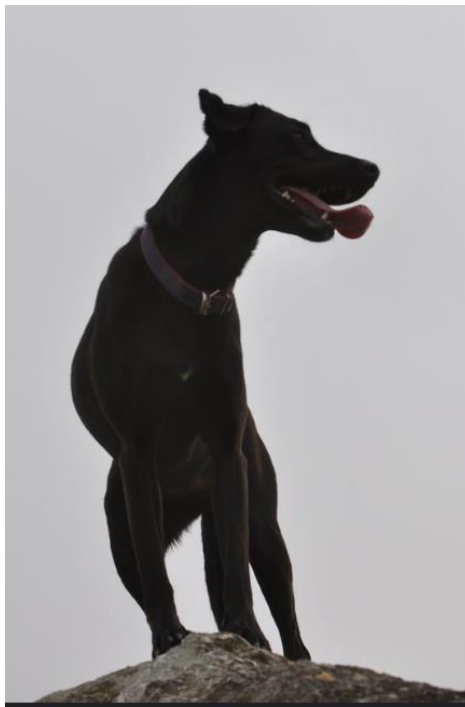


To Rotem, as she turns 17

Happy the man who, like Ulysses, has made a fine voyage (Joachim du Bellay, 1522-1560)

Desperately Seeking Coda

A story in four uneven parts for otherwise well-balanced boys and girls



Part one which also doubles as the introduction – Coda is out or what happens to Coda after she's leaving home on Wednesday morning at five o'clock as the day begins

And it's not like I've just dropped a bombshell because for a while now I've been eating sandwiches right off your schoolbags and upending the bin then littering the whole place with leftovers and vandalising furniture and even going number two in your rooms just like back when

I'd just moved in and laid waste to the favourite camera of the one with the big nose and black cellphone shell and demolished some Swatch watches to boot and nor did I spare shoes on a left/right basis because a job half done is as good as none and I have accordingly wrecked the car's seatbelts and even ripped out the wipers' lever from right next to the steering wheel and moved on to all those sparkly buttons on the radio there at the car's front and it is with pleasure that I inflict all this damage so as to make your missing me that much easier and even give you a sense of joy at finding out I'm no longer there and between us there's also a sense of pride to it because it wouldn't occur to just anyone to pull out the wipers' lever and it's not because I'm unhappy with you guys that I'm setting out on this odyssey for it could be that I've actually gotten used to your demeanour and even resigned myself to your quirks but it's mainly that I've heard it through the local dogvine that my twin sister Lilly whose hair is as black as mine has been located with a family in the locality of Adi up north and she's got good eyes Lilly with no catatractor or whatever they call it and I miss her so much it devours me from the inside even in places where I've got nothing but bones because missing bites like a hyena and hard though it is and grappling immeasurably though I have been I decided to come out of the closet but not before I laid waste to its inter-shelf contents whereupon I set out on a northbound quest with a possible stop at Kibbutz Megiddo just to see how celebrated dog Pluto was doing and I will have you know that there are lots of dangers along the way like rabies and rails and rock hyraxes which are cute on the eye but regularly roll out hospitality for dangerous mosquitoes and you get your bearings all mixed up not to mention the inspectors who can have me sent back to the dog pound where I came from and from which you picked me up on that very special day that I will always remember as the fourth day of June otherwise known as The 35th of May and it's quite the doggradation to be back in the dog pound and they'd usually come up with a new name for you like Mucky or Milky and put you with the long-time residents so you can clean after them and even back then at the pound you guys struck me as odd because rather than pet me as if we were long lost pals and take pics on your phones to share with all your friends as other adopting families might do you only took one pic of me with that big black camera which I was later to rip the buttons off and ruin

wholeheartedly with a single click and Big Nose yelled at me calling me *dog's brain* by which point I'd already figured that it was actually the kids that were calling the shots at this household and that his bark was worse than his bite unlike mine and before I left the house this morning I checked into each and every room to wreck a nice single shoe of the pair you each keep by your respective beds and I hope that by the time you will be rising you're neither startled nor mad nor sobbing nor looking for me because time after time I tried to tell you so but you just didn't know that I would really go.

Part two – Coda shows some understanding

And it's also time I explain why I believe you're absolutely clueless when it comes to dogs and as my example allow me to cite the fact that your run-of-the-mill dog can expect to be told *come* or *down* or *bring in the paper* for then they get themselves a juicy yummy treat but over at your place it's not rewarding because at best Big Nose would take my picture saying that he's *still not sure if I'm a dog in the first place* which hurts twice because I'm a bitch and you don't really expect me to hop on the PC desk every other day and prise the paper free from the screen just because that's how it works in this family of yours and the one time I tried to prise the newspaper free from the screen Big Nose was beside himself and he tied me with a rope to the living room's table and bought himself a new screen with a new newspaper and I went number two on his pillow and he wanted to turn me out and the one with the peach-coloured phone cried for him not to and he relented whereupon I realised that the kids were living in two places because Big Nose was no longer living with their mother and it's only the girl with the peach-coloured phone shell that gets me and welcomes me to sleep at her feet and ever so quietly slips stuff under the table for me to eat and don't get me started about the middle son with the white shell who thinks I'm a cat and throws me up in the air as if I'm gonna land on my feet and one time he dressed as a dinosaur and had me in turn painted with white gouache blots as if I were a Dalmatian to say nothing of the fact that Dalmatian is a white dog with black specks rather than the other way around and a year later he dressed as the prehistoric man and painted me in turn with stripes as if I were a zebra and I have yet to tell you

about his elder daughter who has a phone with Lego blocks' theme kind of shell who hardly ever comes over and spends more time at her mama's and when she does come over I really make an effort to give her a proper welcome by jumping up on the furniture and wrecking special stuff just for her and she doesn't appreciate my gestures and my tail-tugging and don't get me started about the quality of the food and the family's serving option of choice for every normal home would have a bowl for the main course and another bowl for water whereas with them it's an upside down yellow Frisbee for my food and a bowl with wall paint aftertaste for the water because when they had their place decorated they had nothing to hold the paint in and if that wasn't enough I have to contend with the Big Nose-Black Shell telling me that *he doesn't eat my food and neither should I eat his* which leaves me barkless and waiting for them to leave their schoolbags' zippers open or the food on the table or a binful galore and there was this one time where I went all out with the bin and had it scattered all over the kitchen which made my heart veritably sing with joy and Big Nose kicked me and said *he was going to issue an in-junktion against me until the dustbin settles* which he found really hilarious but this lack of empathy really culminated when one day I walked into barbwire and had myself riddled with cuts and wounds and aching all over so after he took me to the guy with the vaccine syringe who had me stitched in all sort of places with needle and thread as if I were embroidery and clamped me with staples as if I were made of cardboard he then had my head placed in this table lamp shade which made me look like a premeditated walking joke rather than treat me to consolation meal with nuggets and bangers while telling me I was really brave and all the dogs in the hood not least the purebreds who are more reticent what with their certificates and medals and English accented bark and runway mileage to their names who wouldn't touch anything but their custom-prepared food wriggled on their backs with their legs up and made me their laughing stock and to this day I have not managed to reclaim my former standing in the dog park and even young dogs who have never seen a hyena in their lives have the audacity to go number one right there on the one I have just taken and tell me I have been lampooned and that I'm enlightened like a dog's day afternoon.

Part three just before last —Coda talking us through how she misses Lilly and reminisces over their pre-separation childhood

And at this point I should probably tell you about Lilly who is actually my twin sister from whom I was separated when we were little and we always loved playing tag and hide and seek and we would pull this trick to make it appear like we'd both had a shower when it was only one of us who had had it and we were actually living with a normal family or so we believed and I was not called Coda but Marlene which goes a treat with Lilly denoting though it does wet wipes and I could never work out why Big Nose gave me the Italian name *Coda* which means tail and brings to mind a Skoda or a Kodak and we look very much alike but are pretty different character-wise with her being more on the spoiled side and no way could she chase away a hyena as I did while out in the desert with my jackasses when I suddenly alighted on the scent of the hyena which is scarier and moreover grosser than the scent of inspectors' car and the hyena it stood quite a distance away and stared at me and my jackasses with his teeth glistening in the sun with the colour of meanness and I had no choice but to run toward him and go *boooo* and he the hyena that is only recoiled but did not run away and even sneered and spat down on the sand and I had to replay the element of surprise and bump him because no dog ever bites a hyena but let's go back to Lilly who is far daintier than I am and she would usually play with the girls whereas I was playing with the boys and I got the impression that she was pretty favoured over me because she would be welcomed out in the street to chants of *Pictures of Lilly* and she always struck me as cannier and so street-smart that she never had to show teeth and the dogs were actually nice to her and fighting over who'd get to come up close and sniff her and tried to squeeze into the gap between us and it was all hunky dory until that moment when the children's dad fell asleep in his car of all places on the way back from Acre but not before humming the black dog's lullaby Hey, hey mama said the way you move

gon' make you sweat, gon' make you groove and the car smashed so bad that smoke blew out of the water and fire covered the sky and all those people came with cars bedecked in red and blue lights making a lot of racket for barely one person and after they talked about us wondering aloud whether they should put us down despite us being on the ground as it was they then took us to the dog pound and placed us in different cages which was really unpleasant and they wouldn't let us say goodbye to the family or to one another and back when we were kids we had this cake-believe game where we would lay down in the shade after a good meal and imagine what would happen if we were by accident to stay for the weekend at the grocer who sold delicatessen and bangers and cheese and we had quite the opposite approach to life like those who start at that rather than this end of the bowl or like to sit right in the middle of the car rather than take the window side and there was this one time when I had to defend Lilly from a dog who was smitten with her and I thought any moment now he was going to bite her for real and she didn't really get the situation which made me think it's tough bringing up older siblings and I can barely remember our parents except for the all-round exhilaration when we were born with only some of us pups making it and I remember how they put us inside this kiddies' Indian tent padded with a duvet and this family came to see us but our parents insisted we were only taken to nice homes who'd vow to have none of them choke collars unlike the neighbours whose shepherd she-dog would bark whenever a biker would pass by with a helmet on his head and such instances being so frequent the neighbours' children too started barking whenever a biker would ride past but the main thing is that I finally found her and since our time at the dog pound I haven't seen her and there's so much I have to tell and I'd like her to know that unlike the head of the family I've never fallen asleep in the car and by this I mean long trips as well and it's going to be a real struggle to decide what I should tell first so maybe I should just let it flow and if my barks are lost on her I can tell her about how Big Nose left me in the car for the whole night with neither water nor food and needless to say that I didn't sleep so as to keep an eye on the family despite my being the only one left in the car and he only realised the next day and once he opened the big boot door I gave him an angry look right in the eye and wouldn't come out even as he pulled on me because he said *come on too rye aye*

and finally he apologised and now I could ask Lilly all those questions or tell her about the inspector who chased me for almost an hour on a motorcycle only to run out of petrol and I was really enjoying it and begged for us to carry on and spat on the road sniggering and the neighbours' kids were barking down from the balcony and even the next door doctor who's a bit of a Dane with two well-groomed dogs that go by Molly and Golly laughed out loud and and I reminded the inspector that at the end of each leash lay a family with a tiny chip and model owner and a thousand wags of one's tail.

Part four which is the final part and I mean it – Coda explains that she has left a hint to suggest her prospective return

And you guys have been my family for quite some time now and I remember how the little daughter with the peach phone would sit in the pram on our walks to the park and I always made sure to put myself between the pram and other dogs because good barriers make good harriers and lest it gets into their heads that they can come up and go number two next to the pram and although it has only been this morning that I set out on my journey I find myself missing your nonsense for *what is a man what has he got* without the hair of the she-dog who bit him and I hope that rather than whimpering you will try and get the hint I left each and every one of you for it was the only way I could get it into your undogmatic heads that I intend to come back for I feel sorry for idiot Big Nose-Black Shell who has threatened to *have me sent on a spaceship to look for Laika the Sputnik dog* and who reminds me that I'm but a *self-propelled vacuum cleaner sucking away the leftovers on the floor* and I can't believe I actually miss how after each and every atchoo I take he goes *put a leg over your mouth you do have four of them after all* and he finds his own jokes oh so amusing and one time he laughed himself so hard he had seizures and this car with sequins came over whereupon he was loaded and shipped to the people pound where they have a collar with their given nickname put around their hands and refuse food on the first day then relent on the second and by the third day they actually look forward to it and I forgive how one day after I had gone through his fresh-out-of-the-box pair of sandals with two bites before he even had a chance to walk in them and he had yet to pay them off when I sank my teeth into the right sandal and moved on to the left one for I'm not one to leave a job half done and he screamed at me so hard that I went number one on the living room's carpet overcome as I was with dread and remorse and he sat down on the chair holding his head and saying *I curse the day we brought you in Coda* and it'll make me very happy if you guys take the newer and fancier camera he's got and take a picture of him crying over my leaving because I have wrecked the other camera and he doesn't actually realise that I'm a bit of a

therapeutic dog and may well be said to be his and his kids' caretaker and that I protect him and his son from the packs of feral dogs when they are out and about in the desert and let's face it when I take him out for a walk around the block and we're at the opposite ends of the same leash it is he who picks up my business rather than the other way around and besides what am I going to do if one day there's another dog at the foot of the girl with the peach-coloured phone or a dog who can go through the newspaper in a bite so if you still don't get it just remember that a she-dog like me who may have the voice of a Coda but the mind of a dog and some roots under her canines doesn't do it by halves and I mean it for she is neither a donkey nor a zebra and most certainly not a Dalmatian.