

Tales of the Elder Statesman

Edward Faith

iUniverse (Mar 15, 2021)

Softcover \$13.99 (208pp)

978-1-66320-708-1

Tales of the Elder Statesman gathers stories of gentle mayhem and commonplace events, all from a colorful vantage.

The short stories of Edward Faith's *Tales of the Elder Statesman* are set among the townsfolk of Rough Edge, Alabama, a "humble burg" whose everyday incidents are entertaining.

The book's eighty-two sketches gather curmudgeons, bumbler, and quirky neighbors together via lighthearted observations about rural life. Elder Statesman narrates; he's a composite character who is an elusive observer, an occasional subject, and a local raconteur. Catchy titles, including "Lawrence of Arabia and the Scrapyard Bike" and "Pig's Peaches," combine with the setting's blue marl clay landscapes to make Rough Edge's charms clear. Elder Statesman's folksy affection for the town's people results in fun ribbing and genuine neighborliness. Frequent topics include roadway hazards; a southern topography rich in hunting grounds; the foibles of marriage; blue-collar work; and public exchanges.

Still, the stories are structured in a formulaic manner. Most span from two to six pages, and are designed for casual perusal; such brevity, combined with the book's loose arrangement, shortcuts many characters' growth. Crisp introductions are followed by straightforward scenarios that shuffle toward quips—sometimes pithy, but more often glib. True surprises are few.

Elder Statesman's sense of comedy is broad. He covers numerous mishaps that lead to repeated injuries and minor humiliations. Though his stories avoid outright cruelty, their emphasis on characters who meet with comeuppance are uneven in their effects: they include clever lessons, but are also strained. The book's humor is more satisfying when it arises from subtle sources, such as the sharp contrast between Elder Statesman's purposeful, high-flown vocabulary and the down-to-earth situations he describes, from a doctor's office trip to a country drive.

Despite its penchant for skimming through anecdotes and meandering toward abrupt conclusions, this is a bemusing collection. Among the book's recurrent characters, Lillian stands out. She's the postmistress—and Elder Statesman's wife. She bewilders her husband with her ready ripostes. But the book's characters of color are used for thoughtless jokes, from a Black man who's rumbled by "ladies of questionable virtue," to a man whose skin color and dark outfit render him near invisible in the fog, thus making him a victim for a run-in with a car. Such moments diminish the text by falling into stereotypes about buffoonery and virility, and by taking potshots.

Tales of the Elder Statesman gathers stories of gentle mayhem and commonplace events, all from a colorful vantage.

KAREN RIGBY (September 27, 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.