

### Part III

After supper, Mama asked me to sit with her at the table while Daddy and the boys went on about their business. Daddy would read the Courier-Journal, and the boys would do homework or play checkers. I thought I knew what Mama wanted, and I was right.

“You were quiet this evening.” Mama wiped her hands on the apron and sat down across from me. “Is something wrong?”

I didn’t want to lie, but I didn’t want to get my best friend, Lacy, into trouble. “I don’t know.” Is all I could think of to say.

“Are you telling me the truth?” Mama’s forehead wrinkled, and her eyes got smaller, so I knew I might as well tell her.

“What’s it mean to be simple, Mama?” I rested my elbows on the table and put my head in my hands. “If someone says I’m simple folks, are they saying I’m stupid?”

“Did someone say you were simple?” Mama’s eyes got smaller.

“Yes, mam. My best friend Lacy Cleaves said I was simple folks ’cause I talk funny.” I felt tears starting to come to my eyes. “Mama, I ain’t stupid, am I?”

Mama got up and came to sit next to me. “No, you aren’t stupid, Andrea. As a matter of fact, I think you are a smart little girl.”

“I am to you, Mama, but I’m stupid to my best friend, Lacy.” A tear slid down my face, but I wiped it away quickly, hoping Mama didn’t see it.

“Andrea, Lacy is new to us, and everything we do is new to her. The way we talk, the things we eat, the things we do, and even the way we live.” Mama put her hand on my head and gave it a good rub. “Think how different it would be for you to live in Chicago.”

“Would I think them people were stupid?”

“I would hope not, Andrea, but they would be different from you.” Mama smiled. I loved it when Mama smiled. It made her whole face look happy. “But different isn’t stupid.”

“Why did Lacy say I was simple, Mama?” I understood that me and Lacy were different, but Lacy was my very best friend, and I didn’t understand how she could say something bad about me. “I don’t want you to be mad at her, Mama, but I think she off ended me.”

“Do you mean offended, like hurt your feelings?” Mama had started to stand but sat back down.

“Yes, that’s what I mean.” My Mama was so pretty. I was starting to think she was even prettier than Miss Jean Harlow, even with brown hair and wearing an apron.

“Well, Andrea, I think Lacy probably misses her Chicago friends and the places she went to in Chicago. Just like you would miss your home and family if you had to move to Chicago.”

“I don’t think I would miss Edward, but I would surely miss you, Daddy, and probably Henry.” I thought for a minute before I said anything else. “Should I tell Lacy I’m sorry that I’m simple, but that’s ‘cause I’m ain’t from Chicago?”

Mama smiled at me and patted my head again. “No, I wouldn’t say that but try to understand how Lacy must feel. Everything here is new to her. Even her granddaddy is new to her.”

“Mama, I know something that might make Lacy like me better.”

“It isn’t that she doesn’t,” I cut Mama off mid-sentence.

“Mama, I’ll teach her how I do things like bait a hook, so me and her can go fishing or skim a rock across the pond or use a slingshot or.”

“Andrea,” Mama stopped me from talking. “Maybe Lacy could teach you a few things.”

“Mama, she can’t even throw a rock, so she’s got lots to learn.”

“What about you learning from Lacy?” She said it again.

I wonder what Mama thought Lacy could teach me. I can’t shoot a gun, not yet anyway, but Daddy said this summer he would start showing me how, and I’m pretty sure Lacy can’t shoot one either.

“Learn me what,” I wanted to know.

“Teach me, Andrea. You would learn, and Lacy would be teaching.” Mama had turned toward the cook stove so she couldn’t see my face twist about trying not to cry. Then I got mad.

“See, you think I’m stupid too.” I stood up and pushed my chair back. I had to grab it quickly to keep it from falling over. “Miss Atwood says things like that to me ‘cause I’m simple and stupid.” I wiped my face with my sleeve. “Well, I might be simple, but I ain’t stupid.”

I walked toward the door. “I ain’t learning no more ‘cause I’m as smart as I want to be.” I walked away but came back into the room. “I ain’t ever going to Chicago and be made fun of.”

I couldn’t stop myself from crying as I ran through the parlor.

“Cry baby.” Edward grabbed my arm.

“I ain’t a crybaby, you big dumb ass.” I knew by the expression on Edward’s face that I had done something terrible, but I didn’t know what, and I didn’t care. I didn’t care until I heard my Daddy call my name.

I didn’t stop, which wasn’t good, but I didn’t think I cared. Daddy came and got me and brought me back to the parlor. He asked me what I had just called Edward and whether I thought that was what a young lady would say, let alone say it to her brother. It was something he never wanted to hear me say again. One time, I heard Granny say damn, and she said she thought it, so she might as well say it.

“I called him what I thought.” I wiped my face off with my hands.

“Apologize to your brother.” Daddy turned me around to face Edward. He was sneering at me, and if Daddy hadn’t been holding my arms, I would have punched him.

“I’m sorry I called you what I did,” I said sweetly, but I didn’t mean it. Daddy released my arms, and I started running toward my bedroom. I stopped just long enough to say, “You’re a poop-head.” As I shut my bedroom door, I heard Edward shouting, “Daddy, did you hear what she called me?”

I threw myself down on my bed, still mad and still crying a little. But I don’t think I did anything wrong. Granny said if you think it, you might as well say it, so I did.

I wish I had grabbed the Montgomery Ward Christmas catalog as I ran by Edward, but I’ll wait and look at it tomorrow when I’m more myself, not crying or being happy that I got back at the tattle-tale. I wish Edward would move to Chicago, but I ain’t that lucky. After I wore myself out crying, I decided that tomorrow, I’ll be nice to my friend Lacy, and if she wants, I can show her how to skip a rock across the pond, and I’ll ask her what she wants to teach me, but I sure hope it ain’t playing with dolls.