

THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

*"One finally gets the musical whole
of Dostoevsky's original."*

—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY RICHARD PEAR AND LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY

(c) *Recollections of the Adolescence and Youth of
the Elder Zosima While Still in the World. The Duel*

I was in the Cadet Corps in Petersburg for a long time, almost eight years, and with my new education I stifled many of my childhood impressions, though I did not forget anything. Instead I took up so many new habits and even opinions that I transformed into an almost wild, cruel, and absurd creature. I acquired the polish of courtesy and worldly manners, together with the French language, but we all regarded the soldiers who served us in the Corps as perfect brutes, and I did the same. I most of all, perhaps, because of all my comrades I was the most susceptible to everything. When we graduated as offi-

cers, we were ready to shed our blood for the injured honor of our regiment, but hardly one of us knew what real honor is, and if anyone had found out, he would have been the first to laugh at it at once. We were all but proud of our drunkenness, debauchery, and bravado. I would not say we were wicked; they were all good young men, but they behaved wickedly, and I most of all. The chief thing was that I had come into my own money, and with that I threw myself into a life of pleasure, with all the impetuosity of youth, without restraint, under full sail. The wonder is that I also read books then, and even with great pleasure; the one book I almost never opened at that time was the Bible; though I never parted with it either, but carried it everywhere with me; I truly kept this book, without knowing it myself, "for the day and the hour, and the month and the year."¹⁷ Having thus been in the service for about four years, I eventually found myself in the town of K—, where our regiment was stationed at the time. The local society was diverse, numerous, and fun-loving, hospitable and wealthy, and I was well received everywhere, for I was always of a fun-loving nature, and had the reputation, besides, of being far from poor, which is not unimportant in society. And then a circumstance occurred that was the start of everything. I formed an attachment to a young and wonderful girl, intelligent and worthy, of noble and shining character, the daughter of reputable parents. They were people of high standing, wealthy, influential, powerful, and they received me with affection and cordiality. And so I fancied that the girl favored me in her heart—my own heart was set aflame by this dream. Later I perceived and realized fully that I was perhaps not so greatly in love with her at all, but simply respected her intelligence and lofty character, as one could not fail to do. Selfishness, however, prevented me from offering her my hand at the time: it seemed a hard and fearful thing to part with the temptations of a depraved and free bachelor's life at such an early age, and with money in my pocket besides. Yet I did drop some hints. In all events, I postponed any decisive step for a short while. Then suddenly I happened to be ordered to another district for two months. I came back two months later and suddenly discovered that the girl had already married a local landowner, a wealthy man, older than I but still young, who had connections in the capital and with the best society, which I did not have, a very amiable man, and, moreover, an educated one, while, as for education, I had none at all. I was so struck by this unexpected event that my mind even became clouded. And the chief thing was, as I learned only then, that this young landowner had long been her fiancé, and that I myself had met him many times in their house but had noticed nothing, being blinded by my own merits. And that was what offended me most of all: how was it possible that almost everyone knew, and I alone knew nothing? And suddenly I felt an unbearable an-

ger. Red-faced, I began to recall how many times I had almost declared my love to her, and as she had not stopped me or warned me then, I therefore concluded that she had been laughing at me. Later, of course, I realized and remembered that she had not been laughing in the least, but, on the contrary, had broken off such conversations with a jest and turned to other topics instead—but at the time I could not realize that and began to burn with revenge. I am astonished to recall how extremely heavy and loathsome this revenge and wrath were for me, because, having an easy character, I could not stay angry with anyone for long, and therefore had to incite myself artificially, as it were, and in the end became ugly and absurd. I waited for the right moment, and once at a big gathering I suddenly managed to insult my "rival," seemingly for a quite unrelated reason, jeering at his opinion about an important event of that time—it was 1826¹⁸—and I managed, so people said, to do it wittily and cleverly. After which I forced him to a talk, and in that talk treated him so rudely that he accepted my challenge despite the enormous differences between us, for I was younger than he, insignificant, and of low rank. Afterwards I learned with certainty that he had accepted my challenge also from a feeling of jealousy, as it were: he had been a little jealous of me on account of his wife even before, when she was still his fiancée, and now he thought that if she learned he had suffered an insult from me and had not dared to challenge me, she might unwillingly despise him and her love might be shaken. I quickly found a second, a comrade of mine, a lieutenant in our regiment. At that time, though duels were strictly forbidden, there was even a fashion for them, as it were, among the military—thus do barbaric prejudices sometimes spring up and thrive. It was the end of June, and our meeting was appointed for the next day, outside town, at seven o'clock in the morning—and here truly something fateful, as it were, happened to me. Having returned home in the evening, ferocious and ugly, I got angry with my orderly Afanasy and struck him twice in the face with all my might, so that his face was all bloody. He had not been long in my service, and I had had occasion to strike him before, yet never with such beastly cruelty. And believe me, my dears, though it was forty years ago, I still remember it with shame and anguish. I went to bed, slept for about three hours, woke up, day was breaking. Suddenly I got up, I did not want to sleep any longer, I went to the window, opened it, it looked onto the garden—I watched the sun rising, the weather was warm, beautiful, the birds began to chime. Why is it, I thought, that I feel something, as it were, mean and shameful in my soul? Is it because I am going to shed blood? No, I thought, it doesn't seem to be that. Is it because I am afraid of death, afraid to be killed? No, not that, not that at all . . . And suddenly I understood at once what it was: it was because I had beaten Afanasy

the night before! I suddenly pictured it all as if it were happening over again: he is standing before me, and I strike him in the face with all my might, and he keeps his arms at his sides, head erect, eyes staring straight ahead as if he were at attention; he winces at each blow, and does not even dare raise a hand to shield himself—this is what a man can be brought to, a man beating his fellow man! What a crime! It was as if a sharp needle went through my soul. I stood as if dazed, and the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing, glistening, and the birds, the birds were praising God . . . I covered my face with my hands, fell on my bed, and burst into sobs. And then I remembered my brother Markel, and his words to the servants before his death: "My good ones, my dears, why are you serving me, why do you love me, and am I worthy of being served?" "Yes, am I worthy?" suddenly leaped into my mind. Indeed, how did I deserve that another man, just like me, the image and likeness of God, should serve me? This question then pierced my mind for the first time in my life. "Mother, heart of my heart, truly each of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone, only people do not know it, and if they knew it, the world would at once become paradise." "Lord," I wept and thought, "can that possibly not be true? Indeed, I am perhaps the most guilty of all, and the worst of all men in the world as well!" And suddenly the whole truth appeared to me in its full enlightenment: what was I setting out to do? I was setting out to kill a kind, intelligent, noble man, who was not at fault before me in any way, thereby depriving his wife of happiness forever, tormenting and killing her. I lay there flat on my bed, my face pressed into the pillow, not noticing how the time passed. Suddenly my comrade, the lieutenant, came in with the pistols to fetch me: "Ah," he said, "it's good you're up already, let's be off, it's time." I began rushing about, quite at a loss, but still we went out to the carriage. "Wait a bit," I said to him, "I must run back in for a moment, I've forgotten my purse." I ran back into the house alone, straight to Afanasy's room: "Afanasy," I said, "yesterday I struck you twice in the face. Forgive me," I said. He started as if he were afraid, and I saw that it was not enough, not enough; and suddenly, just as I was, epaulettes and all, I threw myself at his feet with my forehead to the ground: "Forgive me!" I said. At that he was completely astounded: "Your honor, my dear master, but how can you . . . I'm not worthy . . .," and he suddenly began weeping himself, just as I had done shortly before, covered his face with both hands, turned to the window, and began shaking all over with tears. And I ran back out to my comrade, jumped into the carriage, and shouted: "Drive!" "Have you ever seen a winner?" I cried to him. "Here is one, right in front of you!" Such rapture was in me, I was laughing, talking, talking all the way, I don't remember what I was talking about. He looked at me: "Hey, you're a good man, brother, I can see you won't

dishonor the regiment." So we came to the place, and they were already there waiting for us. They set us twelve paces apart, the first shot was his—I stood cheerfully before him, face to face, without batting an eye, looking at him lovingly, because I knew what I was going to do. He fired. The shot just grazed my cheek a little, and nicked my ear. "Thank God," I shouted, "you didn't kill a man!" And I seized my pistol, turned around, and sent it hurtling up into the trees: "That's where you belong!" I shouted. I turned to my adversary: "My dear sir," I said, "forgive a foolish young man, for it is my own fault that I offended you and have now made you shoot at me. I am ten times worse than you, if not more. Tell that to the person you honor most in the world." As soon as I said it, all three of them started yelling at me: "I beg your pardon," my adversary said, even getting angry, "if you did not want to fight, why did you trouble me?" "Yesterday I was still a fool, but today I've grown wiser," I answered him cheerfully. "As for yesterday, I believe you," he said, "but about today, from your opinion, it is hard to believe you." "Bravo," I cried to him, clapping my hands, "I agree with that, too, I deserved it!" "My dear sir, will you shoot or not?" "I will not, and you may shoot again if you wish, only it would be better if you didn't." The seconds were also shouting, especially mine: "What? Disgracing the regiment? Asking forgiveness in the middle of a duel? If only I'd known!" Then I stood before them all, no longer laughing: "My gentlemen," I said, "is it so surprising now, in our time, to meet a man who has repented of his foolishness and confesses his guilt publicly?" "But not in the middle of a duel!" my second shouted again. "But that's just it," I replied, "that is just what is so surprising, because I ought to have confessed as soon as we arrived here, even before his shot, without leading him into great and mortal sin, but we have arranged everything in the world so repugnantly that to do so was nearly impossible, for only now that I have stood up to his shot from twelve paces can my words mean something for him, but had I done it before his shot, as soon as we arrived, then people would simply say: he's a coward, he's afraid of a pistol, there's no point in listening to him. Gentlemen," I cried suddenly from the bottom of my heart, "look at the divine gifts around us: the clear sky, the fresh air, the tender grass, the birds, nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, we alone, are godless and foolish, and do not understand that life is paradise, for we need only wish to understand, and it will come at once in all its beauty, and we shall embrace each other and weep . . ." I wanted to go on but I could not, so much sweetness, so much youngness even took my breath away, and in my heart there was such happiness as I had never felt before in all my life. "That is all very sensible and pious," my adversary said to me, "and you're an original man, in any case." "Laugh," I said to him, laughing myself, "but later you will praise me." "But,"

he said, "I am ready to praise you even now. I will give you my hand, if you wish, for it seems you are indeed a sincere man." "No," I said, "not now, but later when I've become better and deserve your respect, then give me your hand and you will do well." We returned home, my second scolding me all the way, while I kept kissing him. My comrades all heard about it at once and met to pass judgment on me that same day: "He has dishonored the regiment," they said, "he must resign his commission." I had my defenders as well: "He did stand up to the shot," they said. "Yes, but he was afraid of the other shots and asked forgiveness in the middle of the duel." "But if he was afraid of the other shots," my defenders objected, "he would have fired his own pistol first, before asking forgiveness, but he threw it into the trees still loaded—no, there's something else here, something original." I listened and looked at them cheerfully. "My dearest friends and comrades," I said, "do not worry about whether or not I should resign my commission, because I have already done so, I turned in my papers today, at the office, this morning, and when my discharge comes through, I shall go into a monastery at once, for that is why I resigned my commission." No sooner had I said this than all of them, to a man, burst out laughing: "But you should have told us so in the first place, that explains everything, we can't pass judgment on a monk," they laughed, they could not stop, yet they laughed not at all derisively, but tenderly, cheerfully, they all loved me suddenly, even my most fervent accusers, and for the rest of that month, until my discharge came through, they kept making much of me: "Here comes our monk!" they would say. And each of them had a kind word for me, they tried to talk me out of it, they even pitied me: "What are you doing to yourself?" "No," they would say, "he is brave, he stood up to the shot, and he could have fired his own pistol, but he had a dream the night before that he should become a monk, that's why he did it." Almost exactly the same thing happened with the local society. They had paid no particular attention to me before, though they received me cordially, but now they suddenly found out and began vying with each other to invite me: they laughed at me, and yet they loved me. I will note here that though everyone was talking openly about our duel, the authorities dismissed the case, because my adversary was a close relative of our general, and since the thing had ended bloodlessly, more like a joke, and, finally, as I had also resigned my commission, they chose to consider it indeed as a joke. And I then began to speak out quite fearlessly, despite their laughter, for their laughter was kindly after all, not malicious. All these conversations generally took place on social evenings, in the company of ladies; it was the women who liked to listen to me then, and who made the men listen. "But how is it possible that I am guilty for everyone," they would all laugh in my face, "well, for instance, can I be guilty for you?" "But how can

you even understand it," I would answer, "if the whole world has long since gone off on a different path, and if we consider what is a veritable lie to be the truth, and demand the same lie from others? Here for once in my life I have acted sincerely, and what then? I've become a sort of holy fool for you all, and though you've come to love me, you still laugh at me." "But how can we help loving someone like you?" the mistress of the house said to me, laughing, and there was a large crowd there. Suddenly I saw, standing up among the ladies, that same young woman over whom I had started the duel and whom until so recently I had intended as my fiancée. And I had not noticed that she had just arrived at the party. She stood up, came over to me, and held out her hand: "Allow me to tell you," she said, "that I will be the first not to laugh at you, and that, on the contrary, it is with tears that I thank you and declare my respect for you for what you did." Then her husband came over, and then suddenly everyone drifted towards me and all but kissed me. I was filled with joy, but most of all I suddenly noticed one gentleman, an elderly man, who also came up to me, and whom I already knew by name, though I had not made his acquaintance and had never even exchanged a word with him until that evening.