

NATALIA GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN

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Nina's paintings of empty books recall a collection of diaries that rest, chronologically untouched, on the bottom shelf of my library. Every January 1st, I set myself the goal of journaling. I fail; each notebook only contains around a dozen entries followed by blank pages. I find solace in the fact that true diaries are written not to be read, but forgotten - and what is more forgettable than that which was never written in the first place? Blood, tears and emptiness fill the pages of Nina's painted tomes, resembling our own expired almanacks.

The failure to complete my daily entries feeds my admiration for those who can commit to the task. The example of one of Britain's most celebrated contemporary painters immediately springs to mind. She does not know it, but a fan club gathers informally in the pubs of South London to discuss her very public private life, as compiled in four volumes of published blog posts. These gatherings differ only in the level of formality to those held in honour of Samuel Pepys, Britain's 17th-century diarist par excellence. An official society, membership to which can only be obtained by a rigorous selection process, exists to pay tribute to his memoir and memory. Such exclusivity makes sense; since there should be a degree of discretion to a club whose sole purpose is discussing someone else's most shameful secrets.

I flick through a shiny edition of Franz Kafka's posthumously published diaries. The introduction admits that the preeminent writer had intended to keep the subsequent stories private. "My last request: Everything I leave behind me...[is] to be burned unread", Kafka wrote to a friend in his final days. His reticence reminds me of a story Nina once shared about a diary she found lying in the middle of the street, belonging to a man who worked in the local store near her grandparent's home. In it, the man writes about his parents who won't get off his back; about his friends with whom he feels he has little in common; and about a beautiful girl who also works at the store. Nina gets excited when retelling the story, the discovery remains thrilling even years later. If the man had told her all of these anecdotes directly, maybe she would not have cared all that much, but the nature of the find and the format in which they are shared compelled her to treasure the journal ever since.

I imagine the man arriving at the store the next morning, searching for his notebook and the dawning realisation of its misplacement. Where is it? Where is it?! Perhaps he has blown his chance with the beautiful girl. Perhaps the diary fell from his bag the night before when closing the store. Perhaps she found it on the floor that morning. He fears she might have read the entries where he talks about her. He wishes he had never started keeping a stupid diary and swears to never listen to his sister again, since it was she who has recommended journaling to help with his stress. "Writing Therapy" she had called it.

I think of the self-publishing painter, Pepys, Kafka and the man from the store. Unlike them, I cannot summon the determination it takes to commit to this daily routine. I find comfort in Jorge Luis Borges' warnings against an excess of introspection. In his story *The Library of Babel* (1941), he tells of how a prophetic book exists for each person. Finding one's book would be the ultimate triumph, but the search is almost impossible, as the library of lives appears infinite. He describes those whose obsession with such a quest ultimately abandon their lives to it, fulfilling their pre-written destiny. Borges was ahead of his time in accurately predicting the horrors that were to come hand-in-hand with the cult of the self. It might be best to leave tomorrow's entry blank after all.