

Becoming Gaby

offer her a gift? Maybe it was some kind of prescription. Like medicine. Something she was supposed to take to feel better.

Her finger hesitated, then turned the page. She began to read.

There is something that sets humans apart from every other living creature on this planet: imagination. Yet, many people never fully embrace it. Instead, they follow the same routines, day after day, without questioning where those paths lead.

Are you truly happy with the life you live, or are you simply repeating patterns others expect of you? Have you ever paused to imagine your own definition of a richer, more fulfilling life? This book is here to help you design the best life you can imagine.

Those words sent an unsettling feeling through her, like a sudden flash of lightning tearing through the sky, knowing the crashing thunder would follow.

She felt an urge to answer the questions right away, as if proving she was already living the best life she could imagine would quiet the rumbling unease inside her.

Was she really happy?

Her response came quickly: Was she unhappy?

She was a hard worker. Always had been.

In school, at work, at home, whatever landed on her shoulders, she carried it. She had never known another way.

Her work was appreciated. She never had to look for clients, they looked for her. Her husband never cheated on her, unlike some of the rich couples she cleaned for. She'd overheard more

than one fight over affairs. Bill was always home with the boys. He wasn't romantic, but he wasn't violent. They had a roof, food on the table. She was healthy enough to work every day and do what she did best. She didn't have a boss over her head. She made good money for someone with her education.

Plenty of people lived worse lives than hers.

She read a few more paragraphs. Every question forced her to dig deeper, and each time she tried to find answers that proved she was on the right track, doing exactly what she should be doing.

What was there to imagine, anyway? Life wasn't a ride at the fair. There were responsibilities. Work to do. Clients to please. Bills to pay.

She dropped the book and wrapped her arms around her knees, as if shielding herself from something she didn't want to face. Taking a hard, honest look at her life felt like the first threat in line, and she suspected the list of things that were wrong might be long.

She put the book back on the nightstand. It wasn't for her.

She was not a reader.

She was a cleaning woman.

Cleaning women didn't read.

Focusing on her billing was best.

She tried.

Hard.

But the guys in the kitchen were so loud she couldn't concentrate. It was like trying to thread a needle while galloping

on a horse.

Doing her bookkeeping tonight? Who was she kidding?

She shoved her laptop and papers aside.

Now what?

Watching TV in the living room was out of the question. Hearing them through the bedroom door pushed her patience enough as it was, never mind watching them while they drank like fish.

Her eyes drifted back to Dr. Lutterman's book. Her hand, almost of its own accord, reached for it, and before she even realized it, she was reading again.

Two hours later, she was still at it.

She looked at the clock and couldn't believe it: two straight hours spent reading. The lines on the page, the thoughts they unleashed, created a bubble around her, impervious to everything else, even the ranting of the three drunk guys across the thin walls.

To her surprise, she understood what she read. She'd thought it would be above her head, but no. The new ideas were strangely stimulating, even if each paragraph hit her like a head-on crash.

One thing stood out already, and there was no unseeing it: her life wasn't a dream life, and it certainly hadn't been designed by her imagination. In fact, her imagination had played as much a role in shaping it as ladybugs had at putting a stop to World War II.

She'd been sleepwalking through her life. Hard enough to taste the bitterness of knowing that most of her existence had

been carved out by others and by a childhood she never chose.

Her life was exactly what Dr. Lutterman called a robotic existence: her present mirrored her past, and without imagination, her future was condemned to repeat the same-old, same-old.

That much she understood. And she hated that she understood so well, because now the same determination that rose in her whenever she saw clutter in a home kicked in full force to tidy up the mess of her life. Except she had no clue how to do it. It was like stumbling upon a treasure chest and realizing she had no key.

Was imagination something you were born with? Was it tied to intelligence, like chicks were tied to chickens? Maybe she just wasn't smart enough. And if you had imagination at birth but never used it, did it rust away like the cars in Bill's scrapyard, turning more useless every year?

What if she had been born without that miracle faculty the doctor praised so much?

Still, the fire the book had ignited in her only asked for more fuel.

Each paragraph locked a gate behind her. What she was beginning to see, even through a peephole, could no longer be ignored. She felt like the women who first discovered washing machines: they'd gotten by without them, but once they knew such a thing existed, who would ever go back to scrubbing on a riverbank?

She knew something had to change. If only she knew where to begin.

It was thrilling and terrifying all at once, yet she felt a pulse of determination. She might lack education, but she didn't lack