



Maggie's Story



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MACKALL

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Maggie's Story

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A Letter to Readers

This book is different from anything I've ever written, and I want to make it absolutely clear to readers that *Maggie's Story* is a work of fiction. I've simply tried to imagine what life might have been like if Mary Magdalene and Jesus and the disciples had lived closer to home, in our own decade, in my own state. I've invented dialogue, contemporary settings, characters, and events, as I've attempted to get inside the head of "Maggie." That's what fiction does.

Who was the real Mary Magdalene? What do we actually know about her? There are a lot of wild theories flying around about this woman. But most of the talk is as unfounded as the gossip heard in school hallways or around the watercooler.

The facts of Mary Magdalene's life are few, and they can all be found in the Gospels:

Fact: Mary Magdalene and other women traveled with Jesus and the disciples on occasion, as Jesus taught people about God and how they could relate with him.

Fact: Jesus “cast out seven demons,” healing Mary. Her life was profoundly changed by Christ (Luke 8:1-3).

Fact: Mary Magdalene stayed by the cross during Jesus’ crucifixion (John 19:25).

Fact: Mary Magdalene was among the first to go to Jesus’ tomb and find it empty (John 20:1).

Fact: Mary stayed outside the tomb until she saw Jesus. She was the first to see the resurrected Christ (John 20:11-18).

Writing this book has been an amazing journey for me, as I’ve tried to imagine how Mary Magdalene’s story might have played out today. If you want to read more about the life of Mary Magdalene and the actual events that inspired this book, I’ve included a Check It Out section on page 305. A search of the passages suggested there, chapter by chapter, will reveal the stories, facts, and encounters I’ve used for many of the events of *Maggie’s Story*. You may want to use the Check It Out section to investigate the facts for yourself or as a basis for a study or discussion group.

Writing *Maggie’s Story* drove me to examine the Bible’s accounts—the real record—the only truth about Mary Magdalene, about Jesus, and about us.

I hope reading this story will do the same for you.





Part 1





Chapter One

Slayton, Ohio

Dear Chance,

I promised myself I was going to start writing you whenever I could. I'll tell you the straight truth, too, which is more than most have done for me.

So here goes. Just for the record, I'm pushing 22, although I've been told more than once that I look 10 years older than that. I've lived in Slayton, Ohio, my whole life, and I've made it my whole life's goal to get out. So you can see how great I'm doing with my life plan.

But to be honest—and I promised you that much—I guess I'd have to say that I have made it out of Slayton four times. Three times to rehab, once to the loony bin. Not exactly what I had in mind. The only thing I got out of the mental hospital was a line on some prescription meds that, for a while, worked almost as good as the white stuff I wouldn't want you to know about. I've been able to get the pills from Matt since I've been back, but they don't work like they used to.

Nothing does.

I'm writing you this letter from the bar where I work. It's slow today. My boss drove over to Polk to meet with some driver who promised him a deal on import beer. I told him nothing good's going to come out of Polk, but he doesn't listen to me. I'm just the cocktail waitress. Besides, the last time Boss Wells listened to a female was when he was crying in his crib.

Sorry about my handwriting. My hands shake if I drink, and they shake even more if I don't. I could use a computer at the library to write you, but it's not like they welcome me over there, not even before I dropped out of high school. So this is it, kid.

Tonight I'm going out with Ben again. Okay, not out. Just to my place or to his car. It doesn't matter. What matters is that for an hour with Ben, I won't feel. And when he gives me the pills he's bringing from Matt's,



*I'll have the promise of not feeling more. That's all I ask.
To get the gnawing inside of me to stop, even for an
hour. A minute.*



The front door smacked open, then slammed shut. Maggie Dale shoved the letter into the pocket of her short, tight denim skirt.

“Maggie? You got it dark enough in this joint.” Gary, one of the regulars, was okay as long as he didn’t drink too much. He could be a mean drunk. Maggie had found that out the hard way. She wouldn’t let it happen again.

“The Well is a bar, Gary. If you want bright, go to the tanning booth cross the street.” The only light in the bar came from a row of fake Tiffany stained-glass lamps hanging from the ceiling. That, and the glow of the TV behind the counter.

Most customers seemed to like it dark. They settled on wooden stools that lined the mahogany bar, worn smooth by the weight of men’s arms. Not Gary. He thought he owned the table closest to the door. Half a dozen tables were scattered across the uneven floor. Maggie served buffalo wings and cold sandwiches for those who wanted an excuse to drink longer. Night and day, the bar smelled of beer and bourbon.

One of Gary’s buddies, a relative newcomer to town, stormed into the bar like thunder in a hurry. He nodded, then pulled up a seat at Gary’s table. “Maggie, come over here and keep us company, girl! This place is dead empty.”

Maggie liked the sound of the words *dead empty*. She



said them over again in her head and fingered the scar on her left wrist. She wore bracelets to hide the white ridge where the blade had slid as easily as if she'd been cutting a slice of lemon meringue. That had surprised her more than the fact that she'd slit her wrist for no good reason, other than the realization that there was no good reason not to. She hadn't even been able to come up with somebody to write a suicide note to.

Dead empty. That was how she'd felt when she'd taken the blade out of her razor and turned it around to get a good hold. They just didn't make razors like they used to, like they looked in the movies, when a beautiful woman slid into a bubbly bathtub and ended it all. Maggie had had to break her plastic razor to get at the blade. She'd gotten the sharp edge to cut deep enough to make her pass out, although the whiskey and pills may have had something to do with that.

When she'd come to on the floor of her dirty apartment kitchen, her first thought had been, *So I can't even do that right. . . .*

"Maggie?" Gary shouted, jerking her back to the present.

His buddy slapped his knee again. "You coming or not, darlin'?"

Most of Gary's buddies could be good tippers, even though Maggie wouldn't have wanted to be stuck in a grain elevator with any of them. "Hey, handsome," she countered, strutting to their table. "And just who's going to get you your beer if I'm over here on your lap?"

He laughed, his mouth open, showing one brown tooth. "Now that *is* a devil of a choice!"

Maggie took their orders and filled them. Her boss



still wasn't back, so she poured herself a shot of Jack Daniel's and carried all three drinks to the table. She drank hers standing up. It burned in her chest, and she waited for it to reach her head.

"You hold your liquor better than any girl I know, Maggie," Gary commented, as if he'd taught her everything she knew about it.

"Practice, practice, practice." Maggie forced a smile that would pay off when they left their tips. Some guys a whole lot nicer than Gary and his buddies could walk a check without padding so much as 10 percent, even if she did handstands.

Maggie could remember her first drink of hard liquor. At 10 years old, she'd already hated the smell of whiskey almost as much as what it made her daddy do when he drank it. He'd given her sips of beer before she could say the word *beer*. Those sips didn't count, though. Her first real drink had been an offering, something the old man had done after he'd hit her too much—gone so far he'd actually felt bad about it. She hadn't cried though, not even when the blood filled her mouth and trickled down her chin and onto her pajamas.

"You're a tough kid," he'd said, grabbing the whiskey bottle with a fist that looked skinned, the knuckles red and swollen. "You earned this."

He'd poured her a glass from a bottle so dark brown she'd expected that whatever came from it would feel like mud sliding down her throat. But it hadn't. She'd drunk it down like lemonade. Afterward, she'd coughed and choked, blood spurting out with the whiskey.



Her daddy had laughed as she doubled over. Her stomach had pinched together, making her feel like she'd vomit right there . . . something that would have gotten her another smack for sure. When she'd caught her breath again and made her eyes stop watering, she'd asked for another glass.

She'd been asking ever since.

He'd left home three years later, and Maggie had never heard from him again.

"I want everybody to have a good life. That's why I came. That's why my Father sent me."

The words came from the TV above the bar. Maggie turned. A man was being interviewed on the steps of a Worship House in West Salem, Ohio. Laced canopy stretched over the lawn. Long tables with white tablecloths held empty casserole dishes and roast turkey carved to the bone. The man talking was average-looking, lean but strong, with clear green eyes that seemed to hold the interviewer captive. He was wearing a brown suit with a striped shirt. Maggie guessed he might have been in his early thirties.

"There's that guy again," Gary said. "Joshua." He shushed a group of men just coming into the bar. They were backslapping each other and laughing as if they'd already drunk their limit at some other bar.

Maggie knew who Joshua was. You'd have to be living in a cave not to have heard of him. She'd never met him or seen him in person, but a lot of people who came into the bar had.



He'd been in the news off and on, but she couldn't remember getting a good look at him on TV before now. They said he was camera shy, and as she watched him, she believed it. He nodded at the newscaster, then walked away.

The camera shifted to an anchorwoman inside the Worship House.

“Here in the town of West Salem, Ohio, I’m talking with the mother of the bride. Tell us what went on here today.”

She shoved the mike into the face of a middle-aged woman, wearing a mother-of-the-bride dress—coral satin. Something she'd never wear again, Maggie thought.

“It was absolutely amazing!”

The woman scratched her head, as if she still couldn't make sense of it all, before she continued.

“More people came to the reception than we expected, and we ran out of champagne before the wedding toast. I was so embarrassed. So I said something to my friend from Polk, Mary Davidson. She said something to her son Josh. They had a discussion, and then Josh went back with the waiters and—”

“Look! There's Pete!” Gary shouted. “He's all dressed up fit to kill.” Gary pointed at the TV. “There's Andy!”

“Quiet!” Maggie demanded, pushing past them to get



a better view. She did see Pete and Andy, although she barely recognized them in their suits and ties. They were brothers, and they ran the auto-mechanics shop across the street. Pete played minor-league ball for the Toledo Mud Hens. Maggie had gone to school with them. She turned up the volume on the TV. The mother of the bride was still speaking.

“I know you’re not going to believe this. But . . . well, there wasn’t any champagne. I’ll swear to that. And then there was champagne everywhere! Just like that! It gushed from that fountain over there. And it came out of the faucets, instead of water! It was the best champagne I’ve ever tasted. Everybody said so.”

The anchorwoman turned to face the camera.

“Not exactly everybody. I’ve interviewed a number of guests who said that this wasn’t the first champagne fountain they’ve seen at weddings here, even when Joshua wasn’t present.”

She stuck the mike in the face of a guy who looked like he’d had a few too many.

“What do you think of the champagne situation?”

“I’m a beer man.”

“But what about the dramatic appearance of champagne? Would you call it a miracle?”

The guy shrugged.



“They ran out. How should I know where they got it?”

Maggie reached up and turned off the TV. “Well, we might as well close the bar. Free champagne? That Josh character will put us all out of business.”

The men laughed with her. “How do you think he did it?” Gary asked. “Some kind of group hypnosis?”

Maggie went back to serving drinks, while speculation about Josh drifted around the room. She listened to the guys pool their ignorance, until she couldn’t take it any more. “Any of you ever seen him? Josh . . . what’s his last name again?”

“Davidson.” The answer came from a man Maggie was pretty sure she’d never seen before today. He’d come in with a group of guys and stayed on to nurse his second beer. A leather case sat at his feet, and a camera rested on the bar in front of him. He was well dressed and nice-looking—dark hair, good haircut, brown eyes, pale skin. He wore a polo shirt and gray pants. She smelled tobacco on him. Since she’d quit smoking—for the fifth time—she could pick up the scent a mile away.

“Do you know him? that Joshua guy?” She swiped at the bar with a rag.

The man shook his head and grinned. He had a nice smile. “Not really. I’m just trying to get his photograph. I’ve met him a couple of times. He’s an interesting guy.” He held out his hand to Maggie. “My name’s Jude Smith.”

Maggie wiped her hand on her skirt before she shook his. “Maggie Dale.” She eyed the camera. It looked expensive,



like Jude's shoes. She nodded at the camera. "You do this for a living?"

"I work for *The Query*."

Maggie had seen *Query* in supermarket checkout lines. Headlines ranged from "Aliens in School" to which movie star was dating which other movie star while married to another movie star. "Don't think I've ever met a paparazzi before," she joked.

She thought she saw a flash of anger, but it disappeared into a smile.

"Is that right?" Jude took a long sip of his beer. "I've met plenty of cocktail waitresses." He laughed, as if he was just kidding with her.

Maybe he was. Then he stood up, put down a 20 on the bar, and walked away, leaving her the biggest tip so far today.

Maggie waited until he was gone before tucking the money into her pocket, next to Chance's letter. She had no idea what to make of Jude Smith. But then, what else was new? Nobody had ever accused Maggie Dale of having great insight into men.



After work, Maggie drove her old Ford Galaxy to her apartment. She never referred to the one-room, second-floor flat as "home," even though she'd lived there for almost a year. It was in a small complex of six apartments, a five-minute drive from work.

After she'd dropped out of high school less than a



month before graduation, she'd moved out of her mom's house. The only place she could afford to rent had been the room above the bar. She'd been too young to serve drinks, but Boss Wells had paid her to sweep the place and do odd jobs. She'd worked nights bagging groceries six days a week at the Slayton Market. When she turned 21, Boss Wells hired her on full-time at the bar. She'd moved into her own apartment the day before her twenty-first birthday.

Maggie climbed the back stairs, holding her breath until she was well past the first landing, where the stench of uncollected and rotting garbage drew a cloud of gnats. She unlocked her door and flipped on the light.

The apartment smelled like musty carpet and old pennies. The furniture had come with the apartment, and Maggie hadn't bothered changing it—brown couch, blue recliner, a table, and two chairs.

Everywhere she looked, there were “sad spots.” That's how she thought of them. The corner where she'd slid to the floor and cried the day she'd moved in. The spot where Alan had stood when he'd called her a slut, his voice calm and controlled, on the last night she'd seen him. The kitchen sink, where she'd watched the blood from her wrist mingle with ice water and spin pink down the drain.

She grabbed a yogurt from the fridge, curled up on the couch, and clicked the remote control. They were talking about Joshua again. FOX News had picked up the story about the wedding champagne. But again Josh had declined to be interviewed.

“Honestly,” she muttered. The news wasn't much more



reliable than *The Query* these days. She changed channels. ABC had a roundtable discussion. Normally, she couldn't care less about politics, but it was funny to see politicians fight over Joshua. The red states claimed Joshua was on their side. He supported the Ten Commandments, opposed abortion, reaffirmed trust in God, advocated reading the Scriptures and adhering to moral codes. But the blue states claimed Joshua as a strong proponent of peace and nonviolence, a champion of the poor and underprivileged.

There was a knock at the door.

Maggie checked the clock: 11:30. Ben was right on time. She'd been seeing him for two months. In the beginning, she'd actually thought they might have something together. He was quite a bit older than she was, with a good job in Rocky River. Although he swore he wasn't married, she'd never been to his house. It made her wonder.

He knocked again.

She turned off the TV and answered the door. Ben came in and took her in his arms. Maggie closed her eyes and kissed him, trying to block out everything from her mind and get back the feelings she'd had for him in the beginning. He'd swept her off her feet then, and she'd thought about him all the time, counting the hours until they'd see each other again.

On their third "date," Ben had pulled some weed from his glove compartment, and a revolver had tumbled out. Ben had laughed it off and said he needed it for protection after work. Maggie had laughed with him, but she hadn't been able to get the gun out of her head.

Now, as they kissed and his hands roved up and down



her body, all she thought of was the gun. If Ben couldn't fill her mind anymore, if he could no longer take her thoughts away from the gnawing of total emptiness, then maybe his gun could.



Check It Out . . .

If you want to know more about the real Mary Magdalene's life and the actual events that inspired *Maggie's Story*, read:

Chapter 1

John 10:10

John 2:1-12

Chapter 2

Matthew 9:9

Chapter 3

Matthew 3:1-6

Mark 1:1-7

Luke 3:3-6

John 1:9-23

1 John 1:9

Chapter 4

Matthew 9:9-13

Chapter 5

John 4:1-42

Chapter 6

Luke 5:1-11

Chapter 7

Matthew 18:12-14

Luke 15:1-10

Matthew 6:1-4; 20-23

Luke 6:27-36

Matthew 5:2-12; 43-48

Luke 6:17-23

Matthew 4:18-22

Mark 1:16-20

Luke 5:1-11



Chapter 8

John 8:12

John 3:1-21

Chapter 9

Luke 7:11-17

Luke 7:36-50

Chapter 11

Mark 1:35-39

Luke 4:42-44

Matthew 14:1-12

Luke 7:24-28

Chapter 13

Luke 18:18-30

1 Timothy 6:10

Matthew 19:16-30

Mark 10:17-31

Matthew 16:13-20

Chapter 14

Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 19:13-15

Mark 10:13-16

Luke 18:15-17

Matthew 22:37-39

Luke 10:27-37

Luke 15:1-2; 11-32

Chapter 15

Matthew 14:13-21

Mark 6:30-44

Luke 9:10-17

John 6:1-15

Chapter 16

Psalm 8

Matthew 20:17-19

Matthew 16:21-26

Matthew 20:20-28

Chapter 17

Matthew 14:22-27

Matthew 8:23-27

Mark 4:35-41

Chapter 18

Mark 8:22-26

Luke 18:35-43

John 9:1-7

Mark 9:30-32

Chapter 19

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 10:1-20

Psalm 106:1

Luke 10:17-20

Chapter 20

Matthew 17:14-21; 19:26

Mark 9:14-29

Luke 9:37-43

Chapter 21

Luke 8:40-56



Chapter 23

Luke 14:15-24

Matthew 18:21-22

Chapter 24

John 6:26-40

Matthew 23:23-24

John 6:47-59

John 6:60-71

John 11:1-16

Chapter 25

John 11:1-44

Matthew 26:6-13

John 12:1-11

Matthew 20:17-19

Mark 10:32-34

Luke 18:31-34

Chapter 26

Matthew 23:1-12

Luke 20:45-47

Matthew 23:13-36

Mark 8:14-21

Mark 13:24-31

Luke 21:5-24

Matthew 23:37-39

Mark 13:1-23

Chapter 27

John 13:1-17

Matthew 26:20-25

Mark 14:17-21

John 13:18-30

Matthew 26:26-30

Mark 14:22-26

Luke 22:14-20

John 14:1-31

Mark 14:27-31

Luke 22:31-38

John 13:31-38

Chapter 28

John 15:18-16:33

John 17

John 15:1-17

Matthew 26:36-56

Luke 22:39-53

John 18:1-11

Chapter 29

John 18:15-18; 25-27

Mark 14:66-72

Luke 22:54-62

Matthew 24:1-25

Mark 13:1-23

Matthew 23:37-39

Mark 15:1-15

Luke 22:66-23:25

Matthew 27:15-31

John 18:28-19:16

Chapter 30

Mark 15:16-20

Matthew 27:27-31



Luke 22:63-65

Mark 15:31-32

Matthew 27:35-44

Luke 23:35-43

Chapter 31

Matthew 27:45-56

Mark 15:33-41

Luke 23:44-49

John 19:25-37

Chapter 32

Matthew 27:57-66

Luke 23:50-56

John 19:38-42

Chapter 33

Matthew 28:1-15

Mark 16:1-11

Luke 24:1-12

John 20:1-18

Epilogue

John 20:24-29

John 21:15-24

Matthew 28:16-20

Mark 16:19-20

Luke 24:50-53

Acts 1:6-11

