

# The Quilter

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(A grandmother sits on a porch in the summertime in the South. She is piecing a quilt. Her granddaughter (not shown) sits at her feet attempting her first bit of piecing.)

Lila Belle your stitches're way too big. Slow down and take your time. You got no place you need to be but here. Now don't you go and roll your eyes at me. When I was your age I'd sit all day with my grandmother and quilt. We'd have us glasses of sweet tea, sliced tomatoes fresh from the garden and toast. With friends, a quilt in the making and iced tea you could set the world to rights in no time. Course men folk called it gossiping, but it was more than that, much more.

(Nana sees LB twisting around in her seat.)

Sweetie sit still. You scrunching around like you got ants in your pants. You need to visit the little girl's room? Huh? No? Well I tell you what, you take yourself a deep breath and when you breathe out just push that needle in. That's right. But slower. You gotta get yourself a rhythm going, then the mind can just wander off cause the hands, why they know just what to do.

(LB: Nana, when did you a start quiltin?)

Oh gosh let me think. Why I reckon I was 7 or 8 when I worked on my first quilt. Course I done a bit of piecing before that just like you're doin now. I remember sitting on my Nana's screened in porch. My grandpa'd put in a ceiling fan on the porch and it'd go round and round stirring up hot air of a summer's afternoon. My bangs kept tickling my forehead and the dust from the cotton fields across the road would get in my nose. I'd do my darndest not to sneeze, but sometimes I'd just have to let loose with one and then of course three more would follow. I always sneezed in groups of fours and so did your mama. Yes, she did. I found that so strange.

(LB: Nana tell me a story about old times.)

Lila Belle you make me sound old as the hills. Old times? Shoot I'm not old enough to remember old times yet. You give me a few more years sweetie pie before start askin me about old times. Those stitches are looking good. Most people forget to breathe when they're working on something new. And that just makes it harder, so you just remember to breathe real deep. Oh and smile too, cause that relaxes the whole body and then when you're relaxed you can breathe better. That's it.

(LB: Nana, do you remember Mama?)

Your mother? Of course darlin', I got boatloads of memories of your Momma. There was the time she was 13 or so and had to bake a cake for a Halloween Party at school. And I told her she had to do it all by herself cause I had my hands full with your Uncle Hiram and Uncle Oris. Well I don't know what she was thinking, but she didn't hardly let the cakes cool before she was covering it with green icing. Now I never understood why she used green food coloring for Hallo... Oh, well you may be right; maybe for second she thought it was St Patty's Day. Anyway she was slathering this green icing all over the warm cake and when she put the second layer on top and started covering it with icing, the top layer started to slide off. Course I was hanging out the wash when all this was going on. She started screaming and I ran in there thinking she'd done cut off a finger or something

and I took one look at that lopsided cake dubbed it the Leaning Tower of Pisa and then I just burst out laughing. Your Momma, she just glared at me with that look of hers. It took her a minute or two before she let her funny bone get tickled and then she let out a whoop you could hear clean across town. Then with her fingers, she pushed the top layer back in place and skewered it all with toothpicks and licked her fingers. It looked sort of like a fat, green porcupine which I decided was just about perfect for a Halloween cake. And you know what? That cake plate came back licked clean as a whistle!

Oh Lord it's hot as Hades in here. I wish I had that ole fan of Grandpa's?

(LB: Do you remember Great Nana Margaret?)

Well you're just full of questions today. Oh yes I remember great Nana Margaret. She was my mother-in-law and despite what everybody says about mother-in-laws I always liked her. No honey, don't hold the needle so tight; you'll get a cramp. You'll get the hang of it, just takes practice. You do a little bit every day and before you know it you'll be quilting in your sleep. Now where was I. Oh yes Nana Margaret. She was a helluva woman. Oops guess I'll have to put a quarter in the jar. Course if I say enough bad words we might have us enough money saved up to get us an ice cream cone. That'd go down real nice right about now.

Anyway Nana Margaret. I met her when I was 16. She seemed old to me at the time, but I realize now she couldn't have been more than 38 or 39 and here I am on the downhill side of 70 and I don't feel all that old. Course when you're 16 everyone older seems old to you. What?

(LB: Nana, how old was she when she died?)

Well let's see she musta been 83 or 84 when she passed. She had a good long run at life. I remember she kept the coffeepot going all day long. Of course she needed all the caffeine cause she was the most laid back person I ever knew. I never saw her hurry for anything. And it'd drive me nuts cause she'd be late all the time, but now I kinda admire her for it.

(LB: I wish I could remember her. What was your last memory of her?)

My last memory of her? What an interesting question Lila Belle. Well let me think. Two days before she died I was on the phone with her, long distance. She sounded good. Not as if she'd be gone in 48 hours. I asked her how she was doin? And she said, "I feel like I'm just losing myself bit by bit, kinda floating. You know, I'm off on my last, great adventure." I asked her, "Margaret what's your earliest memory?" She paused, I don't know if she was still smoking at that point, but often when we talked on the phone, I'd hear her take a drag on her cigarette while she accessed her memory banks. "Well",--she always seemed to start her thoughts with a long, drawn out 'well' as if she was giving herself time to collect her thoughts. So she said, "Well, I can see myself in this drainage ditch along the road. It's summer; and it's hot as hell. Oh Ok you're right. That's another quarter, but *she* said it not me.

Then she said, "I'm dripping with sweat. I never did perspire. And I sure as hel...heck didn't glow. There's not a cloud in the sky. But the sky's not that crisp blue you get on a cold, dry winter's day. No it's kinda milky blue. And the ditch is still damp with dew, so it must be morning. I'm surrounded by dandelions, a carpet of yellow all around me. My arms are out and I'm twirling in circles. Even now I can feel a smile on my face. Don't know where I am, but the flowers sure are

pretty in the morning light.” Those were her exact words. For some reason they just stuck with me. She died two days later, in the morning. I still miss her.

(Nana realizes things have turned a bit too serious.)

You know what Lila Belle, I think you and me need to raid the curse jar, cause we need us an ice cream cone right about now. Don'tcha think?

End