



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

2009



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Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

Lithuania

Kvėpavimas į marmurą (2006)

Breathing into Marble

Publishing House **Alma Littera**

Biography

Prose writer, playwright. She was born in Vilnius (1976). In 1996, she enrolled in Vilnius University's Department of Extramural Studies to study Lithuanian language and literature. She worked as a freelance publicist for the magazine *Malonumas* (1998-1999); as a language editor for *Genys*, a children's magazine (2000); and as a journalist for *Tavo vaikas* (2001-2002). In 1993, she won the Republic competition of young philologists, and the next year the First Book competition granted by the Lithuanian Writers' Union. In 2001, her play *Liberate the Golden Foal (Išlaisvink auksinį kumeliuką)* was the winner of the competition organized by The Fairies Theatre and Vilnius University. In 2003, *Liučė Skates (Liučė čiuožia)* a prose and plays selection, ranks among the 12 best books of the year, and her play *Liučė Skates* is staged by the National Youth theatre. In 2004, *Liučė Skates (Liučė Čiuožia)* won first prize in the Berlin international play fair *Theatretrefen*.

Synopsis

Breathing into Marble is the fourth book by this young and talented writer. But it is her first novel, a well-crafted drama about painful solitude, family, and relationships between men and women. Černiauskaitė writes about yearning, about unused intimacy, about the gentleness and burdens of the heart, about life, about something from below and something from above. This is the story of a young mother named Isabelle and her young family, which adopts a six-year-old boy who is unable to put down roots in his new family and kills his ill adopted brother. It's a romantic ballad with the plot of a thriller. It's a deep psychological analysis of a mother's soul. It's a book full of so many strong emotions that it is almost possible to feel the characters breathing down your back while you read it.

Kvėpavimas į marmurą

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

Aukos

Į VAIKŲ globos namų teritoriją ateidavo lapė. Ne pro spragą pinučių tvoroje, o, kaip visi, pro vartus. Tarp kamienų lyg dažuose pamirktas teptukas šmėkstelėdavo šermukšnių spalvos kailis. Iš pradžių jie bijojo, kad lapė pasiutusi, ir uždraudė vaikams prie jos artintis. Sargas paspendė spąstus. Bet lapė ėmė lankytis kasdien, spąstus apeidavo, ir netrukus paaiškėjo, kad, nepaisydami draudimų, vyresni vaikai ją prisijaukino. Šitai sužinojusi, Beatričė leido ją šerti maisto atliekomis iš virtuvės.

Bet netrukus lapė dingo. Mažiukai, kasdien po vakarienės nunešdavę jai prie tvoros lauktuves – jei būdavo palankiai nusiteikusi, lapė iškišdavo iš lazdyno pašaipų snukį ir laukdavo, kol jie pasitrauks – neapsakomai nuliūdo.

Maždaug po savaitės sargas ją rado netoli kelio. Lapės kailis nebeliepsnojo, smūksojo samanose kaip paprasta pūvančių lapų krūva. Sargas paspyrė ir atvertė ją aukštelininką – šviesus krūtinės kailis sulipęs nuo kraujo, gerklėje sustingusi juoda pjautinė žaizda. Jis paslėpė dvėseną po žabais, vakare grįžo su sodininko kastuvu ir užkasė. Vaikams buvo pasakyta, kad lapė atsivedė lapiukų, ir daugiau nebeateis. *Kas atsiveda palikuonių, turi užmiršti pramogas, ir jais rūpintis. Žvėrys dažnai tai supranta geriau už žmones*, buvo paaiškinta vaikams.

Bet Ilja jau žinojo, kad viskas, kas prasideda kaip pasaka, anksčiau ar vėliau baigiasi gyvenimu. O gyvenime niekas netrunka ilgai. Kiekviena diena ką nors iš tavęs atima, o jei

gauni dovanų, tai tik tam, kad jas iš tavęs išplėštų. Tasai, kas šitaip žiauriai su jais žaidžia, smaginasi savo malonumui. Ilja žinojo, jautė, kad tasai yra. Jis pulsavo vaizduotės pari-
biuose. Kartais ateidavo į Iljos sapnus, bet niekada nevirsdavo
vaizdu. Pasklisdavo už nugaros kaip rašalo dėmė, ir pašai-
piai švokšdamas alsuodavo į sprandą – nuo jo ledinio kvapo
kūnas nueidavo pagaugais.

Ilja jo nebebijojo. Tik nekenė.

Sugražintas iš Puškų jis smogdavo kiekvienam, išdrįsu-
siam prie jo prieiti ir pažvelgti į akis. Ir niekas neturėjo teisės
klausinėti.

Iš vieno berniuko mainais už kramtomą gumą jis gavo
kišeninį peiliuką.

Lapė nespėjo atsivesti lapiukų.

Jis slėpė peiliuką, suvyniojęs į celofano plėvelę, parke, prie
pinučių tvoros. Pats taip sugalvojo. Paslaptis reikia laikyti
žemėje. Reikia jas kaupti juodai dienai. Ir laiku išsitraukti.
Nežinia kada ir kam jų prireiks, bet jos būtinos.

Ir dar – paslaptys paprastai būna baisios.

Praėjus ketveriems metams, lapę visi užmiršo. Dabar į
mišką už globos namų tvoros ateidavo jauna stirna. Ji buvo
patikli, ir, jei neįsigeisdavai per arti prieiti, leisdavo savimi
grožėtis. Jos naivios akys ir jaukus, lyg smulkiais lapeliais
nubertas kailiukas, liaunų kojų grakštumas, kuriuose lyg
nekantrus gyvsidabris staiga suvirpėdavo laukinė jėga – nuo
viso to Iljai užgniauždavo kvapą. Stirną suglumindavo bet
koks netikėtas garsas. Kryptelėdavo grakščiu kaklu – ir jos
jau nebėra, tik vos virpa užkliudytos šakos.

Ji buvo tyli ir skvarbi, ir tokia jaudinamai graži, kad
Iljai sukutendavo paširdžius, ir jis nevalingai sugniauždavo

kumštį, lyg laikytų jame peiliuką. Jis stovėdavo prie tvoros ir laukdavo, kol stirna išnirs tarp spindinčių liepos lapelių ir pažvelgs į jį gailiom akim. Jis žinojo jos valandas, lyg jie būtų susitarę. Bet laukdamas darydavosi silpnas, o stirnai pasirodžius taip sutraukdavo paširdžius, kad vieną sykį tai turėjo baigtis.

Jis negalėjo būti silpnas.

Vieną dieną Ilja išsikasė peiliuką ir išėjo. Grįžo tik kitą rytą. Paklaikęs ir tuščiomis rankomis, nuo kurių norėjosi nusiplauti kažką gąsdinančiai lipnaus. Upės vanduo neįstengė to nuskalauti, nors jis kruopščiai išsirakinėjo net panages.

Peiliuko Ilja daugiau nebelietė. Nei to, kuris liko upės dugne, nei jokio kito.

Kai po keleto dienų tarp liepos lapelių kyštelėjo stirnos snukutis, Ilja pravirko – iš pradžių tyliai ir skaudžiai, po to – vis garsiau. Bet tik jai. Stirna nesistebėjo, užjausdama uodė orą, lyg norėtų paragauti vaiko ašarų.

Po tos nakties Ilja ėmė laukti, kol pas jį atvažiuos.

LIUDAS atvažiavo po pietų, kai mažieji būna suguldyti. Vyresni globotiniai žaisdavo judriuosius žaidimus atokiau pastatų, kad neprižadintų miegančių. Auklėtojai palikdavo juos vienus, mergaitės išsibarstydavo po parką, berniukai spardydamo kamuolį stadione.

Ilja nebuvo iš tų, kurie susideda su visais. Jis turėjo bendražygių, su jais pavykdavo nepastebėtiems išsprukti iš saugomos teritorijos į mišką, kartais net iki upės, už plento. Bet dažniausiai veikdavo vienas.

Liudas paliko automobilį miške, ir iki globos namų teritorijos atžingsniavo pėsčias. Kieme priešais administracijos pastatą šurmuliavo penkiolikos vaikų būrys, dvi pagyvenusios auklėtojos šūksniais ragino juos išsirikiuoti po du. Liudas

sustojo už tvoros, iš teritorijos pusės dengiamas erškėtrožių krūmo, ir išsitraukė žiūronus.

Vaikai ruošėsi išskylai. Juos vedavo į nesraunų užutėkį, vasarą ten ant kranto priberdavo smėlio, o citrinos geltonumo plūdurai ženklino vietą, už kurios draudžiama plaukti. Nors maudytis jau buvo per vėsu, saulėtas rugsėjo oras tiko išskylai su patiesalais, kamuoliais ir badmintonu. „Eve–li–na, kur tavo kepurė? ! – šūkavo apkūni raudonplaukė auklėtoja. – Modestai! Mo–des–tai, kam pasakiau, aš daugiau nekartosiu! Ilja! Il–ja!.. Turėsime tavęs vieno laukti?“

Liudas sukľuso ir tol vedžiojo žiūronais po vaikų būrį, kol objektyvas užgriebė paniurusį veidą tamsiomis migdolinėmis akimis. Ilja sukiojosi atokiau, žabeliu stumdydamas akmenukus, ir tarytum dėsė. Liudas tuojau pažino išraišką, kuri iškreipdavo Iljos veidą prieš jam ką nors iškrečiant.

Kol vaikai nepatraukė prie vartų, jis skubiai nukurnėjo mišku link automobilio.

Upę Liudas pasiekė pirmas. Automobilį paslėpė atokiau, žemais krūmokšniais apkleistame keliuke, o pats įsitaisė ant pušimis apaugusio skardžio. Iš čia paplūdimys matėsi kaip ant delno.

Iškylautojai pasirodė po gero pusvalandžio. Jų spalvotos striukės sušvytavo tarp pušų kamienų, paskui dingo ir pasirodė jau apačioje, prie vandens. Liudas pakėlė prie akių žiūronus.

Jis matė, kad Ilja kažką rezga, ir tik ieško progos pasprukti iš bendro katilo. Viename paplūdimio krašte mergaitės patiesė kelis applotus, sukrovė krepšius su užkandžiais, sumetė striukes. Auklėtojos organizavo žaidimą su kamuoliu. Prašydama dėmesio raudonplaukė pliaukštelėjo delnais ir paragino vaikus susiburti arčiau jos.

Tada Ilja ir nėrė į švendres.

Liudas nukūrė skardžiu iš paskos, peršoko taką į paplūdimį, kuriuo ką tik nusileido vaikai. Netrukus krantą apaugę krūmokšniai baigėsi, apačioje sublyksėjo vanduo, ir nuo skardžio Liudas vėl išvydo paknopstom skuodžiantį bėglį. Ilgiau nemąstydamas jis nušliuožė šlaitu.

Ilja iš netikėtumo stabtelėjo ir atsigręžė.

Liudas sugriebė jį už alkūnės, surakino lyg replėmis. Ir šitai jį išdavė.

- Sveikas, Ilja, – neatgaudamas kvapo sušvokštė Liudas.
- Nu, labas...
- Kaip laikaisi?
- Gerai.
- Klausyk... mums reikia pasišnekėti.

Nieko daugiau neaiškindamas jis nusitempė vaiką pakrante, kur vėl prasidėjo brūzgynai, o vandenyje – švendrės. Jie nėrė į tankmę kaip vietos lizdui ieškantys paukščiai. Liudas nė akimirkai nepaleido Iljos. Jo veidas pakibo virš vaiko lyg orakulo rutulys – tarytum prieš kvosdamas jis jau ieškotų Iljos veide atsakymo. Šis pakėlė į Liudą akis ir klausimai sumirksėjo – jų rainelėse blykstelėjo sidabriniai grūduliai.

– Aš žinau, kad neseniai buvai pabėgęs. Naktį, – Liudas šneka lėtai ir aiškiai, nenuleisdamas skvarbaus žvilgsnio nuo Iljos. Bet šis nė nekrusteli. Jo akys juodos ir neižvelgiamos, lyg neišpurenta žemė.

– Tai tiesa? – kvočia Liudas. – Nesigink, aš žinau.

– Tai kam dar klausiat? – atšauna Ilja. Šaiposi, prisidengęs išdresuoto našlaičio nuoširdumu.

Vos tvardydamasis, Liudas sugniaužia jo smailą smakrą, ir sušnypščia:

– Tik nebandyk žiūrėti savo nekaltomis akutėmis... Sakyk, kur tą naktį buvai.

– Niekur, – kuo ramiausiai atsako Ilja. – Miegojau.

Galbūt jo akių juodžemyje slypi paslaptys, turtai ar košmarai, tačiau Liudas nežino, kaip juos iškapstyti. Jis stipriau suspaudžia Iljos žandikaulį, lyg grasintų per jėgą iškratyti iš jo teisingą atsakymą.

– Meluoji, žvēriūkšti... Niekio tu nemiegojai.

– Netikit, klauskit direktorės, – atšauna Ilja.

Ir staiga Liudas viską suvokia.

Kas slypi už Iljos nugaros, kas įkvėpė jam įžūlumo.

Su juo jau pašnekėta. Pažadėta neįduoti, mainais už tylėjimą. Gal ir dar kaip nors atsilyginta.

Liudas abiem delnais suspaudžia vaiko galvą ir papurto su tokia neapykanta, lyg ketintų sutraiškyti:

Dar sužinosiu, kad buvai dingęs – sumalsiu į miltus, supratai? Supratai?.. Ir staigiai paleidžia – Ilja lošteli ir vos išsilaiko ant kojų.

Mauk pas visus. Greitai!..

Juodžemis Iljos rainelėse net įkaista, jis kupinas tokios pat neapykantos, kokia kunkuliuoja perkreiptame Liudo veide. Kelias sekundes jiedu grumiasi akimis, lyg bandytų, kuris stipresnis. Ilja pasiduoda pirmas – o gal tik atideda kovą palankesniai momentui. Atsuka Liudui nugarą ir, susibrukęs rankas į kišenes, sparčiai nužygiuoja per aukštą žolę atgal pas vaikus.

Breathing into Marble

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

Translated from the Lithuanian by Jūra Avižienis – Aukos

A fox had been wandering into the grounds of the children's home. Not through a gap in the wattle fence, but through the gate like anybody else. Its fur, red like a paintbrush dipped in ashberry-colored paint, would flash between the tree trunks as it arrived. At first, because of concerns that the fox might be rabid, the children were not allowed to come near it. The guard set a trap. But the fox started visiting every day. It would walk around the trap and soon it became clear that despite the rules the older children had tamed her. With this in mind, Beatrice would let the children feed the fox leftovers from the kitchen.

But just like that, the fox disappeared. The little ones who used to leave it presents by the fence every day after supper were disconsolate (in the right mood, the fox used to poke its arrogant snout in through the fence and wait for them to move away).

About a week later, the guard found it just off the side of the road. The fox's fur was no longer blazing red: it lay in the moss like a heap of decomposing leaves. The guard gave it a kick and flipped it on its back. The light fur on its chest was matted with blood and a black knife wound on its throat had congealed. He hid the carcass under the brush and in the evening he returned to bury it with the gardener's shovel. The children were told that the fox had had kids and would no longer visit. 'When you have kids, you have to give up fun and games in order to take care of them. Animals often know this better than people,' it was explained to the children.

But Ilya already knew that all storybook beginnings end sooner or later when reality sets in. And in reality, nothing lasts for very long. Each day takes something from you, and if you're ever given anything, it's only so that someone can steal it from you later. The evil one who toys with you so cruelly is doing it for his own pleasure. Ilya was certain he felt it that he really exists. He flickered at the edge of Ilya's imagination. Sometimes he would enter Ilya's dreams, but never as anything concrete. His mocking presence would fill the room behind Ilya's back like spilling ink. His icy breath brought chills to Ilya's spine.

Ilya was not afraid of him. He simply hated him.

After they returned him from Puškai, he would smack anyone who dared to come near him or even to look into his eyes. And nobody had the right to ask any questions.

With a little boy he had traded a pack of chewing gum for a pocket knife.

The fox never had the chance to have kids.

He wrapped the knife in cellophane and hid it in the garden near the wattle fence. The idea was his own: secrets must be buried. They should be saved for a rainy day so they could be dug up at just the right moment. You never know where or when you'll need them, but you will.

And what's more, secrets are usually terrifying.

Four years later, everyone had forgotten the fox. Lately, a fawn had been coming to the woods behind the children's home. She was trusting, and if you didn't try to get too close, she would let you admire her. Her naïve eyes and velvet fur that seemed to be speckled with the tiniest leaves and the grace of her slender legs suddenly quiver when swept up by a primitive force like a boorish quicksilver would take Ilya's

breath away. The fawn, startled by the slightest unexpected sound, would arch her elegant neck and then she was gone, leaving only a slight rustling of branches.

She was quiet and shrewd and so astonishingly beautiful that Ilya would get a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach and unwittingly clench his fist as if holding a knife. He'd stand by the fence and wait for the deer to dart out from the lindens and fix her sad eyes on him. He knew her schedule as though they'd planned it. But waiting made him weak, and every time the fawn would appear, it would give him such a knot in his stomach that he knew this could not go on.

He would not be weak.

One day, Ilya dug up his knife and went out. He returned the following morning frantic and empty handed. He wanted to wash off something alarmingly sticky from his hands, but as thoroughly as he scrubbed, even under his nails, the river could not rid him of it.

Ilya would no longer touch the knife not the one left in the riverbed, nor any other one.

A few days later, when the fawn's snout peeked out through the linden leaves, Ilya burst into tears. At first his sobs were choked, painful, but they grew ever louder. He was crying for her. The deer was not surprised. She sniffed the air sympathetically trying to taste the child's tears.

From that night on, Ilya waited. He knew he was coming for him.

Liudas arrived after lunch when the little ones are usually put to bed for their afternoon nap. The older wards played active games farther afield from the buildings so as not to wake them. Their teachers let them go off by themselves. The

girls separated into little groups throughout the grounds and the boys kicked a ball around the stadium.

Ilya had never been one to seek the company of others. He certainly had co-conspirators to sneak off with into the woods, sometimes even up to the river past the highway. But usually he acted alone.

Liudas left his car in the forest, and headed for the children's home on foot. In the yard facing the administration building, a group of fifteen children was making a commotion, and two middle-aged teachers were hollering at them, trying to get them to line them up into twos. Liudas stopped at the fence; hidden from view by a sweet briar, he took out his binoculars.

The children were getting ready for a field trip to a dam. In summer, sand would be trucked in and lemon yellow buoys floated to mark the line beyond which it was forbidden to swim. Although it was too cold now to go in the water, the sunny September air was just right for a field trip with picnic blankets, ball games and badminton. 'E-ve-li-na, where's your hat?' shouted the overweight red-haired teacher. 'Mo-des-tas, Mo-des-tas, what did I say?' 'I am not going to say it again.' 'Ilya, Ilya, do we all have to wait for you?'

His interest piqued by the mention of Ilya, Liudas guided his binoculars through the group of children until they landed on a sulky face with dark almond-shaped eyes. Ilya was sauntering about somewhat further away; he was kicking some rocks around as if stalling. Liudas immediately recognized the look that distorted Ilya's face when he was up to mischief.

Before the kids headed out the gate, he sped off into the woods back towards his car.

Liudas reached the river first. He hid the car further away on a road overgrown with brambles and vines. He set himself up on a hill sheltered with pine trees. From here the beach was clear as day.

The field trippers appeared after a good half hour. Their brightly colored jackets flashed between the pine trunks. Then they disappeared and reappeared by the water. Liudas raised his binoculars to his eyes.

He could see that Ilya was up to something and was just waiting for the opportunity to make his getaway. At one corner of the beach, the girls had laid out blankets on which they'd piled up their jackets and picnic baskets. The teachers were organizing a ballgame. Clapping her hands for attention, the redheaded one was trying to gather the children closer to her.

That's when Ilya dove into the cat tails.

Liudas darted down the hill after him; he leapt across the path to the beach which the kids had just crossed. Soon the shrubbery along the shore gave way to the shimmering water, and from the hilltop Liudas could once again make out the fugitive in headlong flight. Without a second thought, he raced down the slope.

Ilya, surprised, stopped and stared.

Liudas grabbed him by the elbow and locked it with a vice grip. This gave him away.

'Hey, Ilya,' Liudas wheezed, out of breath.

'Well, hello...'

'What's up?'

'Not much.'

'Listen, we need to talk.'

Without further explanation, he dragged the child along the shore back into the thicket, cat tails flanking the water. They dove into the brush like birds looking for a nesting place. Liudas did not let go of Ilya, not even for a second. His face loomed above the child's like the oracle's crystal ball, as if he were already examining Ilya's face for an answer even before asking any question. Ilya raised his eyes toward Liudas and blinked questioningly, silver grains shimmering in his irises.

'I know you ran away a few days ago at night,' Liudas speaks slowly and clearly, not taking his penetrating eyes off Ilya. But the latter doesn't even blink. His eyes are black and impenetrable like untilled soil.

'Is it true?' demands Liudas. 'Don't defend yourself. I know.'

'Then why ask?' Ilya flings back. He sneers at Liudas, his well-rehearsed orphan sincerity his cover.

Barely containing himself, Liudas grabs the boy by his angular chin and hisses:

'Don't give me that innocent look of yours... Tell me where you were that night.'

'Nowhere,' Ilya answers calmly, 'I was sleeping.'

Perhaps there in the blacks of his eyes lie secrets, treasures or nightmares; however, Liudas does not know how to unearth them. He tightens his grip on Ilya's face, as if he were threatening to shake the truth out of him by force.

'You're lying, you little bastard... No way were you sleeping.'

'If you don't believe me, ask the director,' Ilya flings back.

And all of a sudden everything becomes crystal clear for Liudas.

All that lies behind Ilya's back. All that enthuses him with impertinence.

Someone's already spoken with him. Someone's already promised not to turn him in exchange for his silence. Perhaps they're even promising a reward.

Liudas grabs the child's head with both hands and shakes it with hatred strong enough to crush it.

'If I hear about you disappearing again, I'll smash you to smithereens. Do you understand? Do you understand?'

And suddenly he lets go. Ilya jerks back, barely balancing on his two feet.

'Go back to the others. Scram!'

Ilya's black eyes smolder. His hatred is as great as that contorting Liudas's face. For a few seconds they lock eyes, as if battling to see which is the stronger. Ilya looks away first. Or maybe he's just putting off the fight for a more opportune moment. He turns his back on Liudas and with his hands shoved into his pockets, he careers through the tall grass back to the children.



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Kvėpavimas į marmurą

Breathing into Marble

208 pp, 2006

Translated into:

Bulgarian (Bulgarian Translator's Union – Panorama)

Rights sold to (*Last Update – September 2011*):

Italy: H2O Editrice

Publishing House **Alma Littera**

To the attention of Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

A. Juozapavičiaus g. 6/2 – 09310 Vilnius – Lithuania

Tel. +370 (5) 263 88 77 – Fax: +370 (5) 272 80 26 – www.almalittera.lt

Contact: vaida.b@almalittera.lt

Agent: Valda Lovkiene – valda.l@almalittera.lt

ISBN: 978-9955-38-453-3

EUPL / FEP-FEE – Rue Montoyer, 31 – B-1000 Brussels – T. +32 (0)2 770.11.10

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