Michael Strogoff: The Courier of the Czar

Jules Verne · *1876 · Kingston translation (1877)*

The Tartars have invaded Siberia and cut the telegraph, and the Czar sends a courier, Michael Strogoff, to warn his brother in Irkutsk of a traitor. Michael travels in secret across thousands of miles, meets his mother by chance and cannot own her, is blinded by an Emir's hot blade, and goes on with a girl, Nadia, to lead him. The traitor Ogareff is waiting for him in Irkutsk.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a person owe to duty, to a parent and to a friend when all three are in conflict?

Verne's answer is duty held with great courage, and love that saves it. Michael denies his mother to protect his secret, and she denies him in turn. His tears for her turn the hot blade aside, so that he is not blind after all. Nadia's love, and his love for his mother, are the strength under the duty. Verne draws the Tartars in broad strokes, and teachers should note it.

KEY CHARACTERS

Michael Strogoff
A courier of the Czar, strong and steadfast.

Nadia Fedor
A brave young woman traveling to her father.

Marfa Strogoff
Michael's old mother.

Ivan Ogareff
A Russian traitor in the Tartar camp.

Feofar-Khan
The Tartar khan.

Harry Blount
An English correspondent.

Alcide Jolivet
A French correspondent.

The Czar
The sovereign who sends Michael.

The Grand Duke
The Czar's brother, who holds Irkutsk.

Grades 7–12

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01

The Czar's Order

BOOK I, CHAPTERS I–IV

The Tartars have cut the telegraph. At a ball in Moscow the Czar chooses Michael Strogoff to carry a letter to the Grand Duke at Irkutsk and warns him of the traitor Ivan Ogareff.

- A dispatch arrives at the Czar's ball.
- The Czar sees Michael and swears him to secrecy.
- Michael takes the name of Nicholas Korpanoff.
- He leaves by train from Moscow.

02

Nadia and the Journalists

BOOK I, CHAPTERS V–XIII

Michael meets Nadia Fedor, who is going to her exiled father, and the rival journalists Blount and Jolivet. A stranger strikes him at a post-house, and he bears it in silence. The Tartars attack their ferry.

- Michael meets Nadia, and she calls him brother.
- Blount and Jolivet are rival journalists.
- A stranger strikes Michael at Ekaterenburg.
- Michael bears it for his mission.
- The Tartars attack the ferry, and the two are parted.

03

The Meeting at Omsk

BOOK I, CHAPTERS XIV–XVII

Michael meets his mother Marfa at Omsk and denies her to protect his secret. She denies him in turn. Michael is later captured and taken before the Emir at Tomsk.

- Marfa Strogoff finds her son at the post-house.
- He denies her before spies.
- She denies him in turn to Ogareff.
- Michael crosses the marshes of the Baraba.
- He is captured.

04

Look While You May

BOOK II, CHAPTERS I–VI

Ogareff has Michael blinded with a red-hot blade before the Emir. Nadia frees him, and the two journey on, with Nadia as his guide.

- The Emir's court meets at Tomsk.
- Michael is led before Feofar-Khan.
- The blade is passed before his eyes.
- Nadia frees him.
- She promises to be his eyes.

05

The Road to Irkutsk

BOOK II, CHAPTERS VII–XI

The pair cross the Yenisei and the steppe, and meet the dangers of Lake Baikal and the Angara, with the Tartars close behind.

- They cross the Yenisei.
- They go on across the steppe.
- They reach Lake Baikal.
- They float down the Angara.
- A fire lights the river as they near Irkutsk.

06

The Night of the Fifth of October

BOOK II, CHAPTERS XII–XV

In Irkutsk Ogareff has used the stolen letter to pass as the courier and plans to open the gates. Michael exposes and strikes him down, and the attack fails. Nadia finds her father.

- Ogareff poses as the Czar's courier.
- The plan is to open the gates on a night of fire.
- Michael enters the palace and challenges him.
- Ogareff is struck down.
- Nadia is reunited with her father.

Duty | A mother's love | The journey | Loyalty and treason | Blindness and sight

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 7–12

1. The Czar's charge to Michael.
2. What Michael does when he is struck at the post-house.
3. The scene at Omsk between mother and son.
4. How Michael's tears save his sight.

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