

Drowned

By Dana Heifetz

Translated from Hebrew by
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On the fourth day, the drowned returned, rising from the water. For three days the resentful river surged and raged before giving in and letting him ascend. As is usual in such cases, seaweed was tangled in his hair and beard and tiny bite marks bloomed on his skin, especially on his toes, but otherwise, he looked as he always had—closed and haughty.



With an even, confident stride he

walked to the netmaker's meager house, indifferent or perhaps unaware of the impression his looks made on the few who came across him in the early morning hour in which he rose and returned to the dirt roads of the village. Anyhow, they had never spoken to him; that is, none but her.

She saw him from her window as he neared. He was so familiar to her that she forgot, for a moment, that he had died. Only after a long while did her eyes tell her what her heart refused to see—something in his gait was broken, or else he'd lost his natural balance; she didn't know what to call this illusive thing but it was strikingly clear to her that something was wrong, very wrong. And then she remembered, and shriveled, and hurried out to him to try to make him forget what had happened. And only when she reached him and gazed into the holes that used to be his eyes did she realize that he didn't know.

She embraced him, and he, as was his way, allowed it, and also let her lead him to the tub. You are tired, she said, and when he nodded she filled it with water and submerged him in it and rinsed the seaweed off him and gently washed his wounds, and then dried and dressed him in the clothes that waited for him as if he'd only gone out yesterday, and she led him to the bed and said, Rest, and left the room, turning out the light.

She went back to living with him, like they used to, and was astonished at how little had changed. Of course, there was a need to get rid of the few mirrors in the house and to come up with a reasonable excuse for why he no longer ate or slept. But he himself so quickly and naturally ignored these things that she didn't know whether he did so on purpose or didn't even notice. Either way, she was grateful for his return, for adapting, and for the miracle of possibility that let her live with him even after.

Still, when she lay beside him at the end of a long day of tying and repairing, her hands burning from gripping the coarse rope nets, and maybe from other reasons too, feeling his presence – and, it must be said, its new watery hue, elusive and fluid and dark – sometimes, in the foggy moments of odd images that flooded her just before she fell asleep, she felt the flicker of something else. Anger. She refused this thing with a determination that woke her up – what happened wasn't his fault, and

certainly he couldn't be faulted for having made her life with him so easy since he returned like this – but she couldn't help knowing how dearly she longed for him to feel the pain of his death, even a little; an iota of her own pain. And she knew that even in life he wouldn't have been sorry for his death, or for her, and although he let her love him, and consumed her love, sometimes with a boundless demand, in the end he had resented her for keeping him alive. That is, until. And she couldn't bear his despair of life nor the depths of his blindness towards her, even back when he had eyes, really from the very beginning. She shook herself, ordered herself to go to sleep, and turned towards him, gently stroking his cheeks and the sockets of his eyes and said, Good night, my love. And before she fell asleep, she heard his low voice respond, Good night.