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Husbands and Wives

One night we rent the basement of a Mormon couple with young children—a row home in the city, tricycles on the small porch, a wreath of paper flowers on the door. I leave my wedding ring at home. The Mormon husband—a young med student, who we heard earlier giving his young sons a bath—tells us his friends can’t believe he’s married with kids already. He looks fondly at his wife. *But it’s great,* he says. *I don’t have to do laundry, go food shopping, make dinner...*

Wife: from the Proto-Indo European: to twist, turn, wrap.

On the squeaky bed in the basement, we try to be as quiet as possible. *The problem,* I say later, *is they only allow men to have multiple wives, not women to have more than one husband.*

*I’m not your husband,* you say. Petting my hair. Stroking my cheek. Almost like a husband. Or, not at all like a husband.

Wife: a veiled person. Wife: from a root meaning “shame.”