

ANDREJS UPITS

**OUTSIDE  
PARADISE**  
AND OTHER STORIES



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
MOSCOW

ANDREJS UPITS



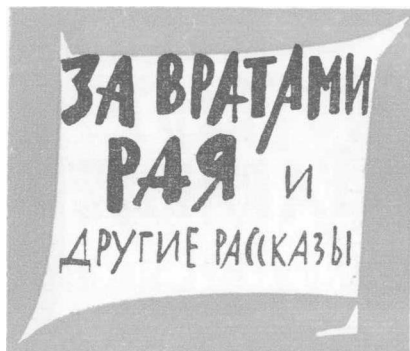
FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
MOSCOW

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АНДРЕЙ УПЧИТ



ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
МОСКВА



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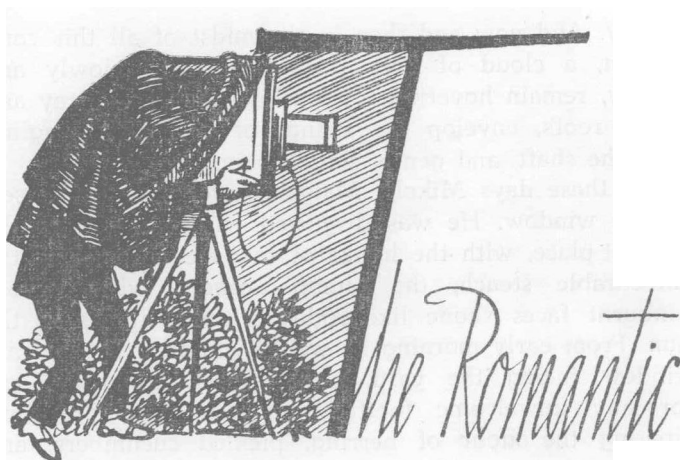


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The little house in which the Laicene photographer Mikelis Maigais had his workshop stood in the very market-place. Its windows looked out over the muddy, unpaved square framed with garbage heaps and centred about a water-pump that was protected by a ramshackle wooden shed. On market day, peasant carts from Kurzeme, laden with curds, and groats, and live piglets, would range themselves just outside the photographer's windows. And there was one particular cart heaped high with cracknels over which their owner would sometimes tread heedless of his boots, offering his goods in a tireless, creaking voice. One of the shafts stood propped against the vehicle, and from its top dangled some strings of cracknels for everybody in the market-place to see. Hunks of pinkish meat, hung up and strung up, and piles of carrots and unripe cabbages glistened all round. The squealing of piglets, the cackling and quacking and gagging of hens, ducks and geese filled the air. Everywhere people were scurrying about, quarrelling

noisily. And now and then in the midst of all this commotion, a cloud of grey dust would rise slowly and calmly, remain hovering for a while above the grey and green roofs, envelop the strings of cracknels dangling from the shaft, and gently settle again.

On these days Mikelis Maigais never showed himself at the window. He was disgusted with the filth of the market-place, with the hunks of raw meat, the dust, the unbearable stench, the plump farmers' wives whose sunburnt faces shone like ruddy autumn apples in the sun. From early morning he would withdraw to the only window facing the yard, nervously straining his ear for any unwelcome footfall, his sensitive nose anticipating the odour of herring, pickled cucumbers, and piglets.

"Phew! How prosaic and ugly this world is!"

Through the window, or rather, half-window that looked out upon the yard he could see the river flowing right past his house. Sluggishly, noiselessly it glided by like a broad stream of molten lead. Sometimes a battered kettle or some other discarded kitchen utensil would float by near the bank. Just opposite, on the far bank, loomed a steep barren hill crowned with an old, gnarled lime-tree. All day long a flock of geese swam about in the water below—little glittering white dots against the grey background of the river bank. Sometimes a solitary carter would strain up the hill, raising a yellowish cloud of dust that trailed reluctantly after him.

Maigais felt lonely, and hot, and bored. . . .

Usually he would sit in the other room by the table dozing or, if he stayed awake, gazing at the photographs that were arrayed before him. But this morning he did not even glance at them and just sat there, his eyes riveted on the opposite bank where a little to one side the estate park sloped down to the water's edge. Now and

then something white would gleam among the green foliage of trees and bushes. Then Maigais' moustache would quiver, his lips would twitch, and a strange light would flit across his face.

He was waiting for midday, when he was to cross over to the estate to take some photographs. That gleaming white object, he knew, was the young mistress there. Perhaps, consumed with impatience, she was looking out for him. . . . Mikelis Maigais went hot in every limb at this thought. The big toes of both his feet grew numb, his scalp tingled as though touched by a hard brush, and the hair on his head moved and fluttered as though ruffled by a breeze. Leaping to his feet he paced twice up and down the room, then dropped back into his chair, cupped his head in the palms of his hands and turned his inflamed eyes upon the water, dazzled by the reflected glitter of the sun that grew brighter every minute.

It was three days now since Mikelis Maigais had been summoned to the estate to take pictures. For three days now he had been sitting by this very window, his look fixed upon the green park on the other side. At night he could find no sleep because of the dreams that haunted him, and if he did drop off for a moment, he saw visions of the young mistress in her white dress, with roses in her hair. To put it in a nutshell, Mikelis Maigais was in love.

The first symptoms of the disease had appeared as far back as five years ago, when Maigais had only just settled down in Laicene, and the young Miss still wore short skirts and climbed the apple-trees in the park together with the boys. But at that time it was no more than a faint glimmer of emotion. The fire of true love had sprung up since that foolish incident with Long-haired Dore.

Dore was the daughter of a local farmer and had come to Maigais one day to have her picture taken. God knows why Maigais had taken a liking to her, but he did. He saw full well that she was lean and lanky, with mousy hair, and a slight cast in her left eye, but he liked her, and that was all there was to it. So on the following Sunday he bought a pound of sweets and half a pound of chocolates and, putting the sweets in his breast pocket, and the chocolates in his trouser pocket and pulling two strands of hair across his forehead from under his slouch hat, ventured out to the dancing floor nearby, which for some unknown reason was called "the hill." But in vain had he trodden the muddy road, and in vain had he spent half a ruble on sweets and chocolates. Before he reached the cord enclosing the dancing floor, he stopped rooted to the ground and remained thus transfixed for more than half an hour gazing in front of him. What was it he saw? His eye had at once fallen on the very lady of his choice. Standing on a hillock she towered up like a maypole, a head and shoulders taller than everybody else, and she was eating a pastry that she had taken from a huge tin tray, whereon lay plenty of similar delicacies, in addition to three bottles of fruit water, a chunk of the famous Laicene sausage, a glass with a chipped brim, and a knife with half a handle. All this rested upon the hands of a farm lad with a bushy black moustache and an impressive tuft beneath his lower lip. Another lad was racing across the dancing floor, his tongue hanging out, with a bottle in either hand, and two under each arm, while a third young man was standing at the buffet, rummaging his pockets for something, and casting desperate glances at the young lady on the hill. And she was smiling an all-embracing smile, smiling at the one whose pastry she was eating, and at the one who was trotting along with the bottles, and at the one who was darting looks at her from the

buffet, and at everybody else into the bargain. It was then that Mikelis Maigais understood in a flash the true nature of Longhaired Dore's love. Like a broad and shallow stream it flowed along taking in anybody who happened to be in its course. And presently Maigais turned on his heels and sat down under an alder bush on a damp knoll, and wept eating his own sweets and chocolates.

Ever since that day he had had a hatred of all peasant girls with their swarthy complexions, and large coarse hands, and idiotic attire. And his love of the young lady from the estate grew more ardent accordingly. At every encounter he would greet her and in her smile find confirmation of the fact that his love was not unrewarded. Only women of the upper classes, he believed, possessed that innate sense of beauty that manifests itself in the perfect fit of clothes, in their hair style, deportment, and smile. None but the daughters of the gentry could appreciate Spielhagen's and Ebers' novels, and the poetry of the decadents, and enjoy the subtle delight which springs from the magnetic attraction between two hearts. Moreover, these young ladies knew the song about the two royal children, and were apt to elope with their beloved...

*"Sie mußten beide sterben, sie hatten sich viel zu lieb,"* he recited, with <sup>tears</sup> welling in his eyes.

Yes, he could see, as though it were painted on a canvas before him, all that was going to happen during his visit to the estate. The landowner's family would group themselves outside the arbour—"he," and his lady, and "she," and all the rest of them. "He" would turn a severe eye on the photographer—his one good eye, while the glass eye went straying somewhere beyond the roof of the barn. And he would sense a secret between his daughter and that man, a secret between his offspring of knightly descent and the Laicene photographer! What

a scandal! But he, Maigais, would pretend never to suspect the old man's anger. He would leave his camera and approach the group with a bow, then turn the young lady's little face towards the light, lift up her chin, and his eyes would delve into hers.... Ah! He leaped up and dashed twice across the room. One look would be enough. They would both understand. It would hold all their mutual feelings, it would intimate where they were going to meet in the morning, and where at night, and how, if need be, they would elope—whether along the Daugava River by boat, or by railway to America or Paris, or to Janiški in a Lithuanian van....

Somebody was fumbling with the door that led into the market-place. If there was anything he could not have endured at that moment, it was to be interrupted in his romantic day-dreams. He snatched up his camera and other implements and rushed headlong to where the boat stood moored at the river bank. The boatman, whom he had hired well in advance, was sitting on a stone by the river, biting reluctantly into a huge chunk of the greyish kind of loaf they called "white bread" in this locality. Maigais shouted to him as he hurried towards him. The man slowly pushed his bread into his pocket, glanced at his own shadow, and trudged heavily down the stony bank.

"You're early," he growled blowing out his moustache.

"Come on, get going!" Maigais urged him, seating himself in the boat with his camera wedged between his knees.

Slowly, as though testing them, the boatman dipped first one oar into the water, then the other, pulled them out again, and, screwing up his eyes, watched the silver drops trickle back into the river. Then he took his seat, shifted himself into position, spat on his palms and

slowly began to row. Almost imperceptibly, the boat slid away from the bank.

Maigais gritted his teeth with exasperation. He lurched forward in a grotesque curve as if thus to accelerate the unbearably slow progress of the boat. But the boatman blinked lazily at him through eyes screwed up either against the glaring sun, or for some other reason, and stared as though set on counting the dots on the young gentleman's fashionable tie. And Maigais realized that he could no more hurry this man than hasten the course of the grey, slow-moving river that was rolling past like molten lead. Not a breath of wind, not a ripple. A raft was floating at a snail's pace along the opposite bank. At one end sat a little Polish peasant wrapped in a little fur-coat, barefooted, bare-headed, swaying as he moved his huge, creaking pole. A pair of small, bleary eyes gazed from his red face with an expression of despair at his futile job, for the grey river kept slowly turning the raft bankwards. And from a little straw shelter on the raft came at regular intervals a deep, hoarse voice: "Left... left."

Maigais buried his head in his hands and looked back at Laicene. The receding stony bank was sinking lower and lower, the little houses of the little town seemed to dwindle and flatten into it. Neither the dirt of the town, nor its stench could be felt at this distance. The grey and green roofs gleamed vaguely in the sunshine. A sultry, heavy weariness had settled upon the whole world, out of which Longhaired Dore would occasionally rear her lean figure with her mousy hair, and with a broad smirk on her tight-lipped mouth.

Maigais jumped ashore before the boat had touched land, and with a "Wait!" to the boatman trotted uphill along the park enclosure. The scramble up the steep slope added to his excitement, took his breath away, and the sweat came pouring down his brow. When he



had passed through the gate between the gardener's house and the ice-cellar that led into the yard, he stopped for a moment to catch his breath, and to straighten his necktie. Then he mopped the sweat off his face, arranged a strand of hair on his forehead and staggered up the path that led to the large front door of the manor house.

A huge shaggy dog leaped over the fence, its ugly jaw drooping, its slimy tongue lolling out, and sniffed at Maigais and his camera. Then, indifferently and almost reluctantly, as though performing a distasteful duty, it calmly bit into the photographer's leg just below the knee, and with equal indifference proceeded to chase the hens across the yard.

The owner of the estate, reclining in a wicker chair on the verandah, was reading the *Düna-Zeitung* about the rules of rabbit hunting. Startled by the chase, he raised his head angrily. Apparently, he took Maigais with his camera for a hurdy-gurdy man, for he waved his newspaper at him as though to drive away a fly and cried in an irritated voice:

"No, no! Please, don't make a noise!"

Whereupon he completely disappeared behind his paper. Maigais summoned up all his courage, cleared his throat and took a few steps towards the verandah.

"Excuse me, Sir, but I have been asked to... I have come at your special request..."

"Whose request?"

Maigais began to explain himself, keeping one eye on the windows, and the other on the hedges—would he catch the white gleam of a dress? But he did not. She must have hidden herself, poor girl, overcome with joy and shame.

At last the estate owner understood, nodded his head to indicate the fact, put aside his newspaper and descended the verandah steps.