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Inga Zolude – Latvia

Mierinājums Ādama kokam (2010)

A Solace for Adam's Tree (a collection of stories)

Publishing House **Dienas Grāmata Publishers**

Biography

The prose writer Inga Zolude was born in 1984 and received her master's degree in English from the University of Latvia. She studied English literature at Southern Illinois University through the Fulbright Program and worked as a project coordinator and manager in the field of culture and education. She is currently studying for her doctorate at the University of Latvia. She has been a member of the Writers' Union in Latvia since 2010. Zolude has had her works published in various periodicals, and her debut novel, *Silta zeme* (*Warm Earth*) was published in 2008. She regularly reviews works by Latvian and foreign authors. She has also translated poetry by Philip Larkin and Robert Crawford, among others. She received a special award from the cultural magazine *Rīgas Laiks* (*Riga Times*) in 2007. She has taken part in many literary and cultural projects and has received several grants, including the Nordic Council of Ministers' Baltic Sleipnir Grant.

Synopsis

Inga Zolude's short story collection reflects on different scenes of life in urban and rural areas in modern-day Latvia. The author's rich and ripe language describes a bright and panoramic view of the past, present and future. A very specific pattern of Zolude's writing (also demonstrated in her first novel) is her skill at destroying any borders between reality and fiction, known and unknown, national and cosmopolitan. Sometimes it is impossible to guess the place or time that frame these stories, which deal with the so-called 'big subjects' at the heart of human life. Despite that, Zolude's stories strongly reflect the atmosphere of 21st century Europe, and make the collection one of the most important prose works published in Latvia during recent years.

Mierinājums Ādama kokam

Inga Zolude

Sprīdīte

Es tieši nācu no darbā iekārtošanas aģentūras Nadežda's Global Human Work Market, kas specializējies sūtīšanā uz Īriju. Es gāju cauri tiem vecajiem kapiem. Es vispār nesa-protu, kā tur nokļuvu. Man šķiet, es apmaldījos. Eju pa ielu priecīga, ka beidzot braukšu uz Dublinu un satikšu pārējos radus, priecājos, priecājos, pārlasu līgumu un info paketi un pēkšņi skatos — apkārt kaut kādi veci, sagāzušies pieminekļi. Nebija tā, ka es nesaprastu, kur atrodos, es zināju, tie noteikti ir tie vecie kapi. Es te esmu bijusi agrāk, kad mācījos Banku augstskolā. Mani gan ātri atskaitīja. Negāja man. Vispār gāja labi, bet trīs priekšmetus nevarēju nokārtot sekmīgi — angļu valodu, vācu valodu un latviešu valodu. Jau no bērnības man bija tā slimība, ka neprot lasīt, neatšķir burtus, man viss vienmēr bija jāiekaļ no galvas. Citos priekšmetos es uzmanīgi klausījos un iegaumēju un pēc tam varēju ļoti sekmīgi atstātīt. Augstskolā es ierakstīju lekcijas diktofonā un ietaupīju laiku, mēģinot atpazīt vārdus. Es, protams, tagad protu lasīt, taču man tas tāpat aizņēma nedaudz ilgāku laiku, un ieskaitēs stresa situācijā es vispār visu aizmirstu, tāpēc arī izkritu valodās. Bet man tāpat riebās tā Banku augstskola. Tagad man ir daudz labāks diploms, es pabeidzu LU Ekonomikas un vadībzinātņu fakultāti gandrīz ar sarkano diplomu, psiholoģijā tikai seši dabūju. Vispār biju uzcītīga. Paralēli arī mācījos taisīt manikīru, skropstu ilgviļņus un pielikt mākslīgās skropstiņas. Katrai sievietei tas būtu jāprot, jā rūpējas par

sevi, taču nē, raud, ka vīrieši ne tādi, bet pašas kā slaucējas staigā. Paskatieties apkārt!

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Man kļūst baisi. Parks ir satumsis, piepeši te vairs nav tik daudz jauno māmiņu vai citu vienkāršu caurgājēju, bet viņu vietā uzradušies dīvaina paskata cilvēki — rudiem matiem, vasarraibumiem, viņi līdzinās elfiem un sarunājas nesaprotamā valodā. Es mēģinu sev iedvest, ka tas tikai manu baiļu auglis, un meklēju izeju no parka, taču nespēju to atrast. Centrā te ir dīvaina baznīca, iekšā deg gaismas, bet ārpusē tā ir tumša, tumša, melna, un visas durvis ir ciet, slēgtas, tām priekšā režģi. Apeju baznīcai apkārt, raustu visas durvis, bet nekā, dažas no tām ir vispār aizcementētas, līdz sabīstos ne pa jokam, kad ieraugu divus bērnus smilškastē pie baznīcas sienas, viņi spēlējas tumsā, runādami nesaprotamas zilbes, es nopriežu, ka tā vien tāda dīvaina bērnu valoda, bet ieklausoties es saprotu, ka tā ir īsta valoda, un izskatās viņi paši arī pavisam dīvaini — mati gaisā, kā vēja izpūsti, spilgti sarkani kā uguns, un sejas no vienas vietas nosētas vasarraibumiem. Es ņemu kājas pār pleciem un steidzos projām no šīs dīvainās baznīcas, skrienot garām kapličām, sajūtu tādu kā ēdiena smaržu un piepeši atceros, ka esmu izsalkusi, nez cik stundas jau te maldos, jau nakts melnums, bet nākamā doma ir daudz šaušalīgāka — tie noteikti ir bomži, kas kapličā cep tādu pašu nevainīgu meiteni, kas ieklīdusi parkā. Es skrienu, ko kājas nes, man pretī skrien koki, no kuriem nevaru izvairīties, ieskrienu vienā ar plecu, aizķeros aiz saknes, skrienu pieliekusies, lai neviens mani neredzētu, līdz tiešā trāpījumā...

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Zelta pods. Pods ar zeltu. Godadieva vārds! Pamostos no bezsamaņas, galva sāp no trieciena, ar kādu iedrāzos kokā, saknes spiežas sānos. Es ceru, ka tas bijis tikai ļauns murgs un es tagad piecelšos, izešu no parka un došos mājās. Arī tumsa vairs nav tik necaurredzami melna, šur tur spīd uguntiņas. Sākumā domāju, ka tās ir laternas, bet tad pamanīju, ka uguntiņas mirgo, nevis spīd rāmi, tās burtiski raustījās, tad izdzisa pavisam, it kā pārtrūktu elektrība. Tad gaismiņa iedegās citur, sāka raustīties un atkal izdzisa. Taču es pamanīju, ka ar katru reizi tās pietuvinājās man, līdz bija tik tuvu, ka es varēju saskatīt, ka tā sākas kā sprakšķis, tad no tās izlaužas liesma un mazs zaļš cilvēciņš, rūķis, kas tur kaut kādu māla podu, no kura nāk gaismas stars, tad tas sāk mirgot, un pazūd gan liesma, gan cilvēciņš, gan pods ar staru. Un es palieku atkal viena tumsā, savākusi savus Īrijas līgumus, pieceļos kājās un eju uz ielas pusi.

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Paldies dievam, es tikpat kā pilnībā biju atguvusies pēc trieciena un gāju mērķtiecīgi uz ielas pusi, es redzēju tālumā mašīnas un autobusu, es domāju, ka tūdaļ man izdosies atrast izeju no šī parka. Taču, kad nonācu jau pavisam tuvu ielai, tā sāka attālināties, es sāku skriet tai pretī, bet tā kļuva arvien tālāka, es jutos, kā skrienot uz skrejceļiņa trenāžiera sporta zālē, tad es apstājos un skatījos uz ielu, mēģināju saprast, kā lai apmāna šo celiņu, kas mani ved atkal parkā iekšā, un es jau tuvojos dīvainajai baznīcai bez ieejas, kas tāpat deg gaiša un bija sākusi skanēt lūdzēju kora balsī, kas dziedāja kādu meldiņu ar nezināmu tautisku pieskaņu nesaprotamā valodā. Te piepeši pamanīju, ka man pretī nāk divi cilvēki, un es uzelpoju. Es viņiem atvainojos un vaicāju pēc izejas no parka. Viņi

uz mani dīvaini skatījās, tad latviski ar šausmīgu, neidentificējamu akcentu jautāja, kāpēc es gribu tikt ārā. Es atbildēju, ka vēlos nokļūt mājās, jo man jāatvadās no saviem draugiem un tuviniekiem un jāsāk kravāt mantas, jo es beidzot došos uz Īriju, kur strādāšu par menedžeri vienā no labākajiem restorāniem, kur nāk ēst zvaigznes. Piepeši es sajutu spēcīgas sāpes kājā, tad rāvienu, elpas trūkumu, pārbīli, mani ierāva zemē! Man pie kājas bija pieķēries kāds skelets, liķis!

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Es atguvos un drīz vien sapratu, ka esmu dzīva, man matos un uz sejas bija smiltis un zemes bumbuļi, es gulēju uz auksta betona, virs manis bija betona velve, un griestos bija sprauga, pa kuru nāca gaiss un varēju redzēt satumsušas debesis. Man apkārt stāvēja vairāki cilvēki, viņi visi bija nosēti vasarraibumiem, ar ugunīgi rudiem matiem, dažiem no viņiem bija uz priekšu izbīdīts apakšzoklis. Kur es esmu, es vaicāju, kas jūs esat? Tu esi tur, kur tev jābūt. Mēs redzējām tavu līgumu. Jā, es braukšu strādāt uz Īriju. Tev nekur nav jābrauc. Tu jau esi šeit. Mēs esam Īrijā. Bet kā? Es pārlaidu skatienu betonētajai telpai. Šī ir Īrija? Ko jūs gribat man iestāstīt? ! Formāli šī jau ir Īrija, bet mēs vēl joprojām esam pie ieejas. Tūliņ dosimies tālāk. Un ieeja ir caur kapu, cauri zemei? Kur es esmu? ! Vai šī ir elle? Viņi mani piecēla un veda pa gaiteni, kas pārtapa šaurā ieliņā ar mazām mājiņām, uz kurām bija dažādas izkārtnes. Iela kā iela, tikai tā nelīdzinājās nevienai no Rīgas ielām, virs māju jumtiem nebija debesu, bet griesti, kas bija nokrāsoti kā debesis. Viņi mani ieveda durvīs, virs kurām bija izkārtne Barbers, tur darbojās tādi paši ugunīgi rudi cilvēki priekšautos, viņi bija draudzīgi, taču es nesapratu daudz no viņu sarunām, viņiem bija dīvainā izruna. Viņi mani iesēdināja

krēslā, frizieris, kā izrādījās, atvēra skapīti, kas bija piekrauts pilns ar vienādām kastītēm, viņš paņēma vienu tādu, uz tās bija rakstīts Irish Red, viņi man teica, ka, pirms ieeju pilsētā, mani jāsaģatavo, lai pārējā sabiedrība mani pieņemtu kā savējo. Pēc aptuveni stundas mani mati bija rudi, tad mani savās rokās ņēma permanent make-up artist Katy, un pēc diezgan sāpīgas un nepatīkamas procedūras mana seja bija nosēta gaišbrūniem vasarraibumiem. Pēc tam viņi man paziņoja, ka esmu gatava, tikai vēl viena lieta — viņi man uzdāvināja The Concise Dictionary of Gaelic. Iekšā bija ielikta lapiņa ar biežāk lietojamiem izteicieniem pirmajam laikam.

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No citiem paslepšus debesis vērojošajiem uzzināju, ka ir arī citas ieejas, viņi man uzzīmēja karti, un es apstaigāju šīs vietas, daudzi no portāliem bija kapličas, kur rūķi glabāja savus zelta podus. Tie bija portāli starp tagadni un pagātņi, mājām un Īriju, taču es nekad nemēģināju neko vairāk, nebāzu galvu ārā pa šķirbu, neskatījos, kas notiek virszemē, jo mani būtu ieraudzījuši mazie zaļie rūķīši — spiegi un portālu sargātāji, bet es nevēlējos pamest šo laimīgo zemi, kur par cilvēkiem tika gādāts, sākot no friziera reizi mēnesī, kurš piekrāsoja saknes ar Irish Red, beidzot ar integrēšanu sabiedrībā un dzīves limeņa celšanu. Īrija piepildīja manus sapņus.

A Solace for Adam's Tree (a collection of stories)

Inga Zolude

Translated from the Latvian by Suzanne McQuade

Thumbelina

I've just come from Nadezhda's Global Human Work Market, an employment agency specializing in emigration to Ireland. I was walking through this old cemetery. I don't really know how I got here. I seem to be lost. I'm walking along the road, happy that I'm finally about to go to Dublin and meet my other relatives, happy, happy, reading the contract and the info packet and suddenly I look up—all around me are these old, crumbling monuments. It wasn't like I couldn't figure out where I was, I knew that this must be the old cemetery. I've been here before, when I was studying at the BA School of Business and Finance. They counted me out quickly. I didn't do well. I did well in general, but I couldn't successfully pass three subjects -- English, German, and Latvian. I've had that disease since childhood where you can't read, can't differentiate the letters, I always had to chisel everything out of my head. In other subjects I listened carefully and memorized and then I could very successfully recite it all. In high school I recorded the lectures with a dictaphone and set aside time to try to identify the words. Of course, now I can read, but it still takes me a little more time and in a stressful test situation I forget pretty much everything, and so I failed languages. But I hated the BA School of Business and Finance anyway. Now I have a much better diploma, I graduated from the

University of Latvia in the Faculty of Economics and Management, nearly with honors; I only got a middle passing grade in psychology. Basically I was diligent. I also learned how to do manicures on the side, give eyelash perms and apply false eyelashes. All women should be able to do that, should be able look after themselves; if not, they cry over the fact that they don't have such and such a guy, while they themselves walk around looking like milkmaids. Look around!

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I've become frightened. It's gone dark now in the park, suddenly there aren't as many young mums or other mere passers-by, these strange looking people have appeared in their place—red-headed, freckled, looking like elves and speaking in an unintelligible language. I try to reassure myself that they're just a creation of my fear, and I look for the exit from the park, but I can't find it. Here at the center there's a strange church with lights burning inside of it, while the outside is dark, dark, black, and all the doors are shut, locked, covered by grates. I walk around the church, pulling on all the doors, but nothing, some of them are practically cemented shut, until I'm startled, no joke, by the sight of two children in the sandbox at the door of the church. They're playing in the dark, speaking in unintelligible syllables; I decide it must be one of those strange languages children have, but on listening further, I understand that it's an actual language, and they look just like all those strangers—their hair in the air, as if blown by the wind, bright red like fire, and faces dotted everywhere with freckles. I hightailed it, racing away from this strange church, running past the crypt, sensing the smell of food cooking and suddenly I remember that I'm hungry, I've

no idea how many hours I've been lost here, the night already grown dark, but my next thought is far more gruesome—they must be bums there in the crypt, bums who cook the very same innocent girls who wander into the park. I run as fast as my legs will carry me, trees racing towards me, I can't avoid them, I run into one with my shoulder, tripped up by roots, I run stooped over, so no one will see me, until the direct hit...

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A golden pot. A pot of gold. God's honest word! I wake from a blackout, roots pressed into my side, head aching from the blow of running into a tree. I'm hoping that it was all a bad dream, and now I'll get up, leave the park, and head home. Even the dark is no longer so impenetrably black, little fires burn here and there. At first I think they're lanterns, but then I notice how the little fires glimmer rather than shine calmly, they literally flicker, then fade completely, as if the electricity had been cut off. Then the little light ignites somewhere else, begins to flicker and fades again. But I'm noticing it get closer to me each time, until it's so close that I can see how it starts like a sparkle, and from that sparkle a flame breaks out, and a tiny little green person too, holding some sort of stone pot emitting these beams of light, then it begins to glimmer, and then it disappears: the flame, the tiny person, even the pot and its beams. And I'm left alone again in the dark, gathering up my Irish papers, rising to my feet and heading towards the road.

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Thank god I'd almost completely recovered from the blow and was heading determinedly towards the road. In the distance I could see cars and buses, I thought I'd manage to find an exit from this park any minute. But when I came almost right up to the road, it started to get further away, I started to run towards it, but it grew even further. I felt like I was running on a treadmill at the gym. Then I stopped and looked at the road, trying to understand how to trick this path that carries me back to the inside of the park, and then I was right up next to the strange entranceless church with its burning lights, and there was the sound of a church choir, voices singing a little melody of an unknown folk song in an unintelligible language. Here I suddenly noticed two people approaching me, and I took a breath. I excused myself and asked for the exit to the park. They looked at me strangely, then in Latvian, with an awful, unrecognizable accent, asked why I wanted to get out. I answered that I would like to get home, I have to say goodbye to my friends and relatives and have to start packing my things, I'm finally headed to Ireland, where I'm going to work as a manager in one of the finest restaurants, where all the stars come to eat. Suddenly I felt an intense pain in my leg, then a jerk, the loss of breath, a sudden shock, and I was pulled into the ground! I'd been caught hold of at the leg by a skeleton, a corpse!

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I came to and soon enough understood that I was alive, there was sand and clumps of dirt in my hair and face, I lay on cold cement, above me, a cement vault, and in the ceiling there were cracks that let the light through, and through which I could see the darkening sky. Several people stood around me,

all of them had faces dotted with freckles and fiery red hair, some of them had underbites. Where am I, I asked, who are you? You're where you're supposed to be. We saw your contract. Yes, I'm going to work in Ireland. You don't have to go anywhere. You're already here. We're in Ireland. But how? I cast a glance around the cement room. This is Ireland? What are you trying to tell me? ! Technically this is Ireland, but we're still only at the entrance. We'll head further soon. And the entrance is through a grave, through the earth? Where am I? ! Is this hell? They picked me up and led me down a hallway, which changed into a narrow lane with little houses on which were posted various signs. A street like any street, only not like any streets in Riga, there was no sky over the rooftops of the houses, but a ceiling painted to look like the sky. They led me to a door signposted "Barbers," there the same fiery red people worked in pinafores, they were friendly, although I didn't understand much of their conversation, they had a strange accent. They sat me in a chair, the hairdresser, as he turned out to be, opened a cupboard stocked full of identical boxes. He took one of them out and on it was written "Irish Red"; he said that before entering the city, I had to prepare myself so that the rest of society would accept me as one of their own. After about an hour my hair was red, then "Permanent Make-up Artist Katy" took me in her hands, and after a rather painful and unpleasant procedure my face was dotted with light brown freckles. After that they informed me that I'm ready, just one more thing—and they gave me *The Concise Dictionary of Gaelic*. Inside, a one-page insert of the most useful beginner phrases.

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From the other secret sky watchers I learned that there are other entrances as well, they drew me a map, and I made the rounds of these places. Several of the portals were crypts where the gnomes kept their pots of gold. These were portals between the present and the past, between home and Ireland, but I never tried anything more, never thrust my head out through the cracks, never looked at what was happening above ground, for I'd see the little green gnomes—spies and portal guards—and didn't want to leave this happy land, where I'd come to be expected, starting with the hairdresser, once a month, who colored my roots with *Irish Red*, and ending with my integration into society and the promise of a better life. Ireland fulfilled all of my dreams.



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