

Migrants

by Elizabeth Hegwood

My grandmother's boyfriend lives in the attic. The roof man said it was pretty common for the migrant workers to stay during these cold spells. Everyone's roofs are still splintered or soft enough for a grown man to climb in without being noticed. People think the noises are imaginations, he says. Flashbacks of the storm.

We sit in the living room with bowls of warm creamy soup. My grandmother makes it for me out of corn, hoping it will bring me home before dark. It works on the days I don't feel like smoking at the Olive Garden bar. I like to eat all of the soup to reveal the picture of a blue bridge and a blue boat and blue willows and two blue birds.

"Look at the yard," I say. "There are a lot of squirrels here. They're waiting for peanuts."

"I know it." She cranes her head to look at the French door where eight squirrels are standing at the glass like pets. We sit on couches in the yellow blush of a single lamp. The dim light is both soft and unsettling. Everything in the room looks the color of honey, even her, as if we're encased in amber.

"A worker. He likes me. The one in my attic I mean, not the roof man. But he's nice, too." Her painted toes are pointed towards each other, and her hands are folded over expensive knit pants. She is too stylish to be crazy, is what the migrant probably thinks. And he's right.

"He knows I'm smart. I left the completed *Times* puzzle on his lunch yesterday with a note that says I don't cheat."

"But you do."

"That would be undesirable."

She gets up to fix cold-brewed iced coffee. I liked it on her breath when I was young enough to get close to her mouth. With her narrow back to me, she stirs milk and ice into glasses with long steel spoons.

"Did he write back?" I ask.

She hands me a glass. "Kept it. But he left the tomatoes. Like you do. Do you still hate tomatoes? He fixed the leak over there already. You see the water spot hasn't grown." She re-folds a soggy napkin around her glass and says, "It finally does what it's supposed to."

We make eye contact. She's waiting for me to object, but if I did, I would have to learn what she thinks of me.

"Don't you wonder what he looks like?"

My grandmother smiles.

Somewhere close, a dog howls. She says, "Did you hear that? You don't hear them that much anymore. Used to be the world was wilder."

