

from: *Du sollst (Thou Shalt, Zurich:*
Ammann Verlag, 2005)

Navid Kermani

Remember the Day of Celebration, That It Be Kept Holy

Still rotating his body in the motion with which he had rolled off her, he reached for the pajama pants bunched up around his ankles. As usual, he had kept his top on. She straightened her brassiere, which had slipped beneath her breast on the left side. Without panties, she went into the bathroom to relieve herself and brush her teeth. When she returned, she could hear him snoring from the hall. In the darkness, she patted the bed in search of her pajamas. She found the top half under her eiderdown. A pant leg stuck out from beneath his pillow. She left the pants where they were and instead switched on her reading lamp. With all that noise, she wouldn't be able to sleep. Had he caught a cold, or drunk too much? She glanced at his wide-open mouth in which something was glittering. Those gold crowns aren't doing anything for your looks, she thought. She picked up the bottle of mineral water from its place beside the bed, drank a little, and then slammed the bottle down on his skull. Bits of glass flew across the pillow and his chest. On his face, the water mingled with blood and shards. Several seconds passed before it stopped fizzing. She placed the neck of the bottle on the night table and thought about whether she should take off her socks or put on her jeans. His voice postponed her decision. That he had survived struck her as unnatural.

—What are you doing?

He had sat up and was touching his face. She seemed to have hit him on the right side of his forehead, but possibly the shards of glass had made other wounds as well, on his cheek, his ear or throat. Everywhere on his face his fingers wandered, it was wet. The blood was dripping

from his hand to the bedspread. The only pain he felt was muted, as if he were feeling it through padding. Admittedly, his brain was trying to break open his skull with every beat of his pulse. He leaned back against the bed frame and tried, in vain, to hold a thought in his head. Although she was sitting beside him with her leg folded beneath her, she appeared to be distant, too far away for his hand to reach. Her contours were blurred, her face eluded his pupils. He looked around and discovered the broken neck of the bottle. Gazing at her questioningly with horrified eyes, he began to pick the slivers from his head:

—What are you doing?

Not: what have you done? What are you doing? Why are you not asleep? Why aren't you helping me? Why are you sitting there watching me?

She knew it was time to call the medics. But the sight of him entranced her. She tried to think when he had looked at her with such eyes. It had been in the very same spot, upon the same pillow, except that she had been lying on top of him, her upper body propped against the headboard behind him. Through her outstretched arms, she had noticed the sudden stillness in his face. He had looked dazed, as if paralyzed by some great terror, fearful and yet filled with an urgent desire to sort out what was happening to him, conscious that something was happening to him. She had stopped moving her pelvis and had looked at him for a long time without time. She picked up the neck of the bottle.

—Do you remember taking my shoes off?

—I sat you on the dining room table and took your shoes off, first the left, then the right.

—Which shoes were they?

—The cream-colored ones with the pointed heels.

He was speaking softly, his voice cracking, but to his surprise the sentences, once he had begun them, came flowing smoothly over his lips. He just had to stop and rest between phrases.

At intervals his mind cleared, but then he would be left again in a state of vague uncertainty. In any case, he had understood where he was and what she had done.

—And what did you do then?

—You know perfectly well what I did.

—I want to hear it from you.

She held the neck of the bottle beneath his chin and prodded it higher with the jagged edge.

—Tell me.

—I tore your stockings, first with my fingernails and then, since that wasn't working, with my teeth, and then I kissed your feet, first the left, then the right.

—Go on.

—That took a while. I also caressed your feet and massaged them.

—And after that?

—I got up and took off your sweater.

—Yes.

—And your skirt. It was that brown skirt, do you remember? The one that's so short and sexy.

—That's right.

The hand holding the bottle neck sank a little.

—I unbuttoned your skirt, and then I lifted you up on the edges of my hands to slip the skirt under your buttocks with my fingers, then I pulled the skirt down slowly, kneeled again, and one at a time placed your left and right feet on my shoulders until the skirt fell to the floor and my mouth was at your toes again.

She had to do something, call a doctor or at least free him from the shards of glass, disinfect his wounds and bandage them. Even just keeping his eyes focused on her appeared to be an exertion for him. Again and again his eyes kept rolling back in his head, and only came again to rest on her with effort. If she was not mistaken, there was now blood flowing out of his nose. She knew he had to lie back down.

—How could the skirt fall to the floor if my foot was resting on your shoulder?

—I don't remember.

—I want to know.

—I think the moment when I was pulling your skirt over your ankles is when I put your legs on my shoulder, first the left, then the right.

—Did you do that on purpose?

—No, at least not with the first leg. It was one single motion, almost a swinging motion, but very slow, and at the end of it your leg landed on my shoulder.

—What happened then?

—I tore your stockings on both sides to above your knee and caressed your calves.

—How did you caress them?

—With my hands, I think, with both hands, left and right, and above all with my mouth, yes, with my mouth, with my lips. I kneaded the muscles with my lips, I could feel them, the muscle fibers, each individual fiber, I used my lips to sort them out. That was lovely.

—Yes?

—Yes.

—He reached out his hand for her and touched her upper arm, but couldn't keep his hand from slipping down to rest on the blanket. She looked at his hand, which was smeared with

blood. At least she had to take his hand, she thought. He had reached out to her with it. His pain had consumed the padding that had been separating it from his consciousness. He wanted either to lie back or get up; which of the two was not clear even to him. All that was clear to him was that she had not taken his hand. With the fear, his eyes lost their question:

—What are you doing?

—I want to go to the bathroom.

Of course he wanted to get up, she could understand that. He wanted to look in the mirror and see what she had done. But she was not yet through with him. There were still so many more answers he had to give, about her stockings and her bra and how he had laid her on the table, and the plates and glasses that had fallen to the floor, the bowls he had swept aside, the sound of broken glass that had startled her. With what tenderness he had taken off her panties, like a relic, and he had opened her legs, which she had been holding pressed together in a final act of modesty, and had looked at her. He had climbed onto the table and had undressed her a second time with his eyes, studying every fold, tasting every orifice. She had been naked. If he were to go now, she would never return. She rammed the open edge of the bottle neck under his chin. This time the blood spurted out as if from a sack filled to bursting. She had seen this in a film once, it spurted all the way to her crotch. Were these the same eyes as before? No, these were different, now he was thinking only of himself. She heard the rattle in his throat before he tipped to one side. To make sure, she stabbed him another three or four times. There had been shards that time too.

Translated by Susan Bernofsky