

Wisdom

BESSIE, AN ELDERLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN ROCKS SLOWLY WITHIN THE COMFORTABLE FAMILIARITY OF A WORN, CANE CHAIR.

BESSIE (90)

What you lookin' at? I said, what you lookin' at? Didn't your meemaw ever learn you that it ain't polite to stare? I should know. I sit on this porch and stare at folks all day long.

But I'm old and I can do that. They always let old folk get away with things other folk can't.

When I was a baby, wild and free, my Pappy, he said I was stubbornner 'en a mule. When I became a new bride back in 1919, my Lambert swore I was the most pig-headed woman in all of Mississippi. An' he was prob'ly right. I always done things my own way. Then, when my Lambert up and died on me, and I was left on my own with five hungry young'uns to feed, I was even more of a spitfire. Folks around town called me 'willful and ornery', 'specially when I wouldn't take no new husband to help raise my babies. Finally, when time whopped me up the side of the head and I found out I was an old woman, people started callin' me 'feisty', 'cuz Lord knows I was too set in my ways by then. Now that I'm ninety-three, they say I'm eccentric.

(considers the word)

Eccentric...

(shakes her head and smiles)

I can be meaner 'en a snake, or crazy as a loon, and they just shake their heads and whisper, "Don't worry none about Old Bessie. She's just eccentric, is all." I get away with murder!

(slaps her thigh and chuckles)

Now that's what I call progress!

SHE LOOKS UP AT THE SKY, THEN WIPES HER BROW WITH A WORN HANDKERCHIEF SHE PULLS FROM HER SLEEVE.

BESSIE

Looks like it's goin' to be a hot day. Why don't you set a spell? I sure could use the company.

SHE ROCKS A LITTLE, ADJUSTS HER GLASSES AND LOOKS AT THE AUDIENCE.

BESSIE

You're not from around these parts, are you? That's a shame. There's somethin' mighty precious about this here land. Families sink their roots way deep into this soil. It nourishes them and helps 'em to grow strong 'n close.