

Part I

We had our first snow the Monday after Thanksgiving. I looked out my bedroom window, and everything was white with snow, but by the time I got up, it had stopped snowing. The sun was shining, making everything sparkle like glass. Mama had fixed oatmeal and sausage for me with skillet bread. I love Mama's skillet bread. Mama bakes bread a couple of times a week mostly to use for sandwiches at dinnertime. For skillet bread, she slices the bread, lathers it with butter and puts it on a hot griddle or in a hot skillet to brown. I like it almost as much as a biscuit. I ate quickly because I wanted to get out in the snow. My Daddy had gotten my snow boots out of the attic and cleaned them. They were by the hearth with my hat, mittens, and my Montgomery Ward coat. I was ready to run out the door when I heard Mama call my name, followed by the instructions, "Button your coat all the way, missy." I stopped, buttoned my coat, put on my mittens, and shouted as I walked out the door, "Bye, Mama," and out the door I went.

Sometimes, when we had big snows, Daddy would bring down our sled, and the boys would take turns pulling me on it all the way to school. This snow wasn't big enough, so I had to walk with my brothers, except they didn't wait for me. My brothers had already walked down the road a piece, so I kept hollering, "Wait for me," but no one did. Finally, Henry stopped walking, and I caught up with him.

"You are supposed to wait for me," I told Henry.

"Yeah, but you are too slow." Henry walked faster, and I couldn't keep up.

"I'm telling," I said as I ran up to Henry and past him. "Hurry up, slowpoke," I yelled back to him.

I couldn't keep ahead of Henry without running, but he slowed down, and we walked the rest of the way to school.

"Is that my dinner bag?" I asked as we were walking inside the school. I wanted to be sure I had what Mama had fixed for me and my friend, Lacy.

"Yeah," Henry said, throwing the bag at me.

Miss Atwood always had the schoolroom nice and warm so we could take off our coats and not sit in our room all bundled up. After taking off our coats, we would run to our room from the hallway before we felt the cold, and Miss Atwood would always say, "No running in the classroom." I took my seat and saw she had written instructions on the blackboard, so we knew

what to do when school started. The fifth-grade directions said, *Read pages 170 to 195 in our history book, and we will discuss it. If you finish that, start working on your Christmas project.*

At eight o'clock, everyone stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance and said the Lord's Prayer. My best friend Lacy wasn't in her seat, so I raised my hand and asked why.

"Lacy is sick." That was all Miss Atwood said.

"What kind of sick?" I asked.

"That is of no concern to you, Andrea." She turned to walk over to the little kids, but I wasn't done talking.

"Yes, it is," I tried to say in my not-sassy voice. "Lacy is my very best friend." Miss Atwood turned and looked at me with her look. I had seen that look before, so I knew what it was.

"Please read your assignment, Andrea." I was going to say more, but I could tell Miss Atwood was in no mood to hear me, so I opened my US History book and began to read.

At dinnertime, Miss Atwood asked me to stop by her desk before leaving the classroom. I was sure I would be in trouble for talking back to her. Over the last couple of years, she had already told my Mama and Daddy that I was strong-willed, very free with my thoughts, and too helpful with the other children.

"Yes, ma'am." I was prepared for some kind of punishment.

"Your friend Lacy has bronchitis ." Miss Atwood sounded upset.

"I had that, member?" I was excited that my friend Lacy and I had the same thing.

"Remember." Miss Attwood said.

"That's what I asked you." Sometimes, Miss Atwood talks in a circle.

Miss Atwood took a deep breath through her nose, and when she did, it made her pull away and sit up straighter.

"Andrea," she said in a tone I didn't much like. "the word is remember, not member." She had a disappointed look on her face. "Member means you belong to a group and have pledged or will commit yourself to that group." She paused, then kept going. "I know you know how to speak much better than you often do. You do, don't you?"

I stood there staring at her. “Well,” she said. “Don’t you?”

“I’m sure I surely do know how to, Miss Atwood.” I didn’t look at her face but at my boots that my Daddy had cleaned for me.

“Then why do you try my patience? It is almost like you are committed to talking like a, I don’t know, field hand and not the young lady you are?”

Miss Atwood was making me mad. All I wanted to know was about my best friend, Lacy Cleaves, but Miss Atwood wanted to talk about how I talk, and then she said that committed word.

“Cause that’s how I talk cept when I’m here.” I kept talking. “Everyone but you knows what I’m saying.” Now I stood staring right at her. I was sure I was close to being paddled, but instead, she nodded her head, I think in disgust.

“Your friend Lacy is sick and will miss several days of school. Doctor Ramey stopped by this morning to tell me.” Miss Atwood stood up. She was right pretty for a teacher. Not Jean Harlow pretty, but she would do. “I plan to take her lessons to her after school, and I will tell her you asked about her.”

I smiled my best smile. “Thank you, Miss Atwood.” I turned away, still smiling, when suddenly I remembered what Miss Atwood had said; she had said that word committed. She said that I was committed. Well, I ain’t committed, and why is everyone so set on me being committed? Why cain’t I be just like I am? That’s what that church song said ‘cause I remember it saying that. I’m gonna be me ’cause that’s who God knows. If Jesus and that Ghost fellow want to know me better, they need to ask God if they can come visit. If he says okay, then that will be okay with me. Until then, I’m just Andy and ain’t committed to nothing.

I went outside and looked around. No one was there, so I spit on the ground like I’d seen my Daddy do. I never knew why Daddy did it, but it seemed like the thing to do when you walk outside. I guess you get too much spit in your mouth when you get older, and you have to get rid of it when you walk outside. I’d never seen Mama do it, so maybe it only happened to men. I was going to keep practicing just in case it was some kind of grown-up rule I needed to know.

The snow was melting in the sunshine, but it was still cold. I wondered if sitting on the church steps after school would be too cold and if I should wait here on the playground for my brothers so I could walk home with them. I also wondered how sick Lacy was, but mostly, I wondered why everyone don’t want me to be me just like I am.