

## Chapter 4

### *Rebellion*

“I must make an admission,” Ivan began. “I never could understand how it’s ‘possible to love one’s neighbors. In my opinion, it is precisely one’s neighbors that one cannot possibly love. Perhaps if they weren’t so high ... I read sometime, somewhere about ‘John the Merciful’ (some saint) that when a hungry and frozen passerby came to him and asked to be made warm, he lay down with him in bed, embraced him, and began breathing into his mouth, which was foul and festering with some terrible disease.<sup>1</sup> I’m convinced that he did it with the strain of a lie, out of love enforced by duty, out of self-imposed penance. If we’re to come to love a man, the man himself should stay hidden, because as soon as he shows his face—love vanishes.”

“The elder Zosima has spoken of that more than once,” Alyosha remarked. “He also says that a man’s face often prevents many people, who are as yet inexperienced in love, from loving him. But there is still much love in mankind, almost like Christ’s love, I know that, Ivan ...”

“Well, I don’t know it yet, and I cannot understand it, nor can a numberless multitude of other people along with me. The question is whether this comes from bad qualities in people, or is inherent in their nature. In my opinion, Christ’s love for people is in its kind a miracle impossible on earth. True, he was God. But we are not gods. Let’s say that I, for example, am capable of profound suffering, but another man will never be able to know the degree of my suffering, because he is another and not me, and besides, a man is rarely willing to acknowledge someone else as a sufferer (as if it were a kind of distinction). And why won’t he acknowledge it, do you think? Because I, for example, have a bad smell, or a foolish face, or once stepped on his foot. Besides, there is suffering and suffering: some benefactor of mine may still allow a humiliating suffering, which humiliates me—hunger, for example; but a slightly higher suffering—for an idea, for example—no, that he will not allow, save perhaps on rare occasions, because he will look at me and suddenly see that my face is not at all the kind of face that, he fancies, a man should have who suffers, for example, for such and such an idea. And so he at once deprives me of his

benefactions, and not even from the wickedness of his heart. Beggars, especially noble beggars, should never show themselves in the street; they should ask for alms through the newspapers. It's still possible to love one's neighbor abstractly, and even occasionally from a distance, but hardly ever up close. If it were all as it is on stage, in a ballet, where beggars, when they appear, come in silken rags and tattered lace and ask for alms dancing gracefully, well, then it would still be possible to admire them. To admire, but still not to love. But enough of that. I simply wanted to put you in my perspective. I meant to talk about the suffering of mankind in general, but better let us dwell only on the suffering of children. That will reduce the scope of my argument about ten times, but even so it's better if we keep to children. The more unprofitable for me, of course. But, first, one can love children even up close, even dirty or homely children (it seems to me, however, that children are never homely). Second, I will not speak of grown-ups because, apart from the fact that they are disgusting and do not deserve love, they also have retribution: they ate the apple, and knew good and evil, and became 'as gods.'<sup>2</sup> And they still go on eating it. But little children have not eaten anything and are not yet guilty of anything. Do you love children, Alyosha? I know you love them, and you'll understand why I want to speak only of them now. If they, too, suffer terribly on earth, it is, of course, for their fathers; they are punished for their fathers who ate the apple—but that is reasoning from another world; for the human heart here on earth it is incomprehensible. It is impossible that a blameless one should suffer for another, and such a blameless one! Marvel at me, Alyosha—I, too, love children terribly. And observe, that cruel people—passionate, carnivorous, Karamazovian—sometimes love children very much. Children, while they are still children, up to the age of seven, for example, are terribly remote from grown-up people, as if they were different beings, of a different nature. I knew a robber in prison: he happened, in the course of his career, while slaughtering whole families in the houses he broke into and robbed at night, to have put the knife to several children as well. But he showed a strange affection for them while he was in prison. He spent all his time at the window, watching the children playing in the prison yard. He trained one little boy to come to his window, and the boy got to be very friendly with him ... Do you know why I'm saying all this, Alyosha? I somehow have a headache, and I feel sad.”

“You have a strange look as you speak,” Alyosha observed anxiously, “as if you were in some kind of madness.”

“By the way, a Bulgarian I met recently in Moscow,” Ivan Fyodorovich went on, as if he were not listening to his brother, “told me how the Turks and Circassians there, in Bulgaria, have been committing atrocities everywhere, fearing a general uprising of the Slavs—they burn, kill, rape women and children, they nail prisoners by the ears to fences and leave them like that until morning, and in the morning they hang them—and so on, it’s impossible to imagine it all. Indeed, people speak sometimes about the ‘animal’ cruelty of man, but that is terribly unjust and offensive to animals, no animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel. A tiger simply gnaws and tears, that is all he can do. It would never occur to him to nail people by their ears overnight, even if he were able to do it. These Turks, among other things, have also taken a delight in torturing children, starting with cutting them out of their mothers’ wombs with a dagger, and ending with tossing nursing infants up in the air and catching them on their bayonets before their mothers’ eyes. The main delight comes from doing it before their mothers’ eyes. But here is a picture that I found very interesting. Imagine a nursing infant in the arms of its trembling mother, surrounded by Turks. They’ve thought up an amusing trick: they fondle the baby, they laugh to make it laugh, and they succeed—the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk aims a pistol at it, four inches from its face. The baby laughs gleefully, reaches out its little hands to grab the pistol, and suddenly the artist pulls the trigger right in its face and shatters its little head ... Artistic, isn’t it? By the way, they say the Turks are very fond of sweets.”

“What are you driving at, brother?” Alyosha asked.

“I think that if the devil does not exist, and man has therefore created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.”

“As well as God, then.”

“You’re a remarkably good ‘implorator of unholy suits,’ as Polonius says in *Hamlet*,”<sup>3</sup> Ivan laughed. “So you caught me, but let it be, I’m glad. A nice God you’ve got, if man created him in his image and likeness.”<sup>4</sup> You asked me what I was driving at: you see, I’m an amateur and collector of certain little facts; I copy them down from newspapers and stories, from wherever, and save them—would you believe it?—certain kinds of little anecdotes. I already have a nice collection of them. The Turks, of course,

are in it, but they're foreigners. I have native specimens as well, even better than the Turkish ones. You know, with us it's beating, the birch and the lash, that's our national way: with us nailed ears are unthinkable, we're Europeans after all, but the birch, the lash—that is ours and cannot be taken from us. Abroad they apparently no longer do any beating nowadays; either their morals have been purified or they've passed such laws that apparently one man no longer dares to whip another; but they've rewarded themselves with something else to make up for it, something as purely national as our way, so national that it is apparently impossible for us, though, by the way, it seems to be taking root here, especially since the time of the religious movement in our higher society. I have a lovely pamphlet, translated from the French, telling of how quite recently, only five years ago, in Geneva, a villain and murderer named Richard was executed—a lad of twenty-three, I believe, who repented and turned to the Christian faith at the foot of the scaffold. This Richard was someone's illegitimate child; at the age of six he was *presented* by his parents to some Swiss mountain shepherds, who brought him up to work for them. He grew up among them like a little wild beast; the shepherds taught him nothing; on the contrary, by the time he was seven, they were already sending him out to tend the flocks in the cold and wet, with almost no clothes and almost nothing to eat. And, of course, none of them stopped to think or repent of doing so; on the contrary, they considered themselves entirely within their rights, for Richard had been presented to them as an object, and they did not even think it necessary to feed him. Richard himself testified that in those years, like the prodigal son in the Gospel, he wanted terribly to eat at least the mash given to the pigs being fattened for market, but he was not given even that and was beaten when he stole from the pigs, and thus he spent his whole childhood and his youth, until he grew up and, having gathered strength, went out to steal for himself. The savage began earning money as a day laborer in Geneva, spent his earnings on drink, lived like a monster, and ended by killing some old man and robbing him. He was caught, tried, and condemned to death. They don't sentimentalize over there. So then in prison he was immediately surrounded by pastors and members of various Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies, and so on. In prison they taught him to read and write, began expounding the Gospel to him, exhorted him, persuaded him, pushed him, pestered him, urged him, and finally he himself solemnly confessed his crime. He repented, he wrote to the court himself saying that he was a

monster, and that at last he had been deemed worthy of being illumined by the Lord and of receiving grace. All of Geneva was stirred, all of pious and philanthropic Geneva. All that was lofty and well-bred rushed to him in prison; Richard was kissed, embraced: 'You are our brother, grace has descended upon you!' And Richard himself simply wept with emotion: 'Yes, grace has descended upon me! Before, through all my childhood and youth, I was glad to eat swine's food, and now grace has descended upon me, too, I am dying in the Lord!' 'Yes, yes, Richard, die in the Lord, you have shed blood and must die in the Lord. Though it's not your fault that you knew nothing of the Lord when you envied the swine their food and were beaten for stealing it (which was very bad, for it is forbidden to steal), but still you have shed blood and must die.' And so the last day came. Limp Richard weeps and all the while keeps repeating: 'This is the best day of my life, I am going to the Lord!' 'Yes,' cry the pastors, the judges, and the philanthropic ladies, 'this is your happiest day, for you are going to the Lord!' And it's all moving towards the scaffold, in carriages and on foot, following the cart of shame that is bearing Richard. They arrive at the scaffold. 'Die, brother,' they call out to Richard, 'die in the Lord, for grace has descended upon you, too!' And so, covered with the kisses of his brothers, brother Richard is dragged up onto the scaffold, laid down on the guillotine, and his head is whacked off in brotherly fashion, forasmuch as grace has descended upon him, too. No, it's quite typical. This little pamphlet was translated into Russian by some Russian Lutheranizing philanthropists from high society and sent out gratis with newspapers and other publications for the enlightenment of the Russian people. This thing about Richard is so good because it's national. Though for us it's absurd to cut our brother's head off only because he's become our brother and grace has descended upon him, still, I repeat, we have our own ways, which are almost as good. We have our historical, direct, and intimate delight in the torture of beating. Nekrasov has a poem describing a peasant flogging a horse on its eyes with a knout, 'on its meek eyes.'<sup>5</sup> We've all seen that; that is Russianism. He describes a weak nag, harnessed with too heavy a load, that gets stuck in the mud with her cart and is unable to pull it out. The peasant beats her, beats her savagely, beats her finally not knowing what he's doing; drunk with beating, he flogs her painfully, repeatedly: 'Pull, though you have no strength, pull, though you die!' The little nag strains, and now he begins flogging her, flogging the defenseless creature on her

weeping, her ‘meek eyes.’ Beside herself, she strains and pulls the cart out, trembling all over, not breathing, moving somehow sideways, with a sort of skipping motion, somehow unnaturally and shamefully—it’s horrible in Nekrasov. But that’s only a horse; God gave us horses so that we could flog them. So the Tartars instructed us,<sup>6</sup> and they left us the knout as a reminder. But people, too, can be flogged. And so, an intelligent, educated gentleman and his lady flog their own daughter, a child of seven, with a birch—I have it written down in detail. The papa is glad that the birch is covered with little twigs, ‘it will smart more,’ he says, and so he starts ‘smarting’ his own daughter. I know for certain that there are floggers who get more excited with every stroke, to the point of sensuality, literal sensuality, more and more, progressively, with each new stroke. They flog for one minute, they flog for five minutes, they flog for ten minutes—longer, harder, faster, sharper. The child is crying, the child finally cannot cry, she has no breath left: ‘Papa, papa, dear papa!’ The case, through some devilishly improper accident, comes to court. A lawyer is hired. Among the Russian people, lawyers have long been called ‘hired consciences.’ The lawyer shouts in his client’s defense. ‘The case,’ he says, ‘is quite simple, domestic, and ordinary: a father flogged his daughter, and, to the shame of our times, it has come to court!’ The convinced jury retires and brings in a verdict of ‘not guilty.’ The public roars with delight that the torturer has been acquitted. Ahh, if I’d been there, I’d have yelled out a suggestion that they establish a scholarship in honor of the torturer ... ! Lovely pictures. But about little children I can do even better, I’ve collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. A little girl, five years old, is hated by her father and mother, ‘most honorable and official people, educated and well-bred.’<sup>7</sup> You see, once again I positively maintain that this peculiar quality exists in much of mankind—this love of torturing children, but only children. These same torturers look upon all other examples of humankind even mildly and benevolently, being educated and humane Europeans, but they have a great love of torturing children, they even love children in that sense. It is precisely the defenselessness of these creatures that tempts the torturers, the angelic trustfulness of the child, who has nowhere to turn and no one to turn to—that is what enflames the vile blood of the torturer. There is, of course, a beast hidden in every man, a beast of rage, a beast of sensual inflammability at the cries of the tormented victim, an unrestrained beast let off the chain, a beast of diseases acquired in debauchery—gout, rotten liver,

and so on. These educated parents subjected the poor five-year-old girl to every possible torture. They beat her, flogged her, kicked her, not knowing why themselves, until her whole body was nothing but bruises; finally they attained the height of finesse: in the freezing cold, they locked her all night in the outhouse, because she wouldn't ask to get up and go in the middle of the night (as if a five-year-old child sleeping its sound angelic sleep could have learned to ask by that age)—for that they smeared her face with her excrement and made her eat the excrement, and it was her mother, her mother who made her! And this mother could sleep while her poor little child was moaning all night in that vile place! Can you understand that a small creature, who cannot even comprehend what is being done to her, in a vile place, in the dark and the cold, beats herself on her strained little chest with her tiny fist and weeps with her anguished, gentle, meek tears for 'dear God' to protect her—can you understand such nonsense, my friend and my brother, my godly and humble novice, can you understand why this nonsense is needed and created? Without it, they say, man could not even have lived on earth, for he would not have known good and evil. Who wants to know this damned good and evil at such a price? The whole world of knowledge is not worth the tears of that little child to 'dear God.' I'm not talking about the suffering of grown-ups, they ate the apple and to hell with them, let the devil take them all, but these little ones! I'm tormenting you, Alyoshka, you don't look yourself. I'll stop if you wish."

"Never mind, I want to suffer, too," Alyosha murmured.

"One more picture, just one more, for curiosity, because it's so typical, and above all I just read it in one of the collections of our old documents, the *Archive, Antiquities*, or somewhere, I'll have to check the reference, I even forget where I read it.<sup>8</sup> It was in the darkest days of serfdom, back at the beginning of the century—and long live the liberator of the people!<sup>9</sup> There was a general at the beginning of the century, a general with high connections and a very wealthy landowner, the sort of man (indeed, even then they seem to have been very few) who, on retiring from the army, feels all but certain that his service has earned him the power of life and death over his subjects. There were such men in those days. So this general settled on his estate of two thousand souls, swaggered around, treated his lesser neighbors as his spongers and buffoons. He had hundreds of dogs in his kennels and nearly a hundred handlers, all in livery, all on horseback. And so one day a house-serf, a little boy, only eight years old, threw a stone

while he was playing and hurt the paw of the general's favorite hound. 'Why is my favorite dog limping?' It was reported to him that this boy had thrown a stone at her and hurt her paw. 'So it was you,' the general looked the boy up and down. 'Take him!' They took him, took him from his mother, and locked him up for the night. In the morning, at dawn, the general rode out in full dress for the hunt, mounted on his horse, surrounded by spongers, dogs, handlers, huntsmen, all on horseback. The house-serfs are gathered for their edification, the guilty boy's mother in front of them all. The boy is led out of the lockup. A gloomy, cold, misty autumn day, a great day for hunting. The general orders them to undress the boy; the child is stripped naked, he shivers, he's crazy with fear, he doesn't dare make a peep ... 'Drive him!' the general commands. The huntsmen shout, 'Run, run!' The boy runs ... 'Sic him!' screams the general and looses the whole pack of wolfhounds on him. He hunted him down before his mother's eyes, and the dogs tore the child to pieces ... ! I believe the general was later declared incompetent to administer his estates. Well ... what to do with him? Shoot him? Shoot him for our moral satisfaction? Speak, Alyoshka!"

"Shoot him!" Alyosha said softly, looking up at his brother with a sort of pale, twisted smile.

"Bravo!" Ivan yelled in a sort of rapture. "If even you say so, then ... A fine monk you are! See what a little devil is sitting in your heart, Alyoshka Karamazov!"

"What I said is absurd, but ..."

"That's just it, that 'but ... ,'" Ivan was shouting. "I tell you, novice, that absurdities are all too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and without them perhaps nothing at all would happen. We know what we know!"

"What do you know?"

"I don't understand anything," Ivan went on as if in delirium, "and I no longer want to understand anything. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I wanted to understand something, I would immediately have to betray the fact, but I've made up my mind to stick to the fact ..."

"Why are you testing me?" Alyosha exclaimed with a rueful strain. "Will you finally tell me?"

"Of course I'll tell you, that's just what I've been leading up to. You are dear to me, I don't want to let you slip, and I won't give you up to your



Zosima.”

Ivan was silent for a moment; his face suddenly became very sad.

“Listen to me: I took children only so as to make it more obvious. About all the other human tears that have soaked the whole earth through, from crust to core, I don’t say a word, I’ve purposely narrowed down my theme. I am a bedbug, and I confess in all humility that I can understand nothing of why it’s all arranged as it is. So people themselves are to blame: they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven,<sup>10</sup> knowing that they would become unhappy—so why pity them? Oh, with my pathetic, earthly, Euclidean mind, I know only that there is suffering, that none are to blame, that all things follow simply and directly one from another, that everything flows and finds its level—but that is all just Euclidean gibberish, of course I know that, and of course I cannot consent to live by it! What do I care that none are to blame and that I know it—I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself. I have believed, and I want to see for myself, and if I am dead by that time, let them resurrect me, because it will be too unfair if it all takes place without me. Is it possible that I’ve suffered so that I, together with my evil deeds and sufferings, should be manure for someone’s future harmony? I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion,<sup>11</sup> and the murdered man rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it was all for. All religions in the world are based on this desire, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I going to do with them? That is the question I cannot resolve. For the hundredth time I repeat: there are hosts of questions, but I’ve taken only the children, because here what I need to say is irrefutably clear. Listen: if everyone must suffer, in order to buy eternal harmony with their suffering, pray tell me what have children got to do with it? It’s quite incomprehensible why they should have to suffer, and why they should buy harmony with their suffering. Why do they get thrown on the pile, to manure someone’s future harmony with themselves? I understand solidarity in sin among men; solidarity in retribution I also understand; but what solidarity in sin do little children have? And if it is really true that they, too, are in solidarity with their fathers in all the fathers’ evildoings, that truth certainly is not of this world and is incomprehensible to me. Some joker will say, perhaps, that in any case the child will grow up

and have time enough to sin, but there's this boy who didn't grow up but was torn apart by dogs at the age of eight. Oh, Alyosha, I'm not blaspheming! I do understand how the universe will tremble when all in heaven and under the earth merge in one voice of praise, and all that lives and has lived cries out: 'Just art thou, O Lord, for thy ways are revealed!'<sup>12</sup> Oh, yes, when the mother and the torturer whose hounds tore her son to pieces embrace each other, and all three cry out with tears: 'Just art thou, O Lord,' then of course the crown of knowledge will have come and everything will be explained. But there is the hitch: that is what I cannot accept. And while I am on earth, I hasten to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, it may well be that if I live until that moment, or rise again in order to see it, I myself will perhaps cry out with all the rest, looking at the mother embracing her child's tormentor: 'Just art thou, O Lord!' but I do not want to cry out with them. While there's still time, I hasten to defend myself against it, and therefore I absolutely renounce all higher harmony. It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears! Not worth it, because her tears remained unredeemed. They must be redeemed, otherwise there can be no harmony. But how, how will you redeem them? Is it possible? Can they be redeemed by being avenged? But what do I care if they are avenged, what do I care if the tormentors are in hell, what can hell set right here, if these ones have already been tormented? And where is the harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive, and I want to embrace, I don't want more suffering. And if the suffering of children goes to make up the sum of suffering needed to buy truth, then I assert beforehand that the whole of truth is not worth such a price. I do not, finally, want the mother to embrace the tormentor who let his dogs tear her son to pieces! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she wants to, let her forgive the tormentor her immeasurable maternal suffering; but she has no right to forgive the suffering of her child who was torn to pieces, she dare not forgive the tormentor, even if the child himself were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, then where is the harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who could and would have the right to forgive? I don't want harmony, for love of mankind I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*. Besides, they have put too

high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket.<sup>13</sup> And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible. Which is what I am doing. It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, I just most respectfully return him the ticket."

"That is rebellion," Alyosha said softly, dropping his eyes.

"Rebellion? I don't like hearing such a word from you," Ivan said with feeling. "One cannot live by rebellion, and I want to live. Tell me straight out, I call on you—answer me: imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, that same child who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears—would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth."

"No, I would not agree," Alyosha said softly.

"And can you admit the idea that the people for whom you are building would agree to accept their happiness on the unjustified blood of a tortured child, and having accepted it, to remain forever happy?"

"No, I cannot admit it. Brother," Alyosha said suddenly, his eyes beginning to flash, "you asked just now if there is in the whole world a being who could and would have the right to forgive. But there is such a being, and he can forgive everything, forgive all *and for all*,<sup>14</sup> because he himself gave his innocent blood for all and for everything. You've forgotten about him, but it is on him that the structure is being built, and it is to him that they will cry out: 'Just art thou, O Lord, for thy ways have been revealed!'"

"Ah, yes, the 'only sinless One'<sup>15</sup> and his blood! No, I have not forgotten about him; on the contrary, I've been wondering all the while why you hadn't brought him up for so long, because in discussions your people usually trot him out first thing. You know, Alyosha—don't laugh!—I composed a poem once, about a year ago. If you can waste ten more minutes on me, I'll tell it to you."

"You wrote a poem?"

"Oh, no, I didn't write it," Ivan laughed, "I've never composed two lines of verse in my whole life. But I made up this poem and memorized it. I made it up in great fervor. You'll be my first reader—mean, listener. Why,