

DEAREST FATHER,

You asked me recently why I maintain that I am afraid of you. As usual, I was unable to think of any answer to your question, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you, and partly because an explanation of the grounds for this fear would mean going into far more details than I could even approximately keep in mind while talking. And if I now try to give you an answer in writing, it will still be very incomplete, because, even in writing, this fear and its consequences hamper me in relation to you and because the magnitude of the subject goes far beyond the scope of my memory and power of reasoning.

I have always hidden from you, in my room, among my books, with crazy friends, or with crackpot ideas. I have never talked to you frankly;. If you sum up your judgment of me, the result you get is that, although you don't charge me with anything downright improper or wicked (with the exception perhaps of my latest marriage plan), you do charge me with coldness, estrangements and ingratitude. And, what is more, you charge me with it in such a way as to make it seem my fault, as though I might have been able, with something like a touch on the steering wheel, to make everything quite different, while you aren't in the slightest to blame, unless it be for having been too good to me.

This, your usual way of representing it, I regard as accurate only in so far as I too believe you are entirely blameless in the matter of our estrangement. But I am equally entirely blameless. If I could get you to acknowledge this, then what would be possible is—not, I think, a new life, we are both much too old for that—but still, a kind of peace; no cessation, but still, a diminution of your unceasing reproaches.

Oddly enough you have some sort of notion of what I mean. For instance, a short time ago you said to me: "I have always been fond of you, even though outwardly I didn't act toward you as other fathers generally do, and this precisely because I can't pretend as other people can." Now, Father, on the whole I have never doubted your goodness toward me, but this remark I consider wrong. You can't pretend, that is true, but merely for that reason to maintain that other fathers pretend is either mere opinionated ness, and as such beyond discussion, or on the other hand—and this in my view is what it really is—a veiled expression of the fact that something is wrong in our relationship and that you have played your part in causing it to be so, but without its being your fault. If you really mean that, then we are in agreement

I'm not going to say, of course, that I have become what I am only as a result of your influence. That would be very much exaggerated (and I am indeed inclined to this exaggeration). It is indeed quite possible that even if I had grown up entirely free from your influence I still could not have become a person after your own heart. I should have been happy to have you as a friend, as a boss, an uncle, a grandfather, even (though rather more hesitantly) as a father-in-law. Only as a father you have been too strong for me, particularly since my brothers died when they were small and my sisters came along only much later, so that I alone had to bear the brunt of it—and for that I was much too weak.

I was a timid child. For all that, I am sure I was also obstinate, as children are. I am sure that Mother spoiled me too, but I cannot believe I was particularly difficult to manage; I cannot believe that a kindly word, a quiet taking by the hand, a friendly look, could not have got me to do anything that was wanted of me. Now you are, after all, basically a charitable and kindhearted person (what follows will not be in contradiction to this, I am speaking only of the impression you made on the child), but not every child has the endurance and fearlessness to

go on searching until it comes to the kindness that lies beneath the surface. You can treat a child only in the way you yourself are constituted, with vigor, noise, and hot temper, and in this case such behavior seemed to you to be also most appropriate because you wanted to bring me up to be a strong, brave boy.

There is only one episode in the early years of which I have a direct memory. You may remember it, too. One night I kept on whimpering for water, not, I am certain, because I was thirsty, but probably partly to be annoying, partly to amuse myself. After several vigorous threats had failed to have any effect, you took me out of bed, carried me out onto the *pavlatche*,* and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door. I am not going to say that this was wrong—perhaps there was really no other way of getting peace and quiet that night—but I mention it as typical of your methods of bringing up a child and their effect on me. I dare say I was quite obedient afterward at that period, but it did me inner harm.

You reinforced abusiveness with threats and this applied to me too. How terrible for me was, for instance, that "I'll tear you apart like a fish," although I knew, of course, that nothing worse was to follow (admittedly, as a little child I didn't know that), but it was almost exactly in accord with my notions of your power, and I saw you as being capable of doing this too. It was also terrible when you ran around the table, shouting, grabbing at one, obviously not really trying to grab, yet pretending to, and Mother (finally) had to rescue one, as it seemed. Once again one had, so it seemed to the child, remained alive through your mercy and bore one's life henceforth as an undeserved gift from you

You put special trust in bringing up children by means of irony, and this was most in keeping with your superiority over me. An admonition from you generally took this form: "Can't you do it in such-and-such a way? That's too hard for you, I suppose. You haven't the time, of course?" and so on. And each such question would be accompanied by malicious laughter and a malicious face. One was, so to speak, already punished before one even knew that one had done something bad.

[About my marriage you said] I can't understand you: after all, you're a grown man, you live in the city, and you don't know what to do but marry the first girl who comes along. Isn't there anything else you can do? If you're frightened, I'll go with you." You put it in more detail and more plainly, but I can no longer recall the details, perhaps too things became a little vague before my eyes, I paid almost more attention to Mother who, though in complete agreement with you, took something from the table and left the room with it.

You have hardly ever humiliated me more deeply with words and shown me your contempt more clearly. You had (unconsciously) always suppressed my power of decision and now believed (unconsciously) that you knew what it was worth. Of my attempts at escape in other directions [besides marriage] you knew nothing, thus you could not know anything either of the thought processes that had led me to this attempt to marry, and had to try to guess at them, and in keeping with your general opinion of me, you interpreted them in the most abominable, crude, and ridiculous light. And you did not for a moment hesitate to tell me this in just such a manner. The shame you inflicted on me with this was nothing to you in comparison to the shame that I would, in your opinion, inflict on your name by this marriage.