

The Gates of Thebes

by mreid

A man reflects on the ultimate riddle: the one the Sphinx never asked. Complete.

His Wife

Chapter 1 of 1

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In the morning, before he leaves for work, he looks in on her sleeping. The light from between the curtains leaves impressionist brushstrokes across the faded blue quilt, paints buttercups along her chin. *She* seems so young, then; although, objectively he knows *she* isn't, not anymore. But he feels protective of her all the same. He pulls the blanket up, snug around her shoulders, and places a kiss in her messy curls. *She* still smells new — powdery fresh like fabric softener. It is at that moment, every day, that he wishes he didn't have to go in to work. He could stay at home getting to know her again: be there for the little things, so he wouldn't miss the big ones.

In the evening, after he returns home, **she** is in the kitchen making dinner. He leans over to kiss her on the cheek, catches the scent of baking bread, and recalls being a little boy — once. He self-consciously smooths a hand over his sweaty head.

She takes his gym bag to the laundry room, adds his dirty socks, shorts, and Virginia Tech t-shirt to the wash. "How was your day?" **she** asks over the family dinner — the first meal to qualify in over a week. **She** knows better than to expect a response. She tucks a loose loop of graying hair behind her ear and waits.

He knows **she's** trying to be accepting of his need for space, but **she** just doesn't understand him anymore.

At night, he crawls into bed next to her, voices his desire without words. She rolls over to face him and he kisses her mouth with insistence. She opens to him without delay; slides down his body to rest a while. His hands tangle in her damp hair, and he wishes it were longer. Her wedding ring warms against his side; he is not wearing his. He rises above her to murmur filthy enticements. She turns her head and lets the dirty nothings dissipate before they reach her ears. Feeling slightly guilty then, she meets him more than halfway with her body. He believes the arch of her spine to be the most beautiful thing in the world.

And when his wife finally says, "Love you," he follows her back down to the bed.