

*Vilis Lacis*

**THE  
FISHERMAN'S SON**



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*Vilis Lacis*

**THE FISHERMAN'S SON**



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ВИЛИСЛАЦИС

# СЫН РЫБАКА

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО  
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
Москва 1954



VILIS LACIS

**THE  
FISHERMAN'S SON**

A NOVEL



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## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

*The Fisherman's Son* was begun by me in 1932 and finished in 1934.

I wrote it in Rinuzhi, a small fishing village situated right on the estuary of the Western Dvina, where I then lived, earning my living as a docker in the port of Riga. I only had the nights and the hungry days of unemployment for literary work. I wrote of my own experience, putting down what I saw with my own eyes. Since however I was trying to create images through the medium of words, I naturally had to select, endeavouring to bring out what was typical in each situation and character.

As soon as *The Fisherman's Son* appeared in print the prototypes of the characters were found in many a fishing village. There was an Oscar in almost every hamlet; Theodores could be counted by the dozen, and a certain prominent fish-dealer, recognizing himself in Garoza, the exploiter of the fisher-folk, actually tried to sue me for libel. From this the conclusion is inescapable that the persons and events, the very fate of the fisherman, mirrored in my book are to a certain extent typical of pre-Soviet Latvia.

Plenty of faults and imperfections may be found in the book, and undoubtedly much has been left unsaid. But the author trusts his readers will bear in mind the

fact that it was written under a reactionary bourgeois regime, when the slightest manifestation of progressive thought was ruthlessly hunted down, and one only dared to speak under one's breath.

At the present time, when the people of Latvia are building a free happy life as members of the great family of fraternal Soviet peoples, the life of the fisherman has also radically changed. That of which Oscar Kļava and all honest people dreamed has become a reality. Exploiters like Garoza, political climbers like Piķieris are no longer to be found on the Latvian coast. There is nothing left for adventurers such as Brother Theodore to do in the fishing villages. Fish-curing plants and canneries are springing up everywhere; the fishing-fleet gets bigger every day, the well-being of the fisher-folk, like that of the whole population of the Soviet Republic, is increasing yearly.

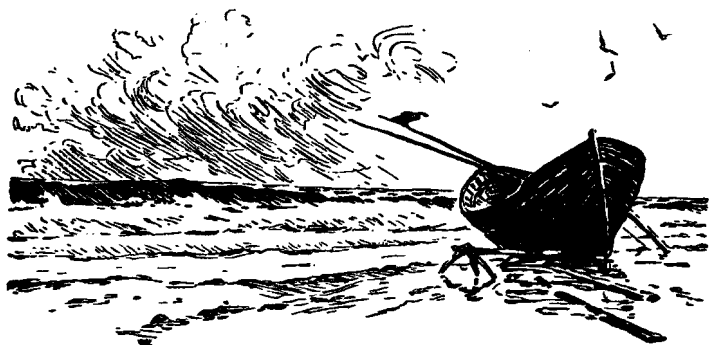
The year 1953 saw the end of my work on a new novel—*The Village on the Coast*, treating of the life and work of the Latvian fishermen, of the birth and development of the new Soviet individual, the toiler of the sea, its lawful master. In this novel Oscar Kļava, Anita, and other characters from *The Fisherman's Son* are shown at a further stage of their lives. But, though *The Village on the Coast* is in reality a development of the theme underlying *The Fisherman's Son*, it seems to me that the two novels may be read also as independent works depicting the life and fortunes of the characters during quite different periods.

VILIS LACIS

# PART ONE







## Chapter I

### WINTER

#### I

The fishing village of Zvīņas\* is situated on the Vidzeme shore of the Gulf of Riga, not far from the bank of the little river Zāļupe, and sheltered from the fierce sea winds by a ridge of dunes. A narrow winding path threads its way among the twenty-four homesteads, and separates them from one another. The roofs of the houses are either thatched with moss-grown reeds, or tiled, and the one house with a roof of red sheet-iron stands out conspicuously among them. It has an attic storey, a verandah, and a balcony: the blue sign, with a sugar cone and a sliced loaf daubed on it, adorns the entrance

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\* Note—In Lettish names, ā=a in *father*, c=ts, č=ch in *chip*, ē=a in *fare*, ģ=dy in *did you*, ī=ee, j=y in *yes*, ķ=ty in *met you*, ļ=lly in *will you*, ņ=ny in *can you*, ŀ=ri in *curious*, s=s in *so* š=sh, ū=u in *rule*, and ž= s in *pleasure*.—Ed.

to the shop of Banders, the most prosperous inhabitant of Zvīņas. Tar, netting-cord, corks, boot-soles, soap, sweets, tobacco, and even certain groceries may all be obtained in the shop. Men can always find something here to slake their thirst, and women can gossip to their heart's content. Banders's shop is the very heart of the fishing village—all the latest news and rumours reach it and spread from it to all the houses with amazing rapidity.

Farthest of all from the sea stands the house of old Dūnis, all by itself at the very edge of the village. Like the other houses it is low, with a drooping reed-thatch and small windows; a covered cattle-yard adjoins it on the northern side, and a little further off are a shed for fishing tackle, a bathhouse, and a smoke-house for curing fish.

Nearest to the dunes is the house of the fisherman Kļava, which is just as dilapidated as Dūnis's. Its spacious yard is separated from the road by a wattle fence of osier twigs, and behind the house stretches a shallow pool. Only thirty years ago it was a tiny bay, but it is now cut off from the sea by dunes. In the autumn, when the western winds propel huge masses of water into the gulf, it again joins up with the sea. A few lilac bushes and sickly birch-trees grow on its sides, but there is not a single fruit tree to be found in Zvīņas. Further north, on a rising of the land from which the whole village can be seen, stands a small house without any out-buildings whatever. It was once the home of the widow Zālītis and her daughter Zenta.

This quiet corner is inhabited by a sturdy race of fishermen. A few years ago events took place which disturbed the peaceful current of everyday life, and the news of these events spread far beyond the limits of the village.



The first Sunday in January after Twelfth-tide, Oscar Kļava harnessed his horse to the sleigh and drove his younger brother Robert, a student of the Economic Faculty, to the little town, from which there was a bus-route to Riga. They were accompanied by the shopkeeper's daughter Anita, who was also returning to the capital, for she was now in the top class of middle school. The whole way Oscar listened in silence to the animated conversation going on between his brother and Anita Banders. They were looking forward joyfully to the pleasures awaiting them in the town—new plays, exhibitions of pictures, and the long-promised concerts of Henri Marteaux. After their fortnight's holiday the young people were eager to plunge into the bright-hued torrent of town life.

Oscar did not like the town. It soon made him tired with its violent contrasts, incessant din, movement, and events, and the wide choice of pleasures, the variety of human sufferings in it, oppressed him. Even when there on business he could never stay more than two or three days. Vaguely disquieted, he would hurry back to the still realm of the dunes, where people breathed the salt air of the sea all day, and fell asleep to the soothing hum of the surf. Here there was nothing to oppress him, and he took up his daily work cheerfully—casting his nets, repairing the seine, and helping his father and sister in the smoke-house.

Oscar was twenty-five years old. He was quieter and more taciturn than the other lads, but he held his head high and bowed it before no man. When Oscar walked about the village his big red hands hung heavily at his sides, as if burdened by their own strength, and he could be distinguished from afar off, even in a crowd of fishermen, by his enormous height. Broad-shouldered, his face sunburned and weather-beaten, fish-scales clinging to his