

## Freedom

For eighteen years, a terrible thought crept through my nature, my ideas and my emotions. I used to turn pale and tremble; I was often paralyzed by fear. Today I turn pale and tremble and am paralyzed by passion. My life is in full bloom: my temper is like that of a dog even mad by thirst. There is but one mood in my eyes and my soul, one will in my ideas and revelations, one feeling on my tongue and in my heart. If I were to commit a crime, I would not conceal it; if I commit in my thoughts, I'll confess it. Everything inside me seeks an exit, strives for expression and finds it. I lose my temper quickly, unexpectedly, madly, when I quarrel, when I drink, when I make love, when I sin. One glass makes me drunk, one look inflames me, one phrase captivates me. Everything is speed, moment and instinct. These two years are but a moment: spirituality without process, feeling without analysis. My nature is rebellion; my logic lack of discipline; my philosophy revolutionary. Puberty! Everything is finally crushed: goodness, holiness and familiarity: a quarter of an hour of kissing and embracing gives me more pleasure than all that which kept me at home. In the arms of the most lovely woman I forget my family, upbringing and shame; and when I am home, I remember only that I am able to forget in anybody's arms all that now surrounds me, traps me and makes me bitter. A drunken party exhilarates me as much as a woman; only with a hangover am I able

write poems. I do not distinguish between the grammar school student, the servant and the prostitute, nor between wine, beer and brandy. I drink to get drunk and to make love until I am satisfied. In brief, I love everything that my father condemns. He is grave, sober and ethical. For him, life begins with marriage; for me, that is where it ends. He is enchanted by mildness, love, goodness: the New Testament; I am enchanted by passion, violence, crime: the Old Testament. His ideal is Christ the Redeemer; mine is Satan the Seducer. To him, a prostitute is loathsome; to me she is luxurious. He would say: the family is the reaction to the brothel; I would say, the brothel is the rebellion against the family. In a word, I am a rebel, and he is a reactionary.

But we don't discuss it. When I am out all night drinking, he is taciturn, sullen and offended. I stay out a second night, and he is silent, he smiles and leaves. A third night out would be too much... I write poems, he writes memoirs. Our eyes rarely meet; we become confused and both look down: he wants to say something to me, I want to say something to him... He once said, 'It is nice that you work and write poems, but losing your nights, that's not healthy.' And I was upset: I can only write poems with a hangover... I write, 'I like Jews for their perversity is one of revolt, crime and sin; idealism begins with the first uprising of the angels, humanity with the institution of hell, life with the murder of Cain, and poetry with the discovery of Satan.' If my father were to read this, he would praise my work, but would criticize the ideas, and yet all of my poetry of pleasure rebels against work...

For eighteen years a terrible thought crept... When was it that I first took notice of it? I suppose it was some years ago when I suddenly awoke in my bed and squeezed my eyes shut in front of my father who had come to wake me. He left immediately, and I suspected that he had found me out. He began to watch me more carefully since... Five years ago, I came home drunk and threw up the wine. My father said sternly, 'This I forbid you, for it is not nice and it is harmful for you.' Four years ago, in grammar school, I lit a cigarette in the street. My father, displeased, said 'You smoke and moreover you are spiteful; and smoking is unhealthy, spite is a sign of malice and stupidity...' So again he spoiled my fun. Three years ago my mother dismissed a maid on my account and my father did not speak to me for a week. He saw me in the company of a cocotte and pretended not to see

me. I did not want to see him. If he had said but one word of disapproval in the street, it would have been easier, I would have felt happier and more relaxed. But his silence spoiled the fun. At home he reprimanded me very seriously and peacefully (while I was still trembling from her kisses): 'That is not a woman for you; she will corrupt you.' The latter offended me. Disheartened, I turned away and thought: Why does he say anything to me when everything he says is a reaction to my nature, my ideals, my inclinations, and my nature is the opposition to all his advice, beliefs and wishes... One time I slapped a school-mate who had spoken ill of a young lady. My father kindly said (while my palm still itched): 'It is nice of you to defend the honor of those who deserve it, but slapping someone is never honorable, for it humiliates both the slapper and the slapped.' And again I turned away in anger, thinking: I defended a lady's honor only in order to slap the fellow, and in this too he has to spoil my fun... Too often my father went for walks with me and talked, but I walked and talked listlessly; but I had to conform to his will because he never said 'you have to'. And he would speak so kindly that it was difficult for me to contradict; he stated his beliefs so humbly that I could not dare to refute... Sometimes he would invite me for a beer, but already after the third glass he would say 'enough', while I would have enjoyed only those that would follow. I drank the first few only to please him, and would only end up displeased with him...

Thus, as a result of the most insignificant daily events, I came to wish he wasn't there. Sometimes I considered running away, but he wouldn't even give me the motive for that. Always kind, silent and peaceful, he indirectly suppressed my desires, my passions and my instincts. The more wanton I became, the more discontented and muffled I was in front of him. I kept quiet, with my tail between my legs. His politeness and soberness bothered me even more because they gave me no pretext for a harsh word or a more determined step. My audacity and passion would dissipate miserably in his presence. The tension of my rapture, my will, my blood constricted ever more aloofly and limply... Thus that thought crept; thus in his presence I was even more subdued; I followed him listlessly, listened to him unresponsively, replied dully. In front of him I acted affectedly, artificially and formally. And that thought dug deeper into my soul. Calmly and coldly I wished for him not to exist, to disappear, to be gone forever. And when I thought about this, something light, carefree and joyful would smile inside me, around me, far

from me – like a prisoner gazing at a bright blue sky and thinking of freedom. His gray beard, his deep wrinkles and tired steps inspired such distant, blue and endless images. My eyes would fill with sighs, my body with shivers. As we walked together, in the long silence interrupted by our steps, the crunching of sand, the rustle of leaves and his heavy breathing - something thick, voluptuous and dreamlike would gather on the horizon, in my soul and in my eyes. When we parted, he would leave slowly and gloomily, reeking of cigar smoke. And I ran to my Anka, squeezed her hands and listened to the sound of her wrists cracking. The thought crept no more. Surrounded by women and wine, my tail would rise again. And then I knew that the thought was in my blood.

## 2

For eighteen years it crept through me... Even in childhood I had sometimes wished for the death of someone to whom life had inextricably tied me. I had wished it out of a kind of curiosity, the same curiosity which drove me to watch women undress or push my finger into my neighbor's hose. But all the curiosity of an impotent child turned into a young man's powerful passion. Even today, after my father has been ill for several months with cancer – which is cured only by death – I feel a rush of blood, tears and bile, and I make love, drink and sing furiously. Inside me, hatred, pain and pleasure are one: the wounds in my father's throat from which soup leaks, the pestilent breath of catarrh, pus and spoiled blood, my father's anger, ill temper and his sobs, my mother's worries, tears and reprimands, my mistress, the orgies, and my thoughts keep me in a state of continuous ecstasy, passion and heat. When I approach my father, he is angry because I have left him alone; he is angry if I speak too loudly; he demands that I read the newspaper to him, then falls asleep after the third line, but awakes immediately if I stop. When he calls for me, I hide in my room. There I write poems. My mother peeks in and is shocked at my callousness and indifference. In front of my father, she defends me, in front of me, she defends my father. – 'You go around with bad women, you drink with vagrants, you laugh and write as if there was nothing wrong. And your father is dying. What will people say? You are disgracing both him and me and the honor of our family. And your father is dying.'

Her refrain reverberates in the semi-darkness of my room and rings irritatingly in my ears. She used to dissuade me from my life like that before, jealous of the noisy charm of the world, saying: 'What will your father say?' Now that the catarrh has destroyed my father's throat, she says: 'What will people say?'

The house is filled with bile, malice and stench. If I am at home, I am not supposed to laugh, talk, read, eat... And if I leave, it's even worse. My mother fears my father and the world. She speaks of honor, love and respect. She calls to my mind the images of death, sables and mourning. The death of the head of the family fills her with apprehension: she even wrote to her brothers to come. Huge tears cover her glowing face and I get the impression that she is using my father's death for her purely maternal interests: the illness, she thinks, will make me always stay at home, her brothers will come, we shall all renounce our work, fun, inclinations and shall become a family of pain, unhappiness and closeness.

The sun is in the west. Its last flames melt through the drawn curtains. Glowing fragments of something invisible are falling on my head. Visions of molten metals, feelings and images dance in front of me. My eyes are hot, my throat is dry, my back on fire. I have torn apart several manuscripts to pieces.

That one thought is swirling, twisting and throwing me to and fro. The house is like a dungeon: dull, ill-humored, silent. My mother is the disciplinarian with her entertainment and threats. For eighteen years I was taught that the family is the only holy thing one must never mingle with. That was my father's law, his religion, his ethics: all that is good comes from it and returns to it. For eighteen years my father was forging chains so that in the moment when he lost his strength he would have slaves at his disposal.

All the while, Anka is waiting for me. My lover is fragrant with youth. Her black hair rests on her forehead like a mixture of oil, jelly and syrup. Her lips are hard and small like those of a Greek goddess. Her eyes are as wide as the eyes on dyed peacock feathers. Her hands soft and warm as feathers. Her skirts cling to her. Her body is tense, undecided.. She promised to come to the woods tonight, with laughter on her lips tears in her bosom and passion in her eyes. I promised to read my poem to her. I have lit on fire all the dry and explosive matter of her female soul

At noon I met her and looked at her in daylight on the hot pavement in a way that made me sweat and her blush. She comes from an excellent family, she is a little frightened and very innocent. But above all, she is reckless. She listens to my poems and understand nothing, but feels everything. They confuse her so much that she seems drowsy and lost.

- In you I love sin, and in sin I love you - I told her the other day in the park, while the sun was shining on the flowers and her hair, and her cheeks turned red with love, summer, fever and vanity... Thus she loses her virginity in every touch of our knees, our breath, our lips. I am the Devil, I always tell her when I want to flatter her. At dusk I squeeze her hand and she responds like echo.

Anka is waiting for me. There is nothing gay in her youth nor charming in my love. The thought of my father and my mother, their senile interests, this house turned into a hospital in the dungeon - all that overemphasizes Anka, my passion and the wonders of the world. My thoughts are clear. The laws of life grow in me and from me. Death both explains and justifies. Why should I care about the consequences? Even the worst life is justified by death. My decision is clear, my problem is solved. My father shall die, Anka shall lose her virginity... At that moment my mother asks me to help her take my father to the bathroom. He holds on to our shoulders desperately, his back hunched, his knees bent; he is digging his fingers into us. He is all sweat, groans and stench. His lower lip is quivering and the whole room quivers with it. He leans on us. With this final longing of his body for life he has turned us into objects, mute matter, crutches. He does not realize that he is hurting us, he does not even think that this can hurt. He has no pity for us. He is treating us as if we were a handkerchief, crutches, socks... things he has bought for his needs. The yellow dressing on his wound touch my nose. My senses are but rags to him.

We leave him there and leave the door ajar. He is breathing hard and straining while his curses are lost in his catarrh. He keeps squeezing his eyes; his shoulders are raised up to his ears. From excessive pain, his body has become elastic. A young puppy peeks through the door and opens its mouth and eyes wide. The wrinkles in my mother's face turn black. My father's gray hair is trembling; the space is filled with the stench of decay. Father cannot do it. He is trying to force himself and becomes smaller: his chin hits his breasts: he is moaning. sweating and

choking. His skinny, bony hands are beating his knees. I notice how much weight he has lost, how he is suffering and raging. The dressing on his wounds is smeared deep yellow. He cannot do it. For the last time he desperately hits his knees and the dressing becomes wet. Blood is dripping on his shirt, his breasts and knees... I turn pale.

We take him to his bed. The smell of blood makes me dizzy; my father's eyes open and pierce my breast. This time, as an exception, I will change the dressing on his wounds. He closes his eyes. I uncover his throat: the two holes stare at me like two hollow eyes. Anka's image is bloodied in my thoughts; I think of her and my father's blood colors the image. Anka is bathed in blood, pain and terror.

It's getting dark. A spray of yellow blood dries on my fingers. Now those two eyes now not only stare, but breathe. The room's thick, humid and greasy smell makes me sleepy, giddy and draws me in closer. I just might fall onto my father's breast. The dog is whimpering in the hall; I don't know why. My mother whips it. The sharp blows echo from his soft, young, plump body. Those two eyes stare straight at me: I feel as though I am looking at hell. It smells of sulfur, burning and corpses. The smells daze me, the sounds irritate me; my father's face becomes a grimace, his lower lip large, white and dribbling.

Something terrible is building inside me: those smells, those colors, those sounds turn solid, rigid and, like an iron fist, they grab my throat, my chest, my heart. Everything is filled with matter: the sound of the blows, the smell of decay and the color of blood. My senses are filled with flesh, my images colored in blood. I don't know what I'm doing. It's as if my father, my mother and myself are but a shapeless mass of flesh in a butcher's shop. Our feelings and thoughts are but a solution smelling of protoplasm, blood and garbage; our souls a cesspool of carnal mass.

...When I leave his room, my mother is still scolding the dog. He has got into the bathroom and is lapping my father's blood, licking the dirty stone all the more passionately under her blows.

## 3

The sun set quite a while ago. I won't be on time. Anka must have left already. As I get ready to leave, my mother pleads:

- Come back soon. He might pass away. I am all alone. God knows whether your aunt will come tonight. Return immediately.

Her eyewhites were gray.

We wired my brothers to come. Mother wanted me to write: "Father is dying." She is doing all she can to gather all of us around the hearth. My brothers are coming. And they will join my mother in forcing me to stay at home and forget about Anka.

My senses are still filled with my father's blood, his wounds and the stench. The sounds of soft and greasy blows resound in my ears. Everything is driving me into my lover's arms. Right away, now, while I'm still full of sick smells and cruelty. My father was bending in my arms and I never thought it might be painful for him. Just like my back was bending under his fists and he hadn't thought it might hurt me. My mother beat the dog into a bloody pulp for lapping my father's blood... What a beautiful story to tell my lover! I am so very thirsty. I will scare her so badly that she will be terrified and die of anemia. My words will fear for her and drink her blood. Life is a vampire.

The forest is black. The lamp casts a feeble light; the dusty path, like a night ghost, is white between the dense layers of trees and darkness. Even the powerless sky expects a crime. Oh, to look at her now! In her white dress! And to bloody the whiteness of her clothes, her soul and her youth.

She's not there. She doesn't answer my calls. In vain I call, I look, I shout. The darkness swallows my voice and my gaze. If I could only find her now. Now, that she has made me so irritable, so angry, now that she has provoked me. Now, in the solitude and darkness. Now that my father has set me on fire, has warmed my blood. To whom would I answer for my crime? Not to my father, he is dying. Where would the crime lead me? Certainly not home.

...I walk down the main street looking for her. I walk over to her window. There she is, at the window. Will she come down? She apologizes. We walk down the long tree-lined path. She is chatting away. I'm not listening. We go farther and farther, where there is less light, fewer lamps.

How many times could I not steel myself to take this step: to seduce an excellent girl and a virgin with only one goal - to leave her.

Consideration and respect for human virtue only belittled my nature and my beliefs. My upbringing was, in this case, stronger than my instincts; my family stronger than my individuality. All of it - my father's horrible nets. His goodness, politeness and kindness prevented me from such a step, which in his eyes would be evil, vulgar and criminal. But his dribbling, large, white lips, the holes in his throat, the stench of blood and flesh, the desperate, unconscious, savage grip of his hands - his inconsideration of my senses, disrespect of my feelings and belittling of my literary work - didn't it all set me free at last? My good, nice and kind father uncovers himself in front of his youngest son and allows with a clear conscience his youngest child to touch with his eyes, his nose and his fingers the ugliness and crudeness of the body.

I come to and looked at Anka. She brings me to my senses. I squeeze her hand angrily.

- Where are you going? (She resists.) Why are you going back?

She looks at me suspiciously and retreats:

- You have been so quiet. You are so rude today.

- Forgive me. I was lost in thought. My father is dying.

It was stupid to tell her. She is surprised:

- And you, you left your father?

I hate her with a vengeance. I take her hands and whisper:

- Shut up. Shut up. Not a word. Because of you. You understand.

I drag her to the side. She resists. She's crying. Her wrists are breaking.

- Your father! Your father!

My strength deserts me. I hate my father, I wish he would die. Anka is shocked and venomous. She goes back. I lag behind.

I don't know whether I've walked Anka home. I'm hurrying somewhere, tripping and stumbling. Nobody wants to tell me I'm being rude. And that's all I'm waiting for. I understand nothing but my anger. I can't justify anything but my absurd desire for somebody to tell me I'm being rude.

I go into a brothel. Zora invites me to her room. The passion has frozen inside me. I drown it in beer and then we go up. I offer her a lot of

money. She lies on her stomach. We are both suffering. It's the first time that she has felt the pain of a man... But I fall on her back omnipotently and sob. I'm disgusted with myself. I can do anything I want with her... while what I wanted to do out of spite and anger, I couldn't. ... My freedom has to be purchased. I go looking for it at a brothel, among slaves... I leave.

The lamps, the stars and the lighted windows tire my eyes. I'm struggling to find a thought, but I find only sweat, noise and melancholy. What is this now? I see this afternoon and the ecstasy of my senses... A great sigh of pleasure and freedom penetrates the forest, the skies and the images of my fantasy. A bloody breath comes from my father's body and falls, thickly, onto the whiteness of my love. I know, what I can do... Dew is glittering on the flowers, the leaves and the grass, and the big, icy scythe of death ravages the meadows... Why didn't I murder Anka? My words drank all my blood!

Can I go home now? - Something huge was inside me and wanted out. And now it seems as if it had been nothing, and as if there is nothing inside me. I call upon my verses, the visions of my imagination, the illusions of my images for help... The house ceased to enchant me so long ago - the brothel profanes freedom... And there I could do what I wanted to... something unnatural - out of spite, anger, curiosity... But what I wanted, I could not do.

The night is falling down a steep cliff. Our earth is an abyss. With its lamps lit, the city looks like a hole filled with flies and worms. The sky is also a hole, a starry one. And wherever I look, I see holes. My sighs linger around the hole, which is humid, dark and endless.

## 4

Last night I came home a little drunk, but fully aware. I threw up in the bathroom. My mother poured water and tears on me. I said:

- I have been drinking. Why did you let me change the dressing on Father's wounds? Why did I have to see his wounds? I drank out of desperation. I was disgusted, so I drank. I drank and got sick again.

I stayed at home today. That brandy should do me harm bothers me more than anything else. It is a disaster at my age, like being impotent with a naked woman. It shames me. I would be completely

destroyed if my friends were to find out about it: I have always been so proud of the fact that I can hold my liquor.

I am helping my mother, taking care of my father ever so kindly, quietly and humbly. My father looks at me now and then and his gaze lingers as if it is written in the air. The sun is sneaking through the window and its red rays slide down the wooden floor lustfully, reaching the polished bed. Father would like to say something, but he lowers his head, his lips and eyelashes sadly, while the sun keeps sliding merrily through the sky and over the floor, through my hangover and my sad thoughts.

I think I have managed to convince even myself that it wasn't the brandy that harmed me. My aunt arrived and I kissed her hand three times. I saw the milk-maid to the door and in my thoughts I kissed her blond hair and healthy blush of her cheeks and her scarf. I peek through the window and the people passing by leave a pleasant sense of movement. A girl appears from the house next door and laughs at my gazes. I stare at her, and her teeth still remain white. I forget about Anka. I become more quiet, considerate and sly. Now my mother thinks I'm an excessively sensitive and dutiful son. I have convinced her and shall convince her... It would be awful if she were only to think that brandy could have harmed me. That would be a great argument for her to fight against my binges, babbling in front of my friends.

## 5

Today after lunch a sadness came over me and I fell asleep in my chair. In a half-dream, I saw my father mysteriously beckoning me to follow him. He was smiling sadly and mockingly and was pointing to the sea, the islands and the dusk. Then he left, waving good-bye.

When I wake up, I think about the dream, for I can find no connection or interpretation in its events. Now even my dream makes me think when I'm awake. It was so simple and melancholic. The large, gray and dead sea; the islands like frozen ships on which everything living had died, except for a dog which announced the death of its masters like a bell. This dead and gray landscape touches me deeply. A great sense of peace descends on my soul. I am amazed that vomiting shamed me,

while all my father's and mother's suffering and my criminal thoughts elevated and warmed me. Through this silence of my soul and surroundings I understand only too clearly what the chains were, the ones my father forged and what the freedom was that my being demanded. In my father's presence I could feel everything but instinct; in front of him all my thoughts, feelings - and limbs - would droop impotently... Goodness, kindness and politeness were irreconcilable with the essence of my youth. The feeling of embarrassment and sexual impotence would increase from the very thought of my father, who might find out about my adventures and speak to me about them... And his daily presence, the looks and conversations were only the prevention and destruction of the growth and flourishing of my idea, which could flow out and away only far from him. Furthermore, I could not even tell my father that this was what I needed, let alone ask him about his youth. Thus in all our conversations we would anxiously evade the subject which may have been my only crucial question and the reason for our animosity. And when I saw him ill, powerless and degraded, the thought that had crept through me for eighteen years and had kept its tail between its legs suddenly elevated my whole being, from head to toe...

It is amazing; it stupefies me and makes me think; I believe I should sooner miss my father's funeral than a date. And I'm not fighting this feeling, but neither does it captivate me like it did yesterday. And this thing, so amazing when I think about it, becomes so natural, when I begin to feel.

Nor am I ashamed that it is improper, shameful and criminal; that it is beastly, savage and totally corrupt. There is no struggle between good and evil in me, but right now evil doesn't fascinate me either. The vomiting that had destroyed me, shamed me and given me a bad conscience makes all my enchantment a naive illusion. And I believe that even my father would laugh sadly and mockingly about it, just like he did about that dead landscape. At the verge of death - what is it all to him? His advice, my mother's tears, my vomiting...

- His breathing is heavy - my mother whispers. I feel her hands on my back and we both shiver. - He wanted aunt to leave the room... Your brothers are coming tonight, but he's only asking for you.

I leave slowly. My mother's strange voice has confused and frightened me. I think of meeting my father's gaze.

The sun is yellow and the west is bathed in thick light. The window-panes reflect colors like lighted candles in a mirror. I am overcome by curiosity: my father is asking for me. What will he say to me? What does he want to tell me? ... I'll kiss his hand if he is dying.

Everything around me tells me that something holy, great and ordinary is happening. The dog lies under the table and the flies have stopped buzzing.

My mother touches my sleeve, then kisses me. My eyes fill with tears. I feel as if moths were buzzing in both orifices, and maggots lazily crawling along my bones... I enter my father's room curiously. The three of us are alone. He is going to say something, I think, and I wait silently. This silence conveys something holy and magnificent. Mother and I wait patiently. Father speaks only with gestures: Would I close the door? We close it... Could we raise him up a little? He points to the bedside cabinet: A book? His rosary? ... I don't understand. I look at my mother. She understands immediately and puts the chamber pot on the bed. But father is speaking: Does he want to get off the bed? Yes. We lift him to his feet. I put the chamber pot under him. I never even think: Is this what he wanted to tell me? My father is standing upright, he looks taller. But suddenly, I step back. My mother catches him with her last strength. His eyes open so terribly as if they want to speak. A quick, surprised, uncomprehending look and my father drops dead on his bed.

## 6

For the next half hour my mother, my aunt and I argue. My aunt has called the priest and I say I will throw him out. I begin to feel that it is up to me to defend the beliefs and the honor of my father. My aunt belongs to a church. She says it is up to her to protect the reputation of the family. She is very angry, probably because father had sent her out of the room and because the last wish of the deceased was a chamber pot, not the holy sacrament. I see clearly how she would like to influence our family, to have some rights within it; at least, to take her share. There is so much lust and self-interest in her arguments that I feel she is infringing on my birthright. Mother keeps crying and is more upset that I won't allow the priest to come than that my father has died. We have left his body alone. My aunt is shouting at the top of her voice that she will not

do a thing, that she will not budge before the priest arrives. She even tried to throw me out: I have profaned the deceased, I was drinking while he was dying; I was ashamed of my own father when I was in the company of bad women. Only now do I begin to feel a deep love for my father and in arguing with my aunt I come to believe that I loved him more than anybody else.

- He asked for me - I say maliciously - and didn't even mention you. - That pleases my mother too. She approves, she comes to life: the dead man brought the son back to the family. She kisses me passionately, she cries and takes me to my father's room.

"He is ours", I feel as if my mother is saying. "He's mine", I reply silently, triumphantly. "We shall see", my aunt seems to be whispering to herself sarcastically. And the growing silence, the malice that cannot speak, the separate interests always at work develop a silent battle over the corpse, as each of us flatters his own egotism; we remember that we have some beliefs and principles which we want to, which we must express, over a body that has already started to smell.

Something new appears inside me. Since my father's death I begin to feel an ever more passionate love for him. The self-respect, the imperative tone, my aunt's impertinent showing off awaken my duties as a son, my rights and feelings and my youthful decisiveness, energy and defiance... I go to the coroner, to the undertaker's, I wire our relatives...and in a quarter of an hour I have taken care of everything and return full of energy, passion and strength - just to show that I am the master around here.

Entering the apartment, I run into a monk; I hurry to the door, wait for him and say:

- He didn't ask for you.

My aunt opens the door. The monk is smiling. I'm ready to push him down the stairs, but he says he has been invited. I let him pass and say behind his back:

- All right, you might as well come in. The dead belong to you, but while he was alive, he believed in God, but not in priests; and monks he detested, because he was industrious, worldly and ethical.

But my aunt drowns out my words.

The new feeling is growing and developing inside me. The very fact that the priest came despite my protests - the fact that things went the way my aunt wanted them - provoke my youthful vanity, honor and temper. For the first time in my life I feel that I have beliefs which I must affirm as consistently as possible. What's more, acting as my father's defender delights me.

My aunt says: you were drinking while he was dying and yet you now want to defend his honor. She wants to disarm me. And can I really talk of ethics? Can I show that my words are - pure defiance? My aunt conceals her desire to rule, to advise and to protect under the veil of - religion... Am I just concealing my defiance under the veil of principles? It seems to me that my defiance actually is turning into principles. So many words come to my lips, so much passion in my heart, so many ideas in my mind.

The coroner arrives. He examines and concludes. I am at his service. I take him to my room so he can wash, I give him a clean towel, hand him his hat; I bow and see him to the door. Thanking him for everything on behalf of everybody... In my new status, I enjoy the politeness, the discussion of important matters, the correct posture and excellent personality, and at the same time I show my aunt: I was as polite to the coroner as I was with the monk.. I received the coroner with more respect than she showed the priest. Indeed. And I am necessary in the family and on this grave occasion. Even more than that. In receiving the coroner, I felt as if I was bringing into the house a rebellion against the reactionary, to the ignorance and my aunt, who, next to my father's bier, had spat out insults to his son. And I was the only child who had been with him. My brothers are arriving now. I can hear the car. It's them!

How my head feels enlightened. How the horizon is clearing, the duty and my thoughts. For eighteen years a thought... And I had kept my tail between my legs. But now - there is no tail.

I begin to feel flattered by my role as an adult: even though I am the youngest, I will be the one to talk of my father's illness, his suffering and his life with understanding and experience. For my brothers were absent, and my mother knows nothing of politics, literature or medicine.

Yes. It is them. My brothers will weep. I will comfort them, I will say: It's better this way. If you had witnessed his suffering, you would

feel better now. It's easy for you to mourn and weep now.

Yes, it is them. The first and the second son. The third one couldn't make it. He's abroad. I forbid my mother to go to meet them. You will cry, I say, and that will only make it worse for them. And I was think, I shall explain to them. Nicely, quietly, soberly. There is so much kindness, goodness and politeness in my every move, thought and word. To protect my father and comfort my brothers! Ah! What a magnificent image of the deceased arises in my mind. My brothers won't understand it; they haven't seen him. But me! I looked into the two holes through which soup poured out; in the bathroom he had tried to force himself so fiercely that a stream of blood fell to the floor and the dog lapped up father's blood, while I was looking at the two holes through which hell came pouring out... And what will they be able to tell me about?... There they are, hesitating: they don't dare come in; they already lost courage! And what would they have done had they faced what I faced? What could they tell me about? Drinking, women, vomiting? But about cancer, about cancer, about cancer!!! About decomposing, decay, holes! And what is all the pleasure in the world compared to one moment of terror!

Oh, my brothers. My brothers, come into my arms! Take courage.

## 7

My brothers notice that I have grown in the year they haven't seen me. I talk confidently and I choose my words. I explain in detail how the illness developed; how the catarrh choked my father and how it finished him off. How cancer has remained incurable and unexplained to this day... What's more, today while everyone was sleeping, I took "Home Medicine" and carefully read the passage on cancer several times. Cancer is intensified by psychological suffering, the writer says. Cancer is hereditary, he continues... That's very important to know. Now I can talk about the disease with more understanding and can make my father's image more grandiose. In front of my brothers I stress his liberal beliefs, his education, the spiritual battles of the pater familias, the clash between the problems of freedom and discipline in raising children. I explain his tragedy: such a kind, good and polite man, and he had to die of the harshest disease, uncovered in front of his son like Noah; he, a man of ideals, to have a chamber pot for his last wish.

My brothers look at me with respect and delight while I go on and on praising the deceased. Finally I add:

- His illness was so unexpected and illogical like "deus ex machina" arriving in our modern tragedy to untie the knot with illness and death.

And with these words, which make me more important, I commemorate my father and enjoy the respect gained through my commemoration.

My brothers are silent. They are not writers. I feel I am the most extinguished person in the house now. They had me write the short obituary for the newspaper. I write the letters to our relatives. They only signed them. Even my aunt consents to that.

...I am alone. The funeral is tomorrow. Accidentally I think of Anka. And immediately a dark thought comes: tomorrow I shall have to walk behind my father's coffin dressed in black... What would happen if I was to refuse?

That spoils my mood. I always made fun of all formalities; if I now consent to them, I shall be mocking myself. That worries me so much that I descend from the lofty heights to which I had risen. Again I am upset, I sweat and suffer: what will my friends say? Once we made fun of a friend who inherited a lot of money from his father, paid for our wine and wore a black band around his sleeve. "It's because of others" - he tried to justify himself. I was the first to attack this justification which was really a condemnation.

- How can a tradition, a lore with no significance, which only has significance in vulgarity, dictate who is qualified for our weddings - the priest! - how can a ridiculous formality dictate how we are to behave, how to act - how can it rule our souls and minds?! We comply to tradition because it is insignificant; but we feel no shame that insignificant things play such a major role in our lives, because - we ourselves have become formal, vulgar, worthless...

And he replied:

- You only talk that way because you have as yet had no opportunity to fight formality.

- Your wedding will be the first!

- I shall not marry.
- Your exams the second.
- That has a practical purpose.
- The third shall be death!
- We shall see. (My blood was hot from the wine.) Besides, if anyone in my family die, I would be neither sorry nor glad... My father will leave me nothing so I won't be able to afford mourning clothes.

Thus we argued drunkenly and insulted our benefactor in the name of principle.

That stupid drunken brawl seems even more stupid now and upsets me more. I fruitlessly try to capture the peace I felt this morning, the seriousness, importance and propriety. Neither the dream of my father smiling mockingly, nor the vomiting which had turned me noble overnight, nor my father's last wish which I expected with fear and curiosity, nor the fight with my aunt over the diseased, can divert me from this mood, lighten it and make any importance given to trifles just an illusion.

In vain I try to think of Anka. A terrible thought attacks me again, the thought that had lost its tail with my father's death... This thought is the more enchanting because it contains an endless curiosity... How would it be if I were alone, all alone...? And all the spasms of my nerves bounce off like waves - off my mother...

Clouds are heavy in the sky. The house is full of guests. They call me, but I cannot part with this haunting solitude so suddenly. My mother and aunt must be weeping; my brothers are entertaining the ladies. I recognize the voices of three girls from the neighborhood, three naughty and merry brunettes... Strange! I could not stand female company now. I would be ashamed to show sorrow; and if I were to act merry, I'm afraid I might offend... And that's consideration!

I am again plagued by the question of mourning blackness. That too is consideration: double consideration! Consideration of traditions represented by my mother and of my principles acquired with my friends over a glass of wine... It is uncanny: my own principles torture me, retreat, fall upon me and retreat once more. But they do not elevate me: they do not delight me anymore. So, before I would sooner have

missed a funeral than a date! And now I couldn't go to the funeral in anything but a black suit! I don't feel like opposing my mother's wishes... The thought of women quickly weakens the seriousness I had maintained since the arrival of the priest and which I decided to maintain at any price throughout the funeral. Beauty, charm, lust, fragrances, looks and clothes fill me with passion, and now it requires my principles - the principles which are expressed by sobriety, peace and dignity. What a naive reply it would be to say: "I'm not wearing black because it is against my principles!" As naive as the believers who do penance after confession seem in the eyes of both believers and non-believers... It was enough for me to hear female voices and my principles have become just as naive - like penance, like the black suit. The black suit is my mother's principle, but also the tradition, like greeting someone with "How do you do", which nobody takes as a real, literal question. And not saying it reeks of savageness and stupidity... Finally, a patriotic duel and a drunken party delight more than moving, voting, making presents or petty work...

What am I being liberated from?

Wasn't I enchanted with atheism, freedom, revolution because of my temper and my age? Principles! Wherever did I acquire them? Over a glass of wine, during demonstrations, in the coarsest intercourse... Wherever I smashed things, shouted or made love. And isn't that precisely what my father condemned and what humiliated me in his presence?

What did I liberate myself from?

My mother is still here. I get rid of my principles, but not of kisses, wine and rousing. No, there is absolutely no reason not to consent to my mother's wish.

## 8

It's better to keep quiet. All that is coming - the funeral, the mass, the black suit - is so trivial that I am truly ashamed that my youth of revolution, passion and pleasure has anything to do with it. Truly: my father's death was my secret, my thought and sigh. Father was an obstacle to my feelings, thoughts and movements. He was a rein constraining me, and - unwillingly - a whip which drove me. The fact that I never dis-

cussed my writing with him the way I discussed it with enemies - that fact alone was a deep and crushing reason of our estrangement. And the slackening of my passions in his presence was more than a rein and a whip - it was a chain.

For eighteen years I embellished my secret, speaking of it only spoke when drunk. This strange, passionate and elementary thought passed from abstraction into reality and so my father's death became freedom. And only thus could it delight me without a bad conscience and become a sigh, desire, instinct - of which I did not have to be ashamed, just like I didn't have to be ashamed of my beliefs and needs. All the nakedness was covered: My father's death is only a criminal thought, a tragic idea.

And while my thought, thus covered, embellished and painted, compressed itself into one abstract word - *f r e e d o m* - there was impudence, energy and greatness in it. And every step toward death was a step toward freedom; and each step away from death was a step away from freedom...

And the realization of an ideal? And freedom itself? What has been written in my spiritual history these last three days? Reality writes: the chamber pot, the priest, the funeral, wreaths, the mass; and my soul remembers: visions, a horror of sin and crime, the bad conscience about vomiting, insisting on my principles out of defiance, praising my father out of egotism and vanity and consent to formalities out of the fear of naiveté.

Feelings ever more vulgar, behavior ever more polite and thoughts ever more trivial.

No, I can't even think anymore. In vain I try to find something to delight me. Only those distant thoughts and unclear visions of other chains; my mother's strong desire that I should wear my black suit, my friends who will remind me of my principles, my opposition to the traditions, my passion to seduce women and have them like me... All these thoughts of all the chains around me and in me are so distant, so absurd that freedom becomes concrete in the death of everyone including myself.

Why did I begin to analyze myself? Why contemplate? Why expose my ego? Its contents are so pale, so feeble, so mundane, so impotent, cowardly and listless.

I cannot draw one conclusion out of all this! One idea! One feeling! One belief! One decision!

Analysis has made me distracted, lost, impotent and - confused... At the funeral I walked as properly, normally and mechanically like everyone else, even though I felt so distracted and lost. Those steps still resound in my ears; they resound to eternity. If I think of the future and if I remember the past.

I wonder through the woods. It is getting dark. My brothers are gone. My mother invited my aunt to stay with her. Leaves are rustling. The path is white. The lamps are shining. Stars are emerging in the sky. I search for forgetfulness and a synthesis. The warm summer night is creeping through the branches, through my senses, through my disappointed youth, and I think of Anka. I go to the brothel again. Again I get color in my cheeks, I come to life and become stronger. Synthesis is in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is in passion.

I hold Zora and in my fervor I pretend to be holding Anka.

No, tonight I am not going home. My house is here, where there are no considerations, no uneasiness and bad conscience.

My body is flourishing. My energy solidifying. My ego synthesizing.

It only costs ten crowns, but is worth the whole dowry and beauty of my beloved.

No, I'm not going home.

...Seven in the morning. My knees are giving in. My youth is dying. I'll sleep like the dead. Sleep too is both forgetfulness and synthesis...The red and rising morning sun reflects off me just as the setting sun reflected the death candles on the windowpane.

I have a few glasses of plum brandy. I'll sleep even deeper and longer. All my youth shall pass in forgetfulness, passion and sleep; and if I grow old, I shall give advice to my children.

The city is afire. To me it seems the lamps have just been lit. And the sun is like a red torch shining through the empty, humid and infinite cave.

Punat, July 1909

Translated from the Croatian by Ljiljana Šćurčić