

It was still dark when she awoke with a heavy heart. And as she shook the cobwebs from her night-mind, she remembered the previous day's events, and her heart ached with the pain of loss and a nagging fear of the unknown, because her best friend had been found guilty of a crime he didn't commit, and had been put to death. With her own eyes, she'd witnessed each moment of his passing, and with each moment, a tiny piece of her died with him – hanging from a rough-hewn wooden cross, tormented by soldiers, thirsty, weak, his life dripping out of him, her friend and teacher gave up the battle and surrendered his soul to the other world.

As she gathered her robes and slipped into her mourning clothes, she considered what made her friend so unique. He had not been like other men she'd known, that was certain. He had treated her and the other women who traveled with their group very differently. It seemed to her that most men saw the women in their lives as little more than property, placed on earth to ensure their comfort, to have their babies and care for their homes. Men kept women in a separate room at temple; and they stayed away from women during the bleeding times, because women were considered unclean. The laws of marriage were very strict, and often, women found themselves without family or support of any kind because of circumstances they couldn't avoid. Men controlled money, men made decisions, men wrote and followed the law. That's just how it was. She was lucky - she had no man in her life and her shop afforded her a sufficient income – she was independent; but it seemed to her that sisters suffered many injustices just because they were women.

All that changed, though, when he came through their village. Strolling down the road, covered in dust from the previous journey and escorted by a motley-looking group of men, he had looked curiously around him, and as he passed by, she had caught his eye. The look he cast upon her wasn't sexual, but more of an acknowledgement of her true inner self – as if he'd looked into her soul. It said, "Hello, dear woman. I have so much to tell you – join me." She'd felt a warmth flow through her, and was so curious about it, she had followed the group at a safe distance until they'd gathered under a tree and set up camp at the edge of town. He'd seen her standing back from the crowd's activity, and had motioned for her to join them as they prepared the evening meal. In that instant, she became his disciple.

The days that followed seemed like a blur in her mind's eye. Because she was now part of the motley group of followers, she had opportunity to see his work with women first hand, and it amazed her. He invited the women to table at mealtime, and he asked them their opinions about current events. He offered them counsel – and listened when they spoke. He encouraged them to think about his teachings, and he praised them if they understood. She felt her sense of purpose evolve – She allowed herself to be open to his message and his selfless actions, and as she observed his ministry, as she worked at his

side and received his caring friendship, she knew she would never be the same person again.

She also noticed the other men began to act in the same way toward the women in the group. Working together, getting the word out about this man and his teachings, all those old rules fell away and they were a community of people, men and women together. It was clear something was different for them all – they could sense there was no turning back, and she welcomed the feeling of freedom she felt just being in his space. She hoped – they all hoped – this would be the Messiah they'd all longed for.

And then, they killed him.

She still couldn't believe it – he was gone.

Sighing, she took the vessel of anointing oils from a shelf and carefully balanced it on her hip. There was much to do to prepare him for burial. She stepped out into the blue of the morning to take the long walk through the sleeping village to his grave...

### **Mars**

The fisherman just spent the worst night of his life – he couldn't sleep the nightmares and sweats were so bad, and now this woman was at his door, sobbing and telling him to come quickly to see.

See what? The Rabbi was dead! They'd just left him there, hanging, suffering until he died. It was the most helpless feeling – all the men, his friends – his disciples - standing around – watching – waiting - wondering – good men, strong men – and no one knew what to do. They wanted to take him down and hide him someplace else, but they were afraid of the soldiers, so they just stood there until it was all over. Then someone – a stranger! - took him away, oiled him down and put him in a vacant tomb. He helped roll the stone to block the entrance himself...what was there to see? The body of his best friend would be stinking – rotting...

The Rabbi was dead!

How could this happen? Didn't he tell them he would be their salvation? What about that? The fisherman shook his head and tried to shrug off the pain – they'd come so far with him – given up old lives to walk with him. At first it was difficult because his ways were so different from anything they'd ever known or done, but after a while, they could see the Rabbi believed what he said about Yaweh – and his actions proved it. Lepers cleaned – blind men could see – dead people lived again – every day, it seemed, something happened that convinced him the Rabbi was special – he could heal. Word got out – soon there were crowds in every village to greet them – to sit at his feet and listen - and now he was dead. Now it was all gone – how could they continue his work without him? So much to do – so much they didn't understand yet – so much to be afraid of. His friends were hiding, they were so afraid.

The woman outside called to him again to come see – what was there to see? Women. The fisherman shook his head, remembering how the Rabbi had taught him and his friends to listen to and work with women instead of treat them like servants – that had been a tough lesson to learn – a lifetime of unlearning to do. And he patiently showed them how to accept the others no one wanted to be around; they ate with tax collectors and kept company - honest company with whores – then there was collecting food for the poor - and the children – children! Children were underfoot in every village, pulling on him, shouting at him with their high-pitched voices – and always, always they were greeted with a quiet smile from the Rabbi. So many lessons learned from him – the fisherman knew life would never be the same again – how could it be? He was changed because he'd walked alongside Yaweh's Son these few years, and he regretted none of it.

The Rabbi was dead.

And now he must go see what the woman was crying about. With a deep sigh, the fisherman pulled on his robe and slipped into his sandals as he opened the door to the blue light of the early morning.

### **Venus**

Finally! She'd almost given up getting the fisherman out from his bed, and then he stopped to wake and bring another to help, but now they ran behind her to the tomb so they could see for themselves what she had seen. She'd told them – the stone was gone – but she had the feeling they didn't believe her – they needed to see with their own eyes.

It was empty! Empty! All that remained were two piles of used linen gauze...the Rabbi's body was gone!

She couldn't believe what happened next. The men looked into the tomb, exchanged a few words, and then, they went home! That was it! No plan, no instructions for her – nothing. What was happening? Had everyone lost their minds?

Tears she'd been holding back came in a flood – her grief and frustration finally took over, and she couldn't stop them. The Rabbi was dead, his body was missing and she didn't know what to do anymore – she was tired, heartsick and scared. Sobbing, she wrapped her arms around herself and tried to find strength to go into that tomb to clean up – that felt normal, and it seemed to her she needed to do something – anything – to help her feel better.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

She jumped out of her skin – someone spoke! Looking into the tomb, she saw two beings – she felt no fear, but warmth inside – and she told them why she was crying. “The Rabbi is gone – and I don't know what to do.” But they didn't speak.

“Woman, why are you weeping?” A new voice – a man, standing close by.

“Did you take the Rabbi?” the woman asked.

Then she heard him call her by name – and she knew. Through a fresh round of tears, she called to him - “Rabbi!”

“Don’t cry, Mary. I’m here. You can’t touch me because soon I’ll go to our Father and God. But I need your help - I want you to tell them you’ve seen me. Go tell them, Mary - ‘I’ve seen the Lord.’ ”

Suddenly, all the grief, the fear, the hopelessness left her. A peace she’d never experienced before filled her soul, and there was joy in her heart as she realized the truth! He lives! He lives! Jesus, the Christ lives!

Mary Magdalene took off at a run to share the good news with the others... joy bubbled up from deep inside, and a song filled the early morning air...

“I know that my Redeemer lives,  
On the last day, I shall rise again.  
And in my flesh, I shall see God.  
On the last day, I shall rise again.

I shall see my Savior’s face  
And my own eyes shall behold my God.  
On the last day, I shall rise again.

I know that my Redeemer lives,  
On the last day, I shall rise again.  
And in my flesh, I shall see God.  
On the last day, I shall rise again.”

Amen.