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A Dishwasher's Diary

Richard E. Kuykendall
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In this fictionalized diary of a minister-turned-dishwasher, Joshua Thornbee offers a glimpse into his internal struggle as he wrestles with feelings of unhappiness in his job and his marriage. He also begins to question what his faith means to him.

Richard Kuykendall, who lists Joshua Thornbee as his alias in the bio, traces Joshua's challenges in daily diary entries over the course of a year—the year after he left his position as a minister at a Christian church in California.

Part personal account of his life and part encyclopedia, entries begin the day Joshua starts working at the Iron Skillet. The personal reflections illustrate that, at first, he enjoys having a job with no pressure and no responsibility, as he considers it a welcome change from the ministry. But by mid-year he grows bored of the job and his wife. Entries cover a wide variety of subjects, including faith, scripture, paganism, witchcraft, numerology, astrology, existentialist philosophy, and the history of saints, writers, musicians, and political figures.

Presenting the story through a diary has the potential to reveal Joshua's unique perspective and thought processes, and to allow readers to experience his trials along with him. However, the personal entries that hold the most potential to engage include few revelations about Joshua's life-changing decisions. Instead, they frequently gloss over major events and report ordinary details about what he ate for breakfast or the fact that he worked that day. Several simply state he had nothing to write about, or they repeat the same information presented earlier.

Key events and concerns that convey Joshua's backstory, as well as his innermost anguish, are told in Kuykendall's ten-page introduction, where he explains why he was unwilling and unable to continue preaching. However, Kuykendall's use of an alias for the diary, while framing the essence of the story in his own words in the introduction and postscript, is confusing and serves to distance readers rather than engage them. Each entry is also written using mostly the same short, simple sentence structure, creating a plodding pace, and the stream-of-consciousness approach results in a disjointed collection of ideas that lacks a broader context.

While Kuykendall does not go beyond the diary stage to present Joshua's story in a way that would be relatable and thought-provoking to a wider audience, his willingness to share his experiences with readers is admirable.

MARIA SIANO (October 16, 2012)

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