Winesburg, Indiana: Mari, Waiting

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Abstract
A wife waits for her husband, a wife waits for her husband.

Mari whose name is not Mari waits for Gus whose name is not Gus.

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Cover Page Footnote
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A wife waits for her husband, a wife waits for her husband.

Mari whose name is not Mari waits for Gus whose name is not Gus.

(Mary waits for Gursnan.)

Mari waits for Gus, her husband, though she’s not yet used to the word.

A wife waits at the window for her husband, though they have not uttered these terms since the interview.

A wife in contract but not in covenant, a wife in status, a wife in stasis, a wife in ink and pixel—not loin, not bone—a wife like scissors for red tape, a wife beneath a loophole arbor dripping with marsh marigolds and lady’s slipper and pasture roses worn wide by a pageant of loveless lovers walking arm-in-arm, waits.

Mari waits for Gus at the window, practicing—This is Gus, my husband. My husband has not eaten for twenty days. My husband does not plan to eat for fifteen more.

A wife waits for her husband to come home from a run.
Mari waits at the sink while Gus—twiggy brown hull—jogs in slow motion, jogs as an old man wind-up toy might jog, jogs as Go-Go Ghandi might if Ghandi had a new pair of Brooks Adrenaline GTS 12s, jogs into Winesburg and out the other side, though his wife has asked him not to jog there.

Mari waits and waiting with her is Gus, the ghost of him, the cartoon silhouette: short, silky and regal purple running shorts, and beneath those his special cotton underwear which poke out the bottom a little and have a drawstring, his bare boy’s chest, his tiny lavender nipples, his pinched taut abdomen, his hard outie, his black mist of beard, his lovely and bulbous marigold turban with its secret wooden comb tucked inside, his brown legs pistons, his brown arms thew, his go belt strapped around his hips, hung with plastic globules filled with water and his crescent dagger in its sheath, his polished silver kara around his wrist, tinking lightly against his stopwatch.

Though she has asked him not to, Gus jogs frail past the county park and the Catholic school and the Winesburg Diner and the Dollar General and the closed Circuit City where they were best friends before they were play pretend spouses and Karl’s Finer Food and Martin’s Grocery and the house where Mari grew up with her mother inside making ham salad and sighing over the curious decisions of an undutiful daughter and the slaughterhouse and the Target glowing in the dusk like all those spaceships landed in all those cornfields, while Mari waits.

Mari waits at the end of the driveway with a fresh, sweating water bottle, a few drops of lemon juice added in secret.

In secret, Mari waits for Gus, waits to pluck the cicadas from his sweat-glistening back, waits to scoop the gnats from his eyes.

Mari waits and waits and waits while duallies downshift and open up the sky and thunder too near Gus, waits while boys she went to high school with shout, Raghead and, Faggot and, Sand nigger.

Mari—kneeling at the tub, rinsing in hot water yards and yards of supple saffron fabric which sway like water plants, losing and finding her hands in them, scraping with her square, unpainted fingernails crusted pink flagella where a gallon of strawberry ice cream launched from a Cummins Diesel detonated in front of Gus, recalling how he came home early with fat carpenter bees wafting behind him, recalling how she had wanted very badly to lick him clean—waits.

Mari at the window, Mari at the drive, Mari at the bathtub and Mari in the bedroom, stringing damp fabric to dry around the room where the night before Gus stood in his...
special cotton underwear—a gift from God. But wasn’t everything?—telling how the knot at the drawstring was there to thwart lustful thoughts, to remind the faithful to think of members of the opposite sex as they would a family member, Like you, Mari, you’re like a sister to me, then Gus unknotting the knot and saying how to test himself, Ghandi used to sleep nude with his grandniece, and holding Mari from behind, Gus sliding his smooth penis up and down between her fat-dappled butt cheeks, waiting.

Mari waits for Gus to leave her, Mari waits for Gus to love her.

Mari waits for Gus to stand up too quickly, waits for him to faint, because when he falls he falls silent as a pile of laundry and she sits on the floor and puts his swaddled head in her lap and kisses him.

Mari waits, though for what she does not know.

Claire Vaye Watkins was born and raised in the Mojave Desert. Her stories have appeared in Granta, One Story, The Paris Review, and elsewhere. Her story collection, Battleborn, won a Silver Pen Award from the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame and inclusion on the National Book Foundation’s “5 Under 35.” An assistant professor at Bucknell University, Claire is also the co-director of the Mojave School, a non-profit creative writing workshop for teenagers in rural Nevada.