

by the same author

EVANESCENT BLOOM
THE BLACKBIRD'S CALL BEFORE DARK
THE TALE OF GENTLE HUSSEIN

The Jackal

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Published in 2024

By Cactus House publishing

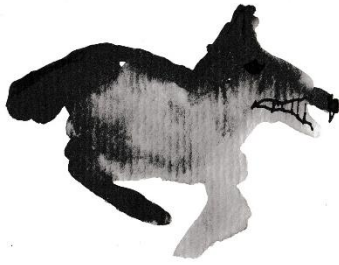
11 Grinboim St. Nahariya, Israel

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resemblance to persons or events is entirely coincidental.

For Ariel



Walking out of the clinic, Nita felt as though her limbs were made of melting wax. She felt as though any moment something would spill out from her insides, the ones that were just now penetrated with cold instruments, disemboweled from the warm pulsating contents, and immediately thrown to the organic waste container, discretely disposed somewhere in the inner rooms.

She was angry at herself. She had gone through this before, and every time she promised herself this wouldn't happen again, and here she had to take days off again, just in the middle of the project. She calmed herself with the thought that she needed only a few days at home, and she would be back. Working at the software company, leading a team of programmers on a complex project, she did not have time to waste laying on her back and bleeding.

Standing on the edge of the pavement waiting for the taxi she was grateful for the cloudy sky and the cool breeze from the sea nearby. She wished she was home already.

The white taxi arrived, and she climbed in slowly, starting to sense pain in her loins. "Please Drive me to Balfur Road" she instructed the driver, who had a little toothpick sticking out of his mouth "and could you please turn off this terrible music" she added. Reluctantly he turned it off and drove off.

When they reached the address, she had given him he noticed her difficulty getting out of the car. "Lady, do you need help?" he asked

"No, I'm fine" she snapped. He followed her with his eyes, watching her fumble to find her keys and then she opened the front door, disappearing inside then he drove off.

Nita was grateful for the cool dim light of her apartment. It suited her need to hide. She placed her bag on the kitchen table and poured herself a glass out of the water mini bar and drank while looking at the kitchen sink, thanking herself for turning on the dishwasher before she left that morning. She walked slowly to the large sofa and sat down leaning against the soft white pillows, exhaling a deep breath. She wasn't expecting a call from Matan. They knew each other for a very short time. He was much younger than her, just finished his army service and they barely knew one another. They met through the dating site where she had nice studio images in which she looked sensual and ripe, a young man's fantasy of having sex with a mature woman.

She wondered if she should call someone else. Maybe talk to a friend. But who then? Her friends were people she met at work and their relationship was based on the things they did together, the projects they achieved. The faraway places they went as part of this work team or another. It had nothing to do with the soft organic matter of their lives. Maybe I'll call mother? She hesitated. No she would just

say something pragmatic that begins with “You should have done so and so..” which wouldn’t be much help at that moment.

Her parents had a global electronics company manufacturing microchips. At the age of ten, she had a birthday cake shaped like a large microchip. Her parents photographed her slicing it and sent copies of it to their friends. They liked taking shots of her. She thought it was their way of proving to themselves and the world that they were indeed her parents, although they adopted her when she was a month old.

The Yoelbergs lived in the wealthy suburbs of the city, deep within the natural reserve. Nita thought that her parents played being parents more than taking on the role of parenting a child. Most of her memories were of this housekeeper or another who took care of her while they flew around the globe in their semiconductor business. They did bring her many gifts so she couldn’t complain of being deprived. All the new electronic toys from the US, the sparkling clothes from London, sweets from Japan and

a tiny cuckoo clock that popped out once an hour from Switzerland. Yet she did not have any memories of being hugged. Warm comforting hugs were not part of their family vocabulary.

Nita ate the steak brought to her door by the delivery man, with relish. She had at times a ferocious urge to bite her teeth into something with blood and flesh in it. Satisfied, she turned the television on the film's channel and tried to concentrate on a fast-moving film full of vehicle stunts yet her mind drifted back to the experience at the clinic.

The anesthetist struggled to find her vein and poked her several times until he managed to connect her to the infusion. After the procedure, she woke feeling sad and tired, lying hidden behind a blue curtain, she listened for a while to the drifting sounds of the staff's work behind it. Then the nurse decisively pulled open the curtain, checked her blood pressure and finding it satisfying, she offered her a glass of water.

Nita looked around and said, "Where is my bag?"

"I kept it for you. Just a second" said the nurse, walking away and returning with her bag. She was young, Nita estimated that she had probably just finished her studies.

"Do you feel any pain?" she inquired looking at the data board.

"I feel fine, just tired. When can I go home?" said Nita
"We'll keep you here a little longer to let the anesthesia wear off and then the doctor will sign your release papers. Do you have someone who can take you home?" asked the girl.

"No. I can manage by myself."

The nurse nodded her head. "I hope you are not planning to drive home. You must rest for four or five days. If you have pain, you should take painkillers and if you see that you continue to bleed for more than a week you should see a healthcare professional," she said and then wrote something on Nita's chart.

"When can I go back to jogging?" asked Nita

The nurse seemed confused for a moment "Maybe wait two weeks, but I think you'd better ask the doctor" she

exclaimed, then walked away before Nita could ask anything else.

Most of Nita's childhood was surrounded by such professionals. Even when they showed care or attention, she could sense beneath their separateness, their hidden lives. After all they were paid staff members. Their words were hollow and she did not trust them.

The only time when she felt a fleeting sense of ease as a child was at night when she dreamed of the Jackals.

It was a recurring dream. From early as four years old, she would feel in her sleep that she was growing a fuzzy coat of fur. It was a pleasurable sensation, a sense of something sweet and soft sprouted out of her pores, her body becoming a safe haven, easing the sense of vulnerability and helplessness she always felt. In the dream she would get out of bed and walk on four into the forest just outside her room. The forest was full of sounds and hushed whispers. Threads she couldn't untangle yet she found pleasure in their complexity. She walked in it carefully, a giant to the crickets and caterpillars as they rubbed their feet and chewed green leaves, wild boars

greedily sniffing the earth, digging out just for the pleasure of finding out what was under the crust of the earth. When she crossed their path, they lifted their heads with blind eyes reminding her of the poor who sometimes searched for treasures in their dumpster. But the most peculiar were the Jackals singing. she could understand their courting ballades. She was afraid to meet them, they were like foreign citizens, strange and familiar at the same time.

So she wandered during many nights until the last time when she was about eleven years old and just as she entered the forest she came upon a grey haired Jackal who was singing about the coming rain, standing on a rock bathed in moonlight. Patches of his hair had been torn off and one of his eyes was swollen. He reeked of rotten flesh and the right corner of his snout was dribbling. He noticed her standing under the Charybdis tree and jumped of the rock, gasping with pain when He landed, He came near and sniffed her. She recoiled in fear, baring her teeth.

"Hail be thou green las, from what brood are you? I haven't seen you around these woods before. You smell of lather and a whiff of mint, are you some human's pet?"

“I don’t know” she replied

“That’s not a proper answer. Either thou are or thou are not”

She hesitated, not knowing what exactly was the right thing to say.

“I reckon ya think being a pet is a god sent.

Yet ya seem sickly and faint.

Wouldn’t stand a winter out here.

Thou are used to fondling.

Ya grovels for a little affection

And when ya don’t get it ya despair

Better taste biting cold.

Amongst the white clouds drifting through the Wadi
blinded by the mist.

only yar nose to guide thou

Shivering and thine teeth chattering

But yar only lord is the wilderness.

And when the great star

Shines upon thee

No greater gladness of resting in a blue shade,
or dipping in the spring at the hidden cave.

Thou pets have lost yar sense of the real.
You know only thick dullness
Of all yar needs met
nothing to yearn for
Thou hast forgotten the magic of juxtaposition”.

Then he bit her neck, and Nita gagging, fled back home to the safety of rooms and windows that you can shut off to the world outside. The world of showers and a bed you can crawl inside. She awoke from that dream sensing her naked human bare body, realizing that she had wet herself, again.

She buzzed Rachel, her nanny to come as she always did when she needed her bed sheets replaced.

"Again?" the woman exclaimed "I will talk to your mother in the morning. Maybe you need to see a doctor," she said.



"You told me in your email that you had gone through an abortion and that you are continuously bleeding for the past month, is that correct?" asked the Homeopath, a woman in her sixties, she was a Jewish Orthodox and the walls of her clinic were filled with diplomas and bookshelves stacked with hard cover books embossed with gold.

"Yes. I have been to several doctors, and I just don't seem to heal," said Nita.

The healer asked her many questions and then fell into a deep silence for a time that lasted enough for Nita to read about Atonement Day in a book she took from the table in the reception room about the Jewish holidays.

The women made some notes and then finally said "All right, God willing I found you a remedy, it's something from the animal kingdom. But it wouldn't work alone. You need to help your body. Tell me where do you live?"

"In Tel Aviv"

"Well then you have to move out. Find yourself a place to live near nature. Spend as much time as you can outdoors among trees. If you can find a natural water source that would be even better. That is the environment you need to heal".

There was the sound of children arriving outside. The Homeopath got up and opened the door and the children ran in to hug her. She kissed them and then they walked inside the house.

"Are these your grandchildren?"

"No. My adopted children. I tried for years to conceive but nothing worked. But it's just the same adopting. I love them just the same" smiled the Homeopath. Nita paid her and got up. When she was at the door the older woman said "Don't brush off my instructions, Nita. Take good care of yourself. This condition might get worse if you don't. Untreated you might not be able to bring children in the future".

Nita missed her work and wished she could go back to work as soon as possible. The idea she would have to take more time off upset her. Yet she had no other choice but to call Zed, her direct manager, and tell him she is still not well and will need more time off. He sounded concerned for her wellbeing but said he is moving the project over to Mark. "You have been off too long. We can't stall this project any longer. When you come back, we'll see what to do. I'm sorry" he said in his even, well-mannered English.

"I understand" she said. She loved her work, and she felt the distress crawling up her neck like a row of angry ants.

She closed her eyes feeling the blood continuously trickling out of her womb, drop after drop. Outside the gardeners were trimming the hedges with their electric saws and the air was filled with the shrill drone sound of their engines. Nita felt like it was ripping her tired senses, preventing her raw, bleeding flesh from healing.

Perhaps the Homeopath was right and indeed she should move somewhere out of the city. She admitted that the last five years have included long days at work, flying

back and forth to Singapore to the company's headquarters, staying at a business hotel, which had what you needed to be comfortable for the duration of your stay yet it left your senses dull. And then her long evenings at home, facing the television, watching nature films and when her sexual appetite reached the red line of carnal starvation, she would log into her dating site's account and get herself a date. Immediately if possible.

Since these one-night stands were scarce and random, as she was absorbed most of the time with projects at work, she didn't prepare, and she didn't use prevention. Time and again she would hit that moment of no more restraint and reach for these immediate fleeting body-against-body experiences.

Consequently, she became pregnant again and again. She never thought of keeping the child. Just paid what was needed and got rid of the thing. It was too early to be considered as a human being. It was not even sentient. It had no nerves or a heart. Just cells dividing blindly. An automaton.

This long rest at home irritated her. She missed work. She loved the vibe of the company, young programmers with fresh minds, jamming together projects she coordinated. She loved the combination of technology and human relations pressed under the pulsating rhythm of time. There were moments when she felt like an orchestra conductor, pushing, inciting, encouraging sometimes threatening them to go on and on, get the job done, hit the deadline, reach the blue open sky and for a moment feel the loosening of the gravitational force, forever young and agile, full of potential, Timeless.

The force of time intrigued her. Once, during a long flight to the east, hung between heaven and earth, in a moment of repose, she jotted down a few ideas about how the development of computer programming was an excellent case to explore much wider things like the metamorphosing of ideas and human consciousness through its clash with time restraints. And if there was a power called God it had to be that force that made things rush constantly forward. At times when things rolled fine at work, she felt like a priestess, coordinating the work of

many humans to the beat of schedule. Those thoughts made her love her work even more. She dreamed that one day she would write an inspirational book for programmers. Something to guide them to see the spirit in the system.

But now she had lost her footing. She couldn't face the world while her soft matter was in such an ambient state of constant flow. She reminded herself of Michelangelo's self-portrait in the Sistine Chapel, melting into non-existence, a ghost.

She now remembered that she had spent in the forests of the north a peaceful weekend once with a man she could still remember his name, Rubi. She googled the name of the resort, and the page uploaded the beautiful scenery of the north. Deep green and dense foliage arching over gurgling streams, she felt her spine tingle and her hand was shaking as she dialed the resort. A male voice answered. "Paradise resort" he said, "How can I help you?"

"I would like to book a single hut for four days. If possible, starting from tomorrow noon" Nita said, then realized she was about to go up there.

"Yes, we have a shack available. Would you like to include breakfast?"

"No. Ill bring my own supplies. Just a room in the forest"

"Excellent. And who will be making the booking?"

"I. Nita Yoelberg"

"Welcome. We will be waiting for you. I'm required to let you know that it is now the Jackals' mating season so you might hear them howling under the windows. If those sounds don't bother you, I think you will enjoy your stay."

"No, I'd be delighted to hear the sounds of the forest. I have been in the city too long" she admitted.

"Yes. Our guests are mostly city people," said the man. "My name is Jacob and I'm the owner of the resort. It's very important for me that my guests are satisfied. You're welcome and don't forget to bring mosquito repellent. I wouldn't want them to spoil your vacation."

The resort had changed since her previous visit several years before. The front of the main buildings was now decorated with large statues of Greek female figures, scarcely draped with stone clothing and a small fountain trickled in the middle of a green plastic lawn. She knocked on the front door was opened by a man in his fifties with a bald shaved head and a few day's stubble opened the door. His gaze measured her body, and he grinned with a large toothy smile.

“Hello” he said extending his hand

Nita ignored his hand and said “I'm Nita. Was it you I spoke with on the phone yesterday?”

“Yes, come in. There are a few formalities and then Ill show you the room”.

She entered the house, standing in a large entrance hall with a large collection of swords and weaponry hung on the walls.

Jacob handed over to her a sheet of paper clasped to a wooden writing board. She filled it up quickly and handed it back to Jacob.

“Great now that’s settled let’s go see your nest” he smiled and took a key from a keys box hung on the wall. Nita walked after him on a winding path down the hill through the dense foliage, he stopped her on the way and showed her a little dovecot hung on a tree "I hung this for the sparrows but instead a couple of dormice climbed in and made it their home" he said with that same predatory grin as before “In nature everything comes in couples. It’s only us humans who spend our lives many times all alone” he said then continued down the path.

Following him inside the shack, Nita noticed it was different than the one back then. This one had a wide low window and a porch that opened to the forest. Nita looked around, satisfied with the large bed and the clean bathroom. "This is my nicest shack. It’s the deepest one I have inside the thicket yet it’s with full utilities. You can get the Tarzan experience out here yet still have Wi-Fi and a cellular connection. I hope you enjoy it and if you want some company just ring the bell. I'm always happy to chat with the guests" he said touching her arm. She took a step back and suddenly felt dizzy she sat down on the well. He

walked to the window and looked outside "Well I'll let you settle down now" he said "If you need to buy groceries there is a village shop down the road. They have basic supplies and some organic vegetables".

"Thank you" said Nita placing her hat on the low wooden table by the far wall. Jacob walked to the door and as he was about to leave, he said "and if you change your mind I'm a great cook. My specialty is grilled meat. Some of it I hunt myself."

"Thank you, that will do" said Nita turning her back to him.

"And before I go, I must warn you" he said at the door "that if you plan to go out into the forest, I wouldn't do it all alone. I'd look for a companion. Someone who knows the paths. You don't want to be attacked by an angry female boar with her puppies, do you?" He chuckled with self-satisfaction.

He left, and she locked the door, then opened the windows wide, sensing her contracted chest from the interaction with him. She would just have to stay away from him. She walked out to look at the forest. A single

bird chuckled as she listened to the lavish sound of the trees swaying in the wind. Content, she walked up to her car to bring her bag. Planning to stay in most of the week, she brought only a few clothes with her.

She woke up in the afternoon sensing the cool breeze that drifted in through the window touching her arms and face. Summer is over. This coolness was a beginning. It made her feel better. Things were changing. She got up, took a long satisfying gulp of water, and got dressed. It would be another hour before dark fall, a good time to take a little stroll in the nearby thicket.

She walked down the path, hearing the shrill sound of a bird calling again and again, filling the air with a sense of urgency and rage. What bird makes such sounds? Nita walked along the hedges then crossed a group of low trees with a red bark and came into a small clearing where two small gray birds were fluttering between the nearby tree and a little nest in the ground where she could see now there was a crow feeding on their eggs. She stood watching at the scene, wondering if there is any point in intervening upon this family tragedy and decided to stay an observer.

She became conscious of the dense dark foliage around her, only random light trickling in, as sunlight diminished, a few last rays of light falling on a spider webs, giving an eerie atmosphere to the forest, she had a growing sense that she was being watched.

She heard a rustle between the bushes behind her. She thought she heard a whisper “Come hither, come hither”. She turned to see where the whisper was coming from. She caught at the corner of her eye a black snout disappearing into the darkness behind the shrubs. Something rushed through the thicket around her. Alarmed, she turned to run back. Anything could happen out here, she thought. The forest is full of ghosts. She dashed back the way she came, and it felt as though she was fighting against the forest closing on her as she now got tangled in the thicket, stumbling on a protruding root she fell on her knees. A bird shrieked, she got up to her feet and ran out of the forest’s darkness into the afternoon light that still lingered on the gravel road. She felt her heart running, her damp armpits and she broke into tears. She felt lost. Like she had just failed. The forest was supposed to be her sanctuary and

now it was full of the unknown, its mystery too great for her.

Returning to the shack, she tried to calm herself down. Making herself a cup of tea, she sat on a cushioned chair by the window. Maybe she should have stayed down in the south. Looking out at the darkening forest, sounds of crickets and owls hooting drifting in she sensed the dripping out of her continuing. She must heal. She knew the forest could offer that to her. Determined, she breathed deep and faster, allowing that pull, that force she sensed before in the forest to grow inside her, a great tempest, colliding against her ribs, her heart pounding. She dreaded this feeling, it was a force beyond her rational mind could contain, she had to let go of her self-control, of her knowing. She held her breath trying to resist but this effort hurt her, she decided not to struggle against it, instead she would observe what was making its way to the surface. She closed her eyes and her breathing swelled larger and larger. An immense appetite for more oxygen grew within her. Needing to move, she got up and walking out to the balcony in front of the shack, the light from the inner room

spilling out on the trees and bushes surrounding the terrace she allowed herself to move, to dance, her breath becoming a torrent that took over her limbs, she felt the pleasure of her back arching back, her entire body stretching to a length she didn't know she was capable of. She relaxed and now watched what was happening from a distance, her pores spilling out soft fuzzy matter as something ancient surfaced large and fierce and capable of great feats. She opened her mouth and out came a long howl that echoed on and on into the great dome of the night sky.

Only now, standing in her true form, she sensed the stability of standing on four legs, her enhanced sense of smell and sound and she realized that this was the truth always lingering under the surface all those years and what a relief it was that the struggle to keep leashed has ended. She sensed the forest now with a heightened awareness. Not a source of terror any longer but full of potential and life. A little creature with the smell of rust was walking right under a nearby tree. She leapt and caught it between her paws, grabbing it with her teeth, she bit into the creature's flesh, relishing its warm blood, quenching a

thirst that had been screaming within her mind and body for years.

She walked a little further into the shrubs, tasting with her long-wet tongue the coolness of the air. Her eyesight in the dark was clear and vivid. She looked up at the infinite star filled sky. She saw the far away suns shining on green planets where creatures not so different from her were gazing back at her at that very moment and her heart pounded hard, full of gratitude against her ribs.

Then she heard a male Jackal nearby. He sensed her and he was beckoning her to come near. “Come hither, come hither” he intonated over and over steering in her a yearning.

She followed his voice walking on a narrow trail through the ticket. The forest was not threatening any more. Quite the contrary, it felt liberating to walk through it, away, away from the human world.

The air was heavy with the scent of Jasmin and honeycomb and the foliage was becoming denser as she walked in the direction of the male Jackel. She heard his howl much closer now and then a rustle of leaves, and there

he was standing a few feet away from her wagging his tail. He was large and his fur shined entirely white in the moonlight.

“Are my senses speaking truth?” he said.

Nita didn't know what he meant or what to answer.

He waited a moment and then continued

“Thee must be the goddess of all divine beasts” he called out

“I must have crossed the threshold into the divine, stepping into the dominions of paradise if the sight of thee is shining on me as pure and mysterious as the winds' gentle breath.”

Nita giggled, sudden shyness washing over her. “My name is Nita” she finally said.

I am most honored to meet thee graceful maiden. I am White the third of the Creb dynasty, prince of this domain.”

Nita wagged her tail "It is my pleasure too" she said.

White walked closer and gently sniffed her muzzle.

“May the owls and the Jasmins be my witness that the shrine of my chest has opened and the bird of my most

vulnerable sentiments have flown out seeking to be consumed by your everlasting fire” he whispered.

“I am new to ways of the forest” Nita stammered “please be patient with me.”

“Yes, yes precious maiden” he said “All I wish is to be at your service. May I take you forth, inside the depth of this wondrous kingdom? May I show you its treasures to be yours?”

Nita smiled “Yes, that would be lovely.”

“Then please do follow me” he said turned and Nita followed him deep into the unknown.

They crossed on their path a few large cherubs trees the scent of their bloom sensuous and rich and then ran out into a bare terrain spotted with large boulders and wind bitten bushes. They then Reached a fence, White turned to her “Would thee wish to wet their throat with some juicy meat? There is beyond this boundary a kingdom most rich with succulent creatures to feast upon.”

Nita curious, nodded her head.

White crawled under the fence then waited for her and once she was on the other side he said "look hither" Nita looked at the silhouettes of long rows of trees heavy with fruit around them. That rustled in the gentle night breeze and Nita could discern that these were citrus trees. Deep silence rested on the dark tree alleys.

"Can thee smell them? They are bewitching my senses with hunger" he asked as he sniffed the ground. Nita looked beyond noticing now that under the trees, shadows were running from one tree to another. Then she heard their talk "Peak sneak I dear say I have found a treat" "Show me show me you stingy bugger" another shadow squeaked.

Suddenly White sprung forward chasing one of them. She ran after him. He caught one in mid-sentence and holding it between his paws he offered it to her. "Here fair maiden, satiate thy thirst and hunger" he said.

Nita took his offering and ate it. It was delicious. White set out again and returned after a few seconds with another animal, having his fill.

"This orchard is heaven for those with a fine pallet" he laughed then set out chasing another.

After their hunger was satiated, they lay side by side resting. White nuzzled her ear. "Sweet as a berry" he murmured.

"Will thy be my eternal heavenly mate, to walk with me this kingdom side by side?"

Nita smiled wearily "I'm sorry But I can't mate. I'm wounded."

"Pearl of my heart, thy must heal and then consider my offer. A life, manifold as beautiful as this night, awaits us if you bring your consent to our bond. I can take thee to a pond of sacred water that heals all wounds" said White.

"Oh, please do take me there" said Nita

"Follow Me," White said and jumped to his feet.

They crawled back under the fence into the open. White moved south and Nita followed him through the thicket, then out into a clearing that under the open sky seemed like crossing a moon crater.

The night was quiet but the sounds of a hooting owl and the screeching of the male cricket. Nita heard the sound of water trickling and then they entered the forest again, reaching a pebbled area under high majestic trees, where a creek was flowing. At one point it gathered into a pond.

"There, you, see? Go in, it will help you" he said.

She dove inside, feeling the sharp cold of that dark pool, she didn't dare to seek its bottom. Surrendering to that purifying liquid as it washed the deepest layers of her soul, not just her canine body. She dived under a few more times, grateful. Sensing how all the pain and aggravating thoughts, how the fatigue and sickening habits are being peeled of her. She surfaced feeling dizzy, she had been under the water for too long holding her breath. She swallowed air realizing that she began transforming back to her human form. White was nowhere to be seen.

Tired, Nita lay naked on the pebbles. They poked at her bare skin. She turned to lie on her back, relaxing her muscles. She was lying under a mastic tree and its smell was familiar from her childhood. The memory of those warm summer nights when she wandered the forest by

their house in a state of dream came back to her. A tender feeling of vulnerability mixed with excitement and pleasure descended on her. What a peculiar thing to turn into a Jackal.

Nita wondered where she got this ability from, who her parents were, a question that had riddled her many times. She felt better than she had felt for a very long time. Noticing the bleeding had stopped. She wondered how she can get back to her room without being noticed. She figured she was near the resort. She walked back through the forest, covering herself with two branches, grateful that no one was out at this hour and that she had remembered the way back.



The warm dry winds that blew strong all morning diminished towards the afternoon and as the shadows extended across the lawn, Nita felt a pang of loneliness. She googled where was the nearest pub and indeed down the road there was a local place called “The Cow”.

She got dressed enjoying the sense of robustness she hadn't had for a long time since the abortion. Walking out with her flip flops she enjoyed the growing coolness of the air as she walked down the road to the pub.

The small pub which had photographs of the locals hung on the walls and a billiard table by the far end, was mostly empty now except for one table where she saw Jacob sitting with two women. The bar tender smiled at her when she came in. He poured her a glass of wine and as she was about to sit down by the bar Jacob called her inviting her to sit with them.

She joined their table. "We were just talking about the Jackals" he said.

She felt the hair on the back of her neck bristle "what about the Jackals?" she asked.

"The community office received today a letter from the ecology department that the Government had approved hunting Jackals. At last, they have heard our desperate calls for legalization of putting a limit to these pests," said Jacob

The other two nodded their heads in approval.

"I am so afraid that one of those sick animals would infect my children with rabies when they walk to school early every morning," said one of them. She had ruddy cheeks and a worried expression.

"They keep turning over my compost container. I'm so tired of all the havoc they create" said the other, a lean white-haired woman in her sixties.

"Yes, People are afraid to enter the forest alone because of these animals. And there's also the wild boar. There's no way around it, we need to cut down on their numbers. We

created the ecological imbalance so we must be the ones to solve it" said Jacob looking at Nita.

She felt embarrassed. Why was he looking at her? Did he know something? She thought about her new friends in the forest, thinking about White, and she felt fear for them. "I'm sorry for these animals" she said under her breath. Jacob heard her.

"Yes sure, you come from the city. City people have a lot of sympathy for anything natural. In their imagination we should just let it all grow wild. You should drop your romantic notions about nature. Nature is just eternal growth and decay. If we want to carve ourselves a space to live in, we have to arrest this endless expansion."

"Oh, Jacob don't be such a militant." said the plump woman.

"Well people like animals and nature needs to be ordered and disciplined. Boundaries must be set. That's what cultivation means." said Jacob highlighting his words with his right hand. With the left he lifted his glass of beer to his mouth.

"So, you should use preventive measures like spaying the animals like you do with cats" said Nita

"That's just pussy talk. A good hunter can go out and get the job done within a few hours" said Jacob "It takes too long to catch these bastards and spay them".

Nita felt the blood rising to her face. She felt terrible contempt and disgust towards this man with his thick hands that he kept waving them in the air as he was talking.

"I think people should nurture their humility and try to abstain from playing god" she said trying to sound calm.

"Well, I have better things to do than sit here and philosophize" he said getting up to his feet, putting his hat on his head he marched out of the pub.

Nita returned to the forest with a sense of urgency. She had to find White and warn him. The moon still hadn't risen as she ran through the thicket, her heart pounding. She heard White howling for her "White I'm coming, be careful" she howled back to him and then she heard the shooting followed by silence.

Following the scent of humans and fresh blood drifting towards her with the wind, she reached a clearing. In the dark she detected White lying on the dry thorny grass. She came nearer and sniffed him.

“White. Are you all right?” He was motionless and there was no breath in him. His white fur smeared in blood.

“Oh White, dearest White” she exclaimed, and a great wail came out of her chest. She howled into the night sky, the other Jackals responding, the night sky was filled with their lamentation.

“Dam, that’s his female” she heard someone utter. She turned and at that moment she smelled the familiar smell of Jacob. It was he who had shot her beloved White.

She bared her teeth and growled.

Nita lunged forward towards his silhouette, moving through space faster than a bullet, finding his arm she dug her teeth deep into his muscle, as deep as she could, then again, and again, tearing flesh, celebrating the gush of blood sprouting out of his torn limb. The force of the

violence erupting from her filled her with joy and then like spreading black ink in water, her consciousness blurred. She felt confused and deep fatigue fell over her. She sensed her body transforming back to its humanness. She withdrew and leaving behind her the bleeding man she fled into the thicket.



Many people shook Giora's hand during Edith's Shiva. Day after day he sat on the couch, receiving condolences. His daughter sat with friends on the balcony overlooking the fields, leafing through family albums full of photographs from their youth. Back then, they traveled around Europe with Ayala on their back. He still didn't fully grasp that she was gone yet the fatigue he felt after those last six days of Shiva made him close his eyes and lean back against the soft pillows.

They had been married for thirty years. It was a good marriage. He could tell just by the fact that they kept talking with one another, sharing intimacies, while their friends divorced one after the other. And the interesting thing was that when she got sick it only became better. The prophesized end just brought an attentiveness to their interaction, every gesture meaning something. He loved coming home after work, telling her about his day. When

she felt tired, he read her. They went through Anna Karenina and The Karamazov brothers. She said she loved the tragic qualities of Russian heroes, the depth and richness of their souls. When she weakened, he washed her, loving every bit of her withering body. He felt like a witness to a magnificent manifestation of nature. Her withering highlighted her acute sensitivity to life. She was working on writing her final poem. Every day she added a word. Sometimes omitted a few and he followed patiently, feeling like a duckling following mother goose. Two days before she died, she finished writing it. She let him read it out because she was too feeble. When he finished, he cried and snuggled against her transparency.

And now she was gone. A thick blanket of pain rested on his chest, but he couldn't cry. It was all too public the Shiva, he didn't dare send the guests home, although he cared nothing about religious rituals. But he was civilized and kept face. That was easy. He knew how to restrain his emotions, stay sober and collected. He took a deep breath and opened his eyes. Gil came to sit on the edge of the sofa

beside him, eating some cake. She looked at him saying nothing.

"What?" he asked, he knew his sister. She had something on her mind.

"What are you going to do now she's gone?" she asked

"I don't know. Go back to work. Live life. That's what those behind do. Deal with life as it comes."

"Don't you want to take a vacation. You were totally immersed with her these last two years. Give yourself a break. Go to some quite Island in Greece."

"No. No. I just want to continue as usual. I'm out in nature every day anyway. I find my solace there" he said.

"All right then. I'll come and visit you more often. I promise"

"You don't have to Gil. You have your own game," he said stroking her back with his wide hand. He loved his little sister. Since she was a toddler, ten years younger than him, he remembered she liked putting things in her mouth, constantly eating. It was a phenomenon how she stayed slim.

"Well, Im going now, Ill just say goodbye to Ayala and I'm off" she said and squeezed Giora's unshaved cheek between her fingers "Big brother wolf" she smiled and got up.

The next morning, after he had shaved and dressed, Giora sat down at his desk turning on his computer. He skimmed through old messages reaching a new one, from the day before. It was from his boss "new case, file no. 238952, Jackal attacked local" he opened the email. "Hi Giora" wrote his manager "The locals in Hila, the settlement in the west Galilee, reported that a female Jackal had severely attacked a man. I want you to look into it first thing when you get back to work."

Giora wrote back without hesitation "Ill be there by noon".

The sky was cloudy as he drove up north on the highway. It would soon be the holidays, he thought. First time without her. He remembered how his mother had always complained about the holiday's loneliness. Edith had much more patience towards his mother than he did. He noticed the arches of the aqueduct set in the middle of crop fields,

passing the Holocaust Museum. His mother could drain anyone, yet perhaps because she confided in him since he was a child, he had developed patience. He and Edith got along so well because they were both peaceful creatures. They didn't rush one another. Most other human beings tired him. He preferred being out in the silence of nature, engulfed in the simplicity of the animal kingdom.

He wondered what had caused that female Jackal to attack the man. He had read that there were some cases in India in which Jackals attacked humans when they were threatened. However, since he began working in the forest guard he had never heard of a local occurrence.

He arrived as he promised at noon and parked his car by the house of the man who reported on the Jackal. He knocked on the door and Jacob opened the door, immediately showing Giora his bandaged arm.

"See what that bitch did to me. I'm happy you have come. No one dares to go inside the forest now. If I didn't have all these stiches, I would go out there right now and shoot her. The results just came in, thank God she didn't have rabies"

"Im happy to hear. We must find out why she attacked you. Were you threatening her? another Jackal?" asked Giora

"I was aiming to shoot a wild boar. Why would a Jackal attack a man for aiming at a boar?" lied Jacob taking two beers out of the fridge "do you want a beer?"

"No, I don't drink" said Giora deep in his thoughts "You did something else lately out in the forest?"

"Yes. As you know the legalization of hunting the Jackals was finalized by the government, so I went hunting Jackals two days ago and I shot down a White Jackal, they are rare you know."

"Before you shot him did you see him with a mate?" asked Giora

"No. He was howling on the lawn of one of the guest rooms in my resort."

"Could you show me the place?"

"Sure. But I think the female guest who's staying there right now doesn't like men, you know what I mean" winked Jacob.

"We wouldn't take much of her time. Just take me there" said Giora ignoring Jacob insinuations.

"Right, no problem" said Jacob taking his car keys and slipping into his wornout flip flops.

When Nita opened the door to Jacob and Giora she grimaced.

"yes" she said impatiently "I was on my way out."

"Hi Nita, I'm sorry to hold you, but as you can see, I have been attacked yesterday by a female Jackal. The investigator here wants to look around" said Jacob

"We're sorry to barge in" said Giora noticing Nita's nervousness "my name is Giora, and well be here just a few minutes. I want to look at the forest from the balcony if you don't mind."

Nita nodded, noticing as she looked at him the sadness in his eyes. "Fine" she took a step back, letting them in.

Giora wandered around the lawn, looked under the trees and bushes then noticed the footprints of a Jackal. He followed them noticing they ended at the edge of the lawn under the balcony.

"Do you have an idea what could have brought the Jackals here? Did you leave food outside?" he asked Nita

"No. I do not eat outside. I don't know what brought them here," she said "I didn't hear the howling but was alarmed by the shooting," she said looking at Jacob with suppressed anger.

Giora said nothing yet he noticed the passion of her feelings.

"Do you like animal's?" he asked her calmly.

"Yes, I do" she replied feeling suddenly anxious, sensing he was probing.

"Have you been enjoying your time around here? It is a vacation or a longer stay?"

"Just a vacation. Im from tel Aviv" she smiled brushing her hair back.

Against his will, Giora felt drawn to her.

"So how do you spend your time here?"

"I take walks, I read and exercise" she said casually.

"Excellent. What do you read?"

"Just books.... nothing interesting" she said trying to sound as dull as she could.

"Well, we will not take any more of your time" he smiled calmly yet noticed she was hiding something.

"Come Jacob" he said and walked out.

"You be careful not to go into the forest Nita" said Jacob lingering behind Giora "There are wild animals out there, so you stay in" he said with a protective tone and walked out after Giora.



As Nita closed the door behind them, Nita felt distressed. Maybe she should just leave and drive back south. Yet she couldn't just turn her back on the Jackals. Abandon her own Jackalness. She dropped down on the bed and through deep rapid breathing she let her body ignite with this newfound force until she became four legged again, grounded, sensing her heightened sensitivity and vitality. The fear had left her all together. She jumped off the bed and ran out across the lawn and right back into the forest, feeling sweet delight once she was under the canopy of trees again.

She had an urge to run off deep into the forest, yet she knew better. Now was a time to watch carefully for this investigator and Jacob with his gun. She sneaked back to where she had attacked Jacob the day before. The two men where there now, inspecting the ground for Jackal dens. They found none.

Jacob's telephone rang. A new guest just arrived at the resort.

"I need to go now" said Jacob "do you want to come back with me?"

"No, I'll be fine. You can leave. Thank you," said Giora. Jacob nodded his head "Ok, you have my phone, you can call me if you need me" Then he got in his vehicle and drove off, the wheels of his car raising behind him a cloud of dust.

Giora stood for a while at the edge of the clearing, thinking how long he still had before sun sets. Then he opened his navigation map and closely inspected the area. He decided to camp for the night by the stream, knowing that many animals came there to drink during the night. He took with him a backpack with water and food, a shovel and his infra-red tracking camera and walked up the stream.

Hidden by the thicket, Nita followed behind. She watched him as he reached the stream and searched for animal footprints.

Walking along the stream, Giora reached the pond and found the footprints of several Jackals by the water edge. He installed the camera on a tree that overlooked that spot and then carefully paced back to the furthest point In the clearing where he pitched his tent. After he had finished

organizing his equipment, he felt he needed a rest. He washed his face in the cool water and took off his shoes and socks, sitting on the water edge, marveling at the coolness of the water, enjoying with his toes the softness of the mud. Small fish gathered around him, biting delicately at his skin. Knowing no one would come there now, he decided to take a swim and took off his clothes. Nita watched as he slid inside the water, diving in, disappearing from the eye for a few moments then appearing far off on the other side, splashing water, and exhaling a liberated groan of satisfaction. He felt that he had shed a heavy weight and after diving several more times he swam to the edge of the water and lifted himself out to sit on a smooth rock.

Giora felt ease. He enjoyed the coolness. He noticed the water dripping from his hair onto his belly realizing he had grown some redundant flesh throughout these months. Nita, sitting under a bush, watched him move his hand through his wet hair. Then she noticed that his strong back was heaving, and she realized he was sobbing. He covered his face and cried like a man confident in his privacy.

Nita sensed he was sad from the moment she met him back in her flat, but now watching him so vulnerable, deep in sorrow she felt her heart steer. Without thinking of the consequences, she walked out from under the bush and went to him. He didn't notice her until she licked his arm. He lifted his head in alarm, realizing it was a Jackal. A Jackal that was brave enough to approach a human being. Could it be that it had the intension of consoling him? Giora became very still, wiping his tears, he patted her on the head. She then reclined beside him, knowing that just her presence would ease his pain.

"You are a peculiar animal," said Giora half to himself.

She looked up at him gazing steadily into his eyes.

He patted her head again "I lost my wife a week ago" he said "and I loved her very much. Life is very strange. You spend many years with another human being and then one day they are just gone, with no option for return. I thought we talked about everything but now I realized I did not listen enough; I didn't pay attention enough. I missed out on things. Things she said and I did not get. I didn't respond like I should have and now it's just too late."

Nita lifted her head and rested it on his knee. He patted her head, thinking that was exactly what he needed. A quiet listener. They sat in silence for a little longer and then Giora got up and walked to his tent. He opened a few food cans and emptied them into his camping pot, heating it on his burner for a few minutes. Then he improvised a plate from a plastic bottle and served them both beans and tuna.

"Here, enjoy" he said and sat down to eat. They sat eating in silence for a while and then Nita knew it was time to go back. She looked at him, wagged her tail and then walked off, leaving him for his night's vigil.

After she was gone Giora thought that he should have caught her and taken her in for inspection. That was the professional thing to do he thought as he washed his face in the pond. He let himself get carried away by his sorrow. But then he thought that this female Jackal seemed friendly and that if she was the one that had attacked Jacob he must have threatened her somehow. That perhaps this is what he had to find out. But how could he write that in his report? Perhaps he should continue his investigation to find out more. The new hunting regulation, that between him and

Edith he was against, will change the balance of things, so perhaps he can make sure no one abuses these new rules. He decided that the next day he would place several cameras around the forest.



The next day Jacob found his transparent wire and loading his hunting gear at the back of the car he drove into the forest. He had a plan which made him feel better. He was determined to catch that female Jackal. He could see her in his mind's eye dead, hung on the hood of his car so everyone could see his catch.

Arriving at the nearest spot to the stream he got out of the car and began cutting long snippets of wire, twisted, and wrapped them into a hoop that he carefully hung among the low branches of the trees, on the animal trails that his experienced eye could detect, at the height of a Jackal. These traps were almost invisible to the naked eye, hidden by the dense thicket, yet they did their job well. Once an animal walked into one of them the wire tightened around her neck and the more she struggled the tighter it became until she suffocated.

He never thought about the cruelty of these traps. Animals to Jacob were like trees or bushes – something that had to be cut down and restrained because otherwise it would take over human living territory. Once, he had a guest at his rooms, a psychologist that told him he was probably chronically depressed. She asked him about his childhood. He didn't remember much of it. He grew up in an agricultural settlement, his father had an industrial chicken coop and a herd of horses. He drank a lot and used to toss his mother around when she upset him. His parents didn't speak much with Jacob but from a very early age he helped in the farm. They all worked hard from dawn till dusk. When his father brought home the first black and white TV and it was placed in the living room, Jacob promised himself he would have a life with style, like he had seen on shows like Charlie's angels and Cojack where he saw powerful crooks with girls wrapped around their necks. He wanted to have that kind of good life. He thought he had made a good deal buying that plot in the settlement – he cleared it entirely of all the trees and bushes, built the five guest rooms and a house for himself and the rest he

paved with oriental tiles and cement. He wanted nothing to move around or get muddy in the winter. He thought that after he would have a home of his own and a business the part with the girls would come easy, but for some reason he stayed a bachelor. The women came and went, sex was crazy, he was a stallion, and they were his mares, but no one stayed long. At some point he flew with a bunch of friends to Thailand, where he had a taste of young hookers and when he returned, he just couldn't get serious about any local girl. They all seemed coarse and heavy, with their large thighs and their dull speech. He was more attracted to the women who came from the center, who were educated and who held position of authority. But they were guests just for a few days, and they never took him seriously.

After he finished tying the traps, he sat down on a wide rock to roll himself a joint. He let the sweet smoke enter his lungs enjoying the sense of calm that came over him. Good stuff, he thought, I should talk to Abed to bring me some more of it. The midday heat and the sound of the

crickets made him sleepy. He reclined on the rock and placing his healthy arm under his head drifted into a midday nap.

Giora passed by and spotted him fast asleep on the rock. He didn't want to wake him up. He wondered what the man had done in the forest at that time of the day. Yet when he came closer and saw the role of wire Jacob had at his side he knew right away he had placed traps. He was familiar with hunting methods of catching animals in the wild. Walking along the animal trails he found three traps and decided to place the cameras with a view of the traps.



Nita spent the day in the shadow of her balcony, watching the insects hovering and humming in the shrubs circumventing the lawn. She was thinking what to do next. She needed a way to stop Jacob from hunting more Jackals without getting herself caught. The breeze through the window brought his familiar scent. She wondered what he was doing out there and how she could protect the other Jackals. She couldn't stop him from shooting them neither could she follow him about. She decided to wait until dark to return to the forest and pick out his trail.

Night came. She changed her form and walked quietly into the forest. A single bird calling repetitively followed her, like a programmed sound which made her feel for a moment as though she was in some pre-recorded movie. But then her senses called her back to reality. She sniffed the earth, following the scents of the foxes, a single badger, and a pack of Jackals. She also detected the scent of Giora

and Jacob. She followed Jacob's scent when suddenly her leg got caught in something. She looked at her hind leg and realized it was caught by a transparent plastic wire. The harder she pulled the tighter it became. She wanted to release herself but could not because she did not have her dexterous human hands. Filled with a sense of vulnerability she stopped struggling and surrendered. That turned out to be a good decision as she quickly transformed back to her human body. She waited patiently, breathing as calmly as she could, until she had her human hands back. Then she reached to her foot and untied the knot.

Once she had done that, she quickly breathed again through her mouth turning as quickly as she could back to her canine form and set out to find the other traps that Jacob had placed around the area. She heard sounds of distress, something struggling in the dark. She didn't walk far when she found a trapped young female Jackal. She was struggling and the string was choking her.

"Easy, calm down" said Nita "It's a simple trap. I can loosen it off your neck."

"Yes" replied the female her eyes wide open with panic. She must have been not more than a year old. She stopped trying to pull away "I can't breathe," she exclaimed.

"That's because the grip is so tight" said Nita and carefully with her teeth cut the wire, releasing the female.

"Thank you" she said after she got back her breath "I thought I had to forsake my life already and follow the gods."

"There are many such traps around the forest now. You must warn the other Jackals that there is a hunt in this area and that they had better flee deeper into the forest. They should know that humans are now out to hunt them, and they must be very careful. "

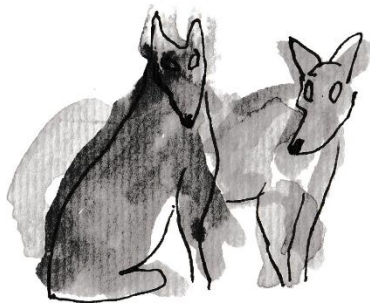
The female wagged her tail in response.

"What is your name" asked Nita.

"Suri is my name. Duchess of the olive grove. I was on my way to the gathering. Would you like to join me?"

"I wish I could, but I cannot. I must find the other traps before dawn so I will leave you now. Don't forget to warn the others."

"I will tell them. Goodbye now then my friend" said Suri and disappeared into the thicket. Nita continued to search for the traps into the small hours of the night. She found ten of them in all. She tore them from the branches with her teeth and when she walked back to her room before dawn, she felt satisfaction that she had managed to sabotage Jacob's plan as well as warn the other Jackals.



The morning was chilly when Giora met Jacob on the gravel road circumventing the settlement, on their way to inspect the forest and pick up any animal that had been caught. Before entering, Giora made a stop by the gate, he boiled some water on his camping gear and made them mint tea he picked from the bushes.

“Must we stop now?” said Jacob

“This has been my routine for years. I need to have a cup of tea outside in nature. How much sugar do you take?” Giora asked when the water boiled.

“It doesn’t matter, I just want to get in there and see what’s in those traps. I hope I caught that crazy animal.” Said Jacob as he was watching Giora steering the tea “She haunts me. I keep rewinding repeatedly in my mind how she dug her teeth into my arm that day”.

“Yes, it is traumatic” said Giora “do you want some?” he said, offering Jacob a biscuit with the tea.

"No, no" said Jacob

Giora nodded and took a sip "we are not used to contact with wild animals. Think about it – 10,000 years ago you would have been devoured by such a pack of carnivores. But I still wonder why she attacked you."

Jacob nodded his head "Im thinking about that a lot too. I have a guess that the Jackal I killed the night before was her mate and she remembered some way that it was me...I don't know. I didn't think those animals were so intelligent...it's scary."

Giora took that last sip from his tea, spilt the remaining few drops on the ground and packed up the equipment, taking it back to his car. "So, let's go see what we got" he said.

They then walked down the gravel road into the forest.

"I see you carry this gun with you everywhere now" said Giora

"Yes. In case she leaps on me again"

"I see. You know it could be a peaceful animal after all who had just been pushed too far" said Giora "I know in India there have been cases of Jackals attacking humans in

areas where human settlements pushed the animals out of their territories."

"I don't care." Said Jacob. "I want to see those Jackals gone from our settlement and this female in particular".

Giora didn't like Jacob's hatred of the Jackals. In his work he had met those people who thought mankind was made to rule over the animal kingdom with an iron fist. He believed mankind was an animal just like all the others, only it had the role of the keeper. The responsibility to keep the garden blooming with life. Giora dreaded the sight of more roads and buildings erected every year covering more and more natural reserves and open fields. Each new building meant the death of many animals who lived there. He walked in silence thinking about the cameras he had placed. There were five of them and he hoped they captured some clues.

As they walked along the narrow animal path, Jacob stopped and kneeled next to some branches "Look at this, mother fucker. Someone had loosened the trap" he exclaimed.

Giora looked at the untangled wire Jacob was holding.

"This is very strange" he said "There must be a human involved here because it isn't possible for a Jackal to open these knots."

"It has to be someone local. Someone who knows his way around this forest" said Jacob

"Listen Jacob, I'm going to fetch the film from the cameras and sit in the car to see what they captured" said Giora

"Well, you can be sure I'm not going to shut my mouth and continue like it's an ordinary day" said Jacob "I'm going to get this son of a bitch".

"I would hold my horses," said Giora "Wait until I return with my findings and then we will think together what to do, can you do that? Can you wait?"

"You do what you have to do, and I'll do what I need to do. If there is an environmentalist involved in this, trying to protect his precious animals, I am going to give him a hard lesson. It all makes sense now. Someone must have trained a Jackal to attack hunters."

"I wouldn't go to such conclusions yet" said Giora
"Don't do anything until I come back" he said hurrying off
to get the cameras.

In her cabin, Nita listened all day to the scents of men and animals drifting through the open window. She knew she was in trouble, her mind kept telling her it would be best to leave the settlement and go back south, but the desire to return to her Jackal form and roam the forest free and naked, covered only by soft fur was irresistible. The arching trees of the forest above her head felt like a cathedral of an ancient religion, far more mysterious than anything mankind has created. She knew she would be back in the ticket after nightfall.

Those days as a Jackal, healed both her body and soul. She felt content and grounded. She could see clearly now how she had been captivated by her ambition throughout her adult life, fooled again and again by the false belief that if she would complete this project and then another, she would eventually reach a sense of completion, something would come to rest, some deep pain would heal. Yet again

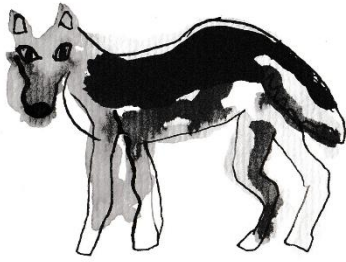
and again she was washed back on shore drained and wounded. Work did not fill her soul like these days in the forest had. She had found at last her four feet, her awakened senses and most of all the forest, she was back from exile.

She watched from her bed how the light outside faded to the chuckling sound of birds. She got up and stood before the mirror, looking with wonder at her breasts, her thighs, her hair that fell loose on her shoulders. Her body was unique. It could change form, abiding to her wish. It had the ability to immerse itself and live in both the human and the animal world. She could not turn her back on this miracle, not yet.

She rolled down the shutters, turned off the light and began breathing, moving with ease into her canine form. Standing on four legs feeling grounded and strong she walked through the open balcony window onto the lawn then plunged into the depth of the thicket. There was a tense silence in the forest as she walked through, a coolness that was not there before. She heard the leaves rustling under her feet as she moved forth with a clear

sense of direction. United at last, body, womb and mind chasing this rare moment of fleeting beauty. She was a limb of the forest's limbs, serving its higher purpose. Grow, grow, whispers the forest. Expand to the ends of the universe, long fingers reaching the stars, let the pulse of life contract and expand, relentless and unceasing.

As she reached the area where Jacob had set the traps the day before she sniffed the area carefully so as not to get caught in one of them. But to her surprise she couldn't detect any. She walked around several times and once she was sure there were none, she decided to walk towards the stream.



Sitting in the car, Giora connected the cameras one after the other to the monitor he always kept in his car. He watched all that day the recordings, finding nothing out of the ordinary, animals came in and out of the frame on their way to drink or back to their den after feeding. He was numb already from the long gazing at the screen when into the frame walked a Jackal. It was evidently a female, a curious one by the way she sniffed the ground and looked about, her eyes gleaming in the infra-red light. Her foot got caught in Jacob's trap and she tried to pull it out, the hoop tightening on her leg, she sniffed her trapped leg then stood still for a long time. If Giora had lost his patience, he would have missed it. Usually, animals' instinct was to flee when caught but this Jackal seemed to wait for something. Giora didn't understand her unlikely behavior. He fast forwarded the film – and saw within a few moments an unbelievable transformation of this Jackal into a female

human being. He re-winded the film to watch it again, thinking his mind was tricking him, this time slowly. He now saw in detail how her paws changed into hands, the snout into a small delicate nose, the furry body, became slim and smooth. Yes, it was a woman crouching now on the forest floor. Mesmerized, he watched her open the trap with her two dexterous hands, freeing her foot, she stood up and lifted her head, her face coming right into the frame. He recognized immediately the woman. It was Nita, the guest at the resort.

So, it was her doing. Not a tamed animal under her control but she herself. If he had not seen it for himself, he would have never believed it to be true. A woman turning into a Jackal, how incredible. Then he thought about Jacob and his insistence on catching her and exterminating her and wondered what he was about to do. He picked up his phone and dialed Jacob but there was no answer.

Giora knew he didn't have much time. He had to find this woman and warn her. He had to stop Jacob from doing whatever he was about to do. He hoped he would find her

before Jacob kills her as a Jackal. He rushed out of the car, taking his large field torch.

Jacob had spent the day scattering bits of poisoned meat all over the forest. As night fell and he heard the Jackals howling nearby he sat down to rest on his favorite rock by the stream and listened. “See how you take that, bastard. You and your precious beasts” he muttered to himself.

He then heard something falling behind the nearby bushes. He turned on his flashlight and walked over to see what it was. As he neared, he saw that something large was twitching inside the bushes. He moved the stalks that were hiding it and directed the flashlight beam at it.

On the forest floor was a convulsing female Jackal, foam coming out of her mouth, pitiful shrieks coming out of her mouth. Jacob sniggered “one to go” and he aimed his rifle to shoot her.

Giora who heard the sounds came running, he turned his flashlight at Jacob blinding him "don't shoot Jacob" he said.

"Get that light out of my face" yelled Jacob "I got this bitch nailed this time."

Giora directed the beam in the direction where Jacob was aiming, seeing the animal convulsing, foam coming out of her mouth.

"What did you do Jacob? She looks poisoned."

"Sure is, and she's going to die as well" said Jacob aiming again.

Giora struck Jacob's hand with his torch and the rifle dropped down shooting a stray bullet at one of the tree trunks, chips of wood sprayed Giora who stood near, one of them scraping his cheek, a thin line of blood appearing.

"Look what you have done" screamed Jacob picking up the rifle from the ground "You're crazy to interfere...this is a devil of an animal, and she should die"

"No, she's not, now give me that gun" said Giora reaching to take the man's weapon.

"Don't you dare," said Jacob.

Giora, realizing Jacob was directing his gun again at the Jackal kicked Jacob with all his force making the man lose

his balance and fall, again a bullet whizzed through the air cracking a branch on a tree, the branch fell with a thud.

"Just put down that weapon. You're going to get us all killed" shouted Giora then realizing Jacob was not prepared to give up so fast he picked up a branch and hit Jacob on the head. Jacob's body laxed and he fell. Giora knew he didn't have much time before the man came around, so he picked up his flashlight and turned it to the female. She was now lying motionless, yet he could see she was still breathing.

Giora walked over to her and picked her limp body from the ground. She sensed him and opened her eyes.

"There, don't be afraid, I'll take you to the hospital" he said and ran with her to his car.

As he was driving down the hill, he looked in the back mirror to see how she was doing. She had lost consciousness and regained her human form. She was a beautiful creature. He hoped the staff at the hospital would be able to save her.

Arriving at the hospital, he let the paramedic pull her out of the car and roll her inside the emergency room. He

parked the car and walked inside. The corridor to the emergency room was lit by strong florescent light and he sat heavily on one of the metal chairs by the door, leaning against the wall with fatigue.

A nurse came out of the ward with some papers in his hand.

"Are you the spouse of the woman who had just come in?"

"No. Im a nature reserve inspector. I found her convulsing and twitching in the forest. I believe she is poisoned."

"Yes, they are pumping now her stomach and injecting her with atropine."

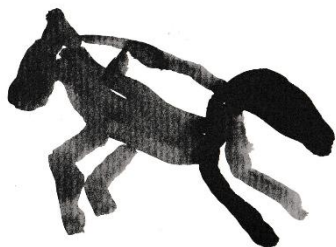
"But she will be alright, yes?" asked Giora

"She lost a lot of fluids. She will need to be under observation for a few days. We hope she will be fine. Will you be waiting for her when she wakes up?"

"Yes. I'm here. I'm waiting right here" said Giora

"Fine. I will let you know once she is out. If you can get in touch with anyone who knows her let us know. We need her name and identity number to complete the registration"

said the young man and walked back inside, the sliding door closing behind him.



"She is awake. You can come in now" said the nurse, waking Giora up some hours later. Giora, scratching his unshaved chin, looked at his watch. It was five am and he had managed to nap a little with his head resting on the cold wall. He got up heavily.

"Good. That's very good" he said. He walked after the nurse who seemed after his night shift to be still full of energy and zest.

Giora entered the room where Nita was resting with her eyes closed. As he neared her bed she opened them, she was paler than he remembered her and obviously weak.

"Hello Nita" he said.

"Hello Giora" she replied "Thank you for bringing me here. I thought I was going to die."

"It was a close call" he said and brought a chair to sit by her bed.

They sat in silence for a long moment.

"I saw you transform" said Giora "How do you do that? I have never seen anything like this."

"I don't really know. It is just something I can do. I was born like that" she replied.

"Where are you from? Who are your parents?" he asked leaning close.

"I don't know. I was left at the entrance of an orphanage. No one knows. I don't know when exactly I was born either."

"That fascinating" he said "So when did you begin turning into a Jackal like that?"

"I think I could do it from a very early age. I dreamt most of my childhood of walking in the wood by our house. But then when I grew up it stopped. It's only lately that I learned to do the transformation again. And it was for a purpose."

"What purpose?" he asked.

"I think killing those Jackals is just terrible. It must be stopped" she said.

Giora leaned back against the chair and exhaled "That's a big issue we have been debating about for a long time. The

Jackal's population is multiplying with all the human garbage feeding them. It must be restrained. They are becoming a hazard," he said.

"Then spay them. But shooting them and poisoning them is horrid."

"Yes. You are right about that. Jacob is in tremendous trouble. I will have to report that he placed poisoned food in the forest. I'm afraid to go back there and find the calamity caused by what he has done. You can be assured though that I am not going to report about your special talent" he said smiling looking into her eyes.

"Really?" she said, hope in her voice.

"Well, I think he did a cruel thing and also that your ability has to be protected. If the world found out about it, you would be harassed and probed. It's better to let this rest. But you have to promise me not to transform anymore."

"I don't think I can stop," she said.

"So, what is your plan? Go on roaming the forest at night, playing hide and seek with Jacob?" asked Giora.

"I don't know. I know I need to go back home."

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"I live in Tel Aviv. I'm a high-tech project manager."

"Good. Then go back to work and put the Jackal world behind you" he said.

She became silent. Tears started rolling down her cheeks.

Giora looked at her, saying nothing.

"There is no place for wilderness anymore" she said.

"Perhaps you're looking for it in the wrong places. You are a human being. Seek the wilderness within the scope of your human world. The wilderness and freedom that there is in relationships, in creativity, in your emotions. The wilderness of the forest is a lost battle. You cannot be free there," said Giora again leaning forward, then he reached out his hand to her.

She looked at him then hesitantly placed her hand in his

"I'm scared" she said.

"What are you scared off?" he asked, holding her hand.

"The finality of things. I can see my life just continuing the same hectic way it has been for years, just growing old

in my routines. I felt alive these days in the forest. There was a meaning to it all. "

"Perhaps the meaning came from caring about the forest and the Jackals. If you could care for something as much then your life would have a deeper meaning"

"Something like what?" she asked, closing her eyes, and taking a deep breath, sensing her body, she moved her toes.

"Maybe you need to build yourself your own pack. Match up with a male and give birth to a litter of human puppies," smiled Giora.

Nita did not answer him. Something in his tenderness and his eyes touched her in an unfamiliar way.

"Im sorry about your wife" she said "I wanted to tell you that back then by the pond."

"I could feel that. Thank you," Giora said.

The nurse came in at that moment. "The patient needs to rest now" he said.

"Yes, but of course" said Giora getting up "So rest well and I'll come back later."

Nita smiled "I'd like that". Giora smiled back and walked out of the room.

Nita looked out of the window for a while, noticing the delicate pearl gray sunrise lighting the horizon and the tree rustling in the autumn wind while a Myna landed on one of its branches and welcomed the morning with its many tongues. Perhaps, Nita thought, she could learn to give voice to the feral creature inside her too. There must be a safe way to be who she was.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Greta Barak, Eileen Lev & Nina Jawitz for reading the manuscript before publication, Ofer Abel from *Nomads Workshops* for the instructive tour in the forest, Dr. Yoram Yom - Tov & Professor Eli Geffen from Tel Aviv University, Dr. Miha Krofel from University of Ljubljana & Ovidiu C. Banea co-founder of GOJAGE for suggesting relevant bibliography.