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Alexander Voloshin

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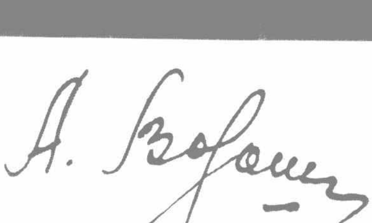

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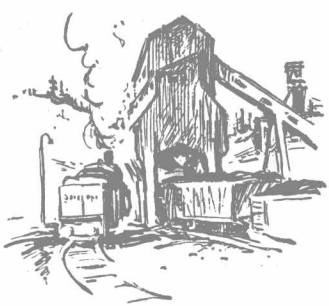

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ALEXANDER VOLOSHIN

KUZNETSK LAND

NOVEL

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ALEXANDER VOLOSHIN

ALEXANDER Nikitich Voloshin was born in 1912 in Petersburg. His father was a worker in the Putilov plant. At the beginning of the First World War the Voloshins moved to Siberia. It was there that the future writer spent his childhood. There he went to school, and wrote for the school wallnewspaper. In 1928 he sent an article about a skiing trip he made with his schoolmates to Kirghiz villages to the local magazine "Tovarishch" ("Comrade"). His surprise and joy when it was accepted knew no bounds.

In 1929 Alexander Voloshin received his graduation certificate. Many roads lay open before him, but like most young people of the period, whose imagination was fired by the dazzling targets of the first five-year plan, he chose to take part in the construction of the giant Kuznetsk iron and steel works, the plan's first objective. Working as a concrete layer, he devoted his off hours to Komsomol duties and educational activity among the workers.

When the work was finished, young Voloshin, brimming with recent impressions and athirst for a fuller view of life, visited the city where he was born and which now bears the name of the great Lenin. From Leningrad he intended to return to Siberia—a lap of some three thousand kilometres—on foot. This adventurous project was prompted by the youth's ardent longing to see as much of the world as he could with his own eyes, to enlarge his knowledge of life.

Although en route to the Kuznetsk coal basin he did not dispense entirely with the railways and other means of transport, Alexander Voloshin nevertheless satisfied his wish to "see the world." He now had first-hand knowledge of the life of many ancient Russian towns. On his way he had tried his hand at many trades: he had been a sailor and a stevedore, though never so much an apprentice learning a job as a student of human nature. He had been

in Igarka, the largest town of the Extreme North, then little more than a village. His journey ended in Novo-Kuznetsk, now named Stalinsk.

In that town, in 1931, Alexander Voloshin went down into the pits as a coal hewer and blaster. Later he became a Komsomol organizer at the Osininki Ore Mine. It was then that he wrote his first story, a story about miners which was run by a Stalinsk Komsomol newspaper.

Subsequently called up for service, Alexander Voloshin, following the example of many Soviet army men studying by correspondence at technical schools and higher schools, took a course at the Leningrad Institute of Journalism.

From his discharge and until the Great Patriotic War, the young author worked on the staff of a town miners' newspaper and wrote short stories. In 1939 the magazine "Sibirskiye Ogni" ("Siberian Lights") carried a short story by him called "Two Friends."

The Great Patriotic War put an abrupt end to this work. First as a private in the engineers and then as Sergeant of the Guards, Alexander Voloshin trod the roads of war. He was wounded three times and decorated with the Order of the Patriotic War and three medals. After the war Alexander Voloshin returned a seasoned veteran to the Kuznetsk basin, yearning, like all ex-fighting men, to tackle a peacetime job and took up the offer of a position on the staff of the *Kuzbas,* the Territorial newspaper.

As a correspondent covering the Stalinsk and Osininki areas, Alexander Voloshin made a thorough study of the life of the miners, both above and below ground, noting everything the Stakhanovite miners had added to the old work methods during the war. He observed the common striving of both the ex-servicemen and those who had laboured in the rear to add new glory to the Motherland. He did much to uphold and promote rationalization proposals in his paper. Alexander Voloshin lived in the very thick of a life stimulated by labour enthusiasm. He published more stories about the miners, two of which, "New Year's Eve" and "The White Swallow," were parts of a future novel.

Alexander Voloshin displayed considerable interest in the past history of the Territory which even he himself could recall as a dead and desolate country. He learned of the brothers Migashev, who belonged to the tiny Shor people and who went to the tsarist officials

with a bag of coal in the hope of bringing to their notice the untold wealth of the land, wealth which would mean much to the country and its people. The brothers were unceremoniously turned away. Undaunted, they sent letter after letter to Petersburg. In 1915 the capital replied by sending an engineer to investigate. The latter made a cursory survey of the Polkashtin ravine and there the matter ended.

This criminal indifference of the tsarist officials towards their country's vital interests shocked Alexander Voloshin all the more in the light of the amazing changes wrought by the people during the Soviet years. He resolved to write a book which would tell the world of the life that had blossomed on what for ages was useless wasteland, and of the hardy Soviet miners who now people it.

"Kuznetsk Land" was first published in 1948 in the "Siberian Lights" magazine; the second edition was put out in Moscow, in 1949.

The novel is preceded by a prologue which outlines the novel's chief idea—the ardent patriotism of the Soviet people, the force which motivates the behaviour of its heroes, fighting to increase coal output, to promote the advanced work methods of the Stakhanovites.

J. V. Stalin, speaking of the Stakhanovite movement, laid stress on one of its fundamental traits. "This movement," said J. V. Stalin, "is breaking down the old views on technique, it is shattering the old technical standards, the old designed capacities, and the old production plans, and demands the creation of new and higher technical standards, designed capacities, and production plans. It is destined to produce a revolution in our industry. That is why the Stakhanov movement is at bottom a profoundly revolutionary movement."*

It is a revolutionary movement of the kind described by J. V. Stalin that Alexander Voloshin writes about in his book, vividly revealing the postwar life of the Kuznetsk miner.

Rogov, the engineer—the book's main hero—heads the Stakhanovite movement at Kapitalnaya Mine. He is an industrial executive of a new type who has no patience with those who would sit back and ride comfortably into communism, who do not actively strive to shorten the period of transition from socialism to communism.

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* J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow 1953, p. 664.

Engineer Drobot, on the other hand, likes doing things the old way. He is a hidebound lover of routine and despite the feeling he has for his mine, his rich experience and weighty special knowledge, he is extremely narrow-minded. The survivals of capitalism have impressed themselves strongly on his make-up, and even while taking part in the socialist emulation drive he takes care not to let his own mine get ahead of the others any more than is necessary for official recognition.

The novel deals with the day-to-day fight with the predilection for the old, conservative ways, the fight to hasten the laggards, which is now being waged by the advanced Soviet people and which becomes more intense as the lights of communism draw closer.

"Kuznetsk Land" is the first major work of the writer. Alexander Voloshin is a skilful portrait painter; he sketches his characters with a few deft strokes that cling to the memory: "He's just a zero.... You'd think by the noise he makes that he's really got something in him. But scratch the surface and all you find is a gasbag."

The reader sees how under the impact of the new, a "spark" is ignited in the heart of chief engineer Filenkov; he will follow with interest the adventures of Annushka, who is "as alive as a drop of quicksilver," and her young husband, Kolya Dubintsev, and all the other memorable characters in the book: miners and engineers, representatives of the older and younger generations. They are all united by their love for constructive labour, their love of country. In this connection, it may be appropriate to quote what the miners in the book said to Kolya Dubintsev's mother who was about to go with a delegation to England.

"Tell the mothers of England about the Kuznetsk land that lies in the heart of great Siberia, tell them that for the miners and steelworkers who live in the Kuzbas there is no greater happiness, no more enviable lot than the lot of the Soviet working folk! And tell them too that there is no force in the world that could take from the Soviet people that which by right they call their own!"

This "lot of the Soviet working folk" has been ably, sincerely and convincingly depicted by Alexander Voloshin in his novel.

The novel "Kuznetsk Land" has won its author a Stalin Prize.

KUZNETSK LAND

PROLOGUE

THE HEARTS of the men beat fast when the train crossed the frontier and sped on deeper and deeper into their native land. Crowding in the open doors of the boxcars, the returning soldiers gazed in silence at the lacerated fields slipping by. A blue haze curled beyond a distant woods and scattered blue-grey cloudlets crept westward across the sky, their edges crimsoning in the setting sun. And it dawned on the men that it had been a long time since their lives had contained such ordinary things as clouds, pink sunsets and curly mists rising over the woods.

This was the homeland. But how many of her sons would never return to their native expanses. . . .

"Look, a rabbit!" Sergeant Danilov seized his trench cap and pointed excitedly with it at the ball of fluff bounding over the green field.

Sleep eluded them long that evening. At first they talked to the accompaniment of the hurried clicking of

wheels, then several voices joined in the melody of "The weeds rustled and the trees bowed their heads." They sang of Yermak and of great Baikal Lake—sang in impatient anticipation of a home-coming now so near.

The door of the car was left open and far into the night the short, sturdy figure of Stepan Danilov could be seen silhouetted against the pale patch in the darkness. The young man with a stubborn tuft of fair hair escaping from under his trench cap was restless and fidgety, not because of any childish impatience, but because he could not wait to feast his eyes on his native soil and to breathe its fragrance. Short and stocky, he held his head high, and a pair of keen blue eyes shone on his lean, alert face. Whenever the train stopped, regardless of the hour, he would drop down on the trackside and promptly run off somewhere. Thanks to him the occupants of the car were well informed: they knew, for instance, the name of the engine driver, that he had been driving locomotives for thirty-seven years now, that he had a niece who was a student at a Moscow theatrical school, and that all his other relatives had been killed by the fascists.

It was Danilov who announced that the first big station after the frontier would be reached in the morning.

That morning, however, he disappeared. At first nobody thought much about his absence, assuming that he must have been riding in another car or on the buffers. But when evening came and there was still no Danilov, everybody felt somewhat worried. For one thing there was no one to play the accordion or to forage for odd bits of information.

"That's a pretty fix—he must have got left behind," an old soldier named Alexeyev shook his head sadly.

"He's probably found himself a nice girl," Grigori Voshchin joked. "Remember he said when we left Germany that he'd fall in love with the first Russian girl he met on this side of the border."

Two days later, when the train pulled in at Smolensk, Danilov showed up as suddenly as he had disappeared. He climbed into the car without a word to anyone and clambering on to a top bunk fell asleep at once. Upon waking up he made a leisurely meal of a mess tin of baked milk bought from a collective farmer at a wayside stop, wiped his lips, and reached for his accordion. He fingered the keyboard for a while, then stopped, and his hand absent-mindedly strayed to his unruly forelock.

"I took a look at Ovrazhki," he said in a low voice. "That's where I got hit in 'forty-one. Properly too—spent six months on my back in the hospital."

"Well, what was it like?" Alexeyev asked.

"What was it like? Had bedsores all over me—that's what. You could still mine iron out of me."

"Chuck it. That's not what I meant. What was Ovrazhki like?"

"I found the trench our section held," Danilov said, and he smiled sheepishly, as if afraid his excursion might be taken for a boyish prank.

An expectant hush fell over the men around him.

"They've planted potatoes where Section One dug in, and where my trench was they're laying out an orchard. Wonderful folk!" After a moment's pause he added: "A tough spot it was too."

A suspicion of a smile appeared on the faces of the returning soldiers.

"An orchard, eh?" put in Alexeyev.

But Danilov had shaken off the pensive mood and now struck up a lively tune.

In Moscow the men scattered in different directions. Danilov, who was from Novosibirsk, found himself on board a regular passenger train with three other Siberians also headed for home: the sapper Moiseyev, the elderly infantryman Cherkasov, and the rugged, broad-featured signalman Voshchin. They were all going to the Kuznetsk coal fields.

The agile little sergeant quickly took possession of an upper berth. His restiveness was gone and he lay there day and night although the carriage was insufferably hot.

Beyond the Urals the train plunged into the boundless expanses of Siberia. Now a turntable of green steppe dotted with blue splinters of lakes slowly revolved outside the train windows. As the miles clicked off the soldiers grew less talkative. Voshchin and Cherkasov, a reserved pair, showed their excitement by going through their kitbags at more and more frequent intervals to rearrange the modest gifts they were taking to the folks at home. Moiseyev from Prokopyevsk would look around every now and then as though in a daze.

"Hard to believe it's over, isn't it?" he would exclaim, rubbing his hands. "By God, there's no end to miracles!"

"Stow it, man!" Danilov could not refrain from putting in at one of these outbursts of wonderment. "There hasn't been a miracle since Christ's resurrection."

"It's a fact," the other insisted. "Here am I—been fighting for years. . . ."

Danilov groaned.