

The Bookish Life of Nina Hill

By

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Solitude is independence.

Hermann Hesse

Independence is happiness.

Susan B. Anthony

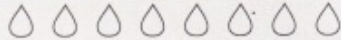
Happiness is having your own library card.

Sally Brown, *Peanuts*.

Today is the day

DATE Thursday, April 30

M T W Th F S Su



SCHEDULE

7>8 _____
8>9 _____
9>10 _____
10>11 Work
11>12 _____
12>13 _____
13>14 _____
14>15 _____
15>16 _____
16>17 _____
17>18 _____
18>19 Spin
19>20 _____
20>21 TRIVIA

GOALS
DRINK MORE WATER !!

NOTES

Finish diaphant



TO DO LIST

- Buy water bottle
- Get paperclips
- Stapler
- cat fd
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

+ BREAKFAST
Smoothy ☺

+ LUNCH
Subway?

+ DINNER

+ WORKOUT
Spin before trivia?

One

In which we meet our heroine and witness a crime of thoughtlessness.

Imagine you're a bird. You can be any kind of bird, but those of you who've chosen ostrich or chicken are going to struggle to keep up. Now, imagine you're coasting through the skies above Los Angeles, coughing occasionally in the smog. Shiny ribbons of traffic spangle below you and in the distance you see an impossibly verdant patch, like a green darn in a grey sock. As you get closer, the patch resolves into a crosshatching of old houses and streets and you have reached Larchmont. Congratulations, you've discovered a secret not even all Angelenos know. It's a neighborhood like any other, but it boasts a forest of trees, planted generously along semi-winding streets that look like they were lifted wholesale from a Capra movie, and were actually all planted at once in the 1920s.

The houses are big but not showy, set back from the streets with front gardens that make the streets seem even wider than they are. Even today, most of the houses look the way they always have, thanks to historical preservation and a general consensus that the whole thing is hella cute. The trees have grown into truly beautiful examples of their kind; Magnolias drift the streets with perfume, cedars strew them with russet needle carpets, and oaks make street cleaning and alternate side parking a necessity.

Larchmont Boulevard is the linear heart of Larchmont Village, populated by cafés, restaurants, boutiques, artisanal stores of many kinds, and one of the few remaining independent bookstores in Los Angeles. That's where Nina Lee Hill works; spinster of this parish and heroine both of her own life and the book you're holding in your lovely hand.

Knight's has been in business since 1940, and though its fortunes have risen and fallen over time, a genuine love of books and a thorough knowledge of its customers have kept it in business. It is like all good independent bookstores should be, owned and staffed by people who love books, read them, think about them, and sell them to other people who feel the same way. There is reading hour for little kids. There are visiting authors. There are free bookmarks. It's really a paradise on earth, if paradise for you smells of paper and paste. It does for Nina, but as our story opens she would happily go back to the part where we were all being birds, and poop on the head of the woman in front of her.

The woman was staring at Nina in what can only be described as a truculent fashion, jangling her extensive, culturally appropriative turquoise jewelry.

"I want my money back. It's a very boring book, all they do is sit around and talk." She took a breath and delivered the coup de grâce. "I don't know why the manager told me it was a classic."

Nina looked around for Liz Quinn, the guilty party. She could hear the distant rustling of washable silk as Liz went to ground in the young adult section. Snipe. Nina breathed in hate and breathed out love, flexing her fingers as she did so in order to make sure all the negativity dripped out onto the floor. She smiled at the customer. "Did you read it all the way through?"

The woman didn't smile back. "Of course." Not a quitter, just a whiner.

"Well, then we can't refund your money." Nina curled her toes inside their fluffy socks. The customer couldn't see that, of course, and Nina sincerely hoped she looked calm and resolute.

“Why not?” The customer was short, but she managed to draw herself up a couple of inches. All that Pilates finally paying off.

Nina was firm. “Because we sold you a book and you read it. That’s pretty much the whole lifecycle of bookstores right there. If you didn’t enjoy it I’m very sorry, but we can’t do anything about it.” She looked down at the book on the counter. “You really didn’t like it? It’s generally considered one of the greatest novels of all time.” Nina resisted the impulse to pull out her imaginary blaster and blow the woman's head off, and got a micro-flash of the bit in *Terminator 2* where his silvery head splits in the middle and waves about. Liz was always telling her to be warmer towards the customers, and remember they could go online and buy any book on the planet faster than Knight's could order it. Nina needed to make it a friendly and personal experience, so they liked her enough to give the store a) more money and b) more time than they had to give That Other Place. Independent booksellers call it The River, so as to avoid saying it out loud. But as Nina often thought, denial ain’t just a river in South America.

The woman made a face. “I don’t know why, the heroine sits around and gazes out of the window. If I spent all my time sitting on my butt pondering life I assure you I wouldn’t be as successful as I am.” She shook back her long blonde hair, with its carefully casual beachy waves, and had another thought, “If I don’t like the food at a restaurant I can send it back and get a refund.”

“Not if you’ve eaten it.” Nina was confident on this one.

“Can I get a store credit at least?”

Nina shook her head. “No, but may I suggest a library card? At a library you can borrow the book, read it, and give it back totally free of charge.” She forced a smile. “There are actually

two within walking distance of here.” She was sure Liz would be happy to lose this customer. Pretty sure.

“Walking?”

Nina sighed. “There’s parking at both.” She slid the book back across the counter. “This is still yours. Maybe you could try it again sometime. I’ve read it about twenty times, actually.” (This was a gross understatement, but Nina didn't want to blow what was left of the customer's mind.)

The woman frowned at her. “Why?” She looked the younger woman up and down, not unkindly, just trying to work out why someone would do something so strange. Nina was wearing a pale green vintage cardigan over a blue dress, with a Poe and raven cardigan clip across the collar. Apparently this clarified things for the customer, because the woman’s expression softened to sympathy. “I guess if you’ve got a boring life other people’s boring lives are reassuring.”

Nina stepped on her own foot and seethed as the woman dropped *Pride and Prejudice* carelessly into her fancy handbag, bending the cover and dinging the pages.

Two minutes later Liz appeared over the top of the graphic novels shelf. “Is she gone?”

Nina nodded, viciously tidying a pile of bookmarks and trying to forget the callous book treatment she had just witnessed. “You’re a craven coward, and wouldn’t even emerge to defend your second favorite 19th century writer. For shame.”

Liz shrugged. "Ms. Austen needs no defense. You did fine, and besides, I've never forgotten a long conversation I had with that particular customer about LSD and the boundaries of consciousness." She straightened some copies of *Roller Girl*. "I thought I was asking about her vacation, but it turned out she'd stayed home and gone further than she ever thought possible." She tipped her head down to peer at Nina over her glasses, her short dark hair barely touched with grey, despite the several careers she'd had, and the many cities and lives she'd been part of. "There was a long portion about the deep inner beauty of yogurt when viewed through the lens of hallucinogens that put me off Yoplait for life."

Nina regarded her carefully. "I find that story almost impossible to believe."

Liz turned and walked towards non-fiction. "I should hope so, seeing as I completely made it up."

Nina looked down and smiled. She'd never felt more at home than she did at Knight's, with the plentiful sarcasm and soothing rows of book spines. It was heaven on earth. Now, if they could only get rid of the customers and lock the front doors, they'd really be onto something.