

# MY NAME IS MARY MAGDALENE

by JC Miller

## EXCERPT

*"Man is the cruelest animal" - Friedrich Nietzsche*

*Hello, My Name Is...*

My name is Mary Magdalene. I know you're wondering, how did a heathen like me get stuck with such a sacred name? My Mama named me—on her deathbed. I haven't thought about Mama, or me for that matter, in years. I try not to think about the past; it helps make the present more doable. Life brushes past you. Months and years seem to blend into one indistinguishable blur. It wasn't until Salmone Abrams, with his beautiful and gentle self, walked into the psychiatric ward where I was an involuntary mental patient, did I even think of such thoughts. Up until that moment, everything I knew and everything I was, was dark, hidden, and dying inside of me.

That morning, an orderly rolled me out onto the East Lawn Pavilion for breakfast.

Supposedly I was soaking up rays from the end of the summer sun. Nurse Mulligan would have never allowed such a courtesy. From the moment we met, she disliked me and handled me with mean intentions. She was, by nature, a nasty and uptight person who assaulted me every chance she got. Having no one to turn to, I was devastated and stripped down to my foundation. The first chance I got; I bit a plug out of her arm. I was placed in a Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit from that day on, and Nurse Mulligan made sure I was uncomfortable and forcibly over-medicated against my will. She kept me loopy, feeble, and isolated. But on that last sun-filled day, the evil wench had a premature delivery. An acting psych nurse, who changed the trajectory of my life, was filling in for Nurse Mulligan's maternity leave. If I could have, I would have jumped for joy when I heard the news. As it was, I was still coming down from being drugged, and I hadn't eaten anything. My hands felt like rubber mallets; I couldn't lift a spoon, let alone bring one to my mouth. To make matters worse, my

next set of meds were scheduled after breakfast; instead of numbing me, they caused me to see monkeys. If I wasn't careful of how I reacted, the meds were capable of sending me straight to lockdown in the secluded padded rooms. That was where I usually spent my afternoons—hungry and screaming at a locked door with dem damn monkeys crawling the walls.

That blessed morning, Salmone Abrams, wearing the most angelic smile I've seen in a long time, along with Nurse Lindt, the fill-in, walked across the East Lawn with a giant fluffy white teddy bear in his right hand.

"Mrs. Owens, you have a visitor," Nurse Lindt announced with a smile not quite as charming as Salmone's but kind. "It's your grandson, Mrs. Owens." She added, reiterating the information on his visitor identification badge while resting a gentle hand on my shoulder. I drew away my shoulder, rejecting her.

*Next thing I know, you'll be drugging me up and locking me in too. No, ma'am.*

*Get your hand off me,* I thought, keeping my eyes on the colorful plate of food I wanted to eat but could not.

Salmone squatted down next to me and placed the gift down on the table in front of my plate. The teddy bear was holding a big red heart made of felt that read, I Love You. I didn't know how to act. I was giddy on the inside but forgot how to express myself. It had been so long since a man, smelling and looking as good as he did, brought me anything. I did get that one cracker from Eddie, a patient who frequented my room when I was incapacitated to poke his nasty drawn-up thing in me. When I say poke, that's what I mean; he thrust himself into me. We didn't have sex—it was just a thrust. I think Eddie forgot how to do the rest and he came back hoping to remember.

He did give me that stinking stale cracker, though. Salmone, wearing a navy-blue open blazer over a white tee and faded jeans, inched closer to me and brushed my hair with his hand. I didn't realize I still had hair. It wasn't something you thought about often in there.

"Hey, Maw-Maw, 'membba me?" I turned toward him, and he smiled that same pleasant smile.

There was a dim flicker of recognition, but I didn't know him from Adam. I think I smiled anyway. *Why not?* He was colored, kind-looking, and called me Maw Maw—speaking the language I grew up with.

"Awww... there you go!" Nurse Lindt responded, clasping her small, white age-spotted hands together, pleased with my reaction to Salmone. "I'm going to give you two some privacy." She lightly

touched him to attract his attention. He was gazing at me, and I was avoiding his eye contact. "If you need me, Mr. Abrams, I'll be in the nurse's station. Also, the orderlies in blue uniforms are here for you if needed." She added, stopping the one that I hated as he was walking by. Dino. He was one of Nurse Mulligan's flunkies. A tall, narrow, slimy piece of crap. He was strong, though. The other was a woman with a nasty facial tic. I hardly ever saw her around except when Nurse Mulligan needed her.

"Hey!" Dino responded, stopping in his tracks, and smiling wide for the new Head Nurse, with crooked, metal-wired teeth and acne scars tracing his face.

Salmone stood and shook his hand. "I do have a few questions. Is my... grandmother able to speak?" He gestured toward me, rubbing my head again. He had me curious about how I looked.

Dino glanced at Nurse Lindt first, and she nodded, giving him permission to answer, being that she was new. "Ahh, well no! At least not in full sentences...that I know of." He answered using facial and body expressions that implied he somehow cared. "She hasn't spoken to her treatment team...her social worker, or the unit's clinical psychologist, Dr. Davis, since her admittance."

*Damn, fool!* I thought, observing Salmone's immediate disheartened expression.

*I talk. Just not to that raggedy-mouthed rascal.* I looked up at my teddy bear, into his big placid black glass eyes, and felt sad now myself. I wanted Salmone's company.

"Ooh," he uttered sadly, stooping down near me again. "I guess I'll sit with her for a while anyway...maybe help her eat some of this good-looking food." He picked up that heavy behind spoon, and I opened my mouth like a little bird as he scooped up some cold eggs. Lord was I happy.

Salmone didn't stay long that first day, and I wasn't sure when, or if, he would return. I didn't have any answers for him, but he did make me remember who he was.

He was the preacher's kid from back home in New Orleans. Little Sal, all grown up. The little boy who used to run behind my great-niece, Rah...I claimed her as my granddaughter. He and his family lost contact with mine around the same time I did. Ten years ago. Sometime after that cursed night back in 1984 that finalized my admittance into the crazy house. Sal told me that he moved to New York City and became a cop. In his spare time, he searched for my family, mostly Rah. His childhood crush and committed friendship propelled him. He said the only public record he found on her was from high school, listing a welfare hotel in Hell's Kitchen as an address, with no forwarding information.

When I left them, they were staying with me at my Brownstone on Strivers' Row in Harlem. Back when I was well, and well to do. Sal said it was like my family disappeared from the face of the earth. No listed employment, utility bills, loans, credit cards. Nothing. He looked so sad, having hit a brick wall. I wasn't much help either, and I knew he was counting on my assistance. I simply sat there while he held my hands, rubbed my arms, and looked directly into my eyes. He wasn't scared, like most people.

They saw the mental unit as a locked box of angry people held against their will. It was.

If the top of my head could have been unscrewed and looked into, it would have scared the hell out of most. Yet Sal looked at me with love and concern. He told me that he attempted to visit before, around three years earlier, after discovering my whereabouts. I was on lockdown, and Nurse Mulligan deliberately fed him a trough load of hogwash, deterring him from coming again. He almost didn't. Then, he figured, if Rah was gone for good, he could enjoy a piece of her in me.

I listened carefully as Sal rambled, drinking his every word. I hadn't been spoken to in so long; the words gently fell upon my ears and revived my hearing. I enjoyed Sal's youth, his zeal for life, and how his almond-shaped eyes gleamed and danced as he reminisced over old times back home in Louisiana. I didn't utter a word, and although my expression was blank, my eyes smiled in remembrance of the world I seemed to have forgotten. My thoughts were knocking around in my head, but at least they were my thoughts and not those tormenting voices. I wanted to talk to Sal. I wanted to join in his laughter, but I felt a lot of irrational shame about being there. Besides, I was afraid. I, too, didn't know where my family was. They abandoned me just as I did them. I couldn't fault them. Dr. Davis told them that I would never recover from my Schizophrenic psychosis. *Was he right about me?* I wasn't sure. I definitely wasn't myself, yet I wasn't who he said I was either. I didn't know who I was anymore...but I knew that my name was Mary Magdalene.