



**ILZE AIZSILA** (1982)

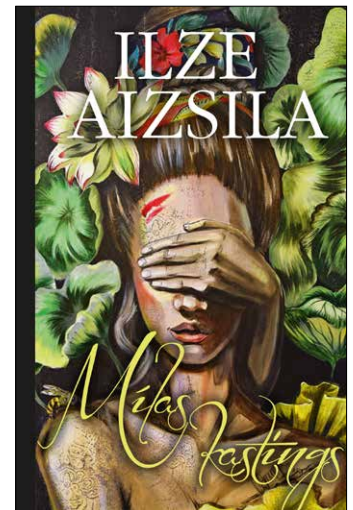
Ilze Aizsila has earned a Master’s degree in social sciences with a focus on Management. She has worked in the fields of tourism and public relations and is currently professionally advancing in the library sector. Concurrently with her studies at the Latvian Writers’ Union’s Literary Academy in 2020,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

**LOVE CASTING (MĪLAS KASTINGS)**

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

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

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




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

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

**A STEP TO THE ALTAR**  
(SOLIS LĪDZ ATĀRIM)

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

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

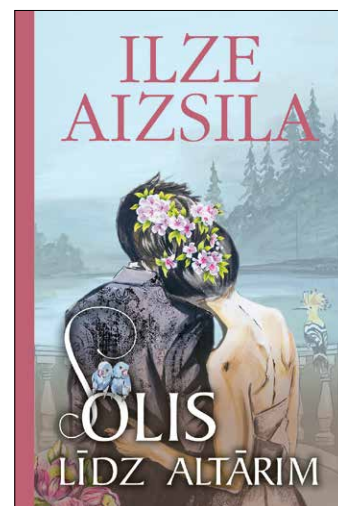
Teiksmas's colleague, registration specialist Charlotte, is blessed with a sharp mind, a law education, and enough audacity to fight and think of a plan to save the district but doesn't know how. The mood is further dampened by yet another cancelled marriage ceremony, though they narrowly manage to save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

The manager often does Tarot readings,

and the librarian offers illegal cosmetic and hairdressing services.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

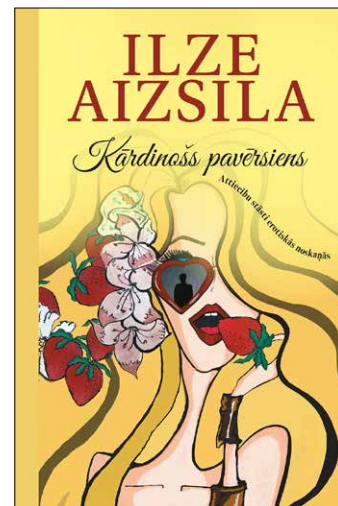
“Contract” – a story set in sombre tones about twisted relationships. Teresa, the manager of a tourism company, visits a new tourist lodging to seal a collaboration agreement. The owner happens to be her ex-lover,

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

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

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

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



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## FICTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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