

# Mentari's Diary

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## Abstract

“Mentari's Diary” is a collection of diary entries of a girl living in Indonesia with her single mother and her older sister, starting from when she was twelve years until her early adulthood. Struggling financially, Mentari's mother decides to marry her oldest daughter to an affluent man in Taiwan. Soon after, her eldest daughter dies from childbirth complications, but Mentari doesn't know this until much later. “Mentari's Diary” meditates on the themes of internal conflict and self-discovery, as she learns, unravels and accepts the truth of her sister's death.

**Keywords:** diary, grief, self-discovery, Asian, femininity, bildungsroman, trauma, family, creative writing, arranged marriage

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## Mentari's Diary

### Mei 12 2012 Sunni and reining

Todei I saw my sister's weding

Mum say her husben from taiwan

Sis dress is veri pretti

Sis husben is old like uncle

Mum say sis will be veri hepi there

But why is my sis' smile kinda weird?

### Jun 27, 2012, cloudi

I heard my sis' voice

## Mentari's Diary

I miss my sis

Mum is calling sis

saying endure it

I heard sis is sobbing

Can't hear well

I ask mum after

Is sis sobbing?

Mum says sis is laughing

I tell mum I miss sis

## **December 31 many flowers in the sky**

Mum is happy

Sis gives us gift from Taiwan

My auntie says we are rich now

I don't know what rich is

But I think it's something good

Because mum is smiling

Sis gifts me new shoes, red shoes

Me, mum eat a lot today

Mum says it's also from sis

I think chicken is my favorite food now

## **February 10 2013 raining and red envelopes**

It's Chinese New Year

Many people come to my home

Mum gives many red envelopes to many kids

## Mentari's Diary

Mum say sis also give me red envelope

But mum say she will keep it for me

Many auntie and uncle that come to my home smile and hug me

It's the first time they smile at me

### **March 3, 2013, raining**

Sis call mum

I answer it

First sis is sobing

But she stop after i say hi

I think sis miss me

She must be happy to hear me

Sis ask me if i have enough clothes and food

I said my favorite food now is salmon

And mum buy many dress and shining ring

My sis laugh and she say to eat many food

I tell my sis I miss her

She said she miss me

She must miss me much

Her voice is sad

like broken radio

### **July 17, 2013, sunny**

It's my first day of school

I am nervous because i change school

My mum tell me my new school is english school

## Mentari's Diary

I am learning english and mandarin now

My mum say i need to learn proper mandarin

Because mandarin that we speak sounds different

And i need to learn english so i can be better than other

### **August 1, 2013, extremely hot**

I tell mum I dont want to go to school

My friend said my english is bad and my clothes is stupid

I hate everyone

Mum said not to worry about it and she call my sis

Mum's sound kinda angry

I dont know why she is angry to sis

### **September 18, 2013, rain**

Mum calls sis

She says something about new apple phone

Mum's tone kinda scary

I can hear sis is crying

Mum's tone is softer now

Mum said something about being pilial?

### **September 30, 2013, cloudy**

There's a parent meeting at my school

Mum's clothes kinda flashy, but mum looks happy

Some mums give my mum side eye when mum talks about her new phone

I don't know what's so special about that phone

## Mentari's Diary

But other mums also have the same phone

On the way back

Mum calls sis, she sounds upset and sad

Mum says that other mums are laughing at her clothes

Mum says she loves sis

### **November 11, 2013, bright candles**

It's my birthday.

Me and my mum decided to celebrate my birthday in a restaurant

I get to wear pretty dress, not as pretty as my sis' wedding dress, but still a pretty red wavy dress.  
With puff sleeves.

Mum ordered layered choco mint cake and invites my classmates

My classmate gave me many presents

I am happy

### **December 22, 2013, raining**

My sis calls my mom, maybe because it's mother's day.

But sis starts to cry and says she can't take him anymore.

I don't know why she is so unhappy there

People say that my sis's husband is kind and rich

She should be happy instead of crying

Right?

### **March 18, 2014, cloudy**

My mum tells me that sis is pregnant

Pregnant means there's a baby in my sis' belly

It means that my sis is going to be a mum

Mum said that she should check whether is a boy or a girl

She said something about getting rid of it if it's a girl

Does that mean mum doesn't want a granddaughter?

But aren't I and sis a daughter?

**May 10, 2014, no moon in the sky**

Sis calls mum and she said it's a boy

Mum looks so happy, happier than ever been

Is having a baby boy that good?

Mum said sis should ask for more money from her husband

Because she's having a baby boy

**May 11, 2014, cloudy**

Mum ask sis about her husband's reaction

Sis said he's happy and will send more money

Mum laugh and smile

Sis's voice is sad

Does sis don't want a baby boy?

**Augustus 17, 2014 hot**

It's Independence Day

Ms Tanya asks us to draw our flag and interpret the meaning of our flag's colours. It's easy. Our flag's colour is simple, red and white.

I wrote red is the colour of blood, betrayal, and pain.

White is the colour of sacrifice, purity, and selflessness.

When my teacher ask me to explain it

I don't really know how to explain it so I just cried

## Mentari's Diary

I feel sad for some reason

I don't know why

### **December 19, 2014, cloudy**

My sis will give birth this week.

My mom visit her to Taiwan

I haven't heard anything from Mum or sis

I hope I can hear some news from them soon

I am staying with auntie

Auntie keep telling me that my sis is very lucky

To have a rich husband who can give us money

And send me to a rich kid's school

And I and sis should be thankful to our mum

Because mum married sis off to a rich man

So we will be happy

### **December 20, 2014, Rain**

Auntie looked weird and she walks back and forth

When I ask about mum and sis

Auntie said she doesn't know

Auntie didn't look at me all day

Why?

### **December 21, 2014, Heavy Rain**

My mum came back, she's holding something that shaped like a vase

Her eyes kinda puffy and red

Mum went to her room and refused to come out

I don't know what happened

I don't want to know what happened

### **December 22, 2014, rain**

I tried calling sis, but she never answered my calls

Is she busy with her child? Will she forget me?

Mum came out at night, she grabbed my shoulder, and with tiger-like eyes, mum said something like, "Marry a rich guy so you can be happy," then mum laughs

I think mum wants me to marry rich guy

Is that why mum married sis off to a rich guy?

But sis cried every time she called mum. Does sis feel happy?

### **January 1, 2015, Dandelions in the sky**

Sis still ignoring my calls. I tried to call her for New Year wishes and tell her I wish her to be with us, safe and happy. I asked mum what happened to sis?

Mum said sis will not be able to pick up my calls because she is busy with her son. And I should try to understand her situation.

### **December 19, 2017, Artificial lights and baubles**

Found this book in one of my boxes. I thought maybe I should try journaling again. Reading my past writing makes me nostalgic. I didn't realise that I talked about my sis all the time. But, since mum returned from Taiwan, talking about my sis is like taboo. Mum always makes it look like she just bit her tongue and tried to hide the pain every time I mentioned sis, and avoided me. Since then, mentioning sis is like swallowing a thousand needles. I stopped thinking about her too, sometimes.

### **February 14, 2018, Cotton candy clouds**

Sam confessed his love for me; all eyes stared at me as an object of entertainment. I felt stacks of stones weighing me down when I said "no." My palms start to sweat, and my feet too. I ran away



from everyone. I tried to find an empty, unlit classroom for me to hide in. I feel exposed and naked for some reason.

Now I realised that sometimes Sam would steal glances, and he would smile after our eyes met. Then he would pretend that he didn't see me and walk away with his friends laughing and giggling with them. I feel naked. I sometimes look down to check whether I am wearing a uniform or not. I thought he was making fun of me. Maybe he wasn't?

Mum would be happy if she knew Sam confessed to me. There's no reason why I should turn him down. He's rich—way richer than us. I heard his parents are lawyers or something. He's good-looking, and he's not dumb like other boys. I dunno my own feelings. Feeling pathetic. I want to talk to Sis. Maybe she can give me advice on love.

### **February 15, 2018, Kinda warm**

My classmate swarmed me with questions from early morning, asking about why I ran away and why I rejected Sam. They said, "Mentariiii, why did you reject a cool guy like Sam?" "Sam is a good choice, you know..." Truly, I don't understand myself either. I just... I don't understand my own feelings.

Sam still smiles at me. I imagine that he would be in rage, or he would start spreading shitty rumours about me. I mean, I wouldn't blame him if he does that. It must have been embarrassing for him to confess in front of so many people, only to find the person you confessed to just ran away. If I were him, I am sure I would be embarrassed. I don't think I can go to school and walk past the girl who ran away from my confession.

### **February 17, 2018, Sunny**

Sam talked to me. He said, "Take your time, I'll wait for you. Do you wanna go on dates with me? Maybe we can know each other better." He sounded so confident; I wonder why? Should I go? If I go, mum will find out about him. What if mum finds out and she pushes me to date him?

I wonder why he's so adamant. I clearly rejected him in front of everyone. Shouldn't he feel upset? I don't even know if I love him or not. Moreover, what is love anyway? My best friends say that when you're in love, you feel a butterfly in your stomach, and everything about them just seems perfect, and they monopolised your mind. I don't know how I felt, but my heart beats anxiously fast. I felt I was to be hanged. Should I try to love him?

### **February 18, 2018, pinkish sunset**

Went on a date with Sam. I guess it went well? He has the demeanour of a gentleman. Opened the door, pulled the chair for me, asked for my opinion, walked at my pace, said "thank you" to the staff all the time, and he wouldn't let me carry my own bag; he said it might be heavy for me. Is that good? I don't know. When he carried my bag for me, I felt that I lost control of my own belongings. I usually reapply my lip balm every time I finish my meal, but because he carried my bag, I couldn't really reapply it because I keep it in my backpack. It felt weird. I am the owner of that bag, but I had to ask for my bag from him. It didn't feel right. I felt that accessing that bag was hard.

Mum also knew about my date with Sam. She didn't seem to be happy about it. I wonder why?

### **March 27, 2018, Cloudy**

Today was our third date. We went to play golf; it's a new sport for me. Sam promised to teach me how to play golf. He took the time to teach me how to play. I think the reason why Sam took me here is to get physically close to me. Or maybe I am just overthinking.

In every swing I made, I tried to hit the tee and the ball as hard as I could. I felt upset for some reason. Maybe it's because I realised the difference between me and Sam. The difference between our birth and blood. Somehow in every swing he emanated elegance, and if I didn't know better, I would say he was an aristocrat. Me, on the other hand, is full of misfits and shame. Shame because I realised the difference between our births.

Sam held my hands, and with his tender, naive eyes asked me to go out with him again. I asked him if he knew anything about my family, and he said that he doesn't care about it. Does that mean he knows? I didn't continue the question; I am scared of understanding which part he doesn't care about. Doesn't care about my background? Or he couldn't care less about who I am. Because I am just a girl to fill his boredom. But even so, I still said yes while hoping that I could feel the bugs flying in my stomach. I guess mum will be proud to know that I am dating a rich boy, right?

### **June 18, 2018, Sky filled with graduation cap**

We had a graduation party today. I am wearing a red kebaya that Sam gave me. To be honest, I don't think I look good in red, and something about the colour red makes me uncomfortable. But Sam already got it for me, so I accepted it. My mum seemed proud of me. I took lots of pictures with mum, Sam, and my friends. It's a day to be remembered anyway. I also met Sam's parents; they look kinda scary. Like typical strict Asian parents, who would spit on their son's girlfriend, and I do think that they disapprove of me.

**September 25, 2018, Hot**

Mum asked me about Sam. She looked concerned, and she wants to know how I feel about Sam, she thought that it's just a high school thing. I don't know why, but there's a hint of disapproval, but that's impossible. She should be happy that I have a rich boyfriend. Isn't that what she always wanted? Sam is a good person anyway. He gave me many things, just like sis' husband.

**December 25, 2018, blurry lights**

Sam invited me to Christmas dinner at his place. I didn't expect any warm welcome, but neither did I expect them to insult my mum. Sam's mother said my mum sold my sister off for financial freedom and social status. She said blood speaks louder, and you can't change your birth. I left after I heard that. What does she mean by that? Sold my sister? Why would an outsider know?

I asked mum about this, and as always, she avoided my question without even looking at me. Always keeping me in the dark.

**December 26, 2018, rainstorm**

I hate it. I hate that mum never tells me anything about sis. I hate that she always thinks that I am still a kid and would be a burden to my sis. Why can't I know more about my own sister?

After what Sam's mother said, I think back, and I clearly remember that mum is the one who forced sis to be with that old guy. "Endure," that's what my mum used to say to my poor sis. Now that I know what endure means, I know that she's not happy.

**December 29, 2018, tears intertwining**

I confronted mum. Clearly, what Sam's parents said about my sis has taken most of my brain activity. I couldn't think clearly after that.

Mum sat down and, while biting her lower lip, tears by tears streamed down her cheeks. We sat for what felt like hours. I clenched my fist until it became white to hold back tears, then a word came to my mind: sacrifice. I closed my eyes, and I welcomed the tears along with the pain in my chest. My mum held me close. Repeating words of apology. Then I realised it wasn't a vase. It was an urn.

After hours of crying, mum told me that she doesn't want me to be with Sam. She said my smile faded away. I don't live up to my name anymore, Mentari, which means sun. Mum said whenever I came back after meeting Sam, it seemed that my light had been sucked away from me. I have become an empty shell.

**January 1, 2019, Bloody blotches in the sky**

Sam took me to a fine dining restaurant. The taste of steak and the red bloody juice are nauseating me. I used to enjoy it so much, but now the sight of it makes me feel like I am eating forbidden flesh. Flesh of my kin in this fancy manner.

**January 2, 2020, Clear starry night**

I think I will break up with Sam. I can't continue living like this. Living a good life at the price of my sis's death? No. Aunt said that I am wasting her sacrifice if I end things with Sam. But if I don't end things with Sam, I am ending myself. The vine of guilt will strangle me to death; the thought of me enjoying a luxurious life with Sam is killing me. How could I ever be happy after knowing the truth? My mum sold her daughter to give us this lifestyle. Yes, I didn't ask for this lifestyle, but continuing means agreeing that my sis's life should be sacrificed.

**January 4, 2020, moon in daylight**

They say, "Find a rich husband, and all you need to do is spread your legs; find a rich husband, and you will be happy; find a rich husband, and you will only worry about what new bag to buy." Yet they never say, "Find a rich husband, and you will be lonely. Find a rich husband, and you wish you were dead every time you wake up in the morning. Find a rich husband, and people will judge you because they know you sell your body for money." It's just a type of lifelong prostitution with the same man.

**January 6, 2020, clouds like hand reaching**

Emotional scars are like a shadow; they stubbornly follow, and you can't seem to get rid of them. Because it's part of who you are now. Either learn how to live with it and accept its presence or be in denial so it will turn into a parasite and suck you dry.

I need to learn how to live with this guilt. I need to learn to accept the fact that my mother sold my sister so that she can live in material riches, and I can have a better social standing. But all those calls my sis made in my old diary—none of them were happy calls. Those calls were her distress calls, her way of asking for help. Either I was too blind, or I turned a blind eye to her calls.

**January 7, 2020, stairs-like-cloud**

I broke up with Sam. Never felt more alive. I've been lying to myself all along. Forcing myself to believe that I am in love with him. In reality, I just want to be someone like my sis. Someone useful for mum.

**December 24, 2020, Streaks of lights in the sky**

There are many flowers in the sky; the red one fills my heart the most. It reminds me of someone.

They say when in labour, my sis lost a significant amount of blood that led to her death. Her husband disapproved of a c-section. He said it's better for his son to be delivered naturally, but does that make my sister's life weigh less than his son's?

The husband never stopped giving us money even after my sis died, but he wouldn't let us see the copy of my sister. The smaller version of my sis. Sometimes I ponder if he has my sister's beautiful eyes? Do his lips utter sweet and loving words? Does he take after my sister more or his father?

Sometimes I wonder the role that we, daughters, have in this world. Does it require the sacrifice of a woman, a mother with a dead daughter, and a sister with a dead sister for a son? I used to ponder on that, but I no longer think it cost the lives of three people for a son. The thought of that should be non-existence. I shouldn't measure a person's life. Each life is equally precious and irreplaceable.

But if I can be selfish, I just want to sleep on my sis's lap again.

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