

# A Masterless Dog

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A man died and when he was dead, no one took care of his black dog. The dog mourned him bitterly and for a long time. Nonetheless, he did not lay himself down to die on his master's grave, perhaps because he did not know where it was, perhaps also because he was basically a young and happy dog, who still felt that he had a good deal left to settle with life. There are two kinds of dogs: dogs who have a master and dogs who do not. On the surface, the difference is not great; a masterless dog can be just as fat as the others, often fatter. No, the difference lies elsewhere. To a dog, a human represents the eternal, providence. A master to obey, to follow, to rely on: he is, so to speak, the meaning of life for a dog. Of course, he does not have his master in his thoughts every minute of the day, nor does he always follow closely behind his heels. No, he often runs around on his own with a businesslike demeanor and sniffs at the corners of houses and establishes contact with his peers and snatches away a bone, should the opportunity arise, and shows interest in many things. But in the same instant his master whistles, all of that disappears from his dog's brain faster than the lash drove the merchants from the temple, for he knows that only one thing is important. And he forgets his house corner and his bone and his friends and rushes to his master.

The dog, whose master had died without the dog knowing how and was buried without the dog knowing where, mourned him for a long time. But since the days passed and nothing happened which could remind him of his master, he forgot him. On the street where his master had lived, he could no longer detect his scent. When he frolicked on a lawn with a friend, it would often happen that a whistle would cut through the air, and in the same instant, the friend would be gone like the wind. Then he would perk up his ears, but no whistle resembled his master's. So, he forgot him and he forgot even more: he forgot that he had ever had a master. He forgot that there had ever been a time, when he would have considered it impossible for a dog to live without a master. He became what one could call a dog who had seen better days, but in an inner sense, because on the surface, things went rather well for him. He lived like a dog can live: every now and then, he stole a good meal in the square and got beaten, and he had love affairs, and lay down to sleep when he was tired. He had friends and enemies. One day, he would completely thrash a dog who was weaker than he, and another day, he would be seriously roughed up by one who was stronger. Early in the morning, one could see him running down his master's street, the place, which out of habit, he most often frequented. He runs straight ahead, looking as though he has something important to attend to; sniffs, in passing, a dog going the other way, but cannot be bothered to cultivate the acquaintance; thereafter, he picks up speed, but sits down suddenly and scratches himself behind the ear with frenetic energy. In the next moment, he springs up and flies across the street to chase a red cat into a cellar window, whereupon, with a readopted businesslike air, he continues on his way and disappears around the corner.

So went his day, and one year followed close upon the heels of the next, and he aged without noticing it.

One day, the afternoon grew murky. It was wet and cold, and now and then a shower would pass by. The old dog had been on an excursion all day far into town. He walked slowly up the street; he limped a bit. A few times he stopped and shook his black coat, which over the years, had become flecked with gray around the head and throat. As was his habit, he walked and sniffed now to the right, now to the left. He took a detour through a gate, and when he came out, he had another dog in his company. In the next moment, a third dog came. They were young and mischievous dogs and they wanted to trick him into playing, but he was in a bad mood, and besides, it began to pour. Then, a whistle cut through the air, a long and sharp whistle. The old

dog looked at both the young dogs, but they paid no attention. It was not one of their masters who whistled. Then, the old masterless dog perked up his ears; suddenly, he felt quite strange. A new whistle and the old dog, perplexed, hopped first to one side and then to the other. It was his master whistling! But of course he must follow! For the third time, someone whistled just as prolonged and sharply. Where is he then? In which direction? How could I have become separated from my master! And when did it happen, yesterday, or the day before, or perhaps a short while ago? And what did my master look like? And what was his scent like? And where is he? Where is he? He ran around and sniffed at all the passersby, but none of them was his master and none of them wanted to be his master. Then he turned and ran. He stopped at the corner and looked around on all sides. His master was not there. Then he ran back up the street at a gallop; he was spattered with mud and the rain dropped from his coat. At every corner, he stopped, but nowhere was his master to be found. Then he sat down in an intersection and stretched his shaggy head towards the heavens and howled. Have you seen, have you heard, such a forgotten, masterless dog, when he stretches his throat towards the heavens and howls, howls? The other dogs slink slowly away with their tails between their legs. They can offer neither solace, nor help.