

ZVAIGZNE ABC PUBLISHERS

Latvian Books for Adults

CATALOGUE 2024



ZANE DAUDZIŅA (1967)

Zane Daudziņa holds a PhD in Art Sciences and is an Associate Professor at the Latvian Academy of Culture, where she conducts practical stage speech classes for students in Drama Theatre acting and directing courses. As a speech instructor, she teaches aspiring actors techniques for body relaxation, proper breathing, voice projection, expanding vocal range, articulation, and understanding the logical analysis of text.

Zane Daudziņa regularly leads public speaking seminars for company executives, teachers, cultural workers, civil servants, and representatives of many other professions throughout Latvia. She also serves as a speech consultant for Latvian Radio. In addition to her academic and teaching work, Z. Daudziņa participates as an actress in various theater and television projects. She is the author of four books: *Diary* (2021), *My Year of War* (2023), *Actor's Speech in Latvian Theatre in 21st Century* (2022) and *Speak Confidently* (2023).

Childhood in Kommunalka is the author's fifth book. It recounts her childhood in a communal apartment in the Soviet Union. **The book has become a bestseller immediately after its release, selling 7 500 copies in its first month and 10 000 in 6 weeks.**

Awards and nominations for Zane Daudziņa:

- Winner of the Latvian public media annual award "1 kg of Culture" autumn voting 2023 in the category of literature (the biggest annual culture award in the country)

CHILDHOOD IN KOMMUNALKA (BĒRNUDIENAS KOMUNĀLIJĀ)

"Inspiration came from the fact that my parents told me a lot about their childhood, and my mother still enjoys unraveling and reminiscing about those strange events and situations from Soviet times. She's a wonderful storyteller, and this has resulted in my own vivid recollections of my very early childhood. I had material to build on. It was a very unnatural and artificial environment where we had to live our lives and coexist somehow. There was an enormous amount of absurd humor

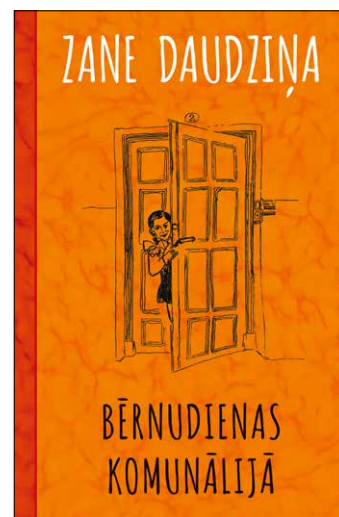
and curiosity because the characters who came together had such vibrant personalities, and many are vividly described in the book. It's a time with different problems, a different worldview. Now, when you look at it from a distance, there's much more comedy than tragedy. Even about important, more tragic events, I've tried to write from a child's perspective, so there's none of the heaviness that the adults of that time had to endure."

Zane Daudziņa

The book consists of 49 short stories that narrate the author's childhood in a communal apartment in the Latvian SSR. It takes place from 1960s to 1990s. These stories are based on the experiences of the author, her parents, and neighbors. Each story illustrates, from a child's perspective, a specific aspect of Soviet life, a character from the communal apartment, or a childhood experience, but all are presented with the lightness and humor of a child's worldview. Reflecting on her years in the communal apartment, Zane Daudziņa talks about the strange daily life where, under external circumstances, one had to

coexist with strangers with totally different mentality. In the carousel of apartment neighbors, some characters stand out more vividly (such as Anatoliy, Nadya, Zina), while others are more episodic (Misha, Olya, Sasha, the OMON officer, etc.).

Overall, the book's tone, language, and compositional structure make it easily accessible and enjoyable even for readers who have no experience of the Soviet era. This is one of the motivations behind creating this story—to introduce the world of Soviet childhood to future generations, offering them a way to feel the pulse of life in another time.



Rights sold: Estonia, Lithuania

Sample translation: English

978-9934-32-687-5
21 × 13,5 cm
256 pages



LAURA VINOGRADOVA (1984)

Laura Vinogradova is a Latvian writer of children’s and adult literature. She studied business management at Riga Technical University and did not start writing until she was 30. Her first published book was a story for children, *Snīpulītis no Snīpuļciema* (*Baby Long Nose from the Long Nose Village*, 2017), followed immediately by two collections of short stories: *izelpas* (*exhalations*, 2018) and *Lāču kalns* (*Bear Hill*, 2018). In 2019, she published a book for children in two volumes, called *Mežpasakas* (*Tales of the Forest*). *Upe* (*The River*) is her first novel and the work that brought her much wider recognition. Her latest published book is a story for children *Tētis un suns* (*Father and the Dog*). She currently lives in Riga and works at the Museum of Literature and Music.

Awards and nominations for Laura Vinogradova:

- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literature Award, 2021 (*The River*)
- European Union Prize for Literature, 2021 (*The River*)
- Nominated for the Annual Latvian Literature Award, 2022 (children’s story *Dad and the Dog*)
- Egonā Līva annual award for the best novel of the year, 2023 (*The Crows*)

THE RIVER (UPE)

The life of Rute is prosperous, but it is filled with an emptiness made more and more intolerable by memories of her harsh childhood, pining for a long-lost sister, painful thoughts about a mother in prison and an inability to open up to the people closest to her, her husband included. Rute never knew her father, but when he dies leaving her an inheritance of a country house by the river, she escapes – escapes from the city, from people, from herself. She needs not only to escape, but to try and learn to live with the pain caused by her sister’s disappearance – a pain that she has lived with for 10 years. Living in her father’s country house on the riverbank, she gets to know her neighbors, but, most of all, she gets to know the river ... a river that becomes her symbolic sister.

It is a beautiful, slow-paced novel in the best traditions of Nordic literature with many descriptions of nature, and the charm of the countryside, showing the special connection person established with nature at milestone moments of his life.

“Rute goes down to the river and sits for a while. The riverbank is damp. The air smells of sweet flag and seaweed. Of smoke and wet moss. A bit like autumn, even though it’s

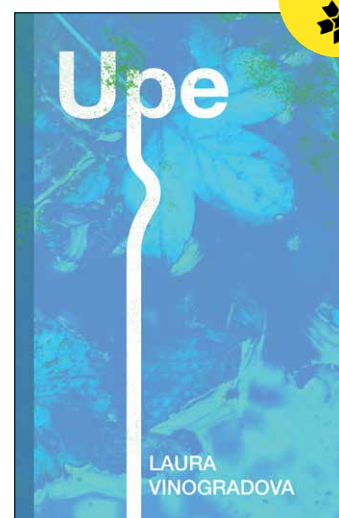
summer. Rute sheds her clothing and slides into the water. Then she lets it carry her. She floats on her back and stares at the sky. Now and then she moves her arms and legs so she stays in the middle of the river. Then she reaches a spot in the river where there is a lot of seaweed. The current can’t carry her any farther, and she floats in the water, the seaweed swirling and wrapping around her. Like snakes. Rute mentally speaks the words of the river. She has no idea where the words come from. She speaks and speaks, but then suddenly a hand grabs her and pulls her ashore. It’s Kristofs. He’s staring at her in fear, he wants to yell, but then he lets her go and she drops to the ground. Rute is tangled and wrapped up, so full of the river’s words, that her legs fail her. Kristofs takes off his shirt and gives it to her. Only then does she remember she is completely naked. Kristofs turns and slowly walks up the path, cleared by fishermen, and goes home. Rute follows. They don’t speak. Simply walk.”

Translated by Kaija Strautmanis

Full translation available: English

Rights sold: USA, Bulgaria, Lithuania,

Germany, France, Macedonia



987-9934-0-8847-6
21 × 14 cm
112 pages

CROWS (VĀRNAS)

Sanna grows up in an orphanage. There she meets Andrey, a Roma boy. Unexpectedly, Andrey leaves the orphanage, and Sanna continues her journey alone. The feelings of loneliness and unimportance, stemming from her orphanage experience, make Sanna an unhappy and angry teenager who, after arriving to the capital city and living in the dormitory, drinks alcohol excessively, smokes, and is aggressive towards other young people.

After several years of not seeing each other, Andrey finds Sanna sleeping on a bench in the park. He takes the girl to his home, and they fall in love. Until now, Andrey has been supported by Aunt Rita, who now becomes a support for Sanna as well.

Sanna and Andrey seem happy; they have a daughter, Lia, but Sanna feels that her anger towards life has not subsided.

Lia is already attending school, and Sanna resumes her neglected studies. However, one evening Sanna fails to

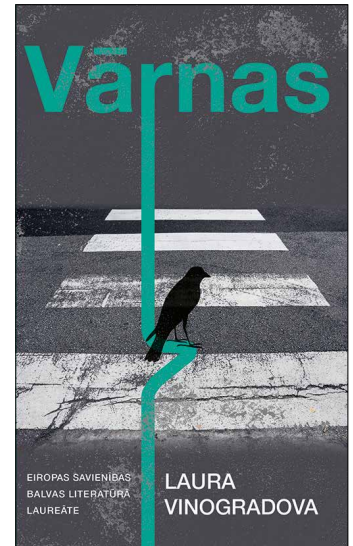
cross the pedestrian crossing – she is hit by a trolleybus.

Several years have passed. Lia returns home from Scotland because she heard a man on a show talking about his life after receiving a heart transplant. Lia and Aunt Rita are convinced that it is Sanna’s heart.

Unexpectedly, his family finds Andrey – Roma people whom he has not known until now. Romani culture enters their peaceful lives – loud, free, very family-oriented. Lia’s stereotypes about Roma are shattered; she learns to be part of a family, to have a strong backbone, although at school she experiences severe bullying precisely because of her Romani heritage.

Lia decides to meet the man who received Sanna’s heart. During the meeting, she encounters clear dislike, even disgust, as the man believes he is living with a gypsy’s heart. Lia leaves without revealing that Sanna was Latvian.

Accepting her Roma family, Lia also accepts herself.



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translation available: English

Rights sold: Germany

978-9934-32-189-4
21 × 13,5 cm
160 pages



DACE VĪGANTE (1970)

Writer Dace Vīgante was born in Jūrmala, Latvia. She graduated from The University of Latvia, Faculty of Law. After a successful career in law, Dace turned to writing. Vīgante attended “Literary Academy” programme of the Writer’s Union. Vīgante’s first novel “The Romantic” was published in 2022. Currently, Dace is working as a professor at the “Literary Academy” programme of the Writer’s Union.

Awards and nominations for Dace Vīgante:

- Nominated for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, 2017 (*Ice Orange*)
- Kilogram of Culture Award, 2017 (*Ice Orange*)
- Youth and Paternal Jury Award, 2017 (*Ice Orange*)
- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, 2023 (*The Romantic*)

ICE OCEAN (LEDUS OKEĀNS)

At the centre of the “Ice Ocean” are the stories of three women from the same family – Irma, Mara, and Rasa – intertwining in various times and contexts, both present and in memories.

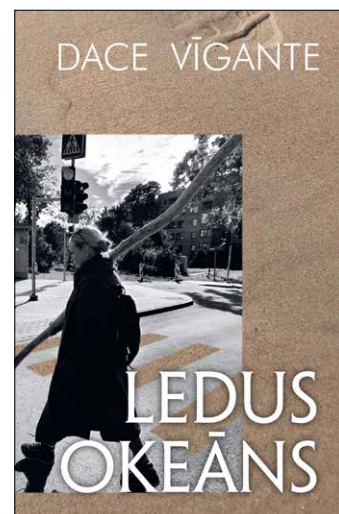
Although the plot is based on a family story of Dace Vīgante, with all events having a real historical background from 1940–1991, this is a literary work.

Irma’s and Mara’s lives are harshly influenced by the events of 1940 when Latvia is violently incorporated into the Soviet Union and in 1941, more than 14,000 Latvian intellectuals are deported to Siberia. One of them is Irma – Mara’s mother.

After Stalin’s death, Irma returns to Latvia from Siberia, where she spent 16 years in forced exile. Irma’s deported husband died in the gulag. She returns to her nationalized home, where now live both Irma’s children, relatives, and immigrants from Soviet republics. Meeting her adult children – Mara and Kaspars, instead of expected joy, Irma experiences misunderstanding and resistance. Irma’s children have experienced the events of World War II

and poverty, grown up in the Soviet system almost as orphans and have developed Soviet values, opposite to Irma, who has experienced hunger, cold, and humiliations in the settlement in Siberia by the Arctic Ocean, yet has preserved her inner core and wants to provide her children with a good education and a better future. Due to different beliefs, a particularly deep conflict arises between Irma and Mara. Mara treats Irma as an unwelcome stranger who has come to impose her order in her life. Therefore, Irma pays more attention to her son, whom she remembers better. Over time, the conflict between mother and daughter deepens. When Kaspar dies in a drunken state, Mara believes that Irma has taken away her brother too, convinced that Irma is guilty of her brother’s death.

Irma’s daughter Mara is one year old when her parents are deported to Siberia. For several years, she and her brother are raised by their grandfather, Irma’s father; after his death, they experience mistreatment from their relatives who have moved in into their home. Life’s hardships have hardened



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translations: English

Publications: Lithuania, Germany, China

Rights sold: Germany

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86 pages

Mara; she learns to stand up for herself. Seeing her mother after 16 years, she doesn't understand this strange woman with different beliefs and peculiar manners; between them, a sea of misunderstanding and intolerance spreads. Disappointed in love, after a painful divorce from her husband, Mara is left alone with her daughter Rasa, but finds joy and satisfaction in the multinational collective of the factory. However, when Irma suffers a stroke after her son's death, Mara is the only one who takes care of her mother until circumstances force her to place her mother in a nursing home.

Mara's daughter, Rasa, does not understand what is happening between the two women of the family.

She only knows that Grandma has never loved Mom, only her brother, as Mom has told her. But is that really the case? In order to protect Rasa, family had never told her story of exile to Siberia, as well as the circumstances of Grandma's return. However, gradually Rasa discovers the complex characters of the family women, the dramatic events of the past, and feels not only the hunger for love of both women but also realizes her own strong bond with both. Rasa is like a living bridge over the "ice ocean" created by the family women.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

THE ROMANTIC (ROMANTIĶIS)

Set in Latvia between 1938 and 1993, the novel follows the fortunes of a series of characters and the ways their lives are both impacted by the occupation of their country, first by the Germans and then by the USSR, and also affected by the winds of change with Latvia's National Awakening. Despite the author drawing inspiration from the life of her father, a keen racing driver, personal diaries of the period in question and other historical facts, the novel remains a work of fiction.

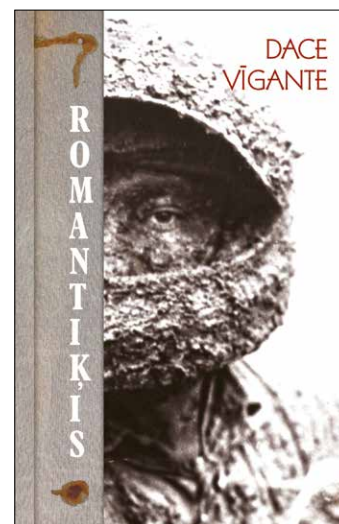
The novel opens in 1993 as fifty-five-year-old Haralds Vindinieks wins his final competition in the buggy class and says farewell to competitive racing. Sporting events have played a major role in his life and he now finds himself feeling lost and bereft. Katrīna, his girlfriend, does her best to be supportive but her attentions do nothing but irritate him. He suffers terribly with insomnia and his nights are spent fretting about his life; he worries that he has not lived his best life, has not really known the people closest to him and has been unable to communicate openly with those around him. The racing track was the only place where he felt fully at ease with himself. In his mind, he starts conversing with his daughter, Elza's, unborn child who he refers to as Baby.

In chapter two, Haralds puts pen to paper and starts writing his memoirs for his grandson. He thinks back over his childhood and family home; of himself as a five-year-old boy, his youngest brother, his sister, his mother – the daughter of a Polish aristocrat, his father, grandparents, his childhood adventures, the traumatic

events of WWII, his father's disappearance in 1944, the start of Soviet power and the atrocities committed by their 'liberators'. Haralds never came to terms with his mother's decision to marry a Russian, Tolyk, and struggles with this betrayal.

The deportations of 1949 destroy Haralds' family; his grandparents are deported to Siberia and, although his mother and Tolyk manage to save her children, only her daughter Dita is allowed to remain with her whilst her sons are sent to an orphanage. It is there that, staring out through the railings of the orphanage yard at the cars and motorbikes driving past in the street beyond, Haralds' love of speed and the way it symbolizes freedom is first born. The brothers are separated for many years. Haralds' great-aunt, his grandfather's sister, Ellātante, takes him in and, through her, Harald experiences not only the harsh reality of poverty but also learns about the world of art and selfless love. Haralds drops out of school, his lack of education contributing to a chip on his shoulder he carries for the rest of his life, and becomes the main breadwinner, working in a kolkhoz. He also develops his lifelong passion for motorbikes. Encouraged by his entrepreneurial sister, Dita, he returns to his mother who, in the meantime, has suffered another tragedy. Tolyk has left Latvia taking her third son with him. It is not until eight years later that his brother Edgars returns.

Haralds is demobbed from conscripted service and, knowing how much her son loves them, his mother buys him a Java motorbike. His sister Dita, as if acting out of spite against the world



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translation: English

Rights sold: Estonia

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21 × 13,5 cm
416 pages

at large, leaves to work on the Baikal-Amur Mainline, the railway traversing Eastern Russia, and is gone for two years. Meanwhile, hoping to be accepted into the motor racing association, Haralds starts practising on his motorbike through the streets of Jelgava and almost loses his leg following an accident. In hospital he meets Lidija, a nurse, who nurses him back to health and later becomes his first wife. Haralds' mother has grave misgivings about her son's motorsport escapades. Lidija has a baby girl, Elza, and, like her mother-in-law, loathes her husband's dangerous hobby yet the couple stay together for the sake of their daughter.

Two years after her departure, Haralds' sister, Dita, returns from Russia with a son. Haralds, meanwhile, has become a well-known motorcycle racer. Motor racing occupies all his free time and his marital relations are complicated. Lidija is offered a job in the seaside town of Jurmala and the family of three move there, living in one small room. In Jūrmala, encouraged by his coach to get involved in water motorsports, Haralds takes up glider racing. He succeeds in winning a host of competitions but the devotion of all his time to sport and money issues lead to him and Lidija divorcing. Around this time, Haralds is also deeply affected by the death of his great-aunt, Ellātante.

By 1974, Haralds is pinning his hopes on getting into formula racing and buying his own car. His petitions at the motor sports office are met with indifference although he does meet some contacts who recognize his talent and agree to help him. Haralds eventually comes into possession of an Estonian-manufactured formula racing car which leads to continuous vicissitudes as he tries to manage all its technical defects. Sleepless nights, money issues, competitions won and others he is forced to abandon. Haralds is met with challenges every step of the way and yet still he perseveres. He is invited to join the Latvian national racing team and travels with them to Leningrad on a dilapidated old tour bus when he meets the love of his life – a porcelain decorator called Beāte. Their love is mutual and profound, but Beāte has a secret. She has lost a child and wants no more children. Encouraged by Beāte, Haralds discovers music, art, literature and is introduced to her circle of friends but

with whom he does not feel fully at ease. Facing ongoing technical issues with his car, Haralds grows impatient with Beāte, especially when she becomes pregnant and subsequently falls into a depression. Haralds misinterprets the behaviour of Beāte's ex-husband and leaves with his team for a fortnight in Georgia.

The day of Haralds' return, Beāte is killed in a road accident. Haralds then learns that she has had an abortion. He seeks solace in his motor racing, pushing himself so hard that he nears breaking point. He is close to becoming suicidal but is miraculously saved by a dog. He also has a heart-to-heart with his mother and they reconcile. At work, Haralds has a new mechanic, Boris, who becomes a great friend and support. His daughter has come to play a more central role in his life and he has to deal with various uncomfortable situations. He then has a serious accident while racing and his formula car is completely written off. He attempts to reconstruct his speedster but in the end is forced to concede defeat. He then meets Viktors, head of the Moldavian buggy team. Enthusiastic about this new encounter, he decides to move to Moldavia although the plans are stalled when he meets up with Katrīna, his boyhood sweetheart. Katrīna seems the ideal woman in every way and yet Haralds cannot let go of the memory of Beāte, unconvinced that their tie might be true love.

In the third and final chapter of the novel, Katrīna tells Haralds she is leaving him and sets out the reasons for her decision. Haralds is devastated. One freezing night, when there is black ice on the roads, Haralds' daughter, Elza, goes into labour and Haralds and Katrīna take her to hospital. Elza is in an advanced stage of labour but they make it in time, with Katrīna almost passing out with fear on the hair-raising drive to the hospital. Returning home, Katrīna reads the last lines in Harald's notebook which both surprise and bewilder her.

The novel concludes with the last message to Baby in which Haralds acknowledges that, thanks to the conversations they have had together, he has realised what really matters and is now ready to get on with rest of his life.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini



ARNO JUNDZE (1965)

Arno Jundze is a Latvian prose writer, cultural journalist, literary critic and theorist. He has hosted several culture TV programs. Arno Jundze is an editor of the cultural news section for one of the biggest newspapers in Latvia, and helps in shaping country's most important art and literature forums. Despite being deeply involved in administrative work, he also finds time for creative writing. His first works in creative writing were two books for children and a collection of stories about paradigm shifts, morality and culture in Post-Soviet Latvia.

Awards Arno Jundze:

- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literature Award, 2015 (*Dust in an Hourglass*)
- Zelta vilnis Award for hosting the TV show *National Treasures*
- Latvian Language Agency and Association of Latvian Journalists "Storyteller" Award
- Latvian Publishers' Association Award

THE DUST IN AN HOURGLASS (PUTEKĻI SMILŠU PULKSTENĪ)

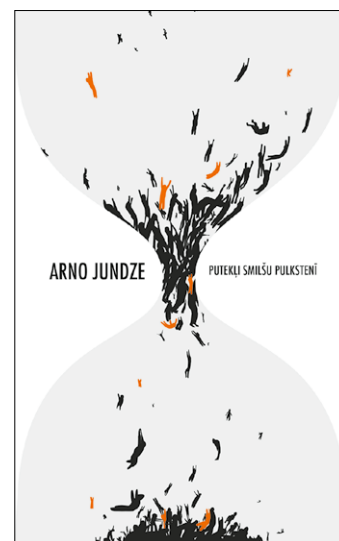
Every man is just a grain of dust in the sunshine, and that grain of dust gets one chance to shine. This novel is like an amazing mosaic that the reader must put together himself. And it's unbelievable how all the pieces fit together.

The protagonist is tormented by strange dreams and it's as if he is remembering his previous lives. Everybody dreams sometimes, but the protagonist's dreams are much brighter than his personal life, besides the men he visualizes in his dreams are all at a breaking point in their lives. At times these are moments of happiness, at others quite unpleasant situations. These weird dreams chase him from his very childhood during the Soviet times when no one spoke as yet of the reincarnation. Time passes, the protagonist comes to the conclusion that it is better not to reveal those strange feelings to anyone, therefore he shares them only with his diary that he keeps at home in his garage.

France, 2003. A successful IT specialist, working in a branch of a big Latvian company, decides to go to Paris. He makes plenty of money and has handled the practical side of life well, but has not achieved any work-life balance. It's high time for a change. He enjoys his time in the city and takes it easy. Having a good time leads him

to inviting a prostitute of enormous proportions to his hotel room. After a good dose of whisky, he pulls himself together and invites his sweetheart to Paris. They are both happy and they feel like part of a romantic novel. The detective of the local police is of another opinion. In a cheap hotel they have come across the corpse of an Eastern European, a drug addict who has overdosed. Quite by chance, somebody has found his passport on the bank of the Seine so they know the poor guy's name. The police have discovered that the deceased was a great IT specialist, who unfortunately had succumbed to various addictions and lost everything – both his career and the woman he loved.

Nowadays. Latvia. A small town. Two old pensioners, who have little left of their lives, engage in small talk early one morning when the town is still waking up. They discuss crow hunting as well as old times. One tells the other how he once served in the army as a Gulag guard and witnessed a strange episode when the head guard had tried to humiliate a Lutheran minister in front of the captives. Making him crawl broken glass on his bare knees when he refused to give up his faith. The glass didn't hurt the minister, but the head guard



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translation: English

Full translation: Spanish

Rights sold: Mexico, Lithuania

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20 x 13 cm
272 pages

ended up in hospital. The old Russian would like to meet the minister again to ask his forgiveness and tell him that the rest of the guards had been on his side at the time. Most likely it's no longer possible.

The end of the 16th century, Livonia. An old mystic healer feels death approaching. He knows that his neighbour has made accusations against him and that he will most likely be burnt at the stake. But he must not die before he has been able to pass on his secret knowledge to someone. Bearing in mind the recent witch trials organized by the Christian church he doesn't want to pass on his knowledge to a child, as tradition would have it and how he had been initiated. He decides to trust a small oak, the sacred tree of his faith, with his secret wisdom. He knows now that he can die in peace, the church and the feudal lord will have no say over it.

The Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia in the '80s. A 14-year-old boy is forced to undergo for the first time in his life the humiliating experience of the War Commission's medical check-up. But he manages to forget it in no time. He is a good student; he completes his high school education and starts university. He is a naive boy that for a long time hasn't even had a relationship with a woman, but then, during his student years, he meets his first love and, when the girl leaves him, he cries. After his first year at university, he is drafted into the army and sent to the war in Afghanistan. The Soviet Army isn't doing well there because some senile old comrade in the Kremlin has had the bright idea of sending the intellectual Soviet elite from the universities to war. The army is hell, a place where you have to save your barren life. The guy is taught to kill and the naive student becomes a sniper – a man hunter. When he is discharged, the desire to kill has become too much of a permanent instinct to suffocate it. He tries. He tries to establish his own business with friends, but, coming across a criminal gang, he kills the extortionists in cold blood. His future life is full of illegal affairs, narcotics and arms smuggling deals.

The Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia. A Lutheran minister who had been through the Gulag and continues serving God. Even the fact that society has turned its back on him and considers him an enemy hasn't affected his faith. The minister only spends time with outsiders like himself, marginalised by the Soviet government and who, deep down, hate the communist ideology but are too scared to admit it to anyone. The minister observes with sadness as the regime tells lies and destroys everything good that once stood for the free Republic of Latvia. The minister didn't see his children while they were growing up as he was in Siberia, therefore he is very attached to his grandson who has just started school and they talk a lot. Once

they talked of the afterlife and made an agreement that, should it exist, when the minister dies, he would come to tell his grandson about it. Their conversations are endless. Time goes by, the grandson has grown up, and the grandfather has become weak. The night when the minister dies, he comes to his grandson and says – now you see that the afterlife does exist, but it is much more complicated than we ever imagined it.

Riga. Latvia. From the '90s until present days. After the independent state of Latvia is re-established a young and promising scientist decides to give up his work in research because his salary is so small that he is unable to provide for his family. His youngest daughter disappears whilst out on a walk. When her parents find her unconscious near a clump of old oak trees, only a miracle can save her life. She is in a coma for several days, and the doctors are at a loss as to what's wrong with her. The man leaves for Denmark and becomes a salesman of agriculture equipment. He would have preferred to stay in science, so close to his heart, but the family comes first. But on the coast of a cold sea his youngest daughter meets a strange, old, white-haired man. When for the girl it's time to return, the man claims that she would forget for the time being all that was said, but it would all return to her when she grew up and when the time was right.

The outskirts of Riga, 2005. An alcoholic journalist, a former media king, the former editor and owner of a leading boulevard press magazine, having lost his family and property, is now a miserable night watchman on a building site on the outskirts of Riga – on a plot where they are planning to build an estate of houses for wealthy buyers. For the time being there are only a few old buildings. In the course of demolishing them the man comes across hidden fragments of documents that testify some tapped telephone conversations, espionage and contraband schemes, illegal affairs and even murders. He gives up his old habits and starts researching during his time off, discovering step by step what is behind the unusual document bundle. The man writes a sensational book where he reveals a brutal, unresolved murder and makes his comeback to the life he had given up some time ago. Society welcomes back the once famous journalist because nobody has any idea where he has spent all those last years. But the man himself doesn't realize that he hasn't found those documents by chance and that soon someone would supply him with even more sensational and compromising material.

The author of the diary kept in the garage has finally come to a conclusion that it's high time to stop dreaming about the lives of others and to start living a life of his own. He is not even fifty yet. The man buys a camper van, restores it and decides to leave for a long trip around Europe.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

THE ONLY WITNESS (VIENĪGAIS LIECINIEKS)

“The Only Witness” is a fast-paced thriller that takes place in Riga and Vilnius. It is a rollercoaster of crimes, love and sex.

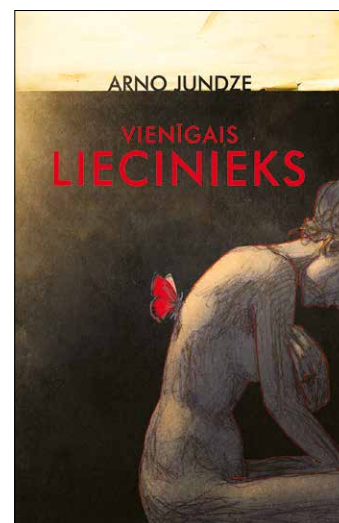
In the course of an argument, a TV talk show host, Joe, loses his temper, strikes his boss and gets fired. Returning home, he walks in on his wife with her lover who, it appears, is no other than his best friend. That night he checks into a hotel, only to discover the following morning that his car has been taken to pieces by car thieves. He spends several days drowning his sorrows in alcohol before heading, anonymously, to Vilnius, Lithuania, where he plans to write a novel. He is both hurt and furious about what has happened and, undeniably, being a TV star, he could come up with something very scandalous.

In Vilnius, Joe stays in an apartment rented to him by a friend from his youth, now a wealthy real estate holder. He struggles with his writing, unable to stop thinking about the affronts he suffered in Riga. He has filed for divorce and is drinking heavily. One day, he meets an unusual young woman in a restaurant, Naomi. Admittedly, she has the look of a down-at-heel prostitute looking out for wealthy, foreign clients. A racy conversation results in an even racier continuation of the evening back in Joe’s rented flat. All this leads to a passionate affair. Or that’s what Joe thinks. Naomi’s intentions are not entirely clear, nor is the opinion of her gay brother Nick; a drug and gambling addict. Joe, however, is seemingly obsessed with the woman. His luck seems to have turned, too, and his novel gets written in a flash. Joe then receives an offer from a commercial TV channel to host a new, more prestigious TV show, and the channel he had previously worked for begs him to come back. His divorce goes through and the assets divided. Joe starts

considering a return to Latvia with Naomi. Prominent men in their forties generally have partners half their age, after all. The fact that his lover has got him caught up in drug trafficking does nothing make him shelve the idea.

After spending a few days in Riga where he meets his publisher and the boss of the commercial TV channel, Joe, full of exciting plans for the future, returns to Vilnius and goes straight to Naomi’s. Here he is confronted with a devastating revelation; Naomi and her brother have been brutally murdered. The flat resembles the inside of a bloody slaughterhouse. In a state of shock, Joe runs from the flat without alerting the police and starts drinking heavily. Finding him in an inebriated state, the police arrest him on suspicion of the double murder and interrogate him. Stunned by the brutality of the crime, the investigating officer does everything in his power to get Joe to confess. It is not until several weeks later that it becomes clear that Joe could not have been responsible for the murders since he was travelling by bus to Vilnius at the time. Obviously, Joe hopes and prays his connection with the drug trafficking won’t come to light, as then he would never get out of custody.

Eventually, Joe is released. Having collected his possessions, he returns to Latvia a broken man, where he tries to settle into his new life as a divorcee and even out relations with his ex-wife and other women. Luckily, he has already written the bulk of his novel. Somehow, he manages to finish it and, with work on his new TV show now underway, he is saved from breaking down entirely. Still, the question of who killed Naomi and Nick still hangs over him. He suspects Nick’s lover, Stas, a drug addict and Mafioso. One morning, Joe reads online of a shoot-out between the Lithuanian police and a felon,



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translation: English

978-9934-0-9652-5
21 × 14 cm
192 pages

pursued for double murder and drug trafficking. It turns out to be Stas. Some time later, Joe hears that a memorial service is due to be held in a church in Vilnius in memory of Naomi and Nick. Joe attends the service where he meets the investigating officer who not only fills Joe in on developments in the murder case but also apprises him of the fact that Naomi and Nick were the offspring of wealthy Lithuanian entrepreneurs who had been killed in a mysterious car crash. Joe is astounded to hear the siblings had in fact been extremely wealthy, especially in view of their impoverished lifestyle. Joe also has the sense that there is more to Naomi's death than the investigating officer is willing to let on.

Joe returns to Riga filled with a burning desire to uncover the truth about his lover's death. During a presentation of his new and highly successful book, Joe is handed an envelope. He is surrounded by people, greeting and congratulating him, and does not look inside the envelope there and then. Opening it later, he discovers that, rather than well wishes for the success of his book, it contains evidence of him having sex with Naomi and Nick together. Someone is clearly trying to blackmail him. Joe's nerves are in shreds and he fears for his sanity. Unable to sleep and beside himself with not knowing what actually happened, he starts to question whether he himself had actually committed the murders.

Desperate to discover the truth, Joe returns to Lithuania. Here he winds up in the grasp of mafia drug lords but

narrowly escapes being killed thanks to the help of his friend from Vilnius. The matter now seems to be closed and Joe attempts to get on with his life; hosting his TV show and attending book signings. Doubts concerning the suspicious circumstances of Naomi's death continue to haunt him, however, and he hires a private detective who succeeds in throwing new light on the case. Subsequently, the unknown person who had previously sent Joe the photograph now sends a video taken of Naomi's flat on the day of the murder. Their meeting is bewildering and Joe is unsure why it is necessary. Further complications arise when the Lithuanian criminals who had tried to kill Joe are, in turn, murdered. At this point, Joe is terrified that he is next on the list. It eventually transpires that the man who sent Joe the photographs and video was in fact the murderer. He had once been Naomi's family lawyer but was also a criminal mastermind in the Vilnius underworld, intent on getting his hands on her family's fortune. An international warrant for his arrest is issued. It is only when he learns that the lawyer has been shot dead in the forest outside Vilnius and the case is closed that Joe can finally let down his guard. However, months later while on holiday in Crete, Joe unexpectedly witnesses something in the old town of Chania that reveals to him that the plan had been more diabolic than he could ever have imagined.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini



DŽENA ANDERSONE (1977)

Džena Andersone is a lawyer and a writer. She was born in Ventspils, where she graduated from medical school, currently she lives in Riga. In 2007 she obtained a Bachelor's degree in law at the Latvian Police Academy, in 2009 a Master's degree at Riga Stradins University, and in 2019 a Doctorate in criminal law at the University of Latvia. She combines a successful legal career with her writing. She has studied creative writing at the Literary Academy (organized by the Latvian Writers' Union), and her debut collection of stories "Dadži" (Thistles) was published in 2021.

Nominations for Džena Andersone:

- Nominated for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, 2021 (*Thistles*)
- Nominated for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, 2024 (*Chalk Circles*)

CHALK CIRCLES (KRĪTA APĻI)

Fifteen-year-old Frances lives in a communal apartment in a small Eastern European city with her unstable mother, fearful grandfather, and domineering grandmother, who is the main authority figure in their lives. Frances dreams of attending college. However, since the 6th grade, Frances has been home-schooled and works part-time – she mops floors at a philately shop. Her mother strongly objects to Frances' desire to study, believing that Frances shouldn't study at all but rather should try to obtain a disability status so she can always stay at home and receive benefits. Frances herself feels healthy, but her mother has managed to have Frances diagnosed with epilepsy.

Frances dislikes that her mother routinely calls her Robchik – a men's name, which makes her wonder what it would be like to be born a boy; she feels unsure about herself and her name. But what bothers her most are the constant conflicts between her mother and grandmother; it's exacerbated by the fact that both her mother and grandmother constantly put Frances in a position to choose between them.

Frances prefers her grandmother's side because her grandmother

possesses great, almost magical power, and she also has chinks with which she draws chalk circles around her bed every night to keep evil away. Frances feels that sometimes she sees ghosts at night, so she feels safer with her grandmother because her mother doesn't provide her with that sense of security. Frances is happy when her grandmother gives her one of the chinks because with that chalk, she can draw chalk circles around her own bed too.

When her grandmother dies, Frances blames her mother because she thinks her mother might have poisoned her grandmother. A heated argument breaks out between them, and Frances is determined to go to the capital city to study; her mother threatens with suicide.

The only moments of relief for Frances are at her job – at the philately shop, where she works with the old, wise, and gallant Cheslav, who not only offers advice but also encourages her to go to college. There is also a young neighbour boy named Harvey who works at the store and is only a few years older than Frances. He lives with his alcoholic father and stepmother in the same communal apartment where Frances lives.



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translation: English

Rights for selected stories

sold to: Spain

978-9934-32-093-4
21 × 13,5 cm
320 pages; (CHALK CIRCLES 110 pages)

Frances likes Harvey, but he shows no interest in her. Then one day, Frances finds out that Harvey secretly collects bricks. He brings them one by one to his room, where he plans to build a wall to hide from the world, but mainly from his abusive father.

Frances helps him, but realizes that the wall won't protect him, so she offers to go with him to the capital city. Frances is brave and ready to change her life, but Harvey is not. He believes he has no right to leave his disabled father, no matter who he is.

When Harvey's father discovers his son's secret stash of bricks, he

causes a scandal and hits Harvey on the head with one of the bricks. Frances defends Harvey, but her mother arrives and tells her not to meddle in other families' affairs. Frances is completely disillusioned, but she remains loyal to her dream.

So early one morning, she leaves her mother a note, saying that she loves her very much but wants to be happy, and only a free person can be happy. As a keepsake, she leaves her mother one of the chinks. Then Frances takes a train across the country, leaves, and enrolls in college, where she plans to continue her studies and become a journalist.

HERBARIUM WITH FROST FLOWERS

(HERBĀRIJS AR LEDUSPUKĒM)

(In production)

The quiet and peaceful policeman Vincent lives in a small northern town with his progressive-minded wife Ida, who is a lawyer and human rights activist; she consciously chooses not to have children, as she deems this world unsuitable for them. Vincent's father, a former chief of police, has passed away. Vincent's mother idolizes her deceased husband, always presenting him as an example and ideal for Vincent to aspire to. Vincent remembers that in his childhood, his father seemed to pay him no attention, but now, after his death, Vincent often sees him in his dreams. One morning, on a deserted road leading to his home, he finds a bag containing a human body. Not wanting to alarm Ida, he calls his former colleague Dag, who, being old and experienced, often helps Vincent. Dag decides to take the body to the town hall meeting place and hastily calls a meeting of the town's most important people to decide what to do. Despite Vincent's

objections, everyone decides that they must not alarm the residents, so they will not report the discovery anywhere. Since the ground is frozen and they cannot bury the body, they store it in a shed until the thaw. On the same day, Vincent receives news from the local school about the disappearance of a teacher. One of the last people to see her was Jen Hoover, the school janitor. Vincent goes to Hoover's house, where he meets Jen and remembers that he saved him from drowning many years ago. Jen lives with his abusive and domineering aunt Erica, who has raised Jen since childhood because Jen's mother (Erica's sister) is paralyzed, bedridden, silent, and completely dependent. Tragedy with Jen's mother occurred when she was raped, left on the road, and run over by a car. As a result of the rape, Jen was born, but he himself is unaware of it. Erica hates Jen since childhood, never provided him with the necessary care and upbringing.



978-9934-32-760-5
304 pages

Jen lives in the same room with his immobile mother, who is his only close person to whom he confides his feelings. He confesses he didn't want to kill the teacher; it happened accidentally and almost not for real.

Jen himself cannot believe it; he hopes that the next morning when he returns to the lonely bus stop, where he had left the teacher's body under the fir tree, it will no longer be there. When Jen realizes that the body hasn't disappeared, he decides to bury it "so that no one would worry unnecessarily." To bury the teacher in the cemetery, he digs up a fresh grave where the deceased from the old folks' home was buried. Jen buries the teacher's body in a foreign grave, but the dug-up one - he puts it in a bag and takes it to a frozen riverbank. On the way, he must leave the dug-up body on the road, where Vincent later finds it.

However, Vincent eventually tells Ida everything about the body he found on the road, the meeting that took place, and the decision made there; they both go to the shed to see the body.

Vincent investigates the case of the missing teacher, gradually uncovering the tragedy of the Hoover family and Erica's abuse, not understanding why neither his father nor Dag, who were city policemen at the time, did anything to catch the culprit (Jen's mother's rapist) and to stop Erica's abuse of Jen.

When Vincent begins to suspect Jen, Ida gets involved, defends Jen, accuses Vincent of bias, as there is no direct evidence. Ida visits them at their home, meets Erica, and takes care of this family.

Dag urges Vincent to blame Jen. Vincent decides to listen to Ida and opposes Dag's opinion for the first time.

Jen is asked by two girls to buy alcoholic drinks for them because they are underage; he agrees, then tries to befriend the girls, inviting them along, but they hurry away because they are not interested in him. Jen fails to understand the situation, starts running after them, a conflict arises, and as a result, Jen is beaten up, ends up in the police station, and is accused of attacking the girls. Jen is transferred to the investigation prison.

Vincent and Ida have a serious disagreement. Ida confides in her childhood friend, teacher Karla, with whom they grew up in the same orphanage, and admits that she wants to divorce Vincent. Karla convinces Ida otherwise.

After a month, the judge releases Jen due to procedural violations. Jen returns to Douzville. Vincent receives a call from Erica, reporting that someone is attacking her home, breaking in. Vincent arrives and detains the attackers - Dag's son and his friend, who have come to settle the score with Jen, ready to lynch him. Vincent takes them both to the police station. On the way, Dag's son is furious, not understanding why Vincent is defending Jen, and he reveals the truth to Vincent that Vincent's father is the one who raped Jen's mother, meaning Vincent and Jen are half-brothers.

When Vincent later questions Dag about this, he is forced to confirm it. Vincent is shaken by what he learns.

The townsfolk turn against Vincent; they all want to lynch Jen. With Ida's help, Jen's whereabouts are found at Karla's place - in the monastery.

Some time later, Jen pushes Karla into glass doors, injuring her neck and she dies from heavy bleeding. Ida's world and faith in goodness crumble, she takes a stand against Vincent and joins the mob - ready to lynch Jen.

Ida leaves Douzville. Jen ends up in prison again, but soon he is released because there is no direct evidence of the attack. It is said that Karla might have fallen into the glass doors accidentally.

Jen returns to Douzville and lives inside the monastery's auxiliary room, where no one contacts him. He does hard labour, agonizing over the fact that he cannot see his mother because he is afraid to go to the town where he might be lynched.

On Christmas Eve, he decides to secretly visit his mother. While crossing the frozen lake, the ice breaks, and Jen starts drowning. When Vincent passes by, Jen cries for help, and Vincent hesitates. Vincent realizes that if he saves Jen again, someone else will die because wherever Jen appears, people perish. Vincent notices how similar Jen is to their father. Vincent stands and watches as Jen disappears under the water.

MANSEV HOUSE (MANZEVA NAMS)

Forty-three-year-old Gwenda is a lawyer at an Eastern European law firm specializing in litigation and evictions from apartments in the capital city center. As a reward for successfully resolving a litigation case that resulted in freeing a building from all tenants, Gwenda receives, as compensation from her boss – attorney Kim – a penthouse apartment in the attic of an old city building known as Mansev House.

When Gwenda arrives to inspect her new home, she meets the peculiar and unpleasant manager and owner of Mansev House – Justas Mansev. From him, she learns that the deal is structured in such a way that she is not entitled to sell the apartment for the next forty years. Gwenda is disappointed because her intention was to sell the apartment she received as a salary and buy herself another, smaller one of her own choice.

Gwenda sets out to clarify the situation with attorney Kim, but he too is busy and unwilling to explain the mistakes in the documents. Gwenda is angry with Kim, his attitude towards people, subordinates, his secretary Rovena and others. She is disgusted with her job, feeling regretful about evicting people from their homes, and doesn't want to continue working with attorney Kim.

Furthermore, Gwenda has just divorced her husband, so her new home should be a haven of comfort, marking the beginning of a new phase in her life. However, the new apartment brings neither comfort nor joy. In Mansev House, she lives among strange neighbours who insist that they should all be friends, all participate in the communal affairs of the building, etc. The only one different from the others in this house is old Claudia, who advises Gwenda to be cautious. From Claudia,

Gwenda learns that a woman killed her husband in the apartment Gwenda acquired some time ago.

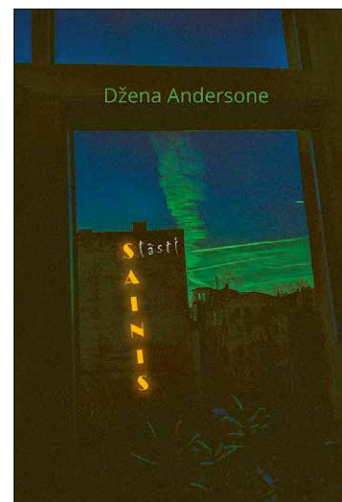
Gwenda accidentally meets Kim's secretary Rovena, who informs her that one of the tenants whom Gwenda had evicted from the apartment had committed suicide by jumping off the roof of the building, after having cursed all the lawyers involved in the case.

Gwenda decides to talk to Justas and try to persuade him, convince him to withdraw from the contract condition and allow Gwenda to sell the apartment. She goes to the soap museum set up in the adjacent wing of Mansev House, managed by Justas. Justas takes Gwenda through the museum, explaining the process of soap making and clearly stating that he will not back down from the contract. The conversation turns into an argument.

Gwenda cannot reconcile with not being able to leave Mansev House. After arguing with Justas, she is left alone in her new apartment. From this day on, she begins to experience various visions (people walking over the roof of the neighbouring building, jumping from a great height, etc.), but Gwenda cannot distinguish them from reality. Her guilt over what happened to the tenants, the person who committed suicide, and her loneliness deepen the situation. She calls her adult son but realizes that he doesn't need her either.

Gwenda tries to explain to Justas what she saw (about the suicides on the neighbouring house roof). Justas mocks her, saying that Gwenda hallucinates.

The neighbours are angry with Gwenda because she refused to participate in their meetings.



978-9934-31-260-1
21 x 14 cm
140 pages

One day, Gwenda finds a black hair braid nailed to her apartment door. Claudia suggests burning it. Claudia also talks about the origins of Justas's soap museum when Justas's grandfather made soap from people. Gwenda doesn't believe Claudia's story; however, follows her suggestion. Gwenda continues to receive strange signs; her reality increasingly merges with dreams.

One day, Gwenda returns home and finds her apartment door broken. Justas explains that smoke was seen. The neighbours thought it was a fire, so they made that decision. Gwenda checks the apartment and notices what she believes is a hidden surveillance camera. Gwenda calls the police and reports the inappropriate, intrusive behaviour of the neighbours, breaking into her door, the video camera, etc.

The police check Gwenda's apartment and find nothing suspicious. The object that Gwenda thought was a video camera turns out to be a decorative screw. Justas also arrives and claims that Gwenda needs psychiatric help because she hallucinates. Gwenda begins to argue with Justas in the presence of the police, saying that her words can be confirmed by neighbour Claudia. Claudia's apartment is checked, but there is no one there. Justas claims that Claudia is a figment of Gwenda's imagination, which disturbs Gwenda even more.

After the police leave, Gwenda is desperate, not knowing what to do. She decides to go to see the house from which, thanks to her, all the tenants were evicted,

and where a person committed suicide. Gwenda sees the huge, empty house, falls to her knees, asking forgiveness for her guilt in the death of the person.

From Rovena, she learns that Kim has been seriously injured in a car accident. The suicide's curse begins to come true, Rovena explains to Gwenda.

Gwenda returns to Mansev House, goes to Claudia's apartment, sees that it is empty, long abandoned, as if no one had ever lived there, there is nothing indicating Claudia's existence.

Gwenda is completely drained; she gives up, decides to leave everything, leave the apartment to Justas, go to zero point, wherever it may be, try to fix the unfixable. Gwenda goes to her apartment, looks through the belongings she should take with her before leaving, realizes that she doesn't need anything, nothing at all, because nothing brings happiness or joy.

Gwenda lights a candle, inspired by sudden warmth and light, she begins to walk around the apartment and slowly sets fire to all her belongings. Soon, a major fire breaks out, Gwenda rushes to the door, sees a ghost urging her to jump out the window. However, Gwenda ignores it, rushes out through the door, and not caring about anything anymore, runs away from Mansev House, leaving everything behind.

Justas, smirking through the window, watches Gwenda's escape.



KRISTĪNE ILZIŅA (1969)

Kristīne Ilziņa (née Sadovska) has begun her career as a journalist, working for various Latvian media outlets and as a copywriter in an advertising agency. She works for the publishing house Zvaigzne ABC as a PR specialist. Her works include a collection of poetry “The Crazy Sunflower” (1995), children’s books “My first teeth” (2007) and “In the Street” (2007) published by Valters un Rapa, a collection of literary fairy tales entitled “About Paws, Tails and Unusual Beasts” (2010), published by Dienas Grāmata and, most recently, “I Won’t Testify Against You” (2022), published by Zvaigzne ABC.

Awards and nominations for Kristīne Ilziņa:

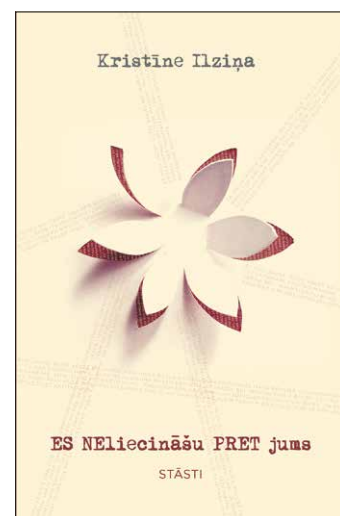
- Klāvs Elsbergs Prize, 1996 (*The Crazy Sunflower*)
- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, 2023 (*I Won’t Testify Against You*)
- Nominated for the Baltic Assembly Award, 2023 (*I Won’t Testify Against You*)

I WON’T TESTIFY AGAINST YOU (ES NELIECINĀŠU PRET JUMS)

“I Won’t Testify Against You” is a short story collection that, while featuring the honest, free form of modern storytelling is, at the same time, vastly different. The collection includes several poignantly lyrical and profoundly personal short stories told through the narrating voice of both a young and a mature woman. The stories touch upon the eternal question of relationships while the main motif lays elsewhere. Ilziņa’s stories are set mainly in the 1980s – the years prior to the Third Awakening in Latvia – and focus on the events leading up to it and the various expressions of the movement.

The stories are personal, informal testimonials without the excesses

of patriotic speeches and singing. They are told by the “little people”, more often than not youngsters or even teenagers whose formative years happen to coincide with those in which their nation achieved independence. Describing colourful episodes in the lives of these people who, willingly or not, are caught up in these turbulent times and live through the period of historic, elated tension whilst still fretting about all the usual things that perturb adolescents. Never straying too deeply into a sense of pathos, the writer skilfully weaves her characters’ stories into the fabric of a wider historical context, describing both details of the times and personal thoughts with unsparing precision.



Sample translations: English

Rights for selected stories sold:

Czech Republic

978-9934-31-242-7

21 × 13,5 cm

288 pages



BAIBA ZĪLE (1974)

Baiba Zīle is a writer and translator, she was born in Ventspils, Latvia and now lives in Frankfurt am Main in Germany. She has a degree in Philosophy and Law and has worked as a philosophy teacher, journalist, airline marketing assistant, assistant to a trader in New York, project coordinator in the EU, UN and USAID projects, lawyer and executive assistant in the European Central Bank. Baiba Zīle has translated into Latvian the works of Boris Vian, Albert Camus and Simone Weil among others. Her first novel *Simulating Life* (Dzīves simulācija) was published in 2006. under the pseudonym Anna Kravicka. Under the pen name Barbara Sea, she has also written several books in English.

MASTER OF LIES (MELU MEISTARS)

“Master of Lies” is a historical thriller that takes place from early ‘80s until the present in Riga and Brussels. Crimes, love, sex and KGB.

Alice and Alexander grow up in soviet Riga, one century, but two completely different worlds. Alice comes from a wealthy family of a political leader. Her father works in the KGB but Alice is unaware of that, she lives in her own bubble of teenage affections and first love. She witnesses the Latvian fight for independence and later the collapse of the Soviet regime. One day she notices a tall man giving her father a gun. After a couple of days her father commits suicide.

After twenty years everything has changed. It is a different era, different people and no more fear about the future. Alice is married, her family and the whole country are doing great, but she is not happy. Why? She wants to find out the truth about her father. Alice meets the tall man who gave her father the gun; he calls himself “the Master of Lies”. Using his old KGB techniques, he recruits Alice as an agent to sleep with several men and to uncover their ‘dark hearts’ – their most hidden secrets. In exchange he would provide her with information about her parents.

Reluctant at the beginning, Alice soon gets into the Master of Lies’ dark game. Shen discovers her own secrets and

realizes that the ‘dark hearts’ are more than innocent secrets. The plot thickens when the Master of Lies asks her help to catch a dangerous criminal called Wolf who wants to kill him. This would be Alice’s final mission, the answer to all her questions and at the same time a rendezvous with Alexander.

Alexander was born in the countryside, but he moved to Riga as a child. His family belonged to the working class and he spent his adolescence in criminal gangs that deal with robbery, black market and prostitutes. He is dreaming to become a spy. One day he witnesses the murder of an elite prostitute called White Mare and a tall man leaving her room. Soon he realizes that he himself is the main suspect and runs from the police and is caught by another criminal gang. The leader of the gang, Bela, smuggles Alexander to Brussels, where he has an illegal precious stones and antiques business under the cover of an art gallery. He makes Alexander his assistant and teaches him everything about precious stones, art and antiques.

After twenty years Alexander is still working in the same gallery. He has become a European citizen who is fluent in many languages, an art connoisseur and has a fiancé. Yet no one knows that he is still working for the post-soviet mafia. Alexander wants to leave this business and start with a clean slate. Yet there is only one



Sample translation: English

Full translation: German

Rights sold: Germany

978-9934-0-6824-9
21 × 14 cm
400 pages

last deal during which Bela is killed. Someone is after a very precious ring with a black diamond, someone whom Alexander recognizes as the tall man from his past, who killed White Mare and who made him to become a runaway.

In search of revenge Alexander comes to Riga where he wants to find and kill his biggest enemy – the Master of Lies. Yet the Master of Lies knows about his plan and is plotting to catch Alexander with the help of Alice. She should spot

him in an antique market and inform the police. But then the Unexpected happens.

Will Alice and Alexander fight the Master of Lies and his shadowy web of agents? Can one overcome the past? Is evil a product of an authoritarian regime, or does it lie in “the dark heart” that is hidden in every one of us? Are lies a way to the truth? Will Alice and Alexander stay together? It is a crime story of a quest for the truth and love.

ALMA – THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

(ALMA – PASAULES MALA)

“Alma – The Edge of the World” is a page turner road trip which takes place in Latvia, Germany, France and Spain. It is a detective-thriller with a unique glimpse into post-totalitarian societies, comic passages on Eastern and Western civilizations clash and even a fire of Notre-Dame. At the same time, it is a passionate love story with erotic elements and a good balance of adventure, noir, irony and suspense.

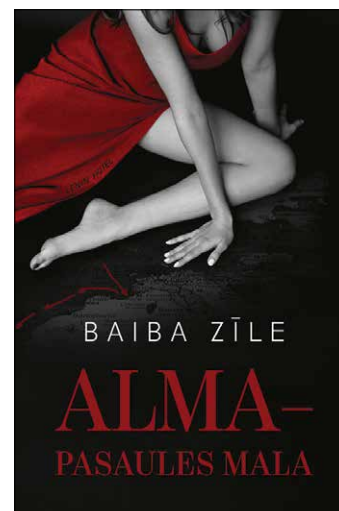
Jonas is a well known and successful 35-year-old German photographer who lives and works in Frankfurt am Main. He has a fiancé and they want to buy an apartment and start a family. One day Jonas has a dream about his childhood and starts to reflect on his life and goals. He realises that he does not want to take portraits anymore and secretly starts to work on his own project. At the same time he gets a proposal to work with the prestigious Rorbach foundation on a themed book about post-totalitarian sites. The project is lead by a journalist called Gerda and they need to travel across the Eastern Europe.

Their trip starts in East Germany, then on to Czech Republic and Budapest,

finishing in Riga. There, in the local Lenins Hotel, Gerda and Jonas encounter a mysterious Russian girl called Arina who has a scar on her right cheek. Arina tells a story that the scar is related to her parents soviet past and they decide to hire Arina as a representative face for their book. Soon after this decision Arina dies from a drug overdose. Another girl from the hotel – Alma (28) claims that Arina has been murdered and the whole case is reported to the police.

However, the publicity with Arina’s pictures has already gone to the media and there is a press conference about the forthcoming book in Stockholm. Both Jonas and Gerda are devastated about the girl’s sudden death and its impact on their project. Then Alma appears in their room, tells the story that she worked in a local theatre and draws a scar on her face. Since both girls are the same age and look similar, Alma convinces Jonas and Gerda that she should take Arina’s place in Stockholm.

The whole trio go to Sweden and are very succesful. Alma in her disguise is a perfect ambassador of



The book has been published with a support of the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Sample translations:
English and German

978-9934-0-9710-2
21 × 14 cm
334 pages

the post-totalitarian culture, she is even too good and Jonas starts to question her about her motives for such identity fraud. Then Alma tells a semi-mythical story about her family roots that involves murders in every generation and convinces Jonas that she wants to go to the edge of the world. What is the edge of the world? Jonas wants to find that, also Alma again hints that Arina has been murdered. At the same time the book project gets more and more response in Western society and they all go first to Helsinki for another press conference and then to Cologne, where the meeting with Rorbach foundation management is held.

Working closely with Alma and listening to her stories about her family Jonas gets more and more fascinated by her and falls in love. They start an affair and are hiding it from Gerda. In Cologne they meet a history professor Gersl who now is following them.

Meeting at the Rorbach foundation creates even bigger publicity and the tension between two love birds, Gerda and professor Gersl raises. Also, Alma is speaking about the edge of the world and murder of Arina all the time. The whole team is driven to Paris where the biggest photo exhibition of the year Photo-2019 is taking place. There things suddenly get out of control. While walking through the city Alma, without Jonas's consent, drugs professor Gersl and tells Jonas to flee the project. This moment coincides with the fire of Notre-Dame, the whole city is in agony.

Is that the edge of the world? Both Alma and Jonas steal all of the project money and run to Nice. Jonas cuts all ties with his fiancé and family in Frankfurt.

Now they are fugitives with stolen money in their hands and are probably murderers. Is professor Gersl dead? Who killed Arina? What is the mysterious edge of the world they need to reach? Alma still does not provide the answers to these questions, but in Nice they have a short honeymoon, then the paranoiac road strip starts – through Marseille, Perpignan, Barcelona and other cities of the French-Spanish coast. Alma calls her brother in Riga and he tells her that the police are after them. At the same time Alma explains more and more on her edge of the world philosophy and the death of Arina. The mysteries start to dissolve one after the other.

When they reach Malaga with a further plan to go to Africa, they run into two American couples who offer a trip to Gibraltar. Jonas and Alma agree and there, at the border checkpoint, when Alma has already passed through, Jonas realizes that his ID is stolen. In his pocket is a farewell note from Alma that she decided to go further on her own.

Devasted and broken Jonas goes back to Riga, to Lenins Hotel, to meet Alma's brother and find out answers about his beloved, her family and also the meaning of their whole trip. There, at the beginning of the whole odyssey he finally finds peace with himself and the edge of the world.

PHOTO: LIENE PETERSONE



LJETA PUTĀNE (1988)

Ljeta Putāne is a London-based detective story writer with a Master’s degree in 19th-century Russian history and literature from UCL. Originally from Latvia and bilingual by birth, she loves exploring the topics of cultural identity and what does it mean to truly belong. In addition to writing, Ljeta works in sustainability and has previously led a creative agency.

The Buried Moon is her first novel and invites readers into a world where her diverse experiences and background turn into captivating narratives.

THE BURRIED MOON (APRAKTAIS MĒNESS)

It is 1896. Riga, a 700 year old city on the Western shores of the Russian Empire, is becoming increasingly restless as Latvians are starting to rebel against the increasing russification of their land. Latvia might just be a Russian province for now, but what if one day it could become an independent country?

One late autumn evening, annoyed by one of Tolstoy’s best-selling novels, Anna goes for a walk in the city. As she makes her way through lantern-lit parks, she stumbles upon a suspicious encounter in the city gardens. An older gentleman seems to be accosted by two scruffy men. Intrigued, Anna creeps closer but soon finds herself in trouble.

Having narrowly escaped to safety, Anna arrives at the police station. The two police officers, grumpy Boris and perky Yevgeny, investigate Anna’s account but find no evidence in the park, except for a cryptic poem written on a scrap of paper. Something about the Duke

of Courland and a moon that lies down to die? What nonsense!

Anna, though, is determined to solve the mysterious clue, but is interrupted by her flamboyant and charismatic cousin Georgy. He invites her to a dinner party that will include a poetry reading by a young poet named Dmitry, who has an unusual companion – a mischievous pet rat, Bertie. Anna arrives at the candle-lit dinner and enjoys the evening, especially Dmitry’s secret glances. However, the conversations in the room paint a dark future and hint at a storm brewing all over the Russian empire...

It’s not long until Anna finds herself pulled into this very storm. She discovers that the gentleman accosted in the park was the famous publisher Aleksandrs Krause. His colleague Zenta seeks Anna’s help and discloses that Aleksandrs was safeguarding a secret manifesto she urgently needs to take to London for printing. It advocates for a free Latvia and lists all the members of “The Free Land”, an underground organisation to which Zenta also belongs.



978-9934-31-987-7
 21 × 13,5 cm
 288 pages

If the Russian secret police were to find the manifesto, their movement would be crushed.

Although Anna agrees to help, she feels conflicted. As someone who is half Latvian and half Russian, she agrees that russification has gone too far in oppressing other nations, including Latvians. But is the answer necessarily a new country? Where would the borders be drawn? And what about those left on either side of it? Isn't history already filled with arbitrary borders that split families, never to be united again?

Meanwhile, Aleksandrs decides to act. After being imprisoned by the secret police for days, he reveals the manuscript is hidden in a secret compartment in his office and takes agent Reznovs to the publishing house. As they search for the latch in the floor, Aleksandrs escapes to a hidden room that leads to an underground passage. But just as he slips through the door, he is badly wounded.

The next day Anna and Zenta meet at the publishing house and find it completely ransacked. Amidst the chaos, Anna discovers a copy of Brothers' Grimm tales, recently translated into Latvian. She draws Zenta's attention to the story about the buried moon but they struggle to connect it to Aleksandrs' clue until Anna finds the name of the translator. It fits! The manifesto must be hidden in his grave!

The women head to the Great Cemetery, where they sneak through spooky alleys and pass eerie tombstones. Soon they find the grave and the manifesto, however they are met by Reznovs. He takes out his gun and asks Zenta to hand over the manifesto.

Out of nowhere, a brave stranger suddenly attacks Reznovs. Seizing the opportunity, Anna and Zenta run. They reach Georgy's house but can't stay there for long. They need to catch a train to the port city of Libava, from where the ship to London departs.

That night, Aleksandrs awakes in the city hospital. Despite having lost lots of blood, he is recovering quickly. He has given a false name to make sure no one finds him. But he can't find peace. He keeps on returning to the same question that has been gnawing at him for days. Who betrayed him?

Artfully disguised, Anna and Zenta embark on the train to Libava. They engage in a conversation about national identity and belonging. Anna reveals that her mixed Latvian-Russian parentage leaves her feeling like she does not fully belong to either nationality. While Zenta has a strong Latvian identity, Anna slides between

identities, wondering if nationality should be viewed as a scale or a spectrum rather than a fixed point.

"Nationality is often used as a subjective authenticity test, where anything below one hundred percent is deemed inadequate. For example, "she's not a real Russian, her mother is Latvian" or "what kind of a Latvian is she, she was raised by a Russian father." Nationality is often used as an exclusive label, inaccessible if not acquired through birth. And that's not fair, because anything that discriminates based on what people are born as, not choices they make, is wrong. Why shouldn't we be able to change our nationality based on how we feel? Why do we even need nationalities if they're only used to discriminate?"

As the train pulls into its final stop, it is met by local police officers who have been instructed to capture Zenta. Upon seeing the police, the women decide to flee but Anna gets caught and is taken to the local precinct. Reznovs interrogates Anna but she refuses to budge. Regardless, the agent soon learns from a secret source that Zenta is planning to board the ship to London. He decides to release Anna but ensures she is being tailed.

It's a foggy morning in Libava. With the manuscript tightly tucked into her jacket, Zenta makes her way to the port and boards the ship. However, the moment she reaches the top of the gangway, Reznovs greets her with a repulsive smile. There is no way back as the ramp is blocked. There is no way forward as it means surrendering to Reznovs and revealing secret information. Zenta swiftly turns and jumps into the cold, dark water. But as she jumps, Reznovs shoots her.

Zenta hits the water. Slowly drowning, she retrieves the manifesto and tears it into small pieces that disappear into the darkness. Her mind drifts and she remembers a story about a parasite that plants itself inside an ant's brain to control it. The parasite forces the ant to willingly sacrifice its life so that the parasite could grow and multiply. When the ant has fulfilled its mission, it dies.

As Zenta loses consciousness, she thinks to herself that perhaps great ideas are just like parasites. They too need bodies to live and multiply.

Anna arrives at the port as Zenta's lifeless body is being lifted out of the water. Shattered, she slumps on the age-old cobblestone and refuses to move long after everyone has left. Anna stares into the void and gently touches the ground where Zenta was laid down. Suddenly she feels something prickle her hand. She lifts it up and finds a small piece of amber glinting in her palm. A tiny piece of hope that had accidentally fallen out of Zenta's pocket.

PHOTO: ALJA KRÖDERE



ZANE ZUSTA (1982)

Zane Zusta has written books for both children and adults. She began her career in journalism and public relations before debuting in literature in 2015 with her first children’s book, “Ucipuci/Ucklepuckle is Lost from Home”. Her other titles for children focus on socially engaging topics, such as OCDS in “I am the Boss”, the process of adoption in “Austra, Clouds and the Little Bird” and manifesting what you desire in “Toto Uncracks a Secret”. Zane Zusta has also written a poetry collection for children “Good/Swell Rhymes”.

In terms of literature for adults, the writer’s main focus is on psychological aspects. Her bestselling short story collections “Cockroaches in My head” and “Cockroaches in Your Head” have been adapted into TV series.

Zane Zusta has received the No Limits Authors’ Rights Award (Autortiesību bezgalības balva), her Ucipuci titles have been adapted into TV series and developed into the “Ucipuci” magazine. Zane Zusta has written the screen adaptation for her “Cockroaches in My Head” and “Cockroaches in Your Head”.

DIĀNA ZANDE

Dr. Psych., psychologist, psychotherapist

I work every day with people who want to live more fully, so they challenge their “cockroaches” by boldly facing them. Insecurity, jealousy, worries – such a familiar human experience.



PHOTO: ALJA KRÖDERE



Dr. **GATIS LĪDUMS**

Dr. Gatis Līdums has studied family and systemic psychotherapy, theology, systemic supervision and organizational development. He completed his master’s degree in the USA and received his doctorate from the University of Helsinki in Finland. Currently, he works in private practice and advises various organizations as a supervisor.



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Zane Zusta and Diāna Zande

COCKROACHES IN MY HEAD. STORIES ABOUT WOMEN (TARAKĀNI MANĀ GALVĀ. STĀSTI PAR SIEVIETĒM)

The book “COCKROACHES IN MY HEAD” with interesting and easy to read stories tells the everyday stories of several women – young and younger, beautiful and more beautiful, virtuous and more virtuous.

All these women have something in common: their lives are controlled by “cockroaches”, or rather, survival strategies. These strategies had been created in a moment of crisis, which they helped get out of, but instead of leaving after the crisis, they stayed in their minds. And when the cockroaches celebrate, the women have trouble.

The author of the book, ZANE ZUSTA, and the psychotherapist DIANA ZANDE help the reader stop their “cockroaches” and at least begin learning to control them.

MELANCHOLY FLIRTING ON A TRAM

Zelma makes herself more comfortable in the driver's seat, placing all the things she needs to make her day more enjoyable on the window ledge – a raspberry yogurt drink, three cinnamon buns from the local bakery, a cola and a small, framed picture of freckled girl with a broad smile – her granddaughter.

'Oh, I almost forgot...' Zelma mutters as she changes her boots for a comfy pair of slippers. Now her day can at last begin.

Zelma had been working as a tram driver for almost forty years – it had always been her dream job, even when she was little. Back then, when her other friends grew up and went to work as sales assistants, seamstresses and book keepers, she had learnt to drive a tram – something she still did and loved. Zelma's tram always stood out as when she was on duty, her tram was always sparkling clean. She never climbed into the driver's cabin until she had polished it until it shone like a diamond.

'Look, Zelma, you missed a bit there!' her work-mates call, teasing her about her obsessive cleaning. Although Zelma knows they are only joking, as soon as they have left she double checks that she hasn't missed a bit of dirt anywhere.

Zelma takes the responsibilities of her job very seriously, although admitting herself that being a little too kind-hearted is her main shortcoming. Indeed, she feels guilty whenever she sees someone dashing desperately to the tram stop, believing they might just catch it when in fact the tram has already closed its doors and has started gliding off. But rules are rules and the tram slips away. At such times, Zelma feels her heart wrench painfully and mentally she apologizes to everyone chasing the tram, wishing silently that they will make it or the driver will stop.

No, the tram driver won't let you in, my friend.

Approaching the "Mēness iela" stop, Zelma comes to life – sitting up straighter and smoothing her hair down. Today is the day her life is going to turn around.

Why?

Well, this is why: for the past year, a distinguished gentleman about ten years older than her has caught her tram at this stop. It all got off to a rather curious start. As luck would have it, the gentleman boarded the tram

through the front door and Zelma caught his shopping bag between the closing doors. The situation was righted soon enough but Eros had already got to work – the two glanced at each other and exchanged friendly smiles: Zelma to apologize, the gentleman to grant her his forgiveness. Nothing more happened on that occasion and he didn't cross Zelma's mind again for a couple of weeks. After all, someone handsome gets on every time she stops (well, maybe not always, not at every stop and not every day). It was certainly not something to lose any sleep over. By the way, Zelma is happily divorced – as she always tells anyone who asks if she's married. 'I've always considered my divorce as my ticket to freedom. Unfortunately, love faded but the children stayed, my grandchildren were born and now I can do what I please. Besides, the divorce took place twenty-five years ago – I can barely even remember that far back!' Zelma assures everyone. She truly is very happy and never yearns for another husband who would want his socks washed and dinner served to him. Zelma just wanted to get on with her life and in no time thought of her divorce as something positive. Besides, living as they had with her mother-in-law, they didn't own anything that needed to be split between them. So one fine day, Zelma simply packed her suitcase and bid them all farewell, leaving with the same few things she had when she first met him.

Two weeks after the bag-trapping incident, the tram comes to a stop as usual at "Mēness iela" and the same man steps in. He has a slight limp and is slow boarding. Zelma waits patiently then closes the door and sets off. The man stays by the conductor's cabin and looks at her. Zelma pretends not to notice and gets on with her driving, although her 'third eye' is alert and curious. After a couple of stops the man gets off and stands so that Zelma can see him. As the tram moves off, he winks at her and lifts his hat like a true gentleman. Zelma doesn't have time to react and glides passed him, expressionless. But something has lit a spark in her tummy and she is aware of a strange feeling she has never felt before. "Are they butterflies?!" she laughs aloud like a teenager and looks in her rear view mirror, grinning at herself. "Dammit, I've got something in my teeth." She picks out the uninvited guest, left behind from her breakfast salad, with her little finger nail. She considers it for a moment, concluding in relief it was too tiny for the gentleman to possibly have seen it, especially as she hadn't even opened her mouth.

The days when no one was waiting for her on “Moon Street” were very dull but those days when, approaching the fateful stop, Zelma caught sight of HIM, the day immediately took on a new meaning. The day before she had even tossed a small bottle of “Dzintars” perfume into her bag. Of course, no one else could smell it through the glass panel but it made Zelma feel more beautiful and feminine. A true woman.

‘My lucky day!’ Zelma giggles as she sees her man at the stop. As usual, he is waiting for her tram and boards by the front door so that their eyes meet. He stands in the same place as before, looking at her. Zelma again pretends not to notice. After a couple of stops the man gets off, turns and winks at her. This time Zelma returns his smile and the tram slips past him. Over the following days she can’t stop wondering about him: Who is he? Why is he interested in me? What does he want from me? To Zelma’s surprise, the stranger has invaded Zelma’s mind, occupying much of her thoughts. As if that weren’t enough, Zelma even starts dreaming about him at night – the two of them meeting on the seafront, dancing on the beach then turning into seagulls and flying away. After one such dream, Zelma woke during the night dripping in sweat.

‘A nightmare,’ she said to herself, dozing back off to sleep.

Over the following months, their meetings were like a scene from the the cartoon “In a Loop” her granddaughter used to watch – the same thing over and over, over and over. Zelma was quite entertained by things as they were and didn’t really wonder about how things might continue. In all honesty, the adventure made her feel as if she were back in high school with a crush on a boy from a year above her, a boy she doesn’t know anything about. Her imagination ran wild: Who is he? What does he do? Where does he live? What’s his name? What does he see in her? Each time she approached the magical stop she felt as if she were plunging back into the carefree days of her youth. One evening after work, back at the tram depot, Zelma poured her heart out to a co-worker, telling her all about her secret “Mēness ielas” admirer. ‘Really? Zelma, that’s great! A man at this stage of your life! Why not? You’ll be able to sit together by the window and count the pigeons, go for strolls through the park, share your shopping and retire together. Go for it!’ Her workmate didn’t beat about the bush. ‘You might even get married!’

‘Oh no, Vēsma! What rubbish! At our age!’ Zelma retorted, although by then she wasn’t so convinced herself of what she was saying.

Admittedly, in her imaginings she had got as far as the two of them exchanging rings. Yes ... ‘My fantasy world is as sweet as it is large,’ Zelma thought to herself.

‘We have plenty of time, we are still in time. If that man is not for me he’ll leave sooner or later all the same,’ Zelma told her workmate as they said goodnight and headed home. All the same, Zelma kept returning to their conversation in her mind over the next few days. How long would things continue as they were? And what comes next, I wonder? Over time, her “tram dates” became so regular and precious that she would have been happy for them to continue like that for rest of her life.

A few days later there was quite a crowd gathered at the “Mēnes iela”, and he was one of them, dressed up and looking smart. Zelma straightened herself in happy anticipation, aware of her heart racing, only to see that this time the man was not alone. There was a lady with him and they both boarded the tram through the rear door. Zelma’s good mood instantly dispelled, a knot of disappointment choked her throat and the rest of the day felt incredibly dull.

‘What on earth have I been dreaming up?’ Zelma mumbled. ‘Why should he like a woman like me – a tram driver?’ she concluded, immediately belittling herself. Zelma wished she could stop thinking about him. He was probably married with five children and ten grandchildren. Besides, they hadn’t made any promises. More to the point – they had never even spoken! It was clear that Zelma didn’t and never would occupy a place in his life!

‘Did I really want it after all?’ Zelma asked herself as she continued driving her tram. ‘It was just a bit of fun at work and now it has come to an end.’

The gentleman and the lady got off and the tram drove away.

The next day there was an unexpected turn of events – her admirer was waiting for the tram one stop before his usual one, holding a long-stemmed red rose. Boarding at the front door, he gestured that the rose was for Zelma and he wanted to give it to her. Opening the door of the driver’s cabin without good reason was strictly against regulations – those were the company

rules but Zelma dearly wished to break them. And she did so; quickly, slightly awkwardly, spraying on some of her perfume. While people were getting on and off at the next stop they had an entire minute at their disposal for their first conversation. 'Hello! This rose is for you, please accept it as a token of my appreciation of your beauty!' Holding out the rose to her, the man uttered these old-fashioned words as if he had memorized them in advance, which he probably had. He no doubt had realised they would have very little time to chat, maybe no time at all.

'Ritvars,' the man introduced himself.

'Thank you! You shouldn't have!' Zelma answered, taking the flower and smiling at him.

'Zelma,' she also introduced herself.

'No, I had to!' he said, shuffling his feet awkwardly. 'Oh well, take care!'

Zelma felt embarrassed too, unsure what to do next. She hastily closed the door of the driver's cabin and the tram doors. After a few stops he got off, stopped on the pavement and turned to her, winking and raising his hat. Zelma smiled at him and waved back at him with the rose.

So now she had something to think about again. Why had he given her a rose? Did he feel guilty about his tram ride with another woman yesterday? Who was that woman and what was he doing with her and, dammit, would that be continuing in some way too? A sense of impatience rose in Zelma and she felt as certain feminine expectations surged deep inside her.

The rose smelled absolutely lovely – she couldn't stop thinking about Ritvars.

'Ritvars' she hummed his name again, carefree, putting on her pink glasses.

And so, despite sounding rather far-fetched, the days, weeks and months went by. From that time on, he always alighted through the front door of the tram, alone. He always smiled, sometimes brought her flowers, sometimes had a quick chat and once gave her a letter – handwritten in a pale blue envelope, surprisingly with a stamp. In it was a poem dedicated to Zelma. Zelma was no judge of its artistic or literary worth, she had no understanding of all that clever, intellectual stuff. Who cared if someone else viewed the poem as silly or trite – it was about her!

ZELMA! A POEM FOR YOU!

When the tram is approaching
My heart ripples.
Your beauty so clear,
My heart rate so quick!

My youth is long gone
But life is still flowing.
When you are coming
My heart starts racing!

You handle your tram as if dominating a bull
Zelma, how I admire and respect you!

Zelma blushed and immediately cut it out with her granddaughter's scissors, gluing it on to thick yellow cardboard and putting it in a frame. No one had ever dedicated a poem to her before. Just the thought of the man buying paper and an envelope, sitting at his desk and writing it while thinking of her made Zelma's heart melt. His charming rhyme now stood next to the framed picture of her granddaughter on the window ledge of her tram.

The following morning, as she put her comfy driving slippers on in her cubicle, she resolved that this time, she would take the initiative – she would smile, open the door to her driver's cabin's and invite him for tea later that day. They had been carrying on their silent routine for almost a year – two adults playing around like kids, like Romeo and Juliet. It was all very romantic, of course, and Zelma loved that play. At this point, Zelma was in a state of happy elation and, if truth be told, deeply in love.

'Next stop Mēness iela,' blasted the recorded message inside the tram. Zelma looked out hopefully but there were only three school children with enormous rucksacks standing at the next stop. Ritvars wasn't there. There was no sign of him the next day either, or the day after. He didn't appear the following week or even after two, then three. Ritvars never came, never stood there, never boarded her tram or winked at her as he got off. Finally realizing there was nothing more to wait for, she was engulfed in terrible sadness. She knew nothing of him – not his surname or his address, nothing that would help her trace him. From one day to the next he simply disappeared out of her life as if he had never existed. If it weren't for the poem and the flowers she had dried and still had at home, she would think he was a figment of her lonely and plainly hungry for love imagination. Zelma didn't know what to do with herself. She felt very miserable and every day was dull, grey and meaningless. The very day that in response to his declaration of love

Zelma had decided to give Ritvars her heart and if he wanted it her hand, he went and disappeared! They had spent a whole year on the same time but had got no further than childish flirting. Was it really all over, the beautiful fairy tale ended when it had barely begun? At the end of her shift, Zelma sat in her cabin wiping away the tears running down her cheeks – everything might have been so different if only they hadn't wasted their time like two old fools thinking that two old fools in love had all the time in the world. Cleaning her nose, she turned on the radio. The words of Igo's song went straight to her heart, piercing it painfully ...

'The time you waste will never forgive you, be your best in the turmoil of time. The time you waste will no longer take pity on you. Be your best and give it to someone....'

A COCKROACH "I HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD"

It often feels that we have plenty of time. We drag our feet, consciously and unconsciously. And only when it's too late do we finally appreciate what we might have had if only ... It is then that we grasp the true meaning of apparently trite sayings such as "Life is a gift", "Carpe Diem" and "Live every day as if it were your last."

(Zelma)

DEAR ZELMA!

Looks like you have made a real safe haven for yourself in your tram driver's cabin. Your dream job from the time you were a child, you have all the things you hold dear displayed just the way you like them in the cabin where you wear your cosy, homely slippers. It's a shelter of your own making. You're so at ease there that there's no need to wear perfume and you keep your yoghurt on the window ledge. There's no denying that it's YOUR PLACE. As it's against regulations to open the door, no one can enter your cabin to visit you and, as a result, you live in your safe little world all on your own, despite being constantly surrounded by people. They get on and off the tram, intermingle, make friends, chat, flirt, split up, have arguments while all the time you ... yes, you are safe and sound but totally isolated.

Life deals us continuous surprises and Ritvars must have been exactly that kind of unexpected bombshell. Things change instantly, remember the "Dzintars" perfume ...

but why for someone else, Zelma? Why not just for you and why not every day – you do deserve it, don't you? Even if you've been divorced for more than 25 years it doesn't mean that you've ceased being a woman. The first time Ritvars stepped on your tram he finally awoke an awareness in you that you are a woman. You heart trembled, it skipped a beat and a feeling whelmed up in you that you had all but forgotten – the desire to be liked. Zelma, it happens to all of us! The essence of every woman is a wish to feel beautiful, every woman wishes to be appreciated. And it only takes one person to put such appreciation into words ...

Ritvars raised his hat graciously and smiled – he noticed you. But think about it, it often doesn't take as much as that to give you that wonderful feeling inside. It doesn't take much to reawaken those long forsaken butterflies in your tummy. It would be great if everything stayed the way it was but, in human relationships, nothing stays the same. Relationships don't necessarily stagnate but they do need to develop, to maintain the dynamics, to progress.

So what next? Ritvars is on your mind, and you on his. You touch each other and, as feather light as dandelion cotton, fly in opposite directions. Then you come into touch again and again and afterwards ... the only vivid, intense life is the one you lead in your head. It's comfortable enough, safe and cosy. There's plenty of room for whimsy, second chances, flights of fancy. Only in your fantasy world do you allow yourself to consider marriage, having previously against ever doing so again. Are you quite sure? How long are you going to keep up the pretence? What do you do in reality other than buy yourself some perfume – an alarm bell from your feminine side that is trying to get itself noticed? Zelma, listen to yourself and hear what your heart is trying to tell you!

We all face an endless amount of choices in life and we all are free to choose what's closest to our hearts. There's no one stopping us, it's not forbidden. No one is imposing any regulations. It is up to you if you opt to live in your own little safe haven – isolated but safe. Fairy tale princesses wait to be awoken by a kiss from Prince Charming. You can afford to act like that in youth, with the whole of your life ahead of you and wading deep seas. But Zelma, you're not a teenager anymore, you are a grown woman. Do you really have to wait for something to happen? Why not try setting your alarm and waking up when you decide? And what's more, you are allowed to pick up on the signs someone sends out to you. If a man says, 'I really like you!' and you feel the same, you don't need permission to let it be known or wait to be dragged

by force from the safety of your barricaded driver's cabin.

Restricting your hopes and dreams to a world of fantasy is such a sad state of affairs as a life lived in fantasy is a life in an unreal world. Unhappily, none of it actually exists yet we deceive ourselves into thinking there is something real and tangible. When you reach out to touch it there's thin air. A void. Zelma, I'm a little sad when I think of you. As children, many of us were told not to make a fuss, not to worry, to speak when we're spoken to, not to interfere. You've learnt this lesson well. And that's exactly why you a doomed to live a life of self-imposed suffering and sadness. Life transmits signals, sometimes quiet and sometimes loud, like the time Ritvars got on the tram with another woman. Instead of acting you gave up – you withdrew into the safety of your shelter, hurting yourself with belittling thoughts. You were lucky, however, as you were granted a second chance – he came to you with a rose.

An entire year – twelve months or three hundred sixty five days. You keep waiting. You are patient. Yes, many Latvian women are very resistant, they've learnt to wait and focus on things which "might happen on day" and live them instead in their fantasies. We tend to forget that we, too, sometimes need to play a more active role in our lives. Take the initiative, have some gumption and aim for a goal. We have to be more proactive, make our own opportunities and strive for happiness – happiness does not generally come up to you on its own bearing roses. But what if it does? Then you must grasp it and say 'Yes, I want this!' It is a duty a grown woman owes to herself. To acknowledge what she needs to the world and say it out loud. To open the cabin door and let someone in. Or open the door and go out to meet him. What happens when we keep waiting? We count on

everything sorting itself out, believing it will all be fine in the end. But if we let circumstances evolve like that, in some unexplainable way things somehow don't go as we hoped and no one even asks how we feel about it. Because it would have already been a done deal! You, Zelma, trusted in him coming day after day and so on indefinitely ... Until the day came he didn't come anymore ... Whilst it's true there may be another opportunity, it's also true it might have been the last one.

Who am I and what do I want from life? What are my needs? Do you know what you need? What you need emotionally to engulf you like a soft feather pillow, making you happy. It's up to us to ensure that the man, possibly by our side, knows about it. Let him know when and how exactly he should be by your side. Because the ways of being together can be very different. 'I need you!' These few words can change everything. It's your duty to tell them rather than wait for the moment when someone might grace you.

We don't stop feeling emotions and wanting to have relationships as we get older. Never write yourself off saying, "I'm too old." That's nonsense! Age shouldn't deprive you of the wish to feel closeness, warmth, love, friendship, happiness, joy and pain. To fall in love, get married or divorced. There's no age limit! The delightful feeling of falling in love is not the privilege of the young. It doesn't matter how old you are. Don't shut yourself away in your tiny tram driver's cabin with your comfy slippers. You may feel safe in there but you must get out and live for once. Enjoy every moment! Don't fantasize over 'what ifs' ... As soon as that thought pops into your head, get out there and do it! Do it and find out what it's like!

DIANA

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

Zane Zusta and Gatis Līdums

COCKROACHES IN YOUR HEAD. STORIES ABOUT MEN
(TARAKĀNI TAVĀ GALVĀ. STĀSTI PAR VĪRIEŠIEM)

The novel “Cockroaches in Your Head” offers an outline of ten men and how their thinking and prejudices often result in misunderstandings, quarrels, poor decision-making and even total obliteration. At the conclusion of each story is a letter to each character from a psychotherapist Gatis Līdums, letters which serve to inform readers, too, be they male or female.

THE ICICLE

The protagonist of this story is a thirty-year-old, unemployed man, aimless and with an empty fridge. He strives desperately to be different from his father, but does he succeed? One fine day, a little girl rings on his door and involves him in an unexpected incident. Behaving out of character, he takes the initiative and agrees to help to the child; at least it gives him an excuse not to answer his father’s telephone call and stops him from just killing time in the flat. Returning home later, he learns that he will no longer have the chance to pick up his father’s calls. At that moment, his artificially constructed world collapses and just one question remains – do men cry?

THE LIFT

Leaving his office, Patrick, an accountant, gets stuck in the lift with a stranger, Elsa. At first, both of them are panic-stricken but then, everything goes black and the two come together in a spontaneous coupling. Can an accidental incident in the lift influence Patrick’s life and ruin his existing relationship or is it just the latest test he has to get through? Why?

‘PERFECTLY PLANNED MURDER’

Sweaty, scared and under the cover of darkness, Adam is following ... his wife. The beautiful Selma, whom he adores, has a strange, even inexplicable secret and, upon discovering it, Adam seems to lose his mind. Instead of talking

it through, Adam is seized by some animalistic instinct and takes matters into his own hands; a decision that will cost him dearly. But it all could have turned out so differently.

‘JURY OF THE SHADOWS OF NIGHT’

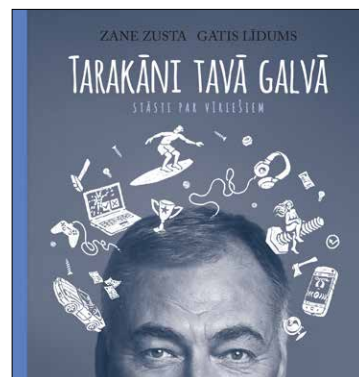
On a sleepless night, Gatis is gripped by an agony of melancholy and, recalling the painful childhood trauma surrounding his parents’ divorce, he waits for a woman who ... doesn’t exist. Will he have the strength to put aside his past and finally start living?

‘THE CARPET’

Wherever he goes, Aivars always takes a carpet; grey, shaggy, heavy and very dear to him. The carpet is very useful and as old as he is. It is, indeed, no more than an imaginary carpet but one which is immensely practical – he is able to push all manner of problems beneath it, just like that, without a care and without analysis. The carpet is particularly handy when it comes to relationships with women. Can anyone go through the whole of their lives in this way?

‘HIDEAWAY’

Hiding away, unshaven and unkempt in a tiny guardsman’s cabin, his seclusion is suddenly interrupted by Erica who bursts into his life like a ray of sunshine. She appears to be



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22 × 21 cm
144 pages

desperate to remind him that there is a whole world to experience out there. Fully alive. But for him, the outside world means nothing but pain and responsibility; things that, to protect himself, he has done a great job in shying away from. Sometimes, people come into our lives who encourage us to face up to the things we seek to escape, but first we have to deal with our past.

'SURPRISE'

He has everything and yet, unaccountably, it is just not enough. He wants more from life. And more. Another car, another woman. But at some point, it all becomes too much and everything starts slipping uncontrollably through his fingers. There is only one thought in his mind – how did I not realize before it was too late?!

'THE BEER STAIN'

What do men think about? And women? Over the weekend, Jacob torments himself over the fact that he has been fired and has spilled a bottle of beer on the carpet, whereas his girlfriend, Jane, tries to guess what he is thinking, convinced that he wants to break up with her. The story reveals how, in a relationship,

trying to read each other's thoughts invariably leads to unnecessary heartache and misunderstandings.

'US'

The main character in this story is a forty-year-old man who still lives with his mother. Neither of them has ever successfully severed the umbilical cord that ties them; a cord pulled even tighter by a tragic event in the protagonist's childhood. Can a man truly engage fully with adulthood if his mother is still his main priority in life?

'HELMUTS'

There is no rehearsal for life – if something is never achieved, it simply never is, it's as simple as that. Helmut drifts through life; a man who has swapped his profession as a physician for alcohol and constantly seeks to redeem himself in the eyes of his daughter, abandoned by her mother and raised by a relative. When his daughter is little, she loves her father and is always glad to see him but, as she grows up, she announces that she has no need for him. Helmut experiences these words like some sort of letter of dismissal, plunging helplessly into the void of alcoholism until, one day, they meet again.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

FLUTTER OF BUTTERFLY WINGS
(TAURIŅA SPĀRNU VĒZIENI)

On the surface, Jasmina's life appears delightful and orderly. Her husband, Bruno, is a fine man and they have two children; Eva aged ten and Gabriel, fifteen. Jasmina works as a dressmaker, employment which she is able to successfully combine with running a home. Other women may well envy her seemingly perfect life and yet something is quietly seething within her; something is missing. One day, Jasmina's eye is caught by an online job ad for a post helping elderly people suffering with loneliness in a retirement home and suddenly, almost without her being aware of it happening, her life is bound up with that of a total stranger. What is Jasmina searching for and why?

Brick by brick, the perfect world Jasmina has created over the years starts to disintegrate. What previously seemed a charmed life displays the first signs of crumbling when, at a social event, she meets a mysterious man she is then unable to stop thinking about. Then Bruno, the paragon of an ideal husband and father of her two children,

blindsides her by saying that he wants a divorce.

Jasmina now needs to rebuild her life from scratch yet her mind loiters, lingering over various fantasies that both help and hinder in her quest to become a stronger person. Jasmina is not alone – she has her children, her best friend and her mother but she is soon to lose for ever one of her men just as she convinces herself that, this time, it will all work out.

Zane Zusta's novel "The Flutter of Butterfly Wings" is permeated by the themes of loneliness, the search for self and, contemplating the nature of life itself, also the idea that nothing happens merely by chance. Life can take sudden, unexpected turns resulting in its course being permanently changed. The author deals adroitly with the complex mechanism of the human mind, harsh reality as opposed to the perfect world of dreams, human weaknesses and their consequences.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini



Sample translations: English

978-9934-0-9733-1

21 × 14 cm

240 pages

UNTAMED BIRD
(NEPIERADINĀTS PUTNS)

The novel opens with a flashback to the main character's childhood. Linda gets home from school to find her mother, who has obviously been crying, in the kitchen where the window is wide open. She tells her daughter that her father, whom the child has never met, dropped by that day and left her ten *Plombīrs* ice creams and a cuddly toy – a small purple rabbit – the only proof she has that he has ever been to see her. Linda clings to this special memory as something to treasure.

Ruta, Linda's closest friend since childhood, is celebrating her thirty-ninth birthday. Ruta is married with two children but her husband has taken them off in order to leave Ruta free to enjoy her special day with her parents and best friend. Linda is unmarried, living alone with a cat for company.

At the birthday brunch an old friend of Ruta's father, Ernest, happens to join them. He is a theatre director and Linda enjoys a fascinating conversation with him about books and the performing arts. Linda takes a shine to Ernest but suddenly everyone is in a hurry to leave and there is no time to get to know him better. On their way out of the café, Linda spots Ernest's scarf lying on the floor. After a moment's thought, she picks it up and puts it round her neck.

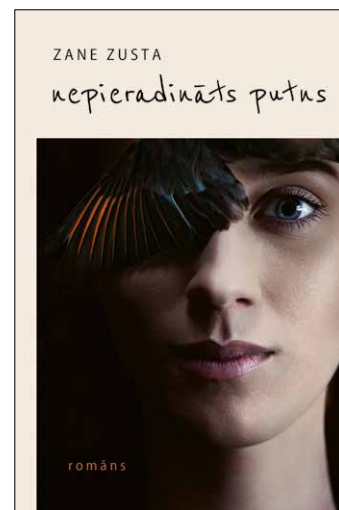
Linda is preparing for an author's event in the library where she works. The writer is highly esteemed and engages the audience with his passion. An elderly man comes in and Linda goes over to see if she can help him. He has a book which a friend of his has requested he deliver to Linda. Linda puts the book down and invites the man to take a seat as the author's event is underway. After listening for a short while, the man makes his excuses and leaves. Later, Linda takes a closer look at the book and finds a handwritten note

inside. She is shaken to read that it is from her father, writing to ask if she would consider meeting him at a café he names in a week's time.

Stunned by what she has read, Linda calls in to a local supermarket on her way home from work and buys herself ten *Plombīrs* ice creams, her mind constantly occupied with thoughts of her father whom she has never met but who has now reached out to her, seemingly from nowhere. Linda can't help wondering if the man who delivered the book was actually her father himself and if so, whether today she has met her father for the first time. When she gets home, she takes herself off to bed from where she calls her mother, although she chooses not to tell her about the events of the day.

Linda goes to visit her mother where, in secret, she re-reads the letters she has written to her father, dating right back to her childhood. She has spent her whole life longing for him and, through her letters, sharing details with him about whatever was going on at school and asking for his advice. Back at work, she thinks over the events of the previous day; wondering how she came across, taking a long, hard look at herself and trying to come to a decision as to whether she wants to meet her father or not.

Next comes a flashback to when Linda is ten and has written the first letter to her father. Their home is an absolute mess; the living room overflowing with all manner of discarded items and stinking of cigarettes. Linda opens the window. Later she goes out to play with Ruta; they climb a tree and, in its branches, play mummies and daddies. Ruta then goes home while Linda returns to an empty kitchen where, having chased away the cockroaches, she helps herself to three cold potatoes from the fridge and sour cream for her



978-9934-32-112-2
21 × 14 cm
208 pages

lunch. That afternoon, she goes out to play again and her friend Ruta has kindly brought her a meat schnitzel from home which Linda gobbles down greedily, staving off the pangs of hunger. The two girls then have a falling out over some minor matter and Ruta runs back home. Linda, instead, goes to her hiding place in the foundations of an unfinished building site where she keeps the purple rabbit her father had left for her, buried in the loose earth. Her mother insisted she get rid of the thing but instead Linda buried it away in her hidey hole.

Linda's mother comes home, smoking and looking exhausted. She is an attractive, slender woman with a good figure and large chest. Linda's aunt had died long ago and her mother goes regularly to tend her sister's grave. Later, her mother receives a gentleman caller. Linda can hear them arguing and is frightened of him, so is relieved when he leaves shortly afterwards. Returning home, she re-reads the letter she has written to her father, kissing it before hiding it away.

Ruta is moaning about her size, saying she's overweight and likening herself to a hamster. Things are not helped by the gift of a lovely bicycle and her father exclaiming that she, Ruta, is the prettiest girl in the world. Linda dreams that she has a beautiful new bicycle like her friend. In the dream, she rides it to school and pins a drawing she has done of her father on the classroom wall. But Ruta appears and starts shouting that the man in the picture is her father, not Linda's. Ruta suddenly turns into a hamster and Linda pops her into her school bag. Going to the window, she sees her father in the school yard but, running outside, she finds he is no longer there.

Linda is aware that her mother has many gentleman friends whom she takes to her bedroom. The conversations that go on behind the closed bedroom door are for grown-ups only, Linda is told. One day, Linda comes across Ruta's father in their kitchen. Her mother appears to be in very good spirits. It transpires that he is going to lend them a car so Linda and her mother can go to Riga. Linda refuses to leave them on their own, fearing they might go and have one of those conversations for grown-ups in the bedroom, but they don't. Linda's mother tells her about all the wonderful things they will do in Riga, the cafés they will visit and the beautiful city parks they will see. But instead, Linda finds herself left on her own in the car for absolutely ages. It is a boiling hot, summer's day. A shady old man appears by the car and tries to lure Linda out of it, waving a soft toy by the car window as an enticement. Linda does as her mother instructed and does not get out of the car, although when the need to go to the toilet becomes ever more pressing, she starts thinking that maybe she will go with the kind man after all, just so she can use his

bathroom and get the soft toy. Fortunately her mother reappears just in time and the fishy old man disappears back into his flat and draws his curtains. Her mother is upset, her lipstick all smudged. Feeling her mother's embrace, Linda is filled with love for her again and promises she will never disobey her orders ever again.

Linda goes for a sleepover at Ruta's house where she is rather in awe of the cleanliness and pleasant accord between her friend's parents. Linda confides in her friend the fear that she may smell. As she is falling asleep, she hears Ruta's parents arguing which has a calming effect on the girl.

Ruta is sent to stay with her grandmother in the countryside. In her absence, Linda starts visiting her elderly neighbour, Olita. In her eighties, Olita is a kind-hearted cat-lover, her home full of feline friends. The unlikely pair get to know each other when one of Linda's boyfriends comes to the flat and Linda goes out into the communal stairwell. Finding the neglected child sitting alone by the mail boxes, playing with their metal flaps, Olita invites her into her home. Olita listens to Linda's stories about her father and her home becomes a safe haven for the girl; a place she feels she is understood.

Linda goes along to a summer camp which is running, free of charge, at her school. Whilst there, a boy mocks her, saying she smells; something Linda's own mother confirms that evening at home. Linda is then banned from going to Olita's as her cats have a tendency to wet on her clothes. Linda is upset by this and argues with her mother whilst still trying to stay on her good side as she knows she needs both her mum and Olita.

One day, Mum seems to be in an exceptionally good mood. She is eagerly anticipating the arrival of a special visitor. Linda is sent to Olita's before the guest arrives but rather outstays her welcome and the old lady eventually falls asleep. Seeing as her mother has not come to collect her, Linda returns to the flat on her own where she hears muffled laughter coming from behind the closed bedroom door. Linda retreats onto the stairwell where she falls asleep. Linda dreams that she is being lifted up and taken back into the flat, that she is flying. She loves the smell of the person carrying her, a man, and wants him to hold her forever.

Linda's mother has a new paramour – Peteris. He visits their home on a regular basis but, unlike all the men before him, he takes an interest in Linda, too. Softly-spoken and a non-drinker, Linda takes to him immediately. Linda tells Olita about Peteris and how fond she is of him but the old woman is not convinced and tells Linda not to get her hopes up. Linda is over the moon when Peteris gives her a bicycle. Showing off her prowess, she cycles

with no hands and ends up riding into a tree. She is quite badly injured and is taken to hospital. Peteris gives her a bracelet of plastic beads as a get-well-soon present.

When Linda comes out of hospital, Peteris takes her and her mother on a day trip. Linda starts imagining them together as a proper family. Her mother is concerned that the trip might be too much of an exertion for Linda and Peteris calls her a spoilsport. The day out does not end as planned; they have no tickets for the bus, Linda is sick and Peteris gets drunk. All the same, once back home Peteris continues to pay Linda plenty of attention. By now, Ruta has come back from the countryside and Linda tells her about the exciting new development at home. Ruta, however, is unenthusiastic and sceptical, suggesting Peteris is no more than a stand-in father, and Linda takes offence.

Linda's mother and Peteris have a fiery row resulting in him being kicked out. He stays away for a number of days. Linda wants to do something nice for Olita and thinks some balls of wool would make a nice gift as she knows her friend likes knitting. Not having any money, Linda decides to steal the wool from a shop but she is found out and gets a severe telling off from her mother. What frightens Linda the most is the thought Peteris might not come back because of what she has done. But Peteris does come back and explains to Linda that grown-ups make mistakes, too. He also reassures her that although her mother is not very good at demonstrating her love for her daughter – growing up in an orphanage she was never shown any love herself – she does indeed love Linda and he, too, would be happy to take her father's place.

Linda waits for Peteris to return but he never does. Linda's mother eventually tells her that, having

discovered that he does not work in a shop as he claimed and that the bicycle he gave Linda was actually stolen, she has sent him packing.

When Linda is seventeen, she and Ruta set off for Riga where they get jobs in a fairground. She meets Peteris again who not only tells her he still loves her mother but also admits to having served a prison sentence. He is warm and affectionate with Linda and buys her ice cream.

The following year, Linda starts a university course which will qualify her to become a librarian. She has her first physical experience with a man, a one-night stand, and later discovers she is pregnant. Looking ahead to single-parenthood, history appears to be repeating itself but Linda has a miscarriage. Afterwards, she resolves not to have any children until such a time as they might be raised by both parents.

Linda is on her way for the long-awaited encounter with her father. She bumps into Ernest who notices she is wearing his scarf and they agree to meet.

Linda sits waiting in the café where she has arranged to meet her father. He is late. When the door finally opens, she sees Peteris standing there, clutching a bag of *Plombirs* ice creams, but he has a heart attack. Peteris dies and Linda is left with many unanswered questions. Linda goes on to marry Ernest and the couple have a daughter who is raised by two loving parents. Linda's mother admits that she had deemed it best to keep some things secret but by now Linda has moved on from holding grudges against her mother and simply accepts that it is only human to make mistakes.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere-Pasqualini



INGA GRENCBERGA (1981)

The Sixth Wife is Inga Grenčberga's debut novel. Since 2006 Grenčberga has worked as a Marketing and Communications expert for the leading Nord Europe digital services and software company TietoEVRY. She has published a number of features and articles in printed press. In 2014, Grenčberga graduated from the playwriting course DRAMATIKA, led by one of Latvia's leading playwrights Lauris Gundars.

Just after publication *The Sixth Wife* reached No. 1 on Zvaigzne ABC Publishers bestsellers list and No. 2 on the publisher's bestselling e-book list. It was among the Top 20 bestselling titles of the year 2020 in Latvia and among Top 10 of the most borrowed books in libraries across the country. The novel and its author received wide media attention. Inga Grenčberga was featured in the mainstream news channels, printed press and TV shows. Author is currently finishing her second novel.

THE SIXTH WIFE (SESTĀ SIEVA)

Inspired by true events, the adult contemporary romance *The Sixth Wife* is the fictional memoir of Alice Berg – a budding marketing specialist in her mid-20s who's just moved from a small town to a metropolis. One day, she bumps into Michael, a famous poet, at a traffic crossing. Soon Alice finds herself in the grip of an exciting and erotic but toxic love affair with Michael that lasts for the best part of a decade. During their turbulent relationship, Michael marries twice – but never proposes to Alice, leaving her in the perpetual role of 'the other woman'. Despite her attempts to break it off, Alice finds it impossible to leave him, and harbours secret hopes of becoming his wife one day.

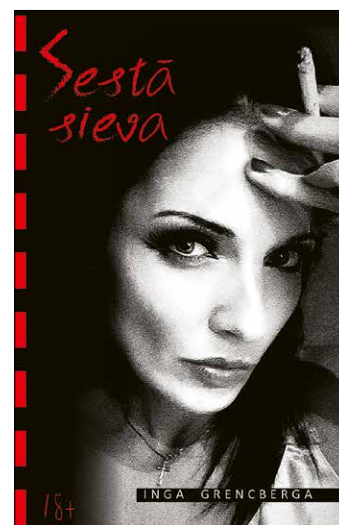
Told in a nonlinear narrative with noir undertones, the novel is peppered with intimate details of the couple's love life: their first night together at a casino hotel; Michael's request to engage in anal sex; a surprise visit to a swingers' party. But it's the fearless exploration of Alice's psyche that drives the story forth.

The novel touches on the grief over Alice's father's tragic death. Five

years after his death, she is due to marry the charming Arthur. But, unable to resist him, she spends the last night before her wedding with Michael, subsequently breaking off her engagement to Arthur. During a break in her relationship with Michael, she has a one-night stand with a Russian criminal called Sasha and a short-lived affair with her physiotherapist Christian that leads to an abortion, recounted in gripping and heart-breaking detail.

Perpetually battling depression, anxiety and her persistent and mysterious migraines, Alice overdoses on painkillers and anti-depressants resulting in a nervous breakdown during a work meeting. Advised by her colleagues, she seeks the help of a psychotherapist. Encouraged by the therapist, she starts to break out of her self-induced isolation. Inspired by Nietzsche's concept *amor fati* or 'to love one's fate' Alice decides to take up a course in calligraphy and sets out to write "the world's most beautiful suicide letter".

By the time Michael finally proposes to her, he has become too consumed by his sex and gambling addiction.



Rights sold: Estonia

Sample translations available:

English; Estonian

978-9934-0-8727-1
 21 × 14 cm
 352 pages

After going missing for a weekend, he returns home, announcing that he has lost 'everything' at a casino.

In a desperate attempt to return their relationship to 'ground zero' and resurrect the feelings she once had for Michael, Alice follows an impulse and donates all of her money to a homeless shelter. Although the action fills her with peace and lightness, she breaks off her engagement with Michael. She meets a man called Thomas in a café while she's writing her suicide note, and he invites her to come to India and live in his commune. The novel ends with Alice phoning her mum to tell her the good news: she is due to marry Thomas and become his sixth wife.

Elegant, noir and flirtatious, the book uses gripping excerpts from the author's own diary. Although the erotic scenes could rival E. L. James *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Anaïs Nin's *The Veiled Woman*, the book has more substance, exploring society's taboos such as abortion, major depression, anxiety and what it means to be 'the other woman' in gripping and fearless detail.

Although the book is set in Latvia, the action could just as well take place in any European capital. And the narcissistic poet Michael may as well be the reincarnated version of Henry VIII, reminding of Olivia Hayfield's modern re-telling of the theme in *Wife After Wife*.

Translated by Ieva Lakute

MARIA /,deɪzɑːˈv(j)uː/ (MARIJA /,deɪzɑːˈv(j)uː/)

MARIA /,deɪzɑːˈv(j)uː/ is the second book by Inga Grenčberga, following the phenomenal success of her bestseller *Sestā Sieva* (*The Sixth Wife*).

Told in a linear narrative and peppered with poignant quotes from other authors, this novel of 70,000 words is an unwritten diary of its main protagonist, Maria Dietrich. A successful marketing strategist in her 40s, working for a ground-breaking creative agency, she suddenly finds herself on the brink of a breakdown.

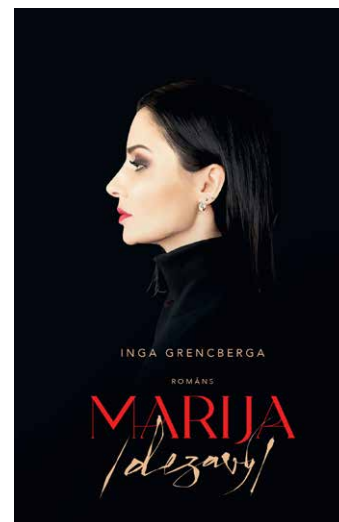
Unannounced, she hands in her resignation to Gregory, her boss – whom we later discover has had a huge influence on Maria's life as her teacher, inspirator, and lover. While their relationship is never truly defined – at least not in the traditional sense – Maria's encounter with Alice, a character from *The Sixth Wife*, seems to spark some jealousy in Gregory.

When, following a brief affair, the untamed Alice announces that she

must break up with Maria in search of "her own ocean", Gregory blames Alice for disrupting Maria's life. However, Maria reassures him that her breakdown is caused by an inner transformation that has been a long time coming. To figure it all out, she must go away for an undetermined length of time, no longer able to cope with the demands of work and her personal life.

Maria embarks on a journey across Europe with no destination in mind, bringing little else than a small suitcase, a supply of water, and a block of cigarettes with her. Over the course of several weeks, she crosses the borders of Lithuania, Poland, Germany, France, the UK, Spain, and Portugal, though none of these destinations are explicitly described in the novel.

She meets a cast of characters along the way, all of whom seem to be searching for something too. Maria spends a wild night in London with Albert and lavishes herself on a glamorous retreat in Cabourg



Sample translation: English

978-9934-32-393-5
20,5 × 13,5 cm
368 pages

(once frequented by her favourite author, Marcel Proust). Finally, she ends up in Bilboa where she meets Harry – a budding artist, battling his own inner turmoil – who takes her on a Dalí-inspired tour of discovery.

Along her journey, Maria must wage war on her inner demons, venturing deep into her past, meeting her teenage self and experiencing the unprovoked violence she once endured from her classmates. This holds the key to discovering what caused Maria to self-harm, why she feels like she doesn't belong anywhere, and why she's always felt like a disappointment to others, despite all her successes.

Upon discovering the scars on Maria's arm, Harry encourages her to get a tattoo. It transforms her past suffering into a magnificent work of art, signalling

her victory over pain and loneliness, and paving the way towards recovery. The tattoo makes her realise that there are far fewer scars on her body than she imagined, and far more space for a good life.

With many resonant themes, the novel will appeal to women in their mid-20s to mid-40s who have all felt the pressures of success and modern life, requiring them to 'always be switched on,' constantly proving themselves to others. Maria's road trip across Europe is a metaphor for her inner change, with parallels to other Great Road Novels, such as the American classic, *On The Road* by Jack Kerouac, and more contemporary examples like *Amy & Roger's Epic Detour* by Morgan Matson, *The Edge of Never* by J.A. Redmerski, and *Let's Get Lost* by Adi Alsaid.

Translated by Ieva Lakute



ILZE AIZILA (1982)

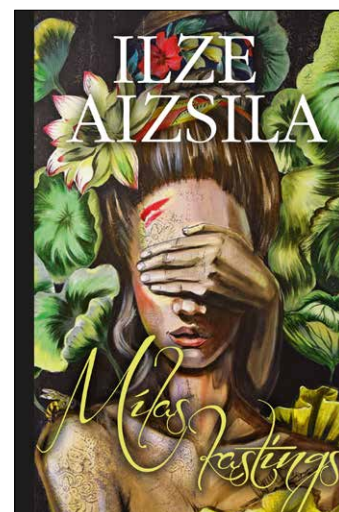
Ilze Aizila has earned a Master’s degree in social sciences with a focus on Management. She has worked in the fields of tourism and public relations and is currently professionally advancing in the library sector. Concurrently with her studies at the Latvian Writers’ Union’s Literary Academy in 2020, the author embarked on her creative journey. Her first two novels and a story have been published, having successfully participated in competitions organized by Latvian publishers. The writer delves into themes of romance and family relationships, bringing fresh breezes to Latvian literature with vivid characters, witty dialogues, and unique humor. Staying true to her motto “Literature for the heart and the joy of life,” the author continues to surprise with ever-new fantasy works.

LOVE CASTING (MĪLAS KASTINGS)

A romantic, familial, and heartfelt novel about returning home, a quirky twist of fate, romantic quarrels, self-discovery, and the role of parents in shaping a child’s destiny. The work is made even more colorful by the vivid descriptions of Latgale’s picturesque landscapes, the local cultural environment, and visual art, all of which are highlighted by the character of the artist Kamene.

After a twenty-year absence, Ivo has to return to his homeland due to his father’s wishes. The returnee heads to an unknown town, Dagda, on the eastern border of Latvia. He left behind an awkwardly interrupted relationship with a rope dancer, Sofia, in Germany and all hopes to shape his destiny. The reason is absurd: Ivo’s father, Martins, had a dream in which his deceased sister appeared and expressed her last wish. Both parents, under the benevolence of this deceased aunt, became pastors, the son attained two higher educations and was invited to become a scientist. But now all roads lead to a country about which he knows nothing. Stubbornly, he overcomes all the challenges of hitchhiking, and upon emerging from a cold lake in Latvia, he feels reborn in his homeland. He has plenty of money in his pocket for business and starting a new life. As he approaches Dagda, he meets a local

energetic guy from Latgale, Janis, who realizes that the handsome foreigner is going to live with his beloved. A conflict arises between the two men, which Ivo, in his naivety, does not anticipate. Soon, the returnee meets the exotic Kamene, his landlady, who agreed to rent the room only at the request of her neighbor Monika (Mona), due to Pastor Martins’ excellent reference about his son, and the promised rent money. The two-story country house is located by a lake, adorned with a beautiful flower garden and a typical Latgale yard. However, inside the house are surprising jungle paintings. On the first floor, there’s also a restricted area, a secret room, where Ivo is not allowed to enter. The hostess herself is unusual: depending on her mood, she adorns her head with decorative animal ears, insect relatives, dresses in a bear costume, or ties a squirrel’s tail to herself. Kamene helps Ivo settle in a unique local store, where the employees speak Latvian, Russian, and the local Latgale dialect – often mixing them together. The store sells almost everything imaginable. Strange mixes of scents, overcrowded high shelves – Ivo sees it as a huge challenge and, after an odd job interview, agrees to become the store’s marketing manager, hoping to acquire it. There’s only one problem – the older store manager, Viktoria, with her unbearable



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 21 × 14 cm
 400 pages

character, old-fashioned approach to work, and excessive interest in him as a man. Ivo is determined to find out why Viktoria is desperately hiding the store's review book. Ivo starts a friendship with a childhood friend they accidentally recognize, and with Janis's sister Madara. The young girl turns out to be full of complexes and shy. On a certain summer solstice night, Ivo, while drunk, pays an overly intimate compliment about Kamene to Janis. For this, he receives a punch in the face and a sick leave due to broken ribs. Ivo enjoys the care of Kamene. Conversations about their misfortunes only bring them closer. Janis reconciles and breaks up with Kamene countless times. Ivo suggests to their landlady to find a guy for a transitional relationship. Kamene announces a love casting for short-term partners on social networks. After a grand Midsummer night with Madara, Ivo meets Kamene in the courtyard by a bonfire, where she is indulging in cottage cheese made by their neighbor Mona. In a swift dance move, the two bump into each other, and a flustered Kamene asks to end the celebration. The next day, the two of them head out for a trip to a lake. A boat trip, painting, and photography on an island increase the erotic tension between them in the evening, but they resist it. Ivo faces a challenge at work – crisis communication. Journalist Yekaterina (Katja) doesn't get a sensation but offers to become Ivo's private Russian language tutor. Ivo ends his relationship with Madara and tries to focus on Katja. Out of goodwill, Ivo invites a guy from Kamene, spotted on social networks, for a "love casting". Challenges at work are constant. Victoria, with a dreamy look, calls Ivo "Paul". Other employees are also addressed by the names adopted by the store manager, but he is the only one for whom the boss is sexually interested. For the sake of business, Ivo is willing to accept a lot, especially if he could get the intriguing store feedback book. Victoria disagrees, and Ivo decides to act cunningly. A revelation follows – the feedback book had been mixed up with Victoria's correspondence with a German friend who tragically passed away. Ivo secretly continues his work on buying the small store. The day before the in-person selection for Kamene's love casting, Ivo kisses Kamene. From that moment on, he regrets his impulsiveness in inviting some social media oddity Raimonds to the love contest, who confidently shows up on an expensive motorcycle and doesn't hide that he is the heir to a significant fashion house – a millionaire. The stranger wins the love casting without participating in the selection tests, except during the decision-making phase, which angers the other guys who have been working hard for hours. Ivo looks at the mismatched trio – Janis, Kamene, Raimonds – and feels like a loser. Relationship and work crises lead him to prayers, and conversations with the religious herbalist, Mona, help. Ivo's uncle Arkadi visits Kamene's house,

to whom Ivo promised to give old furniture found in the store's basement for restoration. After an unpleasant conversation with Kamene, Janis' illusions of getting his girlfriend back crumble. Kamene and Raimonds head out on a motorcycle tour. Victoria, while driving from Rēzekne, ends up in a ditch due to a punctured tire. Ivo arrives at the scene with his uncle, who seduces Victoria. However, she had been traveling with a hitchhiker from Germany – Sofia. The rope dancer wants to persuade Ivo to leave Latvia. During a lunch break, in an outdoor cafe, Ivo, Sofia, Yekaterina, and Janis unexpectedly come together. A heated exchange ends with the German woman and the Latgalian heading off together. Janis offers to drive Sofia to Riga airport. Kamene struggles with jealousy, realizing that Ivo likely spent the night with Sofia, while Janis said goodbye the previous evening, giving Sofia a hopeful look. Kamene can't stand Raimonds' snobbish moves. In a moment of weakness, Ivo enters the room. In the flickering candlelight, Kamene, dressed in a chemise, paints a self-portrait. Enchanted by the circumstances, the two enjoy passion in bed. The next day, it becomes clear that Kamene is not ready to leave Raimonds for career opportunities. Ivo breaks up with Yekaterina. The artist, immersed in the anticipation of Anna's holiday, prepares for the fair, where Raimonds arranges for the painting and sale of Cimmerman fabrics. Ivo avoids meeting Kamene. At the fair, Raimonds meets Madara. In an instant, both understand each other and feel a mutual attraction. During the ball, Kamene sees Jānis kissing Sofia, but Ivo shows up later, deeply irritating Raimonds with his behavior. Ivo confesses his feelings to Kamene, and she is pleased. However, she can't bring herself to tell Raimonds. At the end of the ball, Ivo again gets a black eye. At night, Kamene and Ivo walk naked through the house and enter a secret room, where he discovers a large-scale work of art – a tribute to the town. On the fabric printed by Madara, Kamene has painted a bird's-eye view of the Dagda surroundings. In Ivo's store, he shocks everyone by presenting himself as the new owner. Over time, improvements are made in the store, with a photo and painting exhibition set up in its basement. Eventually, a wedding is expected in the basement, to which Kamene arrives wearing a dress from the Cimmerman fashion house. Ivo's parents and neighbour Mona attend the celebration, the latter turning out to be the godmother of Pastor Martins, suggesting that Ivo's trip to Latvia might have been orchestrated by his father. At the altar, adorned by Kamene's beautiful Dagda painting, the new couple, Arkadi and the attractive Victoria, are wed. Finally, Ivo gets the courage to ask where Kamene keeps getting her ever-new animalistic accessories, to which Kamene responds by forbidding such questions. "Latgale will never be fully understood," Ivo concludes, and this thought pleasantly excites him.

A STEP TO THE ALTAR
(SOLIS LĪDZ ATĀRIM)

A contemporary novel about intergenerational relationships, where in absurd situations, the most painful themes of Latvia in 2020 are humorously addressed – the anticipated administrative-territorial reform of municipal districts in 2021, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the rise of artificial intelligence. At the heart of the narrative is a long-cherished dream – to reclaim a youthful love.

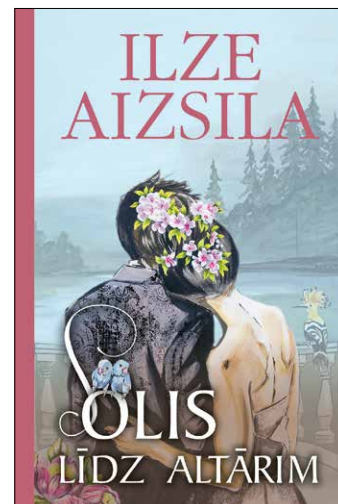
The head of the civil registration department, Teiksma, receives an ultimatum from the local municipality's chairman, Donats – to come up with a plan to save the district, which is reportedly lacking in residents, from merging with another district due to the planned administrative territorial reform. Teiksma is also upset with Donats' tone and attitude. Both have been harbouring a secret for decades – in their early youth, they had intended to marry, but their plans fell apart due to an accident. After the accident, Teiksma became permanently limp and nervous, while Donats got a scar on his face.

Teiksma's colleague, registration specialist Charlotte, is blessed with a sharp mind, a law education, and enough audacity to fight and think of a plan to save the district but doesn't know how. The mood is further dampened by yet another cancelled marriage ceremony, though they narrowly manage to save the last scheduled wedding of the day with unconventional methods. The civil registration office is located next to a beautiful park by a river, on the second floor of a historic and renovated manor. The first floor houses a library where two colourful employees work. The manager often does Tarot readings,

and the librarian offers illegal cosmetic and hairdressing services.

In the evening, Teiksma and Charlotte have a Tarot session. The cards suggest that events are unpredictable, masculine forces and passion will be in play, and in the end, the ladies will get what they deserve. During a presentation meeting for the district-saving plan, the awkward remarks of the civil registration staff, rephrased by the chairman, turn into a real plan. An idea is born to create a matchmaking platform that would bring couples together for stable marriages. By having children, the district would prove that they can achieve the required population in a short time. Right after the meeting, Donats introduces the ladies to a programmer and his godson, Tonis. A tall, handsome guy, who in turn, invites another programmer – the IT genius Andris.

The beginning of their collaboration is challenging. The ladies not only don't understand the young men's lifestyle but also the language they use for communication – English and jargon. They need to create a dictionary to keep up. The boys are wealthy, and their behaviour and attitude are completely different from the long-time municipal employees. The emotional journey between them evolves from misunderstanding and jealousy to regret, anger, and divided feelings. Both women are lonely. Teiksma only has a daughter, Rasa, who practices horse therapy, is a spiritual being, and a good advisor to her mother. Meanwhile, Charlotte, almost in her fifties, has neither children nor a lover. She becomes smitten with Tonis, who is considerably younger but very



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21 × 13,5 cm

368 pages

attractive and intelligent. They often enjoy smoking breaks on the balcony, and a special bond develops between them. Teiksma recognizes the risks and is familiar with Charlotte's nature. On other hand, Teiksma finds Andris as a potential suitor for her daughter, even though he tends to fall asleep from exhaustion during work. Later, Teiksma becomes convinced that he plays online casinos, and the lady's attitude changes immediately. As the council session approaches, where the idea of the new dating platform should be defended in front of the deputies, Donats interferes in an internal meeting. He is annoyed by the ill-fated ideas of the dating portal. Toni promises his godfather that he will sort everything out. Donats tells Teiksma that both urgently need to congratulate a couple in the district on their golden wedding anniversary. Teiksma reluctantly fulfills her work duties, blurting out dark humour instead of congratulations, and once again clashes with Donats. Charlotte has started learning to drive a vehicle - Toni's motorcycle. Teiksma is furious about such irresponsibility. Programmers become frantic due to lack of time and lack of ideas. They order a hookah and scare the ladies with a smoky room. In a bad mood, Teiksma makes an even bolder move - she drinks cream liqueur, grabs a guitar, and heads to the river raft to sing out everything she thinks about Donats, with whom she just had another quarrel, sending him nonsense due to lack of glasses. Donats, suspecting trouble, goes to look for Teiksma. Instead, he meets Rasa, whom he actually knows much better than Teiksma thinks. Rasa even looks like him. Both ride a horse along the river, thinking that Teiksma's raft is heading to the sea. Donats rescues her with a motorboat. Soon the quartet of the dating platform "Step to the Altar" project celebrates the successful end of the council session. The ladies were not allowed to participate, but the programmers successfully defended their work and received approval to continue. The party begins at the registry office, meanwhile, others in Latvia start panicking because of a new virus. However, after the trip on the raft, Teiksma feels a cold coming on and sneezes, causing suspicion of Covid-19. Teiksma gets sick, stays home, writes poetry, drinks wine, takes sedatives, and thinks about Donats. Rasa's mother reassures her and encourages her to fight for her happiness. Meanwhile, Charlotte, due to a misunderstanding, gets deeply offended after reading a message from Toni's sister

and decides that she is his lover. As revenge, several of Charlotte's clients suffer. Due to Covid-19 precautions, weddings begin to take place under strict conditions. The married couple this time are goth-style dressed youngsters who dare to break ethical norms. While Andris helps Teiksma with the wedding ceremony, Toni takes the time to make up with Charlotte. Power goes out at work. Everyone spends the day in candlelight, playing cards. Emotions flare. Players argue about Covid-19 conspiracy theories, and someone reveals that Donats is also sick. Teiksma is worried sick. Rasa avoids coming to the registry office because the librarians gossip that Teiksma wants to pair her with Andris. They haven't met yet, but sometimes Andris sees a blonde ghost by the mansion window. Actually - it's Rasa. The programmers launch the "Step to the Altar" platform in test mode and warn the ladies that those who match best will emerge in group chats. AI will help guide conversations, but it still needs improvement. Teiksma quickly finds a like-minded person on the dating platform and realizes that the AI is different. The lady becomes addicted and cannot stop chatting even at night. In a stern conversation, Charlotte extracts information from Toni: Teiksma is chatting with a by-product of AI. When Rasa, bumping into Charlotte, finally meets Andris, they recognize each other from a shared retreat. The young couple instantly click. Toni upsets Teiksma, saying he wanted her to nurture the AI in natural conversations. He also adds that Donats has addressed a letter to Teiksma to be given to her after his death. Teiksma collapses. Rasa calls for emergency help, a doctor in a Covid-safe suit picks her up and takes her to the forest. It turns out to be Donats, who reveals his intentions - to win Teiksma's heart with the help of the portal and the support of Rasa and Toni. It turns out Teiksma was actually chatting with Donats. The municipality expected completely different work from both programmers. However, the issue of municipal reforms also remains relevant. Donats has proposed to Teiksma many times in his life, and, approaching retirement, he no longer wanted to settle for another rejection. He still feels guilty about an accident in his youth and still loves Teiksma. In the forest, Teiksma finds a laid table, bird songs, and an amber found on a joint walk by the sea in their youth, which Donats has embedded in a ring and finally puts on her finger.

A TEMPTING TWIST. Relationship Stories in Erotic Moods
(KĀRDINOŠS PAVĒRSIENS. Attiecību stāsti erotiskās noskaņās)

Sixteen lively and sensual stories in which pairs, previously strangers or reacquainted couple, meet under various circumstances and with diverse emotions. The characters in these stories experience a sudden and tantalizing urge to touch and feel each other. Through the lens of eroticism, the narratives address the internal struggles of the characters and their pursuit of immediate or long-term happiness. They reveal the inherent human desire to be understood.

This reading material allows the audience to physically indulge in the stories. Each narrative elevates the pleasure from the previous one, prompting readers to reflect on themes that might be relevant to them at various life stages. The dialogues resemble playful banter, where the human mind flirts with its primal instincts. Unexpected situations often lead to misunderstandings and laughter but can also evoke nostalgic and sentimental feelings. The story numbering is interspersed with exclamations one might hear in the bedroom, setting the reader in an erotic mood.

“The Next Morning” – a story about the morning after a party that a girl can’t remember. However, there’s evidence of some indecent happenings in her apartment – a half-naked guy with a mischievous mood. The girl feeds him, trying to find out what she forgot in her drunkenness and how to get him out of the house. The guy has the opposite desires – to charm her and stay.

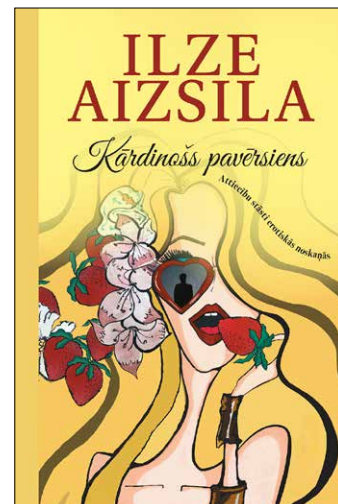
“Contract” – a story set in sombre tones about twisted relationships. Teresa, the manager of a tourism company, visits a new tourist lodging to seal a collaboration agreement. The owner happens to be her ex-lover,

whom she wooed out of spite in the past. Teresa wants to see if there’s still a possibility for their feelings to change anything. However, he is still unaware of his wife’s infidelity, while at the same time, he is not opposed to getting close to Teresa once again. Their passion is interrupted by the realization that it will change nothing. She rushes away, shouting the bitter truth in her car, which her lover accidentally overhears.

“It Can’t Be” – a comedic story about a remote parents’ meeting in a kindergarten. After the online meeting ends, one of the fathers remains on the screen. What follows is an intriguing conversation, which leads to the kindergarten teacher and one of the toddler’s fathers indulging in a mischievous adventure.

“Fixing the Grade” – a story about love and dreams in a student’s life. She observes her classmates, assessing their mutual affinities, while at the same time, she can’t figure out why the professor, to whose summerhouse they’ve all come, is so irritating and harsh specifically towards her. While the others have gone to the beach, the student, to spite the professor, stays in the garden to study for the upcoming test. The student falls off the hammock and begins a moment of passionate healing in the tutor’s bedroom among the Indian oils.

“Pillow Drama” – a story about the doubts and fears of coming out to parents for a gay individual. A young male couple visits to help one of the partner’s parents with farm work and, at the same time, to confess that they are together. The situation is complicated by the father’s stern attitude and remarks, as well as the unexpected arrival of an ex-girlfriend. When the parents learn the truth, the boys decide to move abroad – to a country



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21 × 13,5 cm
320 pages

that happens to be the mother's as-yet-unvisited dream destination.

"Inviting You" – a story about the feeling of loss and masking it with distractions. Upon learning that her ex-boyfriend has married another woman abroad, a young woman immerses herself in sorrow. Her sister and brother-in-law persuade her to attend a concert of her favourite rock band. She gets heavily intoxicated and unintentionally gets involved with the band's manager, while also flirting with the drummer. Attending the band's album launch party, she encounters the darker sides of celebrity life and realizes she's in trouble, from which she's rescued by the drummer, leading to an unforgettable erotic adventure.

"Help Me" – a story about a relationship hindered by a man's indecision. Being in a mistress role and knowing that your lover is lying, promising to end his unhappy marriage, is difficult. The girl, along with her friend, goes to a beach bar where they are joined by a group of guys. One of them is a charming man she had met at a dance, and another she recognizes as an acquaintance of her lover. He doesn't hesitate to report everything he saw to the married friend. After a passionate night, the girl realizes her actions when she receives a message the next morning that her lover has confessed everything to his wife and is planning to divorce. Both suitors visit her at once, but the girl, feeling trapped, decides... to take her time.

"Because of Tomatoes" – a story about reuniting and the ignition of passion after years. This time, the events unfold in a greenhouse. A girl, replacing her parents, unexpectedly sells tomato plants to a past young love. The day ends with both reminiscing about what happened in the greenhouses and things their parents were unaware of.

"A Surprise Gift" – a story about meeting a childhood friend in adulthood in a completely different context. A girl has come from France to surprise her brother on his birthday. She has arranged for a boatman since the venue is on a little island in the middle of a lake. It turns out to be the celebrant's best friend, who now looks enticing enough in the girl's eyes for a fling. Seductive turns steer the boat to the coast of another island where they both indulge in delightful moments that continue...

"I'll walk with you" – a story about falling in love at first sight. A guy spots a beautiful young lady on a train. She

is travelling with a friend but gets off at her stop alone. The guy follows her, accompanies her home, where her husband is waiting. On the way, he listens to her suggestions on where he, as an architect, could build a house for himself. The places they visit are experienced as physical pleasures, as the two indulge in naughty activities on the lake, in the meadow, among the tree trunks. The girl says goodbye, showing her hand without the wedding ring.

"The Witch" – witty erotic correspondence between former colleagues. In the middle of the night, an editor, still determined to read a piece about the war, receives a text message from a former colleague, a proof-reader. He confesses that he saw her in a naughty dream. The two begin to share fantasies and drift off into an erotic world where reality does not exist, where their spouses are absent and where they feel orgasmic. The glitch comes at the end of a correspondence in which the guy is interrupted by his wife knocking on the bathroom door when he is still aroused.

"Don't Drive Me Crazy" – the story of how a couple sparks passion in an original role-play. A Christmas elf works in a shopping mall at Christmas time and meets a jazz singer. The two decide to meet at their lunch break in the warehouse of the mall, where there are enough props to expand their imaginations and have some spicy moments. In the end, it turns out that the two live together and this was one of the pre-conceived role-plays.

"Coffee for Two" – a story about the pleasures of misunderstanding during a pandemic. The main characters are known only on computer screens and decide to meet in an unauthorised way – during a ban on two households meeting. The idea is very simple – to finally feel physical pleasure with another person. When the two meet in the car, the air heats up and the face masks reveal their true faces, it becomes clear that the man got into the car by misunderstanding, he just wanted to talk about how to solve the car door knock issue.

"Wait!" – a story about the desire to be understood, to be loved and to find a suitable other half. The protagonist picks up keys found on a forest road and gives them to a girl he passes by. The keyring represents the male phallic symbol. Both fantasise why and to whom it might belong. The girl is delighted to have the chance to ride his motorbike. The two go to a moor where they begin to satisfy each other in nature's mystical settings. The guy confesses that the keys are to his house and the girl can now live there. Love requires no explanation.



MAIJA POHODŅEVA (1973)
and **MODRIS PELSIS** (1970)

Maija Pohodņeva and Modris Pelsis are Latvian writers and journalists who have written series of four thrillers about the adventures of assassins of Latvian origin. Their opponents are special services of different countries, arms smugglers, corrupt officials and organized crime. Authors are currently working on a sequel of the series.

This tandem has also created a documentary novel "Alliance against cancer" based on Pelsis's fight against cancer. Documentary was followed by an optimistic novel "The Cat Whisperer" about a path of a middle-aged woman after her children have grown up. The sequel of this novel is expected to be published soon.

This couple which in not a couple in private life have been working together for more than 20 years. Pelsis has been a captain of the criminal police, while Pohodņeva works in the field of criminal news and investigative journalism as a freelancer. Both draw inspiration from their real work experience, because during the years of cooperation, they have also produced documentaries, TV programs, participated in international media projects with the world's biggest TV channels like BBC and given various public speeches and lectures.

DON'T TRY TRACKING A SNIPER
(NEDZENIET PĒDAS SNAIPERIM)

In modern day Latvia before the war in Ukraine, in the winter snows of the north with temperatures far below zero, a sniper kills three officials one after another. The murders are meticulously planned, expertly executed and no traces whatsoever are left.

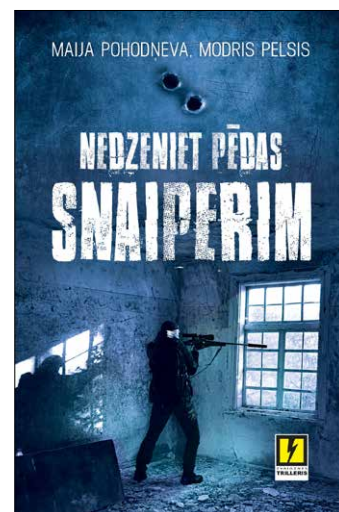
Andris Kadiķis (36), a police detective, leads the team investigating the shootings. The questioning of witnesses results in one dead-end after another and the only piece of evidence which could possibly lead them to the killer is a hair from a rare, exotic guinea pig.

During the investigation, in an attempt to extract confidential information about one of the murdered men, Kadiķis becomes romantically involved with the young, attractive PA of one of the victims. This newfound intimacy makes Kadiķis reflect on the loss of his family; after being shot whilst on duty, his wife decided she could no longer live with the dangers of her husband's profession and filed for a divorce, taking their child with her. Kadiķis, still a reasonably young man, then threw

himself completely into his work. The latest case involves a sniper killing.

The killer, about the same age as Kadiķis, though tenacious and far more experienced, struggles with the consequences of the choices made and uncertainties, questioning the line of work and loneliness. As abhorrent as the contract killer's reflections are, everything is part of a quest for a different future, which is what has led the killer to risk agreeing to contracts in Latvia.

Kadiķis conducts in-depth research into the dealings of one of the victims, discovering that he was a crook involved both in the local crime scene and international fraud scams. Not only had he hidden vast amounts of cash in his mother's cellar but had also left the elderly woman to die alone, starving and helpless. The desperate businessman who lost everything because of the dealings of the murdered man was unlikely to be the only victim of the greedy official. Insight into the victim's own wrongdoings, while shining a light on the nuances of



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20,5 × 13,5 cm
204 pages

economic crime and corruption in Latvia, does not allow us to get close to either the principals or the perpetrators.

In investigating these three murders, the police push themselves into a state of exhaustion; a place where only a little light-hearted humour can save them. Kadiķis excels at this and

is excellent at thinking outside the box; qualities which serve him well as the investigation moves beyond the ruthless and crooked world of business into the realm of guinea pig welfare. The detective interviews both a pet shop assistant and the head of the Small Pets Association.

Kadiķis focuses his search on people connected to the guinea pigs rather than the murder victim himself. Eventually, he strikes lucky and finds a vet who had worked for the killer; vets specializing in rodents being few and far between in Latvia.

They now have the address of the suspected killer. The police operation is prepared in great haste and

is doomed to failure; the officers are totally unaware that the killer's property has been designed with one purpose in mind – survival. No further information is available – the police know nothing of the killer's life or character. They are on the trail of a sniper; someone whose sole wish is that of protecting the pets which play such an important role in the killer's isolated life.

The sniper, who is revealed to be a woman, blows up her own home and, in so doing, kills some police officers and wounds others. She escapes, but not before being shot and wounded by a special police task force. The Chief of Police, head of the operation and Kadiķis' long-time boss, is blamed for the fiasco and is forced into retirement. Kadiķis, suffering with concussion yet fraught with rage, finds he is entrusted as the guinea pigs' guardian as they are kept as evidence. He knows he will not rest until he finds the fugitive.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

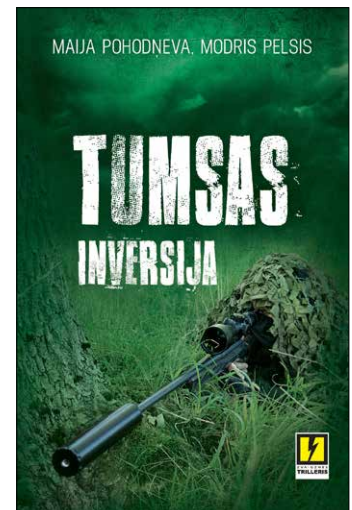
INVERSION OF DARKNESS (TUMSAS INVERSIJA)

After the female sniper absconds, police detective Andris Kadiķis (38) loses his position with the police and moves to the Latvian capital of Riga. He puts to good use his previous work experience, character, soft skills and technological know-how and becomes a news reporter. Given his independent, rebellious nature, he prefers to freelance. He is always keen to travel, to throw himself into engagements, including erotic ones, to make money and to film material of any level of complexity. All the same, he has not abandoned his quest for the contract killer; indeed, it is the main focus of his life.

Eighteen months after fleeing Latvia, Anna, a professional contract killer, is fully recovered and living in Portugal. She is actually on the point of buying a property and turning over a new leaf when she finds herself waking

up in a hotel room in bed with a dead man, and it wasn't her who shot him. She is forced back on the run. At Lisbon airport, on her way to London, she is spotted by British journalist John Raven, the only man Anna has ever loved. In her youth, their paths crossed in Yugoslavia, where Anna had been working as a gun-toting mercenary.

In Britain, Raven offers Anna a job and a place to stay. He has no wish to lose her again, despite being married with two children and having various mistresses. She is reluctant to accept the offer since their relationship had fallen apart in Yugoslavia due to Raven's betrayal of her. The journalist plans not only to keep the fearless, highly intelligent mercenary but also to use her in filming a sensational documentary; one which he hopes will bring him success and fame. But in



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20,5 × 13,5 cm
206 pages

order to make this film about human trafficking, Raven requires a second cameraman who will not only be willing to film under highly dangerous circumstances but who can also speak Latvian. While preparing to take his children to an air show, Raven chances upon a Latvian reporter on a list of accredited journalists.

Raven's plan is that Anna and Kadiķis should work together as a close-knit team, but the two take an immediate dislike to each other. Each has their own reasons for hating the other and yet they continue to work together. Anna's distrust of Raven proves to be well justified as he betrays her again. Aware of his relationship with the sniper, the CIA had long since recruited him as an informant and he now duly apprises them of her whereabouts. The woman is now under constant CIA surveillance.

While Kadiķis engages in hazardous intelligence gathering activities and infiltrates criminal gangs of human traffickers, the CIA uses Raven as a go-between to task Anna with a contract killing in London. She is to assassinate a powerful drug trafficker. She agrees to this last job, hoping to then break free of her former profession as she is approaching forty.

As an ex-police detective, Kadiķis has excellent powers of observation and highly developed intuition. Working alongside her, he starts analysing Anna's behaviour and starts to suspect that this fair-haired, physically unremarkable woman could in fact be the killer he has long been searching for. When their filming project is completed and all the footage edited,

he follows Anna to one of Raven's properties where she is staying, keen to discover the truth about her.

Catching sight of her pursuer, Anna attacks Kadiķis but the pair are immediately captured by a CIA unit which promptly sweeps in. Kadiķis, too, is detained like Anna in a secret CIA prison cell and interrogated. The proposal is that they carry out the contract killing in Latvia together, as a team; after which in recompense they will be allowed to disappear. Kadiķis strikes a deal apart, stipulating that once the hit has been carried out, Anna will also be shot leaving him as the sole survivor to gain his freedom.

Anna's true identity is revealed to Kadiķis. He accepts they are in it together when they are released with false passports and a one-way plane ticket from London to Riga. Anna misses her chance to kill Kadiķis. She reveals that the would-be matchmaker has a long history of drug addiction, so may not understand what is going on. The mercenary takes the lead. She steals a car and the two of them head back to London, where Anna stabs Raven in front of his own family home with a screwdriver found in the stolen vehicle.

The ex-police detective is overwhelmed by unexpected thoughts and emotions after being made an accessory to murder. He then asks Anna some rather personal questions. After the murder, the pair part company to cover their tracks, agreeing to meet up at the airport. Kadiķis offers his accomplice a coffee.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

SYMMETRY OF HATE (NAIDA SIMETRIJA)

In order to stop the Ukrainian army from plundering arms, hired assassins are sent to Latvia to neutralize an international arms smuggler, Rihards Akots, whose handlers are officers of the Russian Federal Security Bureau.

Former police officer, Andris Kadiķis (38), and professional assassin, Anna, are forced to carry out the assignment together, having previously been captured by the CIA in the UK. Kadiķis is deeply embroiled in a complex set of circumstances, having left the police to become a journalist while still hunting down the contract killer from the last case he had been involved in. This turns out to be Anna, with whom he comes into contact by chance in London. Kadiķis had also come to a further agreement, which the matchmaker was also aware of, namely that a contract should be taken out to kill Anna. If Kadiķis and Anna fail to execute their mission, or if they dodge CIA surveillance under the command of agents Tom and Rick, the killers themselves will be eliminated. If successful, at least Kadiķis will be allowed to survive.

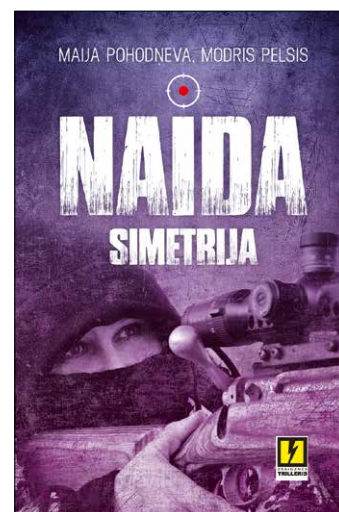
The ill-matched pair of accomplices, notwithstanding the great hostility they harbour each other, abscond together. They take refuge with August "Bear", a friend of Anna's father from his younger days at his home in a remote, swampy corner of Latvia on the border with Russia. They receive orders just as Latvia is hosting a NATO summit and all the national security services are on high alert. The weapon, after a series of vicissitudes, arrives from Russia.

Akots' property in a remote forest is fortified and well-guarded, meaning that their order can only be executed by shooting

from several hundred metres away. The CIA are using Anna also to uncover the identity of Akots' confidante, and she is the only one able to do it.

Finding themselves drawing closer due to their shared circumstances, Anna reveals to Kadiķis that she is the daughter of a Soviet officer and grew up on a military base on the Baltic Sea. Owing of her rebellious nature, as a teenager her father handed her over to military intelligence officer, Sergey Agafonov, for him to oversee her upbringing. Considering the girl as though she were military property, he schools her using the cruelest means possible, accustoming her to killing by starting with animals until he has transformed her into a cold-blooded killer. When a military unit is sent to Afghanistan, it is ordered to shoot civilians. Spurred on by her sense of power, she loses all fear and roams the streets alone at night, exploring the gardens of Kabul where she meets a grey-haired guard. Tasting a blood-red pomegranate for the first time in her life, the youngster reflects on death, her fallen comrades, her own death and the garden, which the old Afghan calls "paradise"; the only word the child soldier understands.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and decline of the Russian army, Anna, now almost eighteen, rebels against Sergey and plots to kidnap her father, Aivars Kreslovs, by tricking him into returning to Latvia. The country regains independence and the father and daughter cross its borders illegally, only to find that her hopes are soon to be dashed. A former commander of a special task force becomes a bar guard. Kreslovs



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 21 × 14 cm
 336 pages

is murdered by thugs and Anna then stabs all four of them in revenge. Now all alone, she leaves Latvia and returns to what she is best at – fighting and killing. Thus begins her career as a mercenary.

In the run-up to Akots' murder, Anna trains Kadiķis as a sniper, allowing him to experience both the hardship and magic of the world she inhabits. Kadiķis saves his rival's life in the swamp and misses the chance to shoot her. The ex-cop realizes that he is more like Anna than he would like to think. Anna's shared memories reveal more and more about her past and her personality.

The contract killing goes awry. Anna, catching sight of her former tutor, Sergey, now heading up the millionaire's security service, standing next to Akots, fluffs the shot and hits Akots' lover. Akots' security men go after them but they both manage to escape.

After analysing the attack and reviewing the surveillance footage, Sergey recognizes his pupil. Seeking

information on how to access Akots, Kadiķis goes to meet a former colleague but is taken hostage. Sergey tortures Kadiķis and uses him as bait to get to Anna, hoping she will come to the rescue.

Kadiķis realizes that Anna will return; not to rescue him but rather to kill Akots. Anna uses her carefully honed skills to enter Akots' estate where she encounters her former tutor and, following hand-to-hand combat, seriously injured him. Andris escapes from the basement and tries to kill Akots with his bare hands, but Anna then shoots him dead.

Anna and Kadiķis continue the fight, blowing up a shipment of weapons hidden in the property in the process. Kadiķis is wounded, but both survive.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

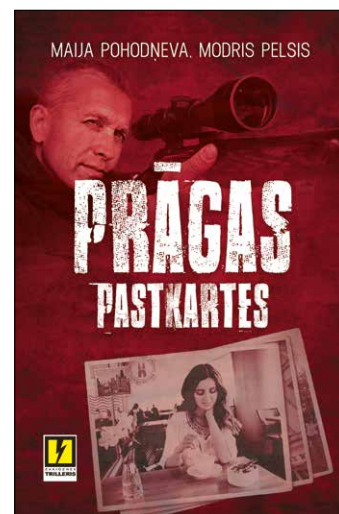
POSTCARDS FROM PRAGUE (PRĀGAS PASTKARTES)

The CIA receives information that a chemical weapon is being offered on the illegal arms market. Sergey Agafonov, a Russian military intelligence officer, is aware of this and has been set up by his former pupil, Anna, a hired assassin and sniper. She was sent by the CIA to kill Sergey's employer in Latvia, arms dealer Rihards Akots. Sergey manages to survive the attack, is rescued by double agent November and is taken to the Czech Republic, badly wounded.

Anna and her partner, former policeman Andris Kadiķis, are detained by the CIA in the Czech Republic. They are not formally confined but are forbidden to leave the country. Their peaceable way of life and training is disrupted by the sudden appearance of trackers, from whom Anna and Kadiķis escape.

Corrupt judge Ivars Silājs is shot dead in Riga; the two men committing the crime then leave Latvia for the Czech Republic. In Latvia, reporters Rolands Virba and Daina Vītoliņš investigate Silājs' murder. Failing to uncover anything of interest, they turn to other cases and agree to Alexandra Beinarts' request to investigate her husband's death. The reporters are given postcards, sent by the victim from Prague prior to his death, which may contain clues about the event that followed.

Anna and Kadiķis' CIA handlers, Tom and Rick, lead the two to find Sergey, who is suspected not only of arms smuggling but also of organizing the murder of a judge and others. He must be taken alive. Anna and Kadiķis discover by chance that Agafonov is in the Czech Republic and realize that he must be on their trail.



Sample translation: English

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21 × 14 cm
384 pages

The CIA tasks the pair with tailing two Latvian reporters, Virba and Vītoliņš, who have come to the Czech Republic at Beinarts' request.

Arms dealers are fervently chasing the trail of a Soviet-era chemical weapon. Alexandra Beinarts' husband, a crook nicknamed "Kaban", had been a link in the chain of sellers involved with this deadly merchandise; a chain which is now broken.

On two occasions, one after another, Anna and Kadiķis save the two reporters from attempts to kill them. The first is a bomb attack in a café followed by another in a rented apartment. Daina Vītoliņš, believing that their rescuers are simply journalists like themselves, and all of a similar age – in their late thirties – tells them about some postcards in their possession. These turn out to be more than merely photos or greetings cards but contain encoded information.

The four of them, having found somewhere safe to lie low, try to decipher the information in the postcards. They enlist a Latvian acquaintance of Kadiķis to help them, a graphic designer named Ila. In each image, a different method has been used to hide the message. One is based on the secrets of medicinal herbs, another on postcodes, or numbers or different section of a map and so on. As it happens, cryptography is Anna's hobby, one she developed under the tutelage of Sergey as a youngster training to become a sniper.

They follow the clues.

Tom and Rick analyse the murders of Akots and "Kaban"; their connection to the arms trade and to Sergey. They discover that Vītoliņš is the daughter of Ginters Vītoliņš, one of those developing the active ingredient in the chemical weapon.

Tom discovers that there is a traitor in their midst.

One postcard points to the KGB museum in Prague, where Kadiķis steals a box with a special key. The clues held within the postcards lead them back to Latvia.

Already in Latvia, Daina interviews an oncologist to find out more about the decrypted information. This is difficult for her, as both her parents died of cancer. The conversation turns to military medical experiments.

The doctor entrusts Daina with the archive of one of his patients, a chemist, which he inherited after his death and keeps discreetly hidden in a remote place. The address is one the four have seen before – it is encrypted in the memory of another postcard when viewing it digitally.

Studying the huge archive, the four are in no doubt that the chemist is the creator of the cards. The entire archive, which is encrypted, cannot be studied or saved because of the attack that follows. During the shootout, Roland, who turns out to be the traitor, is killed. The assassins had been sent by Beinarts.

Agafonov arranges for the murder of Beinarts, who has failed to deliver either information or goods.

In the hope of getting information, Anna and Daina go to interview Sandra Salmiņš, a former lab assistant and colleague of Daina's father.

Ginters was one of those who developed the chemical weapon, a cancer-causing organic substance and an essential component part of the Soviet Union's secret war. But the antidote failed. Almost all the researchers working on the project paid with their lives. One scientist stole samples of the chemical weapon and production formulas, which he hoped to sell in order to continue work on the antidote. His escape plan failed, however.

Ila, decoding one of the cards, discovers the coordinates of the hideout – a secret underground communications hub near Riga, now abandoned but once belonging to Soviet armed forces. Anna and Kadiķis pass on the information to their CIA handlers. Before the upcoming battle in the forest, the pair discover how much they fear losing each other. Realizing that it will be impossible to defeat Sergey and his henchmen in open combat while also attempting to retrieve the chemical weapon hidden in the cache, they resort to subterfuge. Sergey's mercenaries are eliminated and he himself is also taken down.

Anna and Kadiķis move to Europe where they decide to make information about the antidote to the chemical weapon, which Anna has not handed over to the CIA, available for free online.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

PHOTO: INFALLIA BRECH



GUNTIS TĀLERS (1968)

Guntis Tālers is a Latvian crime novelist who has started his creative writing after reaching the age of 50.

He is a traveller, who has studied law, worked as a project manager, private consultant and journalist. He is best known for his work in journalism.

Guntis Tālers is a father for three children and a grandfather for two. He is living and working in Tukums, old and scenic town of Latvia.

“The Last Client” (2022) is Thaler’s first novel, which has won the main prize at the novel competition organizes by the publishing house “Zvaigzne ABC”. In 2022, the author has published another crime novel “Monster’s Playground” and a collection of horror stories “Immortal souls”. Two more novels are in preparation.

THE LAST CLIENT (PĒDĒJAIS KLIENTS)

“The Last Client” by Guntis Tālers is the first novel in the author’s crime novel series focusing on the endeavours of investigators working for NEDA (Nelsons Eglītis Detective Agency). The novel was awarded the crime writers’ prize in 2020.

One summer’s day, a man’s body is found on the outskirts of town. The murderer had clearly used immense physical strength, given that the murder weapon was a wooden bench. The investigators fail to unearth a plausible motive for the murder; the only hypothesis forwarded by the police being that the attack was part of an attempted robbery, given that the victim dealt in illegal alcohol supplies. Some years later, Irma Valdovska, a legal executor, is found dead in her office; the cause of death is given as a heart attack.

That same year, businesswoman Marta Reigats seeks the help of NEDA when her husband, Kārlis Reigats, goes missing.

During the course of the investigation, the detectives progress through a maze of inexplicable events. The first victim is a car thief (who had previously stolen Kārlis’ car) who draws the outline of a pentagram in his own

blood on a wall before dying. Sifting through the movements of the Reigats, a young detective in the agency, Zints Endijs Neibards, meets lonely widow, Antonia Korf, who begs for their protection, fearing she is being watched. Not long afterwards, a dog walker in the forest, close to the local cemetery, comes across a decomposing corpse with its skull crushed in. Inexplicably, before the police arrive at the crime scene, the skull disappears. That same night, the house of a local businessman is attacked by an arsonist and the owner’s body is later found in the burnt remains of the property.

All these events are somehow connected, although just how the detectives are yet to discover. They suspect the headless corpse may be that of Kārlis Reigats, as indeed is later confirmed by DNA testing. Psychic Marija Stella Vintere, employed by the agency for her skills in locating missing persons and things, successfully locates the scene of the murder – an isolated spot in the depths of the forest on the grounds of Antonia Korf’s property, far from the location where the body was discovered.

The detectives continue in their attempts to ascertain who moved



Sample translations available:

English, Polish (unedited),

Spanish (unedited)

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384 pages

Reigats' body and their reason for doing so, coming across a host of unaccountable events in the course of their investigations. The chief NEDA detective has an accident, an attempt is made to poison Sintija, a cleaning lady having connections with the first two murder victims, Igils Blūms, another detective and totally unrelated to the NEDA is found dead under mysterious circumstances and Antonia Krof's suicide is staged. Zintis and Marija go into Blūms' apartment without permission and manage to obtain some vital clues which, when considered alongside data from the dead man's phone, allow them to identify the most likely suspects involved in the crimes, gradually whittling them down to just one – Ugo Treide. This character, a failed businessman, has lost everything following a scam against him by estate agents working in cahoots with legal executors, resulting in his property being sold from beneath him and him being left homeless. Ugo decides to avenge the scamsters who have deprived him of everything by means of his knowledge of chemistry. Through his contact with a man named Lange, he comes into possession of the chemical compounds needed to concoct certain psychotropic substances and poisons. Lange becomes his first victim, as described in the opening of the novel, and his murder is followed by that of legal executor, Irma Vladovska, who had auctioned off his property under false pretenses. Whilst on this murdering spree, Ugo becomes the lover of cleaning lady,

Sintija, from whom he obtains the keys to Vladovska's office. From here, he poisons Irma before going on to kill businessman Birgers and another legal executor, Marika Knese. For the murder of Kārlis Reigats, he opts for a different method; luring him out of town only to assault him with a heavy stone and dump his lifeless body in the middle of the forest. When investigations get underway into the disappearance of Reigats, Ugo decides to move the body but, unluckily for him, he is seen by a dog-walker who calls the police. He is forced to abandon his plan but not before snatching up the head from the dead body, fearing it may allow investigators to draw comparisons with this murder and that of Lange.

Ugo experiments freely with the psychotropic substances he has concocted following Lange's indications, becoming gradually more addicted and losing all contact with reality. He is consumed with the notion of completing his mission, convinced that he is in communion with the Angel of Death, Samael, who urges him onwards and authorizes his murder of all those who have done him wrong. In a desperate attempt to cover his tracks, he starts threatening NEDA detectives, kills his friend Antonija and ultimately commits a series of errors which lead to him being unmasked as the murderer.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

MONSTER'S PLAYGROUND (MONSTRA ROTAĻU LAUKUMS)

In a house of rented rooms, someone's pet is found dead. This first death is soon followed by that of the landlady. Initially, circumstances point towards these deaths as having been accidental, however, as time passes, it becomes evident that they may have been cold-blooded, brutal murders. Henija Pelīte, a sharp-eyed student living in the house, believes there is something suspicious underlying the deaths and embarks on her own investigation.

Trying to make some money for her accounting studies, Henija Pelīte has moved from her home in the countryside to Tukums – a small town close to the capital. She finds a job in a shop to help fund her accountancy studies and takes a room in a house known to the locals as the Klopers House. On Henija's first evening, she meets neighbours Stefa and Elaina who fill her in on the house's history and its residents, discovering that her room had previously been occupied by a certain Žanis. The opening episode of the novel describes how Žanis, a retired gentleman with an overly inquisitive nature, had been found murdered near the railway not far from the Klopers House three months earlier.

In no time, Henija gets to know the other residents in the house; to her mind an odd but friendly bunch of people. The day after she moves in, the housemates go on a picnic together to celebrate their landlady's birthday; Ārija is sixty-two and loves being the centre of attention, dressing up and enjoying life to the full. She is a loud, strong-minded character who, despite her advancing years, enjoys an active love life. At the picnic, an incident occurs involving her son, Klopsis, who gets involved in a fight with one of the tenants, Ancis, and ends up throwing him over the fence. The result is that Klopsis is later considered one of the main suspects in the subsequent

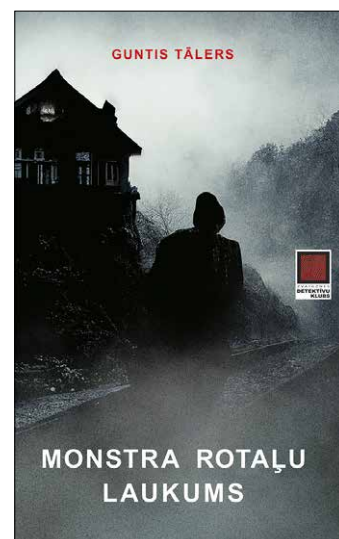
crimes. The picnic concludes in an intimate atmosphere with just two of the guests, Ancis and Ārija, continuing the party in private. Henija concludes that the pair are having an affair.

Some time later, trouble is brewing between the landlady and her son. Klopsis, a rather slow-witted and childlike youngster, possibly displaying signs of autism but with considerable physical strength and a fiery character, is forbidden by his mother from keeping a pet rat. But he goes ahead and keeps one anyhow, trying to enlist Henija's help in hiding the cage housing Bun the rat. As she is allergic to animal fur, Henija refuses to keep the rat in her room but suggests Klopsis should keep the cage in the outdoor shed.

Just a few days later, Bun disappears, only to be found later in the shed, brutally killed. Klopsis buries his pet with solemnity and swears he will avenge Bun's death, threatening his mother in doing so. Josiks, Ārija's business partner, tries to reassure Klopsis by telling him, in simple terms, about reincarnation. The boy is comforted by the idea that Bun will one day return.

There is much concern amongst the housemates who are worried that someone capable of such a heartless murder may be loose amongst them. Together with housemate Elaina, with whom she has become quite friendly, Henija tries to ascertain the whereabouts of each housemate at the time of the killing. Everyone, it seems, is able to account for their movements. But the very next evening, whilst out for a stroll, Henija comes across a number of dead frogs, all brutally mutilated, which leads her to think that they have been killed by the same hand that murdered Klopsis' pet rat.

Ancis promises Henija his assistance with the investigation and, intimating



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384 pages

that he has some further information, invites her to dinner. As Henija is getting dressed ready to go out, she catches Klopsis spying on her as she undresses. His mother witnesses the occurrence and makes a big scene on the staircase. When Henija emerges from her room to see what is happening, she finds Klopsis on his own.

Whilst in the restaurant with Henija, Ancis gets a call from Klopsis, saying that his mother has gone missing. This is followed by the arrival of Ancis' girlfriend, Ivika who, discovering her boyfriend out to dinner with another woman, slaps Henija on the cheek. Deeply offended, Henija leaves the restaurant. Upon returning home, Henija succeeds in calming Klopsis down, reassuring him that his mother is no doubt just out enjoying herself.

Later that night, Henija hears muffled noises and footsteps from Ārija's room, situated above hers, leading her to conclude that her landlady must have come home. However, the following morning as she's running to catch her train to work, Henija finds Ārija's dead body outside. It appears that, in a state of drunkenness, her landlady must have fallen from the balcony upstairs and hit her head on the stone wall before rolling down the bank.

A full police investigation then ensues. Initially, the police believe the death was accidental. Henija, however, is quick to notice a few facts about the death which simply don't add up. On the night of Ārija's death, as Henija had been hurrying off to dinner with Ancis, she had glanced at the time on numerous occasions and now she is convinced that the timings of many of that night's events really don't match up. The following day, Henija finds a glittery embellishment from Ārija's shoe at the scene of death, whereas the visibly damaged shoe itself is found in Ārija's cupboard. When Henija then picks up Ārija's mobile phone from the balcony and scrolls through her last outgoing calls, it becomes apparent that her landlady's death was by no means accidental. Klopsis' keys are found on the slope where his mother's body was discovered and, given his angry, physical outbursts and threats to his mother following his rat's demise, he is considered as the prime suspect. However, none of the other housemates are completely free from suspicion as, it turns out, each and every one of them has a reason to wish Ārijas dead. On top of this, a mysterious stranger is plainly wandering about the Klopers House at night and Ārija's keys mysteriously disappear before unaccountably

reappearing. Gatis, the investigating officer, who happens to be the son of one of the housemates, Stefa, tells Henija that rats and frogs are not the only creatures to have been killed recently ... before Žanis' murder, a dog had been found, mutilated and hanged, down near the footbridge ...

The house is engulfed in an ever-thickening atmosphere of fear as Henija tries to discover the murderer. In the course of trying to put out a wild fire, Henija rescues a homeless person who has been left, tied up and defenceless. This event provides her with the final clues needed for all the previously uncovered facts and events to fall into place. At this point, Henija and her friends run back to the house to save Stefa, whom they fear might be the murderer's next victim. Ancis, the perpetrator of these crimes, had been raised in a socially disadvantaged family where he suffered abuse, resulting in his growing into a sociopathic adult with a deepseated hatred for society as a whole. While brilliant in certain spheres, he was severely challenged in others. Since childhood, he had displayed a tendency for violent, sadistic behaviour and was a skilled manipulator. He had served time in prison for previous offences, time he claimed to have spent working abroad, before taking a room in Ārijas house from where he dealt drugs. Žanis had discovered some of this and attempted blackmailing his housemate, only to get himself murdered. Ancis, meanwhile, had wheeled his way into being Ārija's righthand man; her driver and her lover. However, his landlady's headstrong character and domineering ways had driven him to distraction, leading him to take out his frustrations on helpless creatures whilst planning how to murder Ārija herself.

At the wake after Ārija's funeral, Henija gives a summing up of the series of events to her housemates, explaining how she had arrived at her conclusion and the discovery of the perpetrator.

Ancis is arrested and charged with the murders of both Ārija and Žanis. The housemates continue living together harmoniously and the novel ends with Klopsis' surprise birthday party, arranged by Henija and Elaina, where he is given a kitten which he believes to be the reincarnation of his rat and which he joyfully names 'Bun'.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini



OLITA TIDOMANE (1971)

Olita Tidomane was born in Riga. She studied printmaking and for many years has worked for media outlets in editorial and photo editorial roles. She has written articles on cats for social media and for local magazines and newspapers. She currently works as a graphic designer for one of the largest media outlets in Latvia.

“Three Tomcats and their Human” is Olita’s first book featuring a collection of stories taken from her diary published over several years on Facebook.

Awards and nominations for Olita Tidomane:

- The Book of the Year 2022, Zvaigzne ABC Publishers annual online contest

THREE TOMCATS AND THEIR HUMAN
(TRĪS RUNČI UN VIŅU CILVĒKS)

If you have ever thought about getting a cat, this book will come in useful as a short manual about what cats are really like. That doesn’t make it a book with advice on feeding, how to fill a litter tray or how often to play with your cat. Instead, this book explores all sorts of details that cat experts often keep to themselves whilst showing exactly what a cat owner’s life is like on a daily basis.

If you are already a cat person, this book is a real treat – it will make you laugh one moment and groan in sympathy the next, both for the cats and their owners. It might be a good idea to read this book together with your cat, although beware! Your cat might pick up a few handy tips on how best to housetrain their owners!

On the other hand, if you don’t own a cat or are more of a dog person, you will still find this book equally engaging and entertaining or, if you view pets as family members and not just an animal, it may even bring you to tears.

The book is about three cats; Rudis, Osvalds and Adolf. In truth, the story starts a good while prior to the arrival of these three cats as their human, and author of the book, had other

cats before. Two other tomcats are mentioned but the story’s main focus is on the aforementioned trio.

At a certain point, the human becomes bored with having just one cat which, by the way, has become something of a coach potato, and the idea of getting a second cat springs to mind. This proves to be a turning point since getting one cat then leads to getting another. Nothing in life ever goes completely according to plan. The human then finds herself once more with just two cats, followed by a long period of mourning and the decision never to get another. And yet this resolution is overturned when she meets a tiny kitten that someone she knows found online. Although it’s love at first sight for both the human and the kitten, the new addition is certainly not the sort that ever sits quietly purring on your lap. This new kitten, named Osvalds, is a very naughty, hyperactive little thing who throws the previously calm existence within the home into disarray. The flat needs to be rearranged and they all need to readjust to the new arrival’s rhythms; if New York is the city that never sleeps, Osvalds is the cat that never sleeps. Gradually, Osvalds



Rights sold: Germany

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20,5 × 13,5 cm
176 pages

also learns about his new home, namely the rules and routines in place there. He needs to make friends with the two adult cats and, most importantly, housetrain his human. We humans believe that the world belongs to us and come up with all manner of rules and regulations to live by. No! That all comes to an abrupt halt when a cat like Osvalds enters our lives and we see how, up to that moment, our lifestyles have been boring and unsophisticated. Now, the human and both grown-up cats have to wake up at the same time as Osvalds. They have to learn how to play his games and be constantly at the ready to guess what the little rascal is up to. Even the grown-up cats come to understand that when Osvalds sleeps, everyone else should sleep, too!

Although they live in a one-room flat, their home provides Osvalds with a whole world of opportunity; places to explore, shelves to climb, plants to dig up, the human's belongings just asking to be scattered all about the place. And then there is the big tank full of irresistible fish just waiting to be caught without tumbling into the water. Not to mention the kitchen which is home to endless delights, some of them meaty, all hidden away and waiting to be found. Whenever a meaty treat is involved, Osvalds is willing to pick a lock or uncover a way of getting the fridge door open! He has so much to do, and there is so much fun to be had! Whenever Osvalds wears his what shall I do next? face, you can be sure both his human and the two grown-up cats are in for some great escapade.

The older of the two grown-up cats is now quite elderly and slow, weary of living so long. The other one, Rudis, is only a couple of years older than Osvalds but the two are like chalk and cheese. Rudis tends to overthink everything; pausing at length by the door when it's opened for him and staring for ages at his usual bowl of food, uncertain if he likes it or not. His aging companion has taught Rudis that their human is there to fulfil their every need – there is no need to steal food or even answer when called, not even when something tasty is in the offing. Should their human want something, she will come to them. And yet Osvalds' antics lead Rudis to wonder if they have taken all their human has to give. Rudis feels a strong dislike towards the new kitten but adores his human, despite the fact that she occasionally bundles him into a carrier and takes him to see someone brandishing syringes and medication. When his older companion cat leaves him for better hunting grounds

in the sky, Rudis feels his faith in humans is waning. This feeling is accentuated further when his human brings home yet another kitten ... Adolf. Sharing his home with one young cat in perpetual motion is taxing, but two! It takes nerves of steel and a great propensity to see the good in everything to rise to such a challenge. Even when a cup of tea is knocked over or the contents of a cupboard overturned, there is nothing for it but to accept the fact that you live with cats, rather than the other way round. And when it comes to assessing cat's health and wellbeing, the human in the book always provokes a smile of sympathy from the reader – is your beloved pet really unwell or just bored?

Adolf is very young and has not been trained at all in the ways of cats, so it falls upon Rudis and Osvalds to teach him some feline truths. In return, they also learn some new tricks from Adolf, such as how to get stuck behind the wardrobe or that going to the toilet in a specific place is not just for humans. And so, a charming trio of radically different feline personalities comes into being. A trio to whom all is forgiven, including nighttime shenanigans, overturned flower pots and a flat in complete disarray, in return for their unconditional love and affection.

Each story features an event providing an insight into the secret life of cats which all cat owners will be familiar with and maddened by. It is only in the evenings, when there is a lull in the active cat world, that the human reflects on why her cats are the way they are and wonders why her three tomcats aren't the lazy, quietly purring creatures she imagined and naively hoped for. Her three cats bring her whole home to life, forcing her to gather her strength and struggle onwards when her health fails and her only comfort and joy is the companionship of her beloved feline friends.

This book gives much food for thought to anyone who imagined cats to be quiet, lazy creatures and reassures owners of lively cats that their pets are indeed perfectly normal. Life without a cat is very dull. All cat owner's will relate to some if not all events in the book and be very familiar with the nocturnal high jinks common to all homes with cats. If you're not a cat owner, the stories may make you sigh with relief at your cat-free existence while giving a humorous insight into the delightful life of cats – be they sweet snoozers or nighttime madcaps.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

PHOTO: KASPARS FELIPE DOBROVOLSKIS



Kristīne and Kristaps Liepiņš

KRISTĪNE and KRISTAPS LIEPIŅŠ

Kristaps is a climber with forty years of experience in the mountains, one of the best-known mountaineering instructors in Latvia. When he met Kristīne, she too became a mountaineer and traveler. Over a period of more than ten years, both Kristaps and Kristīne have climbed countless peaks together in different mountain areas, on several continents around the world.

PAMIR: MY HEART WILL PARTLY DIE IN LOVE

(Original title, direct translation with a word game in Latvian)

THE PAMIR KNOT. A HEART FULL OF LOVE

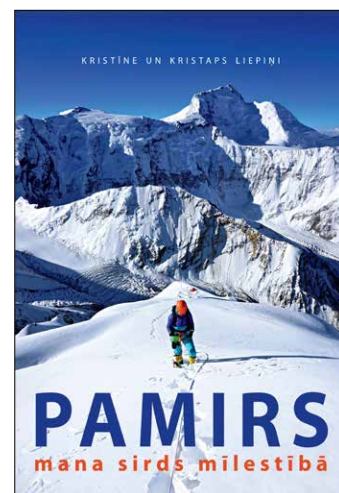
(PAMIRS mana sirds mīlestībā)

The Pamir Knot is in a unique geographical location. It is a place where some of the world's greatest mountain ranges, including the Tianshan, Karakoram, Kunlun, Hindukush and the Pamir itself, meet in a fluid connection. Several countries claim the central home of the Pamir Knot, but it is likely that the true center is in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan.

The story of mountain climbers Kristaps and Kristine is about the Pamir mountains and love. However, early on the story twists into something much more intriguing, much more multilayered than we would expect from a simple documentary-like story. This story is about the connection with nature and other climbers, luck, borderline situations between life and death and the desire not only to survive but also to live a fulfilling and exciting life. The book is about the limitations of human capabilities. About the ones that are physical and even more about

those that are emotional. In this story, mountains are not just a geographical quantity – they are multilayered too, each subsequent peak that's reached makes us see new horizons. This is proof of how important it is to find and realize your true passion in life!

The story is told from a woman's point of view and gives a glimpse of the high-altitude mountaineering expedition climbers' journey to the top. Kristine's emotions are so true and real, that every reader can experience the feelings as if they were right next to her at times. Fatigue, despair, anger, tantrums, tears and moments when you want to give up on everything – many of us have faced this! However, not everyone has been on the balancing rope between being so close to death and at the same time fulfilling the dream of a truly impressive goal. Have you experienced true happiness just for the opportunity to feel alive? At the beginning of each chapter



Book includes 90 full color photos by the authors

Full English translation available (unedited)

978-9934-0-9292-3
25 x 18 cm
296 pages

in the book you will find ponderings from a various point of view – Kristaps’ philosophical and laconic reflections on life or what he has experienced.

The setting of the book “The Pamir Knot” takes place in Tajikistan, in the Pamir Mountains. Mountain climbers Kristine and Kristaps arrive at the 4,200-meter-high base camp on the Moskvin glacier in a Mi-8 helicopter. They settle in and get into the rhythm of the base camp; they get to know other climbers and local workers in the base camp. The first days and nights are spent in the base camp in order to acclimatize to the physical stress of a new, high altitude and to get used to the new living conditions. However, in the first days Kristine already has to face various health problems. At this time the reader is introduced to the base camp, its inhabitants and the problems of the camp, one of them being the negative ecological impact left by the climbers from the previous century on the surroundings. Here we are faced with the unsustainable thinking of camp managers, environmental problems caused mostly by the popularity of commercial mountaineering expeditions around the world. Climbers do not stay in the camp for long, but go to the higher camps in order to take up some of the equipment and food reserves, get acquainted with the conditions of the route and acclimatize to the altitude. As the book is written from Kristine’s point of view, the reader is exposed to various reflections and emotional falls starting with the first chapter.

In the second chapter, the climbers go to the 7105-meter-high Korzhenevskaya Peak but due to bad weather conditions they turn back after a couple of days, without reaching the peak. On the way back to the base camp they painfully feel the lack and uncertainty about the correctness of their decision. Back at the base camp, Kristine experiences more health problems, possibly related to the water or food at the camp.

Once the weather improves again, the climbers head back to the upper camps to attempt the summit. Due to bad weather and heavy snowfall on previous days, the climbers have to retrace the route and steps in pairs, thus making the ascent particularly difficult. Kristine describes with importance and vigor what she personally experienced and went through during the ascent of Korzhenevskaya Peak as a couple, retracing and counting each step. This climb turned out to be completely different than Kristine had previously imagined. After

reaching the summit, the climbers returned to the base camp to recuperate and rejuvenate, as the main goal of the expedition was still ahead. Kristaps and Kristine want to reach another seven-thousander, Somoni Peak, an even higher peak than the previous one (7495m), but will they have enough strength to do it?

The first day of rest at the base camp is made especially dramatic by an emergency situation that is unfolding with other climbers during the ascent of the Korzhenevskaya Peak. The tension of the situation can be felt in the plans and mood of other climbers. The longer Kristine stays at the base camp, waiting for better conditions, the more her inner insecurity is revealed and the question “why?” is asked more and more frequently. Why do we do this? Why so much inconvenience, danger and risk just to climb one mountain peak?

When a suitable window of opportunity finally presents itself, the climbers head up to try to reach Somoni’s summit. Time is of the essence right now and there is no time for any more delays. It’s required to climb a lot more in the day than initially planned and it takes a tremendous amount of strength. A real and unadulterated sense of presence can be felt on every page. The climb to Somoni Peak is not only emotional, but also inquiring and saturated with historical importance – this is a very well-known mountain peak in the post-Soviet time frame: the previous name for Somoni Peak is Communism Peak and it was once the highest mountain peak in the former USSR.

The book takes you through a whole mountain climbing adventure, lets you look into its ups and downs. Together with photos from the expedition placed accordingly in the text, everyone has the opportunity to resonate deeply and go along with Kristine and Kristaps expedition of more than a month. Kristine’s narrative is constructive, witty, full of accurately captured details and allows the reader to observe everything from the perspective of someone who has discovered and started her mountaineering journey relatively recently. The authors of the book, who are professionals and mountaineering instructors in their everyday life, are engaged in the training of mountain climbing beginners in groups and courses. They know very well what is unknown and unfamiliar territory for the reader and anyone new to this world. Therefore the text is not complicated by technicalities, but more educational and inviting instead.

While reading the book, you can gradually understand that mountains and the experiences within, are a micromodel of the world and human life. It is essential to overcome abysses, cracks and dangerous snow avalanches within yourself. To find balance at the right moment, to be aware of your connection with a person

who depends on you and every step you make, and your dependence on them. To get to the top, we can only carry with us what is most necessary, we must leave everything that will not be needed at the beginning of the journey, at the bottom of the mountain. Just like in our life in general.

[SAMPLE TEXT FOR "THE PAMIR KNOT"]

FOREWORD

Facing near-death experiences twice during less than two months. Two borderline situations, not including those which were unnoticed because of exhaustion or weariness. Isn't this a bit crazy? In whose name and why do we climb mountains? What's the point of the whole process?

Life is so beautiful and also fragile. Up there in the High Pamir Mountains, you find seemingly unreachable peaks of ice and cliffs which have been mercilessly polished by fierce winds, freezing cold and solar radiation. There is no tangible benefit there. Few people have been able to create any kind of capital from the experience that they have gained there. The hours spent in barbaric effort mean risking one's life. No one pays a salary and the issue does not have to do with hours or even days, weeks or months. What is more, most people neither understand nor appreciate this excited confirmation of one's id. If you say that you love climbing mountains more than anything else in the world, then you can find diverse and very different experiences in various parts of the world. If your love chooses freedom and the clear and harsh directness of mountains, you do not increase your understanding. Others will accuse you of wasting time or showing off. You're polluting untouched nature or even using it without any purpose. You could be far more sensible for "public benefit". Why should you occasionally torment your id and your consciousness to the point where you decide that "if I stay alive this time, then never, ever again!"?

The motivation has nothing to do with a desire to "look at yourself by pushing the envelope" or "leaving your comfort zone." It has nothing to do with the idea that "limits exist so that they can be challenged." Mountains are not a sports arena with a mob of spectators. There are no ranking tables or Olympic championships. No television, no live broadcasts on social networks, no

excited commentators whose tone of voice suggests the enormous importance of global sports. The truth is that you don't even have mobile coverage to which you are so very much accustomed – coverage that would occasionally allow you to publish cute little stories and colourful pictures to delight those who follow you on social networks. Is it really worth balancing yourself on a knife-edge? Summits that are achieved are mentioned in a few tiny articles in the media "among other things." OK, perhaps a glossy magazine has a slightly longer article with a few photographs. OK, this is diversity that dissolves the important and essential things for the public because there is a presentation of "the lives of peculiar little people." We agree. It really is peculiar and not modern to risk your life again and again even though you might feel that no one will ever find out that you have done so.

Life with all of its complexity and danger is a brilliant miracle no matter what. We hope that the story you will read in this book allows you to examine one of the peripheral corners of the world in the same way that we saw it. This is about the experience of people who purposefully pursue their dreams, and go to places where no one dares to think about going. This experience very much supports those who are still adventurous and curious about the rest of the world. We dedicate this book to them and hope that it will serve as a source of inspiration for all of you!

Reaching another summit while climbing mountains is not very important. The most important thing is to climb down the mountain again and again without losing the desire to climb it once again.

Kristaps Liepiņš

NON-FICTION



CHAPTER 1

AT THE START OF THE ROAD

Our MI-8 helicopter successfully landed in a damp and rocky meadow alongside a small lake not far from the Moskvina ice moraines.¹ When we leapt out of the helicopter, the whirlwinds caused by the rotors smacked into our faces along with sprays of cold water. I was dazzled by the sunlight and blinked my eyes out of surprise. I was all but crawling to get to the rusty fuel barrels that were piled up on the shores of the lake as quickly as possible, the aim being to get away from the wind caused by the helicopter. I tried to catch my breath and watch how the airship clumsily leaned toward one side and conducted peculiar manoeuvres. Finally, the helicopter flew away, creating another powerful cloud of wind and sprays of water. Once we had watched the MI-8 cross the ice field, chattering and activity began at the meadow. Among the big piles of items that were hurriedly unloaded from the helicopter, I found my two bags – a backpack and a large The North Face² cargo duffel bag. It was breath-taking, in the literal sense, to fly to the base camp³ that was 4,200 meters above sea level while carrying two bags which, taken together, weighed around 35 kg. Kristaps also found his two bags. I saw that he had already hung them on his shoulders, so he could not help me. The distance was not long, but I understood that I would not get to the base camp building that was approximately 100 meters away. The bags were too heavy, so I asked local Tajiks to help me. They were waiting for the helicopter and their appearance suggested that the men worked at the base camp. One of the Tajiks grinned broadly and took my bags. At that moment I understood that there are advantages to being a woman at a base camp.

The base camp for the Somoni and Korzhenevskaya summits is in the area of the Pamir mountains.

¹ A moraine – accumulation of glacial debris (rock and dirt) caused by the movement of the glacier and brought to the surface by its periodic melting. Can be found in front, along the sides and down the middle of the glacier. (*here and hereafter: Notes from the authors*).

² *The North Face* is the brand of a manufacturer of mountain climbing apparel and equipment.

³ The base camp is the lowest, largest, safest and often best-equipped camp in the mountains before the intermediary camps that are closer to the summit of the mountain.

The Moskvina and Walter glaciers are at a small and shallow lakeshore in the high mountains. Climbers begin the route to both summits from the same base camp because as the crow flies, they are both approximately 13km from one another. My first impressions of the camp were surprising, not to say shocking. I have been at many mountain base camps in Nepal, Peru and Argentina, but this place resembled a village that had been abandoned in a big hurry. There were lots of tracks of expeditions from previous decades that were very noticeable. They left a serious imprint on the rough but also fragile ecosystem. At first glance it seemed that the buildings that were scattered around the base camp had survived a serious tornado. I suspected that the history of the base camp was equally stormy.

While I examined the spartan conditions of the base camp and waited for my headache to start (I knew that this was inevitable because of the same experience in the past, and it was a normal reaction of my body when it was suddenly much higher), Kristaps looked for a place for our tent. That was not easy, because there were lots of potential places, but not all of them were good. We wanted a flat place for the tent without rocks and grass underneath. It should not be on the route to the camp's lavatories or anywhere nearby. Lastly, it would be great if water did not start to puddle under the tent when it rained. We hoped that our neighbors would not be too noisy and that our tent would not be too close to the diesel generator that was switched on as soon as it got dark outside. We didn't want to smell the smoke from waste that was burned at the camp, because lots of it, alas, was plastic. One place where the waste was burned was right next to the largest building in the camp. The steel "titanic" burned everything that could burn. It was used to heat water for the kitchen and other needs. After quickly looking at various options for our tent, we decided that we would sleep in one of the local RedFox tents for the next month. These were offered to expedition participants for a fee and in a small, but green meadow that was not far from the moraine barrier. A few steps away from our tent was a dry and rocky bed of a stream, which suggested that if it rained, there would be a place for the water to flow away. A fairly loud and

temperamentally active national expedition of Turks set up several tents alongside us. The Turks quickly started to decorate their tents with little Turkish flags. Two meters from our tent were two Russians – Igor from Germany and Lyosha from Sakhalin. A bit further away in a Vaude tent was Timur, who was thin but with lots of sinews and muscles. He was of Russian origin and lived in Sweden. Timur was always tempted by long bicycle expeditions and, increasingly, high mountains.

I have always enjoyed the slightly electrified feeling at the base camps of high mountains. The air was actively roiling, there were activities all around us, and the summits seemed to be so close. The near future was both clear and unknown. All of us were there for the same reason, but very few of us would reach the summit. No one could say who would be lucky enough to stand at the top of the mountain and then successfully climb back down.

After we arranged our tent, it was time for breakfast. I was not hungry, but to be polite, I ate a bit of a bun with jam and drank a cup of sweet tea. While we were breakfasting, we saw through the windows of the dining hall that a few other helicopters were arriving. The base camp was already full, but now there were other climbers who wanted to reach the heights. We talked to others about the weather, our hopes, dreams and experience. My head was lightly buzzing, but my pulse was at a level of 61, and the “thimble”⁴ showed that I had enough oxygen in my bloodstream. I walked slowly, but it felt a bit as if I were swimming. My right side hurt a bit, and that worried me. I told myself that this was not the first time that I felt such pain when I was high up in the mountains. I thought about a Latvian woman who climbed the 7,134-meter Lenin Peak (now known as Ibn Sina or Avicenna Peak) and suffered serious pain at the base camp. It turned out that she was suffering from appendicitis, and an operation had to be conducted right there and then. I really did not want to test the competence and skills of the base camp’s doctor on my own skin. I crawled into the tent to take a nap, even though we were not supposed to lie about. A bit of a physical burden is needed to better adapt to the heights.

⁴ This is a small oximeter device that is put on one’s finger to measure the speed of the pulse and the saturation of oxygen in the bloodstream.

I slept for less than an hour and the pain still hadn’t gone. I suddenly heard a metallic bell and poked my nose out of the tent. Everyone was active and moving in various directions. I didn’t react to this until Kristaps came and told me that it was lunchtime. The metal bell told us that it was time to go to the common table. Vegetable soup with a layer of fat was served for lunch, with macaroni and meatballs as the main course. I couldn’t eat anything. There was also compote that was so sweet that it was hard to drink. There was no shortage of sugar here. I asked for some tea. The staff at the kitchen told me that for the past 10 years, compote had been served for lunch, not tea, but despite this tradition I was given a cup of tea. I understood that eating would not be easy here. I had planned to walk a bit up the moraine after lunch, but my stomach hurt more and more. I wanted to lie down again. I laid on a mattress outside of the tent that had been put on a couple of boards to dry in the sun. The sun was so bright at its apex that I soon looked for a cooler and shadier place. I snuck into a plywood hut that was finished with tin plates. Inside it was finished with waxcloth and linoleum. At the far end of the hut was a bunk made of boards. I put a mattress stuffed with wool on it, though it smelled of rot. I tried to sleep. Living in these huts was a fee-based service for those expedition members who did not wish to live in tents. Right now the huts were empty, because not all of the climbers had arrived yet. No one bothered me.

Late in the afternoon I got up and decided to walk up the moraine along the glacier. The glacier was impressive. Looking up from the camp one could see the icefall filled with steep seracs.⁵ From the moraine, I saw a labyrinth of crevasses that were both snowy white and dirty white. Elsewhere there were rocks of various sizes scattered around them. I was walking quite quickly because I had enough strength. The sun was shining and high in the sky, but an unpleasantly cold wind was blowing from the glaciers. It was odd that my head wasn’t hurting. I climbed a bit less than 200 vertical meters.⁶ I sat down on a rock and saw

⁵ These are massive freestanding towers of ice formed in places where the glacier breaks, in icefalls and on the face of the glacier tongue.

⁶ Distances in the mountains are not measured in kilometres or meters, as is the case down on the ground. Distances in mountains are often stated in hours or minutes, based on the speed of an average-level climber. On high and steep mountains, in turn, precise distances are often determined on the basis of the height meters that have to be climbed.

that the camp down below was so very tiny. I could see the disorder and the slightly feverish activities. I sat on a granite bluff and looked to my left. The Somoni summit has a massive trapeze-shape bastion, and in my mind I started to think about how we were going to scale it. How were we going to get across the barriers that were fortified by the towers of ice? What was behind the seracs in the unseen part of the fortress? I would have liked to check out the route to the Korzhenevskaya summit, because we would climb it first, but because I have terrible spatial perception, I couldn't really understand where the summit was. Looking from down below, the height of various mountain summits and hillocks can be very misleading. I naively thought that it was good that there was so much snow. I always think that snowy summits are much more beautiful than rocky ones.

I thought about my first major mountaineering experience and the first peaks that I climbed. Six years ago I was in poor shape and that was very obvious to everyone who was with me, in a mountain hike along the Varzob Valley in Tajikistan. It is no exaggeration to say that Kristaps pulled me up to the summit in a direct and indirect sense. He pulled me with a short rope and he was carrying both his backpack and mine. I quite vividly remember being at the clear and bluish-green Siam River, trying to put on my own backpack. One moment later Kristaps saw my surprise about the fact that I could not even stand up with the heavy bag, let alone walk in it. He took it off my shoulders, removed the package of food and put it in his own bag. During my first mountain hike, he carried the items of two people as well as, during the first day, a sack of tomatoes. I'm not sure why we bought aromatic tomatoes at the Green Market in Dushanbe to carry along with us. Perhaps I imagined that I would eat fresh tomato salad with onions and coriander, which is sometimes known as Asian parsley, for dinner.

I read a few newspaper articles about mountain climbers when I was a child, but I had no real sense of the mountains. It was no surprise that mountain climbing did not interest or excite me. To tell the truth, it did not excite me even after I climbed the first summits in the Alps and the Pamir-Alay mountains and Varzob valley. Mountain climbing is dangerous, terribly difficult and torturous. I was not a woman with potential in either mountaineering or rock climbing. I was not motivated by the fact that I was at the back of each group, which meant that everyone else had to wait for me. What's more, any

woman can imagine how she would feel if she suddenly discovered that she had to wear the same black mountain trousers every day because there would be no room for a dress in the bag. In the mountains, I learned that I could leave my hair uncombed for a couple of weeks, that I could wash myself with 1.5 liters of not very warm water and that mountain boots are quite uncomfortable.

Suddenly there was an avalanche at the Moskvina Glacier. It loudly rumbled down the couloir of the opposite mountain. The avalanche raised a cloud of ice crystals and I decided that I would not go any higher today. I didn't want to stress myself too much and I also didn't want Kristaps, who was back at the tent, to worry about me. I ran into him on the way back down, because he had come to look for me. We sat down on a large boulder at a melting glacier stream to wash our feet in the sparkling and cold water. From there, we slowly climbed back down.

Women were already setting tables for dinner in the dining hall. I sat aside, took out my pad and started to keep a diary. There were people playing a local table game. Someone else was paging through one of the two large photo albums that had black-and-white photographs from the 1970s. When the ladies got to us, they asked everyone to go outside, but I was allowed to stay and write. Meanwhile, Kristaps prepared our beds in the tent. The woollen mattresses had dried in the sunshine all day long. Above them was a thick padded blanket and then another blanket. I hoped that that would be comfortable and warm. The old woollen mattresses and blankets were stored in a large, round metal container and each person could choose what was necessary. Sadly, the things were in sad shape. The blankets and mattresses were bleached, torn and damp. They had experienced many users in previous seasons and were accustomed to the cold of the winter. Those who got there first got the best things.

We had no clear sense of what would happen tomorrow. The only thing that we knew for certain was that we would climb the Korzhenevskaya summit as the first one. Its first intermediate camp was at a height of 5,100 meters, and we might climb up to it tomorrow. Still, that would be fairly audacious. I was not particularly worried about the climb. This evening I was most upset about my stomach ache and the noise that was being made by the Turks.

NON-FICTION



The night was restless. It was very hot with a warm padded sleeping bag, but cold without it. I suffered side pains and a headache all night long. I had to go to the loo several times. Still, I heard someone in the adjoining tent vomiting, coughing and having a hard time. Toward the morning, I sensed that it was very cold outside, but as soon as the sun rose, it became notably warmer. In the morning, I washed myself before the breakfast signal. I was feeling slightly nauseous and we were served soured cottage cheese for breakfast. Luckily there were also traditional white bread buns from Central Asia. I could force those down with sweet tea.

We put a few things in our backpack and left the camp for our first acclimatisation hike.⁷ The first job was to carefully cross the Moskvina Glacier. We walked without putting crampons on⁸, using only the trekking poles we were carrying. On the ice we tried to follow a barely visible and poorly marked pathway between the crevasses and chunks of ice. From place to place, we found cairns and old aluminium poles around which the ice had already melted.⁹ These had fallen over and could no longer be seen. As we crossed the glacier without crampons, I thought very carefully about where to take my steps. I tried to put my feet on rocks or pieces thereof. In steeper areas I had to be more careful so as not to slip down or fall. The glacier is approximately 500m wide with many crevasses and we had to walk carefully, lest we find ourselves in an inescapable situation. Russian guides who had been hired for the season to mark trails and install fixed ropes in the most steep and dangerous places apparently had not been too concerned about the work. Each person had to find his or her way across the ice on their own. Compared to others, we didn't have much problem, and we crossed the glacier in approximately half an hour. That was a good result. Last night we heard

someone complaining about having wandered around the glacier for more than an hour.

On the other side of the glacier the trail was steeper, but also more easily noticeable. It crossed a small ridge and from there the trail started to descend. We were a bit confused because we thought that it would continue to rise, but we followed the path which led to a scree slope. We couldn't really tell where the trail continued to go upward but we were not worried, because today was just about acclimatisation. We climbed up to the 4,550m mark, sat down on a rock and had some tea. Our neighbors at the camp, Lyosha, Igor and Timur appeared. They too, had gone for a walk and were planning to climb higher. We didn't want to stress ourselves and so we went back to the camp. I had a headache, I also felt a bit sad and nervous. Kristaps wanted to climb to the first intermediate camp at an elevation of 5,100m tomorrow, but I felt poorly even at the base camp. I was so sad that I ate a whole milk chocolate bar with hazelnuts.

During the afternoon we started to pack up for the hike that would take the next two days. We asked the camp manager for gas that we had ordered and paid for in Dushanbe, but it turned out that there was no gas. All of the tanks, including ours, had been distributed to other climbers who got to the warehouse more quickly and took enough gas for the whole expedition. The next gas tanks, said the warehouse manager, would be arriving in a week. To resolve the situation, we had to pay for new tanks because supposedly there was a special reserve for a very important expedition that had not yet arrived. I suppose that we had to count on such unpleasant surprises here. We had no other option than to buy the gas because we could not wait for an entire week.

It was hard for me to fall asleep. I was under an old woollen blanket that I found at the camp, and it was so heavy that it was complicated to turn over and to breathe. The sleeping bag was too hot, while the blanket did not warm me at all. The night was restless. We got up at 6.30 AM, because the newly risen sun had heated up the tent to the point where it was hard to sleep. While I packed up, Timur was talking to a few climbers about how much they would be prepared to pay him to bring their things to the first upper camp. Timur was asking for 4 US dollars per kilogram or at least 45 dollars per day. He refused to lower the price and there was no bargaining.

⁷ This is a process which allows a climber's body to accustom to changes in the environment, particularly height. This allows the climber to continue to act during the new circumstances. Climbing high mountains without gradual adaptation is dangerous and creates threats that some mountain climbers encounter.

⁸ A crampon consists of a metal plate with sharp metal spikes that fastens to a boot and allow one to move safer across glaciers, snow and ice slopes and even vertical walls of ice.

⁹ A cairn is man-made stack of stones often placed to mark the trail or the summit of the mountain or hill. This is particularly important in places where the path is difficult to see or notice – rocky cliffs or glaciers.

NON-FICTION



Kristaps took advantage of the sunrise and the clear mountain skies and he went off to take some pictures. I was a bit upset, because we hadn't yet really agreed what to pack for the upper camp. I was confused. Time was passing by, there was no clarity, but he was gone!

After breakfast we went to see the most important person at the camp – the manager of the warehouse. He issued food to us and wrote down what he had given. The manager lived in the only cement block building at the camp. He was roly-poly and a bit older than 30. This was his tenth season at the camp. He walked around in Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses, a tracksuit and fancy shoes. What a stylish guy! Sometimes the manager winked at me and when he smiled, his golden front tooth sparkled. He liked to sleep in and was unhappy if someone woke him up prematurely. Often the manager was not even at the camp unless you had agreed in a timely way, on when you would receive food. He had his own dish washing soap and store soap, and he did not have the cheap laundry soap of the type that everyone else at the camp was using. The manager's brand was expensive and smelt of wild lilies. The manager was clearly one of the most important people at the camp, because he was responsible for all of the food. On Sundays he and his men went to the sauna of the base, after which they were always merry. He swore that he did not drink alcohol because Allah sees everything. Tajiks are Muslims and that was evident in our contacts with the employees of the base camp. Religion and faith are one thing, while business and transactions are something else. Food was distributed on the basis of face control. It seemed that the manager's favourite people got the best food, because his attitude changed. I learned quite quickly that I must try my best to keep on this guy's good side.

The first time that we visited the warehouse, we were a bit shy. The manager gave us a stingy amount of cookies, rolls, triangles of soft cheese, dried sausage and a bit of dried fruit. Out of interest, Kristaps asked for a can of sprats that had been produced somewhere in Russia, but had the name "By the Baltic Sea." The manager recorded everything that he gave us and we had to sign the book to inform him how long we would be gone and when we planned to be back. We returned to our tent with the food that we had received. It was not too far from the warehouse. The manager caught up to us and after looking around to make sure that no one was watching, he quietly hummed, flashed

his gold tooth and presented me with a bar of chocolate. Girls, after all, need something sweeter than a roll.

Our backpacks were outside of our tent and we had everything we needed. We repacked our blue *Black Diamond* bags several times before we found the right way to arrange things and to even out the load. I was still fairly bad at packing. Practice makes perfect, but sometimes I did not succeed and Kristaps was never shy about pointing that out. I had to repack the bag and better to do that here at the camp than somewhere along the trail.

We departed for the intermediate camp at 5,100m elevation a little before 10.00 AM. The sun was right above us. As we started to cross the Moskvina Glacier, we were a bit surprised to find people walking in various directions on the ice. They appeared very chaotic and it seemed that they were not going to the right places. That was no surprise, because a number of cairns had collapsed and could not be seen. We decided not to follow others, and our route led us across the glacier in 25 minutes without any problem. We were familiar with the next part of the trail. Another hour passed, we put our bags down to catch our breath and to have some hot tea from our thermos.

The next part of the trail was very rocky, steep and unstable. I had to be very aware to avoid knocking down dangerous rocks or slipping. Above us were some Spaniards, and we were approaching them. Although we tried not to be right under them on the steep and rocky trail, sometimes there was no other option, because of the switchback trail that led up the increasingly steeper and narrower couloir. Kristaps was in front of me and I was a few dozen meters lower. We had our own tempo. The heavy backpack in which we were carrying things for the intermediate camp didn't help. At the steepest part, Kristaps told me to hurry up because it would be best to be close to one another. I was upset that I had to move more rapidly and murmured that I could not go that fast with my heavy bag. Kristaps was standing under a cliff overhang and waiting for me. I walked a bit more quickly and I was almost next to him when the Spaniards, who were above us, knocked down a few large rocks that started to roll down the hill. Now I understood why Kristaps so very carefully followed the unwritten laws of the mountains. The rocks flew over our heads and continued to roll, making lots of noise. We watched them and waited for the fall to stop. God was with us.

How lucky we were to be under the overhang! My bag was heavy and my thoughts were angry. I became too emotional and loudly denounced the Spaniards for failing to follow the trail. Kristaps was angry, too. We moved more quickly and reached the Spaniards. It is better to be above than below such careless climbers. For almost an hour, the Spaniards were just a few meters behind me while Kristaps followed the trail. They were breathing down my neck and that was even more annoying. Perhaps that was because I was still angry about the fallen rocks.

The steep trail led us to the saddle of a pass on the rocky ridge, where we caught our breath and had a sip of tea. We continued to follow the trail to a section of steep, small rock steps with the first fixed ropes. It was hard to call them ropes, because they appeared to be bits of old cord of various quality that had been bound together. We didn't trust the rope, so we had to decide on the spot whether to use them carefully or ignore them. I chose

the latter option. As I climbed, I found that it was better to hold on to the rock with my hands in the steeper areas. It was no simple thing with the heavy backpack, but I felt safer than I would with the shoddy ropes. It would be easy to fall here, so I had to be very cautious. After one such steep section, there was an almost identical one. The trail wound around a shoulder, then dropped down towards the glacial river valley. The river had several small streams flowing close to one another, separated by chunks of rock that had fallen from higher up the hill. It was necessary to cross the river very quickly, preferably running, because rockfall from the glacier above can happen with surprising regularity. Running with a heavy bag, crossing rivers and leaping across powerful streams as part of the acclimatization trips was nothing nice for me, but I did the best that I could.

Translated by Kārlis Streips and Kristaps Liepiņš

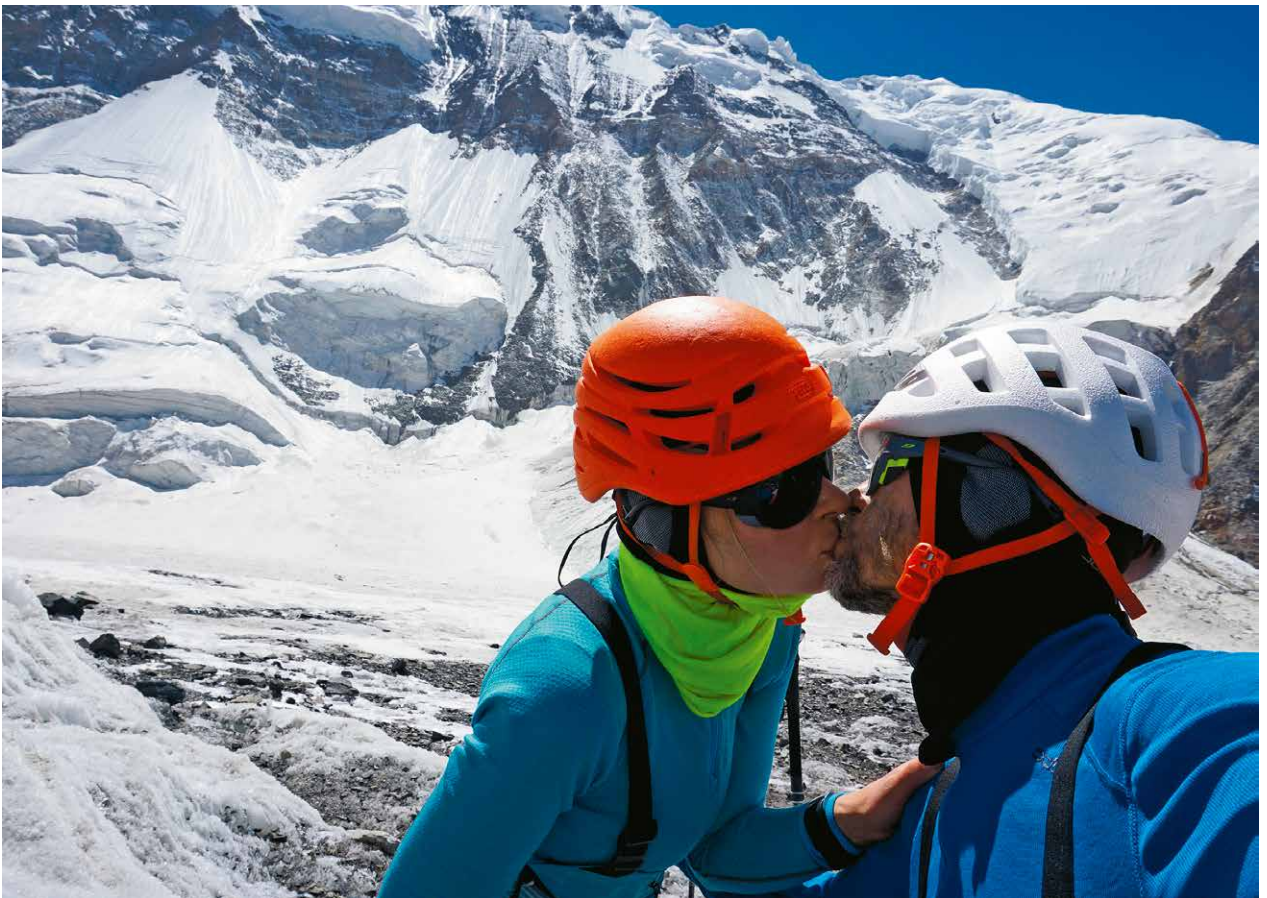


PHOTO: AL LAFKOVSKY



MARIJA ĀBELTIŅA (1977)

Marija Ābeltiņa, PhD – a doctorate in clinical psychology. She defended her dissertation on the topic of professional burnout. She was among the first in Latvia to obtain qualifications as a cognitive-behavioural therapist and supervisor, as well as a schema therapist. She is the author and co-author of numerous scientific papers and, in 2021, received the Latvian Psychologists Association’s annual award in the category of “Young Scientist of the Year”.

Marija Ābeltiņa provides individual consultations to help individuals cope with various mental health disorders. In organisations, she assists in reducing the risks of professional burnout, promotes well-being, helps overcome crises, and enhances communication with clients, including in conflict situations.

Currently, Marija Ābeltiņa is a board member of “EMDR Latvia”, responsible for emotional trauma processing using the EMDR method, and a member of the Certification Commission of the Latvian Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Association. She has previously served as the chairperson of the Latvian Clinical Psychologists Association.

PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT (PROFESIONĀLĀ IZDEĢŠANA)

Fatigue, stress, insomnia, difficulties in performing, headaches, a sense of guilt, and irritability – behind various masks lie professional burnout. There are many books that often focus only on one aspect of the problem, but here you will find a comprehensive and universal approach to the issue of professional burnout.

This book can help you overcome professional burnout, regain lost productivity, and teach you not to fall into the burnout trap again by recognizing the early signs. The author challenges the widely held belief that we all burn out the same way. No, the paths are different, and so are the solutions! What works for Liene, who is burned out from juggling five jobs, may not be suitable for Ivars, who is stuck with an outdated computer.

The book is written clearly, comprehensibly, and with humor. It contains many practical examples and exercises. At the end of each chapter, there is a summary. The information is based on scientific research filtered through the author’s professional work and personal experience, including insights

from the author’s dissertation on the topic of professional burnout. The help strategies are divided into self-help techniques and support methods for employees because the author hopes that both employees and their supervisors, who care about the well-being of their colleagues and want long-term success, will read the book.

Suitable for employees and managers, professionals and amateurs, those overwhelmed by work, those feeling oppressed by the work environment, those seeking motivation, and those tired of a monotonous routine and looking for meaningful challenges. For strategic thinkers and emotionally intelligent leaders, this book can provide inspiration and practical tools to help their employees.

This is the first book on professional burnout in Latvian, and the examples used in the book are easily understandable and relevant to our cultural context.

In the introduction of the book, the author honestly shares her experience of burnout and the main reasons and



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goals for writing the book. The first chapter defines what is and what is not professional burnout, discusses the signs of professional burnout, and pays attention to statistics and numbers. The author also talks about the relevance of the problem and the role of work in our lives in general.

“Let’s be honest, life is not somewhere after work – it is every moment. We live at work. Yes, life is our vacation time and time spent with family or simply with a fishing rod in hand, but time spent at work is also life. Yes, a very specific way of life, but it doesn’t change the essence. We don’t leave our life hanging on a hanger with a raincoat at the beginning of the workday and don’t take it untouched at the end of the workday; it flows continuously with us, every moment.”

The title of the second chapter is “Burning or Emotionally Toxic Work Environment.” The chapter begins with a story about John, who works in a large bank and is a middle-level manager who was asked to temporarily take on the duties of two colleagues due to reorganization. Unfortunately, management forgot about the “temporary” part, and John continues to perform these duties. What is happening to him? How does he feel? What is happening to his department? Answers to these questions illustrate the specifics of the burnout process. Further in the chapter, such workplace characteristics as inadequate workload, lack of positive feedback, lack of positive relationships, unfairness, lack of control, mismatch of values, emotionally heavy work content, and harmful working hours are sequentially examined. The next question to which you will find answers in this chapter is: “What to do?” if you are a manager and what to do if you are an employee. Also, 10 different practical exercises are offered for your attention.

“There are people who are willing to take all the blame and responsibility upon themselves, ignoring the influence of the environment. They often say things like this: “No, I guess I don’t understand something,” “I suppose it wasn’t meant that way,” “I came up with the problem myself,” “I’m too emotional,” “adults should be able to adapt,” and so on. This can mean wasting energy, fighting, and putting effort in the wrong place. It’s exhausting and doesn’t yield the desired results... So in this chapter, let’s look at how not to miss signals of workplace toxicity.”

The third chapter is dedicated to the role of the leader in the burnout process. Complex but extremely important issues of emotional violence are discussed – how to understand and recognize them and how to react to them. This chapter, like the previous one, opens with a vivid and illustrative story about the relationship

between a leader and subordinates, a situation in which the leader allows himself to shout and demean his employees. Further, there is an explanatory section and answers to the question of solutions for both managers and employees. In this chapter, there are 4 practical exercises.

“Emotionally abusive behavior at work from a leader is very toxic. It’s like a nuclear bomb that not only destroys at the moment of detonation but also radiates and poisons everyone around, and the consequences of this radiation harm for a long time after the explosion: clinical depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and panic are consequences not only for one day – sometimes for a lifetime. Moreover, such a management style also means financial losses for organizations.”

The fourth chapter, “Self-Burning or Emotionally Toxic Habits,” introduces less-known ideas about various types of burnout and shows how we can burn out even in the best working conditions – which is our individual vulnerability. In this chapter, you will find a detailed explanation of the internal mechanisms and roots of professional burnout. The author talks about fanatic, unchallenged, and resigned types of burnout, describing them with vivid life stories, offering individualized solutions and exercises for each one, as well as recommendations for leaders. In addition, attention is paid to our inner beliefs about ourselves, self-criticism, and inflexible internal demands in the burnout process.

The characteristics of the “fanatic” type are ambition and an inability to accept mistakes; the second major characteristic is overload. For this type of burnout, 7 different exercises are offered on how to become a good leader for yourself.

“We all know that there are 24 hours in a day. When we say there is “no time,” it’s not true. There is always time; the question is what we choose to dedicate it to. And every time we choose, we give up something else. This is a very interesting paradox: people who don’t know how to say “no,” in fact, do it all the time, but very monotonously – they always choose the same thing and give up the same thing. This book is about professional burnout, and from this perspective, fanatically burned-out employees will always choose work, even if it is an obviously bad choice.”

The “unchallenged” type of burnout is characterized by a lack of development and boredom with monotonous and routine work. If someone burns out in this way, you will find 6 inspiring and motivating exercises in the book.

“A person hides from themselves, from important needs and dreams. For example, you haven’t even started, but

self-criticism is already echoing in your head: “You won’t succeed!” And you stay in your comfort zone where you succeed. However, by avoiding significant changes, we actually narrow down our comfort zone over time, making it more restrictive and suffocating. We don’t challenge ourselves and slowly wither away.”

On the other hand, the “resigned” subtype is characterized by a lack of appreciation – an inability to see that one’s contribution to work is noticed and valued, as well as a lack of control – despair that arises from the unattainability of results when facing difficulties in completing work tasks. For this type of burnout, the author has prepared 8 effective practical tools.

“This type of burnout is the closest to what we usually understand by burnout. This is what we are used to

seeing in a burned-out person. a person who can no longer work. We see all the signs of burnout in full spectrum – exhaustion, a negative attitude toward work, and ineffectiveness.”

The last chapter of the book is about universal prevention, about what can help all of us improve our mental health and resist burnout risks. As a bonus, you will find the answer to the question in the book: “Why is it that good advice often doesn’t work?” where you will learn how to overcome obstacles on the path to positive changes in your life.

TAKE WHAT IS USEFUL FROM THIS BOOK AND
USE IT TO IMPROVE YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE!
MAY YOU SUCCEED!

PHOTO: ZIMBLE PHOTOGRAPHY



AIJA IESALNIECE (1984)

Aija is an improvisational theatre actress with 20+ years of experience who has built a career in international companies and reached a senior executive level – all while engaging in improv as a hobby. She then made a 180 degree career change, starting her own company & becoming an applied improvisation professional, as well as a certified supervisor with a Master’s degree in Management Psychology. Currently, Aija conducts individual, group and team trainings; she also practices business consulting for managers of various levels, enterprises, and professionals seeking a career change. Applied improvisation is undoubtedly the most frequently used method in Aija’s work. It is also the subject of the first book in the Latvian language written by Aija.

IMPROVISE FOR YOUR GROWTH
(IMPROVIZĒ SAVAI IZAUGSMEI)

A fascinating, truly motivating and even fun book for personal and professional growth through various methods of improvisational theatre. Using personal experience, a broad theoretical base and 16 practical exercises, the author gives everyone the opportunity to build confidence, regain enthusiasm and feel truly proud of themselves, by practising improv thinking.

The success of the book lies in the customisable exercises that each reader can carry out independently, while also following the author’s life story and experiences and using the same exercises in their own professional and personal development.

Step by step, through the book the author allows the reader to learn simple improvisational theatre techniques that help build self-confidence, identify and remove obstacles to fulfillment in everyday life

The first chapter describes the history and theory of improvisational theatre and introduces the applied improv movement – theory, experience and world practice.

In the second chapter, the author introduces her own experience of being professionally stuck, and offers

a first step to be taken when in similar circumstances. This is the author’s 3-point T.I.A. approach which improves the ability to be present ‘here and now’ in every situation. It allows to learn practical mindfulness and helps to understand and experience what is called ‘flow’ in improvisation and positive psychology.

In chapter 3, the author justifies the fact that professional aspirations and dreams can change over time. The readers explore ways of holding themselves back, and also learn techniques to identify their strengths. As implementing changes is a time-consuming process, in the third chapter the author offers a practical and fun method of practicing patience. At the end of the chapter, the reader also starts to practice using improvisation in everyday life and learns one of the basic theses of improvisational theatre – celebrating mistakes.

Chapter 4 takes the reader through their own fear of success, and helps to overcome it. It then identifies the direction in which the reader wishes to further develop. The author also introduces another essential component of improvisational theatre – ‘Yes, and’ – a way of thinking and a method



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21 x 14 cm
112 pages

that allows to come up with specific solutions and overcome stuckness. And since improvisation is always accompanied by fun and lightness, in this chapter the author encourages the reader to take their problems lighter, and even laugh at them.

Chapter 5 is the turning point, and is therefore called 'taking the actual first step'. The reader begins to practise a method that allows them to take the first practical step in creating the new daily routine. Then an individual road-map or a plan is created, to actually achieve what has been identified in the previous chapters.

Chapter 6 takes the reader through the process of painlessly stepping out of the comfort zone. Initially, the reader begins to practise techniques that allow perfecting attention to detail, in order not to miss new ideas and seemingly insignificant details. Next, there's a description

of improvisation techniques that help to adapt to the unexpected, while gradually expanding one's comfort zone. And of course, applying these techniques guarantees lots of moments of fun, thus reinforcing the positive experience and ensuring a truly fearless move towards changes and growth.

The seventh – final – chapter is the icing on the reader's cake, as the author puts it. It is wonderful to take risks, to celebrate mistakes and to expand your comfort zone, however, it is also clear that everyone needs some sense of security. The author therefore proposes a method that allows to clearly identify the reader's 'safety cushions' and how to take advantage of them. The final step is to boost the reader's self-confidence and to offer additional courage training exercises. All this is an extra reassurance that if the reader steps forward – they will succeed!



INGŪNA VEIDE (1977)

“Echoes” is Ingūna Veide’s first work in which she shares, with frankness, courage and painstaking detail, her life experience since her very first year. What is life like for someone living with a condition which places her beyond societal norms? What is it like to live with papillomatosis of the vocal cords and how does the damage it causes impact wellbeing – from living with a different voice and the need to dig deep within herself to rediscover her self-confidence, lost during a lifetimes of living with the condition, to inspiring and encouraging others to be themselves and walk their own path.

Inguna is a certified coach of Rebirthing Breathwork, an NLP master and creator of inspiring social media content.

Mother to two wonderful daughters, Inguna is a passionate *bonne-vivant*, always on the lookout for things to take pleasure in. She adores cold water swimming, something which has helped her overcome a host of ‘I can’t’ moments throughout her life, has trained as a breathing instructor and supports many others on their path to self-awareness. The conscious breathing process of Rebirthing Breathwork has been instrumental in showing Inguna what it means to ‘turn your life around,’ daring to transform herself from a victim of her medical condition and a life lived in fear and anxiety, to a place where she is confident to live her life without hiding who she really is.

ECHOES (ATBALSS)

“Echoes” is a work of autobiographical non-fiction, describing Inguna’s journey from 1978 when she was just over one year old. One August morning, her family’s idyllic life was shattered when their baby daughter started suffocating and was later diagnosed with papillomatosis of the vocal cords. This rare medical condition follows a highly unpredictable course and, back in Soviet times, research into the condition and treatments offered were very limited.

On that August morning, the ambulance service fails to answer the call promptly so Inguna’s father, in a desperate bid to save his daughter’s life, picks her up and runs out into the street to flag down a passing car and beg a lift to Hospital No1.

Inguna has stopped breathing and is clinically dead, although the use of a defibrillator gets her heart beating again. The little girl is reanimated, brought back to a life which will place many difficulties and hurdles in her path.

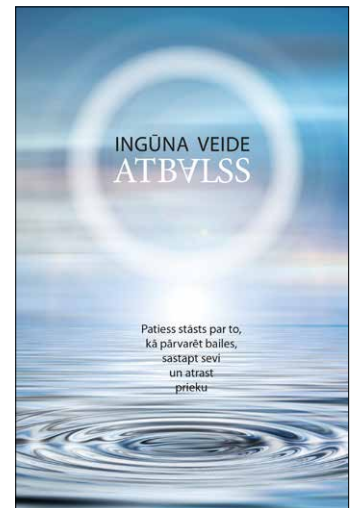
The baby’s rare condition takes its toll on family life. The couple have another

daughter but all their energy and attention is focused on keeping Inguna safe. The relentlessness of sleepless nights and constant worry that their child may have another fit forces a wedge between the couple. Her father turns to alcohol while her mother battles against the all-consuming anxiety for her baby’s future and the nightly fear Inguna might stop breathing.

Inguna undergoes countless operations which increases tension and stress within the family. This finally leads to her father leaving and her parents divorcing, resulting in further alienation and uncertainty in a life where nothing can be relied upon; breathing, family, the presence of a father, a mother’s tender touch.

‘Life is harsh with constant difficulties to be overcome.’ An approach to life that Inguna shares with her mother who, in turn, inherited from her own, meaning that fear and insecurity rooted in the past is handed down across the generations.

Despite these hardships, Inguna grows to be a naturally cheerful, inquisitive child who observes the adults and



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21 × 13,5 cm
320 pages

the world they have created, learning and imitating as children in all families do; trying to fit in, garner praise and feel appreciated, unaware that she is a complete, whole being as she is. Loved, accepted and always protected.

Following the multiple surgeries she has undergone on her vocal cords, Inguna's voice is hushed and coarse, unmelodious and somehow unacceptable in terms of wider societal norms. Inguna perceives her voice as the ugliest, most damaged and despicable part of her being.

A voice which prevents her from taking up her rightful place in society, preventing her from talking or expressing herself in unfamiliar circles (and later, also familiar ones) so as not to elicit looks of horror or bewilderment on the faces of anyone she speaks to.

It is other people's reaction to her, their futile questions and useless advice, which provoke in Inguna a painful sense of unbelonging. Her most heartfelt wish is to be someone else, someone with a 'normal' voice.

Inguna's memories are interwoven through the autobiographical details of the book, taking the reader back to her childhood.

The author describes her perceptions of the world as a child, her outlook and feelings, understanding and learning. She shares her memories of the communal apartment where her family lived, the neighbours she baked pies with and waited to use the toilet alongside, accompanied by the constant yelling of people living in close quarters.

She tames a kitten she finds in the courtyard, keeping it hidden from her noisy neighbours and delighting in sharing her world with the tiny ball of fluff which warms her heart and soul.

Inguna recollects her embarrassment as she hides the stolen chicks when her aunt Baiba and Aldis, a family member in the militsiya, have enough of their chirping.

The author recollects her first dog; a small, fun-loving creature they get at their countryside house and with whom Inguna imagines she will enjoy all manner of amusing escapades. But her new four-legged friend doesn't take to her, doesn't return her unremitting love and indeed actually turns on her one day, snarling and biting and frightening the life out of her. Fearful of being punished for the episode, Inguna spends hours on end hiding in a field of rye, weeping for her lost doggy friendship.

This anecdote, along with many other of the author's recollections, are imbued with a subtle but sparkling

sense of humour which make the reader laugh one moment and cry in sympathy the next.

Inguna also describes her years at school – the time she had the greatest difficulty fitting in, painfully aware of how different she was. It was at this time that she learnt to keep herself to herself due to the constant uncertainty of how her peers would react to her voice.

Her recollections also serve as a reflection on the outcomes of a mother's excessive love; the desire to protect her child to such an extent that she essentially makes her a captive. In attempting to shield her beloved daughter from the trials and tribulations life brings, her mother somehow deprives her of the opportunity to learn how to be brave and confront the world and all its hardships face-on and thus learn how to dare and trust in herself, to embrace the unique individual that she is.

Despite all the obstacles in her path, Inguna grows up, graduates from high school and gets a place in a nursing college where she studies hard and qualifies as a midwife, a profession she adores. On the very evening that she is celebrating the end of her studies with her girlfriends, she meets a young man. After two years of getting to know each other, they marry and start a family.

Despite their beautiful wedding and her husband demonstrating his love for her constantly, his loving attentions never seems to make Inguna truly happy and she fails to grow into a fully realized and self-reliant young woman. Instead, she is plagued by feelings of inadequacy stemming from her condition and the impact it has on her voice.

Following her head rather than her heart, Inguna sets her sights on becoming a lawyer, believing that this will make her husband love and admire her more. What she fails to understand is that what she really needs to achieve is self-love and acceptance of her voice and body just the way it is.

Their first child is born – a weak, premature baby girl whose health and life in her first days appear as a feeble glimmer of hope in the chaos-filled world. Luckily, the baby rallies and the new family go home together.

The life Inguna now leads is close to perfect; a happy family life and success professionally, although she continues to hide behind various masks and the roles she occupies. She forges ahead with her career until a major setback when she loses her second baby in a pregnancy that had been planned and hoped-for. Recovering from her loss, Inguna reflects that maybe the pregnancy was not meant to be as she admits to herself that her main reason for wanting it was to escape from a job she no longer loves.

At this point, she decides to resign from her demanding job; its price is simply too high and it fails to deliver the sense of fulfilment she hopes for.

Inguna goes on to have a second baby and, following the child's birth, a new desire for self-acceptance and self-knowledge is ignited within her. She decides to enrol at the People's University of Denmark – a real challenge as she has never travelled on her own before and, once there, discovers to her dismay that her English language skills are not as strong as she had imagined.

This experience is a point of departure for Inguna; her inner strength and self confidence is just nascent and she is still not ready to fully embark on her journey of self-acceptance and awareness.

Upon her return to Latvia, Inguna undergoes a series of surgical interventions which she experiences as a horrific nightmare returning to haunt her and catapulting her back into overwhelming hopelessness, depression and sorrow.

At this time, Inguna hits rock bottom. The countless operations on her vocal chords have left her without even the damaged voice she previously had and she has no alternative but to communicate with pen and paper. But just as she is at her lowest point, she unexpectedly receives a job offer to work as a receptionist in a private

clinic. She jumps at the opportunity without a second thought.

Inguna is extremely happy in this role – she doesn't miss her high-flying previous career and absolutely loves helping and supporting the clinic's patients, all couples with fertility issues.

It's not long before Inguna is offered another position as coordinator of overseas patients. Over the following years, Inguna comes to view this role as her ideal job, she finds it completely fulfilling and the caring aspect of it resonates with her on a personal level. And yet, her outward satisfaction masks a deep-rooted inner turmoil. She has a loving husband, two daughters, a lovely home, a dream job and a good salary and yet there is always something missing – an inner dissatisfaction with her physical being.

Inguna now embraces healthy living – changing her diet and adopting a disciplined exercise routine, she gradually achieves the body she has always dreamt of. And yet not even this brings her the happiness, fulfilment and self-acceptance she has spent her life looking for.

It is not until she embarks on an alternative therapy course known as Rebirthing Breathwork that she slowly but surely starts to make changes to the very foundations underpinning her entire life and well-being.

Translated by Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini

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