



ZVAIGZNE ABC PUBLISHERS

Latvian Books for Adults

CATALOGUE 2023



LAURA VINOGRADOVA (1984)

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 Snīpulciema* (*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 for Laura Vinogradova:

- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literature Award for the novel *The River*
- European Union Prize for Literature 2021 for the novel *The River*
- Nominated for the Annual Latvian Literature Award for the children's story *Dad and the Dog*

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

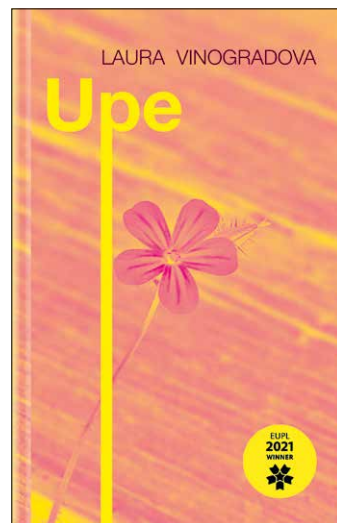
sheds her clothing and slides into the water. Then she lets it carry her. She floats on her back and stares at the sky. Now and then she moves her arms and legs so she stays in the middle of the river. Then she reaches a spot in the river where there is a lot of seaweed. The current can't carry her any 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

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Germany, France, Macedonia



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112 pages



DACE VĪGANTE (1970)

Writer Dace Vīgante was born in Jūrmala, Latvia. She graduated from The University of Latvia, Faculty of Law. Vīgante attended “Literary Academy” programme of the Writer’s Union. In 2017 her debut collection of stories *Ledus Apelsīns* [Ice Orange] was nominated for the Annual Latvian Literary Award, as well as the Kilogram of Culture Award, and received Children, Youth and Paternal Jury Award. In 2018 Vīgante published her second collection of stories *Tad redzēs* [Then Will See]. Vīgante’s first novel “The Romantic” was published in 2022 and it is nominated for the Annual Latvian Literary Award as the best novel of the year. 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 (*Ice Orange*)
- Kilogram of Culture Award (*Ice Orange*)
- Youth and Paternal Jury Award (*Ice Orange*)
- Shortlisted for the Annual Latvian Literary Award (*The Romantic*)

ICE ORANGE (LEDUS APELSĪNS)

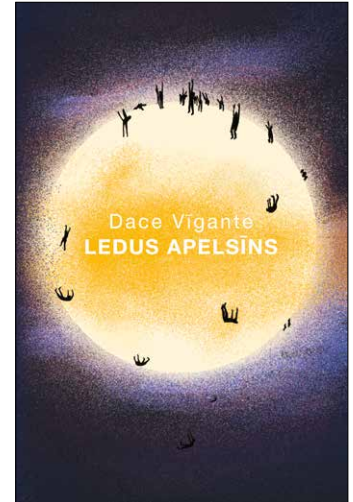
Psychologically nuanced and dense with detail, the stories in this debut collection *Ice Orange* are mostly about women whose lives were shaped by the 20th century, a time when people learned to understand each other more from what was unsaid, when each step seemed to be both more difficult and more meaningful than it is now. These sketches of lives, from childhood through adulthood—both the minor as well as significant dramas—are full of familiar emotions, nostalgic details, and unspoken secrets. The stories in this short collection offer quick reads that will nonetheless leave a tangible impression, allowing insight into life through the prism of Vīgante’s marvelous and delicate prose.

Excerpt

I would never have plucked up the courage to host summer guests, or *dacha tenants*, as my neighbour Nina—the one who patiently spread newspaper out on the pee-soaked elevator floor in our building—called them. On the rare occasions that we bumped into each other on the stairs, she always returned to the same subject—how come no-one ever got caught and how could anyone relieve themselves so quickly. It was the only

topic we dealt with, if my shoulder shrugging can be counted as sufficient response to her remarks.

One morning, sighing heavily, she happened to open the main entrance door at exactly the moment my world was coming to an end, as I tried to unsnag my tights from where they had caught on a splinter on the door frame. I must have looked dreadful, as I replied to her query of “What happened?” by stating that I wanted to go and hang myself. Fancy saying something like that to a stranger! I must have gone into some kind of trance, not coming to my senses until after my monologue, to which Nina had obviously listened with indulgent patience. I heard my own jagged voice going on about the lack of any spare tights to change into and no time to mend the laddered ones. I voiced my doubts over my mother’s post-war golden advice about there being no shame in old but clean, after all there wasn’t a war on any longer. That on my budget, there was no allowance for snagged tights, that little Pauls was ill and I was struggling to make ends meet. And, even if I had had a bit of extra money, how would I ever make it to the shop in time, the bus was hardly going to wait for me.



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Publications: Lithuania,
Germany, China

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174 pages

It would just be my tough luck. How was I meant to go out like that, with a ladder in my tights like a right slut.

I only snapped out of it when I caught sight of Nina's wide open, staring eyes. The gold sleepers in her ears swung rhythmically as her hand, a gold ring with a decent-sized claret-coloured stone on one finger, pushed the gleaming, greenish headscarf back from her slightly damp forehead.

"You should always carry clear nail varnish with you," she said. "What?" I didn't get her.

"As soon as you get a ladder—ploof!—a lick of nail varnish on top of it, and it won't run any further," she explained, matter-of-factly.

I ran the palms of my hands over my cheeks. Black smudges of mascara came off on my fingers. I searched frantically for a tissue and apologized for my endless stream of words—most inappropriate. Must be nerves, you know. My neighbour, putting her shopping bag on the floor, gave me a friendly hug and called me a poor mite, crushing me against her ample bosom over which her cotton housecoat, decorated with blue tulips, strained tightly and barely closed. She kissed me on both cheeks and invited me down for tea that afternoon, saying she had a proposal to make. I missed my bus that morning all the same.

It turned out that a hug from a stranger was not that unpleasant, considering that no-one, except of course for little Paulītis, had hugged me in the last four years. However, I was in no mood for a home visit that evening. Besides, I was put off by the idea of a return to the topic of that damned elevator. Drat, I should have asked for her phone number so I could have called with an excuse. I took a deep breath, shrugged and went up anyway.

The smell of Nina's kitchen took me back to my childhood, memories of my granny's house—it smelt of bay leaves, onions, milk and freshly baked pies. A feeling that you were expected somehow. I let her put a plate of warm *vareniki* (doughnuts) in front of me, along with a square slice of rye bread topped with a generous slice of glossy, garlicky, smoked Russian lard and a cup of raspberry tea. All of a sudden, I wanted to stay there, in the warmth. While I was tucking eagerly into a pie, she asked me, all business-like, how many rooms I had.

When I replied that I had two, she said that was exactly as she thought and went straight to the point—I should let the second room out to summer tenants. She told me she had connections at the local market who had promised her the relevant information. Gesticulating wildly like a TV weather forecaster, Nina let on to me that she usually hosted good, decent people from fellow Soviet republics. Sometimes relatives or friends from the Ukraine would come for a visit, and one summer she had had Armenians—the table had almost given way beneath all those southern treats, they had brought so much authentic *shashlik* and kilos and kilos of sun dried *basturma* meat that she had even managed to make a saving on housekeeping. Every evening she had been entertained with free chamber choir concerts. The many-starred bottles of cognac on the kitchen table had been drained as if they were lemonade, she still didn't know how her liver had survived, although she couldn't say the same for her husband.

Last summer she had had a scientist from Moscow to stay. Not once had she walked down to the beach, she had just read all the time and tapped away on her typewriter for days and nights on end. They had had to plug their ears with cotton wool balls if they were to have any chance of sleeping. When she left, she had embraced Nina and, shedding tears of joy, thanked her for the invigorating rest, saying that thanks to the plentiful sea air she had drafted her entire dissertation.

All in all, quite normal people. In any case, she would be there to lend a guiding hand, just two floors below. When I left she winked at me, as if to say to call her if I ever wanted a chat. And just imagine, the elevator floor had been dry that morning. I thanked her and promised to think over her proposal and call her, even though I knew I wouldn't get too chummy with her anymore. I was no good at talking, even with my own mother. She thought she knew everything about me but, in actual fact, she didn't know a thing. She passed away quite convinced that she had been so unlucky with her daughter—having raised me to always be top of the class and instead I ended up a failed artist with a child on my hands.

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.

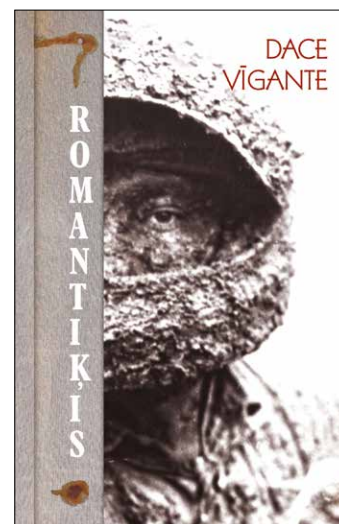
The novel opens in 1993 as fifty-five-year-old Haralds Vindinieks wins his final competition in the buggy class and says farewell to competitive racing. Sporting events have played a major role in his life and he now finds himself feeling lost and bereft. Katrīna, his girlfriend, does her best to be 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 Harald's 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



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Sample translation: English

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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 Jūrmala 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)

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 Best Prose for the novel *Dust in an Hourglass*
- Zelta vilnis Award for hosting the TV show *National Treasures*
- Latvian Language Agency and Association of Latvian Journalists "Storyteller" Award
- 2002, 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



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Full translation: Spanish

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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.

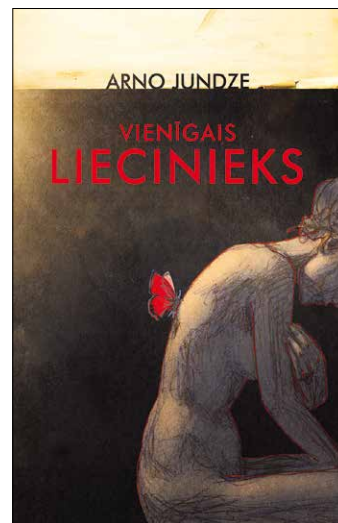
In the course of an argument, a TV talk show host, Joe, loses his temper, strikes his boss and gets fired. Returning home, he walks in on his wife with her lover who, it appears, is no other than his best friend. That night he checks into a hotel, only to discover the following morning that his car has 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, pursued



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Sample translation: English

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192 pages

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



BAIBA ZĪLE (1974)

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.

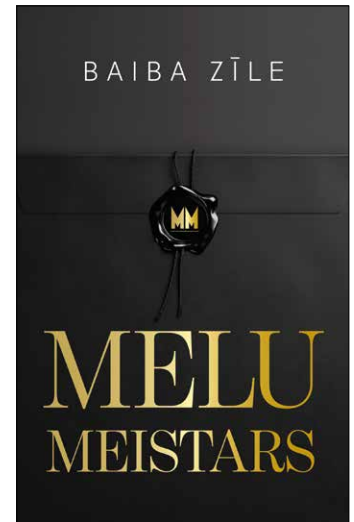
After twenty years everything has changed. It is a different era, different people and no more fear about the future. Alice is married, her family and the whole country are doing great, but she is not happy. Why? She wants to find out the truth about her father. Alice meets the tall man who gave her 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. She 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.

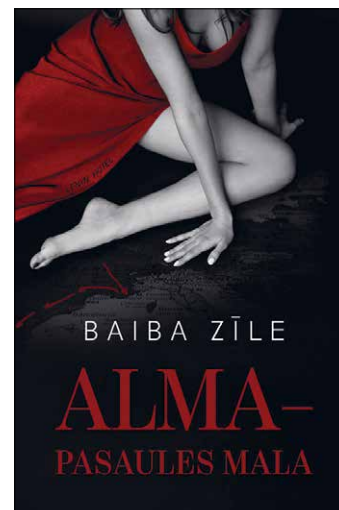
Jonas is a well known and successful 35-year-old German photographer who lives and works in Frankfurt am Main. He has a fiancé and they want to buy an apartment and start a family. One day Jonas has a dream about his childhood and starts to reflect on his life and goals. He realises that he does not 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



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

Sample translations:
English and German

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21 × 14 cm
334 pages

of 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.



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.

SYNOPSIS OF THE SIXTH WIFE BY INGA GRENCBERGA

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.

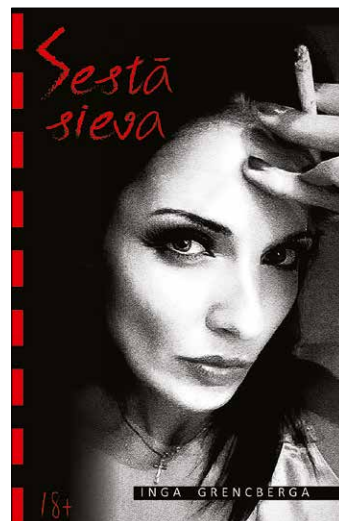
Told in a nonlinear narrative with noir undertones, the novel is peppered with intimate details of the couple's love life: their first night together at a casino hotel; Michael's request to engage in anal sex; a surprise visit to a swingers' party. But it's the fearless exploration of Alice's psyche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



Sample translations available:

English; Estonian

Rights sold: Estonia

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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



MAIJA POHODNEVA (1973)
and MODRIS PELSIS (1970)

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 Pohodneva 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.

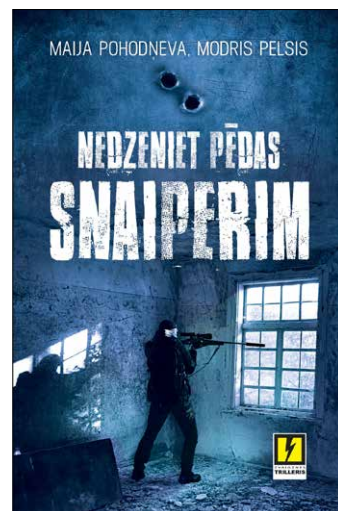
Andris Kadiķis (36), a police detective, leads the team investigating the shootings. The questioning of witnesses results in one dead-end after another and the only piece of evidence which could possibly lead them to the killer is a hair from a rare, exotic guinea pig.

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 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



978-9934-0-9083-7
20,5 × 13,5 cm
204 pages

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

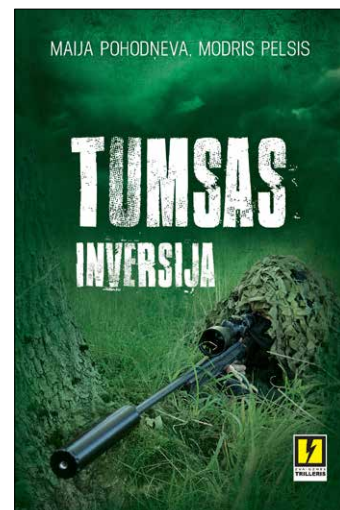
INVERSION OF DARKNESS (TUMSAS INVERSIJA)

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 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



978-9934-0-9081-3
20,5 × 13,5 cm
206 pages

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.

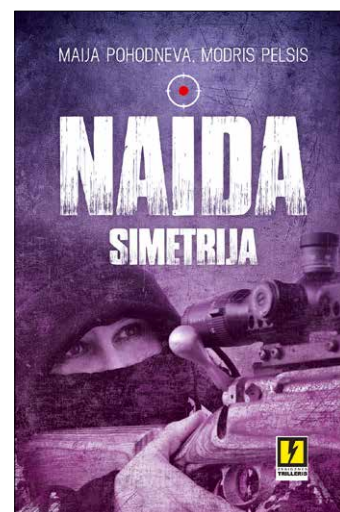
The ill-matched pair of accomplices, notwithstanding the great hostility they harbour each other, abscond together. They take refuge with August "Bear", a friend of Anna's father from his younger days at his home in a remote, swampy corner of Latvia on the border with Russia. They receive orders just 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 x 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

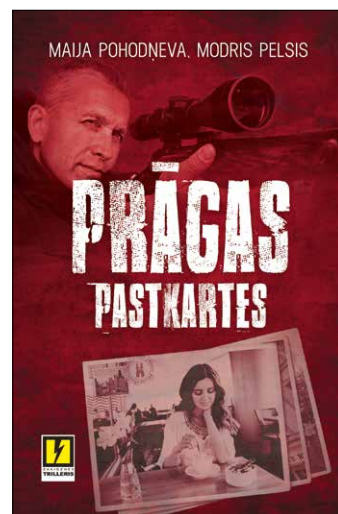
POSTCARDS FROM PRAGUE (PRĀGAS PASTKARTES)

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



GUNTIS TĀLERS (1968)

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 organized 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.

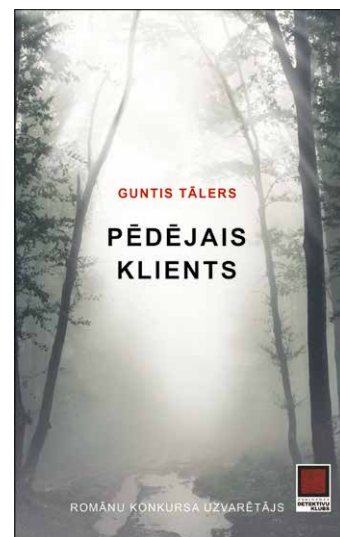
That same year, businesswoman Marta Reigats seeks the help of NEDA when her husband, Kārlis Reigats, goes missing.

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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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 gentlemen 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

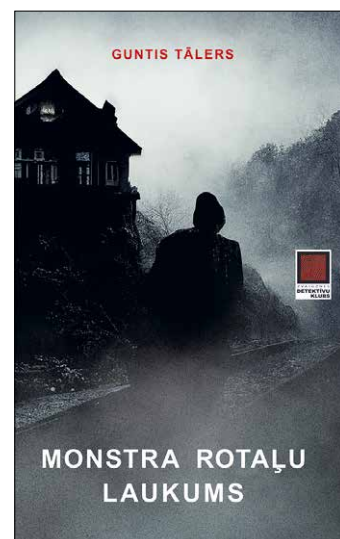
crimes. The picnic concludes in an intimate atmosphere with just two of the guests, Ancis and Ārija, continuing the party in private. Henija concludes that the pair are having an affair.

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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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 wheedled 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

Photo: Kaspars Filips Dobrovickis



Kristine and Kristaps Liepins

KRISTINE and KRISTAPS LIEPINS

Kristaps is a climber with forty years of experience in the mountains, one of the best-known mountaineering instructors in Latvia. When he met Kristine, she too became a mountaineer and traveler. Over a period of more than ten years, both Kristaps and Kristine 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

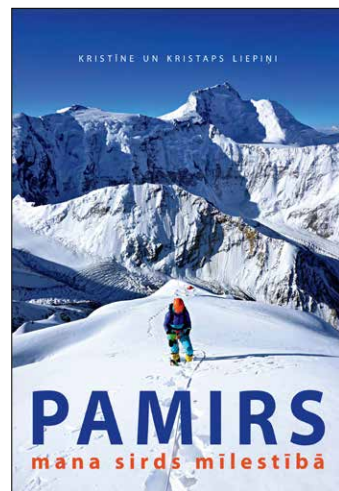
(PAMIRS mana sirds mīlestībā)

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



Full English translation

available (unedited)

Book includes 90 full color
photos by the authors

978-9934-0-9292-3

25 x 18 cm

296 pages

each chapter 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 Moskvín 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 that the camp down below was so

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.

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.

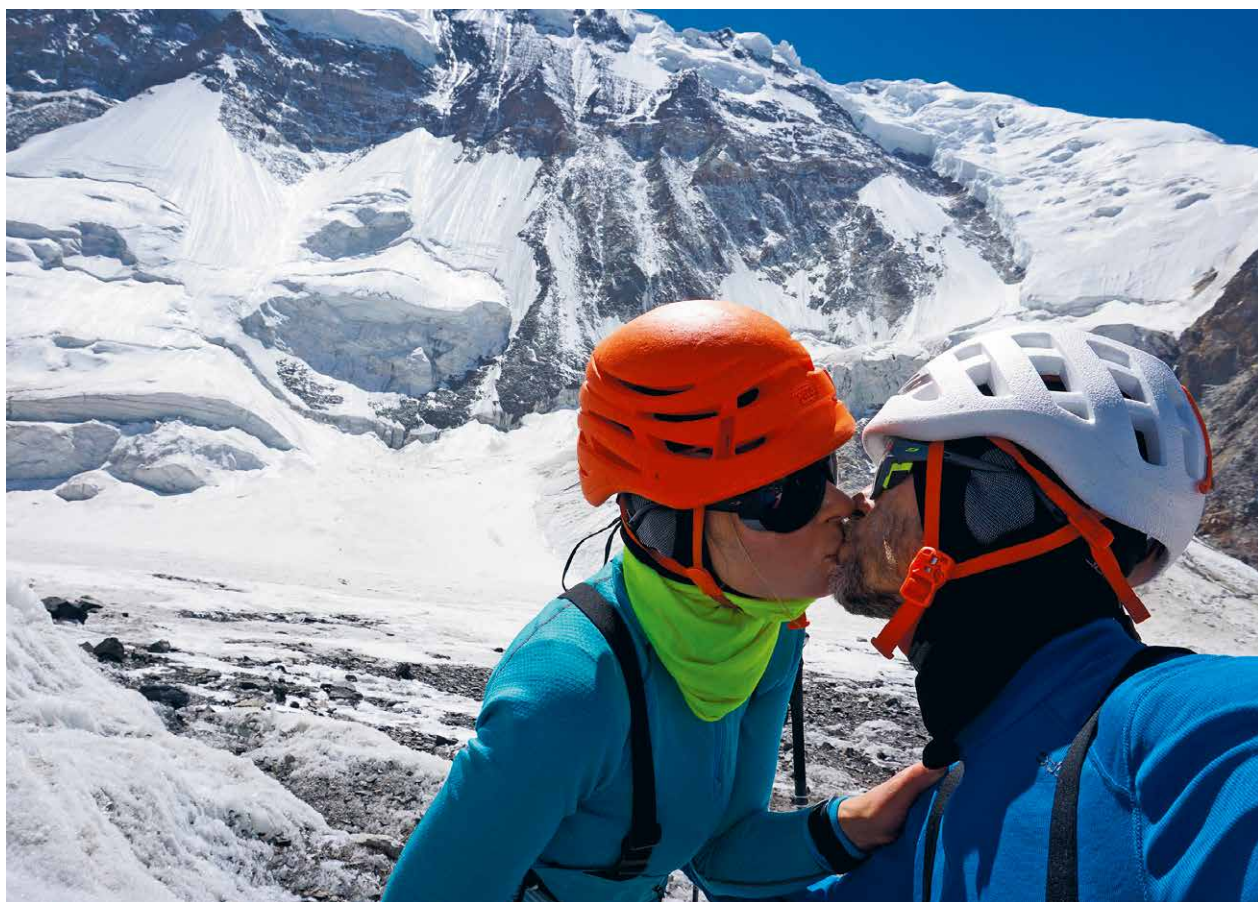
The next part of the trail was very rocky, steep and unstable. I had to be very aware to avoid knocking down dangerous rocks or slipping. Above us were some Spaniards, and we were approaching them. Although we tried not to be right under them on the steep and rocky trail, sometimes there was no other 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.

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