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## Excerpts from *The Letters of Dostoyevsky to His Wife*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Selected by Sanju George

In 1867, just two months after their marriage, Dostoyevsky and his wife Anna Grigorievna fled to Dresden, to escape his gambling debts. From there he went alone to Homburg to play roulette. The excerpts below are from his letters to Anna written from Homburg.

*Sunday 19 May. 10 a.m.*

‘Yesterday was a very horrid day for me. I lost far too heavily (judging relatively). What am I to do my angel? Gambling is not intended for a man with nerves like mine. I played for about ten hours, and ended by losing. I lost during the day and won again. [...] as soon as I begin to win, then immediately I take risks. I cannot control myself [...].’

*Monday 20 May. 10 a.m.*

‘The main thing about it all is, that it is so senseless, stupid and vulgar and yet I cannot tear myself away from my idea, i.e. I cannot leave

absolutely everything and return to you. [...] Can you believe me? I lost everything yesterday, everything to the last kopeck, to the last gulden, and in the end I decided to write to you at once to ask you to send me some money for my journey home. But I remembered *my watch* and I went to the watchmaker either to sell or to pawn it; it is a terribly common practice here, i.e. in a gambling town.’

*24 May. 10 a.m.*

‘Anya my dear, my friend, my wife, forgive me [...]. Can you, will you respect me now? And what is love without respect? Our very marriage is shaken by this. Oh! My friend, don’t condemn me completely! I loathe gambling, not only now, at this moment, but yesterday, and the day before yesterday I cursed it [...]. Our circumstances are bad enough as it is, and yet I have wasted money on this journey to Homburg and lost more than 1000 francs – nearly 350 roubles. It is a crime!’

IN OTHER  
WORDS

**Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky** (1821–1881), widely regarded as one of the best 19th-century Russian writers, is perhaps less known for his gambling addiction. Dostoyevsky battled this addiction, or ‘cursed monomania’ as he called it, for several years. He eventually recovered, but not before it had strained his marriage, finances and psychological health. The excerpts here are from *The Letters of Dostoyevsky to His Wife* (translated from Russian by Elizabeth Hill & Doris Mudie), Constable & Co, 1930.

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