

第三章 米歇尔·施托戈夫与沙皇见面

Chapter 3 Michael Strogoff Meets The Czar



等了一会儿，基索夫将军向沙皇报告，信使找到了。他来自西伯利亚的鄂木斯克，今年三十岁，能忍受疲劳、饥饿、严寒等痛苦，是沙皇信使团的一名上尉军官，名叫米歇尔·施托戈夫。

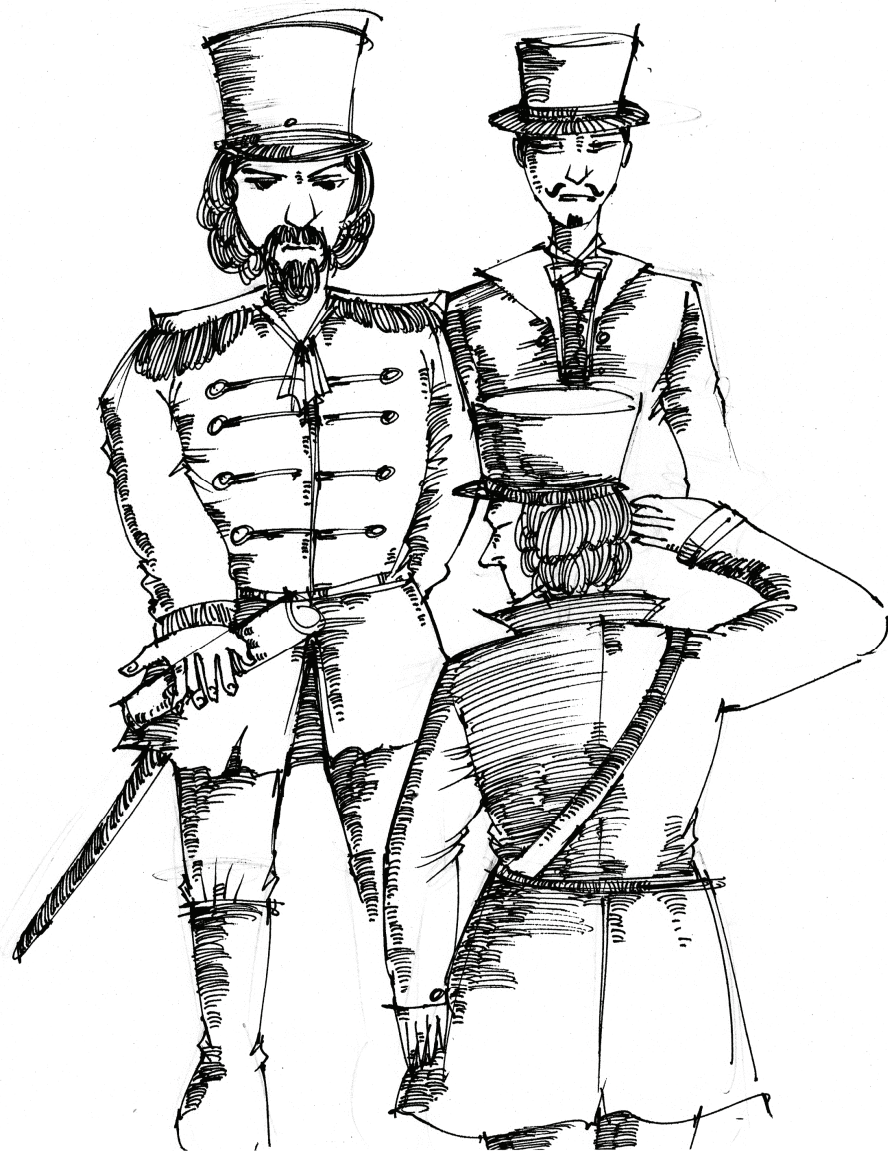
沙皇让人叫他进来。一会儿，进来一位高大、健壮，穿着一身军装的军人，他的目光坚定有神，具有一种冷静与勇敢的气质，胸前挂着几枚勋章。

他的父亲已在十年前去世，母亲还住在鄂木斯克市，他从小跟父亲打猎，练就了坚强、勇敢的性格。很多猎人死在捕杀第四十头熊时可能会死于熊掌之下，可他捕杀的熊已经超过了四十头。

他二十岁时服兵役加入沙皇信使团，在一次执行任务中立了功，以后地位迅速上升。他的假期从来就是和母亲待在一起。再过几天他就要休假了，现在被带到了沙皇面前。

沙皇走向办公室，向警察局长口述了一封信，之后沙皇在信上签上了他的神圣用语“但愿如此”，并将皇家徽章印在封口上。

沙皇告诉米歇尔·施托戈夫，现在需要他穿过鞑靼人侵略的地区到伊尔库茨克，把信亲自送到大公本人手中；并要求途中不能去看望母亲，以免暴露身份。



米歇尔前来报到

米歇尔·施托戈夫发誓，不管什么情况下都不暴露自己的身份和使命，然后向沙皇敬了个军礼，离开了新宫。

THE door of the imperial cabinet was again opened and General Kissoff was announced.

“The courier?” inquired the Czar eagerly.

“He is here, sire,” replied General Kissoff.

“Have you found a fitting man?”

“I will answer for him to your majesty.”

“Has he been in the service of the Palace?”

“Yes, sire.”

“You know him?”

“Personally, and at various times he has fulfilled difficult missions with success.”

“Abroad?”

“In Siberia itself.”

“Where does he come from?”

“From Omsk. He is a Siberian.”

“Has he coolness, intelligence, courage?”

“Yes, sire; he has all the qualities necessary to succeed, even where others might possibly fail.”

“What is his age?”

“Thirty.”

“Is he strong and vigorous?”

“Sire, he can bear cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue, to the very last extremities.”

“He must have a frame of iron.”

“Sire, he has.”

“And a heart?”

“A heart of gold.”

“His name?”



“Michael Strogoff.”

“Is he ready to set out?”

“He awaits your majesty’s orders in the guard-room.”

“Let him come in,” said the Czar.

In a few moments Michael Strogoff, the courier, entered the imperial library. He was a tall, vigorous, broad-shouldered, deep-chested man. His powerful head possessed the fine features of the Caucasian race. His well-knit frame seemed built for the performance of feats of strength. It would have been a difficult task to move such a man against his will, for when his feet were once planted on the ground, it was as if they had taken root. As he doffed his Muscovite cap, locks of thick curly hair fell over his broad, massive forehead. When his ordinarily pale face became at all flushed, it arose solely from a more rapid action of the heart. His eyes, of a deep blue, looked with clear, frank, firm gaze. The slightly-contracted eyebrows indicated lofty heroism—“the hero’s cool courage,” according to the definition of the physiologist. He possessed a fine nose, with large nostrils; and a well-shaped mouth, with the slightly-projecting lips which denote a generous and noble heart.

Michael Strogoff had the temperament of the man of action, who does not bite his nails or scratch his head in doubt and indecision. Sparing of gestures as of words, he always stood motionless like a soldier before his superior; but when he moved, his step showed a firmness, a freedom of movement, which proved the confidence and vivacity of his mind.

Michael Strogoff wore a handsome military uniform something resembling that of a light-cavalry officer in the field—boots, spurs, half tightly-fitting trousers, brown pelisse, trimmed with fur and ornamented with yellow braid. On his breast glittered a cross and several medals.

Michael Strogoff belonged to the special corps of the Czar’s couriers, ranking as an officer among those picked men. His most discernible characteristic—particularly in his walk, his face, in the whole man, and which the Czar perceived at a glance—was, that he was “a fulfiller of orders.” He therefore possessed one of the most serviceable qualities in Russia—one which,



as the celebrated novelist Tourgueneff says, “will lead to the highest positions in the Muscovite empire.”

In short, if anyone could accomplish this journey from Moscow to Irkutsk, across a rebellious country, surmount obstacles, and brave perils of all sorts, Michael Strogoff was the man.

A circumstance especially favorable to the success of his plan was, that he was thoroughly acquainted with the country which he was about to traverse, and understood its different dialects—not only from having traveled there before, but because he was of Siberian origin.

His father—old Peter Strogoff, dead ten years since—inhabited the town of Omsk, situated in the government of the same name; and his mother, Marfa Strogoff, lived there still. There, amid the wild steppes of the provinces of Omsk and Tobolsk, had the famous huntsman brought up his son Michael to endure hardship. Peter Strogoff was a huntsman by profession. Summer and winter—in the burning heat, as well as when the cold was sometimes fifty degrees below zero—he scoured the frozen plains, the thickets of birch and larch, the pine forests; setting traps; watching for small game with his gun, and for large game with the spear or knife. The large game was nothing less than the Siberian bear, a formidable and ferocious animal, in size equaling its fellow of the frozen seas. Peter Strogoff had killed more than thirty-nine bears—that is to say, the fortieth had fallen under his blows; and, according to Russian legends, most huntsmen who have been lucky enough up to the thirty-ninth bear, have succumbed to the fortieth.

Peter Strogoff had, however, passed the fatal number without even a scratch. From that time, his son Michael, aged eleven years, never failed to accompany him to the hunt, carrying the ragatina or spear to aid his father, who was armed only with the knife. When he was fourteen, Michael Strogoff had killed his first bear, quite alone—that was nothing; but after stripping it he dragged the gigantic animal’s skin to his father’s house, many versts distant, exhibiting remarkable strength in a boy so young.

This style of life was of great benefit to him, and when he arrived at



manhood he could bear any amount of cold, heat, hunger, thirst, or fatigue. Like the Yakout of the northern countries, he was made of iron. He could go four-and-twenty hours without eating, ten nights without sleeping, and could make himself a shelter in the open steppe where others would have been frozen to death. Gifted with marvelous acuteness, guided by the instinct of the Delaware of North America, over the white plain, when every object is hidden in mist, or even in higher latitudes, where the polar night is prolonged for many days, he could find his way when others would have had no idea whither to turn. All his father's secrets were known to him. He had learnt to read almost imperceptible signs—the forms of icicles, the appearance of the small branches of trees, mists rising far away in the horizon, vague sounds in the air, distant reports, the flight of birds through the foggy atmosphere, a thousand circumstances which are so many words to those who can decipher them. Moreover, tempered by snow like a Damascus blade in the waters of Syria, he had a frame of iron, as General Kissoff had said, and, what was no less true, a heart of gold.

The only sentiment of love felt by Michael Strogoff was that which he entertained for his mother, the aged Marfa, who could never be induced to leave the house of the Strogoffs, at Omsk, on the banks of the Irtysh, where the old huntsman and she had lived so long together. When her son left her, he went away with a full heart, but promising to come and see her whenever he could possibly do so; and this promise he had always religiously kept.

When Michael was twenty, it was decided that he should enter the personal service of the Emperor of Russia, in the corps of the couriers of the Czar. The hardy, intelligent, zealous, well-conducted young Siberian first distinguished himself especially, in a journey to the Caucasus, through the midst of a difficult country, ravaged by some restless successors of Schamyl; then later, in an important mission to Petropolowski, in Kamtschatka, the extreme limit of Asiatic Russia. During these long journeys he displayed such marvelous coolness, prudence, and courage, as to gain him the approbation and protection of his chiefs, who rapidly advanced him in his profession.

The furloughs which were his due after these distant missions, he never failed to devote to his old mother. Having been much employed in the south of the empire, he had not seen old Marfa for three years—three ages!—the first time in his life he had been so long absent from her. Now, however, in a few days he would obtain his furlough, and he had accordingly already made preparations for departure for Omsk, when the events which have been related occurred. Michael Strogoff was therefore introduced into the Czar's presence in complete ignorance of what the emperor expected from him.

The Czar fixed a penetrating look upon him without uttering a word, whilst Michael stood perfectly motionless.

The Czar, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, motioned to the chief of police to seat himself, and dictated in a low voice a letter of not more than a few lines.

The letter penned, the Czar re-read it attentively, then signed it, preceding his name with the words "Byt po semou," which, signifying "So be it," constitutes the decisive formula of the Russian emperors.

The letter was then placed in an envelope, which was sealed with the imperial arms.

The Czar, rising, told Michael Strogoff to draw near.

Michael advanced a few steps, and then stood motionless, ready to answer.

The Czar again looked him full in the face and their eyes met. Then in an abrupt tone, "Thy name?" he asked.

"Michael Strogoff, sire."

"Thy rank?"

"Captain in the corps of couriers of the Czar."

"Thou dost know Siberia?"

"I am a Siberian."

"A native of?"

"Omsk, sire."

"Hast thou relations there?"

"Yes sire."



“What relations?”

“My old mother.”

The Czar suspended his questions for a moment. Then, pointing to the letter which he held in his hand, “Here is a letter which I charge thee, Michael Strogoff, to deliver into the hands of the Grand Duke, and to no other but him.”

“I will deliver it, sire.”

“The Grand Duke is at Irkutsk.”

“I will go to Irkutsk.”

“Thou wilt have to traverse a rebellious country, invaded by Tartars, whose interest it will be to intercept this letter.”

“I will traverse it.”

“Above all, beware of the traitor, Ivan Ogareff, who will perhaps meet thee on the way.”

“I will beware of him.”

“Wilt thou pass through Omsk?”

“Sire, that is my route.”

“If thou dost see thy mother, there will be the risk of being recognized. Thou must not see her!”

Michael Strogoff hesitated a moment.

“I will not see her,” said he.

“Swear to me that nothing will make thee acknowledge who thou art, nor whither thou art going.”

“I swear it.”

“Michael Strogoff,” continued the Czar, giving the letter to the young courier, “take this letter; on it depends the safety of all Siberia, and perhaps the life of my brother the Grand Duke.”

“This letter shall be delivered to his Highness the Grand Duke.”

“Then thou wilt pass whatever happens?”

“I shall pass, or they shall kill me.”

“I want thee to live.”

“I shall live, and I shall pass,” answered Michael Strogoff.

The Czar appeared satisfied with Strogoff's calm and simple answer.

"Go then, Michael Strogoff," said he, "go for God, for Russia, for my brother, and for myself!"

The courier, having saluted his sovereign, immediately left the imperial cabinet, and, in a few minutes, the New Palace.

"You made a good choice there, General," said the Czar.

"I think so, sire," replied General Kissoff; "and your majesty may be sure that Michael Strogoff will do all that a man can do."

"He is indeed a man," said the Czar.