

BOOK



ONE



# KATARINA'S DARK SHADOW

Ukraine 1915-1917

MJ KRAUSE-CHIVERS

# KATARINA'S DARK SHADOW

*Book One*  
*Russian Mennonite Chronicles*

*by*

*MJ Krause-Chivers*

# **Katarina's Dark Shadow**

(Book One: of series: Russian Mennonite Chronicles.)

Copyright © 2021 by Miranda J. Chivers

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by: Sanctified Hearts Publishing

For more information, contact: [MirandaJChivers@gmail.com](mailto:MirandaJChivers@gmail.com)

ISBN - Paperback: 978-1775-1895-5-8

ISBN - Hardcover: 978-1775-1895-6-5



## THE DOG'S BREAKFAST

Katarina kicked at the dusty ruts and glanced over her shoulder at the scullery maid trailing behind her.

"Where're you from, Kiva?"

"Me? I live in Petrovka with my husband." The woman picked up the pace and drew closer.

"Does he work at the factory?"

"Yes."

Kiva's abrupt answers were annoying and Katarina's attempts at pleasant conversation were failing miserably. During the servant's daily interaction with Alyona, she was quick-witted and talkative. But Katarina had never been alone with her before, at least not like this. She wracked her brain for a good topic. The woman was a local. Perhaps she had insight into the recent uprisings.

"Do you know Makhno?"

"I know of him. Everyone does."

"I heard he's a trouble-maker."

"He has ideas to free Ukraine from Russia."

"I see. Are they good ideas?"

Kiva shrugged, "I don't know." The maid's pace slowed as she shifted the picnic basket to her other arm.

Katarina sensed more resistance. She changed subjects, "So... what's it like in Petrovka? I've never been."

Kiva snorted, "We live, we work, we sleep. Like everyone else."

“Do you have roses in your gardens? I like roses, cornflowers, and sunflowers. I’m sad when summer is over, and they fade into nothing.”

“We don’t have time for such things. In our free time, we celebrate with friends and families.”

Katarina frowned. “We do that, too. And we enjoy our gardens.”

“We don’t have servants to take care of our homes. We take care of your homes, then we go home and take care of ours. You Germans think everyone has servants.”

Katarina clenched her fists. She wanted to slap the maid’s face. Anna would never tolerate such disrespect. However, discipline would only increase the animosity and make for an uncomfortable afternoon. She wanted to enjoy a peaceful walk and a blissful hour under the golden autumn sun by the water.

A dignified rebuttal would put the maid in her place. “We’re Mennonites, not Germans.”

“It’s all the same to us.” Kiva’s tone laced with resentment.

Katarina grimaced. Had she offended Kiva? She’d always tried to get along with the help, but it wasn’t working this time. She bit her lip. Maybe the woman hadn’t slept well. That thin mattress under the kitchen table couldn’t be very comfortable. Then again, not seeing one’s family for the better part of the week would be tough for anyone.

Katarina wondered about the servant’s family. Where was Petrovka? Would Anna be upset if she asked Olek to take her for a drive to see it? She shook her head. That would invite gossip from the sewing circle.

Her father's words came to mind, "Don't make friends with them." She squared her shoulders. As much as she wanted to be liked by everyone, it wasn't proper to defer to the servants. Friendship was not a requirement of the job, but rudeness wasn't tolerated. She'd report the behavior to Anna later.

They traipsed past the grain bins and the machinery barns without speaking further and took the left fork into the tree plantation, past the neat airy lines of fruit trees, turned right by the walnut and chestnut groves, and meandered into the deep, structured rows of coniferous and evergreen trees.

The lush emerald forest of summer was morphing into veils of rusty tentacles draping into a spooky comb of shriveled brown fingers and a dry, warty bottom. She shivered at the thought of the upcoming long, chilly nights.

Her mind drifted to the war and the soldiers' requests for warm clothing. The women's charities concerned themselves with such things. Soon, they'd pack up holiday gift boxes for the men, filled with cakes and dried sausages, knitted gloves and woolen socks, and other life-preserving necessities. An encouraging letter would be slipped into each box before it was loaded into wooden crates and shipped to the front by rail. She looked forward to taking part in the seasonal brigade.

Katarina wondered if David would be home for Christmas. Or Dietrich. If she and Anna went home ... no. That wouldn't happen. If Anna refused to walk on a beautiful day like today, she certainly wouldn't go on a trip to the other side of the river during bitter frost. It was going to be a long, boring winter.

She pictured the snow drifting over the evergreens and considered the seasonal change, then looked over her shoulder at the servant sauntering three paces behind her. “Hey Kiva, do you celebrate Christmas?”

“Of course. In January, like all Orthodox.”

“Do you believe in Jesus, too?”

“Yes. We have the true religion.”

True? “You mean, Christian — like us?”

“No ... I don’t know. The Orthodox church says they are the true church. Started by Apostle Andrew.” Kiva shrugged. “I suppose we all believe in the same God.”

*Is it the same God? We think our church is the correct one, too. Can both be right or is one wrong?*

“That Russian leader wants to ban all religion.”

Does she know anything about politics?

“Lenin says there is no God.”

“Who? That communist leader? Oh. He can say what he wants. I don’t care about his ideas.”

So, Kiva knew who Lenin was. And she knew Makhno. How educated was the woman? Katarina probed, “He has many strange convictions. Do you think he’ll change Russia?”

“Anything is better than what we have now. The people are tired of being slaves to the Czar.”

*Anything is better?* Katarina wondered what was so bad about the Czar. The Mennonites appreciated the strict values of the old guard, and they were aiding in the battle to restore old Russia. Was the system so unfair to the locals?



They turned the corner and exited the plantation along the western river trail.

Katarina filled her lungs with the musty autumn air. The mixing smells of decomposing foliage and freshwater triggered memories of the earthy scent of her father's arms after a hard day's work on the fields.

Recalling the innocent times in the pristine world of yesteryear caused her to sniff again to spark another childhood image. Instead, a stinky whiff caught her nose, and the daydream screeched to a halt. Vagrants, she guessed. Rotting garbage on the riverbanks. She shuddered and prayed they were alone.

The sparkling river lured them to the familiar bathing spot beyond the wooden bridge. Sunlight danced, embracing the water with a shimmering hug. A faint mist rose from the rippling surface. The current swirled around a shallow, sandy bar encircled by a stony ridge. It created a warm, natural pool — the perfect place to fantasize and wish the world away.

Katarina contemplated stripping down to her drawers to sit on the mound or rolling her skirt up above the knees and wading in. A soft, cool breeze wafted across the water, so she decided to first test the temperature with her feet. She plopped down on the bank to remove her shoes, gazing dream-like at the gurgling body with the remnants of summer floating along the surface, "Where do you go, river? How I wish I could go with you." Katarina turned to invite Kiva to join her, but the maid stood rigid, clutching her chest, and staring into the tall grasses on the bank.

"Kiva, what's wrong? You're as white as a ghost."

Kiva's mouth trembled. She shook her head and pointed to the marshy grasses under the bridge. "There."

"What is it?" Katarina crawled up the stony ledge and ran over to the maid.

The charred remnants of a fire and scattered animal bones at the edge of the stream suggested a recent resting spot for undesirable guests. She looked up into the bulrushes and swampy pit where Kiva pointed. Her eyes followed the trail of trampled grasses to a fetid, furry heap. A chill ran down her spine and her hand flew to her mouth. "Dog ... " She held her breath and tiptoed around the fire pit. "It's Mopsy."

Kiva shadowed and touched her elbow. "Your sheep dog... are you sure?"

Gagging on the pungent smell, Katarina removed her headscarf and tied it around her mouth and nose. She crept closer to inspect the bloated dome, "Black and white. The flies are buzzing. It must be days old."

"Look. There's a piece of wood with writing on it." Kiva pointed beside the carcass. "Be careful," she added as Katarina stepped into the brown river grass, "Snakes are still awake."

*Snakes and what else?* Katarina inched forward, bending each marshy blade with her foot. A river rat zipped out in front. She hesitated and scanned her surroundings.

How did the dog die? Could it be that infamous rebel trying to make a name for himself? Anna said to watch out for bandits. Her arms prickled with goosebumps and her knees quaked as she crept down the bloodied trail.

The rotting mass with a gash across the neck carried a deliberate message. The Cyrillic lettered board lying beside the animal left no room for misinterpretation. Go home, Kulak. Next time it won't be the dog. Katarina bit her lip to fight the brimming tears as she picked up the sign. "Kiva, we must bring this home. Can you bring it to Olek, please? I'll tell Anna."

The maid accepted the board from Katarina's shaking hands and examined the lettering — tracing the patterns with her fingers. The color fell from her face as she looked up. "Miss Katarina, I am so sorry. It is no one I know."

The maid could read, but not well, Katarina noted. She swallowed the lump in her throat and jerked her chin towards the trail. "Let's go home."

The last swim of the year forgotten, the women grabbed their supplies and hiked back.

The late afternoon sun flickered through the gloomy canopy and carved sinister outlines through the deep woods. She kept a watchful eye along the forested path, but her stomach was in knots. "Kiva, why? You must know why."

"It's a warning."

"This is no caution sign, Kiva. They're threatening our lives. I want to know why. Why do they want us to leave? We have nothing to do with the war. Haven't we proven ourselves after a hundred years? We're a peaceful people and we've faithfully served Russia. We bear no grudges, and we try to get along with everyone. What are we doing wrong?"

"Your German ties make you an enemy." Kiva's voice was cold and emotionless.

Katarina searched for an explanation. "But we're not German. Speaking the language doesn't make us warmongers. It's the

language of our ancestors. They came from Prussia.”

Kiva scoffed. “You don’t act like Russian. You keep your German ways and your precious churches — bullying our people like rich aristocrats and insisting on your own languages and your own schools. You don’t try to become like us. And you steal our land.”

Katarina stumbled on a rock. Neither the scorn nor the attitude made sense. “Steal your land? What do you mean? Catherine the Great gave us land and asked us to farm the steppes. We didn’t steal it.”

“Miss Katarina, have you ever been to one of our villages?”

“No, I can’t say that I have.”

“You should come and see. We don’t live like you — your pretty little rows of perfect boxes with drawn lines around a piece of dirt that you buy and sell like expensive shoes covered in ribbons and colored jewels.”

Katarina wrinkled her brow. “What does land have to do with any of this?”

“We have a saying here. God is our Father. The land is our mother. And nature is our teacher. Land is an eternal gift from the creator. It is a treasure to be shared, not owned, and traded like a commodity. You Germans would sell your own mothers for land. You have no respect for the sacred.”

Kiva gestured to the trees with an upturned palm.

Katarina’s mouth gaped. “The land is your mother? What kind of nonsense is that? Do you worship creation? I think you should talk to your priests. I doubt any Christian church teaches that. It’s not Biblical.”

Kiva rolled her eyes. “That’s not what I meant. We honor the land the way God commands. Each person uses what they need.”

“We take care of the land, too. God gave it to us to produce food so the world can eat,” Katarina protested. Kiva’s logic was confusing.

“To feed ourselves and our families, yes. However, when one has too much land, one needs help to take care of it. Like the greedy Czar, one falls into temptation to make slaves of the workers.”

Katarina pondered the maid’s statement. “Yes ... it’s true that responsibility increases with ownership. But God requires us to be productive and to increase our wealth so we can help those who cannot help themselves. Besides, anyone can own land if they work hard enough.”

“Own land? We already own the land. It belongs to us. All of it. You have no right to it. That’s my point.”

“But we provide work for you. We pay well. We developed the steppes and constructed the factories. Without us, you wouldn’t have jobs or money.”

“Jobs?” Kiva snorted, “Money? My dear Miss Katarina, I scrub your floors, and toilets, wash your clothes and decorate your tables with roses from your fancy gardens so you and your sisters can parade as ladies of leisure — knitting socks and organizing your committees — trying to justify yourselves when you serve the poor with a bowl of soup.

Every night I go to bed on a thin mattress on a cold stone floor — with my knees bleeding and my hands cut — all for a loaf of bread. On my free days, I scrub my own floors, wash my husband’s dirty factory clothes that stink of petrol, help him scour the grease from his aching body, check my children’s teeth, and cook a good meal. I see my family two times a week. I’m thirty-five years old; my joints hurt, and my fingers can no longer hold a needle and thread. Now you tell me how I can work harder.”

Katarina tripped over a root sticking up from the ground and her bad arm flailed for support. The quick movement pinched. She bit her lip, steadied herself on a low-hanging branch and grasped for an answer to the verbal assault. *She talks as if we treat her like a slave.*

“I’m sorry, Kiva. I didn’t mean to imply you didn’t work hard. I’m sorry about your life. I know the heart of my families. We don’t want for your people to suffer ...”

“There ... you just said it. Your people. You see. There’s a thick wall between us. Who will tear it down?”

*Are we enemies? Is it us versus them?* Fear knocked on Katarina’s mind. How far would the rebels go to achieve their political goals? Was Kiva one of them? She reflected on her doubts about Dimitri. Could any of the servants be trusted?

They broached the perimeter of the pasture as the heat of the afternoon faded. The clammy silk undergarments twisted beneath her skirts, sticking to her sweaty legs in awkward folds. Katarina wished the rotting dog and the signboard had surfaced after the swim. It was too late to turn back now.

She brushed the sweat from her brow. Her throat parched, she turned to the maid. “Kiva, did we bring water?”

Kiva set the disturbing placard on the ground. She opened the picnic box, retrieved a bottle of water, uncorked it, and held it up to Katarina.

Katarina realized she’d never studied the woman. The plaited coarse brunette hair, wrapped around her head in the traditional style of a young woman, belied the strands of gray peeking from the temples; the gnarled, scarred hands, the lines in her face, and the bags under her amber eyes all suggested a woman much older than her stated thirty-five years. Katarina had guessed the maid to be at

least fifty. A pang of guilt washed over her. The woman deserved a better life.

Katarina toyed with the drops beading from the jar. If she had been born into a local peasant household, would she be any less worthy? She held the container up to Kiva. “Here. You haven’t had a drink all day. You must be parched.”

“Oh no, I can’t,” Kiva gushed. “It’s not right.”

“I insist.” Katarina pushed the container at Kiva’s chest.

The maid hesitated, then accepted and guzzled. She wiped her mouth on the back of her hand before offering the jar back to Katarina. “Thank you. Shall I put it away, or do you want to drink after my lips have soiled the jar?”

Katarina hesitated to take the dare. Anna would have a fit and probably send her to the doctor to be checked for contagion. Except Anna didn’t need to know. She sensed the relationship with Kiva was paramount — although she wasn’t sure why; she barely knew the woman.

Accepting the bottle, she wiped the top with her sleeve, and held it to her lips, sipping tentatively while Kiva watched. The smirk on Kiva’s face widened. Not wishing to be scorned further, Katarina turned the bottom to the sky and gulped. Kiva’s smile disappeared.

They completed the trek in silence until they reached the yard. Katarina took the sign from Kiva’s arm. “I’ll go talk to Olek. Take the rest of the day off. I’ll tell Anna you’re running errands for me.”

END OF SAMPLE

Please purchase the book on Amazon. Your reviews matter. Kindly leave a positive review to encourage others to learn about this important history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MJ Krause-Chivers writes historical fiction from her picturesque home in Niagara, Canada. Katarina's Dark Shadow is her debut fiction novel.

As a C-PTSD survivor and former social worker, the author writes insightful stories about trauma, mental health, and relationships. Her motto is "to write stories that matter."

When visiting her ancestral homeland of Poland and Ukraine in 2014, she heard the chilling tales of the plight of the German speaking Mennonite peoples in Ukraine during the Russian civil war. She yearned to tell the story for modern generations.

The series, Russian Mennonite Chronicles, Book One: Katarina's Dark Shadow begins with a cultural view of the people that once flourished on the Ukrainian steppes.

MJ Krause-Chivers is the pseudonym for Christian author Miranda J. Chivers.

Find all her books on Amazon at:

<https://www.amazon.com/author/mirandajchivers>

Check out her linktree: <https://linktr.ee/mjkrausechivers>

Join the readers' group at <https://russianmennonitefiction.mailerpage.com>

Write to the author at [mirandajchivers@gmail.com](mailto:mirandajchivers@gmail.com)