

32 Hyland Ave.
Crichton, Alabama
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I. B. P. [Ila B. Prince]

LENA CASH, OCTOGENARIAN

Lying propped up in bed surrounded with everything to make her comfortable was Mrs. Lena Cash, a woman eighty-eight years of age. Mrs. Cash's eyes are bright and keen. She never uses glasses for reading. Her mind is equally keen, and she seems to enjoy life to the fullest extent, although she has been confined to her bed for three years.

Mrs. Cash said: "I was born in New Orleans eighty-eight years ago, on a street near the canal, and the house is still standing today. My mother's name was Matilda Smith and my father was John Smith. My folks were big folks of New Orleans, but my parents didn't live long after I came. Some woman took me after my mother died, and didn't want to give me up when my aunt and uncle sent for me. They sent for me by a river boat captain, who was on a boat that ran between Vicksburg and New Orleans. When he came back without me, they asked another captain to bring me. And he said they could be sure I would be with him when he returned.

"I can remember it just as well as it was yesterday, although I was only three years old. I was sitting on this woman's lap on the porch of her home. She was combing my hair, and I only had on my little drawers and petticoat. This captain came walking up the brick walk, placed one foot up on the steps

and took a picture of me out of his pocket. After standing there a few minutes, looking from me to the picture and back again, he grabbed me out of her lap, and picked up my dress and another petticoat that was lying on the floor at her side, and started running with me. He ran a long time, and finally we come to the river and he took me on board of a boat. He gave me to a stewardess and told her to put me to bed, so I could rest after being in the hot sun. He lay down, too, for he was tired and hot, as it was just before dinner time. I remember when he first reached the boat, he blew the whistle two blasts and soon the boat begun to move.

"I forgot to tell you that after I was born, Ma and Pa moved to Vicksburg and died there, and I was in Vicksburg when I was kidnapped. They didn't call it that then, but that was what it was. So when the boat reached New Orleans, I remember seeing my aunt and uncle come up the gang plank to get me.

"I lived with this aunt and uncle, who adopted me and gave me the name of Gilmore, so I was known as Lena Gilmore after that. Soon after my aunt and uncle got me, they had me christened a Methodist in their parlor. I remember I was standing by the piano, and the aunt gave me this little book. It is called 'Dew-Drop,' and it has a passage of scripture for every day of each month of the year. That was in 1853. You see, I was born on the fourth day of July in 1850.

"Shucks! I have been many places since then; but let me tell you when I lived in New Orleans with this aunt, she made

me work. I would have to crawl under the beds and dust with a brush. You know those winding stairs? Well, I had to take my duster and go over every banister and crevice on them; and one day when I was only four years old, I was dusting those stairs and they heard such a noise, 'blump! blump!' and when they picked me up they thought I was dead. They had to put braces on my chest and back. That fall weakened my spine.

"When I was eight we moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, and lived a few years then went to Water Valley. When I was fifteen, I came to Mobile on the first day of February, 1865. I have moved twenty-four times in my life, and every time I've come back to Mobile. Looks like I was doomed to live in Mobile.

"When I was seventeen I was married, and I was just a splinter of a girl. My! how I did work. I was always the greatest hand for planting seed. If I got an orange or an apple seed I'd plant it.

"Oh, I had my first baby, this here boy Will, when I was eighteen years old. I had five children, only three livin' now. Cicero is my other boy, and he and Will own the Noah's Ark Grocery, and the Pine Grove Ice Company. Bless their hearts!

"Now, you come here son," she said to her son, 'hold your hand; this is your money, it belongs to you for paying my taxes.' You see, I get forty dollars a month pension from the Federal army. Now get this straight. I could get a Confederate pension, because Mr. Cash was a Confederate soldier, and then he fought

the Indians with the Federals. Of course, I can't draw both so I take the Federal pension, for it pays me more than the Confederate would; and they only pay every three months. I couldn't live on that. When that check comes every month I get it cashed, then I get my little boxes around me here on the bed, and I put the tax money in this Lipton tea box; in this salve jar, I put the wash and paper money, and in these other tea boxes I keep my church money and money for other expenses.

"The way I do is to pay all my bills, and if everybody was as honest about their debts as I am the world would be better off."

When the son, who is now seventy years of age, went to the bed, she said to him:

"Now, sit down and hold your hand and count with me."

She took the tea box and took out eleven paper dollars, and counted them into his hand. Then she began unwrapping silver money, and said:

"Now, that paper money was out of my pension money, but this here silver is charity money. You see this here dollar? Your son, Joseph, give me that dollar."

Then she began counting a dime at a time, and said that Mrs. Thompson and the daughter gave her that dollar in dimes.

"Now, listen, ain't you glad you come? Listen, here's two dimes that come from Houston, Texas, and here's another ten cents from Mrs. Thompson. Now wait, -- ten, there's twenty, there's thirty, thirty-five cents from your wife. This here -- I don't know how I got that" she said, holding up the money in

her hand; "that makes eighty or ninety cents. Oh yes, I put this dollar in myself. You see, your mother never cheats nobody. Now my box is empty, but you've got half of your tax money back. Next month I'll pay the other half. Now, you come here and kiss me for all that money."

When Mrs. Cash had finished counting the money, her son said:

"Ma, how can you tell who gave you the money?"

She said: "I just wrap it in different pieces of paper, and I just remember. Folks think because I am eighty-eight years old I can't remember anything, but I can see and remember better than most folks can these days. In fact, some of my near neighbors around here think I am crazy because I believe in certain things. You take my daughter Nora, she gets mad at me when I get to telling all about signs. But let me tell you when I tell you anything, now look out, for it will be just like I tell you.

"To begin with, if you have company on Monday morning, you will have company all the week. Now, here you are, and then in comes my boy Will, then Miss Alice here comes in. Didn't I tell you?"

The lady referred to here by Mrs. Cash at this moment walked into the room.

"Now, don't you ever let anybody sweep the dirt out of your house after night. Just as sure as you do, you will sweep somebody out by death, and if you have somebody die don't let them be taken out of the house feet first, because another will follow soon. Now, Nora here, don't believe in that, and she won't let

me talk about it much. Why there's ever so many signs that are sure. If a rooster crows after sun down, or a cow lows at night there will be a death in the neighborhood. If a bat gets in the house, it's a sign that someone will leave the house for good. Be sure you never cut a loaf of bread and put the cut end on a table pointing to the edge of the table; always turn to the center of the table, or it will bring trouble. Another sure thing is, don't ever move a cat or old broom when moving from a house. If you want to keep the cat, send it on ahead of you; and if you have chickens and pigs always move the pigs first, because they will root up good luck, but if you send the chickens first, they will scratch away all your good luck.

"Now, there's another thing, when a woman first gets out of bed from childbirth, she should not carry water in a bucket, she should carry a thimbleful at first, because if she doesn't the baby will dribble all the rest of its life. Never let a baby look in a mirror, for it will have a hard time teething, and be sure you never put a baby's shoes on the mantelpiece or any place higher than its head, for it will not rest. A sure way to give a baby the cramps is to rock its cradle when the cradle is empty; and be sure and don't hang its clothes in the wind, for it will give it the colic.

"There's another thing I must tell you that is good for nightmares. Put a knife and a prayer book under the bed. That sure will help for sometimes the witches ride you. Now don't

get me wrong, I believe in God, and I went to church as long as I was able, and I now pay twenty-five cents apiece for me and Nora for my Sunday money, but I can't pay anything extra. You see, I was christened a Methodist, but I am a Catholic now. I tell you I think the Methodist Church is better than the Baptist. You just go see for yourself; the Baptists don't get down on their knees like the Methodists. Since I haven't been able to go to church, Father comes every first Friday and gives me Communion."

Her daughter, Nora, came in at this point and said:

"Ma, I don't believe in them old signs. Father said you break the first Commandment when you believe in signs."

Mrs. Cash replied:

"You go 'long. The priest is just a man like you and me."

Nora said: "Yes, I'll tell Father not to bring you any more Communion, you old hypocrite. Don't you know signs were done away with when the Lord come on earth?"

"That's all right" Mrs. Cash said, "but just the same, how do you account for the ghost without a head that used to walk around the old Carver house? You know that big two-storey house that used to be near the creek between here and town? Well, many's the time people saw that headless man walking around there before they tore the house down.

"Now, get that old paper your pa had that was found in the old Carver house when they was a-tearing it down. Here it is, it's the Federal Union, published in Milledgeville, Georgia,

July 2, 1839. That's some old paper ain't it? Now, while you are in that trunk, git that other old book of mine. Did you ever see a veil what babies are sometimes born with? Well, here's the veil that come off of my last baby's face, fifty-four years ago. Poor little thing didn't live to be but eight months old. I know if that baby had lived it would have been wise, for they say that a baby that is born with a veil over its face has powers to see into the future.

"Now, hush! I ain't told you nothing yet. I have now got my third set of teeth. One day here at home I was rubbing my tongue over my gums and I said to Nora; 'I feel a tooth,' and she said, 'Aw Ma, you don't no such thing.' Then later I was a-setting in church and I felt another tooth, and when I got home, I said; 'Nora, don't tell me I'm a-lying, for here's another tooth.' And sure enough, Nora looked and I was a getting a third set of teeth. My! but my gums were sore; but that soreness is all stopped now. That was after Mr. Cash died, and he's been dead fourteen or fifteen years; and that ain't all that has happened since Mr. Cash died. Why, just six weeks after he died, our home burned, but Nora managed to save most of my furniture and things, and by the help of God, we built back and have managed somehow.

"But you take Nora here, she is a good girl; she cleans St. Catherine's Church every week and they give her two dollars a week for it. Nora's good at most everything, if you want a good show just send for her. Here, show the lady your costume

you made and wore in the burlesque antique show."

Nora brought out a unique costume, that she wore, calling herself "Soft Drink Princess." The waist was a basque of pale blue rayon, with round neck, edged with white ruching, and spangled with root beer tops. The sleeves were short and edged with deep lace that had been on one of her petticoats in the intended trossseau that she never used. The buttons down the front of the basque were of black jet with a gold horseshoe on it. The buttons are over sixty-eight years old.

The hoop skirt was made of bright-colored cretonne that had a panel of plain pink rayon. The skirt was edged with coca cola stoppers, six hundred and seventy-six stoppers being used. In the center of the panel was a coca cola bottle made of stoppers. To make the three hoops for the skirt she said she used clothes wire held together with straps.

"It took me two weeks to make my costume," she said, "because I had to take an ice pick and drive holes through two sides of each stopper to be able to sew them on. Polly, the parrot, and my two dogs thought I was cracking nuts and they watched longingly when I was a pounding on them stoppers, fo all three of them loves nuts. But let me tell you, you ain't seen nothing 'till I get my train. Here it is, three yards long of pink rayon, edged with pink crepe paper ruffling. Around the edge, you see, I've used coca cola stoppers, and making my basket in the end of the train, I've used different colored stoppers off of root beer bottles, R. C. Cola, Chasers, for the flowers in the basket, and

for the blue bow on the basket I've used cream soda stoppers. See, around the basket is peaches and bunches of grapes made of stoppers.

"Now, don't go till I show you my wig. It's made of combings of my hair, powdered and sewed on a kid glove. See, here are five strings of heads on it, which made me look real pretty. Oh, my! I told everybody, ain't it a pity I had to dress up in old bottle stoppers to look pretty. Oh! I almost forgot to show you the comb I wore in my hair. Here; I made it with two brilliant clasps, fixed on to three nut picks. Ain't it pretty? But let me tell you, I did have on something that was valuable, my Grandpa's watch that is over one hundred and fifty years old. Grandpa traded a hundred square acres of land for this watch. This here brooch that I wore belonged to my grandmother, and it is over eighty years old. With this here costume I wore gilded slippers. But let me tell you I had on a bustle, too. You see, I have plenty to do taking care of Ma, and cleaning the church and being in plays. But it's fun, although I am in my sixties.

"Independ, this male puppy, was born on Ma's birthday last July 4th, and that is the reason we call him Independ. This other dog here is his mother; her name is Annabelle. Polly is thirty-nine years old and keeps Ma company while I am out at work, seeing after the chickens, and other things. Polly's got as much sense as a person; she loves the radio and nearly busts

her sides laughing when Sarah and Sally come on. Sometimes she wants me to turn on the radio, and she will say 'Nora radio! Nora radio! When I tell her, she can't have the radio, she will tell me to go to the devil!'"