



The Classic Book I'd Like to Rewrite

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THE CLASSIC BOOK THAT I'D LIKE to rewrite is actually a film — though it did begin life as a short story and eventually became a book. Its provenance may be less than straightforward, but there is no doubt that it is a classic. In fact, it is arguably the second most popular and inspirational Christmas story ever told — the first being the birth of a baby in a manger. The film, of course, is *It's a Wonderful Life*.

It's a Wonderful Life is the antithesis of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. In the latter, Ebenezer Scrooge, a man whose life is judged a success by himself and society, is visited by spirits who show him that, in fact, it is a failure. He has lived without love and has done nothing but increase the misery of the world. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey, a man who once had dreams, but whose life is judged a failure by himself and his society, is saved from suicide by an angel who shows him how valued he is and how much more miserable the world would be if he'd never been born.

For much of our history, no matter how small a man's life, a woman's was smaller. Women couldn't even dare to dream. Lucky to be able to leave the house, women weren't the explorers or the adventurers. Women ran homes, not countries, companies or wars. They weren't the heroes of the stories — whether victorious or tragic; they were the other characters. The wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. They did the things that women do — in the background, away from praise and recognition. They nursed the hero when he was ill and listened when he told his tales. They cooked his food, warmed his bed and bore his children.



In *my* rewrite, George would be Georgia. On a cold and snowy Christmas Eve, she sits alone. She was born at a time that allowed her dreams, but not the chance to pursue them. She married and had children. She was the wife who made her husband's life easier and the mother who made cakes for the bake sale, went over homework and attended every school event. But now she's by herself, wondering what her life was for. She has won no prizes or accolades; had no celebrity or obvious success. She's always been in the background, one meaningless member of life's perpetual crowd scene. 'I might never have been born for all my life has meant,' she says out loud. 'You can back that truck up right now!' says the young woman suddenly standing beside her. Georgia's angel shows her how much poorer the world would have been without all the acts of kindness and thoughtfulness that she did every day, week, month and year. All the care she gave to her family and friends. The millions of things that wives and mothers do that go unnoticed by the big, wide world but matter greatly in the little one where most of us live.

'If the world was made only of adventurers and warriors and empire builders, where would it be?' asks the angel.

Where indeed?