

Just Write

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers' Group

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| Freeholder Library Liaison, Lyman Barnes



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What Star?

By Jane Harre

When you find yourself in jail,

Will Jimmy Buffet pay your bail?

When your doctor says, "It's cancer,"

Will Madonna have an answer?

Schools and towns can cancel prayer

As long as Oprah's on the air.

If your hero is a star,

Does the star know who you are?

Maya
By Loretta Condon

Black panther stalking in the night
Asleep all day
Soft black fur, covers white sheets
A lick of love? Or a lick of hunger?
click of laptop keys as she prances across
Scratch at the couch, at the door, on the pillow
Eyes glow in the night, watching every move
A tail whips and waves like a trapped snake
Yelling at the intruder, all of the intruders
A paw on my thigh, a claw in my skin
Telling me:
"I love you"

Dear Willow Tree
By Loretta Condon

Willow Tree,
Will you protect me?
Let me climb your branches and escape from life?
Will your bark protect me from the boys who bite?
Willow Tree
Do you hear me?
Picking the leaves from your vines
Hands stained green
Willow Tree
Are you in my heart?
Even when they tore you to pieces
I could still hear you saying to me:

Yes Always

Blue Elephant

By Loretta Condon

I felt the walls of the shed shift, the wind moaning along the sides. I had been through plenty of storms, locked up in this shed. I stared at the objects who I shared this small space with. The things that belonged here, the mower, bags of mulch, and hoses. Then there was me. The door opened, the rain pouring in like a water balloon bursting at impact. My body stirred, the shackles at my ankle's jingling. He struggled with the keys, his hands soaked. He seemed tired today, I stared. He looked up suddenly, our eyes meeting. He sighed, pulling a cloth over my eyes and pulling me up onto my feet by my arm. My legs ached from a lack of use. The door opened again, rain dancing around my body. He moved me forward. I hadn't felt grass on my feet in so long. The sensation sent shivers up my spine. I moved with him, his grip tight on my arm. The wind was strong, making it almost difficult to walk straight. I wanted to ask why he was taking me out and what was happening, but I knew better than to ask questions, let alone even speak.

He stopped, helping me up five or six steps then continued to walk, until he stopped again. The sound of a sliding door opened and I was pulled into the sounds of a dishwasher, a dryer and a newscaster on tv. I felt disoriented, my legs began to wobble. Pushing me forward, he continued to walk behind me, his quiet breathing making me feel uneasy. Another set of stairs.

“Stop,” he said.

I obeyed.

He ripped the cloth from my eyes, his face tense. Travis, if that was even his name, was undeniably handsome. That's what had made me trust him. But the man I saw was different. I

stood in a bedroom, a large bed in front of me with side tables and a large dresser. A normal looking bedroom. Does a room know when a monster lives inside it? Travis moved behind me, then a towel slid around my shoulders.

“Stay here and don’t move”

I nodded, my legs screamed for me to sit down. Travis entered again, placing some clothes on the bed in front of me.

“You’re soaked. Maybe I should have just left you out there,” Travis smirked and began to pull at my clothes. As if I was a doll to be dressed. I looked down, my naked body standing in front of him. Travis sighed, pushing me towards the bed. I was just happy to be able to lay down. Travis had been raping me out in that shed, but somehow the fact that he was going to do it to me on a bed, made everything feel different. He liked to pretend that we were lovers, saying my name as if I was enjoying it. I had become accustomed to his body, the way he moved, the way he touched my body. When he was finished, he shoved the clothes towards me and stood. He grabbed my arm, pulling and pushing me towards the open closet in the bedroom.

“You know what will happen if I hear you moving around up here”

I nodded. Travis had made empty threats like this since the beginning. He was a monster, but not a murderer. He shut the light out, closing the door behind him. The sound of something heavy and large banged against the door. Just like that I was stuck again, at least I didn’t have to wear my shackles.

“Excuse me, Are you looking for your mom?”

I turned to the man, his hand on my shoulder. He was gorgeous, with short brown hair and bright blue eyes. Boys didn’t look like him in school, they were all short, fat and boring. He

looked like my older neighbor, who stood at the bus stop in the morning for the high school bus. I shook my head, tightening my grip on the stuffed animal I was holding. Mom had left me in the aisle to go look for baby formula, but when I went to find her, she wasn't there.

The man smiled, "It's okay, she's standing right outside waiting for you, she asked me to come get you".

My eyes wandered to his shirt, the Walmart logo sat right below his shoulder.

"My mom said that I shouldn't.."

"That's why she sent me, I'm Travis, I work here, she sent me to come get you, come on,"
Travis grabbed my arm, pulling me. He walked quickly, avoiding the aisles with people. I screamed, I told myself. When we stepped outside, I looked around for my mom. Noticing he hadn't let go of my arm. Run, Run Run.

"Where?" ...I finally turned to look at him.

He leaned in close, his grip tightening on my arm, "If you scream, I will kill your mom and your little baby brother, is that what you want me to have to do?"

My body jumped awake, my heart racing. Travis was in the bedroom, moving around. I moved onto my knees, placing my cheek on the carpet, looking underneath the door. He was pacing, walking from the bed, almost to the closet door and then back again. The room was dark, even the hall light that had been on before was out. The wind and rain seemed to pound against the house. He moved towards the door quickly, I picked my head up and swiftly laid down, pretending to sleep.

"Maci?"

He didn't open the door, but I kept my eyes closed. He moved away from the door, the floor creaking beneath him. I sat up, looking underneath the door again. He was gone. I sat quietly for what seemed like hours, waiting for him to come back up, but he didn't. I shifted my legs, moving my hands around me. It was dark, but I could see jackets and shirts were hung up on a rack, shoes laid on the floor around me, stacked in perfect pairs. I reached up, touching one of the jackets. It made me think of dad, giving him hugs in the morning, feeling the roughness of his work suit. My body jolted back as the sound of banging flooded through the house.

"Hello! Anybody home? I'm a police officer from ----- county!"

I peered underneath the door. Waiting to see Travis, but he didn't come. I twisted the doorknob in my hands, it turned freely, but when I pushed the door, it didn't move.

"No," I whispered.

I pushed at the door. My muscles quivered, as if to laugh at me for even trying. The banging continued, echoing through the house.

"Wait, please wait!" My voice screeched, the tears flooding my eyes.

My body seemed to cry out, my arms moving by themselves. I nearly attacked the door with my fists, screaming with everything I had. Even if Travis was in the house, there was no way the cop wouldn't be able to hear me.

"Help me! Please!"

Then the door swung open. I closed my eyes, bracing, preparing for Travis's arms to grasp at me.

"Are you alright? What are doing in here?"

The cop stood in front of me, staring at me confused.

"I'm Maci Anderson. My name is Maci Anderson."

Slowly, realization crossed over his face. I covered my face, the tears had erupted into a full sob. He stammered and then began to speak into his radio. The tears flooding through my fingers, falling to my thighs.

“You’re alright now, Everything’s going to be okay,” He said. The cop helped me up, leading me down the stairs and outside. The storm has ceased, but wreckage was all over the streets, trees blown over, trash and debris was everywhere. Four houses sat in the background, completely dark. I stepped onto the porch. The cool wind brushed at my skin. The cop looked at me, a small smile seemed to turn his lip up. He pulled his rain jacket off, sliding it around my shoulders.

“Everything’s alright now”

The sound of sirens and the color of flashing red and blue lights seemed to fill the street. All these people, here to save me. For the first time in a long time, I smiled too.

Epilogue

Officer Michaels and his partner had been sent out to check on the houses in the neighborhood after the storm, but they never would have guess they would find me. About a month after everything had happened, I was sent a package from the police department. Within it was a small stuffed elephant. The same one I had held in my hands the day Travis took me. It was dirty from being in the shed with me all those years. The police weren’t sure why Travis had left the house that day. They made assumptions that he might have gone to get a generator to get the power back on. Either way, Travis couldn’t have been prepared for his brakes in his truck to not work on the flooded roads and couldn’t have known that an eighteen-wheeler truck wouldn’t have time to stop when he floated into the center of the light.

“Wise’s Gardeners” Save Petersburg: June 15, 1864, Part 2
(Continued from the January 2018 edition of *Just Write*)
by Ben Carlton

The Seven Days Campaign was now over, and Wise’s Brigade returned to its post before Richmond. General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia marched off to new heights of glory on farther fields of strife, but with the Yankees lurking no further away than Williamsburg, the Confederate capital had to be safeguarded. Wise’s Brigade stayed put to perform the essential but inglorious tasks of keeping the Federals under surveillance and strengthening the fortifications that ringed Richmond. The men also rounded up conscripts, deserters, and fugitive slaves. The occasional raid and foraging expeditions into the no-man’s land that existed between the outer defenses of Richmond and Union-held Williamsburg interrupted the brigade’s usual routine duties.

One such raid occurred in April 1863. General Arnold Elzey, in overall command of the defenses of Richmond, ordered Wise to create a diversion for General James Longstreet’s foraging expedition in southeastern Virginia. Wise’s Brigade left camp on the morning of 8 April, completing the 50-mile trip to Williamsburg in three days. On 11 April, Wise drove in the Union sentries on the western edge of town, having sent Colonel William Tabb and a detachment of 218 men of the 59th Virginia to circle around behind Fort Magruder the previous night. At Whitaker’s Mill, Tabb captured and burned a Federal cavalry camp, destroying thousands of dollars of supplies before marching away. Unfortunately, two officers and 18 men of Tabb’s detail fell behind and were taken prisoners, apparently having imbibed too much purloined Yankee whiskey.

In the meantime, Wise entered Williamsburg at sunrise with the rest of the brigade, marching his infantry and artillery down Main Street in a solid column, not bothering to send skirmishers ahead to clear the town of any remaining enemy troops. Although Wise and his men received a hero’s welcome from the ladies of Williamsburg, exuberantly waving their handkerchiefs and cheering their deliverers, Sergeant Luther Rice of Wise’s command noted that, “Four pieces of artillery at the lower end of town would have destroyed half the Brigade.” Fortunately for Wise, the Federals had precipitately withdrawn inside of Fort Magruder, two miles southeast of Williamsburg.

Wise contemplated attacking the works even as the fort’s nine guns began to rain shells on the lower end of town where Wise’s Brigade had emerged. Lieutenant Fleet wrote that the soldiers waited under fire for the “old General” to make a decision. As yet, not having heard from Tabb, Fleet added that Wise seemed “perplexed...and I felt by no means satisfied at being under him.” Upon learning that the Federals holed up at the fort were being reinforced, Wise withdrew his brigade to the upper end of the city after losing two men and four horses killed in a Confederate battery.

Wise’s men camped outside Williamsburg until 20 April. Wise thought better of attacking the Union entrenchments and wrote to General Elzey that the Yankees “have shown

no disposition to advance.” Subsequently, Wise’s troops gathered up wagonloads of forage and supplies while offering to assist any citizens who wished to depart for the safety of the Confederate lines. The southerners also brought back 19 Yankee prisoners and some 30 fugitive slaves found hiding in the town.

After the Williamsburg raid, Wise’s Brigade resumed picket duty in the Richmond defenses until September 1863, when it was ordered to take the cars to the besieged city of Charleston, South Carolina. At Charleston, Wise reported to General Beauregard, who placed Wise in command of the area between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers, southwest of the “Cradle of Secession.” Once again Wise had been relegated to a backwater command where newly promoted Lieutenant Mills complained, “Our Brigade is doing comparatively nothing. Our regiment [26th Virginia] does the picket duty...one week at a time at Fort Johnson.” Then, on 21 December, Colonel Page took five companies each from the Twenty-sixth and the Fifty-ninth regiments, accompanied by 16 field pieces, over to John’s Island. Page had orders to capture the 150-man Federal garrison at Legareville. To accomplish this, Page’s batteries first had to sink or drive off the gunboat, USS *Marblehead*, lying in the Stono River opposite the garrison. On Christmas Eve, Page’s infantry worked stealthily all night to erect redoubts for the artillery within three-quarters of a mile of the gunboat. At first light, the guns opened fire on the *Marblehead*. Despite achieving complete surprise and firing over 200 rounds at the Union vessel, Lieutenant Mills reported, “Our artillery...failed to touch it!” The *Marblehead* began to rain broadsides onto the Confederate position, compelling the batteries to withdraw. The gunners were forced to leave behind two eight-inch howitzers when 14 horses and mules were killed. All told, the Confederates lost three killed and nine wounded, mostly in the artillery companies. Page’s command was forced to retreat, leaving the Federal garrison unmolested. Mills wrote, “I never heard infantry abuse artillery as ours did.”

Following this less than stellar performance, Wise’s Brigade skirmished with Unionists on 10-11 February 1864, again on John’s Island. Federal troops advancing under General Alexander Schimmelfennig inflicted 17 casualties on the Virginians before evacuating the island. This small affair was noteworthy for the fact that the 26th Virginia sustained its first battlefield casualties of the war: Lieutenant Albert Bird was struck by a shell fragment on the right leg and Private George Cardwell was hit “by two pieces of shell, one of which went nearly through his left thigh and the other struck his right ankle.”

Eleven days later, two regiments of Wise’s troops were sent to reinforce General Joseph Finegan’s command in Florida. The 26th and 59th Virginia regiments arrived at Lake City on 2 March, too late to participate in the Battle of Olustee. There was little for Wise’s men to do when they got to Florida. With no Federals to shoot at, Wise’s men took aim at rodents (perhaps thinking there was little difference between the two species). Regimental Chaplain Wyatt recorded, “Took a gopher hunt this morning; found a very large one, which we had for dinner; it was excellent meat.” In a letter to his brother, Mills wrote, “We catch a great many young, black squirrels...If we pass through North Carolina I will try to send Martha one.” A little over a month passed before Wise’s Brigade was sent back to Charleston. [To be continued...]

Twilight

BY SHELBY CARLTON

*Between night and day,
During twilight's magic hour,
I'll meet you at our place,
Where I'll whisper your name to the trees
And the wind will carry my words away—
Away to a faraway place,
A dreamworld where Time stands still
And only you know my name.
Come find me and I'll take you there—
Meet me at our place,
Where you'll whisper my name to the stars,
And we'll dance away to a place beyond this world—
A dreamland outside of reality,
Where you and I can dance together unseen—
Two shadows flickering endlessly between life and dream,
Remaining here for all of eternity—
Remaining here only until twilight ends—
Disappearing completely when the magic hour is over.
As twilight begins to fade
And the darkness takes over,
You are ripped away from me by the wind,
And I am left utterly and completely alone—
Dancing alone at our place forever,
Whispering your name to the trees,
But my name is long forgotten.*

EVERYONE SINS

By Shelby Carlton

I died a really long time ago, when I was still in my mother's belly. I learned that on Earth humans call that a miscarriage. I'm not sure exactly how long ago it was, because time doesn't matter here. It has no meaning. There is no past or future, only the here and now. But I can't stop thinking about what my life might have been like if I had lived. I can't stop wondering what the Earth looks like. I've never seen it myself, but I've heard countless stories of it. I listen to every story eagerly, soaking up every word like a sponge soaks up water. (I heard that Earthly expression from one of the other angels, and I love it. I am constantly using as many Earthly expressions as I can find.)

I know I'm supposed to be thinking about God and praising Him always, and I am always doing that, I swear, but sometimes I just can't help myself; my thoughts seem to wander to the Earth on their own. Sometimes I think about my mother. Is she happy? Does she have a good life? Does she miss me? But how can she miss me if she's never met me?

Don't get me wrong, I'm tremendously happy here. I love Heaven and all of its beauty; who couldn't? Heaven is breathtakingly wonderful. Heaven is perfect. And God made me an angel because I've never committed a sin or done anything wrong. I never had the chance. I guess dying before ever being born has its perks.

I was lost in thought, thinking about the Earth as usual, when one of my fellow angels came to me and said, "Our Lord wishes to speak with you."

I stared at him in shock. Surely I must have heard him wrong? Why would our Heavenly Father want to speak with *me*? “Me? He wants to talk to me?”

“That is what I said, isn't it?”

Trembling, I followed the angel to the foot of God's Throne and bowed low.

“Rise, my child,” God's thundering voice rumbled gently. “You may leave us,” He told the other angel.

I rose slowly to my feet, keeping my eyes lowered. It was impossible to look directly at Him because His light was so blinding. “What can I do for you, my Lord?”

“You continue to speak of Earth to the other angels, and you are constantly thinking about it.”

I swallowed, shaking in fear. Was He angry with me? “I'm sorry, Father. I will never speak of Earth again.”

“No, my son. I'm not angry with you,” He answered my unspoken question.

Forgetting my place for a moment, I glanced up and met His soft gaze, and He smiled warmly. I quickly looked away when His brilliance began to hurt my eyes. “You're not angry with me?” I whispered, feeling amazed.

“Why would I be angry with you? You have done nothing wrong. Now, tell me, what can I do to put your mind at rest?”

“I want to visit Earth!” I blurted out. To my horror, the words continued to tumble out of my mouth. “I want to see what it's like! And I want to meet my mom! I want to make sure she's okay, and I want to see what her life is like and make sure she's happy!” When I finally regained

control of my tongue, I snapped my mouth shut and studied the golden floor underneath my feet.

“Oh my son, if this is what you truly want, I will grant you your desire. But I must warn you—you won't like what you find.”

A huge smile spread across my face, and tears pricked the corners of my eyes. “Really? You're really going to send me to Earth so I can meet my mom? Oh, my Lord, thank you, thank you! Thank you so much! What have I ever done to deserve this wonderful gift?”

“You have always been a good and faithful servant, my child,” He rumbled. “When you go to Earth, you will be tempted by sinful desires, but you must reject them. You must not do anything wrong, or you won't be able to come back. Do you understand?”

I nodded eagerly. “Yes, I understand, my Lord.”

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes, Father, I'm absolutely sure. This is what I've always wanted. I won't sin, I promise.”

There was a pause before God said, “Very well, then. I will give you an Earthly body and send you down to Earth. I will make sure you arrive directly in front of your mother's house. Her name is Elaine Parker. You'll know her when you see her.”

Just as God promised, I jumped through the gates of Heaven, falling past the stars and galaxies and planets before I landed on Earth, right in front of my mother's house. As soon as I saw it, I just knew it was her home. Slowly, I turned around in a circle, taking my surroundings in. I knew the names of everything I saw from the stories the angels had told me—grass, houses, trees, the busy street in front of my mother's house with cars racing past...

I could feel the warm sun on my Earthly, human face, and I could feel the cool breeze on my bare arms. I breathed in deep lungfuls of air. I sat down in the coarse green grass and ran my fingers through it, the blades tickling my fingertips. I could hear birds singing in the trees overhead and the cars roaring by. I looked up and watched the white, puffy clouds slowly drifting away in the beautiful blue sky. I could smell some sort of food cooking in a nearby house...some meat, perhaps? I didn't know what meat smelled like, but if it really was meat cooking, it smelled delicious. My mouth started to water, and my stomach rumbled. Was I...hungry? Wow, I was hungry! I had never been hungry before. A grin spread across my face, and I laughed out loud. I just sat there in the grass, laughing and laughing and laughing. I couldn't stop; I was just so happy. I was here, on Earth. I was actually here! I was on Earth and I was hungry. I could hardly believe it!

I stood up and twirled around in circles and leaped and spun and kicked and punched, still giggling uncontrollably. The Earth's beauty was nothing compared to the golden brilliance of Heaven, but it was still beautiful nonetheless, and I loved it. I realized with a pang that I already missed my perfect home in Heaven, but for now I was happy to be on Earth. I would go back soon enough, once I spoke with my mother.

"Hey! You there! What the hell are you doing on my lawn?" An angry voice snapped me back to my senses, and I finally stopped giggling and leaping around. I turned and saw what must be the most beautiful woman on Earth glaring at me with her slender, delicate hands on her hips. Her dark blue eyes were sharp and narrowed, and her curly red hair tumbled over her shoulder. Her mouth was pressed into a firm line.

I stared at her, knowing instantly who she was. "Mom," I whispered, my voice cracking.

The woman's eyes widened for a moment, but they quickly narrowed again into tiny slits. "I don't know who the hell you are, or what kind of stupid prank you're trying to pull, but if you don't get off my lawn right this instant, I'm calling the police!"

I took a shaky step toward her, desperate for her to understand. "No, Mom, it's me! It's your son! You had a miscarriage, and I died, but I came back so I could meet you!"

"I don't know what you're going on about, but I've never had a miscarriage! You need to leave right now!" Her voice was beginning to shake, and she looked more scared now than angry. Was she scared of me?

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. Please, Mom, don't make me leave! I just wanted to make sure you were okay. I just want you to be happy!"

"Stop calling me that!" she screamed, tears brimming in her beautiful blue eyes. "What is your problem? I don't have a son! I had an abortion! Is that what you wanted to know? Did you come here to punish me for my sins? I'm sorry, okay? Just leave me alone! Please, just leave me the hell alone!"

The sudden horrifying news hit me like a blow to the chest. I couldn't breathe. My new human lungs wouldn't work. I blinked. Then I blinked again, trying to keep the tears from escaping. "You...you didn't want me? So your solution was to...kill me?" I could barely choke the words out.

"I'm calling the police! Stay away from me, you freak! Just leave me alone!" My mother threw the words over her shoulder as she sprinted back inside the safety of her house, slamming the door behind her.

I stood still for a while, unable to move. Something inside my chest had been crushed, smashed into a million pieces. My mother had killed me. I choked on a sob. My own mother had ended my life before it ever had a chance to begin, and no one had ever bothered to tell me. None of the angels told me. God never told me.

A slow anger began growing inside me, replacing the horrible crushed, grief-stricken feeling in my chest. The anger burned like a smoldering fire in my stomach, and I let it consume me. I charged across my mother's lawn and pounded on her door with both fists, screeching, "How could you do this to me? You stole my life! I never had a chance to live! You killed me before I was even born! How could you do that? What...what kind of horrible...*sick* person are you? God will punish you for your sins! You're going to Hell when you die, you...you...*demon!*"

I spun around and raced back across the grass, hot tears blurring my vision. I stopped when my feet touched asphalt and screamed into the sky, "*Why didn't You tell me?* How could You do this to me? Why wouldn't You tell me?? I trusted You! I served You and praised You and worshiped You my entire existence! And this is how You repay me? I...I hate You! Yes! Do You hear me?! I said, *I hate You!!*"

I was screaming so loud I didn't hear the roar of the car until it was too late. I realized I was standing in the middle of the street just before the car plowed straight into me. Then my world went black.

I woke up to feel white-hot flames scorching my face and fire licking hungrily at my feet. I gasped in pain and stood up as fast as I could, trying to get away from the fire, but it was everywhere. I heard a dark laugh and looked up to see the Devil himself sitting on his fiery throne.

“You shouldn't make promises you can't keep,” Satan told me, his black eyes smoldering. “Everyone sins.” A sinister grin spread slowly across his face, and it wasn't until that moment that I finally realized where I was, and I understood that I would be trapped here forever, being tortured by the Devil for all eternity.

I screamed as the flames of Hell engulfed me completely.

Just Write

Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @

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