



How to Steal a Dog

BARBARA O'CONNOR

Georgina Hayes may be homeless, but she's not hopeless.

The day I decided to steal a dog was the same day my best friend, Luanne Godfrey, found out I lived in a car.

I had told Mama she would find out sooner or later, seeing as how she's so nosy and all. But Mama had rolled her eyes and said, "Just get on up there to the bus stop, Georgina, and quit your whining."

So that's what I did. I stood up there at the bus stop pretending like I still lived in Apartment 3B. I pretended like I didn't have mustard on my shirt from the day before. I pretended like I hadn't washed my hair in the bathroom of the Texaco gas station that very morning. And I pretended like my daddy hadn't just waltzed off and left us with nothing but three rolls of quarters and a mayonnaise jar full of wadded-up dollar bills.

I guess I'm pretty good at pretending.

My brother, Toby, however, is not so good at pretending. When Mama told him to get on up to the bus stop and quit his whining, he cried and carried on like the baby that he is.

“What’s wrong with Toby?” Luanne asked me when we were standing at the bus stop.

“He has an earache,” I said, trying as hard as anything to look like my life was just as normal as could be instead of all crazy like it really was.

When I saw Luanne’s eyes narrow and her lips squeeze together, I knew her nosiness was about to irritate me.

Sure enough, she said, “Then how come your mama is making him go to school?” She kept looking at me with that squinty-eyed look of hers, but I didn’t let on that I was irritated. I just shrugged and hoped she would hush up about Toby.

She did. But then she went and turned her nosy self loose on me.

“No offense, Georgina,” she said. “But you’re starting to look kind of unkempt.”

Unkempt? That was her mama talking if I’d ever heard it. Luanne wouldn’t never have said that word “unkempt” if she hadn’t heard her mama say it first.

And what was I supposed to say to that anyways? Was I supposed to say, “Well, for your information, Luanne Godfrey, it’s kinda hard to keep your clothes looking nice when you’ve been sleeping in the backseat of a Chevrolet for a week”?

Or maybe I was supposed to say, “I know it, Luanne. But my hairbrush got tossed out in that pile of stuff Mr.

Deeter left on the sidewalk when he kicked us out of our apartment.”

And then Luanne would say, “Why’d Mr. Deeter do that?”

And I would say, “ ’Cause three rolls of quarters and a mayonnaise jar full of wadded-up dollar bills doesn’t pay the rent, Luanne.”

But I didn’t say anything. I acted like I hadn’t heard that word “unkempt.” I just climbed on the bus and sat in the sixth seat on the left side with Luanne, like I always did.

I knew Luanne wouldn’t give up, though. I knew she’d keep on till she found out the truth.

“What if she wants to come over?” I said to Mama. “Or what if she looks in the window or something and finds out we don’t live there anymore?”

But Mama just flapped her hand at me and closed her eyes to let me know how tired she was from working two jobs. So every day I imagined Luanne peeking in the kitchen window of Apartment 3B. When she did, of course, she wouldn’t see me and Toby and Mama and Daddy eating our dinner and being happy. She’d see some other family. Some happy family that wasn’t all broken up like mine.

And then one day, when we got off the school bus,

Half of me was thinking,
Georgina, don't do this. Stealing a dog is just plain wrong.

The other half of me was thinking,
***Georgina, you're in a bad fix and you got to do
whatever it takes to get yourself out of it.***

Georgina Hayes is desperate. Ever since her father left and they were evicted from their apartment, her family has been living in their car. With her mama juggling two jobs and trying to make enough money to find a place to live, Georgina is stuck looking after her younger brother, Toby. And she has her heart set on improving their situation. When Georgina spots a missing-dog poster with a reward of five hundred dollars, the solution to all her problems suddenly seems within reach. All she has to do is "borrow" the right dog and its owners are sure to offer a reward. What happens next is the last thing she expected.

★ "Will keep youngsters totally engaged. This novel's gentle storytelling carries a theme of love and emphasizes what is really right in the world."

—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

"A suspenseful and achingly realistic story."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"O'Connor knows how to spin a touching story, and reading this novel is its own reward."—*The Horn Book*

Go Fish

Look inside for an interview with Barbara O'Connor.

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