

The Totally True Story of Gracie Byrne

Shannon Takaoka

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In Shannon Takaoka's charming novel *The Totally True Story of Gracie Byrne*, a struggling girl finds a magical journal that lets her rewrite her own life.

In 1987—a period captured via references to music, fashion, and cars—Gracie's parents get a divorce. She, her brother, and her mother moved two hours away to take care of her grandmother, Katherine, who has Alzheimer's disease. Shy, awkward Gracie starts over at a new school at the beginning of her junior year. She's lonely, and she has few ways to connect to her best friend back home. When she finds a journal in a locked drawer of her grandmother's vanity, she decides to use it.

Gracie writes a fictional story about Luke, a cute boy in her art class. When Luke describes the story to her the next day as a dream he had, Gracie suspects that the journal may be special. She uses it to make her classmates admire her; to help with math; and to summon a rare owl into the school with entertaining results (though Gracie also worries about the owl's safety since it's so far from its natural habitat).

But Gracie does not trust this new power. She questions what is real, what is wish fulfillment, and whose lives are being affected by her stories. Indeed, there are unintended consequences to her writings. And at the same time, Gracie becomes friends with Tom, a genial boy who lives across the street from her. Their relationship makes Gracie wonder whether reality may be preferable to fiction.

The Totally True Story of Gracie Byrne is a delightful coming-of-age novel in which an unhappy girl learns to appreciate the ups and downs of life.

CATHERINE THURESON (November / December 2023)

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