

В.Г. КОРОЛЕНКО

ЛЕС ШУМИТ

(отрывок)

В этом лесу всегда стоял шум – ровный, протяжный, как отголосок дальнего звона, спокойный и смутный, как тихая песня без слов, как неясное воспоминание о прошедшем. В нем всегда стоял шум, потому что это был старый, дремучий бор, которого не касались еще пила и топор лесного барышника. Высокие столетние сосны с красными могучими стволами стояли хмурою ратью, плотно сомкнувшись вверху зелеными вершинами. Внизу было тихо, пахло смолой; сквозь полог сосновых иголок, которыми была усыпана почва, пробились яркие папоротники, пышно раскинувшиеся причудливою бахромой и стоявшие недвижимо, не шелохнув листом. В сырых уголках тянулись высокими стеблями зеленые травы; белая кашка склонялась отяжелевшими головками, как будто в тихой истоме. А вверху, без конца и перерыва, тянул лесной шум, точно смутные вздохи старого бора.

Но теперь эти вздохи становились все глубже, сильнее. Я ехал лесною тропой, и, хотя неба мне не было видно, но по тому, как хмурился лес, я чувствовал, что над ним тихо подымается тяжелая туча. Время было не раннее.

Между стволов кое-где пробивался еще косяк луча заката, но в чащах расплзались уже

V. KOROLENKO

THE FOREST SOUGHS

(excerpt)

Translated by Aline Delano

The forest sougged. . . . The forest always sougged, now with a murmur calm and prolonged, like the echo of distant ringing, and again soft and gentle, like a song without words or a dim memory of the past. It always sougged, for it was an old and mighty forest, still untouched by the saw or the axe of woodman or trader. The tall, centennial pines, with their vast trunks, stood like threatening warriors, and their green tops formed a massive wall. Everything below was still; the air was filled with an odor of resin. Ferns of vivid hues pushed their way through the carpet of pine-needles with which the ground was strewn, expanding luxuriantly and resting thereon, like a soft fringe, without stirring a leaf. In the damp corners the green grass shot up its tall and slender stems, and the white clover, heavy with bloom, drooped its languid head; while over all sougged the forest, with long-drawn, indistinguishable sighs.

Now the sighs were growing deeper and louder; and as I rode along the forest path, although I could not see the sky, I judged by the moaning of the trees that heavy clouds were slowly rising above it. It was late in the afternoon. Here and there a sunbeam made its way, but in the dense woods the twilight was spreading rapidly. Evidently a storm was brewing.

All plans for hunting must be given up for to-day. The storm might overtake me before I could find shel-

V. KOROLENKO

THE MURMURING FOREST

(excerpt)

Translated by Marian Fell

The forest was murmuring. There was always a murmuring in this forest, longdrawn, monotonous, like the undertones of a distant bell, like a faint song without words, like vague memories of the past. There was always a murmuring in the forest because it was a dense wood of ancient pines, untouched as yet by the axe and saw of the timber merchant. The tall, century-old trees with their mighty red-brown trunks stood in frowning ranks, proudly thrusting their green, interwoven tops aloft. The air under them was still and sweet with resin; bright ferns pierced the carpet of needles with which the ground was clothed, and superbly displayed their motionless, fringed foliage. Tall, green grass-blades had shot upward in the moist places, and there, too, white clover-heads drooped heavily, as if overcome with gentle languor. And always overhead, without a pause and without an end, droned the voice of the forest, the low sighing of the ancient pines.

But now these sighs had grown deeper and louder. I was riding along a woodland path, and although the sky was invisible, I knew, under the darkly frowning trees, that a storm was gathering overhead. The hour was late. A few last rays of sunlight were still filtering in here and there between the tree-trunks, but misty shadows had already begun to gather in the thickets. A thunderstorm was brewing for the night. I was forced to abandon all idea of continuing the chase that day, and could only think of reaching a night's lodging be-

мглистые сумерки. К вечеру собиралась гроза.

На сегодня нужно было уже отложить всякую мысль об охоте; впору было только добратся перед грозой до ночлега. Мой конь постукивал копытом в обнажившиеся корни, храпел и настораживал уши, прислушиваясь к гулко шелкающему лесному эхо. Он сам прибавлял шаг к знакомой лесной сторожке.

Залаяла собака. Между поредевшими стволами мелькают мазанные стены. Синяя струйка дыма вьется под нависшею зеленью; покосившаяся изба с лохматою крышей приютилась под стеной красных стволов; она как будто врастает в землю, между тем как стройные и гордые сосны высоко покачивают над ней своими головами. Посредине поляны, плотно примкнувшись друг к другу, стоит кучка молодых дубов.

Здесь живут обычные спутники моих охотничьих экскурсий – лесники Захар и Максим. Но теперь, повидимому, обоих нет дома, так как никто не выходит на лай громадной овчарки. Только старый дед, с лысою головой и седыми усами, сидит на завалинке и ковыряет лапоть. Усы у деда болтаются чуть не до пояса, глаза глядят тускло, точно дед все вспоминает что-то и не может припомнить.

– Здравствуй, дед. Есть кто-нибудь дома?

– Эге! – мотает дед головой. – Нет ни Захара, ни Максима, да и Мотря побрела в лес за коровой... Корова куда-то ушла, – пожалуй, медведи... задрали... Вот оно как, нет никого!

– Ну, ничего. Я с тобой посижу, обожду.

– Обожди, обожди, – кивает дед, и пока я

ter for the night. My horse snorted and pricked up his ears, when, striking his hoofs against the naked roots, he heard the sharp sound of the forest echo, and he quickened his pace as he drew near a familiar hut.

A dog barked, and whitewashed walls glimmered through the trees. A bluish ribbon of smoke curled above the overhanging foliage; and the crooked hut, with its shaggy roof, came in sight, nestling against the trunks of the trees. It seemed as though it grew out of the earth, while the tall, slender pines tossed their heads above it; beyond, in the middle of the clearing, rose a clump of young oaks, clustering together.

Here lived the constant companions of my hunting expeditions, the forest guards, Maxim and Zakhar, who were evidently not at home, since the barking of the large shepherd dog brought no one to meet me. The grandfather, with his bald head and long beard, sat alone on the bench making bast shoes. His beard reached almost to his waist, and his eyes looked dim, as though he were vainly trying to recollect something.

"Hallo, grandfather! Is any one at home?"

"Ehé" * muttered the old man, shaking his head; neither Zakhar nor Maxim is in, and Motrya has also gone into the woods to fetch the cow ... for she has strayed away . . . may be the bears have got her. . . . So, you see, no one is at home."

"Never mind; I will wait and keep you company."

"That's right," he replied, nodding, and, as I fastened my horse to an oak branch, he peered at me with his bleared eyes. The old man was getting feeble. He could scarcely see, and his hands shook.

"And who may you be, my lad?" he asked, when I joined him on the bench.

He asked the same question every time I came.

fore the storm broke. My horse struck his hoof against a bare root, snorted, and pricked his ears, harkening to the muffled impacts of the forest echo. Then of his own accord he turned his steps into the well-known path that led to the hut of the forest guard.

A dog barked. White plastered walls gleamed among the thinning tree-trunks, a blue wisp of smoke appeared, curling upward under the overshadowing branches, and a lop-sided cottage with a dilapidated roof stood before me, sheltering under a wall of ruddy tree-trunks. It seemed to have sunk down upon the ground, while the proud graceful pines nodded their heads, high, high above it. In the centre of the clearing stood two oak trees, huddling close to one another.

Here lived the foresters Zakhar and Maksim, the invariable companions of my hunting expeditions. But now they were evidently away from home, for no one came out of the house at the barking of the great collie. Only their old grandfather with his bald head and his grey whiskers was sitting on a bench outside the door, braiding shoes of bast. The old man's beard swept almost to his belt; his eyes were vague as if he were trying in vain to remember something.

"Good evening, daddy! Is any one at home?"

"Eh, hey," mumbled the old man, shaking his head; "neither Zakhar nor Maksim is here and Motria has gone into the wood for the cow. The cow has run away; perhaps the bears have eaten her. And so there is no one in the cottage."

"Well, well, never mind. I'll sit here with you and wait."

"Yes, sit down and wait!" the old man nodded, and watched me with dim, watery eyes as I tied my horse to the branch of one of the oaks. The old man was fail-

подвязываю лошадь к ветви дуба, он всматривается – в меня слабыми и мутными глазами. Плох уж старый дед: глаза не видят и руки трясутся.

– А кто ж ты такой, хлопче? – спрашивает он, когда я подсаживаюсь на завалинке.

Этот вопрос я слышу в каждое свое посещение.

– Эге, знаю теперь, знаю, – говорит старик, принимаясь опять за лапоты. Вот старая голова, как решето, ничего не держит. Тех, что давно умерли, помню, – ой, хорошо помню! А новых людей все забываю... Зажился на свете.

– А давно ли ты, дед, живешь в этом лесу?

– Эге, давненько! Француз приходил в царскую землю, я уже был.

– Много же ты на своем веку видел. Чай, есть чего рассказать.

Дед смотрит на меня с удивлением.

– А что же мне видеть, хлопче? Лес видел... Шумит лес, шумит и днем, и ночью, зимою шумит и летом... И я, как та деревина, век прожил в лесу и не заметил... Вот и в могилу пора, а подумаю иной раз, хлопче, то и сам смекнуть не могу: жил я на свете или нет... Эге, вот как! Может, и вовсе не жил...

Край темной тучи выдвинулся из-за густых вершин над лесною поляной; ветви замыкавших поляну сосен закачались под дуновением ветра, и лесной шум пронесся глубоким усиленным аккордом. Дед поднял голову и прислушался.

– Буря идет, – сказал он через минуту. – Это вот я знаю. Ой-ой, заревет ночью буря, сосны будет ломать, с корнем выворачивать станет!..

"Ehé! I know now," he said, as he resumed his work. "My head is like an old sieve; it holds nothing. Those who are long since dead I remember very well, – but I forget the younger people. . . . The fact is, I have lived too long."

"And how long have you lived in this forest, grandfather?"

"A long time! I was living here when the Frenchman invaded the land of the Tsar."

"You must have seen a good deal in your lifetime; you could relate many a tale."

The old man looked up in surprise.

"What could I see, my lad? The forest. . . . The forest soughs night and day, summer and winter, and I, like that tree yonder, have spent my life in these woods, and have never had a chance to see. . . . It is time to die, and sometimes, when I try to think, I cannot understand clearly whether or no I *have* lived in this world. . . . Ehé! So it goes! It may be that I have not lived. . . ."

The edge of the dark cloud appeared above the high tree-tops of the clearing. The branches of the pines which encircled it swayed, as they were blown by the wind, and a prolonged murmur passed like a crescendo chord. The grandfather raised his head and listened.

"The storm is coming nearer," he remarked a moment later. "I know it. What a battle there will be to-night! It will break down the pines and uproot them. . . . The Spirit of the Forest will have full sway, . . ." he added, in an undertone.

"What makes you think so, grandfather?"

"Ehé! I am sure of it! I know the language of the trees. . . . They too are afraid, my lad. . . . The aspen is a cursed tree; always whispering; it shakes when there is no wind. When the day is fair, the pine sings at its

ing fast. He was nearly blind and his hands trembled.

"And who are you, lad?" he asked, as I sat down on the bench.

I was accustomed to hearing this question at every visit.

"Eh, hey; now I know, now I know," said the old man, resuming his work on the shoe. "My old head is like a sieve; nothing stays in it now. I remember people who died a long time ago, oh, I remember them well! But I forget new people. I have lived in this world a long time."

"Have you lived in this forest long, daddy?"

"Eh, hey; a long time! When the Frenchmen came into the Tsar's country I was here."

"You have seen much in your day. You must have many stories to tell."

The old man looked at me with surprise.

"And what would I have seen, lad? I have seen the forest. The forest murmurs night and day, winter and summer. One hundred years have I lived in this forest like that tree there without heeding the passage of time. And now I must go to my grave, and sometimes I can't tell, myself, whether I have lived in this world or not. Eh, hey; yes, yes. Perhaps, after all, I have not lived at all."

A corner of the dark cloud moved out over the clearing from behind the close-growing tree-tops, and the pines that stood about the clearing rocked in the first gusts of wind. The murmur of the forest swelled into a great resonant chord. The old man raised his head and listened.

"A storm is coming," he said after a pause. "I know. Oi, oi! A storm will howl to-night, and will break the pines and tear them up by the roots. The Master of the

Заиграет лесной хозяин...– добавил он тише.

– Почему же ты знаешь, дед?

– Эге, это я знаю! Хорошо знаю, как дерево говорит... Дерево, хлопче, тоже боится... Вот осина, проклятое дерево, все что-то лопочет,– и ветру нет, а она трясется. Сосна на бору в ясный день играет-звенит, а чуть подымется ветер, она загудит и застонет. Это еще ничего... А ты вот слушай теперь. Я хоть глазами плохо вижу, а ухом слышу: дуб зашумел, дуба уже трогает на поляне... Это к буре.

Действительно, куча невысоких коряжистых дубов, стоявших посредине поляны и защищенных высокою стеною бора, помахивала крепкими ветвями, и от них несся глухой шум, легко отличаемый от гулкого звона сосен.

– Эге! слышишь ли, хлопче? – говорит дед с детски-лукавой улыбкой.– Я уже знаю: тронуло этак вот дуба, значит хозяин ночью пойдет, ломать будет... Да нет, не сломает! Дуб – дерево крепкое, не под силу даже хозяину... вот как!

– Какой же хозяин, деду? Сам же ты говоришь: буря ломает.

Дед закивал головой с лукавым видом.

– Эге, я ж это знаю!.. Нынче, говорят, такие люди пошли, что уже ничему не верят. Вот оно как! А я же его видел, вот как тебя теперь, а то еще лучше, потому что теперь у меня глаза старые, а тогда были молодые. Ой-ой, как еще видели мои глаза смолоду!..

– Как же ты его видел, деду, скажи-ка?

– А вот, все равно, как и теперь: сначала сосна застонет на бору... То звенит, а то стонать

play; let the wind rise, and it begins to sough and moan. But this is nothing. Hark! Though my eyes are dim, my ears are still good. I can hear the oaks stirring on the clearing. . . . That is a sign of a storm."

And, in fact, the group of sturdy oaks standing in the middle of the meadow, protected by the woods as by a wall, waved their strong branches, rustling loudly, with a sound unlike the murmuring of the pines.

"Ehé! Don't you hear it, my lad?" said the grandfather, smiling in his innocent, childlike way. "I know what it means when the oaks rustle. The Master of the Forest will come at night and make sad havoc. . . . But even *he* cannot break them! The oak is a strong tree; the Master himself cannot break it. . . . That is the truth!"

"What do you mean by the Master, grandfather? You said, just now, it was the storm that broke them."

The old man nodded with a knowing air.

"Ehé! I know something. . . . The world is full of people nowadays who believe in nothing. That is the trouble. But I have seen him as I see you now, and perhaps even better; for now my eyes are dim, but in my young days, I tell you, they were keen!"

"I wish you would tell me how you saw him, grandfather."

"It was a day very like this: the pines began to moan. . . . Generally they murmur, but before a storm they always moan . . . ooo . . . ooo . . . then silence for a while . . . and then again the moaning, faster and faster and more pitiful. Ehé! That's because they know the Master means to lay many of them low in the night. Later the oaks begin to murmur, louder and louder, and by night comes the havoc; the Master runs to and fro, laughs and cries, whirls and dances, trying to uproot

forest will come out."

"How do you know that, daddy?"

"Eh, hey; I know it! I know what the trees are saying. Trees know what fear is as well as we do. There's the aspen, a worthless tree that's always getting broken to pieces. It trembles even when there is no wind. The pines in the forest sing and play, but if the wind rises ever so little they raise their voices and groan. This is nothing yet. There, listen to that! Although my eyes see badly, my ears can hear: that was an oak tree rustling. The oaks have been touched in the clearing. The storm is coming."

And, as a matter of fact, the pair of low, gnarled oak trees that stood in the centre of the clearing, protected by the high wall of the forest, now waved their strong branches and gave forth a muffled rustling easily distinguishable from the clear, resonant notes of the pines.

"Eh, hey; do you hear that, lad?" asked the old man with a childishly cunning smile. "When the oak trees mutter like that, it means that the Master is coming out at night to break them. But no, he won't break them! The oak is a strong tree, too strong even for the Master. Yes indeed!"

"What Master, daddy? You say yourself it is the storm that breaks them."

The old man nodded his head with a crafty look. "Eh, hey; I know that! They tell me there are some people in the world these days who don't believe in anything. Yes indeed! But I have seen him as plainly as I see you now, and better, because my eyes are old now, and they were young then. Oi, oi! How well I could see when I was young!"

"When did you see him, daddy? Tell me, do!"

"It was an evening just like this. The pines began to

начнет: о'-ох-хо-о... о'-хо-о! – и затихнет, а потом опять, потом опять, да чаще, да жалостнее. Эге, потому что много ее повалит хозяин ночью. А потом дуб заговорит. А к вечеру все больше, а ночью и пойдет крутить: бегают по лесу, смеется и плачет, вертится, пляшет и все на дуба налегает, все хочется вырвать... А я раз осенью и посмотрел в оконце; вот ему это и не по сердцу: подбежал к окну, тар-рах в него сосновою корягой; чуть мне все лицо не искалечил, чтоб ему было пусто; да я не дурак отскочил. Эге, хлопче, вот он какой сердитый!..

– А каков же он с виду?

– А с виду он все равно, как старая верба, что стоит на болоте. Очень похож!.. И волосы – как сухая омела, что вырастает на деревьях, и борода тоже, а нос – как здоровенный сук, а морда корявая, точно поросла лишаями. Тьфу, какой некрасивый! Не дай же бог ни одному крещеному на него походить... Ей-богу! Я-таки в другой раз на болоте его видел, близко... А хочешь, приходи зимой, так и сам увидишь его. Взойди туда, на гору,– лесом та гора поросла,– и полезай на самое высокое дерево, на верхушку. Вот оттуда иной день и можно его увидеть: идет он белым столбом по верху лесу, так и вертится сам, с горы в долину спускается. Побежит, побежит, а потом в лесу и пропадет. Эге!.. А где пройдет, там след белым снегом устилает... Не веришь старому человеку, так когда-нибудь сам посмотри.

the oaks. . . . Once, in the autumn, I spied him from the window. That angered him; running up to the window, he gave it a blow with a branch, that came very near disfiguring me, may the Evil One take him! But I am not a fool; I jumped back! Ehé, my lad, he is a cross one!"

"What does he look like?"

"He looks like an old, dried-up willow in the swamp. Very much like one! . . . His hair is like the mistletoe, that grows on trees, and his beard the same . . . his nose is like a big twig . . . and his face is covered with pimples. Fu! what a fright he is I Heaven preserve any Christian from looking like him, to be sure! Another time I was very near him in the swamp. . . . If you come here in winter, you may see him yourself. Go up that hill, the wooded one, and climb to the top of the highest tree. You may see him from there some day. . . . He soars like a white cloud above the trees, whirling as he descends from the hill into the woods. . . . He travels rapidly and vanishes in the forest! Ehé! And wherever he passes he leaves a white trail. If you don't believe me, you may see for yourself some time."

* *An exclamation common in Little Russia.*

groan in the forest. First they sang and then they groaned: oh-ah-o-oh-a-h! And then they stopped, and then they began again louder and more pitifully than ever. Eh, hey; they groaned because they knew that the Master would throw down many of them that night! And then the oak trees began to talk. And toward evening things grew worse until *he* came whirling along with the night. He ran through the forest laughing and crying, dancing and spinning, and always swooping down on those oak trees and trying to tear them up by the roots. And once in the Autumn I looked out of the window, and he didn't like that. He came rushing up to the window and, bang-bang, he broke it with a pine knot. He nearly hit my face, bad luck to him! But I'm no fool. I jumped back. Eh, hey; lad, that's the sort of a quarrelsome fellow he is!"

"But what does he look like?"

"He looks exactly like an old willow tree in a marsh. Just exactly! His hair is like dry mistletoe on a tree, and his beard too; but his nose is like a big fat pine knot and his mouth is as twisted as if it were all overgrown with lichen. Bah, how ugly he is! God pity any Christian that looks like him! Yes indeed! I saw him once quite close, in a swamp. If you'll come here in the winter you can see him for yourself. You must go in that direction, up that hill it is covered with woods and climb to the very top of the highest tree. He can sometimes be seen from there racing along over the tree-tops, carrying a white staff in his hand, and whirling, whirling until he whirls down the hill into the valley. Then he runs away and disappears into the forest. Eh, hey! And wherever he steps he leaves a foot-print of white snow. If you don't believe an old man come and see for yourself."

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