

Part IV

The next day, everything seemed okay with my friend Lacy and me. I was still a little mad and still sad, but I tried to remember that different didn't mean stupid. I wanted to know what it meant to be a Chicago friend, so maybe I could be one, too. At dinnertime, we sat next to one another and shared my lunch. Today, we had fried chicken and coconut cream pie with lots of what I call calf slobber, but that ain't the real name. I think they call it something like ma -rang. Lacy didn't act no different, so I decided Lacy didn't know she off ended me.

"You still got friends in Chicago?" I took a big bite of my chicken leg, then wiped my mouth on my shirt sleeve. Lacy looked at me hard, like I'd done something terrible.

"Use your napkin." She said as she handed the cotton napkin Mama had given each of us. "Yes, I still have friends in Chicago. I hope to go back one day soon."

"Soon?" That is all I asked

"Yes, maybe between Christmas and the new year, but for sure, this summer. I'll spend the summer there." Lacy took a bite of her chicken leg. She wiped her mouth with the napkin. "I can barely wait to find out."

"Find out what?" Suddenly, I didn't want the rest of my chicken leg.

"When I'm going. It depends on a few things."

"What things." I looked at my pie but wasn't sure I wanted it. "What's a Chicago friend like?" I took my pie and handed Lacy hers. "What do they do?"

"You have so many questions." Lacy put her pie on the table and finished eating the chicken leg.

"I'm not stupid." It came out because I thought it.

"What?" Lacy wiped her mouth and put the chicken leg on the table.

"Well, I'm not." I took a bite of my pie so I wouldn't start crying.

"Silly and funny is what you are." Lacy smiled and then took a bite of her pie. "We might not have enough money for me to go back to Chicago until the summer, but that's okay. I can stay longer then." She wiped part of the pie off of her face, "This pie is good."

I ignored the pie thing because my Mama's pies are always good, but I wondered about having the money. "I don't need money."

"Everybody needs money. We used to have money, but it all went away." Lacy stopped and took another bite of the pie. "That's why we moved here."

“To live with your grandpa,” I took a bite of my pie, too. “but he’s as poor as a church mouse. So, why’d you move to live with him?”

Lacy’s face changed from loving the pie to something I ain’t never seen before, and then Miss Atwood rang the bell for school to start again.

“I want everyone to listen.” Miss Atwood clapped her hands twice and looked at every row from first to sixth grade. “We are going to talk about our Christmas Pageant before we start our lessons, and, like every pageant, everyone will have something to do.” Miss Atwood smiled, and she didn’t do that too much. “I think this year, along with our singing, we will act out the Christmas story.” She smiled and looked around the room. “I spoke with Reverend Simpson, and we think combining our school and church service would be a wonderful idea.” She walked from the little kids all the way up to the sixth grade. “Walter, I’ll ask your father if he can help us with the pageant, too.”

Walter put on a great big smile that didn’t do anything to help how he looked. He was looking at me, so I smiled back at him. I surely hope he doesn’t try to kiss me again. Just because it’s Christmas still doesn’t make me want to marry him.

“Andrea, are you listening?” Miss Atwood was talking to me.

“Ah,” Walter was still smiling at me, but I had to say something. “I was just thinking about our Christmas pageant, Miss Atwood.” That wasn’t a lie, but I was thinking Walter might try that kissing stuff again during the pageant.

“Pay attention, Andrea, or you won’t be in the pageant since you won’t know what we will do.”

I smiled and stopped looking at Walter. “Yes, ma’am. I surely want to be in the pageant.”

“Children, as you leave today, stop by my desk and pick up a handout I’ve made for each of you. It will tell the parts we will be playing, the songs we will be singing, the positions that won’t be on stage but will be an essential part of the production.” Miss Atwood looked around the room. “Everyone will have a chance to audition for the speaking and singing parts, so don’t forget to pick up the handouts when you leave today.” Miss Atwood pointed to the blackboard. “Now, each class, pay attention to your assignment, and I’ll start with the sixth grade this afternoon.”

I tried really hard to pay attention to my lessons, but I had too many things on my mind. The Christmas Pageant was my favorite thing we do at school. All the mothers make cookies and candy, and we have punch and coffee, and we do a little program, all of the children sing, and then, almost like magic, Santa Claus comes. One year, I got a picture book full of color pictures of the USA. It is one of my favorite books. Last year, the girls got a pretty scarf, but I didn't want a scarf. I really wanted one of the slingshots the boys got, but I kept the scarf in case Santa Claus was watching me.

I was also worried Lacy was going back to Chicago to be with her Chicago friends. I was also worried that Lacy didn't know she was poor. I don't know if I'm poor, and since I'm not going to Chicago, I guess it doesn't matter.

I couldn't stop thinking about Walter tryin' to kiss me. He looked at me with that goofy smile every time I looked at him. One time, Edward told me Walter was flirting with me and would probably catch me one day and plant a big kiss on my lips. I never believe what Edward tells me, but this might be true, and Walter will get punched again if he tries.

All these things kept me from caring about a shot heard around the world that my history book was talking about. I hope Miss Atwood doesn't ask me about that shot heard round the world. I've got lots more things on my mind than that, and besides, I bet Miss Jean Harlow or Miss Myrna Low doesn't know what that sound means.

After school, I told Henry to walk home without me. I said I had lots to think about and was going to the church steps. Henry told me it was too cold, but I said I didn't care and walked down the road toward the church.

The other big thing on my mind, maybe the biggest, was changing myself so I could be committed. I'm a new ten-year-old, and I think I could be getting the vapors. I heard Mama talking about someone being really upset and full of worry, and they got the vapors and fell out. I'm not really sure what it means to fall out, but I sure don't want them vapors, and I might be getting them.

I made it to the church steps and sat down. Henry was right. It was cold, but I could stand it for a while. I was just getting ready to think hard when Reverend Simpson opened the church door. He was as shocked to see me as I was to see him.

“What in the world are you doing sitting out here on these cold steps?” Reverend Simpson had on his coat and hat, so I knew he was leaving.

“Complentating.” I smiled but wished he would go away.

“Complentating?”

“Yeah, you know. I’m doing some serious thinking,” I thought Reverend Simpson was smarter than that.

“You mean contemplating?” He smiled and sat down next to me. I had to move over to make room for him. “What can be bothering a little one like you?”

“I’m ten years old, so I ain’t so little, and I’ve got some problems.” I looked up at him, and he had that bellyache look about him.

It seemed like a long time before Reverend Simpson said something, and then it scared me because he knew what I was thinking.

“Andrea, are you concerned about committing yourself to the Lord?” He took his hat off and let it dangle between his knees.

“I just wanna be me, Reverend Simpson. I don’t wanna change or do something I ain’t easy with.” I blurted this out and kept talking. “Everybody wants me to change and be committed, but I don’t want to go there, and I don’t care if that is where Jesus lives.” I started crying, so I wiped my eyes and nose on my Montgomery Ward coat.

“Andrea, you don’t have to go anywhere. It isn’t being committed to a different place. It’s about committing your life to Christ.”

Reverend Simpson was being so nice. His voice was soft, and he handed me his handkerchief so I didn’t have to use my sleeve again.

“But I don’t wanna change. I like me like I am.” I blew my nose and then smiled at him to thank him for his handkerchief. “What if I can’t run as fast or skip a rock across the creek when I get changed? And that song says I can be just as I am. I heard it myself.”

Reverend Simpson put his arm around me and smiled. “Andrea, out of everyone I know here at church, I would pray that you would never change. You are smart, witty, inquisitive, ambitious, pretty, and I think you might already know the Lord.”

“Pretty!” That made me smile. “So, how do I know if I know the Lord and can be committed? Can you help me, Reverend Simpson?”

“Let’s go inside for a moment, then I will take you home:” He stood, unlocked the door, and we went inside. “I have my car outback, so you won’t have to walk home in the cold.”

“Thank you.” Without much thought, I said, “You really think I’m pretty?”