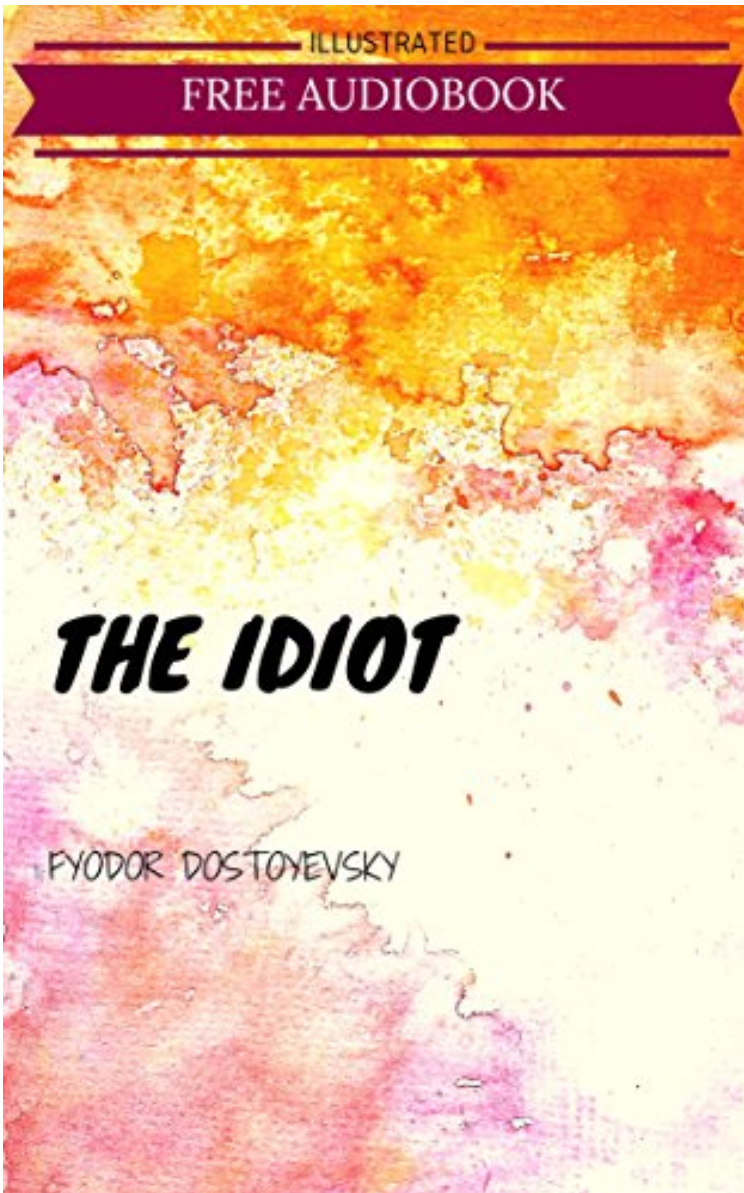


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The Idiot: By Fyodor Dostoyevsky : Illustrated (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe Idiot by Fyodor DostoyevskyHow is this book unique?Tablet and e-reader formattedOriginal Unabridged EditionAuthor Biography includedIllustrated versionThe Idiot (Russian: , Idiot) is a novel by the 19th-century Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It was first published serially in the journal The Russian Messenger in 1868-9. The title is an ironic reference to the central character of the novel, Prince Lyov Nikolaevich Myshkin, a young man whose goodness and open-hearted simplicity lead

many of the more worldly characters he encounters to mistakenly assume that he lacks intelligence and insight. In the character of Prince Myshkin, Dostoevsky set himself the task of depicting "the positively good and beautiful man". The novel examines the consequences of placing such a unique individual at the centre of the conflicts, desires, passions and egoism of worldly society, both for the man himself and for those with whom he becomes involved. The result, according to philosopher A.C. Grayling, is "one of the most excoriating, compelling and remarkable books ever written; and without question one of the greatest."

Extrait I In late November, during a thaw, around nine in the morning, a train on the PetersburgWarsaw railway line was approaching Petersburg at full blast. It was so damp and foggy that it had just barely grown light; within ten paces to the right and left of the rails, it was difficult to make out anything at all from the carriage windows. Among the passengers were some returning from abroad; but the third-class compartments were more crowded, mainly with common folk on business, from not too far away. As usual, everyone was tired, everyones eyes had grown heavy in the night, everyone was chilled, all the faces were pale and yellow, matching the color of the fog. In one of the third-class carriages, right by the window, two passengers had, from early dawn, been sitting facing one another both were young people, both traveled light, both were unfashionably dressed, both had rather remarkable faces, and both expressed, at last, a desire to start a conversation. If they had both known, one about the other, in what way they were especially remarkable in that moment, they would naturally have wondered that chance had so strangely placed them face to face in a third-class carriage of the WarsawPetersburg train. One of them was a short man about twenty-seven, with almost black curly hair and small but fiery gray eyes. His nose was broad and flat, his cheekbones high; his thin lips continually curved into a sort of insolent, mocking and even malicious smile; but the high and well-shaped forehead redeemed the ignoble lines of the lower part of the face. What was particularly striking about the young mans face was its deathly pallor, which lent him an exhausted look in spite of his fairly sturdy build, and at the same time something passionate to the point of suffering, which did not harmonize with his insolent and coarse smile and his sharp and self-satisfied gaze. He was warmly dressed in a full, black, sheepskin-lined overcoat, and had not felt the cold at night, while his neighbor had been forced to endure all the pleasures of a damp Russian November night, for which he was evidently unprepared. He had a fairly thick and wide cloak with no sleeves and a huge hood, just like those frequently used by travelers in winter somewhere far abroad, in Switzerland or, for instance, Northern Italy, who do not reckon, of course, on such distances along the journey as from Eydtkuhnen1 to Petersburg. But what was entirely suitable and satisfactory in Italy turned out to be not quite fitting for Russia. The owner of the hooded cloak was a young man, also twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, somewhat above the average in height, with very fair thick hair, with sunken cheeks and a thin, pointed, almost white beard. His eyes were large, blue and intent; there was something calm, though somber, in their expression, something full of that strange look by which some can surmise epilepsy in a person at first glance. The young mans face was otherwise pleasing, delicate and lean, though colorless, and at this moment even blue with cold. From his hands dangled a meager bundle tied up in an old, faded raw-silk kerchief, which, it seemed, contained the entirety of his traveling effects. He wore thick-soled boots and spatsit was all very un-Russian. His dark-haired neighbor in the sheepskin observed all this, partly from having nothing to do, and at last, with that indelicate smile in which satisfaction at the misfortunes of others is sometimes so unceremoniously and casually expressed, he asked: Chilly? And he shuddered. Very, answered his neighbor, with extraordinary readiness, and just think, its thawing, too. What if there were a frost? I didnt even think it would be so cold at home. Ive become unused to it. From abroad, eh? Yes, from Switzerland. Phew! You dont say! The dark-haired man whistled and burst into laughter. They struck up a conversation. The readiness of the fair young man in the Swiss cloak to answer all his swarthy companions inquiries was astonishing and without the merest suspicion of the absolute thoughtlessness, inappropriateness and idleness of some of the questions. In answering, he declared by the by that he had indeed not been in Russia for a long time, a little over four years, that he had been sent abroad on account of an illness, some kind of strange nervous illness, like epilepsy or St. Vituss dance, resulting in trembling fits and convulsions. The swarthy man chuckled several times as he listened; and he laughed particularly when, in answer to his inquiry, Well, have they cured you? the fair one answered, No, they havent. Ha! You must have wasted a lot of money over it, and we believe in them over here, the swarthy man observed sarcastically. Thats the honest truth! interposed a badly dressed gentleman sitting beside them, a petty official type, set in his crusty scribes ways, about forty, powerfully built, with a red nose and pimpled face Thats the honest truth, sir, they only absorb all the resources of Russia for nothing! Oh, you are quite mistaken in my case! the patient from Switzerland chimed in with a gentle and

conciliatory voice. Of course, I cant argue with you because I dont know all about it, but my doctor even shared his last penny with me for the journey here; and there, he supported me at his expense for nearly two years. Why, had you no one to pay for you? asked the swarthy man. No; Mr. Pavlishchev, who used to pay for me there, died two years ago. Ive since written to Generaless Epanchin, a distant relation of mine, but Ive had no answer. So Ive come . . . Where are you going then? You mean, where am I going to stay? . . . I dont rightly know yet . . . Somewhere . . . Youve not made up your mind yet? And both his listeners burst out laughing again. And no doubt that bundle is all youve got in the world? asked the swarthy man. Im willing to bet on it, chimed in the red-nosed official with an exceptionally gleeful air, and that hes got nothing else in the luggage van, though poverty is no vice, which, again, one mustnt neglect to note. It turned out that this was the case, too; the fair-haired young man acknowledged it at once with extraordinary readiness. Your bundle has some value, anyway, the petty official went on, when they had laughed to their hearts content (remarkably, the owner of the bundle finally began to laugh himself, looking at them, which increased their mirth), and though you could stake your head that it contains no golden rolls of foreign coin with Napoleons or Friedrichs, to say nothing of Dutch Arapchicks, which may already be concluded merely from the spats covering those foreign boots of yours, yet . . . when we add to your bundle such a purported relation as, for example, Generaless Epanchin, then even the bundle takes on a certain different significance, needless to say, but only in the case that Generaless Epanchin is really your relation and you are not mistaken, out of absentmindedness . . . which a person is very, very wont to do, if only . . . from an excess of imagination. Ah, youve guessed right again, the fair young man chimed in. It really is almost a mistake, thats to say, she is almost no relation; so much so that I really was not at all surprised back then, when I got no answer there. It was what I expected. You simply wasted the money for the postage. Hm! . . . Anyway, you are open-hearted and sincere, which is commendable. Hm! . . . As for General Epanchin, we know him, yes sir, for, actually, he is a man everyone knows; and I used to know the late Mr. Pavlishchev, too, who paid your expenses in Switzerland, that is if it was Nikolai Andreevich Pavlishchev, for there were two of them, cousins. The other lives in the Crimea. The late Nikolai Andreevich was a worthy man and well connected, and hed four thousand serfs in his day . . . Just so, Nikolai Andreevich Pavlishchev was his name. And having answered, the young man intently and searchingly scrutinized the know-it-all gentleman. One encounters these know-it-all gentlemen sometimes, even fairly often, in a certain well-known social sphere. They know everything. All the restless curiosity and faculties of their mind are irresistibly bent in one direction, no doubt from lack of more important ideas and interests in life, as the contemporary thinker would put it. The phrase they know everything, by the way, must be taken to apply to a rather limited sphere: where so-and- so serves, with whom he is acquainted, the amount of his net worth, where he was governor, to whom hes married, how much his wife brought in, who are his cousins, who twice removed, etc., etc., and so on in that vein. For the most part, these know-it-alls walk about with worn-out elbows and receive a salary of seventeen rubles a month. The people of whose lives they know every last detail would be at a loss to imagine their motives. Yet, in the meantime many of them are positively consoled by this knowledge, which amounts to a complete science, and derive from it self-respect and even their highest spiritual gratification. And indeed it is a fascinating science. I have seen learned men, literary men, poets, politicians, who sought and found in that very science their greatest worldly comforts and goals, indeed, positively making their careers solely on that account. Throughout this entire conversation the swarthy young man had been yawning, looking aimlessly out of the window and impatiently expecting the end of the journey. He was somehow preoccupied, extremely preoccupied, almost agitated; he was even becoming somewhat strange: at times he would both hear and not hear, look and not look, laugh and not know or understand what he was laughing at. Excuse me, whom have I the honor . . . the pimply gentleman said suddenly, addressing the fair young man with the bundle. Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin, replied the latter with prompt and unhesitating readiness. Prince Myshkin? Lev Nikolaevich? Dont know . . . Cant say Ive ever heard . . . the official responded thoughtfully. I dont mean the name, that is, its a historical name, its to be found in Karamzins History, as it should be; I mean you personally, and indeed there are no Prince Myshkins to be met with anywhere, one never hears of them anymore. I should think not, the prince answered at once, there are no Prince Myshkins now except me; I believe I am the last of them. And as for our fathers and grandfathers, some of them had even been odnodvortsy. My father, by the way, was a sublieutenant in the army, of the Junkers. But I dont in fact know how Generaless Epanchin also wound up being of the Myshkins, also the last in her line . . . He-he-he! The last in her line! He-he! What a phrase you turn, giggled the official. The swarthy man smirked, too. The fair man was rather surprised that he had managed to make a pun, and a pretty bad one at that. Imagine, I said it

without thinking, he explained at last, wondering. To be sure, to be sure you did, the official assented good-humoredly. So then, Prince, and you've been studying the sciences out there too, with the professor, have you? asked the swarthy man suddenly. Yes . . . I was studying. For my part, I've never studied anything. Well,

I only did a little, you know, added the prince almost apologetically. It wasn't possible to teach me systematically, because of my illness. Do you know the Rogozhins? the swarthy man asked quickly. No, I don't know them at all. I know very few people in Russia. You're a Rogozhin, then? Yes, my name is Rogozhin, Parfyon. Parfyon? That wouldn't be of those same Rogozhins . . . the official began, with increased gravity. Yes, one of those, one of the same, interrupted the swarthy man quickly and with uncivil impatience. And indeed, he hadn't addressed the pimply official even once, but from the very start had spoken only to the prince. But . . . how is that? The official froze with amazement and his eyes nearly popped out of his head, his whole face immediately beginning to assume a reverent and servile, almost frightened, expression.

Related to the same Semyon Parfyonovich Rogozhin, Hereditary Honorable Citizen, what passed on a month since and left two and a half million in capital? And how do you know he left a clear two and a half million? the swarthy man interrupted, not deigning to glance toward the official now, either. Just look! (he indicated him to the prince with a wink), and what do they possibly gain by sucking up to you at once? But it's true that my father has died, and as for me, a month later, I'm going home from Pskov practically barefoot. Neither my brother, that scoundrel, nor my mother have sent either money or word. I was sent nothing! Like a dog! I've spent the entire month lying in a fever in Pskov! . . . And now you are coming in for a tidy million, at the lowest reckoning, oh Lord! the official flung up his hands. What is it to him, tell me that? said Rogozhin, nodding irritably and angrily toward him again. Why, I am not going to give you a farthing of it, though you may walk on your hands before me, if you like. I will, I will. You see! But I won't give you anything, I won't, if you dance for a whole week. Well, don't! And I don't need it. Don't! But I shall dance. I shall leave my wife and children and dance before you. Only to flatter! To flatter! Fie on you! spat the swarthy man. Five weeks ago, like you he addressed the prince with nothing but a bundle, I ran away from my father to Pskov, to my aunt; and there collapsed with fever, while he went and died without me. Kicked the bucket. Eternal memory to the deceased, but he almost killed me then! Would you believe it, Prince, yes, by God! Had I not run away then, he would have killed me on the spot. Did you do something to make him angry? countered the prince, examining the millionaire in the sheepskin with some particular interest. But though there may have been something intrinsically remarkable in the million and in receiving a legacy, the prince was surprised and interested by something else as well; and Rogozhin himself was for some reason especially keen to converse with the prince, though it seemed he was in need of conversation in a more mechanical than spiritual sense; rather more from preoccupation than frankness; from agitation and disquiet, for the sake of just looking at someone and prattling on about something. It seemed that he was still in a feverish state, and at the very least suffering from the chills. As for the official, well, he simply hovered over Rogozhin, didn't dare to breathe, hung on every word and weighed it, precisely as if looking for a diamond. Angry he certainly was, and perhaps with reason, answered Rogozhin, but more than anything, my brother did me in. Nothing can be said against my mother, she's an old woman, reads the Lives of the Saints, sits with the crones, and whatever brother Senjka⁹ resolves, so it shall be done. And why didn't he send word to me at the time, then? It's clear, sir! It's true I was unconscious at the time. They say a telegram was sent, too. But you just see if a telegram can get to my aunt. She's widowed going on thirty years now and keeps sitting with the holy fools from morning till night. A nun she isn't, but even worse. Well, the telegram gave her a fright, and without opening it, she went and presented it at the constables station, where it still lies to this day. Only Konyov, Vassily Vassilielich, came to my rescue, wrote me all about it. At night my brother cut off the solid gold tassels from the brocaded pall on my father's coffin. Think what a lot of money they are worth, he apparently said. Well, for that alone he can go to Siberia, if I like, for this is sacrilege. Hey there, you clown, he turned to the official, what's the law say: is it sacrilege? Sacrilege! Sacrilege! the official at once concurred. Do they send you to Siberia for it? To Siberia, to Siberia. At once to Siberia! *Revue de presse* Nothing is outside Dostoevsky's province. . . . Out of Shakespeare there is no more exciting reading. Virginia Woolf