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# *ivine*

A NOVEL



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*Divine*

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## *Author Note*

History and Scripture combined have given us very few facts about the real Mary Magdalene, the woman who so fascinates our generation, our culture. In fact, though it is widely held that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, there is no concrete evidence supporting this notion. The idea that Mary had more than a deep discipleship relationship with Jesus is absolutely unfounded. Worse is the popular thinking that Jesus may have been married to Mary Magdalene. This, of course, is absolutely false, heresy by the Bible's standards.

So who was Mary Magdalene?

Scripture tells us for certain that Jesus saved Mary from seven demons (Luke 8:2). What those demons were, we aren't told. But once she was free, we know that Mary and a few other women were so devoted to Christ that they helped support His ministry out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3). In other words, they were vital to His ministry and the furthering of His message.

We also know that Mary stayed with Jesus until the end and was one of the women at the foot of the cross, witnessing the horrifying death of their Savior (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25). In addition we are



told that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who went to the tomb that brilliant Sunday morning to anoint Christ's body with oils (Mark 16:1-9).

But maybe most telling of all is the account we are given in John 20:1-18. On that resurrection Sunday, when Mary and a few women found the tomb of Jesus empty, the others returned to their homes.

Not Mary. Mary stayed outside the empty tomb by herself, weeping.

Because I write emotional fiction, this part of Mary's story touches me the most. At one time she belonged completely to the darkness. Jesus saved her, as only God can do, and she became devoted to Him for the rest of His days on earth. Devoted in time and financial resources, devoted with her whole heart. When Jesus was killed on a cross, when His body was—Mary assumed—stolen from the tomb, she felt as if her entire world had come undone.

She was devastated.

Jesus saw that, the way He sees us when we are crushed. He had compassion on her and sent two angels to comfort her. They asked her why she was crying. "Because," she said, "they have taken my Lord away. I don't know where they have put Him."

She must've heard something behind her, because she turned around and there stood Jesus. The sight was such a shock that at first she didn't recognize Him. But when she did, she must have run to Him and taken His hands, or maybe she tried to hug Him.

Even then—in what might've been their greatest act of friendship—Jesus was clear about who He is, what His purpose is. He said to Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Basically He told her, "Don't hug me because this isn't about us. Instead, go tell the others that I'm doing what I said I would do." Don't get this wrong. Jesus wasn't angry with Mary. He cared enough for her to send the angels and to appear first to her, above all the powerful men He might've appeared to.

But still, He was clear about His role in her life. He was her Lord, not her lover. Her Father, not merely her friend.

This is where many struggle today—understanding the relationship between Mary and Christ.

*Divine* is a modern-day parable of Mary Magdalene. I have taken liberties—as a novelist must do—in finding seven demons or horrors that a person like Mary Magdalene might've been rescued from. In *Divine*, Mary Madison suffers all types of abuse, among other horrors. There are sections of this book that—though not graphic—will be difficult to read, sections that will put knots in your stomach for what this modern-day Mary suffers.

You may not relate to a story about abuse or faithlessness or promiscuity. But as long as the enemy of our souls exists, all of us will suffer abuse in some form:



fear, doubt, loneliness, addiction, lifestyle sin. We are all in need of rescue by the only one with the power to do so.

Jesus Christ, the divine one.

I bring you a story about a modern-day Mary Magdalene for one reason:

Mary's story is our story.

I see myself in Mary Magdalene, and I pray you see yourself there too. Floundering and falling prey to the demons and darkness of this world, trapped by our own frailty and futility—until we meet Jesus. Then, as He rescues us, we have the incredible chance of a lifetime: to follow Him for all our days, letting our life and our resources bring Him glory and honor.

The way Mary Magdalene did.




## Chapter 1

The speaker leaned toward the microphone. "And now—" his tone took on a timbre of importance—"it is my privilege to introduce to you Mary Madison."

A hush fell over the storied room, and the packed crowd of senators and lawmakers turned their attention to her.

Mary stood and with a practiced grace made her way to the podium. She was thirty, though there were days she felt one hundred. She clutched her notes in her left hand and felt the familiar rush of otherworldly peace. How many times had she done this? The smell of centuries-old tomes and rich wood, the click of her heels on the marbled floor, the walk to the front of the grand place—all of it was familiar.

Polite applause echoed through the room. Washington, DC's most influential and powerful nodded their subtle greet-





ings as she passed. A few even smiled. After five years of testifying at Senate hearings, the sea of faces was as familiar to her as she was to them. She was the voice of faith and reason, a woman whose beliefs and position were clear-cut and one-sided. But they asked her to come anyway. They sought after her and listened to her for one reason.

They knew her story.

Her horrific past, her public humiliation—the details were something they were all aware of. Every senator in the room knew the pain she'd suffered. Each was aware of her determination and drive, the way she held her head high now and had put herself through school, earning nothing less than a doctorate in family counseling.

She was an icon in DC, a pillar. She could've had her own talk show or made a fortune writing books and running a private practice. But Mary's days were spent in the heart of the city at one of her five shelters for abused women. Social work, they called it. She was a survivor, a fighter. The DC elite knew that too, and they liked her for it. Liked her enough to listen to her when an issue was on the floor and moral input was needed.

The issue today was abstinence.

At the beginning of the current president's term, a bill had been passed approving three years of federal funding for abstinence programs in public schools. Now time was up and money was running out. Mary's goal was simple: convince the senators to approve another three years.

"Good morning." Mary took hold of the sides of the podium and made eye contact with a group of senators ten feet



from her. Her eyes shifted toward the back of the room. "More than two years ago I stood in this place and convinced you that it was time for change." She paused and found another group near the left set of doors. "You agreed, and you gave our children a program that has altered the picture of teenage pregnancy across the nation." Her voice rang with sincerity that flowed from deep within her soul. "Today I come because the battle has just begun, and we must—we *must*—continue to bring our kids the choice to say no."

Though the first two speakers had bashed the program as being thinly veiled religious training, the faces before her were alert, ready for whatever she'd brought them.

She glanced at her notes. The statistics were daunting. For the next five minutes she rattled them off. Teen pregnancy down 40 percent. Eight out of ten students presented with abstinence training were making the decision to wait until marriage. There were 28 percent fewer known cases of sexually transmitted diseases.

Next Mary told her listeners about three teenagers, two girls and a boy, from different parts of the country. All of them ran in circles where sexual activity was a given, and each of them had made a decision to wait. The final story ended with Mary reading a quote from Susan, one of the teenage girls: "If someone hadn't taught me it was okay to say no, I never would've said it. Today I'd be pregnant or sick or used. Maybe all three."

Mary gripped the podium more tightly. "When a woman walks into one of my shelters looking for help, more than 90 percent of the time she was sexually active as a teenager.



Women who practice abstinence are healthy women in every sense of the word. The same is true for young men. When they make a choice to wait, they tell the world they are worthwhile, valuable, special. Every other action they take toward their future will fall in line with those feelings."

She paused and gave one more look at a few specific faces around the room. "Please understand, ladies and gentlemen of the Senate the power to help kids like Susan is entirely in your hands. We must—we absolutely must—continue funding this education." She leaned into the microphone. "Thank you."

A break was called, and for the next fifteen minutes Mary was surrounded by senators thanking her for coming and nodding their agreement. Even though a significant number in the room were clearly opposed to the program, seeing it as a violation of separation of church and state, Mary felt good about her talk.

She'd done her part. God would do the rest.

Members of the media converged around her next, and she told them all the same thing. "Abstinence is worth fighting for. It's the only way we can look our kids in the eyes and tell them they'll be safe. Safe in body, mind, and soul."

Ten minutes after the last interview she was in her four-door Toyota headed for the S Street shelter, the one closest to the Capitol, the one where her next appointment would take place in just half an hour. She pulled out of the parking lot, drove past the manicured lawns and carefully kept landscaping, and headed west past the impressive buildings and detailed architecture.

The transition happened in the next few blocks. Lush



green grass became cracked sidewalks and dirty gutters; rose gardens gave way to littered alleys, stunning buildings to old brick and graffiti. Mary felt herself unwind. She had a voice in that world, but she was more comfortable in this one. More fulfilled. Especially today. Her appointment was with a woman who wanted to end her life, a woman fleeing with her two young daughters, running from an abusive boyfriend and convinced at twenty-three that life held nothing more for her.

Mary gripped the steering wheel. *God, give me the words . . . the way You always have.*

*My grace is sufficient for you, daughter.* The words breezed across her heart, full and rich, assuring her.

A group of guys in their late teens was gathered at the next stoplight. They looked rough, with their tight white T-shirts, metal chains, and tattoos. They spotted Mary, and two of them grinned and waved. She knew them. They were regulars at the youth center—another project she'd won funding for.

"Mary . . . hey, Mary!" one of them shouted.

The light was red, so she rolled down her window. "Good morning, guys. Staying out of trouble?"

"Anything for you, Mary." One of the others saluted her, and she smiled. A week ago he'd told her the good news. He was coming to the youth center for regular Bible studies. Another life saved from the streets.

The light changed and she waved good-bye. "Come see me sometime."

"We will!"

She turned her attention back to the road. The women's shelter was three blocks up on the left, an old five-story brick



building with apartments on all but the first two floors. A living room, library, and kitchen, along with a day-care facility and several private offices and meeting rooms, made up the first level, and the second held a workout room, classrooms, and an oversized meeting area for church services.

Mary found her regular parking place in the back lot and headed for the side door. She loved every inch of this place. This was her life's purpose, the reason Christ had rescued her. She squinted against the bright midmorning sun. *Use me in this woman's life, Lord. Give her a reason to stay, a reason to come back. A reason to live.*

Inside she stopped at the front desk.

Leah Hamilton was working at the computer. She looked up, curious. "How did it go?"

"Very well." Mary picked up a stack of mail with her name on it. "They don't take their vote for a while. I think they'll fund it again." She peered around the corner. "Is she here yet?"

"Signing her kids into day care." Leah was nineteen, a lovely girl, inside and out, from the wealthy enclaves across the river. Three days a week she took college courses in theater and music, but the other two she was here volunteering her time and energy to work alongside the team at the shelter. She had an uncanny way of connecting with the women, helping them feel safe and cared for from the moment they entered the building.

And that was always the hardest part—getting abused women to step out of a harmful situation into the safe haven of the shelter.

"What's her name?"



"Emma Johnson. She's twenty-three with two little girls." Leah frowned. "I'm worried about her."

"Me too." Mary took the file marked *Emma* from the corner of the desk. In their initial phone discussion, the shelter's staff counselor had written in the file that Emma had gotten into drugs as a teenager, and now she was bruised and battered because of her boyfriend.

In addition, the counselor had noted that Emma was suicidal. "I feel trapped, like I'm in a prison and I can't get out," Emma had told the counselor.

It was that part that had caught Mary's attention. *Trapped in a prison*. The words could've been her own once, a lifetime ago. Mary sighed. Dozens of abused women filed through the doors of the DC shelters every day. She couldn't meet with all of them, so for the most part she left counseling to her very able staff.

But this one . . .

Mary tucked the file under her arm and nodded at the door down the hallway. "I'll be waiting." She smiled at Leah. "Bring Emma to my office when she's ready."

Inside the small room, Mary shut the door and studied Emma's file again. Once in a while God brought someone who needed to hear her story. Her entire story. Her story of gut-wrenching heartache and sorrow and finally her story of victory.

Her love story.

Without ever meeting her, Mary was convinced that Emma was one of those women.

She stood and went to the window facing S Street. The





sun was passing behind a cloud, and an anxious feeling plagued her. Days like this it all came back, the horrors that had trapped her and threatened to consume her. Fear and deceit, pain and addiction. Faithlessness and promiscuity and a desire to end her own life.

In Bible times people would have called her possessed of those horrors. Demons, they would've said. People today were reluctant to use that word, but whatever the wording, the effect was the same. Bondage and helplessness, with no way out.

Until she met Jesus.

She was no longer a slave to her own seven demons but a willing servant, dedicated and indebted to the Master, determined to make every breath count for His purposes alone. Her devotion was that strong.

Mary looked up and found a place beyond the passing cloud. What horrors did Emma Johnson face? In what ways did she need to be rescued?

A long shaky breath left Mary's lips. Her job was easier when she stayed busy, stayed in the present day, making rounds between Senate committee hearings and ministry on the streets of DC. But sometimes when the situation warranted it, she allowed herself to go back to the sad, sorry beginning. Telling her story was one way of underlining the truth, one way of making sure that the pain she'd suffered hadn't been without reason.

She swallowed hard and leaned into the windowsill. What were people thinking these days? Jesus wasn't merely a good teacher, and He certainly wasn't only a man—the way the world saw men. There had been no marriage or family for



Jesus Christ. He'd come to set people free. Period. And that's just what He'd done in her life. People didn't understand the power of Jesus—not the real power.

It was her job to tell them. Her job to tell Emma Johnson.

Jesus had rescued her, saved her from horrors that otherwise would've killed her. That wasn't something a normal man could've done. Her rescue hadn't come at the hands of a mere mortal—no way. It had come through the working of a mighty God.

Mary felt her anxiety ease. She would tell Emma every piece of her story so the woman might understand the real Jesus, the one people often didn't know about. Her story alone was proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Not just a good teacher or a kind leader, but God in the flesh. Because it would've taken God to redeem someone like Mary. Someone like Emma Johnson. God Almighty, Lord and Savior. Wholly man, yes. But more than that.

Wholly divine.



## Discussion Questions

Use these questions for individual reflection or for discussion with a book club or other small group. They will help you not only understand some of the issues in *Divine* but also integrate the book's messages into your own life.

1. We know very little about the real Mary Magdalene. What we know for certain is that Jesus rescued her from seven demons—Scripture tells us that twice. Mary Madison was delivered from seven strongholds also: fear, lying, self-inflicted pain, addiction, faithlessness, promiscuity, and thoughts of taking her life. How could any one of these ruin a person's life? Explain how these troubles were too strong for Mary to work out by herself.
  2. What strongholds have you seen in your life or the lives of people you know? Give an example of how Jesus has rescued you or one of those people.
  3. Do you think the real Mary Magdalene understood that Jesus was divine—fully man and fully God? Why or why not?
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