



THE  
**THING** ABOUT  
**GEORGIE**

A NOVEL BY  
**Lisa Graff**

THE  
THING  
ABOUT  
GEORGIE

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LISA GRAFF

To Robert and David

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I need you to do me a favor. Yes, you. You'd better do it, too, because I'm not going to let you read any further until you do. Okay, are you ready? Stretch your right arm high up to the sky. Now reach across the top of your head and touch your left ear. Did you do it? Good. Go find a mirror and look at yourself.

Do you see how your arm forms a kind of arch over your head like that? Did you ever realize that your arm was so flexible or that it could reach so far? Did you know you could do that?

Well, Georgie can't.

I thought you should know that before you started

reading about him. It's not that Georgie's problems all started because he couldn't touch his left ear with his right hand, but the fact is that he can't. Even if he wanted to.

You can let go of your ear now.

Georgie sat at his desk in Mr. Myers's fourth-grade class, his chin in his hands, and tried to ignore the tapping on his shoulder.

Tap-tap-tap.

The thing about Jeanette Wallace, Georgie thought, was that she was mean. That's why everyone called her Jeanie the Meanie. Georgie had known her since he was five years old, in kindergarten, and she'd been mean even then. She was always staring at him or following him around at recess and asking him mean questions like "How come your head's so fat?" And when he tried to ignore her, like all the adults in the world told him to, she got mad and bugged him more. Once she'd even made up a song about him.

*Georgie Porgie puddin' and pie  
Too bad you're only two feet high*

True, she'd gotten in trouble for singing it and had to scrape gum off the bottoms of the desks for an entire lunch period, but that still didn't make Georgie feel a whole lot better.

The worst part, though, was that Georgie had been sitting directly in front of her since the first day of fourth grade.

Tap-tap-tap.

Georgie stared straight ahead and tried to think good thoughts, like the fact that this was the last day before Christmas break, which meant no more Jeanie the Meanie for two whole weeks.

Tap-tap-tap.

Suddenly something caught Georgie's eye. Three rows up and two seats over, Andy Moretti dropped his pencil on the floor. Georgie held his breath. If Andy picked the pencil up in one swift movement, it meant the drop had been an accident. But if Andy

struck the pencil twice on the floor before returning it to his desk, it was a signal.

The thing about Andy Moretti, Georgie figured, was that he was Italian. Not just a little Italian like Georgie was a little bit Irish (and a little bit German and Scottish and Native American and who knew what else); Andy was *all* Italian. He was also the best soccer player out of all the kids in fourth-grade lunch and Georgie's best friend since forever.

Andy struck the pencil twice.

Georgie smiled and raised his hand. He tried to raise it as high as he could, so Mr. Myers would be sure to call on him.

“Yes, Georgie?” Mr. Myers said. “Did you want to work out this problem for us?”

Georgie nodded and slipped out of his seat to walk to the chalkboard. He hopped up onto the step stool that was always at the front of the room, just for him, and then he finished the problem that Mr. Myers had written on the board:  $3 - 10 = -7$ .

On the way back to his seat, Georgie made a

detour so he could pass Andy's desk, and Andy slipped a note into his hand. Georgie waited until he was safely back in his seat and then unfolded the paper quickly under his desk. "My mom will pick us up. Don't take the bus!"

Georgie felt another tap on his shoulder. "What's the note say?" Jeanie the Meanie hissed in his ear. Georgie didn't answer. He shoved the paper into his pocket and ignored the tapping until the bell finally rang three minutes later. Then, like everyone else, he leaped out of his chair, snagged his backpack from his cubby, and raced over to the wall by the door to grab his coat.

Everyone in Mr. Myers's class had their own hook for their coats with their name written above it, but Georgie's was different. Georgie's hook was a foot lower than all the others. The janitor had put it in especially for him on the first day of fourth grade. Georgie usually didn't think much about it. He didn't usually think about the step stool under the chalkboard either. Or the fact that his feet didn't reach

the floor when he sat at the lunch table, or that Jeanie the Meanie picked on him more than anyone else in the school. That was just the way things were, and Georgie knew there wasn't anything he could do to change it.

Because the thing was, Georgie Bishop was a dwarf.

# 2

I need you to do me another favor. I need you to sit down on the floor. Don't worry if it's a little dirty. You won't be there too long.

Now stretch your legs out in front of you, and pull your knees up to your chest. Wrap your arms around your legs, and rest your head on your knees for a second. Then take a couple of deep breaths, in and out. It's pretty relaxing to sit with your head on your knees like that, right? I bet you sit like that a lot, maybe when you want to think for a little bit or when you're waiting for something to happen. You probably think that it's no big deal, that everyone can do it.

Well, Georgie can't.

It doesn't bother him, really, not to be able to rest his head on his knees when he needs to do some thinking. But the thing is, he can't. Even if he wanted to.

You can get up now.

“No more homework! No more homework!” Andy chanted as he and Georgie raced across the icy parking lot to Mrs. Moretti's car. Their backpacks were lighter than they'd been in weeks.

“Hello, boys,” Andy's mom greeted them as they piled into the car. “Are you glad it is vacation?” Mrs. Moretti had a thick accent, and Georgie always liked the way she made English sound like a foreign language.

“No more homework!” Andy cried again. Georgie laughed.

When they got to Andy's house, Georgie called his mother to let her know where he was, but he kept his coat on and zipped up. Andy did too. As soon as Georgie hung up the phone, the boys sped right back out the door.

For the past three weeks Georgie and Andy had been running their own business, to raise money for Christmas presents. It had been Georgie's idea. He figured he was getting too old to give his parents just Christmas cards he made in school, and he still wanted to spend his allowance on comics. So he'd decided that he and Andy should start a dog-walking business after school. He knew Andy would agree to it, since he loved dogs but couldn't have one because his dad was allergic.

"Did you decide what you're gonna do with all the money when you get it?" Georgie asked Andy on the way to Mrs. Kipp's house. Today was Friday, payday.

"Yeah," Andy said. "I've been saving up for Galactic Traitors. You know, that new game? Well, that's if I don't get it for Christmas. If so, then I'll probably buy Starbase Invasion 7."

"Cool," Georgie said. He didn't know too much about video games, since he couldn't really play them. He had trouble working the controllers, so all he could do was watch while Andy played, and that wasn't much fun.

They knocked on Mrs. Kipp's door, and she

handed them Buster, her cocker spaniel. “Be sure you bring him back before he gets too cold,” Mrs. Kipp told them while Georgie fastened on Buster’s leash.

Fifteen minutes later they were walking all six of their dogs. Georgie always walked the small ones, and Andy took charge of the bigger ones. One time Georgie had tried to hold on to Tanya, the Great Dane, but when she’d caught sight of a squirrel, she’d run so fast that Georgie thought she was going to rip off his arm. So now he stuck with Buster and the two poodles, even though he thought poodles were too fancy for their own good. But at least they didn’t yank too hard at their leashes.

“So you know what I was thinking?” Andy said as they waited for Apollo, the golden retriever, to sniff a tree.

“What?” Georgie asked.

“Well, I think there’s probably a lot more dogs in this neighborhood. Maybe twenty even. We could be making way more money.”

“Yeah, but how are we gonna walk twenty more dogs?”

“We could get another partner,” Andy said, “to help us out.”

Georgie raised an eyebrow. “Like who?”

“What about that kid Russ?” Andy asked. “I told him about it, and he said it sounded cool. He said he wanted to help.” Andy had to stop talking for a second to untangle Apollo’s and Tanya’s leashes. “So?” he continued after a minute. “What do you think?”

Georgie let out a long breath and watched as it left his mouth like a cloud in the cold air. “I don’t know,” he said. “I mean, I don’t really *know* Russ.”

Russ Wilkins had moved to their town about a month ago. He was in Mr. Myers’s class too, but all Georgie really knew about him was that he had hair that was so blond, it was almost white. That, and the fact that he was an awesome basketball player. Georgie had watched him at recess, when he’d made eleven free throws in a row.

“He’s cool,” Andy said, his boots crunching in the snow as he walked. “You’d like him. I hung out with him the other day when you were sick.”

All of a sudden Georgie knew that he did *not* want

Russ to be their new partner. He'd rather have anyone else, even Jeanie the Meanie, but not Russ Wilkins. He looked down at the dogs, trying to think of something to say.

"I don't think it's a very good idea," Georgie said. "I think it should just be us. Otherwise we'd have to split the money, and we wouldn't be making more anyway."

Andy nodded slowly. "Yeah, I guess," he said. He sounded disappointed, and Georgie didn't like it.

They were silent for a long time after that. They just walked the dogs and watched them sniff trees and didn't say anything. Georgie was about to tell Andy that, Fine, if he *really* wanted to, he guessed Russ could join their business, but only once a week maybe. But right as Georgie was opening his mouth, Andy spoke.

"I think Buster's getting cold," he told Georgie. "We should probably go back."

"Yeah," Georgie said. "I think the poodles are starting to freeze too."

Andy laughed. "They're pup-sicles!" he said.

Georgie snorted so hard he had to wipe his nose. “Poodle-pops!” he said in between laughs.

By the time they’d returned all the dogs and had money bulging in their pockets, Andy seemed to have forgotten all about Russ Wilkins. Georgie was glad he hadn’t said anything. Dog walking was definitely better with only two people.