

Looking to Mary Among the Wildflowers

By Kyndall Rae Rothaus

On Good Friday 2018, my darling foster baby left my care, and I was devastated. I had fallen in love, head over heels, and it was supposed to be an adoption case . . . until it wasn't, which is how these things can go.

I started talking to Mary that Friday. She knew what it was like to say goodbye to a child after all. I spent my weekend at a Catholic retreat center, which was perfect, because that meant Mary was everywhere. Every time I turned a corner, there she was, looking out at me from a painting or a statue, staring right into my heart with her sorrowful eyes.

I rose early Easter morning, before dawn, and walked to my favorite spot on the property—the cemetery. It felt right to start Easter there, the way Mary did, and the gravestones were fitting company for my grief.

What I loved most about this particular cemetery were not the gravestones but the wildflowers—the most vivid blanket of natural color I have ever seen. The juxtaposition of graves and new life had always felt sacred every time I visited there in spring, but this year the contrast felt especially poignant. I usually sit on the wildflower side of the cemetery. This year I sat on the other end, where the flowers were sparse and the graves abundant.

After my three days of emotional solidarity with Mary, I found I was now angry with her. She got her son back. I remained childless. I was pissed. Maybe not at her, but certainly at God. Where was resurrection for me?

The oddest thing happened as I continued to stare at the waves upon waves of bright-colored petals. Amidst my anger and grief, I was overcome with a third emotion. I was unexpectedly flooded with a sense of gratitude that I had been given the chance to love this small child. I felt grateful that she was alive, grateful that I had the pleasure of knowing her and holding her and tending to her in the NICU. It wasn't that my sense of grief and loss went away, but suddenly something else was there too, like a wildflower poking up through the cemetery dirt, like color accompanying my pale despair.

Many months later my daughter would come back to me, and in a couple of years I would adopt her. But I didn't know any of that at the time. I couldn't even dream it was possible. All I had to hold on to was the fleeting feeling of gratitude and the ephemeral presence of the springtime wildflowers.

Nowadays I cannot spend Easter weekend without a trip down memory lane, returning in my mind over and over again to my empty, childless arms. My tired body sitting among gravestones. My heavy heart. Mary's presence on the bench beside me. The sadness. The anger. The gratitude. The flowers. The whole complicated mixture of life that comes with loving.

Life rarely happens in linear or timely fashion where our Good Fridays clearly transform into Easter Sundays and we get to live happily ever after. Even after Sunday, our grief lives on. And even in death, the Universe sends us flowers.



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