

## Expectant Doubt

“If you could do anything, what job would you want?” is a question for your first-grader, not a forty-two-year-old attorney with two decades of experience but no answer.

And it gets worse.

The only thing that came to mind was, in fact, what I probably would have said in first grade: a professional dancer.

It just slipped out, and I couldn’t help but laugh at myself because who says that at this age?

But okay. I answered the question. We’ll move on, right?

Wrong.

My career coach looked at me expectantly through the screen—not because she was judging, but because she knew there was more.

I wasn’t so sure.

I closed my eyes, the weight of the question sitting heavy on my chest and the weight of my blank mind standing atop it, jumping up and down.

“I don’t know. Event planner?”

I shook my head. We ruled that out three months ago.

I’d started this journey because I wanted to not be a lawyer anymore. I had to believe there was something buried in a LinkedIn job description that would set me on the road to “not working a day in my life.” Yet every time I thought I found something worth exploring, I almost immediately felt a pit in my stomach at the idea of actually doing the work... including being an event planner.

Now I’m nearly six months in, and I knew a whole lot of what I didn’t want to do. In fact, I had an entire notebook filled with potential occupations—the physical manifestation of possibilities immediately becoming God, no.

Sighing, I leaned back on the couch, panic and hopelessness buzzing through my head in equal measure. This was why I'd been a lawyer for twenty years despite never feeling particularly invested in it.

What else would I do?

It's not that I hadn't thought about it before. The question was always there, like a whack-a-mole, popping up quickly and leaving just as fast before I could even think about lowering the mallet.

"What if there isn't anything?" I asked her.

Fortunately for me, my career coach was more of a career therapist, so she wouldn't let me get away with that.

"Let's look at this in a different way. What are the things you enjoy doing?"

The question felt lighter. Still heavy because I understood the meaning behind it. I mean, I could see the mole half out of its hole, ready to spring into action—staring at me with a knowing smirk.

No. I'm too deep into this to not at least take a preemptive swing.

"I like to fall down rabbit holes. To research everything. Too much. Possibly to a problematic degree."

She laughed because she'd witnessed it firsthand. But that wasn't the full picture, and we both knew it.

I searched the room, hoping something in there would remind me of what it was I enjoyed. Because apparently I needed visual aids for my hobbies now. My eye caught on the wall covered in shelves of books. Literally. You know, the ones that made it look like you desecrated a book by attaching it to the wall?

"I love to read," I blurted out. "It's a bit of an obsession and takes over my life sometimes. Could you imagine getting paid to read books?"

That sounded amazing, but who got paid to read?

Agents do. While I wasn't sure that was the right way to go, it at least felt like it was in the right neighborhood.

Editor? Maybe, but there wasn't a spark when I thought about it.

And then, in one conversation, she dropped the second question that would change the rest of my life. "Would you ever write a book?"

"No. Absolutely not." I laughed; I shook my head; I spoke with certainty. "I'm not creative enough for that."

She pushed back.

I looked at the wall of books covered in others' imaginations. The characters, the worlds, the relationships. Each different and sweeping. The pages that made me laugh; the found families that made me feel like I belonged; the moments I ugly cried and could only hope no one walked in to see the mess that was my face.

I was a good writer, sure, but my brain couldn't conjure the details needed to write fiction. I was a lawyer whose every sentence ended in a citation.

She gave me that look again. The one that said, 'Get out of your own way.'

"Put aside whether you can; do you want to?"

A flash of my elementary school self popped into my head. Younger me closing a book after a marathon reading session, thinking how cool it would be to write one of those.

Then a middle school version of me who was chosen to take part in a special poetry program. The way the words flowed out of me. Yet somewhere along the way, poetry became relegated to my journal as a release valve for the difficult feelings that built up and had no other place to go. It was merely my angst that no one would ever want to read.

Writing a book? Sure. I'd also love to win the lottery. It was nice to think about, but let's be realistic. Neither of those was actually going to happen.

So I'd buried it deep down where even I had forgotten about it. I'm not sure I'd ever even said it out loud before.

Maybe it was time.

"I've wanted to write a book since I was little, but I can't," I answered, my voice a little quieter, a little shakier than it had been.

“Why not?”

“Because it’s not a thing I do.”

“It’s not a thing you’ve done.”

Well, damn. She had me there.

Amidst my brain swirling with all the reasons the whole idea was ridiculous, a little spark was lit—the good kind of ‘what if.’

What if I could do this? What if I could be good at this? What if I made this my career?

For the first time, I didn’t feel the pit in my stomach, and the weight on my chest lifted just a little.

I still wasn’t convinced, and I definitely didn’t think I would actually tell anyone that I was thinking about doing it.

But maybe it was better that way. Keep it just for me. For now.