

## Part II

My best friend Lacy missed a whole week of school, and when she came back, she still looked poorly to me. When it was time for our morning recess, Lacy stayed at her desk. I didn't. I went outside to play tag and to see if I could throw a rock and hit Billy Talley in the back. Last week, Billy Talley hit me in the head with a mud ball, and I had to get him back. He knew I would, but he didn't know when. I found the perfect rock just as Miss Atwood blew her whistle to end recess. I put it in my coat pocket and saved it for later.

At dinner time, I asked Lacy to eat with me and share my ham sandwich and chess pie.

"How come your Mama fixes you such big lunches?" Lacy and I sat side-by-side in chairs up close to the pot-bellied stove.

I couldn't say why, so I said, "She is so used to fixing for my brothers that she keeps making the same size for me." I was proud of myself for that little lie.

"You aren't lying, are you, Andy?" Lacy asked with a mouth full of ham.

"Why would I lie about a ham sandwich?" I couldn't tell Lacy I knew why she stayed in the classroom while everyone ate. "Sides, I don't lie." I think God likes this kind of lie cause it's me being nice. And I ain't told a soul that Lacy and her folks didn't have much of anything 'cause she is my best friend.

"They used to not be this big." Lacy said as she took another bite

"It's winter, so we eat more. Everybody in these parts knows that." I kept talking. "Daddy says we are gatherers and store stuff up for winter." Daddy did say that, but not about my ham sandwich.

"That's what animals do, not people," Lacy said.

"I'm talking bout eatin' food."

"Animals, like squirrels, store up for the winter, not people," Lacy said. "And some animals eat more to keep warm, but people don't do that." Lacy sounded snooty.

"You ain't from these parts." I sounded as matter-of-fact as I could. "So, you don't know everything."

"Thankfully." She took another bite. "But, I know people don't get fat to stay warm."

"What do you mean thankfully?" I didn't understand.

"It means I'm happy I'm not from here." Lacy wiped her mouth with the cotton napkin Mama had put in the sack for her to use. "I am from Chicago. I miss it and my friends."

I felt tears sting my eyes. “I’m from here, Lacy. I’m your friend.” I wiped my mouth and quickly wiped my eyes. I didn’t want anyone to see me cry.

Lacy never noticed that Mama put two cotton napkins in my lunch bag. If she did, she never said anything; if she asked me, I would have to be a quick thinker and maybe lie, but my worry now crying. I don’t want to cry.

“I know that,” she took another bite, “but I had lots of friends in Chicago. We had an apartment, and it was real nice, too.

“I’ve never seen an apartment cept one time when Mama and me went to the picture show. It was a movie with Miss Carole Lombard. One other time, we saw a western with Miss Myrna Loy. ”

Lacy stood up. “Life isn’t like the movies. You know that, don’t you?”

“I would suppose I do.” I stood up, too, but I wasn’t sure why. If Lacy had been Billy Talley, I would say we stood up to fight, but I wasn’t going to fight with my best friend, Lacy, even though she was starting to make me mad.

“You talk funny, Andy.” Lacy wrinkled up her face like she was thinking of something that smelled bad. “I guess you can’t help it, you being simple folks like you are.”

It’s good that Miss Atwood blew her whistle, telling us dinnertime was over. It’s good because my best friend Lacy made me cry.

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I sat the rest of the day without looking at my friend, Lacy. When Miss Atwood said to pick a friend to play a geography game, I picked Walter Massey. Billy Talley picked Lacy as his partner, so she had to sit with the mudslinger, and I sat with the Pentecostal preacher’s son.

I picked Walter for two reasons. The first one is he is pretty hard to look at, so no one really likes him, but he is also the smartest kid in the two 5<sup>th</sup> grade rows. I had decided early on that Walter needed looking after. He was skinny with big ears, red hair, and lots of freckles. Worse than that, he ran like a girl. Walter always smelt like bacon grease and a fire that got too smokey. You could look at him funny, and he would start to cry, so the boys looked at him funny every day. Miss Atwood tried to protect him, but the boys were mean. That’s when I decided Walter needed a friend. I ain’t afraid of them boys. I can outrun most of them, and I’m as good a rock slinger as you can find around here. One time, Walter tried to kiss me while standing behind the old well-house. I punched him hard on the arm, and he started crying. I told him I was sorry,

but nothing was gonna make me marry him. That happened when we were in the third grade, and Walter was new around here. I don't know how them Pentecostal preachers do, but they moved in one day two years ago and ain't left. Since the day I punched Walter, he has been my friend, and he ain't never tried to kiss me again.

Me and Walter won the geography contest that day. I knew one answer, but Walter knew them all. We each got a cookie and a piece of hard candy. I would have shared my prize with my friend Lacy, but Lacy and Billy came in third, and that made me so happy that I didn't want to share.

I don't know for sure what it means to be simple, but I think it means we ain't smart. I don't know anyone smarter than my Daddy; my Mama's smart too, but better than that, she's a real good cook. I don't like my third brother, Edward, but he's smart and reads everything he can. Sometimes, he helps me do things, but mostly, he pokes fun at me and is usually the reason I get in trouble. James, my oldest brother, is smart enough, and Robert, who is between James and Edward, is smart too, but James and Robert like girls now, so you really can't tell how smart they are. Me and Henry are about the same smart. Henry was born a year before me, and he ain't too good at grammar, but I ain't too good at arithmetic, so we balance out.

I don't know how smart my friend Lacy is, but she thinks she is smarter than me. I bet I run faster, spit farther, throw better, find worms quicker, and I think I sing better than she does, too. We can still be friends, but she needs to understand a few things. I ain't never been in an apartment, but I've got my own copy of Photoplay magazine with a picture of Miss Jean Harlow on the front cover, and I know a few things that I ain't telling her. Things about Christmas. Things she should know about our Christmas, not her stupid apartment Christmas. Our Christmas, with lots of candy, cookies, stringing popcorn, oranges, a candy cane, a big old cedar tree, and brand new Montgomery Ward Christmas catalogs.