

HAPPY BIRTHDAY BEATRICE

20-DE03-W17

A centurion plans to teach a reporter the secret to her longevity  
but ends up being the one who learns a lesson.

FADE IN

Two females are heard singing "Happy Birthday." One voice is strong, the other faint, weathered, and raspy.

STRONG VOICE (O.S.)	RASPY VOICE (O.S.)
Happy birthday to you...	Happy birthday to me...
Happy Birthday to you...	Happy birthday to me...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

On the wall is a tapestry that reads, "Hebrews 11:4." Beside it is another tapestry that reads, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. H. P. Lovecraft."

On the table is a chocolate layered birthday cake with three candles, "1" "0" "0" burning.

The raspy voice is that of BEATRICE JENKINS (100, petite) who sits in front of the cake wearing a beautiful housedress, a pearl necklace, pearl earrings, and a "Happy Birthday" tiara.

The strong voice comes from Beatrice's caregiver, CLARA BANKSTON (60).

CLARA	BEATRICE
Happy Birthday Mrs. Beatrice... Happy Birthday to you.	Happy Birthday to me... Happy Birthday to me.

Beatrice uses the strength of the table to slowly stand and successfully blow out the three candles as Clara CLAPS.

Beatrice sits again and puts her glasses on.

CLARA  
Now you be nice to the reporter who's coming and let him ask the questions. Just think about what you want him to know.

BEATRICE  
How I keep my eyes on Jesus.

The doorbell RINGS.

INT. FRONT DOOR - DAY

Clara opens the door for JAMES FREEMAN (40s, looks studious). He totes a black bag and seems rushed.

JAMES  
Ms. Clara?

Clara nods.

JAMES  
I'm James from Channel Twelve News.  
Sorry I'm late. High winds caused a  
tree to fall and I had to wait  
until the road was clear.

CLARA  
Come on in. Nobody's here but me  
and Mrs. Beatrice.

JAMES  
Is anyone else coming?

CLARA  
Mrs. Beatrice says when you live to  
be 100, everyone else is dead.

Chuckles.

JAMES  
I'm really excited to do this  
interview. I've never met anyone  
her age. I hope I don't get too  
nervous.

CLARA  
She's just people like you and me  
but stubborn as a mule. She loves  
two things: to bake and to talk--

Beatrice has made her way to the hallway interrupting...

BEATRICE  
--I lost some of my sight, not my  
hearing. I love to talk about  
Jesus.

She eyes James.

BEATRICE  
You here to put me on TV?

His eyes light.

JAMES  
(nodding nervously)  
Yes ma'am.

The three slowly head toward the kitchen.

James stops to admire an old framed black and white photo of a YOUNG BEATRICE in a wedding gown and a YOUNG MAN.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The three enter.

James reads, the two tapestries.

JAMES

Before we start the interview, can  
I take a picture of you by these?

Beatrice moseys over and stands between the tapestries.

James takes a picture with his phone.

Beatrice nods for him to sit.

James fumbles through his bag and pulls out a recorder.

JAMES

Mrs. Beatrice, I'm going to ask you  
questions is that okay?

Beatrice nods.

BEATRICE

You here ain't you?

James and Clara shoot each other looks and smiles.

JAMES

How does it feel to be a hundred?

Beatrice seems to think for a moment.

BEATRICE

I guess it feels like I'm alive.

James lifts his wrist and mumbles something into his watch.

JAMES

What is your success to living to  
be one hundred?

BEATRICE

I eat breakfast every morning at  
6:00 AM; make my bed at 6:30; then  
sit in my chair and have a little  
talk with Jesus. I pay my tithes  
every month and all my bills.

(MORE)

BEATRICE (CONT'D)  
Doesn't leave much left but I don't  
owe anyone nothing but love.

James mumbles into his watch again.

Beatrice picks up a pitcher of water and pours it into a  
glass on the table.

James watches her hand tremble.

Beatrice fills the glass and sets it in front of him.

BEATRICE  
You thought I was going to spill it  
didn't you?

James looks guilty.

JAMES  
(nodding)  
Yes.

BEATRICE  
That's because you kept your eyes  
on the glass. Never take your eyes  
off Jesus.

James nods enjoying Beatrice's stern wisdom.

JAMES  
Seems like you're a woman of faith.

Beatrice slices a piece of cake and places it on a small  
plate. She nudges the plate toward him.

Clara gets him a fork.

James indulges.

JAMES  
This is really good! Moist. Where  
did you buy this?

Beatrice side eyes James then lifts her eyes to Clara.

Clara smiles shaking her head. She knows what's coming next.

BEATRICE  
(chuckling)  
Buy? Been making these myself for  
over seventy years. No eggs, milk,  
or butter.

James looks at Clara who nods in affirmation.

BEATRICE

People call em Depression cakes but I call em manna cakes. Just like the Children of Israel wondered in the wilderness, these remind me that God always provides.

James is enjoying Mrs. Beatrice and the cake.

JAMES

The wedding picture in the hallway--

BEATRICE

--That's my Eddie Jenkins. He went home to be with the Lord a long time ago but Clara takes me to the cemetery every year on our wedding anniversary. I already paid to rest beside him. You wanna meet us out there the next time we go? He's been dead too long to be jealous.

James laughs.

JAMES

That would be great footage--

Beatrice interrupts.

BEATRICE

--You read your Bible?

He pauses like it's a trick question.

JAMES

Well, um, not as often as I should.

BEATRICE

God ain't gone judge you according to how many times you read his book but how well your life reads because of it. You got a favorite scripture?

JAMES

(shaking his head)  
Let me think about it.

BEATRICE

Mine is Hebrews 11:4. And it is impossible to please God without faith...

Suddenly the kitchen curtains FLAP in a CLAP of thunder.

The lights flicker.

Clara moves to close the window.

Three BEEPS come from James' watch followed by a voice.

JAMES' WATCH (O.S.)

This is a message of the Branton  
County emergency broadcast system.  
The national weather indicated  
Thunder Storm Peter is registering  
at 50 miles per hour...

James gets up and gathers his things.

JAMES

Mrs. Beatrice, I guess I'm going to  
have to cut this interview short.  
Can I come back tomorrow? I'd love  
to bring my son. He's going to  
school to be an attorney.

Beatrice nods.

BEATRICE

I'm going to call the cemetery to  
get you the location of where  
Eddie's buried. Somethings are  
getting harder for me to remember.  
I just look for the oak tree.

The lights go out.

JAMES

You have a flashlight? I can check  
your switch box.

Clara fumbles through a drawer and hands James a flashlight.

She leads him to a door.

CLARA

It's in the basement.

James heads downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The lights are back on.

James returns.

JAMES

Just a circuit tripped but there's a leak in your basement. We may get a lot of rain in the next few weeks. Make sure you call your insurance company and ask them to send someone to take a look.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Clara closes the door behind James.

Beatrice has made her way into the room. She sits on the sofa and hands Clara an envelope labeled, "The Other Side Cemetery" and large handwritten numbers, "11177701."

Clara picks up the phone receiver and dials...

CEMETERY RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

The Other Side Cemetery. Julia speaking. How may I help you?

Clara hands Beatrice the phone.

BEATRICE

Hello. My name is Beatrice Jenkins. My policy number is 11177701. Can you please give me the number of my two plots?

After a brief silence.

CEMETERY RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

I'm sorry Mrs. Jenkins. We show a Mister Eddie Jenkins in plot twenty-one-delta-charlie but the plot beside him has an outstanding balance of two thousand, three hundred, and fifty dollars.

Beatrice's brow furrows.

BEATRICE

How did you make that mistake?

CEMETERY RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

No ma'am. Our records indicate the last payment you made was January 30, 1995.

Beatrice slowly leans back trying to recollect.

Clara takes the phone.



CLARA

Thanks for the information. We'll call you back.

The mix up weighs on Beatrice's face.

She hands Clara another envelope, "LAKERIDGE INSURANCE."

Clara dials the number.

LAKERIDGE INSURANCE (O.S.)

Lakeridge Insurance. Tom speaking.

Clara extends the receiver to Beatrice.

Beatrice holds her stomach. She shakes her head and flings her hand for Clara to do the talking.

Clara presses the speakerphone button.

CLARA

Hello. My name is Clara Bankston. I'm calling on behalf of Beatrice Jenkins. She lives at 1403 Station Street. I think all the rain we're getting has caused some water damage in her basement.

LAKERIDGE INSURANCE (O.S.)

I looked up your policy by your phone number. I'm sorry but your standard home insurance policy doesn't cover water damage. If you haven't purchased flood insurance before the storm, you're responsible for paying for all flood-related damage out-of-pocket.

Beatrice is agitated. She leans in and speaks out in concern.

BEATRICE

How much will that cost?

LAKERIDGE INSURANCE

Hard to say until someone provides an estimate. Could be hundreds or a lot more.

Beatrice leans back and slowly rubs her stomach.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Clara places Beatrice's dinner plate with baked chicken, broccoli, and mashed potatoes in front of her.

A look of worry rests on Beatrice's face. She grips the edge of the table, gets up, and ambles out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Clara opens the door for James.

James' son, ELIJAH (20s Oxford look) accompanies him.

JAMES

Morning Ms. Clara. This is my son  
Elijah.

Clara shakes Elijah's hand.

CLARA

Mrs. Beatrice found out the plot  
next to Mister Jenkins isn't paid  
for and her insurance won't cover  
the cost to fix water damage in the  
basement. She won't say it. But  
she's worried about where she's  
going to get the money from.

JAMES

Should I reschedule finishing the  
interview?

Clara hunches her shoulders as she leads them to Beatrice.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

She taps on Beatrice's partially opened door.

CLARA

Mister Freeman's here.

James stops Elijah.

JAMES

Let me talk to her first.

Elijah walks away with Clara.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The clock on the night stand shows, "10:00."

Beatrice lies in bed with a blanket over her.

James taps on the door before he enters.

JAMES

Good morning Mrs. Beatrice. It's  
10:00 A.M. How are you today?

Silence.

JAMES

Ms. Clara said you didn't eat last  
night. How can you have strength to  
make your bed and talk to Jesus?

Silence.

He eyes a Bible on the nightstand and thinks before he picks  
it up. He hurriedly FLIPS to Matthew 14:30-31 and reads...

JAMES

But when he saw the wind, he was  
afraid and, beginning to sink,  
cried out, "Lord, save me!"  
Immediately Jesus reached out his  
hand and caught him. "You of little  
faith," he said, "why did you  
doubt?"

He peers over the Bible at Beatrice who lies still.

JAMES

This is my favorite scripture. Have  
you taken your eyes off Jesus?

Elijah heads to the door with a slice of Depression cake.

James beckons him to enter.

JAMES

Mrs. Beatrice. This is my son  
Elijah. He's studying to be an  
elder care attorney.

ELIJAH

Hi Mrs. Beatrice.

Silence.

JAMES

Do you know what an elder care attorney is?

Silence.

JAMES

They are a little like the Holy Spirit. They speak on behalf of the elderly.

ELIJAH

Mrs. Beatrice, Ms. Clara told me you made this cake. Is that true?

Beatrice slowly lowers the cover. She squints as she lifts her head to see Elijah taking pride in her cake.

ELIJAH

She also told me about your sight. There's a program called Aged, Blind, and Disabled. It's a state funded program that provides cash assistance to eligible low-income individuals aged 65 or older, if they meet certain criteria.

Beatrice sits up.

James smiles warmly. As he places the Bible on the nightstand, a black and white photo of a YOUNG MALE SOLDIER IN UNIFORM falls on the bed.

Elijah picks it up.

ELIJAH

Is this your husband?

Beatrice nods.

Elijah smiles as if he knows a secret.

ELIJAH

How long was he in the military?

BEATRICE

Four and a half years.

ELIJAH

Did he serve in a war?

BEATRICE

(nodding)  
World War Two.

ELIJAH

Do you know what kind of discharge  
he received?

BEATRICE

Sure. Honorable.

ELIJAH

As a surviving spouse, you may  
qualify for Aid and Attendance  
which provides monthly payments  
added to your VA pension.

BEATRICE

You sure?

Elijah confidently nods.

Beatrice leans forward

BEATRICE

How much will all this cost me?

ELIJAH

How about a depression cake?

Beatrice leans back against the head rest and blushes.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The four sit at the table.

Elijah enjoys more of Mrs. Beatrice's Depression cake.

James continues his interview with Mrs. Beatrice.

JAMES

I'm learning so much about you.

BEATRICE

I'm learning too. No matter how old  
you get it's possible to take your  
eyes off Jesus. But thank God He  
never takes His eyes off me.

Warm smiles fill the air.

FADE OUT.