

The Tomb

by Bram Floria



“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early, long before first light and saw the stone had been removed...” from John 20:1-2

She **RAN**. The others followed as fast as they could. All the way across town to the safehouse.

“Peter! John! WAKE UP!! The tomb...” And then her throat closes off. She can’t seem to choke out the rest of the horrible thought: “Someone’s stolen his body.” She blubbers on and on about what must have happened. The other women plead with the Disciples to **DO** something. Peter and John are suddenly awake and rushing out the door.

Mary collapses in exhaustion. The last of her adrenaline is spent. She grasps at heels running past her. And now the tears won’t stop. She’s dry as a stone in the desert and still the sorrow pours out salty and unrelenting.

Suddenly - the fear of **Alone**. It’s all around her, washing over in a fierce tide, pulling her under. She hasn’t felt this alone since... before Jesus.

“The Rabbi.” Mary remembers acutely her promise to care for his body. To at least sing the laments. Then as the Sabbath began, the soldiers drug the biggest stone she’d ever seen used to seal a tomb. She watched them struggle and break their own skin getting it into place. Bloody handprints here and there adding more ugliness to this atrocity.

Mary had gone to the tomb early to baptize that stone with what was left of her tears, wringing out the sponge that is her soul to purge the sweat and blood ground into rock over that dark hole. She lay awake all night thinking of the body of Jesus behind that wall. All she’d ever really loved now lay behind the name and image of Caesar who now owns this giant rock simply because the governor says so. Sloppy wax the same color as those bloody handprints – a mottled purple brown. Death swarmed that grave.

She pulls herself up from the floor and stumbles her way after the others. The sobs won’t release her gut. She’s gasping and drowning all the way through the deserted streets, back to the broken tomb. She arrives as the men storm back out of the cave gesturing wildly at each other. They waste little time before moving swiftly away, before the authorities can catch them out.

The women see Mary approach and catch her by the elbow. They sink together at the entrance. The stone is cracked, laying on its side. The seal is crumbled. The body is missing. There’s nothing they can do. They sit in silence and stare. It feels like forever. Mary holds it together for them, until they all eventually filter away. Soon it will be too dangerous to be out. But Mary just can’t leave.

“I promised,” she whispers to herself. Even if every single one of the others melts away, she would never, *ever* abandon Him. She had promised herself. He was the only one who have ever stood up for her. Ever looked her in the eye. The only one who had ever *really* loved her.

And at that, the tears came again. There’s no one else around to worry about. She lets go. She can barely see through the watery veil. She sees light ahead. Sunrise must be beginning. She wipes her face with the back of shaking hands. But the light comes from north, not the direction of the Mount of Olives. Someone has entered the tomb again with a light. How could she miss it? She steps forward to look inside again. She doesn’t care anymore whether she’s caught. She’s falling into the abyss.

The light inside the tomb is blinding and shifts slightly, stark shadows dancing on the ground behind her. Two men are lit by some powerful lamp and sitting where her Rabbi’s graveclothes sit folded.

“Woman, why are you sobbing?” They seem strangely mystified and curious why a woman should be weeping at a fresh grave. She tells them.

It’s useless. These men seem so outrageously, incongruously, calm. They are certainly without concern. Mary looks away from those brilliant lights. Her eyes linger again on those

graveclothes. She can't bear to think that the body of Jesus is now laying somewhere else, naked and unmourned. She turns away from the tomb and into the shadow of another tall man blocking her way. He speaks the same words she's just heard, but in a much more earthy way.

"Woman, why are you sobbing? Are you looking for someone?"

Oh, if he only *knew*... the sound of the voice was not unkind, almost like the voice of... and she breaks down again in the certainty she'll never hear *that* voice again. She's at the end of her rope. She's about to suffocate on it. She's on her knees, palms up, pleading with the man before the words even come.

"Sir if you're the one who's taken him, *please, PLEASE* just let me know where. Just tell me *where*. I'll take him off your hands. Seriously, I'll take care of it. Just tell me *WHERE*..."

The man can't escape the desperation and impertinence in her plea.

"Mary!"

Now *that* shakes her. No one says her name quite that way. Only...

"Teacher?" She barely breathes the word. Perhaps she didn't even say it. All Mary hears is the tightness in her throat. Something in her bursts. She falls forward to grab his legs. She must hold onto *something*. Something real. *Someone*. She grabs hold of his knees fiercely.

Jesus waits a moment.

"Oh Mary, you can't hang on to me forever. Please, let go. I have to go back to my Father, now. But you – go tell my brothers what I'm doing. I'm heading home to my Father, *your* Father; my God and yours."

Suddenly her mind is crystal clear and the fog has lifted. She has a purpose, a task. And now, she's calm. She kisses those feet, rocks back on her knees, eyes closed. Now she understands the calm she saw on the faces of those angels. On the face of Jesus. That peace is now *her* peace. She can't explain it. She doesn't want to. She just wants to bask in it. But she's been given a task. An *important* one she realizes. She rises, unconcerned with what lies behind her. Doesn't bother to consider where Jesus now *is*. It doesn't matter. What matters is that He *is*. With deft steps she glides through the waking streets. She has a message to deliver.