

The Dream

By Iván Turgéniéff

I

I was living with my mother at the time, in a small seaport town. I was just turned seventeen, and my mother was only thirty-five; she had married very young. When my father died I was only seven years old; but I remembered him well. My mother was a short, fair-haired woman, with a charming, but permanently-sad face, a quiet, languid voice, and timid movements. In her youth she had borne the reputation of a beauty, and as long as she lived she remained attractive and pretty. I have never beheld more profound, tender, and melancholy eyes. I adored her, and she loved me. . . . But our life was not cheerful; it seemed as though some mysterious, incurable and undeserved sorrow were constantly sapping the root of her existence. This sorrow could not be explained by grief for my father alone, great as that was, passionately as my mother had loved him, sacredly as she cherished his memory. . . . No! there was something else hidden there which I did not understand, but which I felt,—felt confusedly and strongly as soon as I looked at those quiet, impassive eyes, at those very beautiful but also impassive lips, which were not bitterly compressed, but seemed to have congealed for good and all.

I have said that my mother loved me; but there were moments when she spurned me, when my presence was burdensome, intolerable to her. At such times she felt, as it were, an involuntary aversion for me—and was terrified afterward, reproaching herself with tears and clasping me to her heart. I attributed these momentary fits of hostility to her shattered health, to her unhappiness. . . . These hostile sentiments might have been evoked, it is true, in a certain measure, by some strange outbursts, which were incomprehensible even to me myself, of wicked and criminal feelings which occasionally arose in me. . . .

But these outbursts did not coincide with the moments of repulsion.—My mother constantly wore black, as though she were in mourning. We lived on a rather grand scale, although we associated with no one.

II

My mother concentrated upon me all her thoughts and cares. Her life was merged in my life. Such relations between parents and children are not always good for the children . . . they are more apt to be injurious. Moreover I was my mother's only child . . . and only children generally develop irregularly. In rearing them the parents do not think of themselves so much as they do of them. . . . That is not practical. I did not get spoiled, and did not grow obstinate (both these things happen with only children), but my nerves were unstrung before their time; in addition to which I was of rather feeble health—I took after my mother, to whom I also bore a great facial resemblance. I shunned the society of lads of my own age; in general, I was shy of people; I even talked very little with my mother. I was fonder of reading than of anything else, and of walking alone—and dreaming, dreaming! What my dreams were about it would be difficult to say. It sometimes seemed to me as though I were standing before a half-open door behind which were concealed hidden secrets,—standing and waiting, and swooning with longing—yet not crossing the threshold; and always meditating as to what there was yonder

ahead of me—and always waiting and longing . . . or falling into slumber. If the poetic vein had throbbled in me I should, in all probability, have taken to writing verses; if I had felt an inclination to religious devoutness I might have become a monk; but there was nothing of the sort about me, and I continued to dream—and to wait.

III

I have just mentioned that I sometimes fell asleep under the inspiration of obscure thoughts and reveries. On the whole, I slept a great deal, and dreams played a prominent part in my life; I beheld visions almost every night. I did not forget them, I attributed to them significance, I regarded them as prophetic, I strove to divine their secret import. Some of them were repeated from time to time, which always seemed to me wonderful and strange. I was particularly perturbed by one dream. It seems to me that I am walking along a narrow, badly-paved street in an ancient town, between many-storied houses of stone, with sharp-pointed roofs. I am seeking my father who is not dead, but is, for some reason, hiding from us, and is living in one of those houses. And so I enter a low, dark gate, traverse a long courtyard encumbered with beams and planks, and finally make my way into a small chamber with two circular windows. In the middle of the room stands my father, clad in a dressing-gown and smoking a pipe. He does not in the least resemble my real father: he is tall, thin, black-haired, he has a hooked nose, surly, piercing eyes; in appearance he is about forty years of age. He is displeased because I have hunted him up; and I also am not in the least delighted at the meeting—and I stand still, in perplexity. He turns away slightly, begins to mutter something and to pace to and fro with short steps. . . . Then he retreats a little, without ceasing to mutter, and keeps constantly casting glances behind him, over his shoulder; the room widens out and vanishes in a fog. . . . I suddenly grow terrified at the thought that I am losing my father again. I rush after him—but I no longer see him, and can only hear his angry, bear-like growl. . . . My heart sinks within me. I wake up, and for a long time cannot get to sleep again. . . . All the following day I think about that dream and, of course, am unable to arrive at any conclusion.

IV

The month of June had come. The town in which my mother and I lived became remarkably animated at that season. A multitude of vessels arrived at the wharves, a multitude of new faces presented themselves on the streets. I loved at such times to stroll along the quay, past the coffee-houses and inns, to scan the varied faces of the sailors and other people who sat under the canvas awnings, at little white tables with pewter tankards filled with beer.

One day, as I was passing in front of a coffeehouse, I caught sight of a man who immediately engrossed my entire attention. Clad in a long black coat of peasant cut, with a straw hat pulled down over his eyes, he was sitting motionless, with his arms folded on his chest. Thin rings of black hair descended to his very nose; his thin lips gripped the stem of a short pipe. This man seemed so familiar to me, every feature of his swarthy, yellow face, his whole figure, were so indubitably stamped on my memory, that I could not do otherwise than halt before him, could not help putting to myself the question: “Who is this man? Where have I seen him?” He probably felt my intent stare, for he turned his black, piercing eyes upon me. . . . I involuntarily uttered a cry of surprise. . . .

This man was the father whom I had sought out, whom I had beheld in my dream!

There was no possibility of making a mistake,—the resemblance was too striking. Even the long-skirted coat, which enveloped his gaunt limbs, reminded me, in colour and form, of the dressing-gown in which my father had presented himself to me.

“Am not I dreaming?” I thought to myself. “No. . . . It is daylight now, a crowd is roaring round me, the sun is shining brightly in the blue sky, and I have before me, not a phantom, but a living man.”

I stepped up to an empty table, ordered myself a tankard of beer and a newspaper, and seated myself at a short distance from this mysterious being.

V

Placing the sheets of the newspaper on a level with my face, I continued to devour the stranger with my eyes.—He hardly stirred, and only raised his drooping head a little from time to time. He was evidently waiting for some one. I gazed and gazed. . . . Sometimes it seemed to me that I had invented the whole thing, that in reality there was no resemblance whatever, that I had yielded to the semi-involuntary deception of the imagination but “he” would suddenly turn a little on his chair, raise his hand slightly, and again I almost cried aloud, again I beheld before me my “nocturnal” father! At last he noticed my importunate attention, and, first with surprise, then with vexation, he glanced in my direction, started to rise, and knocked down a small cane which he had leaned against the table. I instantly sprang to my feet, picked it up and handed it to him. My heart was beating violently.

He smiled in a constrained way, thanked me, and putting his face close to my face, he elevated his eyebrows and parted his lips a little, as though something had struck him.

“You are very polite, young man,” he suddenly began, in a dry, sharp, snuffling voice.—“That is a rarity nowadays. Allow me to congratulate you. You have been well brought up.”

I do not remember precisely what answer I made to him; but the conversation between us was started. I learned that he was a fellow-countryman of mine, that he had recently returned from America, where he had lived many years, and whither he was intending to return shortly. He said his name was Baron I did not catch the name well. He, like my “nocturnal” father, wound up each of his remarks with an indistinct, inward growl. He wanted to know my name. . . . On hearing it he again showed signs of surprise. Then he asked me if I had been living long in that town, and with whom? I answered him that I lived with my mother.

“And your father?”

“My father died long ago.”

He inquired my mother’s Christian name, and immediately burst into an awkward laugh—and then excused himself, saying that he had that American habit, and that altogether he was a good deal of an eccentric. Then he asked where we lived. I told him.

VI

The agitation which had seized upon me at the beginning of our conversation had gradually subsided; I thought our intimacy rather strange—that was all. I did not like the smile with which the baron questioned me; neither did I like the expression of his eyes when he fairly stabbed them into me. . . . There was about them something rapacious and condescending something which inspired dread. I had not seen those eyes in my dream. The baron had a strange face! It was pallid, fatigued, and, at the same time, youthful in appearance, but with a disagreeable

youthfulness! Neither had my “nocturnal” father that deep scar, which intersected his whole forehead in a slanting direction, and which I did not notice until I moved closer to him.

Before I had had time to impart to the baron the name of the street and the number of the house where we lived, a tall negro, wrapped up in a cloak to his very eyes, approached him from behind and tapped him softly on the shoulder. The baron turned round, said: “Aha! At last!” and nodding lightly to me, entered the coffeehouse with the negro. I remained under the awning. I wished to wait until the baron should come out again, not so much for the sake of entering again into conversation with him (I really did not know what topic I could start with), as for the purpose of again verifying my first impression.—But half an hour passed; an hour passed. . . . The baron did not make his appearance. I entered the coffee-house, I made the circuit of all the rooms—but nowhere did I see either the baron or the negro. . . . Both of them must have taken their departure through the back door.

My head had begun to ache a little, and with the object of refreshing myself I set out along the seashore to the extensive park outside the town, which had been laid out ten years previously. After having strolled for a couple of hours in the shade of the huge oaks and plaintain-trees, I returned home.

VII

Our maid-servant flew to meet me, all tremulous with agitation, as soon as I made my appearance in the anteroom. I immediately divined, from the expression of her face, that something unpleasant had occurred in our house during my absence.—And, in fact, I learned that half an hour before a frightful shriek had rung out from my mother’s bedroom. When the maid rushed in she found her on the floor in a swoon which lasted for several minutes. My mother had recovered consciousness at last, but had been obliged to go to bed, and wore a strange, frightened aspect; she had not uttered a word, she had not replied to questions—she had done nothing but glance around her and tremble. The servant had sent the gardener for a doctor. The doctor had come and had prescribed a soothing potions but my mother had refused to say anything to him either. The gardener asserted that a few moments after the shriek had rung out from my mother’s room he had seen a strange man run hastily across the flower-plots of the garden to the street gate. (We lived in a one-story house, whose windows looked out upon a fairly large garden.) The gardener had not been able to get a good look at the man’s face; but the latter was gaunt, and wore a straw hat and a long-skirted coat. . . . “The baron’s costume!” immediately flashed into my head.—The gardener had been unable to overtake him; moreover, he had been summoned, without delay, to the house and despatched for the doctor.

I went to my mother’s room; she was lying in bed, whiter than the pillow on which her head rested. . . . At sight of me she smiled faintly, and put out her hand to me. I sat down by her side, and began to question her; at first she persistently parried my questions; but at last she confessed that she had seen something which had frightened her greatly.

“Did some one enter here?” I asked.

“No,” she answered hastily, “no one entered, but it seemed to me I thought I saw . . . a vision. . . .”

She ceased speaking and covered her eyes with her hand. I was on the point of communicating to her what I had heard from the gardener—and my meeting with the baron also, by the way . . . but, for some reason or other, the words died on my lips.

Nevertheless I did bring myself to remark to my mother that visions do not manifest themselves in the daylight. .

“Stop,” she whispered, “please stop; do not torture me now. Some day thou shalt know. . . .” Again she relapsed into silence. Her hands were cold, and her pulse beat fast and unevenly. I gave her a dose of her medicine and stepped a little to one side, in order not to disturb her.

She did not rise all day. She lay motionless and quiet, only sighing deeply from time to time, and opening her eyes in a timorous fashion.—Every one in the house was perplexed.

VIII

Toward night a slight fever made its appearance, and my mother sent me away. I did not go to my own chamber, however, but lay down in the adjoining room on the divan. Every quarter of an hour I rose, approached the door on tiptoe, and listened. . . . Everything remained silent—but my mother hardly slept at all that night. When I went into her room early in the morning her face appeared to me to be swollen, and her eyes were shining with an unnatural brilliancy. In the course of the day she became a little easier, but toward evening the fever increased again.

Up to that time she had maintained an obstinate silence, but now she suddenly began to talk in a hurried, spasmodic voice. She was not delirious, there was sense in her words, but there was no coherency in them. Not long before midnight she raised herself up in bed with a convulsive movement (I was sitting beside her), and with the same hurried voice she began to narrate to me, continually drinking water in gulps from a glass, feebly flourishing her hands, and not once looking at me the while. . . . At times she paused, exerted an effort over herself, and went on again. . . . All this was strange, as though she were doing it in her sleep, as though she herself were not present, but as though some other person were speaking with her lips, or making her speak.

IX

“listen to what I have to tell thee,” she began. “Thou art no longer a young boy; thou must know all. I had a good friend. . . . She married a man whom she loved with all her heart, and she was happy with her husband. But during the first year of their married life they both went to the capital to spend a few weeks and enjoy themselves. They stopped at a good hotel and went out a great deal to theatres and assemblies. My friend was very far from homely; every one noticed her, all the young men paid court to her; but among them was one in particular . . . an officer. He followed her unremittingly, and wherever she went she beheld his black, wicked eyes. He did not make her acquaintance, and did not speak to her even once; he merely kept staring at her in a very strange, insolent way. All the pleasures of the capital were poisoned by his presence. She began to urge her husband to depart as speedily as possible, and they had fully made up their minds to the journey. One day her husband went off to the club; some officers—officers who belonged to the same regiment as this man—had invited him to play cards. . . . For the first time she was left alone. Her husband did not return for a long time; she dismissed her maid and went to bed. . . . And suddenly a great dread came upon her, so that she even turned cold all over and began to tremble. It seemed to her that she heard a faint tapping on the other side of the wall—like the noise a dog makes when scratching—and she began to stare at that wall. In the corner burned a shrine-lamp; the chamber was all hung with silken stuff. . . . Suddenly something began

to move at that point, rose, opened. . . . And straight out of the wall, all black and long, stepped forth that dreadful man with the wicked eyes!

“She tried to scream and could not. She was benumbed with fright. He advanced briskly toward her, like a rapacious wild beast, flung something over her head, something stifling, heavy and white. . . . What happened afterward I do not remember. . . . I do not remember! It was like death, like murder. . . . When that terrible fog dispersed at last—when I . . . my friend recovered her senses, there was no one in the room. Again—and for a long time—she was incapable of crying out, but she did shriek at last . . . then again everything grew confused. . . .

Then she beheld by her side her husband, who had been detained at the club until two o’clock. . . . His face was distorted beyond recognition. He began to question her, but she said nothing. . . . Then she fell ill But I remember that when she was left alone in the room she examined that place in the wall. . . . Under the silken hangings there proved to be a secret door. And her wedding-ring had disappeared from her hand. This ring was of an unusual shape. Upon it seven tiny golden stars alternated with seven tiny silver stars; it was an ancient family heirloom. Her husband asked her what had become of her ring; she could make no reply. Her husband thought that she had dropped it somewhere, hunted everywhere for it, but nowhere could he find it. Gloom descended upon him, he decided to return home as speedily as possible, and as soon as the doctor permitted they quitted the capital. . . . But imagine! On the very day of their departure they suddenly encountered, on the street, a litter. . . . In that litter lay a man who had just been killed, with a cleft skull—and just imagine! that man was that same dreadful nocturnal visitor with the wicked eyes. . . . He had been killed over a game of cards!

“Then my friend went away to the country, and became a mother for the first time. . . . and lived several years with her husband. He never learned anything about that matter, and what could she say? She herself knew nothing. But her former happiness had vanished. Darkness had invaded their life—and that darkness was never dispelled. . . . They had no other children either before or after but that son. . . .”

My mother began to tremble all over, and covered her face with her hands.

“But tell me now,” she went on, with redoubled force, “whether my friend was in any way to blame? With what could she reproach herself? She was punished, but had not she the right to declare, in the presence of God himself, that the punishment which overtook her was unjust? Then why can the past present itself to her, after the lapse of so many years, in so frightful an aspect, as though she were a sinner tortured by the gnawings of conscience? Macbeth slew Banquo, so it is not to be wondered at that he should have visions but I”

But my mother’s speech became so entangled and confused that I ceased to understand her.

I no longer had any doubt that she was raving in delirium.

X

Any one can easily understand what a shattering effect my mother’s narration produced upon me! I had divined, at her very first word, that she was speaking of herself, and not of any acquaintance of hers; her slip of the tongue only confirmed me in my surmise. So it really was my father whom I had sought out in my dream, whom I had beheld when wide awake! He had not been killed, as my mother had supposed, but merely wounded. . . . And he had come to her, and had fled, affrighted by her fright. Everything suddenly became clear to me; the feeling of involuntary repugnance for me which sometimes awoke in my mother, and her constant sadness, and our isolated life. . . . I remember that my head reeled, and I clutched at it with both hands, as

though desirous of holding it firmly in its place. But one thought had become riveted in it like a nail. I made up my mind, without fail, at any cost, to find that man again! Why? With what object?—I did not account to myself for that; but to find him. . . . to find him—that had become for me a question of life or death!

On the following morning my mother regained her composure at last the fever passed off . . . she fell asleep. Committing her to the care of our landlord and landlady and the servants, I set out on my quest.

XI

First of all, as a matter of course, I betook myself to the coffee-house where I had met the baron; but in the coffee-house no one knew him or had even noticed him: he was a chance visitor. The proprietors had noticed the negro—his figure had been too striking to escape notice; but who he was, where he stayed, no one knew either. Leaving my address, in ease of an emergency, at the coffee-house, I began to walk about the streets and the water-front of the town, the wharves, the boulevards; I looked into all the public institutions, and nowhere did I find any one who resembled either the baron or his companion. . . . As I had not caught the baron's name, I was deprived of the possibility of appealing to the police; but I privately gave two or three guardians of public order to understand (they gazed at me in surprise, it is true, and did not entirely believe me) that I would lavishly reward their zeal if they should be successful in coming upon the traces of those two individuals, whose personal appearance I tried to describe as minutely as possible.

Having strolled about in this manner until dinner-time, I returned home thoroughly worn out. My mother had got out of bed; but with her habitual melancholy there was mingled a new element, a sort of pensive perplexity, which cut me to the heart like a knife. I sat with her all the evening. We said hardly anything; she laid out her game of patience, I silently looked at her cards. She did not refer by a single word to her story, or to what had happened the day before. It was as though we had both entered into a compact not to touch upon those strange and terrifying occurrences. . . . She appeared to be vexed with herself and ashamed of what had involuntarily burst from her; but perhaps she did not remember very clearly what she had said in her semi-fevered delirium, and hoped that I would spare her. . . . And, in fact, I did spare her, and she was conscious of it; as on the preceding day she avoided meeting my eyes.

A frightful storm had suddenly sprung up out of doors. The wind howled and tore in wild gusts, the window-panes rattled and quivered; despairing shrieks and groans were borne through the air, as though something on high had broken loose and were flying with mad weeping over the shaking houses. Just before dawn I lost myself in a doze when suddenly it seemed to me as though some one had entered my room and called me, had uttered my name, not in a loud, but in a decided voice. I raised my head and saw no one; but, strange to relate! I not only was not frightened—I was delighted; there suddenly arose within me the conviction that now I should, without fail, attain my end. I hastily dressed myself and left the house.

XII

The storm had subsided but its last flutterings could still be felt. It was early; there were no people in the streets; in many places fragments of chimneys, tiles, boards of fences which had been rent asunder, the broken boughs of trees, lay strewn upon the ground.

“What happened at sea last night?” I involuntarily thought at the sight of the traces left behind by the storm. I started to go to the port, but my feet bore me in another direction, as though in obedience to an irresistible attraction. Before ten minutes had passed I found myself in a quarter of the town which I had never yet visited. I was walking, not fast, but without stopping, step by step, with a strange sensation at my heart; I was expecting something remarkable, impossible, and, at the same time, I was convinced that that impossible thing would come to pass.

XIII

And lo, it came to pass, that remarkable, that unexpected thing! Twenty paces in front of me I suddenly beheld that same negro who had spoken to the baron in my presence at the coffee-house! Enveloped in the same cloak which I had then noticed on him, he seemed to have popped up out of the earth, and with his back turned toward me was walking with brisk strides along the narrow sidewalk of the crooked alley! I immediately dashed in pursuit of him, but he redoubled his gait, although he did not glance behind him, and suddenly made an abrupt turn around the corner of a projecting house. I rushed to that corner and turned it as quickly as the negro had done. . . . Marvellous to relate! Before me stretched a long, narrow, and perfectly empty street; the morning mist filled it with its dim, leaden light,—but my gaze penetrated to its very extremity. I could count all its buildings . . . and not a single living being was anywhere astir! The tall negro in the cloak had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared! I was amazed . . . but only for a moment. Another feeling immediately took possession of me; that street which stretched out before my eyes, all dumb and dead, as it were,—I recognised it! It was the street of my dream. I trembled and shivered—the morning was so chilly—and instantly, without the slightest wavering, with a certain terror of confidence, I went onward.

I began to seek with my eyes. . . . Yes, there it is, yonder, on the right, with a corner projecting on the sidewalk—yonder is the house of my dream, yonder is the ancient gate with the stone scrolls on each side. . . . The house is not circular, it is true, but square . . . but that is a matter of no importance. . . . I knock at the gate, I knock once, twice, thrice, ever more and more loudly. . . . The gate opens slowly, with a heavy screech, as though yawning. In front of me stands a young serving-maid with a dishevelled head and sleepy eyes. She has evidently just waked up.

“Does the baron live here?” I inquire, as I run a swift glance over the deep, narrow courtyard. . . . It is there; it is all there . . . there are the planks which I had seen in my dream.

“No,” the maid answers me, “the baron does not live here.”

“What dost thou mean by that? It is impossible!”

“He is not here now. He went away yesterday.”

“Whither?”

“To America.”

“To America!” I involuntarily repeated. “But he is coming back?”

The maid looked suspiciously at me.

“I don’t know. Perhaps he will not come back at all.”

“But has he been living here long?”

“No, not long; about a week. Now he is not here at all.”

“But what was the family name of that baron?”

The maid-servant stared at me.

“Don’t you know his name? We simply called him the baron. Hey, there! Piótr!” she cried, perceiving that I was pushing my way in.—“come hither: some stranger or other is asking all sorts of questions.”

From the house there presented itself the shambling figure of a robust labourer.

“What’s the matter? What’s wanted?” he inquired in a hoarse voice,—and having listened to me with a surly mien, he repeated what the maid-servant had said.

“But who does live here?” I said.

“Our master.”

“And who is he?”

“A carpenter. They are all carpenters in this street.”

“Can he be seen?”

“Impossible now, he is asleep.”

“And cannot I go into the house?”

“No; go your Way.”

“Well, and can I see your master a little later?”

“Why not? Certainly. He can always be seen. . . . That’s his business as a dealer. Only, go your way now. See how early it is.”

“Well, and how about that negro?” I suddenly asked.

The labourer stared in amazement, first at me, then at the maid-servant.

“What negro?” he said at last.—“Go away, sir. You can come back later. Talk with the master.”

I went out into the street. The gate was instantly banged behind me, heavily and sharply, without squeaking this time.

I took good note of the street and house and went away, but not home.—I felt something in the nature of disenchantment. Everything which had happened to me was so strange, so remarkable—and yet, how stupidly it had been ended! I had been convinced that I should behold in that house the room which was familiar to me—and in the middle of it my father, the baron, in a dressing-gown and with a pipe.

And instead of that, the master of the house was a carpenter, and one might visit him as much as one pleased,—and order furniture of him if one wished!

But my father had gone to America! And what was left for me to do now? . . . Tell my mother everything, or conceal forever the very memory of that meeting? I was absolutely unable to reconcile myself to the thought that such a senseless, such a commonplace ending should be tacked on to such a supernatural, mysterious beginning!

I did not wish to return home, and walked straight ahead, following my nose, out of the town.

XIV

I walked along with drooping head, without a thought, almost without sensation, but wholly engrossed in myself.—A measured, dull and angry roar drew me out of my torpor. I raised my head: it was the sea roaring and booming fifty paces from me. Greatly agitated by the nocturnal storm, the sea was a mass of white-caps to the very horizon, and steep crests of long breakers were rolling in regularly and breaking on the flat shore. I approached it, and walked along the very line left by the ebb and flow on the yellow, ribbed sand, strewn with fragments of trailing seawrack, bits of shells, serpent-like ribbons of eel-grass. Sharp-winged gulls with pitiful cry, born on the wind from the distant aerial depths, soared white as snow against the grey, cloudy

sky, swooped down abruptly, and as though skipping from wave to wave, departed again and vanished like silvery flecks in the strips of swirling foam. Some of them, I noticed, circled persistently around a large isolated boulder which rose aloft in the midst of the monotonous expanse of sandy shores. Coarse seaweed grew in uneven tufts on one side of the rock; and at the point where its tangled stems emerged from the yellow salt-marsh, there was something black, and long, and arched, and not very large. . . . I began to look more intently. . . . Some dark object was lying there—lying motionless beside the stone. . . . That object became constantly clearer and more distinct the nearer I approached. . . .

I was only thirty paces from the rock now. . . .

Why, that was the outline of a human body! It was a corpse; it was a drowned man, cast up by the sea! I went clear up to the rock.

It was the corpse of the baron, my father! I stopped short, as though rooted to the spot. Then only did I understand that ever since daybreak I had been guided by some unknown forces—that I was in their power,—and for the space of several minutes there was nothing in my soul save the ceaseless crashing of the sea, and a dumb terror in the presence of the Fate which held me in its grip. . . .

XV

He was lying on his back, bent a little to one side, with his left arm thrown above his head. . . . the right was turned under his bent body. The sticky slime had sucked in the tips of his feet, shod in tall sailor's boots; the short blue pea-jacket, all impregnated with sea-salt, had not unbuttoned; a red scarf encircled his neck in a hard knot. The swarthy face, turned skyward, seemed to be laughing; from beneath the up-turned upper lip small close-set teeth were visible; the dim pupils of the half-closed eyes were hardly to be distinguished from the darkened whites; covered with bubbles of foam the dirt-encrusted hair spread out over the ground and laid bare the smooth forehead with the purplish line of the scar; the narrow nose rose up like a sharp, white streak between the sunken cheeks. The storm of the past night had done its work.

He had not beheld America! The man who had insulted my mother, who had marred her life, my father—yes! my father, I could cherish no doubt as to that—lay stretched out helpless in the mud at my feet. I experienced a sense of satisfied vengeance, and compassion, and repulsion, and terror most of all of twofold terror; terror of what I had seen, and of what had come to pass. That evil, that criminal element of which I have already spoken, those incomprehensible spasms rose up within me stifled me.

“Aha!” I thought to myself: “so that is why I am what I am. . . . That is where blood tells!” I stood beside the corpse and gazed and waited, to see whether those dead pupils would not stir, whether those benumbed lips would not quiver. No! everything was motionless; the very seaweed, among which the surf had cast him, seemed to have congealed; even the gulls had flown away—there was not a fragment anywhere, not a plank or any broken rigging. There was emptiness everywhere. . . . only he—and I—and the foaming sea in the distance. I cast a glance behind me; the same emptiness was there; a chain of hillocks on the horizon that was all!

I dreaded to leave that unfortunate man in that loneliness, in the ooze of the shore, to be devoured by fishes and birds; an inward voice told me that I ought to hunt up some men and call them thither, if not to aid—that was out of the question—at least for the purpose of laying him out, of bearing him beneath an inhabited roof. . . . But indescribable terror suddenly took possession of me. It seemed to me as though that dead man knew that I had come thither, that he

himself had arranged that last meeting—it even seemed as though I could hear that dull, familiar muttering. . . . I ran off to one side . . . looked behind me once more.

Something shining caught my eye; it brought me to a standstill. It was a golden hoop on the outstretched hand of the corpse. . . . I recognised my mother's wedding-ring. I remember how I forced myself to return, to go close, to bend down. . . . I remember the sticky touch of the cold fingers, I remember how I panted and puckered up my eyes and gnashed my teeth, as I tugged persistently at the ring.

At last I got it off—and I fled—fled away, in headlong flight,—and something darted after me, and overtook me and caught me.

XVI

Everything which I had gone through and endured was, probably, written on my face when I returned home. My mother suddenly rose upright as soon as I entered her room, and gazed at me with such insistent inquiry that, after having unsuccessfully attempted to explain myself, I ended by silently handing her the ring. She turned frightfully pale, her eyes opened unusually wide and turned dim like *his*.—She uttered a faint cry, seized the ring, reeled, fell upon my breast, and fairly swooned there, with her head thrown back and devouring me with those wide, mad eyes. I encircled her waist with both arms, and standing still on one spot, never stirring, I slowly narrated everything, without the slightest reservation, to her, in a quiet voice: my dream and the meeting, and everything, everything. . . . She heard me out to the end, only her breast heaved more and more strongly, and her eyes suddenly grew more animated and drooped. Then she put the ring on her fourth finger, and, retreating a little, began to get out a mantilla and a hat. I asked where she was going. She raised a surprised glance to me and tried to answer, but her voice failed her. She shuddered several times, rubbed her hands as though endeavouring to warm herself, and at last she said: “Let us go at once thither.”

“Whither, mother dear?”

“Where he is lying. . . . I want to see. . . . I want to know. . . . I shall identify. . . .”

I tried to persuade her not to go; but she was almost in hysterics. I understood that it was impossible to oppose her desire, and we set out.

XVII

And lo, again I am walking over the sand of the dunes, but I am no longer alone, I am walking arm in arm with my mother. The sea has retreated, has gone still further away; it is quieting down; but even its diminished roar is menacing and ominous. Here, at last, the solitary rock has shown itself ahead of us—and there is the seaweed. I look intently, I strive to distinguish that rounded object lying on the ground—but I see nothing. We approach closer. I involuntarily retard my steps. But where is that black, motionless thing? Only the stalks of the seaweed stand out darkly against the sand, which is already dry. . . . We go to the very rock. . . . The corpse is nowhere to be seen, and only on the spot where it had lain there still remains a depression, and one can make out where the arms and legs lay. . . . Round about the seaweed seems tousled, and the traces of one man's footsteps are discernible; they go across the down, then disappear on reaching the flinty ridge.

My mother and I exchange glances and are ourselves frightened at what we read on our own faces. . . .

Can he have got up of himself and gone away?

“But surely thou didst behold him dead?” she asks in a whisper.

I can only nod my head. Three hours have not elapsed since I stumbled upon the baron’s body. . . . Some one had discovered it and carried it away.—I must find out who had done it, and what had become of him.

But first of all I must attend to my mother.

XVIII

While she wins on her way to the fatal spot she was in a fever, but she controlled herself. The disappearance of the corpse had startled her as the crowning misfortune. She was stupefied. I feared for her reason. With great difficulty I got her home. I put her to bed again; again I called the doctor for her; but as soon as my mother partly recovered her senses she at once demanded that I should instantly set out in search of “that man.” I obeyed. But, despite all possible measures, I discovered nothing. I went several times to the police-office, I visited all the villages in the neighbourhood, I inserted several advertisements in the newspapers, I made inquiries in every direction—all in vain! It is true that I did hear that a drowned man had been found at one of the hamlets on the seashore. . . . I immediately hastened thither, but he was already buried, and from all the tokens he did not resemble the Baron. I found out on what ship he had sailed for America. At first every one was positive that that ship had perished during the tempest; but several months afterward rumours began to circulate to the effect that it had been seen at anchor in the harbour of New York. Not knowing what to do, I set about hunting up the negro whom I had seen.—I offered him, through the newspapers, a very considerable sum of money if he would present himself at our house. A tall negro in a cloak actually did come to the house in my absence. . . . But after questioning the servant-maid, he suddenly went away and returned no more.

And thus the trace of my . . . my father grew cold; thus did it vanish irrevocably in the mute gloom. My mother and I never spoke of him. Only, one day, I remember that she expressed surprise at my never having alluded before to my strange dream; and then she added: “Of course, it really . . .” and did not finish her sentence.

My mother was ill for a long time, and after her convalescence our former relations were not reestablished. She felt awkward in my presence until the day of her death. . . . Precisely that, awkward. And there was no way of helping her in her grief. Everything becomes smoothed down, the memories of the most tragic family events gradually lose their force and venom; but if a feeling of awkwardness has been set up between two closely-connected persons, it is impossible to extirpate it!

I have never again had that dream which had been wont so to disturb me; I no longer “search for” my father; but it has sometimes seemed to me—and it seems so to me to this day—that in my sleep I hear distant shrieks, unintermittent, melancholy plaints; they resound somewhere behind a lofty wall, across which it is impossible to clamber; they rend my heart—and I am utterly unable to comprehend what it is: whether it is a living man groaning, or whether I hear the wild, prolonged roar of the troubled sea. And now it passes once more into that beast-like growl—and I awake with sadness and terror in my soul.