

看名著学英语丛书

THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

韩文 主编

延边大学出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

看名著学英语丛书/韩文主编.

—延吉:延边大学出版社,2004.7

ISBN 7-5634-2915-8

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. 外国文学 - 课外读物 - 英语 - 小说

. I561.44

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2004)第 121181 号

延边大学出版社出版发行

(吉林延吉市公园街 105 号 邮政编码 133002)

中铁十六局印刷厂印刷

787×1092 32 开 55 印张

2004 年 7 月第 1 版 2004 年 7 月第 1 次印刷

印数:1~1 000 册

定价:180.00 元(全 9 卷)

卡拉马佐夫兄弟 (三)

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《THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV》

By Fyodor Dostoevsky

(三)

Chapter 5 A Laceration in the Drawing-Room

But in the drawing-room the conversation was already over. Katerina Ivanovna was greatly excited, though she looked resolute. At the moment Alyosha and Madame Hohlakov entered, Ivan Fyodorovitch stood up to take leave. His face was rather pale, and Alyosha looked at him anxiously. For this moment was to solve a doubt, a harassing enigma which had for some time haunted Alyosha. During the preceding month it had been several times suggested to him that his brother Ivan was in love with Katerina Ivanovna, and, what was more, that he meant to carry her off from Dmitri. Until quite lately the idea seemed to Alyosha monstrous, though it worried him extremely. He loved both his brothers, and dreaded such rivalry between them. Meantime, Dmitri had said outright on the previous day that he was glad that Ivan was his rival, and that it was a great assistance

to him, Dmitri. In what way did it assist him? To marry Grushenka? But that Alyosha considered the worst thing possible. Besides all this, Alyosha had till the evening before implicitly believed that Katerina Ivanovna had a steadfast and passionate love for Dmitri; but he had only believed it till the evening before. He had fancied, too, that she was incapable of loving a man like Ivan, and that she did love Dmitri, and loved him just as he was, in spite of all the strangeness of such a passion.

But during yesterdays scene with Grushenka another idea had struck him. The word lacerating, which Madame Hohlakov had just uttered, almost made him start, because half waking up towards daybreak that night he had cried out, Laceration, laceration, probably applying it to his dream. He had been dreaming all night of the previous days scene at Katerina Ivanovnas. Now Alyosha was impressed by Madame Hohlakovs blunt and persistent assertion that Katerina Ivanovna was in love with Ivan, and only deceived herself through some sort of pose, from self-laceration, and tortured herself by her pretended love for Dmitri from some fancied duty of gratitude. Yes, he thought, perhaps the whole truth lies

in those words. But in that case what was Ivan's position? Alyosha felt instinctively that a character like Katerina Ivanovna must dominate, and she could only dominate some one like Dmitri, and never a man like Ivan. For Dmitri might at last submit to her domination to his own happiness (which was what Alyosha would have desired), but Ivan, Ivan could not submit to her, and such submission would not give him happiness. Alyosha could not help believing that of Ivan. And now all these doubts and reflections flitted through his mind as he entered the drawing-room. Another idea, too, forced itself upon him: What if she loved neither of them—neither Ivan nor Dmitri?

It must be noted that Alyosha felt as it were ashamed of his own thoughts and blamed himself when they kept recurring to him during the last month. What do I know about love and women and how can I decide such questions? he thought reproachfully, after such doubts and surmises. And yet it was impossible not to think about it. He felt instinctively that this rivalry was of immense importance in his brothers' lives and that a great deal depended upon it.

One reptile will devour the other, Ivan had pronounced the day before, speaking in anger of his father and Dmitri. So Ivan looked upon Dmitri as a reptile, and perhaps had long done so. Was it perhaps since he had known Katerina Ivanovna? That phrase had, of course, escaped Ivan unawares yesterday, but that only made it more important. If he felt like that, what chance was there of peace? Were there not, on the contrary, new grounds for hatred and hostility in their family? And with which of them was Alyosha to sympathise? And what was he to wish for each of them? He loved them both, but what could he desire for each in the midst of these conflicting interests? He might go quite astray in this maze, and Alyosha's heart could not endure uncertainty, because his love was always of an active character. He was incapable of passive love. If he loved any one, he set to work at once to help him. And to do so he must know what he was aiming at; he must know for certain what was best for each, and having ascertained this it was natural for him to help them both. But instead of a definite aim, he found nothing but uncertainty and perplexity on all sides. It was lacerating,

as was said just now. But what could he understand even in this laceration? He did not understand the first word in this perplexing maze.

Seeing Alyosha, Katerina Ivanovna said quickly and joyfully to Ivan, who had already got up to go. A minute! Stay another minute! I want to hear the opinion of this person here whom I trust absolutely. Dont go away, she added, addressing Madame Hohlakov. She made Alyosha sit down beside her, and Madame Hohlakov sat opposite, by Ivan.

You are all my friends here, all I have in the world, my dear friends, she began warmly, in a voice which quivered with genuine tears of suffering, and Alyoshas heart warmed to her at once. You, Alexey Fyodorovitch, were witness yesterday of that abominable scene, and saw what I did. You did not see it, Ivan Fyodorovitch, he did. What he thought of me yesterday I dont know. I only know one thing, that if it were repeated to-day, this minute, I should express the same feelings again as yesterdaythe same feelings, the same words, the same actions. You remember my actions, Alexey Fyodorovitch; you checked me in one of them (as she

said that, she flushed and her eyes shone). I must tell you that I cant get over it. Listen, Alexey Fyodorovitch. I dont even know whether I still love him. I feel pity for him, and that is a poor sign of love. If I loved him, if I still loved him, perhaps I shouldnt be sorry for him now, but should hate him.

Her voice quivered, and tears glittered on her eyelashes. Alyosha shuddered inwardly. That girl is truthful and sincere, he thought, and she does not love Dmitri any more.

Thats true, thats true, cried Madame Hohlakov.

Wait, dear. I havent told you the chief, the final decision I came to during the night. I feel that perhaps my decision is a terrible one for me, but I foresee that nothing will induce me to change it nothing. It will be so all my life. My dear, kind, ever-faithful and generous adviser, the one friend I have in the world, Ivan Fyodorovitch, with his deep insight into the heart, approves and commends my decision. He knows it.

Yes, I approve of it, Ivan assented, in a subdued but firm voice.

But I should like Alyosha, too (Ah! Alexey

Fyodorovitch, forgive my calling you simply Alyosha), I should like Alexey Fyodorovitch, too, to tell me before my two friends whether I am right. I feel instinctively that you, Alyosha, my dear brother (for you are a dear brother to me), she said again ecstatically, taking his cold hand in her hot one, I foresee that your decision, your approval, will bring me peace, in spite of all my sufferings, for, after your words. I shall be calm and submitI feel that.

I dont know what you are asking me, said Alyosha, flushing. I only know that I love you and at this moment wish for your happiness more than my own! But I know nothing about such affairs, something impelled him to add hurriedly.

In such affairs, Alexey Fyodorovitch, in such affairs, the chief thing is honour and duty and something higherI dont know whatbut higher perhaps even than duty. I am conscious of this irresistible feeling in my heart, and it compels me irresistibly. But it may all be put in two words. Ive already decided, even if he marries thatcreature (she began solemnly), whom I never, never can forgive, even then I will not abandon

him. Henceforward I will never, never abandon him! she cried, breaking into a sort of pale, hysterical ecstasy. Not that I would run after him continually, get in his way and worry him. Oh, no! I will go away to another town where you like but I will watch over him all my life I will watch over him all my life unceasingly. When he becomes unhappy with that woman, and that is bound to happen quite soon, let him come to me and he will find a friend, a sister. Only a sister, of course, and so for ever; but he will learn at least that that sister is really his sister, who loves him and has sacrificed all her life to him. I will gain my point. I will insist on his knowing me and confiding entirely in me, without reserve, she cried, in a sort of frenzy. I will be a god to whom he can pray and that, at least, he owes me for his treachery and for what I suffered yesterday through him. And let him see that all my life I will be true to him and the promise I gave him, in spite of his being untrue and betraying me. I will I will become nothing but a means for his happiness, or how shall I say? an instrument, a machine for his happiness, and that for my whole life, my whole life, and that he may see that all his life! That's my

decision. Ivan Fyodorovitch fully approves me.

She was breathless. She had perhaps intended to express her idea with more dignity, art and naturalness, but her speech was too hurried and crude. It was full of youthful impulsiveness, it betrayed that she was still smarting from yesterdays insult, and that her pride craved satisfaction. She felt this herself. Her face suddenly darkened, an unpleasant look came into her eyes. Alyosha at once saw it and felt a pang of sympathy. His brother Ivan made it worse by adding:

Ive only expressed my own view, he said. From any one else, this would have been affected and overstrained, but from youno. Any other woman would have been wrong, but you are right. I dont know how to explain it, but I see that you are absolutely genuine and, therefore, you are right.

But thats only for the moment. And what does this moment stand for? Nothing but yesterdays insult. Madame Hohlakov obviously had not intended to interfere, but she could not refrain from this very just comment.

Quite so, quite so, cried Ivan, with peculiar

eagerness, obviously annoyed at being interrupted, in any one else this moment would be only due to yesterdays impression and would be only a moment. But with Katerina Ivanovnas character, that moment will last all her life. What for any one else would be only a promise is for her an everlasting, burdensome, grim perhaps, but unflagging duty. And she will be sustained by the feeling of this duty being fulfilled. Your life, Katerina Ivanovna, will henceforth be spent in painful brooding over your own feelings, your own heroism, and your own suffering; but in the end that suffering will be softened and will pass into sweet contemplation of the fulfilment of a bold and proud design. Yes, proud it certainly is, and desperate in any case, but a triumph for you. And the consciousness of it will at last be a source of complete satisfaction and will make you resigned to everything else.

This was unmistakably said with some malice and obviously with intention; even perhaps with no desire to conceal that he spoke ironically and with intention.

Oh, dear, how mistaken it all is! Madame Hohlakov cried again.

Alexey Fyodorovitch, you speak. I want dreadfully to know what you will say! cried Katerina Ivanovna, and burst into tears. Alyosha got up from the sofa.

Its nothing, nothing! she went on through her tears. Im upset, I didnt sleep last night. But by the side of two such friends as you and your brother I still feel strongfor I knowyou two will never desert me.

Unluckily I am obliged to return to Moscowperhaps to-morrowand to leave you for a long timeAnd, unluckily, its unavoidable, Ivan said suddenly.

To-morrowto Moscow! her face was suddenly contorted; butbut, dear me, how fortunate, she cried in a voice suddenly changed. In one instant there was no trace left of her tears. She underwent an instantaneous transformation, which amazed Alyosha. Instead of a poor insulted girl, weeping in a sort of laceration, he saw a woman completely self-possessed and even exceedingly pleased, as though something agreeable had just happened.

Oh, not fortunate that I am losing you, of course not, she corrected herself suddenly, with a charming society smile. Such a friend as you are could not

suppose that. I am only too unhappy at losing you. She rushed impulsively at Ivan, and seizing both his hands, pressed them warmly. But what is fortunate is that you will be able in Moscow to see auntie and Agafya and to tell them all the horror of my present position. You can speak with complete openness to Agafya, but spare dear auntie. You will know how to do that. You cant think how wretched I was yesterday and this morning, wondering how I could write them that dreadful letterfor one can never tell such things in a letter. Now it will be easy for me to write, for you will see them and explain everything. Oh, how glad I am! But I am only glad of that, believe me. Of course, no one can take your place. I will run at once to write the letter, she finished suddenly, and took a step as though to go out of the room.

And what about Alyosha and his opinion, which you were so desperately anxious to hear? cried Madame Hohlakov. There was a sarcastic, angry note in her voice.

I had not forgotten that, cried Katerina Ivanovna, coming to a sudden standstill, and why are you so antagonistic at such a moment? she added, with warm

and bitter reproachfulness. What I said, I repeat. I must have his opinion. More than that, I must have his decision! As he says, so it shall be. You see how anxious I am for your words, Alexey Fyodorovitch. But what's the matter?

I couldn't have believed it. I can't understand it! Alyosha cried suddenly in distress.

What? What?

He is going to Moscow, and you cry out that you are glad. You said that on purpose! And you begin explaining that you are not glad of that but sorry to be losing a friend. But that was acting, too, you were playing a part as in a theatre!

In a theatre? What? What do you mean? exclaimed Katerina Ivanovna, profoundly astonished, flushing crimson, and frowning.

Though you assure him you are sorry to lose a friend in him, you persist in telling him to his face that it's fortunate he is going, said Alyosha breathlessly. He was standing at the table and did not sit down.

What are you talking about? I don't understand?

I don't understand myself. I seemed to see in a flash