

*By Kristín Eiríksdóttir
Translated by Larissa Kyzer*

Evelyn Hates Her Name

but not nearly as much as she hates her room. Its peachy-pink walls, childish trinkets, and the view—a shopping center that swallows up people from the neighborhood and then spits them back out carrying bright yellow bags. At night, teenagers gather outside it to scream, fight, and suck face.

What a crap bunch of morons, she whispers to Ylfa, stroking her silky head.

They sit by the window and wait for the clock to strike nine. Then their mom will come home and Ylfa will go to sleep. Then Evelyn won't have to babysit anymore; she can do her homework and watch TV with her mom after that. They watch shows about cops or doctors or families in the suburbs, which merge into one in her head and are forgotten the moment the TV's turned off. But she likes sitting next to her mom in the half-light and letting drowsiness wash over her. That's the way it's always been, as long as she can remember. Night after night in the dim evening light in front of the TV.

Ew, says Evelyn suddenly, bringing her face closer to the windowpane. *They're peeing on that girl.* Ylfa lets out a sharp laugh.

It isn't funny, says Evelyn, shaking her head. Slavering idiots, she says, feeling her face go red. Three of them have cornered a girl and they stand there, their streams of urine glinting, while a group of teenagers watches. The girl lies motionless, like a heap of garbage, and Evelyn can see that her hair is long and blond, that her coat is pink.

When the boys are done peeing, the girl lies still for a moment but then stands up and walks away from the kids in the direction of Evelyn's apartment block. She grabs her binoculars from her desk and sees the girl's face and her grim expression. She realizes who the girl is, remembers that her name is Katrín and that she's in the eighth grade. They've never talked, but Evelyn has often seen her around school. She's got big breasts and is always the center of some fuss. The boys follow her around at lunch, try to pour water on her if she's wearing a white t-shirt, and she pretends that she's trying to get away, but everyone can see she loves the attention. She gives these little pig shrieks that echo throughout the hallways and when she's not being followed around, she's surrounded by other blond girls with incredibly thin, black eyebrows. She's never alone.

Ylfa starts to cry, asks when their mom is coming home, and Evelyn wants more than anything to put her to bed. But their mom wants to be the one who gets to tuck her in.

Once Katrín is out of sight, they sit down on the floor and play with some little teddy bears Ylfa got as a birthday present in the fall. The teddies are in an enormous jungle that's only visible to the younger girl. They swing in the branches and collect honey in a plastic pail. Ylfa sometimes mixes up whether they're collecting honey or gold, but that doesn't matter anyway. Then they hear their mom turning the key in the lock and Ylfa leaps to her feet, pounces at her like an adoring little dog and Evelyn thinks that if they were animals, they'd all be dogs. Her mom would be a Golden Retriever, Ylfa a pudgy Labrador puppy, and she would be that type of little dog with hair over its eyes—a Terrier. The old woman on the first floor owns a dog like that and sometimes, she and her sister get to walk him on the weekends. His fur drags in the slush on the ground and every now and then, he'll look at them, but they can't see his eyes, just his tongue, dangling happily.

Evelyn hates going to school in the morning, hates the yellow hallways and the smell of bag lunches—ham and cucumber and cheese—and she hates the way her chocolate milk slimes down her throat. Sometimes, she feels like she can make herself invisible—it's got something to do with the way she breathes. She opens her mouth and sucks in oxygen, holds it in her lungs as long as she can, until she's about to asphyxiate, then quickly lets it out and she feels like she's gone invisible. It helps, too, to sit all the way in the back of the classroom and only say what's absolutely necessary. To just answer correctly if the teacher asks her something, but never raise her hand. To just pass along the notes the other kids send around the room. The trick is reacting as little as possible, Evelyn concludes. People feed on reactions.

At lunch, she sits at a table with a few kids from her class—they eat in the same cafeteria as the high schoolers and passively follow along with their antics. Evelyn glances around for Katrín but doesn't see her anywhere. Someone recorded the whole thing on their phone the night before—the boys peeing on her—and now, everyone's seen it, the whole school, and Evelyn figures it's not a question of if it'll come out, but when. When the principal will walk into their class and give a speech, try to the best of her ability to explain how behavior like this is criminal, vicious, and that the boys will be expelled. That is, if they're identified, because no one'll dare

snitch. But it doesn't matter because basically everyone thinks that Katrín is a skank who deserves to be peed on. It'd be her fault if they got in trouble—they'd just been messing around.

The kids in Evelyn's class have seen the video on the internet and they giggle when they talk about it. Like there's something clever about humiliating another person because you're bored, thinks Evelyn, and she wants to tell them to shut the fuck up. It isn't funny at all, it's sad, but she doesn't say anything.

After school, she walks home with Sveindís, whose little brother is in the same preschool as Ylfa. They walk in silence and their snow boots almost disappear entirely in the snowdrifts. Sveindís is a head shorter than everyone in their class, has a lisp, chubby cheeks, and little dimples on the backs of her hands just above her fingers.

I feel bad for Katrín, she says out of nowhere, and then continues, I mean, I used to think she was a total slut like everyone, but now I pity her.

I'm sure she doesn't want to be pitied, says Evelyn, recalling the expression on Katrín's face.

But still, I do, too, she adds, and Sveindís smiles at her, relieved.

That evening, when her mom is done putting Ylfa to bed, she comes into Evelyn's bedroom with a large package. Sits on her bed and watches excitedly as she unwraps a pink coat, exactly like the one that Katrín was wearing the night before.

But mom, says Evelyn, because she knows that coats like this cost a fortune. It's made from a shiny material, fur-lined and electric pink with a tall black collar and lapels.

Hush now, says her mom. A woman at work who gave it to me, her daughter grew out of it. But the coat's still almost brand new—we got lucky, that's all!

Evelyn rushes to try it on. Looks at herself in the big mirror at the end of the hallway, sees that it fits perfectly. All of a sudden it occurs to her that this might *be* Katrín's coat and she turns bright red.

When she gets to school the next day, her heart's beating wildly, she's afraid that someone will notice that her coat is just like Katrín's. But no one says anything. She doesn't see Katrín anywhere at lunch and the day goes by without Evelyn hearing any mention of her. Many days pass this way until the rumor starts going around that she's changed schools. The principal

never comes into the classroom to find the guilty parties or give a speech about the moral obligations of teenagers.

Christmas break begins and ends and school starts again. It's as if Katrín never existed, as if no one ever peed on her outside a shopping center. Other videos of other depravities make their way from phone to phone in the middle school and little by little, Evelyn stops thinking about what she saw. At night, she sometimes sits and looks out the window with her binoculars. Watches from a distance who is kissing who, who is beating who up. One night, she sees a boy from the tenth grade pick up a rock and smash the window of a flower shop. The group scatters, the burglar alarm goes off, and Evelyn bursts into tears. As if the rock had hit her head, not the window of the flower shop. The cracks spider out loudly and the whole window explodes. She pulls the shade down over the window and huddles under her comforter, draws her knees up under her chin and cries herself to sleep.

When she wakes up, she still feels terrible—her belly is swollen and sore. She gets up and sees that the bedsheets are bloody, lets out a cry, and her mom comes into room.

There, now, she says. You're just a bit ahead of the curve, like I was. There's nothing wrong with that. She steers Evelyn into the bath, finds a sanitary pad and clean underwear, takes her pajamas and puts them in the wash.

I don't want it, cries Evelyn, like she's a five-year-old throwing a temper tantrum. Don't I have any say? I don't want it!

She disappears behind the shower curtain and her mom turns on the washing machine, goes back into the kitchen to make some oatmeal. It won't be long before she has to wake up the little one, but first, she wants to have a little talk with Evelyn. Maybe she should give her permission to stay home from school today. Her shift doesn't start until three and it's been so long since they've just sat and talked. There's never time for anything, she thinks and cuts up an apple to have with the oats.

The days get longer, the light comes crashing down, and everyone is pale and dazed. Evelyn is studying for her spring exams and her mom gets her friend to pick up Ylfa from the preschool and look after her until she gets off of work. Just for a few days, so Evelyn is sure to do well. She's such a good student—she usually gets the highest grades in the class.

I don't know where you got your brains from, her mom says sometimes, and Evelyn doesn't understand why she'd say that because her mom's not exactly an idiot. She is, for instance, a lot smarter than her homeroom teacher, who has dry gray curls on her head and an insufferable, jangling sort of voice. But her mom's often told her how she could never be bothered to study and didn't even finish high school, and that that's why she needs to work so much and they're always broke.

If I hadn't been such a juvenile delinquent, I'd have a good job and we'd go abroad in the summer, she says and Evelyn forces herself to study, even though it bores her to tears.

Not long after Evelyn's last exam, her mom goes to the annual work party. Her friend comes over to their house and they have wine, try on all the dresses in her closet, and do their makeup. Evelyn helps them with their zippers and their hairdos, braids her mother's long hair and twists the braid up into a big bun on top of her head. Helps her pick out earrings that match her dress.

When they're gone and Ylfa's asleep, Evelyn sits down in the living room and turns on the TV, but she shuts it right back off again when she sees that there's only some boring quiz shows on the schedule. It's 9 pm, but still light out. She goes into the kitchen, thinking she'll clean up. Her mom didn't finish her drink and Evelyn picks it up, sniffs the wine, and takes a sip. The wine is sweet and tastes better than she thought it would. She pours what's left in the bottle into the glass and takes it into the living room, flips through old photo albums. Looks at pictures of her mom when she was younger and of herself when she was a newborn. When the wineglass is empty, she feels her muscles relaxing, feels her thoughts drifting one into another, and she wishes she had more. Then she sits down next to the window in her bedroom and sees that there's no one in the parking lot in front of the shopping center.

Evelyn is bored. She's so bored that she wants to scream. Maybe the scream would cut through all her boredom and tear it to shreds. But she doesn't scream, she just sighs and rambles around the apartment. Washes the dishes and cleans the kitchen. Then she strikes a pose in front of the bathroom mirror and smears her face up against it, opening her mouth wide and looking at her uvula quivering at the back of her throat. Then she finds her mom's makeup and draws a line around her eyes with a black eye pencil, puts on mascara, and is surprised at her own

transformation. She lifts up her sweater and looks at her nipples—they're getting bigger and beckon, absurdly red, from her flat chest.

Ew, she whispers and drops her sweater. She checks on Ylfa, who's sleeping soundly. It won't hurt if she goes out for a moment. Ylfa never wakes up at night and she won't be long. No one even needs to find out, she thinks and then has another idea. There are some beers in the fridge and her mom definitely won't notice if she takes one.

A few minutes later, Evelyn is standing out in the parking lot with a can of beer in her pocket, her face mottled red and her heart pounding fast. She walks in the direction of the hot water storage tanks that stand above the neighborhood. The area around them is deserted and Evelyn remembers an old air raid shelter that she used to play around in the summer when she was younger. She's going to sit next to the shelter now and drink the beer, listen to a few songs on her iPod, and then she's going to go back home to Ylfa.

But after she's made her way through the shrubs and arrived at the air raid shelter, a concrete orifice in the ground, she sees a girl sitting on a boulder not far away, smoking with her back turned to her. Her hair is long and blond, and Evelyn is about to turn around, but it's too late. The girl looks over and she recognizes Katrín.

Hi, she says in a friendly voice and Evelyn walks over to her. I think I recognize you, says Katrín, peering at her. You're in the seventh grade, right?

Yeah, answers Evelyn quietly and sits on the ground next to her, takes out the can of beer, and opens it; the beer foams over and she hurries to drink the froth. Katrín laughs and asks if she can have a sip, offers her a cigarette and then asks if she's remembering right that she has some sort of weird name.

Evelyn, says Evelyn, totally crap name, I know...

No, I think it's pretty cool, says Katrín. It's definitely not a common name, though. My name's Katrín.

I know, says Evelyn and they fall into an embarrassing silence. Katrín passes her a lighter and she lights the cigarette, sucks on it, and coughs.

What school are you at now? she asks and immediately feels her face go numb. Katrín doesn't answer her right away, just frowns and looks down at the ground.

None, actually, she says to Evelyn's surprise. Katrín says she just stopped going.

At first, I always came here—left in the morning with my backpack and walked here instead of going to school. Or took the bus to the mall when it was too cold out. Then I realized no one cared and now I just stay home.

Didn't the teacher call your house?

Yeah, but my parents didn't say anything to me—they're too busy with themselves to ask whether I'm going to school or not. No one gives a shit.

My mom would go nuts if I even skipped a class, says Evelyn and immediately regrets it. Hurries to say something about how she wishes she could stop going to school at all.

I saw what happened, she says all of a sudden and then claps her hand over her mouth. I'm sorry, she adds. I saw from my window. Tears start running down her cheeks and Katrín looks at her in bewilderment.

You mean when those morons pissed on me? Everyone saw that. But why are *you* bawling about it?

Because it was so awful, sobs Evelyn. She's so ashamed that more than anything, she just wants to run away, but Katrín lays a hand on her shoulder, strokes the pink coat, and says she has one just like it.