"The greatest Israeli writer of his generation" *Telegraph*

Falling Out of Time

DAVID GROSSMAN

Author of To the End of the Land

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About the Book

Following the magisterial *To the End of the Land*, the universally acclaimed Israeli author brings us an incandescent fable of parental grief—slim, elemental, a powerfully distilled experience of understanding and acceptance, and of art's triumph over death.

In Falling Out of Time, David Grossman has created a genredefying drama—part play, part prose, pure poetry—to tell the story of bereaved parents setting out to reach their lost children. It begins in a small village, in a kitchen, where a man announces to his wife that he is leaving, embarking on a journey in search of their dead son. The man-called simply the "Walking Man"—paces in ever-widening circles around the town. One after another, all manner of townsfolk fall into step with him (the Net Mender, the Midwife, the Elderly Maths Teacher, even the Duke), each enduring his or her own loss. The walkers raise questions of grief and bereavement: Can death be overcome by an intensity of speech or memory? Is it possible, even for a fleeting moment, to call to the dead and free them from their death? Grossman's answer to such questions is a hymn to these characters, who ultimately find solace and hope in their communal act of breaching death's hermetic separateness. For the reader, the solace is in their clamorous vitality, and in the gift of Grossman's storytelling – a realm where loss is not merely an absence, but a life force of its own.

David Grossman was born in Jerusalem, where he still lives. He is the bestselling author of numerous works of fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature, which have been translated into thirty-six languages. His work has also appeared in *The New Yorker*. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the French Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the Buxtehuder Bulle in Germany, Rome's Premio per la Pace e L'Azione Umanitaria, the Premio Ischia International Award for Journalism, Israel's Emet Prize, and the 2010 Frankfurt Peace Prize.

Jessica Cohen was born in England, raised in Israel, and now lives in the U.S. She translates contemporary Israeli fiction, non-fiction, and other creative works. Her translations include David Grossman's critically acclaimed *To The End of The Land*, and her work has appeared in *The New York Times, The Financial Times, Tablet Magazine, Words Without Borders*, and *Two Lines*. ALSO BY DAVID GROSSMAN

Fiction The Smile of the Lamb

See Under: Love The Book of Intimate Grammar The Zigzag Kid Be My Knife Someone to Run With In Another Life Her Body Knows To the End of the Land

Non-Fiction *The Yellow Wind Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel Death as a Way of Life: Israel Ten Years After Oslo Writing in the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics*

Falling Out of Time



David Grossman

Translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Cohen



JONATHAN CAPE London TOWN CHRONICLER: As they sit eating dinner, the man's face suddenly turns. He thrusts his plate away. Knives and forks clang. He stands up and seems not to know where he is. The woman recoils in her chair. His gaze hovers around her without taking hold, and she – wounded already by disaster – senses immediately: it's here again, touching me, its cold fingers on my lips. But what happened? she whispers with her eyes. Bewildered, the man looks at her and speaks.

-I have to go.

—Where?

—To him.

—Where?

—To him, there.

-To the place where it happened?

-No, no. There.

—I don't know.

-You're scaring me.

-Just to see him once more.

-But what could you see now? What is left to see?

—I might be able to see him there. Maybe even talk to him? —Talk?!

TOWN CHRONICLER: Now they both unfold, awaken. The man speaks again.

—Your voice.

—It's back. Yours too.

- -How I missed your voice.
- —I thought we . . . that we'd never . . .
- -I missed your voice more than I missed my own.
- —But what is *there*? There's no such place. *There* doesn't exist!
- —If you go there, it does.
- -But you don't come back. No one ever has.

- -Because only the dead have gone.
- —And you how will you go?
- -I will go there alive.
- -But you won't come back.
- -Maybe he's waiting for us.
- -He's not. It's been five years and he's still not. He's not.
- —Maybe he's wondering why we gave up on him so quickly, the minute they notified us . . .
- —Look at me. Look into my eyes. What are you doing to us? It's me, can't you see? This is us, the two of us. This is our home. Our kitchen. Come, sit down. I'll give you some soup.

MAN:

Lovely – So lovely – The kitchen is lovely right now, with you ladling soup. Here it's warm and soft, and steam covers the cold windowpane –

TOWN CHRONICLER: Perhaps because of the long years of silence, his hoarse voice fades to a whisper. He does not take his eyes off her. He watches so intently that her hand trembles.

MAN: And loveliest of all are your tender, curved arms. Life is here, dear one. I had forgotten: life is in the place where you ladle soup under the glowing light. You did well to remind me: we are here and he is there, and a timeless border stands between us. I had forgotten: we are here and he but it's impossible! Impossible. WOMAN: Look at me. No, not with that empty gaze. Stop. Come back to me. to us. It's so easy to forsake us, and this light, and tender arms, and the thought that we have come back to life. and that time

nonetheless

places thin compresses -

MAN: No, this is impossible. It's no longer possible that we, that the sun, that the watches, the shops, that the moon, the couples, that tree-lined boulevards turn green, that blood in our veins, that spring and autumn, that people innocently, that things just are. That the children of others, that their brightness and warmness –

WOMAN: Be careful, you are saying things. The threads are so fine.

MAN: At night people came bearing news. They walked a long way, quietly grave, and perhaps, as they did so, they stole a taste, a lick. With a child's wonder they learned they could hold death in their mouths like sweets made of poison to which they are miraculously immune. We opened the door, this one. We stood here, you and I,

shoulder to shoulder, they on the threshold and we facing them, and they, mercifully, quietly, stood there and gave us the breath of death.

WOMAN:

It was awfully quiet. Cold flames lapped around us. I said: I knew, tonight you would come. I thought: Come, noiseful void.

MAN:

From far away, I heard you: Don't be afraid, you said, I did not shout when he was born, and I won't shout now either.

WOMAN: Our prior life kept growing inside us for a few moments longer. Speech, movements, expressions. MAN AND WOMAN: Now. for a moment, we sink. Both not saying the same words. Not bewailing him, for now, but bewailing the music of our previous life, the wondrously simple, the ease, the face free of wrinkles. WOMAN: But we promised each other, we swore to be, to ache. to miss him. to live. So what is it now that makes you suddenly tear away? MAN: After that night a stranger came and grasped my shoulders and said: Save what is left. Fight, try to heal. Look into her eyes, cling to her eyes, always her eyes do not let go.

WOMAN: Don't go back there, to those days. Do not turn back your gaze. MAN: In that darkness I saw one eye weeping and one eye crazed. A human eye, extinguished, and the eye of a beast. A beast half devoured in the predator's mouth, soaked with blood, insane. peered out at me from your eye. WOMAN: The earth gaped open, gulped us and disgorged. Don't go back there, do not go, not even one step out of the light. MAN: I could not, I dared not look into your eye, that eye of madness,

into your noneness.

WOMAN: I did not see you, I did not see a thing, from the human eye or the eye of the beast. My soul was uprooted. It was very cold then and it is cold now, too. Come to sleep, it's late. MAN: For five years we unspoke that night. You fell mute, then I. For you the quiet was good, and I felt it clutch at my throat. One after the other, the words died. and we were like a house where the lights go slowly out, until a sombre silence fell -

WOMAN: And in it