

The Other Side of the Wall

by John Wentworth Chapin

The hunched woman brushed her gray hair and wrinkled her nose. She muttered loudly, "I'm glad they put the wall up. When it gets a little humid around here, I can smell those damn people."

"No, you can't, Mama," Linda said.

"I can and I do and you mind your own business," the old woman retorted.

Linda sighed and folded laundry. So unnecessary.

"It goes under the ground, but not deep enough," the mother continued. "Their rain soaks in and poisons our trees. Look all the way down the wall." She pointed with her chin. "Weeds won't even grow next to the wall."

"Papa," Linda mused.

"Don't," her mother warned.

Linda didn't have to glance out the window to know that the ground along the wall was barren. They poured industrial-strength pesticides along the wall to keep the ground dead and make hole-diggers and runners easier to spot. Her father had crossed the border, even before the wall; they never knew how, whether stowed in a van or on foot. He promised to send money and bring them over. That was nine years ago, and they had never heard from him. They both knew he was dead. Each kept it to herself for her own reasons.

"Keep the bastard up north. We're better off without him," her mother grumbled.

Linda hoped he was happy and rich.

