

Mrs. Noble lifted Henry out of the car, and Georgia and Richard each reached for a platter of cupcakes. They walked into school, their boots dripping slush behind them, Georgia smelling wet wool and damp jackets as they made their way to her kindergarten room.

“I’m here!” she announced to Mrs. Frederickson.

“Wonderful,” replied her teacher, laughing. “Why don’t you put the cupcakes on the table in the back?”

Richard set down his platter in a great big hurry and ran for his first-grade classroom. “See you, baby!” he called to Georgia as he fled.

She ignored him. “Mommy, you’ll come back in time for the party, won’t you? You’ll be done writing by then?”

“Absolutely. Henry and I will be back at two.”

Georgia looked fondly at the pink and red cupcakes. She looked out the windows at the snow falling lightly on the playground. She forgot about the G-E-O-R-G-I-A necklace and limits and restrictions and began to feel excited. Two parties, and a visit from her grandparents, all five of them. It was good to be six.

At her school party, Georgia ate a pink cupcake and showed Henry off to her classmates. He sang the snowplow song and demonstrated how he could stick out his tongue and touch

his nose with it. Having him there was almost as good as having a dog. The only thing that could have made the party better would have been Georgia's father, but he taught fourth grade at Littlebrook, the elementary school across town, and couldn't leave his students.

By the time Georgia and Richard and Henry were riding home with their mother, the sun had come out and the new snow was melting in the street.

"Can I build a snowman?" Georgia asked as her mother parked the car in the garage.

"If you stay in the backyard with Richard," Mrs. Noble replied.

"But I want to build it in the frontyard so everyone can see it."

"And I don't want to build a snowman at all," added Richard.

"Then can I go to Leslie's?" asked Georgia.

"Sure. Call her to make sure it's okay. I'll walk you over."

Georgia let out an enormously loud sigh. "Can't you just watch me from the front steps?"

Mrs. Noble unfastened her seat belt and turned around to look at her daughter. "Georgia."

"Okay."

"Okay what?"

“Okay, I’m not going then.”

Georgia pouted in her room. She slid the offensive heart necklace to the back of the top desk drawer. The desk, which Georgia was proud of, was white with vines and leaves and fairies painted on it. She knew that her grandfather had painted it for her mother when Francie had been Georgia’s age. Georgia ran her hand across the top and tried to imagine Papa Matthew at work in the third-floor room that had been his studio, before he and Nana Dana had gotten divorced and sold the house.

At six o’clock Georgia heard a knock on her door. “Almost party time, Georgie Girl!” called her father.

Georgia felt her heart soar. It was amazing how quickly her mood could change. She ran downstairs and proceeded to open the door each time the bell rang — when her father’s parents arrived from northern New Jersey, when Papa Matthew and his wife, Maura, arrived from their house near the Princeton University campus, and when Nana Dana arrived from New York City. Georgia gathered the presents they brought and set them on the table in the living room.

Each time she added another gift to the pile, Henry asked hopefully, “Is that for me?” And each time Georgia answered patiently, “No, it’s for me, but we can share,” and Henry seemed satisfied.

The menu for dinner had been chosen entirely by Georgia. Her mother had not changed a single thing. Spaghetti with meatballs, artichokes, and chocolate cake. Everyone, even Richard, agreed that it was the perfect menu. After dinner, Georgia longed to be allowed to flick the switch that would operate the garbage disposal, sending the artichoke leaves into a glorious, ground-up fury, but Mrs. Noble didn't like the children anywhere near the sink when the disposal was on.

Georgia decided not to spoil the evening by asking about something she knew was not allowed. Instead she opened her gifts. The only thing of interest to Henry was an intricate-looking toy called a Spirograph, which Nana Dana claimed Georgia's mother had loved when she was six years old. At nine o'clock, as everyone was yawning and the guests were standing and stretching, Georgia's sixth birthday came to an end. She carried her pile of presents upstairs to her room, put on the new nightgown from Papa Matthew and Maura, and wondered what the rest of the year would bring.