

Lasix

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The room is small. Grey and in a constant twilight. The curtains are closed. All colour is tinged with a bit of black. Brian tries to keep the light out. Only once did he open the drapes: and there was the world, the sunlight making the room mercifully bright, more he didn't need to know. The room is enough. Everything he needs is at hand. The bed, the plush carpet, the ashtray, the TV, the bulletin board, and Chantal's stuff. This is Chantal's room. There are perfume bottles in the window sill, purses are lying in a pile up against the cupboard and bras are mixed in with socks in a wicker basket. Brian smokes a cigarette on the bed. He's watching TV and waiting for Chantal to come home. With his back against the headboard he fills the room with smoke. The cigarette burns quickly; he's pulling hard on it. The TV is on but the sound isn't.

It's already late, almost ten-thirty. She'll be here soon. From the moment she locks him in in the mornings, until the moment when he hears the key in the lock, he waits for her. She'll be home soon. Her arrival will be announced by the sound of nails on linoleum. Lasix is always faster upstairs. He hates the dog. From the first time he saw Chantal and Lasix together, he hated the dog. It's a deep, simple emotion with which he's quite pleased.

He's not following the soaps, his thoughts take precedence. Chantal will smell right away that he's done his best. He's been out of the room. When she kisses him, she'll notice that he's washed himself. That his hair smells of shampoo. His mouth of toothpaste. On the list attached to the bulletin board, shower has been crossed out. In the room all the jam jars are unused. She'll let him fondle her breasts.

He's not sure that that's her name. He calls her Chantal. Chantal. Because that's how she introduced herself. Every now and then he hears her answer the phone with another name. He never calls her, she's forbidden him. It's not important. The things that do matter he knows well, better than she herself.

He also doesn't know where she goes. Sometimes she's gone for a long time, sometimes short. Mostly somewhere in between. Thankfully, she takes Lasix with her. It's the only good thing about the dog, that he goes with her.

In the twilight of her room, her body has no secrets. He knows exactly what it looks like, how it feels and smells. He's proud of the fact that there's at least something in the world he understands. It may be a little thing, but it's more than most people can say.

He was nine when his mother locked him out for the first time. He was coming from school and was home at quarter to four. On the inside of the window of the back door was a note: the door will be opened at six. His mother wanted him to go and play with the boys on the street. Run around, come home with grass stains on your pants. Be a real boy, climb trees.

That first afternoon he stayed near the back door. Occasionally he'd try the latch, like a hamster that's been taken out of its cage and wants to get back in. That chews on the bars.

He didn't get angry. That first time he was just shocked. When six o'clock came, his mother opened the door as if there was nothing wrong. Inside he wandered through the rooms where amazingly everything seemed the same.

In time, he learned how he should look. Right before he was allowed back in, he'd stick his hands in the mud, and pull off his sweater, which he dragged over a nail for a snag. It never occurred to him to use the spare key, which he carried with him. That, he never would have dared.

It's not clear to him how long he's been here. The evening he jumped on the back of Chantal's bike and went with her, it was cold outside. He was allowed to warm his hands under her sweater. Their breath made clouds. Everything they said to each other was visible. Now it's warm. Too warm. When Lasix rubs along his legs, he breaks out in a sweat. He hates that. The short, stiff dog hairs that stay stuck to his legs. On everything the dog touches, something is left behind. Even on Chantal. He can taste when she's let the dog lick her face. Would Lasix also notice when he's kissed Chantal?

He just went along with her. Crossed the city sitting on the back. In his hand, a bag with his belongings. Lasix was in a basket on her handlebars.

This is a good house. When the dog is lying against the radiator and he's surfing the channels for an interesting TV program, when Chantal is here, when the door has been locked from the inside and there are enough cigarettes, when the bulletin board is free of reminders from her, when the deep-pile carpet is free of cookie crumbs and dog hair, and he's leaning on his elbow watching TV, he knows that it's good here. This is good, he'll think then, as he creeps up against her and carefully takes a nipple in his mouth. This is good, if only Lasix wasn't here.

It's a quarter to eleven. She should have been back by ten o'clock, that's what she said when she left this morning. It doesn't surprise him that's she's still not here, she often says things that aren't true. It's a game. A game in which she sets the rules. Sometimes he can't tell what's part of the game and what isn't. If she thinks that he's done something good, he can have her breasts. Her big, softly swaying breasts.