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FYODOR
DOSTOYEVSKY

The Brothers Karamazov

A NOVEL IN FOUR PARTS AND AN EPILOGUE

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
DAVID McDUFF

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The Brothers Karamazov

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EPILOGUE

Dedicated to
Anna Grigoryevna Dostoyevskaya[1]

BOOK I
THE STORY OF A CERTAIN LITTLE FAMILY

I
Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov

Aleksey Fyodorovich Karamazov was the third son of a landowner in our district, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, so noted in his time (and even now still recollected among us) for his tragic and fishy death, which occurred just thirteen years ago and which I shall report in its proper context. All I shall say now about this 'landowner' (as he was called among us, though for most of his life he hardly ever lived on his estate at all) is that he was a strange type, one that is, however, rather often encountered, namely the type of man who is not only empty and depraved but also muddle-headed – belonging, though, to the class of muddle-headed men who are perfectly well able to handle their little property affairs, and, it would seem, these alone. Fyodor Pavlovich, for example, began with practically nothing, was a landowner of the very least important category, went trotting around other people's dinner tables, aspired to the rank of sponge, but at the moment of his decease turned out to possess something to the tune of one hundred thousand roubles in ready money. And yet at the same time he had persisted all his life in being one of the most muddle-headed madcaps in the whole of our district. I repeat: here there was no question of stupidity; the bulk of these madcaps are really quite sharp and clever – but plain muddle-headedness, and, moreover, of a peculiar, national variety.

He was married twice, and he had three sons – Dmitry Fyodorovich, the eldest, by his first spouse, and the other two, Ivan and Aleksey, by his second. Fyodor Pavlovich's first spouse came from a rather well-to-do and aristocratic tribe of gentlefolk, the Miusovs, who were also landowners in our district. Just how it came to

transpire that a girl with a dowry, who was also attractive and was, moreover, one of those pert, clever girls so frequently encountered in our present generation, though not entirely absent from our last, could have given her hand in marriage to such an insignificant 'weakling', as everyone called him then, I shall not labour to explain. You see, I once knew a certain young unmarried woman, back in the last 'romantic' generation, who after several years of mysterious love for a certain gentleman, whom, incidentally, she could have taken to the altar at the time of her choosing with a modicum of fuss, ended by inventing insuperable obstacles, and on a stormy night throwing herself from a lofty bank, resembling a cliff, into a rather deep and fast-flowing river and perished in it really for no other reason than her own caprice, solely in order to emulate Shakespeare's Ophelia; and one might even say that had this cliff, so long ago selected and favoured by her, been not so picturesque, and had there been on its site merely a flat, prosaic bank, then her suicide might possibly never have taken place at all. This is an authentic case, and one may suppose that in our Russian life there has, over the past two or three generations, occurred no small number of such cases, or cases of a similar nature. As in those other instances, Adelaida Ivanovna Miusova's behaviour was, without doubt, an echo of trends and ideas acquired elsewhere and also the 'fretting of a captive mind'.[1] It may be that she wished to demonstrate her female independence, to protest against the conditions imposed on her by society, against the despotism of her blood and family, and for one single instant, let us suppose, her complaisant imagination persuaded her that Fyodor Pavlovich, his rank of sponge notwithstanding, was none the less one of the boldest and most rapier-tongued men of that era, transitional as it was to all that was finest, while he was really only a nasty buffoon, and nothing more. Another piquant aspect of the marriage was the fact that it took place following an elopement, and Adelaida Ivanovna had found this enticing. Where Fyodor Pavlovich was concerned, his social position at the time made him thoroughly prepared for strange adventures of this kind, for he entertained a passionate wish to secure his future career by any means that lay to hand; when it came to sucking up to a good family and acquiring a dowry, this was a very alluring prospect. With regard to mutual love, it appears to have been entirely absent – both on the part of the bride and of himself, for all Adelaida Ivanovna's attractiveness.

So it may have been that this incident was the only one of its kind in the life of Fyodor Pavlovich, all his life the most voluptuous-tempered of men, ready in a trice to cling to any skirt at all, no sooner did it lead him on. Yet it appears that this woman alone failed to make any particular impression on him from the voluptuary point of view.

Adelaida Ivanovna realized in a flash, immediately after the elopement, that she merely despised her husband, and that was all. In this fashion the consequences of the marriage showed themselves with extreme rapidity. Even though the family rather quickly came to regard the event as a *fait accompli* and apportioned the fugitive girl her dowry, the couple began together a disorderly existence that involved eternal scenes and rows. It was related that in the process of these the young female spouse demonstrated an incomparably greater degree of good breeding and elevation than did Fyodor Pavlovich, who, as is now notorious, diddled her right there and then, in one fell swoop, out of all her wretched money, to the tune of twenty-five thousand, as soon as she received it, with the result that as far as she was concerned, from that day on those dear little thousands might as well have sunk in the river. As for the small estate and the rather elegant town house which were also included in her dowry, for a long time he strove his utmost to have these transferred to his own name by the formulation of some suitable deed and would most likely have attained his end by the mere, as it were, contempt and revulsion he inspired in his spouse every moment with his shameless beggings and blackmailings, by the mere psychological exhaustion she endured, praying only that he would let her alone. Luckily, however, Adelaida Ivanovna's family entered the fray and placed a check on the marauder. It has been positively established that frequent fights occurred between the couple, but legend will have it that it was not Fyodor Pavlovich who administered the blows but Adelaida Ivanovna, a lady hot-blooded, audacious, dark-haired, impatient and endowed with remarkable physical strength. At last she forsook the house and ran away from Fyodor Pavlovich with a certain schoolteacher – a seminarian who was practically dying of poverty, leaving her three-year-old son Mitya in the arms of her husband. In no time at all Fyodor Pavlovich had set up an entire harem in the house and begun to embark upon the most dissolute of drunken excesses, in the entr'actes of which be traversed very nearly the entire province,

tearfully complaining to each and every one about his Adelaida Ivanovna's desertion, imparting as he did so details that it would be positively shameful for any married man to give about his conjugal life. The main thing was that he seemed to find it enjoyable and even flattering to act out before everyone the preposterous rôle of injured spouse and even to depict with colourful additions the details of his injury. 'Anyone would think you'd got a promotion, Fyodor Pavlovich, so pleased you are in spite of all your misfortune,' the mockers would say to him. Many would even add that in their opinion he enjoyed appearing in the revamped guise of a buffoon and that he was purposely pretending, in order to intensify their mirth, not to be aware of the comical position in which he found himself. Who can tell, however – perhaps it really was a genuine naïveté on his part. Finally he succeeded in uncovering the traces of his fugitive spouse. The poor thing was found to be in St Petersburg, whither she had moved with her seminarian and where she had wholeheartedly launched herself upon a process of the most complete emancipation. Fyodor Pavlovich had at once bestirred himself and set about making ready for the journey to St Petersburg – for what reason? – it hardly needs adding that he himself did not know. In truth, he might actually have gone; but, having taken a decision of such moment, he at once considered himself peculiarly enfranchised, for the sake of keeping up his spirits and for the road, to launch himself upon another most unbridled drunken excess. And then it was that the family of his spouse received the news of her death in St Petersburg. She had died suddenly, in a garret somewhere, according to some versions of the story of typhus, according to others – of hunger. Fyodor Pavlovich learned of the death of his spouse while drunk; some say that he went racing off down the street and began to shout, lifting his arms to the heavens in joy: 'Lord, now lettest thou!',[2] and others that he sobbed violently like a small child to the point where it grieved one just to look at him, all the revulsion he inspired notwithstanding. It may very well be that both the one and the other took place, that is to say, that he exulted in his liberation and wept for his liberatress – both at the same time. In the majority of instances human beings, even the evil-doers among them, are far more naïve and straightforward than we suppose. And that includes ourselves.

2
He Gets the First Son Off His Hands

It may, of course, be imagined what kind of an educator and father such a man would make. From a fatherly viewpoint he did what he was bound to do, that is to say he utterly and completely abandoned the child he had begotten with Adelaida Ivanovna, not out of any ill-feeling towards him, or any resentments of an injured spouse, but simply because he altogether forgot about him. While he was making everyone's lives a misery with his tears and complaints and was turning his house into a den of depravity, the three-year-old Mitya was taken into care by Grigory, the faithful manservant of that house, and had the latter not tended to him there might very well have been no one to change the little boy's wretched shirt. To make matters worse it at first appeared that the relatives of the child on his mother's side had also somehow contrived to forget him. His grandfather, that is to say old Miusov Senior himself, Adelaida Ivanovna's father, was no longer alive at this time; his widowed spouse, Mitya's grandmother, had moved to Moscow and fallen gravely ill, and as for the sisters, they were by now married, with the result that Mitya had to stay for almost a whole year in the care of the manservant Grigory, living with him in an *izba*[1] in the yard. As a matter of fact, even had his father remembered him (and after all, it is impossible that he was totally unaware of his existence), he would have personally sent him back to the *izba* again, as the boy would have been a hindrance to his debaucheries. But it so happened that from Paris there returned a cousin of Adelaida Ivanovna's, Pyotr Aleksandrovich Miusov, who later lived for many years abroad but was then still a very young man, a man, however, unique among the Miusovs, being enlightened, metropolitan, foreign-educated and, moreover, all his life a European, and towards the end of his days a 'forties-and-'fifties liberal to boot. In the passage of his career he had established links with many of the most liberal men of his era, both inside Russia and out, been personally acquainted with Proudhon and Bakunin[2] and had, though this was now towards the end of his peregrinations, a special fondness for recollecting and relating the three days of the Paris February Revolution of the year 'forty-eight, letting it drop that he himself had very nearly been a participant of the barricades.