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The Water of Life

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Have you ever heard them whisper? The walls of Jerusalem? Or weep? Maybe not. Your ears might have been deafened and your eyes blinded by the noises of the crowd. As they were singing “Hosanna” for him with olive branches waving in their hands, and spread across the street. As they took him to be crucified while his blood spilled over the same streets.

I have heard them. The walls of Jerusalem. They have whispered the truth even when lies were celebrated and worshipped for those lies proved to be Caesar’s truths. And they have wept for many, many like him, who have been dragged to the crucifix of death, for they dared to speak the truth.

I’m Mary. Mary Magdalene. And I do not cover my hair. They say that it is my tactic to attract men. Let them say whatever they wish to. The breeze across Galilee is very soothing. You can’t imagine how good I feel when it passes through my hair, taking its strands on rides as I rest on the shores of Galilee. You cannot imagine it even if you are a woman of my tribe, because you never would’ve been given an opportunity to lift your veil and leave your hair free to dance to the rhythm of the breeze, even once in your lifetime.

That is why they detest me. For I let the wind play tunes in my hair. For I dared to labour on the holy *Sabbath*. For I let them *have* me; *consume* my body; as though it was a piece of fried young lamb on their dining table. Seven of them in turn, as the season changed from autumn to winter and then to summer. And this was what earned me the label, “prostitute”. And those seven? They were never called so. Or is there a name at all for men who are equal partners in prostitution? They still wear the feather of honour and lead the tribe as though they were white doves of righteousness.

They say that the mind and soul are all that matters. They have always preached in the synagogue that when the Messiah comes, he wouldn’t count the faults of the body, but that of the mind and soul. I have not sold my mind or soul; unlike them who conspire against Caesar for more power and territory. But no one took stones against them; for they had power. That was what I lacked, and that was why they chose stones for me. Big rolling stones, which were small rock pieces, in fact. Rock pieces of anger; rock pieces of hatred. Only the walls of Jerusalem whispered frantically to them, “please, do not”. They never heard. They never understood.

It was then that I saw him. He is the only one who has once drunk water from my pitcher. He had not asked me my caste. He had not asked me my profession. He had not asked me to cover my hair. He had not cursed or shooed me away as a bad omen. By the time I reached him, I was wounded badly by the stones. Blood dripped from my forehead and I was nearly

fainting. I remember his words to the crowd, as I fell on his feet, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." He knew that I had sinned. But he knew that they had sinned too. And he faced them alone, even without a sword, but only by his one assertive statement; which of course was truth, and because of which they couldn't speak anymore.

And I admit, not with pride, but with true heart devoid of false pretences, "I have sinned; but haven't you too?"

It was him who assured me that my body was perhaps more worthy than to be used as nothing more than a piece of flesh to men; that my body was no less than my mind and soul; that I shouldn't let it be intruded and polluted by their lust, for it was the holy place where the Holy Spirit resided. And his words are what made me understand that my body was precious enough to be more than a mere tool to accumulate wealth. And his words are what made me cry.

I remember the day when my tears of penitence were profuse enough to wash his feet. I wept, for it was then that I recognized the power that was in me. I cleaned his feet with my hair; my hair which I always held as the symbol of my freedom. I wanted to thank him, for my freedom was because of him. I wanted to surrender my freedom before him. He still did not ask me to cover my hair; I should say I was not surprised. Of the pearls, jewels and wealth that I secured, they only knew that I bought a jar of Narddeen to apply on his feet. They never knew where the rest of my wealth went. Only a few knew; the lepers on the banks of Bethsaida.

On my way back home that day, I heard the walls of Jerusalem whispering again. They hailed me a good evening and a good life ahead. Only they have hailed me ever.

I'm Mary Magdalene. He gave me freedom, for I gave him water. The water in my pitcher became the water of life. I was with him when he bore the cross all alone; for he was with me when no one else was. I was with him, throughout his way of the cross. I was with him when he bled and gave up his life for humanity. The marks of his suffering are clearly embedded in my heart. When he was dragged through the streets for what he never did, when his blood poured down in drops to unite with the mud turning it red, when his male disciples abandoned him to save their faces and lives, when he was disowned by the same men whom he loved, I was with him. And a few other women; women whom you think are so fragile and frightened to bear a sight so sad. Women whom you think never to stand by man when he is alone and poor. Only we were there for him when he was defeated and relinquished by his own people. We were not frail anymore. Nor were we powerless. We rose powerful to stand by him; for we loved him; and our love strengthened our souls to give him consolation in his hours of desperation. We weren't afraid. Of any law; of any men.

Nobody noticed; except for the walls of Jerusalem. They wept as they witnessed his journey with his cross in his hands, and mine in my heart. They comforted him offering him shade and a place to lean on to.

I'm Mary Magdalene. And now they call me his wife. They never understand how a relationship between a man and a woman can exist without it being sexual or sanctioned by the patriarchal institutions, preferably marriage. But I do not want to explain myself to them. Because I know they won't understand. They have never understood; and will never do.

I'm Mary Magdalene. I bleed every month across the calendar. I bleed to give life. I bear pain to sustain life. And I believe that the suffering my body undergoes so that the next generation is given the chance to live on the planet, is something that no male member of my patriarchal tribe can afford to replace or reward. They shed blood only to decide their supremacy through wars that make no profit other than killing our children whom we bled and bore pain to bring to earth. It can never match the blood that I and all the women in the world shed so that they live healthy lives, not bloody ones. But why do they always forget that it is our blood that runs through their body and make them stand upright and fight? I do not understand. When we shed blood for them to live, they shed blood for themselves and us to die. Even after he himself showered his blood on the cross, they do not learn. I do not understand them at all.

And they still search for him after killing him. I tell you, do not search for him in the darkness of the synagogue. For he lives in every one whom you have condemned as inferior and 'sinned'. He came in search for us who sinned. Not to condemn us for our battered bodies; rather to touch and heal them. To make them beautiful and make us love and accept them as they are- white or black, weak or strong, male or female- however they might be categorized by men. He came to love us, to love me and make me free. Of what you call your authority and your wisdom.

I'm Mary Magdalene. And I'm near him; not as a noble woman in the kingdom where he is the king. I'm sitting amidst the rocks in Golgotha, a little away from his cross, where he lies deserted and forsaken by all. That is when he needed me; the only one who accepted my right to freedom. And I will always be there, because I know that his body is weak and battered, in need of help and support. He has stood for me, and here I am, unafraid and confident, for him. To offer him a drop of water, the water of life. To offer every one of his sheep who is hungry, a drop of water, and a piece of bread.

The walls of Jerusalem have still not been destroyed; I knew they wouldn't fall. No one who has spoken the truth has ever fallen down. Like him, who said the truth without fear, who died to destroy our death, and was resurrected on the third day to restore our lives. So are the walls of Jerusalem- intact and truthful. They still keep whispering. To any ear which has the patience to listen.

I want you to remember my name.

I'm Mary Magdalene. And I still do not cover my hair.

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