

After church on Sunday, we would either go to Granny's or Ma'am's, or they would come to our house. On this Sunday, everyone came to our house. Mama had put a pork shoulder on to cook before we went to church, and we had green beans, fried corn, cole slaw, cornbread, and peach cobbler for dessert. Pap said the blessing, and he was making it kind of long, so Ma'am said "amen" before he was finished praying. That made me laugh. Then I saw Mama giving me the stink-eye, so I stopped laughing.

It started raining, so everyone, including the boys, moved from the table to the parlor. I loved this time because I heard stories about Mama and Daddy, what life was like when Granny and Pa got married, or how excited everyone was when I turned out to be a girl and "not a stinking old boy." My brothers played checkers and scuffled. Sometimes, Pap would pop one of them with his walking stick when the scuffling got too rough. This is one of those days because Edward and Henry started to play boxing, but Edward hit Henry a little too hard. At first, it was yelling, then Henry punched Edward, and it kept going until Pap cracked Edward with his walking stick and then pointed it at Henry. I sat with my back against Mama's legs and kept reading my Photoplay magazine. I was silently happy when Pap got Edward because he tattled on me when I climbed into the boys-only tree house. I wouldn't have gotten in their old tree house if Edward hadn't threatened to pull the head off of the only doll I have. I don't like dolls, but I do like Sally Ann. I would rather go fishing or tree climbing than play with a doll, but Sally Ann was my only real doll. All the others were sock dolls that Mama made or a corncob doll with yellow silk hair that Daddy gave me every year at harvest.

As I sat quietly reading about Miss Jean Harlow, I kept thinking about what Reverend Simpson said to me before church. I had already lied when I told him I had been thinking about what he said. I stood on the church steps and lied. I don't know if God hears everything we say, but I am pretty sure he hears what people say at church. I told myself I wasn't really in church. I was on my way in, so maybe when God's deciding about that fiery furnace, He can't use that lie against me.

After Sunday church and Wednesday night prayer meetings, the women stand around talking, pretending to discuss recipes. Once this summer, I listened, and they weren't discussing cooking. I pretended I wasn't interested, but I was. Mama kept one finger on my shoulder as a reminder that I shouldn't move, and my body didn't, but my ears did. I learned you could sin just because your clothes didn't look nice on the clothesline. I heard it when Miss Myrtle Leslie said, "It's a sin and a shame how Hettie Arnold's clothes look on the line. Surely, she was taught how clothes should be hung, and her whites are practically yellow." Once, I heard someone say that Betsy Young was keeping company with a man with a shady reputation, and they hoped she knew how sinful that looked. I spent the rest of the summer looking at people and wondering what sin they had committed recently, and I wondered if I could ask someone for a list of sins to make sure I knew exactly how this sinning worked.

I thought I could ask my Mama for a list, but she was always busy doing something, and I don't think she would have time to list all of them because I think there must be a bunch of them. I went down the list of people I knew who might be able to help, but I always had a reason why they couldn't. One day, Henry was sitting on the front porch throwing rocks in a can.

"Henry"

"Yeah."

"Are you busy? Cause if you aren't, I have a question." I sat down next to him and pulled my skirt around my legs.

"I'm practicing."

"For what?"

"A tournament at school." He threw a rock, and it missed the can. "Hurry up and ask because you're ruining my concentration.

"A rock-throwing tournament?" I leaned back and put my elbows on the step behind me. "Looks like you need a can with a bigger hole."

"Shut up." Henry turned to look at me. "What do you want?"

"How many sins are there?"

"Sins!" He said it a little too loud. "What kind of sins?"

"Are there different kinds?"

"Sure, there's lying, cheating, killing, stealing, wanting something real bad that ain't yours, and I think eating too much is also a sin." He picked up a rock, threw it, and it hit the rim of the can and bounced in. "There!" he said, grinning.

"Are they more than a hundurd?"

"Sure, there are probably thousands."

"Thousands of sins!" I leaned forward and let my arms dangle next to my legs. "Where could I get a list?"

"Why do you want a list? He hit the bucket again. "See, I'm getting better."

"How am I gonna know if I'm doing a sin if I don't know what sin I'm doing?"

"Geez, Andy. Don't worry about it."

"I ain't gonna burn in that hell place, specially when I didn't even know I was sinning."

"Ask Preacher Simpson. He oughta know."

"I should have thought of that. Thanks, Henry." I picked up a rock and threw it. I hit the can in the center.

"Get out of here, Andy. I can't concentrate when you make me lose my concentration."

The next Sunday, after worship, I asked Reverand Simpson if I could ask him a question. Of course, he said yes. I didn't want to actually talk. All I wanted was the sin list, so that's what I asked.

"I need a list of sins, and I thought you could get me one." I looked up at him and smiled.

I don't know if he looked surprised, confused, or suddenly got a belly ache, but his face twisted, and he half-way smiled at me. Then he lowered himself so we were looking eye-to-eye.

"And what would you do with this list of sins, Andrea?"

"Well, Sir, I ain't gonna do 'em, but if I don't know what they are, how can I stop myself?"

He smiled at me, and I think he must have had a belly ache because his smile looked strained.

"How old are you, Andrea?"

"I'll be ten my next birthday." That made him stand up.

"I want you to think about something for me, will you?"

"I reckon so."

"I want you to think about learning about Jesus, following Him, and committing to the church and our Lord, Jesus Christ. You might be a little young, but you're a smart young lady with questions that need answering." He put his hand on my shoulder and smiled. "Will you think about it, Andrea?"

All I wanted was a list of sins, but look what I've done. I turned to get Reverand Simpson to take his hand off my shoulder. "I will, yes sir. I'll think about it. I'll start right now."

I lied, and for a second, I wondered if I was on my way to being a sinner. Then I thought I might go fishing after dinner and worry about getting to know Jesus and all those sins later.