



In this velvet darkness

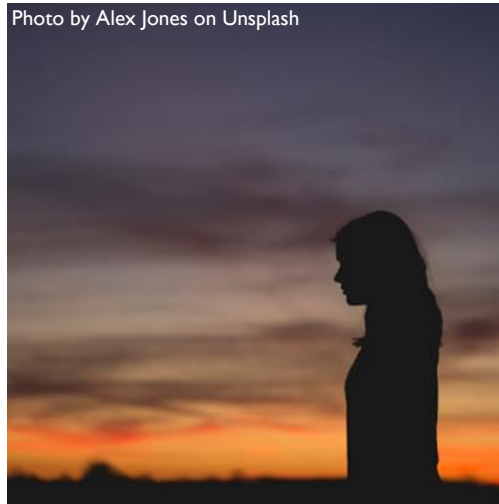
Rob Marsh SJ

'All he'd said, wasted. All he'd done, a fraud. All he'd told me about myself, lies.' But then... What might the days between the crucifixion and resurrection have been like for Mary Magdalene? Rob Marsh SJ gives us an imaginative take on Mary's journey.

'Try to rest, Mary', she's been saying to me since it happened. 'Try to rest, you're only making it harder for yourself.' She means well – a mother now with no son, trying to be so strong for the daughters she's taken under her wing. 'If you don't sleep, Magdalene, you'll do yourself a damage.' But how can I sleep? How can I sleep with him dead, with hope dead, with all I longed for dead? What is there to sleep for? What is there to *wake* for?

He was life to me. He was breath and breathing. He was sight and seeing. He was the blood that beat in my veins. He was my food and my drink. I've loved him since his first smile, since he first whispered my name... Enough! There has to be a limit. She's right – I have to go on. Have to stop these tears and sit still. But I can't. I can't sit still. I can't wait for morning. I've got to *do* something. Curfew be damned! I'm going out. I've got to breathe. I've got to be near to him – even now...

That's better! Just to be moving! In this velvet darkness. With those same stars shining – who'd have thought they still could... Oh, to be doing something at last! ... I *know* there'll be



guards. I *know* it's a risk. But *anything's* better than pacing those sleepless walls, crying those dry tears... Anyway, *he* always liked to take a risk. Used to say his Father had taken a big risk on him so why shouldn't he be a little daring. A little daring?! Raising the dead! Marching on Jerusalem! Turning the Temple upside down! And even when they'd arrested

him – even standing there in front of the Governor – he risked defying them, wouldn't play their games.

Risked too much, it seems. We followed him ... and watched ... and waited. Waited for his risk to pay off. Waited for him to play his trump card. Waited for the happy ending. *Surely* he hadn't risked everything without a back-up plan? He *had* to have a way out. I believed that. I trusted that. Trusted *him* – even right up until the nails were going in, and the screaming started. *Then* I woke up. He'd gambled and *lost*. He'd *risked* everything and there wasn't a safety net. All he'd said, wasted. All he'd done, a fraud. All he'd told me about myself, lies. All he'd made me hope for, just dying dreams. Oh, yes, I woke up then, when he cried out. I haven't slept since ... I may never ...

O my God, did I say I was *awake*? I didn't know what *awake* was until I heard a voice through my sobbing say 'Mary', say my name – give me *back my name*. I didn't know I was dead until he gave me back my *life*! When I saw the tomb empty, I fell apart. I could feel the empty tomb *inside* me. I wailed and ran and fetched the others and then froze there, while all the time the day slowly dawned.

I watched them go in. I watched them go away, arguing. They didn't think to take *me*. I'd be there now but for a hand on my shoulder. A half-familiar hand. And a voice whispering my name. And a face with a smile I knew – knew but could hardly believe. Frozen, I was: I could do nothing, could say nothing. Could I believe my eyes, my ears, my skin? Wouldn't it just be wishful thinking to hold again what's been snatched from you? Wouldn't the others be right about me – not enough sleep and too much hysteria? But still he, he whom I didn't dare name, still he smiled. And the smile was so gentle. And his eyes so *eager* for me to *believe*, and not to embrace all the anxious inner voices alleging madness, preferring fear.

He spoke my name again: 'Mary!' I lifted my hand nearly to touch him. But what if he wasn't real? What if I had to lose him all over again? What would be left of Mary then? Again, my name: 'Mary?' Was I so important to him that he would come back to me like this and risk my running away? Was he so much to *me* that I would risk believing my eyes, believing all that inside me wanted to speak his name and kiss his poor, ruined hands?

Was I going to believe in life or death? Mine to choose. Mine to risk. I met his urgent eyes. 'Jesus', I said.

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This text was first preached as a homily at the church of St Mary-St Francis de Sales in Oakland, California.