

## Why Lydia Is Rich and Wise

Mr. Hinkle sure is different than Mrs. Barbour. She taught me for three years up at the school in Paradise. She always made us kids feel ignorant on account of us using mountain talk. One day, I raised my hand to tell her I had to leave early. When she called on me, I said, “Mrs. Barbour, I need to recollect you that I have to get on up to the holler. Uncle’s William’s taking us’ns to see how BJ’s getting on at the hospital.”

Instead of letting me go, she commenced to lecturing. “You will get nowhere in life using that kind of language, Lydia. You must learn to speak like a proper lady, not a backward hick. Class, where did Lydia make her mistakes?”

Hands shot up all over the room to help me fix my words. She wouldn’t let me go until I said the correct words three times in a row:

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I ran home as fast as I could, tears running down my face. Uncle William paced back and forth aside his car. Mama and Gran already sat inside. “Get in,” he yelled when he saw me. I climbed in the backseat. Uncle William gived me a lecture about how he was all wore out after working so hard in the coal mine, and I had best respect him by being on time.

Mama and Gran didn’t say nothing about it until we got back from the hospital. “Lydia, why were you so late?” Mama asked as we got ready for bed. “That’s not like you. If we make your Uncle William wait, he might not want to take us to the hospital to see your brother.”

I sobbed out the story about Mrs. Barbour. Gran said, “That just goes to show what your teacher don’t know. It’s called a holler ‘cause iffen your kin’s at the other end, you got to holler real loud for them to hear you. Land sakes, whoever heard tell of calling it a hollow. Teachers nowadays ain’t worth a flea on a hound.” Gran shook her head and headed off to bed.

“Mama, I ain’t never going to say nothing to Mrs. Barbour—never again, no way, no how,” I said after Gran left.

Mama stroked my hair. “Lydia, don’t you worry none about it tonight. You get a good night’s sleep, and we’ll talk about it more when you get home tomorrow.”

After supper the next night, me and Mama sat out on the porch. “Look around you,” Mama told me.

I did. The sun headed to bed behind the green and blue mountains, and the sky fired up with rainbow colors. The whippoorwills sung like their breasts would bust open with happiness iffen they didn’t. I took a deep breath of the sweet honeysuckle that was a-blooming just a few feet away.

“All this is our’n,” Mama said. “God gives it to us everyday. He must think we be awful special to do this for us. City folk get so hung up on having the things man makes that they forget that the best gifts come from Him. But you know, Lydia. You carry this truth in your heart. That makes you one of the richest and wisest people in this whole entire world. And your mountain words just pour right out from that truth. Iffen you need to learn to talk fancy to get by in school, that’s fine by me. But don’t never let nobody make you forget who you be.”

I wish Mama could get to know Mr. Hinkle. I think she would like him right well, even iffen he is an outlander from Ohio. They would understand each other real good.