

WALKING IN THE SEA

By S. Yizhar

(Excerpts)

Once a man walked down the road, and walked and walked until he reached the Sea of Galilee. Once a woman walked down the road, and walked and walked until she reached the Sea of Galilee. Once an English lord built a beautiful castle on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and there they all meet. The man did not know about the lord's castle, and the woman did not know either, and the lord certainly knew nothing either about him or about her, even after all of them met on the shore of the Sea of Galilee under the castle of the famous Lord Melchett on the shore of the Sea, midway between Migdal and Ginossar.

Look at this place, he says to her, how wonderful it is. What a perfect shade, she says to him.

- Look at the hedge of white roses, how instead of closing himself in with barbed wire, Lord Melchett closed himself in with flowers and water fountains and with simple beauty, and maybe we ought to go and take a peek?
- Now? I don't want to take so much as a single step away from this spot now but I would gladly go into the sea, and swim and swim till I reach the other side... Want to come into the sea?
- Me? It's not for me. I can't swim and I don't have a bathing suit anyway.
- I don't have one either and I'm not a great swimmer, but just think...

All you have to do is hold out your hand, just stretch it out slightly, and suddenly your hand bumps against hers, sorry, didn't mean to, so close, suddenly it's her hand, her arm, and your hand just happened to find hers all of a sudden, by chance.

And right away he was startled into retreating, and as if only joking:

- What, is that you? So close, look how close, and I'm not even...
- Don't worry. It's only me, why were you startled?
- Startled? Me? Not at all, it's just that suddenly a kind of... you know

And a closeness followed that was so close that they could hear each other breathe, in the total quiet all around, so much so that they had forgotten until now that there was in fact an "all around".

Hey, look, seagulls. Because the entire narrow frame in front of them filled up now with a *white revelry* and the flight of seagulls was swooping down so rapidly that it almost crashed against the surface of the water. And then it turned all of a sudden, soaring upwards in a spectacular white somersault, performed sideways...

... His gaze was fixed on her and he saw how she too was looking right at him, from her side, as if she already knew and was just waiting for him to pull himself together, and he too would know, except that he had no idea at all what it was that he knew.

- Why are you being like this.
- Like what?
- I don't know. As if you want either to say something or to
- Ah, that it's nice here.

But all of a sudden, damn that sudden, a blow of sudden fell upon it all, and the frame fled right away, all the way to the shore, and in the middle, between it and the sea, there stood a grey dog...

One grey dog that hadn't yet made up its mind whether to run along or to join them or maybe to wait for his man, but there is no man, on either side, just the two of them being taken by utter surprise and even growing angry at him for spoiling things.

- So why don't you go in and take a swim?
- Me? Like this? And you?
- If only I knew how to swim. Don't wait. You go ahead and dive in.
- Like this? Just the way I am? And you won't?
- You're not embarrassed to take off your clothes, are you?

One look back and suddenly everything there opens up like a giant pair of doors... This is the mountain bursting into a towering pose, straight into a high upwards, and

like a lion's roar, the cliffs of Mount Arbel rise and soar smooth and steep, monumental and imposing.

- For the distance between wonder and ordinary is not a big one here, you'll see

The fact that she's here with you like this... the two of you so close that you can inhale her closeness... and your hand is touching her arm, or her shoulder, or her waist or her... no, but they are in that blouse of hers.

Young man, just pull yourself up and reach for it, just get up and reach for it, and with your two hands, pull her towards you and hold her very tight, and make her yours, and clasp her against your own self very tightly, and hold on and tell her, come to me, and again, come to me, and even closer, and that's the thing and that is all. And just one more minute, okay?

- Are you coming?
- Sure.
-

And suddenly the world is shining incredibly, and the grey is no longer, and the infinity is no longer and she is standing here pulling her blouse up over her head and letting him, and saying, hold it for me. And there is nothing now but her alone, the golden sunrise of her body walking into the deep water... which, charmed, laps the naked surface of the her girlish thighs and the whole of her golden torso is moving straight ahead... Let every tongue recount her beauty and how beautiful she was...