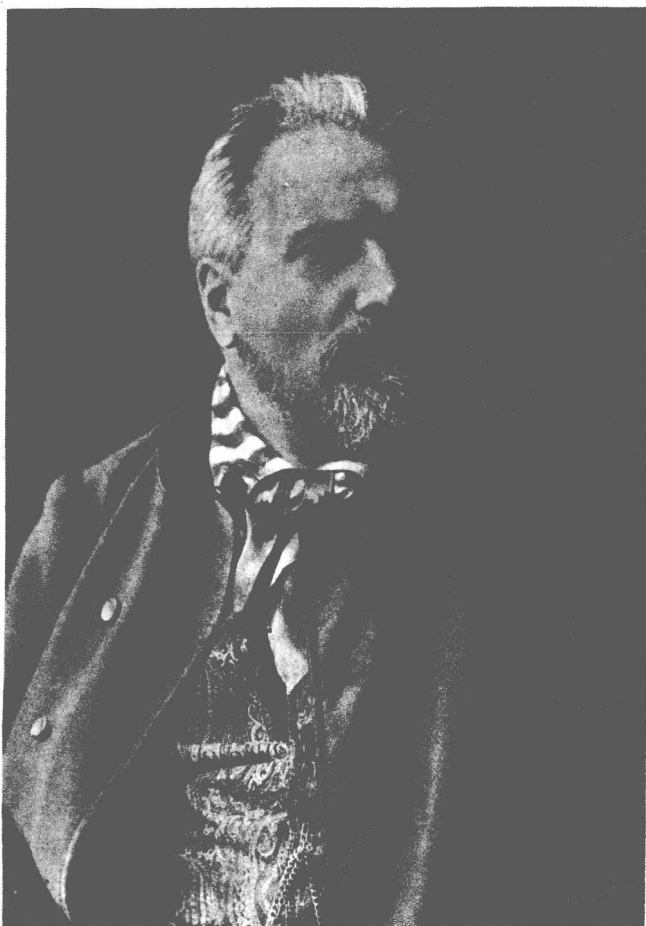


NIKOLAI LESKOV





CLASSICS
OF
RUSSIAN
LITERATURE



Викторъ Асканъ

**НИКОЛАЙ
ЛЕСКОВ**

**ОЧАРОВАННЫЙ
СТРАННИК
И
ДРУГИЕ
РАССКАЗЫ**

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

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**NIKOLAI
LESKOV**

**THE ENCHANTED
WANDERER**

**AND
OTHER
STORIES**

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
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The first song is sung with a timid blush.

Old Saw

LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK

(A SKETCH)



CHAPTER THE FIRST

IN OUR PART of the world one sometimes comes across people of such character that one cannot recall them without a shudder even when many years have elapsed since the last encounter. To this type belonged Katerina Lvovna Izmailova, a merchant's wife, who at one time treated us to such a terrible drama that some wit dubbed her *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and it was by that name that she was afterwards known amongst the local gentry.

Katerina Lvovna was not inherently beautiful although she was a woman of very pleasing appearance. At the time our story begins she was in her twenty-fourth year; although not tall, she was graceful, her neck was like white marble, her shoulders well-rounded, her bosom firm, her nose fine and straight, her eyes black and vivacious, her white forehead high and her hair of that dense blackness that seems almost blue. She was given in marriage to our merchant Izmailov of Tuskar, in Kursk Gubernia, not for love or even infatuation but because he asked for her hand and she, a girl of poor family, could not afford to pick and choose. The house of Izmailov was not the least in our town; they dealt in flour, rented a big mill in the district, owned a big orchard just outside the town and kept a good town establishment. In general they were merchants of affluence. Their family, moreover, was quite small: the father-in-law, Boris Timofeyich Izmailov, already close on eighty and long a widower, his son Zinovy Borisich, Katerina Lvovna's husband, a man well over fifty, and, lastly, Katerina Lvovna herself. Although she had been married to Zinovy Borisich nearly five years there were no children. Nor had Zinovy Borisich any children from his first wife with whom he had lived twenty years before her death and

his marriage to Katerina Lvovna. He thought and hoped that in his second marriage God would grant him an heir to his merchant's name and capital; but he had no better luck with his second wife than with his first.

This childless state was a source of great grief to Zinovy Borisich, and not to him alone, but to old Boris Timofeyich as well; even Katerina Lvovna sorrowed over it. The boredom of the merchant's cloister-like house with its high wall and savage dogs running loose in the yard was at times so oppressive that the young woman was a prey to a melancholy that dulled her brain; how glad she would have been—God knows how glad she would have been—to have a babe to fondle; she was, moreover, tired to death of the reproaches—"Why did you marry, what did you want to marry for, what did you want to foist yourself on a man for, if you're barren"—just as though she had committed some crime against her husband, against her father-in-law and against the whole of their honest merchant tribe.

For all its sufficiency and comfort, Katerina Lvovna's life in her father-in-law's house was of the dreariest. She rarely went out anywhere and even when she went with her husband to visit his fellow merchants there was but little pleasure in it. They were all of them so strict, they would watch to see how she sat down, how she walked and how she got up; and Katerina had such a lively nature and, coming as she did from a poor family, she had been used to simplicity and freedom; she would gladly have run down to the river with her buckets, bathing in her shift under the landing stage, or throw sunflower seed husks at any young fellow who passed her gate; but here everything was different. Her father-in-law and husband were early risers; at six o'clock they would drink tea and then go about their business while she was left to lounge about the rooms

doing nothing. The whole place was clean, the house silent and empty, the lamps burning brightly in front of the icons, but nowhere was there a sound of any living thing or of a human voice.

Katerina Lvovna would wander from one empty room to another, would begin to yawn from boredom and then climb the ladder to their conjugal bedchamber in a high but small attic room. Here she would sit and watch the people weighing hemp or pouring flour at the sheds down below—again she would yawn and be glad of it; she would doze for an hour or two, but would awake again to that Russian ennui, the boredom of a merchant's home, to escape which, it is said, even to hang oneself is a pleasure. Katerina Lvovna was no lover of reading and, anyway, there were no books in the house apart from the *Kiev Lives of the Christian Fathers*.

It was a monotonous life that had been her lot in her father-in-law's house for those five long years of her marriage with an unloving husband; but nobody paid the slightest attention to this boredom of hers, everybody treated it as a matter of course.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

In the sixth spring of Katerina Lvovna's married life the Izmailovs' mill-dam burst and at a time, too, when there was an abundance of work at the mill. The breach was a big one, the lower beams of the dam impounding the mill-pond were torn away and the water escaped at such a rate that it could not be quickly stopped. Zinovy Borisich took people from all over the district and sent them to the mill and he himself spent all his time there; the old man was able to manage their town affairs and for days on end Katerina Lvovna was left all alone in the house. At first she was even

more bored without her husband but then it began to seem better without him; she had more liberty when she was alone. She had never been particularly fond of him and without him, at any rate, there was one person less to order her about.

One day Katerina Lvovna was sitting at the window in her high room, yawning and thinking of nothing in particular until at last she grew ashamed of her yawning. The weather was wonderful: warm, bright and jolly and through the green garden fence she could see perky birds jumping from branch to branch on the trees.

"What's the matter with me, yawning so much?" she asked herself. "I might at least get up and take a walk in the yard and through the garden."

She threw an old brocade coat over her shoulders and went out.

It was light outside and so easy to breathe; roars of merry laughter came from the gallery around the storehouses.

"What are you all so happy about?" Katerina Lvovna asked her father-in-law's warehousemen.

"Oh, Katerina Lvovna, madame, they're weighing a live pig," answered the senior.

"What pig?"

"That pig Aksinya, what had a son, Vasily, and didn't ask us to the christening." The bold answer came promptly; the speaker was a young fellow with a cheeky, handsome face framed in curls as black as pitch and a newly sprouting beard.

At that moment the flushed, fat face of Aksinya the cook peeped out of a flour tub hanging from the scale beam.

"Devils, imps of Satan," cursed the cook, struggling to get hold of the iron beam and climb out of the swinging tub.

"Eight poods she weighs, before dinner. Give her a measure of hay for supper and you won't find weights enough for her," said the handsome young man, and, tipping over the tub, threw the cook on to a heap of sacks lying in the corner.

The woman, swearing drolly, started putting her dress in order.

"See how much I weigh," joked Katerina Lvovna and, catching hold of the rope, jumped on to the scale board.

"Three poods seven pound," answered that same handsome young man, Sergei, throwing weights into the scale pan. "It's a miracle!"

"What's miraculous about it?"

"That you should weigh three poods, Katerina Lvovna. As I see it, a fellow could carry you in his arms all day. He wouldn't get tired, but it would make him feel good!"

"Do you think I'm not human, or what? You'd probably get tired all right," answered Katerina Lvovna, blushing slightly, being unaccustomed to such speeches and feeling a sudden urge to chatter away, to have her fill of jokes and merriment.

"Good Lord, I'd carry you all the way to happy Araby," said Sergei in answer to her comment.

"Your thinking is all wrong, young man," said an elderly peasant who was pouring flour into a bin. "What is it gives you weight? Your body, young man, is nothing on the scale: it is your strength, your strength that counts and not the body!"

"Yes, I was awfully strong when I was a girl," put in Katerina Lvovna again, unable to contain herself. "Not every man, even, could get the better of me."

"Then let me try your grip if it's true, what you say," asked the handsome young man.

This confused Katerina Lvovna but still she held out her hand.

"Oh, let go, the ring hurts!" she cried when Sergei squeezed her hand, and with her free hand she gave him a push in the chest.

The young man let go of the mistress's hand and staggered a couple of paces back from the force of her push.

"Well, there's a woman for you," said the elderly peasant.

"Will you please let me test your strength like this, like we was wrestling," said Sergei, turning to her and tossing his curly head.

"All right, then," answered the now happy Katerina Lvovna and lifted her elbows.

Sergei put his arms round the young mistress and pressed her firm bosom to his red shirt. She only had time to jerk her shoulders before Sergei had lifted her off the floor and seated her gently on an upturned flour measure.

She did not have a chance to make use of her boasted strength. Flushing a deep red, she sat on the measure and adjusted the coat on her shoulders, then went quietly out of the storeroom while Sergei coughed pertly and shouted:

"Come on, you sainted blockheads! Pour it in an' tip the measure. All you scrape off you keep."

He pretended to be paying no heed to what had just happened.

"That damned Sergei is a rare 'un for the skirts," Aksinya the cook was saying as she plodded along behind her mistress. "He gets 'em all ways—he's tall an' handsome an' he has the sort of face they like. Take any woman—why that devil flatters an' flatters her till he gets what he wants. But he doesn't stick to one for long; he's as fickle as they make 'em."