

## Vultures

by Nancy Moran

I guess you could say that I wasn't really expecting to see you so soon after coming back. Maybe that's what it was. Or to see the baby in your arms and the two year old trotting after your wife. Running into you two at Wal-Mart, of all places. You used to boycott Wal-Mart the best you could in college, justifiably angry over their monopoly of this town, and that's how I informed you of slave labor and genocide. I didn't have groceries so soon after being back and I was craving a Ugandan dish I had learned to cook, living there for two years.

I booked the internship with the rehabilitation center two months before you got married and skipped town. State. Country. I told the necessary folks, but it was a pretty silent disappearance. I had managed not to think of you while in Uganda. I had managed not to miss you, most of all.

Suddenly as she walks up to you and kisses your cheek then smiles at me and continues shopping, I remember the exact feeling I had when I saw that you guys were engaged. It's hard to place, though, because everything points to jealousy, like I wanted you. In truth, I did want her to leave you because she symbolized everything I hated about who you were becoming. In a few ways it seems like she came into our lives, showed her superiority in sexual attraction and chastity, and slowly killed us. She knew you weren't good enough for her because we were just a couple of punks who boycotted Wal-Mart, were pissed off about genocide, and felt like the only ones in our group of friends who understood what really went on with suicide and addiction. So, you ditched all things in your life, including me, that weren't good enough for her.

You ask to meet for coffee and I say yes. I look down at the two year old tugging at your leg, blond and beautiful. There's none of her mother in her eyes and that fills me with comfort. This is the strangest feeling and I can feel myself protesting this. I don't know what I'm so against. You look pretty happy.

You, who used to be afraid of children despite the fact that they seemed to be automatically attracted to you. I looked at you and I wanted you back. I wanted the punk who was angry about things and who understood things going on in the world and who loved to show me music that I'd never heard of before. I hoped you would come back. I hoped you would wake up in bed one night next to her, realize all of this, say 'oh fuck,' and wonder how to get out and be who you are, not who she wants you to be.

I try to look like I don't expect much as I meet you for coffee, but I do. I never know how to feel about you. We catch up, and I fake congratulations about how well your life is going. You ask if I have a love interest, and I probably blush, nodding my head, and unashamed I tell you about my girlfriend who worked at the clinic with me in Uganda. Your eyes fall with awkwardness as you don't know what to say, but you sure as hell don't say congratulations. So, I change the subject to our favorite – our shared passion.

Pain, addiction, helping people up onto their feet. My eyes fell, in turn, as you shared with me how uncomfortable you were treating people for mental illness when, you say, they were really living in sin and fighting demons. I sighed. I didn't want to argue with you, but I silently wonder have you really lost all that you've learned? I just nod my head and say maybe, because this bullshit pisses me off and two years ago I abandoned talk for action.

I was passionate in college about pursuing social justice in the face of genocide. But, as a poor college student, what really could I do? The fire burnt out a little bit, but it kept coming back. Soon I saw that haunting picture of a starving Sudanese boy who couldn't have been more than five years old, not just starving but close to death, completely skeletal. He was kneeling; his head in his hands, wailing with agony that I am sure no five year old, no matter whether they are Ugandan or American, should have to experience.

The cruelty of the photo is the vulture who hangs out behind the boy, patient and waiting for him to die so that he can at least eat something. After seeing that photo I could no longer wait, so I got an internship with a clinic who rehabilitates child soldiers, those bloodthirsty killers that not many want to attempt to love. For once in my life I was whole and fulfilled, but as all good things come to an end, so did the internship, and as I stare in your eyes sipping my coffee, I sadly realize we have come to an end as well, and who you really are is gone, not coming back.