

(B)FORREST GUMP, BY W. GROOM

CHAPTER 1

LET ME SAY THIS: TO BE AN IDIOT IS NOT BOX OF CHOCOLATES. People laugh, lose patience, and then treat ¹you badly. Now they say people should be kind to us, but let me tell you— it isn't always true. But I haven't got complaints, because I live a pretty interesting life.

I have been an idiot since I was born. My IQ is near 70, they say it describes me. Probably, I'm more an imbecile, but personally, I think I'm not — and not an idiot — because people think that idiots are like Mongolian idiots — with Chinese eyes too close together. They play a lot with themselves.

Now I'm slow — but I'm probably a lot smarter than people think. For example, I can think things pretty well, but when I try to say or write them, it doesn't work. I'll show you what I mean.

The other day, I was walking down the street and this man was working in his yard. He said to me, "Forrest, do you want to earn some money?" and I said, "Uh-huh." So I had to move dirt. When I finished he took a dollar from his pocket.

It was better to argue about so little money. But I took the dollar and all I could say was "thanks" or something like that. And I went on down the street, holding that dollar in my hand, feeling like an idiot.

Do you see what I mean?

Now I know something about idiots. Probably the only thing I know, but I read about them. I like Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* the most. Their idiots are always smarter than people think. Hell, I agree with that. All idiots agree. Hee Hee.

When I was born, my mum named me Forrest, because of General Nathan Bedford Forrest who fought in the Civil War. Mum always said we were connected to his family.

And he was a great man, she says, he started up the Ku Klux Klan after the war. My grandma said they were not good. I agree with that. So whatever else old General Forrest did, starting Klan was not a good idea— any idiot could tell you that. But that's how I got my name.

¹ To treat – относиться к кому-то

My mum is a really fine person. Everybody says that. My daddy, he was killed just after I was born, so I never knew him. He worked in the docks² and one day a crane was taking a big net load of United Fruit Company bananas, something broke and the bananas fell down on my daddy. He was flat as a pancake. I don't care for bananas much myself, except for banana pudding. I like that.

My mum got a little pension from the United Fruit people, but it was okay. When I was little, she kept me inside a lot, this way the other kids couldn't hurt me. In summer afternoons, when it was really hot, she used to put me in the living room, made it dark, and brought some lemonade. Then she talked to me like a person talks to a dog or cat, but I liked it because her voice made me feel real safe and nice.

At first, when I was growing up, she let me go out and play with everybody. But then she saw that they laughed at me and hit me. After that, she told me not to play with boys anymore. I tried to play with girls but that wasn't better, because they all ran away from me.

Mum thought it would be good for me to go to the public school. But they told my Mum that it wasn't good for me to be there. They let me finish out first grade. The teacher was talking, I didn't listen to them, but I started looking out the window at the birds and squirrels³ outside. Sometimes, I just started shouting. The other kids never played with me. All laughed at me — all except Jenny Curran, who didn't run away from me and sometimes she let me walk next to her going home after class.

But the next year, they put me in another sort of school, and let me tell you, it was strange. It was like they collected all the funny kids they could find and put them all together. They were kids that couldn't even eat or go to the toilet by themselves. I was probably the best of the lot.

I stayed in that school for about five or six years. It wasn't so bad. They let us paint with our fingers and make little things, but mostly, it just taught us how to tie up⁴ the shoes and things like this. We didn't learn to speak — only how to read street signs.

When I was thirteen, some pretty unusual things began to happen. Firstly, I started to grow. I grew six inches in six months. By the time I was sixteen I was six feet six and

² A dock - порт

³ A squirrel - белка

⁴ To tie up - завязывать

weighed ⁵two hundred forty-two pounds. I know that because they took me in and weighed me. They said they just couldn't believe it.

What happen next caused a real change in my life. One day I was walking down the street on the way home from school, and a car stop near me. The guy called me and asked my name. I told him, and then he asked what school I go to, and why he didn't see me. When I told him about my school, he asked if I'd ever played football. I shook my head. I guess I could say that I'd seen kids playing it, but they'd never let me play. But like I said, I'm not good at long conversations, so I just shook my head. That was about two weeks after school began again.

In three days or later, they come and got me out of my school. My mum was there, and so was the guy in the car and two other people. They took all the things out of my desk and put it in a brown bag and told me to say goodbye to Miss Margaret. She started crying and gave me a big hug⁶. Then I said goodbye to all the other kids. And then I left.

We went to the new high school. When we got there they took me inside to the principal's office. The principal⁷ was an old gray-haired man with a tie and baggy pants. He looked like he finished my last school. They asked me questions, explained something and I just nodded my head. They wanted me to play football.

The guy in the car was the football coach, Fellers. That day Coach Fellers took me back to the changing room. I tried on a football suit with all stuff – even a real nice plastic helmet. The only thing was, they couldn't find shoes for me, so I had to use my sneakers.

Then we all went outside and Coach Fellers got everybody together. He introduced me. I was scared to death, because nobody had ever introduced me to strangers. They came up, shook my hand and said they were glad to see me. Then everybody started to train.

It's a kind of long story what happened next, but anyway, I began to play football. Coach Fellers helped me as I didn't know how to play. I couldn't remember what I had to do.

⁵ To weigh - весить

⁶ A hug - объятие

⁷ A principal – директор школы, колледжа, университета

Then they wanted me to be in defense⁸. They made me go and tackle⁹ a big tree about fifteen or twenty times. I had learnt something from the tree. They put me back with the three guys but got mad I didn't jump on the player with the ball. I was just afraid of it. But then that was fine.

I started classes. Here they had more serious things than in my old school. I had three homeroom classes where I just sat and did everything I wanted. There were three other classes where a lady was teaching me to read. Just the two of us. She was really nice and pretty. Miss Henderson was her name.

The only class I liked was lunch, but you can't call that a class. At the old school, my mum gave me a sandwich, a cookie and a piece of fruit— no bananas— for lunch. But in this school they had a cafeteria with nine or ten different things to eat. I couldn't choose what I wanted.

Guess who was in my homeroom class? Jenny Curran. She came up to me in the hall and said she remembered me from first grade. She was older now, with pretty black hair. She was long-legged and had a beautiful face.

My football was not great. Coach Fellers shouted at me.

Then one day something happened that changed all that. In the cafeteria I got my food and was going to sit next to Jenny Curran. We didn't talk, but she was the only person in the school I knew. I felt good sitting there with her. Most of the time she didn't notice me, and talked with other people. One guy started to laugh at me, saying something like "How's Dumbo?" It continued for a week or two, and I was saying nothing. Finally, I said — I can't believe I said it — but I said, "I'm not Dumbo." The guy just looked at me and started laughing. Jenny Curran said to the guy to keep quiet, but he took a carton of milk and poured¹⁰ it in my lap. I jumped up and ran out because it scared me.

Next day, that guy came up to me in the hall and said "I'll get you". All day I was afraid. Later that afternoon, when I was going to the gym, there he was with his friends. He was saying bad things and then he hit me in the stomach. It didn't hurt so much, but I was starting to cry. So I turned and began to run. They were running after me too. I just

⁸ Defense - защита

⁹ To tackle – хватать

¹⁰ To pour - лить

ran as fast as I could toward the gym, across the practice football field and suddenly I saw Coach Fellers, watching me.

That afternoon at the football practice, he divided the players in two teams. Suddenly the quarterback gave me the ball and I had to run outside the right end of the line. When they all started running after me, I ran fast as I could — only eight people stopped me. Coach Fellers was really happy. We'd run a lot of races before, to see how fast we could run, but I run a lot faster when somebody is running after me. What idiot doesn't?

Anyway, I became a lot more popular after that. We had our first game and I was scared to death, but they gave me the ball and I ran over the goal line two or three times. People have never been kinder to me after that.

That high school certainly began to change things in my life.

I was learning to read a lot better with Miss Henderson. She gave me Tom Sawyer and two other books I can't remember. I took them home and read them all, but then she gave me a test where I didn't do very well¹¹. But I enjoyed the books.

After a while, I sat next to Jenny Curran again in the cafeteria. There weren't problems for a long time, but then one day in spring I was walking home. Who appeared on my way? That was the boy that poured that milk in my lap. He got a stick and started calling me things like "stupo."

Some other people were watching, Jenny Curran was there too. I was about to run away again — but then, for no reason I know, I just didn't do it. The guy hurt me in the stomach with the stick. I took his arm and with my other hand I hit him on the head and that was the end of that, more or less.

That night my mum got a phone call from the boy's parents. They said if I hit their son again they would call the police. I tried to explain it to my mum. She said she understood, but I could tell she was worried. She told me that I was very big, I had to be careful, because I could hurt somebody. I nodded¹² and promised her I wouldn't hurt anybody else. That night when I was in bed I heard crying in her room.

But what did that do for me? I mean hitting that boy on the head. It put a new light on my football playing.

¹¹ To do well – хорошо справляться

¹² To nod - кивать

That year I made the All State Football team. I couldn't believe it. My mum gave me two pairs of socks and a new shirt on my birthday. She saved some money and bought me a new suit that I wore to get the All State Football award. First suit I ever had. My mum tied my tie for me and I went off.