



Andi's Pony Trouble
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Chapter 1

Andi's Big Idea

Andi Carter dropped her spoon into her empty bowl. "I have something to say."

Her family kept right on talking.

Andi looked around the breakfast table. She knew that children with good manners did not talk during meals. Polite children waited until somebody talked to them.

But the only time somebody talked to Andi at the table was when they said, "Pass the salt, Andi."

That was not talking. That was bossing.

"I have something to say," Andi said a little bit louder.

Nobody was listening.

Andi felt grumpy. Being the little sister was not fair. Her three big brothers talked at the table. They talked about cows and horses and roundups. Andi's big sister Melinda was eleven years old. She sometimes talked at the table, but mostly she giggled.

And that's worse than talking, Andi thought.

Andi couldn't wait one minute longer. She had something to say, and she was going to say it.

Even if it wasn't polite.

"I have something to say!" she yelled.

That got her family's attention, but not in a good way.

"Andrea!" Mother said. Her eyes opened wide, like she was surprised. "Are you shouting at the table?"

Of course I'm shouting. How else can anybody hear me? Andi thought. But she did not say those words out loud. That's what Mother called "talking back."

Andi did not like what happened to her when she talked back.

“I’m sorry, Mother,” she said quickly, before everybody started talking again. “I have to tell you something.”

“What is it, Andi?” Justin asked. “It must be important.” He smiled at her. Justin always smiled at her. Even when she was acting grumpy.

Andi loved her oldest brother.

“It *is* important!” She looked around. Now nobody was talking. Everybody was waiting for Andi to talk. At last!

She smiled. “It’s very, *very* important.”

“Well, what is it?” Andi’s brother Chad asked. He sounded like he was in a hurry—like always. He probably wanted to talk about cows and horses and ranch work some more.

Andi scowled at Chad. She wanted to stick her tongue out at him, but she didn’t do it. That would not be good table manners.

Instead, she looked at Mother. “I have decided that I’m too big to ride my pony. I want a horse of my own.”

Nobody said a word.

Then Chad laughed. “When did you hatch this silly idea?”

“It’s not a silly idea,” Andi said. “And I didn’t hatch it. Ideas don’t get hatched. Chicks get hatched. From eggs.”

Andi knew this was true. There were lots of fuzzy, yellow baby chicks on the ranch. They all hatched from eggs.

“Chad,” Mother said in her warning voice. It meant, *Don’t tease your sister.*

Andi was glad Mother said that. Chad teased her so much that sometimes she wanted to punch him. But he was too big and too quick. Every time she went after him, Chad grabbed her and held her upside down until she got tired of trying to hit him.

And he always laughed.

“I’m sorry, Andi,” Chad said. “What makes you think you’re big enough for a horse?”

Andi gave Chad a big smile and pointed to the calendar. "I have been thinking about this ever since the calendar changed to M-A-Y 1-8-7-4."

Andi could not read, but she knew all her letters and numbers. "My birthday is this month. I'm going to be six years old. I'm much too big to keep riding Coco."

Melinda giggled. Like always.

"You're not big enough," her brother Mitch said. He stood up and lifted Andi from her chair. "Look here. You hardly come up past my belt. You can walk under a horse's belly without bending over."

Everybody laughed. Everybody but Andi.

She crossed her arms and looked up at Mitch. "I am *too* big enough. I can show you."

Andi walked out of the dining room and into the kitchen. She did not walk ladylike. She stomped just a little bit.

"Where are you going?" Mother asked.

Andi poked her head through the doorway. "Come and see."

Chapter 2

Big Enough?

Andi ducked back in the kitchen and waited. Her heart was thumping fast. Pretty soon she would not be riding that pokey old pony any more. No, sir! This was one of her best ideas ever.

“When Mother sees how big I am, she’ll let me have a horse. I know she will,” Andi told herself.

Melinda ran into the kitchen giggling. “What are you going to show us, Andi?”

Andi rolled her eyes at giggle-box Melinda.

As soon as Mother and the boys came into the kitchen, Andi skipped across the room. Then she pointed to the wall next to the wood box. “Right there. That will show you I’m big enough.”

Everybody looked.

Up and down the wall were lines with names next to them: Justin, Chad, Mitch, Melinda, and Andi. Mother drew a new line each year until the children stopped growing. In a few weeks, Mother would draw a new line for Andi.

“Watch!” Andi said.

Quick as a wink, she ran to the wall and backed up. She put her hand on her head and pushed it against the wall. Then she stepped away. “See? See how much I grew this year?”

Justin bent down to take a closer look. “Well! It sure does look like you’ve grown.”

Andi smiled. She knew she was really close to getting a horse of her own. If Justin said she had grown, then it must be true.

She looked at Mother. “I would like a golden horse, Mother. A horse as shiny as a gold piece.” She dug around in her pocket for her special coin.

Andi kept all kinds of treasures in her pockets: grasshoppers and string and marbles and rocks. She never knew when something in her pocket might come in handy. If she saw a snake, she could throw a rock at it. Or she could give it a grasshopper to eat. Then the snake would go away.

Maybe.

Andi pulled out a shiny gold coin and held it up. It was her Christmas coin. She found it in her stocking last Christmas.

“See?” she said. “I want a horse just this color.”

Before Mother could answer, Chad said, “Not so fast, Andi. You can’t be that tall. Go stand next to the wall again.”

Andi did not want to do what bossy Chad said.

Sometimes her brother acted like he was *too big for his britches*. Andi heard the ranch boss tell her friend Riley that a lot. “You’re too big for your britches, boy,” he’d say.

Eight-year-old Riley was always acting too big for his britches.

Andi frowned. But then she did what Chad told her. She put her special coin in her pocket and backed up against the wall. She guessed it didn’t hurt to show everybody how big she was—one more time.

Chad put his hand on her head.

Melinda giggled. “You’re standing on your tip toes, Andi. You can’t do that.”

Andi looked down at her feet. “Why not? Standing on my tip toes makes me bigger. I have to be big so I can get a horse.”

Chad slowly pushed down on Andi’s head until she was standing on her flat feet.

“Sorry, baby sister. That’s not how it works.”

“Don’t call me that,” Andi huffed. He always called her baby sister. “I’m not a baby.”

“No, you’re not,” Mother said. She gave Chad one of those warning looks again. “But you are not quite ready for a horse. Coco is big enough for you right now.”

Andi let out a big breath. Coco was an old, slow, worn-out pony. He wasn't even Andi's very own pony! Coco was everybody's pony. Even tall, grown-up Justin rode Coco when he was a little boy.

Andi did not want to ride a hand-me-down pony any more.

"Coco is too old," she said. "He's like a great-grandpa pony. He only walks and trots."

"Which is just right for a little girl," Justin said.

Andi felt a tiny bit sick inside. Her tip-toe idea had not turned out too well. On her flat feet, Andi was little.

Too little.

"Please?" Andi said. Saying please sometimes helped.

But not this time.

"I'm sorry, Andrea," Mother said, "but you are not ready for a horse."

Andi slumped down on the floor.

It didn't look like she was going to get a horse this morning, after all.