



*Already, Not Yet*

*By Katherine Harms*

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Was there a fly in the room? Madeleine hated the way they insolently flew around her nose and ears while she slept.

There was no fly. The annoyance was in her thoughts. Something was buzzing around at the edge of her mind, something she couldn't put into words. For a second it seemed very clear, but as she started to tell herself what it was, it buzzed away. She could not go back to sleep. She tried to close her mind to a yearning that refused to subside. The buzzing became a wordless cry. She paced inside her room, then through the house. Dawn was softly creeping through town as she climbed up to the rooftop. Even at daybreak the sounds of Jerusalem were already rehearsing for the midday cacophony, but from the roof, they seemed far away.

This time of day was full of memories. How many times had she found Jesus already awake at this hour? Or had he never slept at all? Regardless, he always seemed rested. They had talked together in the emerging dawn. In the early days he used to remind her that she no longer had to fear the demons of her past, but in time their conversations had ranged far and wide.

One day he had talked about lilies. Madeleine looked at the lilies and thought that she had never seen a lily before. She soaked up lilyness and tasted its color and shape and aroma, the way it seemed to stand tall and bow modestly at the same time. Then she saw a buttercup. She paused again and absorbed buttercupness.

She asked Jesus about her experience with the flowers. He answered, "Each thing in creation is God's voice telling you the word of creation."

They talked about everything. God's love. Jesus' concerns for Israel. Some hints of that terrible day of his death that she overlooked at the time. Now, thinking back, she

wondered if even he had known the full extent of the torture and humiliation that was coming. The death.

She remembered the devastation she had felt that day. The anguish of her own loss and the simultaneous gratitude for the end of his pain when he breathed his last. The fear when she found the empty tomb. The elation when she realized he was alive. The frustration when no one believed her. Death could not hold Jesus. “Love is as strong as death,” she whispered to herself, remembering the words of scripture. She leaned her head back. The sky was growing lighter. Looking up, she whispered again, “Your love was that strong.”

As she stood looking up, tears came to her eyes. She saw Jesus again, rising into that very sky. She heard him say, “Wait for the gift my father promised.” She didn’t feel that she had received any gift yet. She met with the others in secret at different places in order not to be predictable. On some occasions, when the group seemed very fearful, she reminded them of something Jesus had said. She always seemed to know what they needed to remember in order to be encouraged. She had earned a reputation as the hopeful one. Nevertheless, she sometimes wondered if they could ever stop looking over their shoulders. When her fears took charge, she felt drained and despondent.

“I’m not strong!” she cried to the sky. Then she shouted, “I’m not!” She began to sob. “What do I do now? I want to believe that I can do what you ask, but I don’t feel powerful.” The sobs grew deeper. They were almost choking her. “What do I do now?” The tears ran down her cheeks as she reached toward the sky. Her arms stretched up, her fingers grasping for something she couldn’t see. “You are so strong, but you left us! I’m trying, but I don’t think I can do this!”

She stood on tiptoe, still stretching up as far as she could reach. “Why did you leave?” she cried. Then the sobs became so deep she could hardly catch her breath. “Why ever show yourself if you were going to leave us anyway? Why tell us to tell your story if it ends like this? You said that you would give us the power to do the work. What power? I don’t feel powerful. I can’t do this! Why did you leave me like this? Jesus, I feel so alone. We all do.” The buzzing that had awakened her surged again through her brain, her soul. She felt as if someone had poured scalding water on her skin. Deep within there was an open wound that she couldn’t touch, couldn’t endure.

Her arms dropped, she hung her head, still sobbing. She buried her face in her hands.

Eventually, she left the roof. Even though she didn’t feel hungry, she was lured by the aroma of a fresh peach in the kitchen. She took time to savor its sweet, simple flavor. For a few moments its beauty bloomed in her mouth. Then there was work to be done. Since the day of Madeleine’s healing, Joanna had opened her own home in Jerusalem to Madeleine. Madeleine shared the duties of household maintenance and hospitality. Friends dropped by often. After Jesus’ resurrection, they made a point of helping each other through the days that were occasionally lightened by Jesus’ appearance. They all needed each other. They made sure that no one was alone too long.

Madeleine, Joanna, and a young servant girl worked together in efficiency born of years of shared tasks. At midday, they rested. Joanna and the servant girl left to take some bread to John’s home. Since he had taken in Jesus’ mother there was a never-ending stream of visitors, and everyone tried to help out with the load imposed by hospitality. Madeleine took a cup of water and went back up to the roof. The heat of the

city was rising, and the roof was no longer a cool retreat, but it was quiet. From this rooftop, with a haze in the air, the city almost didn't look real. Swirls of heat rose from the streets and melted the distant buildings into a soft blur that might be anything, any time. Today. Yesterday. Months ago.

There were screams, shouts and derisive laughter. That terrible day welled up before her as it had done so many times during the past few weeks. Quiet moans from the victims, loud yowling ululations from the crowd, abrupt gruff orders from the soldiers, unfulfilled importunate sighs from those standing near the center cross.

"Stop it!" she commanded herself. She walked over to the other side of the roof where she had a better view of the temple. She sat there willing herself to think about her most recent meal with Salome, Joanna, Mary and Martha. Martha had put a lot of effort into the appearance of the table and the presentation of the light meal. Salome cried uncontrollably, tears welling up at the slightest provocation, especially when Mary reminisced about all the meals Jesus had taken in their home. Joanna only spoke if spoken to. When they were clearing up afterwards, Martha slammed the table linens into a basket, observing wrathfully, "I don't know why I bother."

"It's what you do," Madeleine had replied as she woodenly washed plates and cups. "It's something we all depend on. We know that no matter what the crisis, you can be counted on to serve an exquisite meal. You came through as always. You are too reliable for your own good. Once in a while you should fail, so we all know it could happen." Martha sniffed irritably, not certain whether she had been complimented or insulted. After all these years, Madeleine thought, she still jumps at the same signals.

There was a loud knock at the door below. Madeleine looked down to see if it was anyone important, but the shadow of the house had slumped into the street, and she couldn't recognize anything. Irritated, she walked over to the staircase and plodded very deliberately to the street level. She hoped that the person at the door was simply lost. She didn't feel like company. The pounding was not so much insistent as persistent. She opened the door.

"So I finally found you," said a voice from the past. Madeleine felt weak. Her stomach was churning. Old fears and fantasies swirled in the back of her mind. "Are you trying to hide yourself in the big city? We heard that you were here with your new friends. We thought maybe you had a little time for some old friends." The voice took the form of a middle-aged woman in scruffy-looking garments. Madeleine took a step back. "Humph. I didn't expect a warm embrace, but I did expect hello. Have you completely forgotten us that care about you? Are your new friends that much better?" The hand that reached toward Madeleine's face didn't look dirty, but Madeleine recoiled abruptly.

"What are you doing here? How did you find me?" Madeleine asked, still not offering any acknowledgement of the hints of friendship served up by the disheveled figure standing at her doorstep.

"So you **were** hiding." The woman chuckled, and the man who stood beside her snickered. The man was thin and tall, with dark hair falling over a macabre brow that appeared to have been slashed and badly mended at some distant time in the past. His clothing was as shoddy and misshapen as the woman's. "Well, now that you are found, I guess you are **it**. Doesn't that mean that we get to hide and you have to seek?"

"Why are you here?" Madeleine asked. "I don't remember sending for you."

“Send for us? Why would you need to send for us?” the dark, ugly man asked, accenting his questions by spitting in the dust. “You shouldn’t have to send for old friends. Why, what sort of people would we be if we came to the city and failed to visit our dear, dear Maddy?”

“Don’t call me that!” Madeleine snapped.

“And why not call you ‘Maddy’? You are our oldest, dearest friend Maddy, and there’s the truth of it. Have you changed your name, too, while you are hiding out here in the “capital” of the kingdom? You are in the “kingdom” aren’t you? I heard you were one of the most important members of the council. Why if you weren’t female, you might even be in charge! But even royalty owes hospitality to old friends, don’t you think?”

Madeleine felt sick at her stomach. After all this time. She couldn’t move. The woman reached out again and grasped her hand. The man shuffled past them into the house. Madeleine felt frozen to the spot, but the woman prodded her toward the room and shut the door. Madeleine couldn’t speak, couldn’t think.

It had been so long. She had forgotten – well maybe she only wanted to forget. Before she met Jesus, she had met... “Cerise!” She said the name aloud before she realized that she was speaking.

“Aahh, you didn’t forget, did you, Maddy dear,” the woman smiled. She hugged Madeleine close, but instead of feeling warm, Madeleine felt a chill that kept growing as she tried to back away. “My little Maddy. How could you forget the ones that rescued you? How could you?”

“Rescue?” whispered Madeleine. Her thoughts were swirling and tumultuous. She felt nauseated.

“Of course! What a day it was, Maddy! I know **I’ll** never forget it. You looked so forlorn there in the marketplace. How could your own dad leave you behind? Too busy, too many kids, I guess.”

The woman kept talking and kept moving around the room. The man, too, was in perpetual motion. Madeleine couldn’t make her eyes focus. They talked, they moved, and suddenly she found herself sitting between the two intruders. She wanted to cry out, scream, shout, “Go away!” Instead she asked, “Have you eaten?”

“Thought you’d never ask, Maddy, and that’s not like you. You was always kind and hospitable. But you’re coming around. Maybe the city hasn’t completely ruined you after all.”

Madeleine stood up, but she immediately forgot what she wanted to do. She sat down, and she felt herself drift away. Images bright and dark, some colorful, some stark, flitted through her consciousness. A face began to form before her, seeming to float in the air. The voices of Cerise and her companion, yammering non-stop, merged into meaningless noise. The sounds grew dim, the face grew sharp.

“Daddy!” she cried softly. The face grew larger. “Why? Why, Daddy?”

Home. Mama. Sisters. Brothers. Daddy. One day Daddy took them all to the marketplace. He said it was a special day, and it seemed wonderful. Daddy gave each child a coin of his very own. Maddy took hers and roamed with her girlfriends, looking at beads and scarves, lamps and earrings. She didn’t notice that the sun was going down until her friend Elia was called away by her mother. Maddy had looked around bewildered when she realized that most of the sellers were leaving, and she had no idea where her family was.

Then Cerise had appeared. With Little John. The memories were surging again. She rubbed her forehead.

“Dear, dear Maddy,” said Little John. “That old familiar wrinkle on your worried little brow. You don’t need to worry any more. We are here to help you. Just like always. Just like before.”

Familiar words. Did she hear them now? Or was she remembering the long ago? Long, long ago.

“I’m not one to carry a grudge, you know,” said Little John greasily, “but you know you left us high and dry. We’re doing all right now, of course, but there for a while...” He let the words dangle.

Something swooped past her face. She felt a cold gust against her cheek. Then, as if a lamp had turned on, she saw herself in another place, another time. Simpering before strangers. Waiting for inspiration, then wrinkling her brow and pursing her lips before she babbled out the oracle they had paid for, collapsing in a heap when there were no more words. Memories rolled over her and she felt nauseous again. But now she knew the two visitors. Ah, yes, she remembered.

“I doubt you suffered a lot,” she said, gathering her courage.

“Oh, that’s where you’re wrong,” said Little John. “You’re so very wrong. Why it wasn’t the money at all, though the Lord knows we wondered for a while how we would keep body and soul together. Oh no. It was you, Maddy. We missed you. Our little treasure.” He leaned close and kissed Madeleine’s cheek.

She recoiled from the touch.

“Don’t call me your little treasure!” Madeleine stood up abruptly, shoving the man away. “You never treasured me. You used me. You use everybody. You are always working an angle. You may have fooled me when I was ten, but you can’t fool me anymore. I’m a grown woman.”

“Grown up indeed!” said Little John as he looked her up and down lasciviously. “Yes, indeed, you are all grown up. If I didn’t feel like a father to you, what I wouldn’t give...” Madeleine swung her hand toward him as if to slap him, but she stopped abruptly, sucking in her breath, grimacing, blinking her eyes to hold back the tears that erupted as suddenly as her anger. What was happening to her? Was it that easy to slip back into the old ways of the old days? Were the demons slipping through her defenses, now weakened by grief and loneliness?

“Leave me alone!” she screamed. “Go away! I don’t know how you found me, but I’m not the woman you think you remember.” She took a deep breath. “Go away,” she said tiredly. “Just go.”

Little John leered and slunk lazily to the door, then turned around to lean against it, blocking any exit. “I think you are exactly the same woman,” he said. “I recognize the way you stand, the way you walk. No man could forget that walk. Oh yes, you are our Maddy, indeed, our very own little treasure.”

Madeleine clasped her hands together, and then she put them down by her side and nervously fingered her robe. She tried to speak, but although she opened her mouth, her throat was clamped shut. “Where are you, Jesus?” she asked herself silently. “You lifted me out of this night of horrors once, but where are you now?” She bowed her head for a moment. Then she looked up at Cerise. “Remember the day we first met? Did you rescue

me, or did you grab me as an opportunity? Was I always for sale? Did you ever really care? I thought you were helping me find Daddy and Mama, but we never found them. Were we even looking for them? Or was it all an act?"

Cerise shifted her feet and wrung her hands. "Maddy, you remember how it was. We didn't have one coin to clink against another. Then you came along, and you had the gift." Cerise smiled cunningly and leaned toward Madeleine's ear. "I think you still have it, honey. I think it's born in you to know the insides of people. You may have dressed up your story for the audience, but it was always so close to home that folks had to believe it. I know that you had a right to a share of the take, but we sort of never realized that you had become a grown-up lady. Come on back now and there will be plenty for us all. Why, when people remember you with your man and the show you two had going, they will fall over themselves to see you again. You know that once you have the gift you don't ever lose it. You turned your back on it, but it's waiting for you. It's always there in the wings." Cerise took Madeleine's hand and patted it gently. Madeleine jerked it away.

"Those days are over, Cerise. I don't have that gift any more, and I don't want it. I am changed, and I'm not going back."

"Well, that's fine if that's how you feel, but you could come and visit with us for a while. You are all alone now. What sort of friends would we be if we let you grieve all alone? Maybe your fine friend did get caught up with, and..." "Don't talk about Jesus that way!" Madeleine cried. "Jesus wasn't just a friend. He was, He is, He ...."

Madeleine wasn't sure what to say. She felt confused herself, and she wasn't sure what to say to these people.

Cerise sneered. “Well, I heard that he was some sort of a prophet, and somebody told a story about him walking on water and raising the dead, so maybe he had the gift, too. But he must have ticked off somebody. To come to such an end. It’s a shame.”

“You have no idea,” Madeleine said, and she sat down again.

Little John slouched across the floor and stood in front of her, looking down. “Well, the way I see it, you have all the gifts he supposedly had, and you’re pretty besides. We could clean up. I mean if you let us help you. It would be like old times, and with all the inside scoop you have on this Jesus, we could add some new dimensions to our old show. For example, how did he pull off the healing of lepers? Now that’s an act we could use.”

Madeleine stared open-mouthed. Where to start? What could she say? Cerise and Little John had spent a lifetime milking trickery and showmanship for a few coins here, a few coins there. How could she explain Jesus to them in any way that would make sense to them? Was it even possible?

“You don’t understand,” she said finally. “You probably can’t even imagine anyone like Jesus. He was not a performer or a magician as you imagine. He loved people, and he was always helping them. I don’t know how anyone could have wanted to hurt him. I know it is hard for you to believe, but he was real. There was no trickery.”

“Well, now, are you going to tell me that you weren’t working the crowd the day he took you away with him? I mean, I thought you were working for us, but the next thing I knew, you had up and gone off with him. You might have stuck around to say good-bye. It’s been no small task finding you again. We missed you.”

“I know what you think,” Madeleine said tiredly. “But there was no trick involved. Jesus didn’t do tricks, and he didn’t ask me to do any tricks, either.”

“But you are so good at it. People think you look honest. They listen to you. What was your job? Point? Chaser? Bait? Ha! I bet you were the bait. He could point to you and say ‘Follow me, and get one of these!’ That should have had them dragging in from everywhere.”

“No, that wasn’t my job,” said Madeleine. We weren’t trying to put on a show for anyone. You have to believe me. I am different now. I am not the woman you think you want back.”

“I know you feel confused and lonely now,” Cerise purred, “but we understand. We know that you need some time to adjust to your loss. You live with a man for two or three years, and then he’s gone. It happens to women every day.”

“It wasn’t like that,” Madeleine said forcefully.

“Like what, honey?” asked Cerise. “When a woman loses her man, it is a dark day. Sometimes they die like yours did, or sometimes they just walk off. And that’s worse, I think, ‘cause you know they’re out there someplace ignoring you. At least you don’t have that pain. Now, why don’t you just come along with us for a few days? Get away from this big city and spend some time in the country with old friends. No pressure. Relax. Let go of your troubles for a while. Why, you would be a new woman when you came back. You need some time away from the hullabaloo.”

As she spoke, Cerise had sidled nearer and nearer to Madeleine. She reached for Madeleine’s hand. “A woman needs her friends when she is left alone,” she said. Madeleine jerked her hand away and stepped backward. Suddenly, there was a sound at the door. Little John smirked. “I’ll get that for you.”

The sleazy man reached for the door, but Madeleine pushed past him. When she opened the door, there stood Joanna, her arms full of fruits, her servant girl behind her also loaded down. “Joanna!” Madeleine cried out with a feeling of deep relief. “Here, let me help you.”

Madeleine took some of the fruit from Joanna, and started back into the house. Joanna looked at the disheveled pair and raised her eyebrows in a question to Madeleine. Madeleine stepped aside to let Joanna and her servant pass. “This is Cerise and John from Magdala,” she said coldly. “They needed directions, and someone told them I could help.” She turned toward them. “I hope you won’t have any trouble finding your way out now,” she said, crowding the duo through the door. “Have a safe journey.” She shut and barred the door. Then her knees failed her, and she sank to the floor.

“Who were those people?” Joanna asked solicitously.

Madeleine burst into tears. Joanna tried to comfort her.

“The demons!” Madeleine cried.

“Were those people demons?” asked Joanna.

“Perhaps. They certainly use the demons. Before I met Jesus they used me. They used my demons. I think they bring demons with them.” Madeleine began to sob.

When the servant girl returned from the kitchen, Joanna dismissed her for the day, and then she helped Madeleine into her room. She poured water into a basin and gently washed Madeleine’s face. Madeleine sighed and relaxed a bit in the soothing coolness.

“It must have been quite a shock to see them here,” Joanna said at last.

“Shock? Yes, a real shock. I thought I was finished with that world. I was with Jesus for three years, and although we saw such people in the crowds, they never came so near me when he was around. Now I am terribly afraid.”

“Why do you fear them?” Joanna asked. “Jesus cast out your demons, and he healed your spirit. You don’t have to be afraid of them any more.”

“I want to believe that. I remember that on the day Jesus drove my demons out, there was a dark, dingy place inside that felt like a gaping wound. The demons were gone, but I was not really whole. Then Jesus talked with me. His voice was comforting, and his presence pushed into that dark place, lighted it up, cleansed it and made it well. His presence. His voice. My whole world changed.”

“The world around Jesus was different, all right. He told us that God’s kingdom was dwelling in us, and I believe that is true. That is why you don’t need to be afraid of your past any more.”

“I thought I had grown past that fear. When I was traveling with Jesus, listening to him speak, I felt nourished and satisfied. Every word had its own flavor. But after Jesus died, that dark place opened up again. I felt hungry to hear his words. Even after he rose from the dead, his presence was profoundly real as long as I could see him, but what emptiness I felt each time he disappeared again! He said that when he left, he would send a comforter. When he went up into the sky, he repeated that promise. I am afraid I don’t feel comforted yet. I feel desolate and alone. Being with you and Mary and the others helps, but it isn’t the same as being with Jesus. I need Jesus to come back now! I can’t wait any longer.”

Joanna hugged Madeleine and held her close for a moment. “Don’t give up,” she said. “You are the one the rest of us lean on. You are the one who always stands up in the group and says, ‘Remember what Jesus said.’ If you fall apart, what will happen to the rest of us?”

“I don’t feel strong, and I don’t feel wise, and everything I remember about Jesus makes me cry. Don’t lean on me, Joanna. Nobody should lean on me. Maybe you could lean on John, or Andrew, or even Jesus’ mother, but don’t depend on me. With each day that passes, I see the light in my heart fading more. When Jesus was appearing now and then, each appearance fed the glow, but he isn’t showing himself to us anymore. He promised us a spirit of power, but where is it? Why is he making us wait?”

“Don’t be so impatient, Madeleine. Our people waited for thousands of years for the Messiah. Is it too much to ask that we wait a while for his promised power?”

“I don’t want to give up. I don’t know what I will hold on to if I give up. That is why Cerise and Little John are so frightening. What if one day I can’t hold on any longer? What if they find me in a weak moment? What if I open the door to the demons next time? Don’t ever leave me by myself. I don’t think I could fight them off again.”

Madeleine stood up, and the two friends went into the kitchen to wash the fruit. Joanna explained that friends had brought the fruit to John’s house, but it was more than he could use. He had almost forced them to carry some away.

“I had to laugh,” Joanna said. “You would have thought this fruit was a litter of kittens to be given away. He insisted that we take this fruit.”

The afternoon passed in quiet tasks. When evening came, Madeleine went to bed early, and slept fitfully. Her dreams were turbulent. First she saw Cerise, then Little John.

Then she found herself running and panting for breath as she tried to escape from a dark evil she couldn't visualize. When she came to a wall, she tried to climb over it, but no matter how high she climbed she could not reach the top. Suddenly the wall disappeared, and there stood Jesus. Not the Jesus who had taught in the temple and disputed with the priests, but the Jesus she had encountered in the garden outside his tomb. Not a Jesus who could bleed and die, but a Jesus who was like light itself. Just as she had done that day, she reached for him, but the image shimmered and faded, and she stood alone in a meadow beside a quiet pool. Eventually she slept.

Madeleine woke when Joanna spoke her name. They dressed quickly and walked to the house where they were to join the disciples and others for the feast of Pentecost. Peter stood at the door greeting everyone effusively. He was having one of his good days, not like the day when he had thrown a cup in the floor and growled, "I'm going fishing. I've had it." John was already there, and Jesus' mother was sitting with him. Madeleine joined them. She often pretended that Jesus' mother was her own mother, and Mary went along with the game.

There had been a time when Madeleine thought she might actually be able to call Mary her mother or perhaps her mother-in-law. Madeleine had awakened at dawn one morning when they were traveling in Galilee, and she found Jesus sitting by the lake alone. Their conversation that day had been very intense. Jesus talked about the way people were rejecting his message or twisting it to their own ends. His deep loneliness and discouragement had opened between them a door that had always previously been shut, and in a moment she would never forget he had held her close, looked into her eyes, and said, "Madeleine, you are a very special woman. You have a gift that ministers to

people's deepest need, because you can see through all their attempts to hide the truth about themselves. And now you have seen my need." She had waited for him to kiss her or to say something more, but instead he turned away and began throwing pebbles into the lake.

Later, Jesus' mother, had said, "Madeleine, you have such a gift. When you walk among the crowds listening to Jesus, I see people drawn to you. They tell you their secrets, and when you take them to Jesus, they are ready to listen to him. I know that what you do spreads his work farther into the crowds. You work together well."

But Jesus had never again bared himself to her quite so completely. For a while, she felt a great longing for that moment, and she knew in her heart that Jesus struggled with it as well. Later, she had come to feel at peace about what they shared together. They were so busy in the last months before his death that her thoughts had no time to stray to that intensely private moment.

When everyone had arrived for the feast, they shut the door and Peter prayed. Then Matthew stood up.

"Friends, we are here today to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. We used to gather like this and listen to what Jesus taught us, but seven weeks ago, those of us closest to him ate our last meal with him. Now we gather to pray for patience to wait for his promised power, and we strengthen each other by remembering him together."

He held up a loaf of bread.

"At our last meal together he shared bread with us and he told us that the bread was his body. We didn't know what that meant then, but now, let us share this bread and as

we eat, let us think about what we learned from Jesus, how he changed our lives, and who we have become as a result of knowing him.”

He took a small piece of bread, broke the loaf in half, and handed the halves to people on his right and his left. Silently, each person broke off a piece of bread and handed the loaf to another.

Then Matthew took a large cup of wine.

“After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine, drank from it and handed it to us with the words, ‘this is the new covenant in my blood.’ We saw his blood poured out the very next day when he died. Later we saw him alive again, and we saw him go up into heaven. His memory is precious to each of us. As you take a sip from this cup, share with us something that you remember from our days with Jesus.”

Matthew drank.

“I will never forget the day I met Jesus. I had heard of him, and I was sure that he scorned me as much as everyone else did. I was sitting there in the marketplace taking in tax payments, and I thought I was simply doing my job. People resented the fee I was allowed to charge for each collection. In fact, many people thought I had broken the law of God by stealing from them, but that was how I earned my living. I admit it was tempting to see that fee pretty high when I thought I needed more money. Of course, people resented me mostly because I worked for the Romans. That fee was an insult piled on top of the tax itself. When Jesus came up to my booth, I thought he was coming to point me out to the crowd for them to scorn. Instead, he looked me right in the eye, and said, “Come with me.” I had never felt drawn to anyone the way I felt drawn to him. I

was overwhelmed by his presence. I stepped out of that booth and never looked back. Even today, I know that would do the same thing again.”

He passed the cup.

As each person drank a sip of wine, a new memory was held up before the group. Although Madeleine knew all the stories by heart, she needed to hear them again. Remembering what Jesus had done helped her to feel stronger. Maybe she would be able to wait for Jesus to send power after all.

Behind the voices, in the distance, Madeleine heard a whistling. The cup passed from hand to hand, the stories of healing and feeding and blessing continued. The whistling became a roar. She watched as Joanna took the cup, and the roar became an explosion of sound. She was enveloped by a gale. She could feel it on her face, yet her hair was not moving, and she could see that the others felt it as well. Joanna’s lips were moving, but Madeleine could no longer hear her words. The wind howled in her ears, and across the room she saw a glow against the wall. The glow became a bright light, then it grew and took form like a huge flame. The roaring in her ears never stopped, yet nothing in the room was moving. Everyone was looking at the flame.

Suddenly the flame rose, and it seemed to ride on the wind. As it passed each person it left a piece of itself behind. The first to be touched was Peter. He stood up, and became suffused from head to toe with a light that was much more than light. Madeleine blinked her eyes. The flame was approaching her.

Then she saw nothing but a great light. From within the light a voice spoke, and it was Jesus. She cried out, “Oh, Jesus! You have returned. We need you.” “Don’t be afraid,” the voice said. “I am the Comforter you were promised. I am the power you have been

waiting for. I have given you the gift to know people's needs. Now I give you the power to minister to them in my name. Tell my story to the broken-hearted and the fearful. Like Deborah of old you will lead in warfare against the forces of the evil one. I cast out seven demons who yearn for their old home in your heart, but my Spirit will war against them and against all the legions who will assail you as you carry my name into the world. I will keep my promise. I will be with you always."

Inside, the dark and lonely place in her heart lighted up. "Jesus. Jesus," she said. The emptiness was healed, the darkness was light. Around her people were jumping up and shouting, but she couldn't hear what they were saying. Her ears and her heart were filled with the presence of one she had thought was forever lost to her.

The exhilaration of Jesus' return made her want to shout it to the skies. She looked around. Everyone was smiling, laughing, talking. Joanna grabbed Madeleine and hugged her. "He was right here! I heard him speak!" Tears were streaming down her cheeks. Blinking, Madeleine realized that she, too, was crying. Tears of joy.

Mary, Jesus' mother, took Madeleine's hand. She was beaming. "He has returned. I heard his voice." Madeleine hugged Mary. They moved with the crowd like leaves floating on a great wave flowing out of the room and into the street.

Madeleine saw a woman and a child standing on the corner looking confused. "What is happening?" the woman asked. "We heard a sound like a great wind, but we didn't feel any wind. Who are all these people who are shouting and laughing?"

Madeleine saw the edge of hunger in the woman's eyes. The child looked at her with no expression, the mask of a will that refused to acknowledge starvation. "Come with me," she said. "We have so much food. Share some with me, and I will explain."

“How is it that you speak Persian?” the woman asked.

“Persian? I don’t know Persian,” Madeleine replied.

“I only speak Persian,” said the woman. “and I understand you perfectly.” Tears welled up in her eyes. “You are kind. We are so hungry.”

Madeleine put her arms around the woman and held her for a moment. Around them the disciples and all the other people who had gathered that morning to remember Jesus were surging among the people in the street. Wherever she looked she saw little groups clustered around one or another of her friends. The roar of the wind that she had felt earlier was softer now, but very insistent. People were looking up and pointing to her and her friends and the building they had just left. “I don’t know how it is that we understand each other,” she said, “but I do know that God’s spirit is here. Come with me.”

As Madeleine was about to re-enter the building she saw another woman. In the giddy crowd, this woman stood silent. She was shaking as if she were cold, even though the air was warm. Deep within, where Jesus’ spirit rested, Madeleine felt rather than saw the woman’s deep pain. She knew, and couldn’t have told how she knew, that the woman had been ill like this for a very long time.

“Wait here,” she said, and hurried over to the quivering woman. “God loves you,” she said, and the woman jerked back. “Don’t be afraid,” Madeleine said. “Inside there is plenty of food. We had so much. And I want to tell you about Jesus, because he doesn’t want you to be hungry. He does not want you to be alone and sick. Come with me.”

The woman said nothing, but she followed Madeleine, who took all three of her new friends back inside.

People told her later that Peter preached a great sermon in the streets that day, and they told her that she moved among the crowd holding people's hands, talking intently and praying with them. They told her that thousands of people had realized the truth about Jesus and received him into their hearts. She said to herself that some day she would try to remember everything, but above all the events of the day, the moment when she heard Jesus speak to her again burned like a beacon in a dark night. She never stopped hearing his voice say, "Don't be afraid. I am the Comforter you were promised." From that moment forward, the dark emptiness that had unsettled her never returned.

On the day that Madeleine died, many women came to mourn her. Each one said of her, "She was like a light of love moving among us. She knew us better than we knew ourselves, and she brought the love of Jesus into our lives."

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Katherine Harms