



VINTAGE

# The Same Sea

Amos Oz

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Translator's Note

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## About the Book

Nadia is dead. Her widower, Albert, comforted by his old friend Bettine, is trying to put his life back together. His son, Enrico, has gone to find himself in Tibet. Enrico's girlfriend, Dita, is being friendly and daughterly to Albert - but his responses are less platonic. Meanwhile, Dita has another lover, and a slightly repellent film producer lusts after her too.

Through these intersecting triangles of desire and loss comes an intimate, everyday tale of unrequited love, attachment and grief - surprising, heartbreaking, funny, poetic and simply unmissable.



## About the Author

Born in Jerusalem in 1939, Amos Oz studied philosophy and literature at Hebrew University and is one of Israel's finest living writers, as well as a respected political commentator and campaigner for peace in the Middle East. He is the author of many previous works of fiction, including *My Michael*, *To Know a Woman*, *Black Box*, *Fima*, *Don't Call It Night* and, most recently, *The Same Sea*, as well as acclaimed works of non-fiction, *In the Land of Israel*, *The Slopes of Lebanon*, *Israel, Palestine & Peace* and *The Story Begins*. His work has been translated into twenty-eight languages and he has won many international literary awards. Amos Oz is married, with two daughters and a son, and lives in Arad, Israel.

ALSO BY AMOS OZ

Fiction

*Elsewhere, Perhaps*  
*Touch the Water, Touch the Wind*  
*Unto Death*  
*The Hill of Evil Counsel*  
*Where the Jackals Howl*  
*A Perfect Peace*  
*My Michael*  
*To Know a Woman*  
*Fima*  
*Black Box*  
*Don't Call It Night*  
*Panther in the Basement*

Non Fiction

*In the Land of Israel*  
*The Slopes of Lebanon*  
*Israel, Palestine & Peace*  
*The Story Begins*

For Children

*Soumchi*

Amos Oz

# THE SAME SEA

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY  
Nicholas de Lange  
in collaboration with the author

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London

## A NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

One point which it was impossible to convey within the translation: the name 'Albert' is pronounced as in French (with a silent t) by everyone except Bettine, who pronounces it as it is written, with the stress on the second syllable.

Nicholas de Lange

## A CAT

Not far from the sea, Mr Albert Danon lives in Amirim Street, alone. He is fond of olives and feta; a mild accountant, he lost his wife not long ago. Nadia Danon died one morning of ovarian cancer, leaving some clothes, a dressing table, some finely embroidered tablemats. Their only son, Enrico David, has gone off mountaineering in Tibet.

Here in Bat Yam the summer morning is hot and clammy but on those mountains night is falling. Mist is swirling low in the ravines. A needle-sharp wind howls as though alive, and the fading light looks more and more like a nasty dream.

At this point the track forks: one way is steep, the other gently sloping. Not a trace on the map of the fork in the track. And as the evening darkens and the wind lashes him with sharp hailstones, Rico has to guess whether to take the shorter or the easier way down.

Either way, Mr Danon will get up now and switch off his computer. He will go and stand by the window. Outside in the yard on the wall is a cat. It has spotted a lizard. It will not let go.

## A BIRD

Nadia Danon. Not long before she died a bird  
on a branch woke her.  
At four in the morning, before it was light, *narimi*  
*arimi* said the bird.

What will I be when I'm dead? A sound or a scent  
or neither. I've started a mat.  
I may still finish it. Dr Pinto  
is optimistic: the situation is stable. The left one  
is a little less good. The right one is fine. The X-rays are  
clear. See  
for yourself: no secondaries here.

At four in the morning, before it is light, Nadia Danon  
begins to remember. Ewes' milk cheese. A glass of  
wine.  
A bunch of grapes. A scent of slow evening on the  
Cretan hills,  
the taste of cold water, the whispering of pines, the  
shadow  
of the mountains spreading over the plain, *narimi*  
*arimi* the bird sang there. I'll sit here and sew.  
It'll be finished by morning.

## DETAILS

Rico David was always reading. He thought the world was in a bad way. The shelves are covered with piles of his books, pamphlets, papers, publications, on all sorts of wrongs: black studies, women's studies, lesbians and gays, child abuse, drugs, race, rain forests, the hole in the ozone layer, not to mention injustice in the Middle East. Always reading. He read everything. He went to a left-wing rally with his girlfriend Dita Inbar. Left without saying a word. Forgot to call. Came home late. Played his guitar.

Our mother begs you, his father pleaded. She's not feeling too—and you're making it worse. Rico said, OK, give me a break. But how can anyone be so insensitive? Forgetting to switch off. Forgetting to close. Forgetting to get back before three in the morning.

Dita said: Mr Danon, try to see it his way. It's painful for him too. Now you're giving him guilt feelings; after all, it's not his fault she's dead. He has a right to a life of his own. What did you expect him to do? Sit holding her hand?

life goes on. One way or another everyone gets left  
alone. I don't go much on this trip to Tibet  
either, but still, he's entitled to try to find himself.

Specially after  
missing his mother. He'll be back, Mr Danon, but don't  
hang around  
waiting for him. Do some work, get some exercise,  
whatever. I'll drop by  
sometime.

and since then he goes out to the garden at times.  
Prunes the roses.  
Picks up the sweet peas. Inhales the smell of the sea  
from afar,  
salt, seaweed, the warm dampness. He might  
call her tomorrow. But Rico forgot to leave her details  
and there are dozens of Inbars in the phone book.



## LATER, IN TIBET

One summer morning, when he was young, he and his mother took the bus from Bat Yam to Jaffa, to see his Aunt Clara. The night before he refused to sleep: he was afraid the alarm clock would stop in the night, and we wouldn't wake. And what if it rains, or if we are late.

Between Bat Yam and Jaffa a donkey cart had overturned. Smashed watermelons on the asphalt, blood bath. Then the fat driver took offence and shouted at another fat man, with greased hair. An old lady frowned at his mother. Her mouth was a grave, empty and deep. On a bench at a stop sat a man in a tie and white shirt, wearing his jacket over his knees. He wouldn't board the bus. Saved it on. Maybe he was waiting for another bus. Then they saw a squashed cat. His mother pressed his head to her tummy: don't look, you'll cry out again in your sleep. Then a girl with her head shaved: lice? Her crossed leg almost revealed a glimpse. And an unfinished building and dunes of sand. An Arab coffee house. Wicker stools. Smoke,

crid and thick. Two men bending forward, heads almost touching.

. ruin. A church. A fig tree. A bell.  
. tower. A tiled roof. Wrought-iron grilles. A lemon tree.  
. smell of fried fish. And between two walls sail and a sea rocking itself.

hen an orchard, a convent, palm trees,  
ate palms perhaps, and shattered buildings; if you continue  
long this road you eventually reach  
outh Tel Aviv. Then the Yarkon.  
hen citrus groves. Villages. And beyond  
re mountains. And after that it is already  
ight. The uplands of Galilee. Syria. Russia.  
r Lapland. The tundra. Snowy steppes.

ater, in Tibet, more asleep than awake,  
e remembers his mother. If we don't wake up  
e've had it. We'll be late. In the snow in the tent in the  
sleeping-bag  
e stretches to press his head to her tummy.

# CALCULATIONS

1 Amirim Street Mr Danon is still awake.  
:’s two in the morning. On the screen before him  
ne figures don’t add up. Some company  
r other. A mistake  
r a fraud? He checks. Can’t spot anything. On an  
embroidered mat  
ne tin clock ticks. He puts on his coat and goes out.  
It’s six now  
1 Tibet. A smell of rain but no rain in the street in Bat  
Yam.  
Which is empty. Silent. Blocks of flats. A mistake  
r a fraud. Tomorrow we’ll see.

## A MOSQUITO

rita slept with a good friend  
of Rico's, Giggy Ben-Gal. He got on her nerves  
when he called screwing intercourse. He disgusted her  
by asking her afterwards how good it had been  
for her on a scale of nought to a hundred. He had an  
opinion  
about everything. He started yammering on about the  
female orgasm  
being less physical, more emotional. Then he  
discovered  
a fat mosquito on her shoulder. He squashed it,  
brushed it off, rustled  
the local paper and fell asleep  
on his back. Arms spread out in a cross.  
Leaving no room for her. His cock shrivelled too  
and went to sleep with a mosquito on it: blood  
vengeance.

She took a shower. Combed her hair. Put on a black T-  
shirt that Rico  
had left in one of her drawers. Less. Or more.  
Emotional. Physical.  
Sexy. Bullshit. Sensual. Sexual.  
Opinions night and day. That's wrong. That's right.  
What's squashed  
can't be un-squashed. I ought to go and see how the old  
man's doing.

## IT'S HARD

With the first rays of dawn he opens his eyes. The mountain range looks like woman, powerful, serene, asleep on her side after a night of love.

A gentle breeze, satisfying itself, stirs the flap of his tent.

It wells, billowing, like a warm belly. Rising and falling.

With the tip of his tongue he touches the dip in the middle of his left hand,

at the innermost point of his palm. It feels like the touch of a nipple, soft and hard.

# ALONE

n arrow poised on a taut bow: he remembers the line  
f the slope of her thigh. He guesses her hips'  
movement towards him.

le gathers himself. Crawls out of his sleeping-bag. Fills  
is lungs with snowy air. A pale, opaline  
mist is rolling slowly upwards: a filmy nightdress on the  
curve  
f the mountain.

## A SUGGESTION

1 Bostros Street in Jaffa there lives a Greek man who  
reads fortunes in cards.  
sort of clairvoyant. They say he even calls up the  
dead. Not  
with glasses and ouija boards  
but visibly. Only for a moment, though, and in a dim  
light,  
and you can't talk and you can't touch. Then death  
takes over again.

ettine Carmel, a chartered accountant, told Albert.  
She is a deputy inspector  
1 the Property Tax Board. When she has a moment he  
is invited to her flat  
for herbal tea and a chat, about the children, life,  
things in general. He has been widowed since the early  
summer,  
he has been a widow for twenty years now. She is sixty  
and so is he. Since his wife passed away he has not  
looked  
at another woman. But each time they talk  
it brings them both a feeling of peace. Albert, she says,  
why don't you go  
and see him some time. It really helped me. It's  
probably an illusion, but  
1st for a moment Avram came back. It's 400 shekels  
and no  
guarantee. If nothing happens, the money's gone.  
People pay even more

or experiences that touch them much less. No illusions  
; a current catchphrase which in my view is just a  
cliché:  
ven if you live to be a hundred, you never stop  
searching  
or those long dead.



## NADIA LOOKS

A framed photograph stands on the sideboard: her chestnut hair pinned up. Her eyes are a little too round, which is possibly why her face expresses surprise or doubt, as though asking: What, really? It's not in the picture, but Albert remembers what pinning her hair up did to her. It let you observe, if you wished, the soft, fine, fragrant down on the nape of her neck.

In the photograph hanging in their bedroom Nadia looks different. More worldly. Fine earrings, a hint of a shy smile which both promises and asks for more time: not now. Later, whatever you want.

## RICO LOOKS

ind-heartedness, bitterness, stamina, scorn – these  
are what Mr Danon sees  
n the face of his son in the photo. Like a double  
exposure: the clear, open  
row and eyes are at odds with the wry,  
most cynical line of the lips. In the picture the  
uniform broadens the span  
f his shoulders, transforming the boy into a tough  
man. For several years  
's been almost impossible to talk to him. What's new?  
Nothing special.  
How are you? Not too bad. Have you eaten? Have you  
had a drink? Would you like  
piece of chicken? Give me a break, Dad. I'm all right.  
And what do you think about the peace talks? He  
mumbles some wisecrack,  
ready halfway out the door. 'Bye. And don't work  
yourself too hard.  
But still there is a kind of affection, not in the words,  
not in the photo,  
but in between or beside. His hand on my arm: its  
touch  
is calm, intimate yet not really. And now in Tibet  
I'm almost twenty to three. Instead of investigating  
further  
What's missing from the picture, I'll make some toast,  
drink some tea,  
and then get down to work. There's something wrong  
with this photo.

## ON THE OTHER SIDE

A postcard arrived, with a green stamp: Hi Dad, it's nice here, high and bright, the snow reminds me of Bulgaria in the bedtime stories Mum used to tell me about villages with wells and forests with goblins (though here there are almost no trees; only shrubs grow at this altitude, and even they appear to do so out of sheer stubbornness). I'm fine here, got my sweater and everything, and some Dutch guys are with me - they're really safety-conscious. And by the way, the thin air somehow totally changes every sound. Even the most terrifying shout doesn't break the silence but instead, how can I put this, joins it. Now don't you sit up working too late. PS On the other side you can see a picture of a ruined village. A thousand years or so ago there was a civilisation here that was lost without trace. Nobody knows what happened.