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Magdalena

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by Rachel M. Srubas

1.

Because the damp, blue darkness
that unborn morning
seemed safer than daylight,
with its gamblers,
executioners,
and thirsts,
I walked out into it,
alone.

I risked my life on the shadowed road
to go look at a stone. My hands
were empty
of everything they'd once held.
It was too late for myrrh and aloes,
too early to imagine a new life

without you. Without your voice,
your face,
I could offer you only
the stunned prayer of a woman
who felt like a widow
but wasn't. I didn't know
who I was any longer, and I could see
nothing in that darkness
but the darker doorway
of your abandoned grave.

A theft? First your life,
now your death?

I ran—
stumbling and breathless—
and told the men you were gone.
They left me behind.
They raced through the indifferent dawn.

2.

My reasons seemed clear,
yet angels asked me why.
Even the gardener
(grave robber?) asked me why.

Because my home had turned silent, sepulchral.
Because my dead teacher
would never again come for breakfast,
I doubled over in the echoing,
spiced threshold
and keened like a jackal.

3.

Say my name,
say my name again.

Your face in tender daylight.
Your voice. My rabbi.

I recollected myself
and all your promises, once outlandish,
now true.
You'd outlived our killing.
You'd outlove us, too.

I let your hands go,
and took up your gospel,
its telling.