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"A Second Attack"

BY ÇETIN GÜLTEKIN AND MUTLU KOÇAK

Translated by Elizabeth Sun

- 1 From the outside, we were now ready to prepare my brother for his final journey.
- 2 On the inside, we could never be ready, because what awaited us was not meant to be seen by human eyes. After this image, we would no longer be the people we once were.
- 3 The four of us lifted Gökhan's heavy body out of the coffin and laid it on the marble Musalla stone, where the dead are traditionally laid out during the funeral ceremony. Mustafa carefully pulled the *kefen*, the shroud, off Gökhan's body. I had explained to Mert and Kemal that an autopsy had been carried out to examine the bullet wound, but what we were about to see was akin to the desecration of a corpse.
- 4 I wish I didn't have to describe here what was left of my brother and what I felt at the sight. But how else can I explain what was done to us? Why we can't find peace? Why we won't stop being angry? I am deliberately rubbing salt into the wound. Only the shocking reality will move us forward. Because for me, it was nothing less than a second attack. When the memories reemerge, I want to hide from them. But we must look where it hurts, even when we want to look away. The only reason I talk about the things that I would rather remain silent about forever, serves only one purpose: to show what such acts of violence do.
- 5 Arms, legs, rear of the head, back—Gökhan's body had been slashed from top to bottom. He looked like a map. The paths where the scalpel had cut into his flesh were sewn together with rough stitches, stapled shut, or left open. Cling film had been wrapped around his abdomen—probably to keep the makeshift patched cuts from tearing open again immediately. After an entire day of being left in the kiosk, his body was swollen and reddish-purple spots covered his skin.
- 6 We didn't speak, but I could see the horror in the others' eyes when I met their gaze. Everyone was in shock. Everyone was struggling. It took a lot of strength to touch this broken body. We put a towel over his private parts and began to wash him with a cloth and shampoo. It was challenging. Open wounds everywhere, stitches everywhere. We could only dab his skin very gently. We tried to control our thoughts somehow, to stay calm so that the circular movements didn't slip. To focus on the *suras* that we quietly recited. To find support in our prayers while we had no choice but to face this enormous task—out of respect for my brother.
- 7 We glanced fearfully at the door. If the people waiting outside had seen what had been done to Gökhan's body, we wouldn't have been able to offer any consolation. Especially not my parents. So we had positioned one of my cousins firmly outside the door, like a security guard, to protect others from what they would never be able to process. "What's taking so long?" the people waiting wanted to know, growing impatient. We had no words for it.

8 When I smell the scent of rose soap today, I think of my brother’s disfigured corpse. We carefully lathered him up with it, but every time we poured water over him, a pink liquid seeped from the seams.

9 “No blood on the shroud.” That’s what the imam had told us. But we couldn’t finish washing the body that way. The two bullet wounds to the head and chest hadn’t been stitched up properly, and there was also a gaping hole on his left flank where the bullet had exited, from which secretions were seeping. We washed him again and again, but when we tried to dry him, the clothes were full of stains again.

10 I had no choice but to send Mert to the supermarket for some absorbent cotton that could carefully seal the holes. This ordeal lasted almost three hours. God gave me indescribable strength to somehow endure the horror. At that moment, I felt no hatred, no fear, no disgust. There was nothing but love for my brother. Never before, never since, have I experienced or seen anything more brutal, not even on television or in the movies. An autopsy like that, I know now, is like killing a dead person again. My brother was killed a second time. It’s the knockout blow that leaves you with nothing left.

11 Three and a half hours. According to the autopsy report from Frankfurt University Hospital, that’s how long it took to finish their examination. I understand that the two gunshot wounds had to be examined in detail. And now I know that an autopsy is part of the standard procedure for unnatural deaths—but like this? He had suffered a gunshot wound to the head, with a bullet through the ear conch, resulting in open craniocerebral trauma with injury to the cerebellum, as well as a bullet through the heart. Either of the two injuries would have been enough to kill him. But why did they have to cut him open completely, so that no one could remember how he once was? Is

it commensurable to cut up the body in this way, when the cause of death is clear, along with the course of the crime and identity of the perpetrator? What is the point of such a law? These are the big questions that we cannot let go of. What were the medical reasons for treating the corpse in such a way? Human dignity is inviolable—even after death.

12 These pathologists must not have known that we have an ablution service. But we live in a country with over five million Muslims.¹ In so many places, mosques are part of the cityscape. Families must also be allowed to say goodbye according to their religion—before the autopsy, as long as the deceased still looks human. The coroner took him apart completely. You do not do that to a dead person. How could it not deprive me of sleep? How could I ever return to normality? He did not deserve an end like this.

1—www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt/staat-und-religion/islam-in-deutschland/islam-in-deutschland-node.html.