

Elmar Green

WIND
*from
the*
SOUTH

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A Novel



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

MOSCOW 1950

24705-

DESIGNED
BY A. RADISHCHEV



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Elmar Green (Alexander Vasilyevich Yakimov) was born in 1909. His father was a shoemaker. His mother worked as a farm hand for Russian landlords on the Karelian Isthmus. Elmar Green was still a small child when his father died and, unable to support him, his mother placed him in an orphanage in Petrograd in 1916. He lived in Leningrad orphanages until 1922, then for seven years he worked as a farm hand on kulak farms in the Novgorod and Pskov regions, the Ukraine and the North Caucasus. From 1929 to 1934 he served in the Baltic Fleet. In 1935 he went to work as a radio operator for forestry trusts in the Leningrad Region.

Elmar Green's first stories "Peeter," "Eino" and "The Returned Family" were printed in the magazine *The Literary Contemporary* in 1937.

During the Great Patriotic War Elmar Green served as a private, then as the commander of a signals platoon and later as war correspondent for divisional and army newspapers.

Wind from the South was written in 1946 and received a Stalin Prize.



* 1 *

TIME moves on and does what it has to do. Nothing would seem to have happened to make one dance for joy, but still, life on this earth is not such a bad thing after all.

There was a fog again last night, and in the morning a warm southern wind sprang up and cleared it away. And all at once you could see how many new boulders, darkly damp, had emerged from under the snow on the sloping fields on either side of the little valley, and how broad the stream had become which had only recently broken to the surface from under the heavy snow and now pierced the long valley from end to end.

It, too, looked black from afar, winding its way amid the snow and disappearing some-

where into the far-off stony hillsides covered with pine woods. The woods, too, looked black and soggy.

My hillock has also become dark and denuded. The foot no longer slips on its steep slope when I descend it in the mornings on my way to work or when I climb it late in the evening coming home. The sole of my boot feels secure on the rough surface of the rock.

My little red house stands on the crest of this stony slope, one white window facing the North overlooking the hillside, the other looking East down to where the valley and stream stretch away in the distance.

I have been told that my choice of location could have been a better one, and that I should have made my home on a plot that had a slope facing the South. I didn't have to be told that. I wouldn't have minded having my house on the southern slope with windows facing South, but this hillock of mine has no southern slope.

Instead of a southern slope there is a sheer wall of rock dead at the back of my vegetable plot. It is higher than the house and shuts out the light and sunshine from the South. Tree roots and tussocks of rusty grass hang down from its upper ledge. These roots

and grass are also soaking wet. Drenching wet too is the whole fissured surface of the granite wall, from top to bottom.

A man must be a fool to put his house up here with windows facing South. What could you see through them if you did? That there wet rocky wall and the four short vegetable beds running into it?

Of course, I realize that the children need more sun. But why not put up with things for a while? Herra¹ Kurkimäki was not able to give me another place right away. He would have been only too pleased to let me have some sunny hillside, but he didn't have so very many of them himself. In fact, that is what he told me at the time:

"I can't deal out left and right the land which my father and grandfather left me."

And I hastened to reply:

"Yes. That's true. That's true."

But I had been working for him twenty-five years. That counts for something, too. He also realized that. So he fell to thinking after he had spoken.

I looked at his wrinkles while he was thinking, and waited. But it's hard to guess a

¹ Mister.

man's thoughts from his wrinkles, which had cut deep into his face like cracks. I tried to read something in his eyes, but I could not see them, because they were overhung by heavy creased lids resembling living little hoods. It is difficult to read any thoughts in such a face, all stiffened in cracks. So I stood waiting for what he would say. And after a while he said in a surly voice:

"You need a place nearby, so you can get to your work on time."

And I answered:

"Yes...."

My heart thumped with joy when I realized that he was not going to refuse me altogether. While I was about it I plucked up courage and said:

"But if you would be so kind as to let me have the bit of swamp or woodland I've been asking for, so that I could use half the crops to settle...."

But he interrupted me testily:

"Too early to speak of that yet. Too early."

And he turned away, still scowling, drawing his cigarette case out of his pocket. And I followed behind. But I did not say anything more for fear of making him lose his temper.

altogether. But it seemed to me that he was turning it over in his mind.

And so he was. He walked on for five minutes or so, teasing my nostrils with the whiff of a good cigarette, then poked it in the direction of this here hillock and said:

"There. This'll be enough for you to put a house up on. It's close to your job, and there's some land which will do for a vegetable garden."

And since then I have been the master of this stony hillock adjoining the high rock, with a little birch tree and shrubbery on its summit.

At some time or other, I should imagine in very ancient times, a huge lump had split off this rock, a lump as big as my house, and had tumbled down to the foot of the northern slope. And now this small patch between the rocky wall and the spot where the fragment had fallen, the whole of this stony hump, became mine.

I leased it from Mr. Kurkimäki and he charged me for it at the rate of real land. But I never once reproached him for it. You daren't make him angry.

Sometimes men get wild and swear and demand things. But what do they get? They

get the sack. But I've been working for him too long to get the sack. It was not as if he had refused me. He had only said: "It's too early." That means there'll come a time when I'll get a bit of swamp or woodland. Just a little bit. I don't need much. Good God, just a little bit of swamp or woodland on which in a year's time I could raise wheat, rye, potatoes and peas. I knew the strength of my arms and wasn't scared by the big deep-rooted trees or the bogland. All I wanted was to get any little bit so that I could say: "This is my land, my farm."

But you had to keep on the right side of Mr. Kurkimäki and not nag him. He didn't like to be angered. And I had been working for him for twenty-five years. It would be a shame to get the sack after those years. So I did not say anything more, and merely tried to fix up life on that hillock as best I could.

* 2 *

The crag that had tumbled down thousands of years ago blocked the path of the stream which made a slight detour in the direction of my hillock before running down into the long valley. And though the stream had found a way for itself by doubling round the crag

it was nevertheless obliged to run upwards a bit. And so, in front of this crag a fairly deep water hole had been formed which served me as a well. The water in it always slightly bubbled, and was fresh and as clear as glass. On rounding the crag it sped on farther down to the middle of the valley in a regular cascade.

Facing the water hole and the crag I had fixed up a little bathhouse out of boards, its corners resting on four little boulders. It was a very little bathhouse, without any dressing room, and could not accommodate more than two people at a time. Still, it was my own bathhouse.

The boards and nails that went into its building I bought from Mr. Kurkimäki. From him, too, I bought the bricks for the stove and the cauldron. He didn't take any money for them. He simply wrote it down against my future work, but mentioned that the cauldron cost a good bit.

He did not take a single penny from me for the house either. I was simply to work off the house, too, that was all. Work twenty days each year. At first he wanted me to work off thirty days a year for the house. But the house was a very little one after all, just one room

inside, and from outside it looked more like half a house. And so he fixed the price at twenty days a year, to be worked off until the end of my life.

I figured that I would work off the cost of the bathhouse in eighteen months, and twenty days' work a year for the house was not so terrible. My children would then get it free.

My wife felt the same way. How her face lit up when she learned that I had accepted the terms. We had been living too long in a crowded little room of the common workmen's barrack, where we had nothing but a bed, a table and two benches on which our children slept. We didn't have our own kitchen or a bathhouse, and now we'd have everything. No wonder my Elsa's round rosy face lit up with happiness.

Only Vilho didn't approve of this new home. He said:

"Well, one hillock dweller more to the tens of thousands of others in Suomi. Settled himself on a rock and hugs his stony joy. . . ."

But what can you expect of a silly boy of twenty-five who has never had the urge for land? He imagined that because he had learned to make butter and cheese at Kalle Poh

Janpää's creamery, he had learned all the wisdom of life. But he was young and foolish, and had not even learned to hold his tongue, which he couldn't keep still in his mouth for more than two minutes.

To be able to sneer doesn't mean that your brains are better than everyone else's. He seemed to think otherwise, if he took the liberty of making fun of those who were more staid than he in character and less talkative. Clearly he was making a butt of me when he related the joke about the two old Finns.

There was nothing funny about the joke, and he was the only one who laughed at it—Elsa simply smiled for the sake of politeness, that's all. Now, what's funny in it? Well, two old Finns were going into the woods to work and on their way they noticed a hare's tracks in the snow. One of them said:

"A hare's been here."

They went into the woods and worked there till midday. Then they sat down on a felled tree, had some lunch and resumed their work until evening, and then started home. When they repassed the hare's tracks the old man answered:

"Yes, a hare...."

I don't see anything funny in this joke. If you ask me, the fellow who made it up overdrew the mark. Why should the second old man have waited with his reply until the evening when he could have answered much earlier, say at noon, when they were having their lunch.

Still better if he hadn't related such nonsense at all and showed more respect for his elder brother. It would be much more useful to learn sense from his elder brother instead of poking fun at him.

If he gave more heed to my advice he would not have got himself into trouble as he did at that dance. The party was arranged for gentlefolks. They paid for the hire of the place out of their own pockets. And he had to butt in, as though he had been invited, and moreover kicked up a row when they told him to clear out. If his elder brother had been there he would not have let him make a fool of himself.

Lucky for him there was a policeman on the spot who pulled him up, otherwise he would have been in for it, because young Vihtori Kurkimäki had already taken his glasses off. And when Vihtori Kurkimäki takes his glasses off it is a bad sign. Better dance if