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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Denmark in the Wind

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Copenhagen

MY husband wants a wind turbine for Christmas. Just a small one, to be erected alongside our summer cabin at the coast. “We could have it out back!” he said. Good idea, I admit. In Denmark, we get our share of moderate-to-fresh winds, as the weather guys say. More often, it seems, we have storms. In the city we don’t notice them that much, but at the cabin we listen uneasily to the howling of the wind in the vents. We sit on edge at the windows and watch the wind tearing at the fir trees. We’ve cut down the tallest and most imposing tree in our garden so it won’t topple over in a storm and smash the roof to smithereens.

Our cabin is by the ocean. Not in the first row, but drawn back some, and on a hill. When I go for a walk in the dunes, I imagine myself inside the cabins in the first row, sitting there in the late light of a Scandinavian summer evening, smoking (even though I’m a nonsmoker), drinking sundowners (gin and tonic) and thinking poetic thoughts with a hint of blue. My husband, who built our cabin on the hill long before I knew him, is slightly jealous about my flirting with the first row. So now we’ve been on Google Earth and discovered that in 50 years all my dream cabins will be claimed by the rising sea! In fact, most of the point where our cabin lies will have disappeared. The hill and our house will remain, an island reachable only by boat, but still. “At least you’ll be able to see the ocean,” my husband says smugly, forgetting that we’ll both be dust by then.

“You’re the ones who will have to live with the effects of climate change,” we caution our youngest as he consumes yet another burger. As a 12-year-old, he has yet to comprehend that at some point he may have to choose between beef and rain forests, plane journeys or glaciers, rationing or perishing. He has no idea that insurance premiums are already rising fast (too fast!), due to the kind of climate-induced flooding that has been filling many a Danish basement. On the other hand, he knows Denmark will have vineyards, and by then he’ll be able to swim with dolphins! Pretty cool, yeah?

I haven’t the heart to mention the plagues of malaria mosquitoes, the risks of contracting West Nile virus and cholera. Neither have I troubled him with forecasts of the cod disappearing from Danish waters, or with the gloomy prospects for growing Christmas trees here. I did, though, (mis)appropriate the climate angle in the course of a discussion about pets. “A medium-sized dog pollutes as much as a 4.6-liter Toyota Land Cruiser clocking more than 6,000 miles a year!” I tell him, reading out of the newspaper. “Yeah, sure,” he says, and rolls his eyes. As if.

He’ll shake his head the same way this Christmas, when he finds out his father’s got a wind turbine. Daddy gets what Daddy wants. Maybe not a whole turbine, maybe just part of one. In Denmark, there are more than 100 wind turbine cooperatives, and special exchanges where you can buy shares in them. Our Christmas will
be a peaceful one: we’ll talk about the wind and the weather, but in the nice way, so we’ll forget that this year once again Christmas wasn’t white. The snow is going, too.

_Hanne-Vibeke Holst is a novelist. This essay was translated by Martin Aitken from the Danish._