

Pullin' the Wool Over Your Eyes

When it was almost time for lunch, Grandma asked us girls for our ABC gum. Diane started recitin' her ABC's as I explained that ABC gum just meant gum that has *Already Been Chewed*. Instantly, Diane stuck her tongue out for Grandma to take her wad. In a pickle, I quickly slipped my piece into her Kleenex. The undercover angel appeared not to be surprised. Did she notice how much bigger my wad was than Diane's? I hoped not.

Momma was fixin' Daddy's favorite sandwich—the “Dagwood.” Before my parents dated, she worked as a waitress at the only drive-in restaurant for miles—“The Toot.” The most popular items on the menu were Dagwood sandwiches (thirty-five cents) and a Black Cow, which was ice cream covered with root beer (ten cents).

“The Toot” was named The Toot because a drive-up customer would have to *toot* his horn as a signal, lettin' the waitress know he was ready to order. At The Toot, Daddy would wait to toot to make sure that when he did toot, Momma was the waitress ready to answer the toot. “Goo-goo eyes” glazin', he'd order a Dagwood and a Black Cow.



To make a Dagwood, Momma started with a fried hamburger and a slice of cheese on top of a piece of toast. Grandma pressed her hamburger in between a towel, which squeezed out all the grease. On top of the cheeseburger, Momma added relish, mayonnaise and a slice of onion, then another piece of toast. The second layer consisted of bacon, lettuce ‘n tomato, plus another piece of toast. Carefully insertin’ two toothpicks in opposite corners, she pressed down and then cut the tall sandwich diagonally in half.

Bacon sizzlin’ in the skillet, plus a mound of it drainin’ on a paper towel, was all it took to make my mouth water. I was starved. Momma told me to fetch the can of lard for the bacon grease. My stomach growled like a bear comin’ out of hibernation. No one appeared to be lookin’, so I snatched two pieces of bacon, then headed to the back porch.

Bacon safely stashed in my stomach, my hunger pains disappeared, but my heart was achin’ and I felt warm all over. Returnin’ with the lard can, I smelled something awful and nasty.

The boys had opened the back door. That’s all it took for the manure smell to spread and stink. Daddy popped his head in the kitchen, gave Momma some goo-goo eyes and even added a *smink*. That’s what Daddy calls a smile and a wink combined—a *smink*! The *smink* didn’t stop Momma from directin’ them down to the basement for a shower and a change of clothes.

Farmers can get downright filthy dirty. With only one bathtub upstairs, Daddy put a shower in the basement. There’s nothing schmancy fancy about it—not even a curtain. Momma makes us wear thongs on our feet even though we stand on a wood slat so the water drains well.

Grandma shook her head, placed her potato salad on the table and commented, “No matter how fast they hurry downstairs, the manure odor seems to linger. It stinks, doesn’t it, Ronda? It’s hard to cover up something so nasty.”

Grandma wasn’t just talkin’ about manure. So, was she thinkin’ about my fib—knowin’ Duane’s punishment—or the teeny-tiny lie about the Chicklets, or had she seen me sneak the bacon? I tried to act as though nothin’ had happened, so one-handed, (my other hand still recoverin’ from the mouse trap) I helped set the table.

Showers completed and half of the Dagwoods made, we all sat down and bowed our heads. Diane shut her eyes so tight her face was twisted—cute, but distorted. Everyone had one eye open, watchin’ as she prayed: “Gawd is gwate, Gawd is good, and we fank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed, fank You, Gawd, for daywee bwed. AMEN!”

She watched as we clapped. “That’s my little angel,” Daddy boasted.

As the baby in the family, Diane gets a lot of attention, but even I hafta admit that she's adorable—maybe not always an angel—but adorable.

Grandma got up to finish the rest of the sandwiches. “Jean, there's not enough bacon left for both sandwiches.”

My body sat motionless while my eyeballs were on a roll. No one noticed me lookin' around except the undercover angel. I knew it. Grandma knew what I knew. I'd hogged the bacon! I can't put anything past her. I bet she knows about the Chicklets too!

“Really,” Momma replied, “I thought for sure I'd fried enough bacon.”

“Somebody must have been achin' for some bacon,” joked Daddy. “Who snitched some pieces?”

Everyone simultaneously blurted out, “Not me!”—except *me*. My “Not me!” came out last and loudest. Now I knew that sayin', “Not me!” was wrong, but I also knew that if I now said, “Me!” I would get in trouble and possibly be sent to my room *without* lunch. It seemed the more fibs I told, the easier it was to tell a few more. Besides, I was hungry.

“We probably counted wrong.” Grandma responded, “We'll just share the last piece.”

Everyone noticed that the last piece was very small. My once empty stomach began to ache again. Those teeny-tiny lies were takin' their toll. I felt awful, but tried my best not to let it show.

Diane was ecstatic, sharin' about our new Silly Putty. That's all it took for *Mr. World Bookworm Encyclopedia*. Ronald took off! “Did you know Silly Putty was accidentally invented during WW II? The rubber-producing countries in the Far East were destroyed, which kept America from producing much-needed tires and boots. James Wright, a Scottish engineer, produced a gooey substance which, when rolled into a ball, bounced higher than any ball he'd ever seen. Scientists tried to find a practical use, but failed.”

Since Ronald was hoggin' the whole conversation, Chatty Cathy wouldn't have been able to get a word in edgewise. Ronald's not a big talker unless he's read about somethin', especially in the *World Book*.

“However,” he went on—he wasn't about to stop now—“Peter Hodgson, \$14,000 in debt, had faith in Silly Putty's potential. Borrowing \$147, he introduced it at the 1950 International Toy Fair in New York. Utilizing an old barn as a warehouse, he began distributing Silly Putty in used egg cartons to stores like Neiman-Marcus and Doubleday bookstores.”

Appearin' not to take a breath, Ronald rambled on, “A New York writer discovered Silly Putty and wrote an article. Three days after the magazine was released, Mr. Hodgson received a quarter million orders for his product.”

“Ronald, what a wonderful lesson on ingenuity,” Grandma politely interrupted. “A ‘mistake’ turned into an incredible surprise and an awesome business venture!”

“Speaking of business,” Daddy added, “boys, you’re going to have your hands full shearin’ sheep today.”

That’s all it took for *Mr. Know-It-All* to blurt out everythin’ he knows about sheep—and then some. “It’s amazing! Once the wool is off, the imperfections lying beneath the wool are exposed. Those imperfections had been covered up with layer upon layer of wool!”

“You’re not trying to ‘pull the wool over our eyes,’ are you?” joked Daddy.

Ignorin’ the question, Ronald kept going: “In the 1900s, men in Europe wore wigs made of wool in the British court. Some still do today.”

“Ronald,” Daddy jumped in, “you’d better eat. By pulling that bright, white, woolly wig down over a person’s eyes, one couldn’t see what was really happening. So if a clever lawyer fooled the judge, he was said to be ‘pulling the wool’ over his eyes. He’d do anything, including cheating, stretching the truth or even lying to make that happen.”

My stomach churned. The undercover angel added, “The more lies told, the more lies were needed to cover up the first lies in the first place. By the way, which one of you tried to ‘pull the wool over my eyes’ this morning?”

Was she lookin’ at me? My heart stopped. Was she *talkin’* about me? I felt hot. No one responded. Grandma clarified, “The rubber mouse?”

I sighed in relief as the boys shook their heads no. Momma glanced at Daddy, “Harold Eugene Friend, I always know when you’re covering up something. I can see it in your eyes! It was you, wasn’t it?”

“My lies have been exposed,” Daddy pleaded guilty, “I can *never* pull the wool over Momma’s eyes!”

“Phooey, Harold. It was a good thing it wasn’t real. I should have known you were up to your old tricks.”

“I’m shocked, Edna. You’ve always been able to smell a *rat* a mile away,” Daddy added, battin’ his eyes and grinnin’. “Sorry, Grandma, that was *cheesy!*”

“Harold,” Momma pleaded, “take that *sheepish* grin off your face!”

“Sorry...I’ve been *baaaaaad!*”

“*Woolly baaaaad,*” Diane added.

Everybody baaaad.

“Speaking of sheep, Ronald, you’ve outdone yourself with the shears we bought,” Daddy bragged. “Grandma Friend would be so proud.”