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The Captain's Daughter

Alexander Pushkin · *1836* · *T. Keane*

Young Grineff is sent to a remote fortress, falls in love with the captain's daughter, and is swept into Pugachev's revolt. A chance kindness in a snowstorm returns as a pardon in a time of hanging. This is T. Keane's English; the rebel's name is spelled Pougatcheff.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does honor look like in a 'senseless and merciless revolt,' and can a personal kindness weigh more than a political name?

"Heaven grant that we may never see such, a senseless and merciless revolt again!"

Near the close, after the fire and the revolt's end

Grineff's father sends him to serve, not to be a fop. At Belogorsk he loves Masha, honors the old captain, and, having once given a hare-skin coat to a stranger in a storm, meets that stranger again as Pougatcheff, the false Peter III. He will not serve the rebel, and he will not abandon the girl. Keane's wording is plain and a little old-fashioned; the comma in 'such, a senseless' is in this text and must be kept. The tale is short, clear, and morally serious about loyalty, mercy, and a revolt Pushkin will not romanticize.

KEY CHARACTERS

Pyotr Grineff
The young narrator, honorable, sometimes rash, faithful to love and to his oath.

Maria Ivanovna (Masha)
The captain's daughter, whose courage outlasts the fortress.

Emelian Pougatcheff
The Cossack pretender; Keane's spelling. Terrible, and, to Grineff, strangely mindful of a gift.

Savelitch
The old servant, scolding and loyal unto risk.

Shvabrin
The jealous officer who turns with the revolt.

A MERCILESS REVOLT

> *"Heaven grant that we may never see such, a senseless and merciless revolt again!"*
>
> Near the close

Grades 7–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Sergeant of the Guards

EARLY CHAPTERS

Grineff leaves home, loses money to a tutor, and is posted not to Petersburg but to a small fortress. Savelitch, the faithful servant, goes with him.

- The family honor is a father's first lesson.
- The road already contains the stranger who will return.
- The fortress is a village with a palisade, not a glamour.

02

The Captain's House

THE FORTRESS BEFORE THE STORM

Ivan Kouzmitch, his wife, and Maria Ivanovna make a household. Grineff duels with Shvabrin, a jealous officer, and asks to marry Masha.

- Shvabrin's slander is the first private treason.
- The father's refusal of the match is pride, not only prudence.
- Masha's courage is quiet and already real.

03

Pougatcheff

THE TAKING OF THE FORTRESS

The revolt arrives. The captain is hanged. Grineff will not swear to the pretender, and is spared—because of an old coat given in the snow.

- The kindness and the terror belong to the same man.
- Refusal to take the oath is the tale's central honor.
- Savelitch's loyalty is comic and costly.

> *"Heaven grant that we may never see such, a senseless and merciless revolt again!"*
>
> After the revolt is broken

04

Masha in the Hands of a Traitor

THE MIDDLE ORDEAL

Shvabrin holds the fortress for the rebels and holds Masha. Grineff returns, with a pass from Pougatcheff, to take her out.

- The pretender's unpredictable mercy is not the same as justice.
- Grineff risks being thought a traitor in order to be faithful.
- Masha will not buy safety with a false marriage.

05

An Empress, and a Name Cleared

THE CLOSE

Grineff is arrested as if he had served the revolt. Masha goes to the Empress. The truth, and a last mercy, restore him.

- The political charge is almost the last injustice.
- Masha's petition is the courage that completes his.
- The famous warning about the revolt is Keane's exact sentence, comma included.

Honor | Mercy | A Cruel Revolt | Fidelity | A Gift Returned

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 7–12

1. The site's hosted EPUB is this tale only, in T. Keane's English. Project Gutenberg #55219 is The Prose Tales of Alexander Pushkin, a collection that also includes Doubrovsky, The Queen of Spades, and other stories. Quote only The Captain's Daughter, and verify against the hosted EPUB.
2. The rebel's name in this text is Pougatcheff (not Pugachev). The famous sentence is exact, including the comma: "Heaven grant that we may never see such, a senseless and merciless revolt again!"
3. The tale includes a hanging, a revolt, and an arrest. It is short enough for a class and serious enough not to be treated as a mere adventure.
4. Do not quote the other Pushkin tales from the Gutenberg file as if they were this work.

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