

# NO PLACE AS WONDERFUL AS HERE

By Michael Magenta

NAME: Michael Magenta

WHERE: Morristown

BIO: BFA in Theater Directing. I began writing plays so my children would know who I was. Now I do it for my grandchildren as well.

EMAIL: [michaelsmagenta@gmail.com](mailto:michaelsmagenta@gmail.com)

KEEPING ME POSITVE: Opportunities like this.

# CHARACTERS

MARY JEFFERSON (Mid-sixties) A southern black woman with all the heart, strength and determination a person can have. A retired schoolteacher who still speaks like she is in front of the class.

MOSES EDWARDS (A Late 30's – Early 40's Black man) A former student of Mary's, he is now her pastor. Moses is a big bear of a man who speaks softly; unless he is preaching.

J.J. JEFFERSON (An Early 40's Black man) Mary's only child. A writer of some note who has lived in New York City for decades. His southern spirit is always present.

## TIME

Spring 1999

## PLACE

The front porch of the house at 1403 Spears Street, West Memphis.

**LIGHTS FADE UP**

***Front porch of 1403 Spears Street in West Memphis. There are two rocking chairs stage left of the front door. There is a window behind them. There are two stools in front of the chairs. There is a small table between the two chairs. Stage right of the porch are a series of potted plants. In the far stage left rocking chair sits MARY JEFFERSON. On the footstool down stage and to the left of her sits MOSES EDWARDS. As the lights are coming up Moses is speaking.***

MOSES

That's why I wanted to check on you. Yesterday was a tough, tough day. Your mother meant everything to this community.

MARY

Yes. Reverend, the service you gave for Miss Vivian was indeed an honor. I will be grateful until the day you send me home too.

MOSES

Hush now.

***The front door opens and out comes J.J. Jefferson. He is carrying a tray with a pitcher of lemonade and two glasses.***

J.J.

We have company and I need a third glass.

MOSES

Thank you, I'm fine.

***J.J. puts the tray on the table and sits in the other rocking chair.***

MARY

The Reverend kindly stopped by to check on me.

J.J.  
Thank you Moses.

MARY  
*(correcting him)*  
Reverend.

J.J.  
It was a wonderful celebration of Miss Vivian's life you gave yesterday.

MOSES  
I am glad you were pleased.

J.J.  
Moses, I honestly cannot express my thanks enough on behalf of my Mama and me.

MARY  
*(with more purpose)*  
Reverend.

J.J.  
Mama I know he is a reverend, but he is also the boy who beat me up and stole my lunch! I know it was in third grade, but...

MARY  
That was a long time ago.

J.J.  
Yes but it was everyday of third grade!

***Moses covers a laugh with his hand.***

MARY  
J.J.

J.J.

And he was only in first grade.

***Moses and Mary laugh out loud.***

MOSES

I was big for my age and a bully. Besides, it was before I got my calling.

J.J.

Yes, and how did the lord work the miracle of your transformation?

***Moses points to Mary.***

MOSES

Though that lady.

J.J.

My mother?

MOSES

Yep, she was my English teacher in my senior year of high school. I needed to do a book report. I was having none of it. We had no books at home and I wasn't going to no library. That always made me feel foolish. Then she sat me down and asked 'Moses, you watch TV?' I said I did and she wanted to know what I watched. Action, Adventure, exciting stuff.

She smiled at me and said, 'Well okay then, I got a book for you, mistaken identity, murder, blood feuds and a great escape. How does that sound?'

Fine, real fine!

"Good, so I'm going to write down the name and you're going to go home and read. Then we will talk about the report. And you've got the book at home. Best of all, you are the hero of the story."

It was The Book of Exodus. When my mother saw me sitting in my room reading the Bible, she rushed over and felt my head looking for fever. I read it three times. Now I'm sure that the Reverends had spoken about this story during many a sermon, but I never really heard. After the report was done I picked up the Bible to read it again. I liked how God had swallowed up

MOSES -continued

the Egyptian army with the power of His holy waters. But this time I started at the beginning with Genesis and read through the whole book. Then again. For over a year I read and reread. I felt so small in comparison to the words, I wanted to be a part of the story, you know, live up to my name. I wanted to feel strong.

By this time you were in school in New York. I went by your house and asked your mother to speak to me on this here porch.

“Miss Jefferson, I’m going to become a reverend.  
I can’t wait to give my first sermon on the Book of Exodus.”

She said, “I can’t wait to hear it.”

J.J.

She got me to be a writer the same way.

MOSES

Damn.

J.J.

Moses Edwards, you shouldn't be cussing, you're a Reverend.

MOSES

You’re right and I am on my way. Miss Jefferson, I’ll pay you a visit tomorrow.

MARY

Thank you.

***Moses got up kisses Mary’s cheek and extends his hand to J.J. who shakes it.***

MOSES

Your grandmother loved you so and I am sorry I was such a jerk.

J.J.

Thank you, Reverend. I would like you to do me a favor.

***J.J. reaches into a pocket and pulls out a folded piece of paper. As he hands it to Moses he says,***

J.J.

I would like to give you this money in honor of Miss Vivian. This community and specifically your church was were important to her. Really to our entire family. In her name please put these funds to go use.

***Moses unfolds the check***

MOSES

Good Lord J.J. this is great deal of money.

J.J.

She was a great woman.

MOSES

Bless you.

***Moses exits down stage left. Mary and J.J. sit sipping lemonade thinking.***

MARY

That was wonderful. Thank you.

(beat)

What are you thinking?

***J.J. is smiling.***

J.J.

That the Right Reverend Moses Edwards may just be the Devil himself.

MARY  
What?

J.J.  
He beat me up, stole my lunch and got my Mama to care for him. Now he is the brother I never knew I had.

MARY  
He is a fine man.

J.J.  
Do I have any other unknown siblings?

MARY  
(laughing)  
Only one but he lives in Chicago. Atlas Weber. Much younger than you. Atlas came to talk about a problem. He wanted to learn to play the trumpet. He was obsessed with Louie Armstrong. His father wanted him to concentrate all of his spare time on Baseball. Something about left-handed pitchers being a commodity. I told him that I'd like to help him but I didn't know how I could. One day after school I was grading papers in my classroom and the door opened and in walks Cletus Weber, who I only knew by sight. He asked, "Is there something wrong with the boys work? He said you needed to see me?" I could see Atlas look through the window of the door. I said, "Mr. Weber, I would like to ask you a favor." In addition to baseball practice and his weekend job and his schoolwork all of which he does gladly; the boy wants to learn how to play the trumpet. I believe that anyone one who excels like Atlas and has the desire to do more should be encouraged." He said, You're his favorite teacher. I said, "I am honored." He said, "Okay fine." With that Atlas burst through the door screamed, "I can pay for my own lessons!" Cletus said, "I'll pay, now thank Miss Jefferson."

J.J.  
What is Atlas doing now a days in Chicago?

MARY

Well in the end he was a better trumpet player than a baseball pitcher and a better pharmaceutical representative than a trumpet player.

*J.J. laughs.*

MARY

I writes me and says that he still practices the trumpet every night and is always happy and grateful.

*They sit again in silence*

MARY

I'm going to miss her.

J.J.

Of course.

MARY

Moses was right, she loved you so. She loved reading your words.

J.J.

I will be sorry not to get her reviews anymore.

MARY

Hmm. I...

J.J.

What is it

MARY

While I guess I can tell you now.

J.J.

What is it this, it sounds like you are revealing a secret.

MARY

I am.

J.J.

Go on.

MARY

Miss Vivian grew up in a different time. She went to work as a child. She never learn to read.

J.J.

I'm stunned.

MARY

It is why she pushed me and my education. When you left for college to be come the writer you were swearing you would be. Miss Vivian came to me and begged me to teach her. "If that boy is going to write stories I want to read them." I was so proud. She read all your books aloud to me.

***J.J. is wiping tears. There are three beats of silence***

MARY

J.J., why are you alone?

J.J.

I'm sorry.

MARY

Why don't you have someone in your life?

J.J.

I have friends and I've had boyfriends.

MARY

I know but not for long. I thought that was why you stayed in New York

J.J.

Mama, do you believe I stayed in New York to meet men? You know there are gay men in Memphis too.

MARY

I know, I thought maybe it was easier for you, made you more comfortable living there.

J.J.

Do you think I'm embarrassed to be gay, or worse, that I thought you were embarrassed by me?

MARY

No child. Is that why you stayed away all these years?

J.J.

No, I stayed there so I could write.

MARY

Now, J.J., that is pure nonsense, you can write anywhere.

J.J.

Mama, Mother, Mary; have you read everything I've written.

MARY

Every single word, dozens of times.

J.J.

What do I write about?

MARY

Family and home, everyday things, life.

J.J.

I write about here, Mama. Every story I write, they all take place here. When I am home, which is what, six times a year? I do not write a word. But when I am in New York all I think about is here. I pine for home, for Miss Vivian, for you. I walk down the main street of West Memphis in my mind. What stores are there, what stores have closed, the people that ran them, how they spoke, how they laughed, why they cried, and when they died. My mind holds a trunk filled with every sound, smell and word. When I visit, I restock the trunk. There is no place as wonderful as here. When I am home, I drink it up. I'm immersed in it. I'm like a sponge, when I get back to New York I squeeze the sponge and the words come pouring out page after page.

MARY

That is the first time I ever heard you speak like one of your stories.

J.J.

Mama, I'm going to ask you a question. It is not easy for me so please be honest with your answer. When people say, 'Your father would not have known what to make of you', what do they mean?' "Is it that I'm a homosexual?"

MARY

Good Lord no! J.J., your father only graduated high school. You are a college graduate, a famous writer. He would not have known where you came from. That's what they mean.

J.J.

I came from you. You love reading, you love books, you passed that on to me.

MARY

Thank you, Son.

J.J.

Now what about you?

MARY

What do you mean?

J.J.

Why are you alone? I was eighteen months old when my father died. So you were only twenty-two. Why didn't you get remarried?"

MARY

I had you, I had Miss Vivian, and I had the memory of a man that I adored. What more did I need? Now put that in your trunk and write about that.

J.J.

Okay.

MARY

Lets change the topic to dinner. What are we going to make?

J.J.

Before food let's take a break and dance

***J.J. stands up and extends his hand to Mary.***

MARY

What are you talking about?

J.J.

You taught me how to dance on this porch before a school function. Miss Vivian sat here and watched. It delighted her. One more dance for Miss Vivian.

***Mary stands and she and J.J. begin to waltz as the lights...***

**FADE TO BLACK**