

Crime and Punishment Summary

Writer: Fyodor Dostoevsky | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Background

Fyodor Dostoevsky began writing *Crime and Punishment* in 1865, and in 1866 it was first published serially in Russia's famous literary magazine *The Russian Messenger*. Later, it was released in book form. Behind this novel lay Dostoevsky's personal sufferings, debts, gambling addiction, and inner conflicts. His four years of imprisonment and hard labor in Siberia, and the lives of the criminals he encountered there, left a deep mark on his thinking. Those experiences were transformed into art in this novel.

The protagonist Raskolnikov represents Dostoevsky's philosophical exploration. Raskolnikov believes that "extraordinary men" may break common moral laws if their actions serve the greater good of society. Within this idea lies a reflection of Russia's political nihilism, social inequality, and struggles of religious faith in Dostoevsky's time. St. Petersburg is chosen as the main setting of the novel. Its dark alleys, overcrowding, poverty, and criminal atmosphere intensify Raskolnikov's mental crisis and guilt. The novel is not just a murder story but also the story of man's inner moral struggle and the test of faith in God.

The novel is divided into six parts and an epilogue. In each part, we see Raskolnikov gradually breaking down after committing the crime, becoming alienated from society, and finally confessing and accepting punishment. Here, "crime" is not only the murder itself but also man's moral transgression, and "punishment" is not only the prison sentence but also the torment of conscience and the path to spiritual redemption through suffering.

From the time of its publication, *Crime and Punishment* created a great stir in Russian and world literature. For the first time, it offered readers a profound psychological novel, analyzing the human inner world, guilt, morality, and redemption. Even today, this novel is not merely a crime story but a philosophical exploration of human life, the harsh realities of society, and the possibilities of salvation.

Plot Summary

Beginning and Theory: Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov is the central character of the novel *Crime and Punishment*. He is a young man, educated, intelligent, and handsome. Once he

studied law but had to abandon his studies because of poverty. He has no job and suffers from despair and hardship. Raskolnikov lives in the city of St. Petersburg. The crowded streets, gloomy alleys, and poverty make him even more depressed. He lives alone in the attic of an old building. The room is small, dark, and suffocating. That room symbolizes his loneliness and separation from society. He is always lost in thought.

Inside him arises a strange philosophy. He thinks all people are divided into two groups. One group is ordinary people. The other group is extraordinary people. Ordinary people follow rules. They are always afraid and remain within the boundaries set by society. They leave no mark in history. On the other hand, extraordinary people act differently. They can break rules. They may even commit crimes if necessary. Their actions serve higher purposes. If crime benefits society, then it is acceptable. Raskolnikov thinks such people change history, like Napoleon.

Raskolnikov believes he is also such a person. He believes he has the right to break the rules, even to commit murder, because it could benefit humanity. This thought confuses him. His pride and despair together create a strange conflict. He refuses to see himself as an ordinary man. He thinks his knowledge, his strength, and his courage set him apart. This illusion gradually pushes him toward crime. From here, the main story of the novel begins.

Alyona and the Murder: Alyona Ivanovna was an old pawnbroker. She lent small amounts of money in exchange for people's belongings. But her interest rate was very high. Poor people were forced to borrow from her, and if they failed to repay, they lost everything. That is why people hated her. Lizaveta Ivanovna was Alyona's half-sister. She was tall, timid, and hardworking. She gave her earnings to her sister, who often beat and humiliated her. Lizaveta was utterly helpless.

Raskolnikov once pawned a watch with Alyona and borrowed money. From that day, the seed of murder grew in his mind. He thought Alyona was harmful to society. Her death would bring freedom to many poor people. He believed that if he killed Alyona, his theory would be proven true. One day, he overheard that Lizaveta would be out the next evening at seven. That meant Alyona would be alone. Hearing this, Raskolnikov became excited. He thought this was his chance.

The next evening, he carefully entered Alyona's flat. Standing at the door, he took out an axe. Before Alyona could understand anything, he struck her down and killed her. After the murder, while searching the room, Lizaveta suddenly entered. She witnessed everything. Lizaveta was terrified. Raskolnikov panicked. Lizaveta was not part of his plan, but to keep his secret, he killed her too. After this double murder, Raskolnikov left the flat trembling. His mind filled with fear, confusion, and guilt. From here begins his mental torment.

The Marmeladov Family and Sofya: One day, Raskolnikov meets Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov in a tavern. Marmeladov is a former government clerk, but he is completely broken. Now he is addicted to alcohol. He wastes all his money and leaves his family starving. He pours out his sorrow to Raskolnikov, telling him how his wife, children, and stepdaughter are suffering. One day, while crossing the street, Marmeladov meets with an accident. Raskolnikov helps him and takes him home. There, he meets Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova, Marmeladov's wife. She is sick, weak, and crushed by poverty, yet she tries to maintain her dignity. But under the weight of her husband's addiction and their dire poverty, she is helpless.

It is there that Raskolnikov becomes acquainted with Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov. Sofya is Marmeladov's daughter. Out of desperation, she has turned to prostitution. She has sacrificed her own life to provide food for her younger siblings. Though her life is full of hardship, her heart is filled with faith, compassion, and devotion to God. Sofya's character is unique compared to others. Even in poverty, she does not break down. Within her lies self-sacrifice, patience, and pure love. At first, Raskolnikov only pities her, but gradually he begins to see in her a light of redemption.

After some time, Marmeladov dies in another accident. His family is left devastated. At this moment, Sofya grows even stronger. She stands up for her family. Through Sofya's faith and compassion, Raskolnikov begins to find a new direction in his life. Later, Sofya becomes the greatest inspiration for Raskolnikov's confession and redemption. For him, she becomes the symbol of mercy, forgiveness, and love.

The Investigation, Porfiry, and Guilt: After killing Alyona and Lizaveta, Raskolnikov falls under terrible mental pressure. He had thought his plan was perfect, but after the murders, his body and mind began to collapse. He develops a fever, suffers from frequent hallucinations, and faints without reason. His behavior becomes strange. At first, the police suspect several other people. But soon, the responsibility of the investigation is given to Porfiry Petrovich. He is a very intelligent investigator. Instead of relying on direct evidence, he tries to discover the truth by analyzing the psychology of suspects. He knows Raskolnikov is brilliant, so he cleverly begins conversations with him.

Porfiry, Raskolnikov, and Guilt: Porfiry continues to question Raskolnikov about his own theory. He asks whether extraordinary people truly have the right to commit crimes. These questions make Raskolnikov uneasy. His answers reveal hesitation and anger, which deepen Porfiry's suspicion. At this time, Raskolnikov finds some comfort with his friend Dmitri Prokofych Razumikhin. Razumikhin is honest, lively, and kind. Seeing Raskolnikov's illness and confusion, he tries to console him. He also reassures Raskolnikov's family.

Meanwhile, Raskolnikov's mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna, and his sister, Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikova (Dunya), come to St. Petersburg. They are frightened by his condition. His restless behavior terrifies them. His mother thinks her son may be going insane. Dunya also feels a strange change in him. Raskolnikov begins to realize that peace has not come after the murder. Instead, guilt is eating away at him. Porfiry's clever interrogations and his own inner torment break him down further. From here begins his deep journey of self-conflict and remorse.

Svidrigailov and Luzhin: Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikova (Dunya) is an important character in the story. Two men appear in her life: Arkady Ivanovich Svidrigailov and Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin. Svidrigailov was Dunya's former employer. Although wealthy, he is corrupt. He is indulgent and immoral, and he once tried to seduce Dunya, which forced her to leave her job. Later, Svidrigailov comes to St. Petersburg. He learns the secret of Raskolnikov's crime. He tries to use this knowledge for his own advantage and pressures Dunya. He threatens that if she rejects him, he will reveal everything to the police. Though frightened, Dunya firmly refuses him. Svidrigailov realizes there is no salvation for him. Emptiness and despair consume him, and in the end, he commits suicide.

On the other hand, Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin is a selfish lawyer. He wants to marry Dunya, but not out of love. He seeks control over her. He believes that by marrying a girl from a poor family, she will always remain grateful and submissive to him. Dunya and Raskolnikov soon realize Luzhin's true nature. Later, Luzhin tries to disgrace Sofya. He attempts to falsely accuse her to ruin her reputation and thereby break Raskolnikov's family. But the truth comes out. Razumikhin and others expose Luzhin's hypocrisy. He is humiliated and fails in his schemes. These two characters symbolize selfishness, indulgence, and immorality in the novel. In contrast, Dunya's determination, Sofya's honesty, and Raskolnikov's inner torment shine even more brightly.

Confession and Punishment: From the moment of the murders, Raskolnikov was tormented by guilt. He felt that he would find peace only if he confessed the truth. But fear held him back. A constant battle raged inside him, on one side his pride, on the other his guilt. At last, he went to Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov and revealed everything. Sofya listened to his story. Though devastated, she gave him love and compassion. She told him that only by confessing the truth could he find redemption. Inspired by her faith and encouragement, Raskolnikov gathered courage.

One day, he went to the police. Porfiry Petrovich still suspected him. Raskolnikov stood before him and confessed. He admitted that he had murdered Alyona Ivanovna and Lizaveta

Ivanovna. The court accepted his confession. He was sentenced to eight years of hard labor in Siberia. Even in prison, Raskolnikov struggled inwardly. His mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna, died from grief. His sister, Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikova (Dunya), married Dmitri Prokofych Razumikhin and began a new life. Sofya did not abandon him. She traveled to that harsh Siberian land from time to time to visit him. She gave him hope and love. Gradually, Raskolnikov realized that it was his pride that had misled him. He understood that he was wrong to commit the crime.

In the end, true remorse was born within him. Sofya's love changed him. Even inside prison, he learned to live anew. Through punishment, he moved toward spiritual redemption. At the very end of the novel, Raskolnikov falls ill. During this time, Sofya nurses him with love. Then, for the first time, Raskolnikov truly feels that Sofya is the real light of his life. That love leads him on the path to spiritual freedom. Dostoevsky suggests at the conclusion that although Raskolnikov's legal punishment has ended, his spiritual rebirth has only just begun. The novel ends with a note of hope, showing that true freedom comes from repentance, love, and faith.