

Excerpt from: **Navid Kermani, Das Buch der von Neil Young Getöteten (The Book of Those Killed by Neil Young)**, p. 162-167:

I am a lonely visitor  
I came too late to cause a stir  
Though I campaigned all my life towards  
that goal.  
I hardly slept the night you wept (?)  
Our secret's save and still well kept (?)  
Where even Richard Nixon has got soul,  
Even Richard Nixon has got soul.

When my daughter lies on my chest I can feel her heart beating. She rests her head on the softer muscle where my chest and shoulder meet, turns her head so that we look into each other's eyes, whereupon her eyelids drift slowly downwards like two people drowning, flash back up at ever more infrequent intervals, until they believe that I will always be there for her, for eternity. Some days she softly touches my cheek, as if she were stroking me, and perhaps she is. I notice from her breathing that she has finally fallen asleep, it becomes slower and slower, on some days she even snores almost imperceptibly. How small she still is: that bit of air that squeezes through her nostrils still manages to almost completely fill her body. In and out her body moves, while one hand creeps into the gap between my triceps and my chest, the other taking root in my neck, two anchors. I stop humming and feel my daughter, alive.

I knew, but almost forgot, that I wanted to have children. That it was time, was something I discovered on a German summer's day. My footballing brother and I visited my father, who had undergone a heart operation a few days earlier, a difficult and dangerous operation, which he appeared to have recovered from well and had therefore been moved from intensive care. During the operation my mother and I had walked around the local spa town where the heart clinic was, each talking up the other's courage, both praying to God, who I requested, whom I begged to be near at hand. At the appointed time we returned to the clinic, rang the doorbell, there had been a rustling, and a woman's voice came over the intercom, whom I explained what we wanted, and she asked us to wait for a moment, and we heard things rustle again and then we heard nothing, and then a staff nurse, who told us the operation had gone well. I could have hugged the clinic intercom, the circle of dots in the steel. My brother and I found the door to my father's room open, but there was no bed there. We rushed to the ward sister's office and were told that my father had been found on the floor of his room and had been transferred to intensive care. Fortunately he had not been lying there for long, as a nurse who had by chance walked down the corridor had heard a strange noise, something like a groan through clenched lips,

and had swiftly opened the door to his room. We ran the few meters to intensive care, rang the bell, waited for endless seconds and were immediately ushered behind a screen that had been placed in the ward lobby. There he lay, hooked up to tubes, surrounded by blinking, beeping machines. At the head of the bed a doctor held an A4-sized pad of paper in his hand and was exchanging quiet but hectic words with two nurses. My mother, who was holding my father's hand, looked at us and her eyes spelled Helpless. I moved closer to the bed. My father, who could unscrew any screw, open any jam jar lid, who could violently lose his temper and could likewise break into tears, my father who never tired and who could never sit still for a moment, even on holiday, my proud, strong restless father had become pale in a ridiculous white gown that they had put him in, although it hardly even covered his knees. My mother had bent down over him again, repeating his name, beseeching him, stroking his entire body in a wild frenzy of tenderness, something I had never before witnessed between them, in fact she was pressing and kneading his skin so urgently that I was filled with fear. Only then did I grasp things, grabbed his cleanly shaven lower arm, punctured by needles, hooked up to a maze of tubes, and I froze.

Hospitals have made him cry  
But there's always a freeway in his eye  
Though his beach got too crowded for a stroll.  
Roads stretch out like healthy veins  
And wild gift horses strain the reins  
Where even Richard Nixon has got soul,  
Even Richard Nixon has got soul.

When my brother and I left the hospital toward evening my father had pulled through. A little color had returned to his face, a little warmth to his veins, a little life before his death. He had nodded to us, almost with a smile and then allowed himself the silence of sleep.

After I had dropped off my footballing brother, a doctor of internal medicine who was able to explain the events of the day, at his place in a new housing estate, I fell into a kind of trance and first awoke from it a hundred kilometers later in my wife's arms. I know how we stood in the kitchen doorway, I can remember the white kitchen table and the little brass holder with the candles in it, the wax dripping onto the wood, drying there, and I can remember how I asked myself why I was noticing the wax splashes while still thinking of my pale father and the tears starting to pour down my cheeks. I told my wife nothing of the insight that I had after asking myself about the wax, but even before I had got as far as the answer, the insight came, in the course of a tenth of a second of timelessness between two units of thought: that my children should preserve an image of my father in their minds and therefore must be born soon. I owed him that, no less than I owed them the same.

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