

Waiting

Inspired by *The Girl at the Gate* by Sir George Clausen 1889

(link <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/clausen-the-girl-at-the-gate-n01612>)

As she came out of the cottage, Mary saw her granddaughter Maggie, waiting by the gate again. Mary's brow furrowed, and she started to nibble her littlest fingernail. She was worried, and she'd never been able to grow out of this childhood habit, despite her over sixty summers.

Samuel, her husband, heard her sigh, and looked up from the patch of ground he was digging for a crop of potatoes. His back was aching; he'd been working in the garden for hours; it was time for his break.

'What's up, love?' he asked softly. 'Don't worry, I've nearly finished... a quick sit down and a mug of ale and I'll be as right as rain and ready to start planting. We'll not starve.'

'It's not that I'm worried about, Samuel dearest. You've always been the bestest husband.' She smiled briefly, before her face settled into a frown once more.

'So, what is it my dear?'

Mary nodded towards their granddaughter. 'I'm worried about Maggie. She's there again. Waiting... I've tried talking to her, but she just clams up.'

'She'll be eager for a glimpse of her young man Thomas, I suspect. I've often seen him passing by at this time of day.'

'But do you think his intentions are honourable? He's a stranger to the village; we know nothing about him.'

Samuel thought for a moment. 'Well, everyone I've spoken to has only good words to say about him.'

Mary sighed again. 'I suppose you're right. But I just can't stop worrying. And ...' her voice trailed into a whisper, '...her waist's thickening... I think she might be...'

Samuel smiled. 'Mary, my dear, and what if she is? You know the child will be loved in any case. Think back, before we wed. Remember how you would stand at the gate, hoping to see me as I walked to the fields every morning, and back again.'

It was a long time ago, but she could still remember the butterflies in her stomach when they met, the exhilaration of their first kiss, their passionate embraces. And her worry over her own thickening waistline, before they wed. He'd been a stranger too, the man who had stood by her. He stood by her still; Samuel, her first, and only love.

Mary nodded. 'You're right, my dearest, I'd forgotten...' A wry smile played over her lips, as her heart lightened.

'Come, I'll get you that mug of ale now.'

Mary and Samuel adjourned to the cottage kitchen. As they sat, there was a knock at the door. It was Thomas, Maggie hovering nervously behind him.

'Come in, Thomas. What can I do for you?' Samuel asked.

Thomas swallowed, took a deep breath. 'I've come to ask for your granddaughter's hand in marriage...' He swallowed again.

'...she's said yes, and we'd like to get the banns read next Sunday...'

'Of course, my dears,' Samuel answered, a broad smile over his face as he winked at Mary.

Mary smiled. Maggie would be waiting no more.