

Migration

by Kari Nguyen

Her work is painstaking and slow. Her hands are given to small fits of nerves, followed by short lapses in memory, afflictions she shakes aside with a slight movement of her head. A low humming fills the kitchen — the light bulb clinging to life above the sink, the cold wind squeezing in against the weathered window pane, the refrigerator steadily at work in the corner- but she no longer hears the real.

Someone comes to the door — she can see the person from the place she sits at the table. He is handsome, young, strong. He has a package for her, something she can open. He helps her with the tape because she asks him to. His hands are callused and hardened and she likes this about him. His name is Sam. She pulls from the box a white satin nightgown trimmed with lace, the icy gauze draped, dripped, sewn to edges. It is from him. Not Sam. Wait —

Someone comes to the door — she can see the person from the place she sits at the table. Her auburn hair is cropped short and windblown. She's wearing a green raincoat but it doesn't seem to be raining, or maybe it's a light rain or a mist or well, just come in there, yes, and you can put your coat on the chair. She offers the girl a seat, asks her to stay for a minute, but she can't, she just came by to say hello, and don't you like my new raincoat?

She shakes her head and resumes her work. Her cuts are methodical and precise, and she only makes them if she is sure her nerves have passed the moment. Now and then she flexes the buckles from her fingers, shakes out her hands, wipes her palms on the front of her skirt. Starts again. The humming continues behind her, around her.

Someone comes to the door. This time the person is hard to see, never coming inside, wandering back and forth out on the porch. She thinks she spots a gray hat, fedora-type, but she can't be sure. The hazy outline moves slowly through the long afternoon light.

She's halfway through now, so she stops and evaluates her work. She thinks the work is fine, and she is confident. Confident,

confident. This will work. Thinking this gives her the strength to continue. Her hands resume their task. Flex fingers, shake hands, wipe palms. The fits come and go, but she rides them out and keeps on.

A bird is a bird is a bird, she sings, knowing it is untrue. A bird is a bird is a bird.

House quaint, devoid of pictures, pictures of cropped auburn hair and gray fedoras, long ago dusted, finally dusted and put away, fallen and tied, stored for the spring, for the next movement.

Nearly finished, she wipes an itch from her cheek. The wood, turned soft in her hands, is warm, feathered, the song sparrow's breast a perfect curve. Setting the creature on the table, she reaches for her shawl and pulls it around her shoulders. A last look around, amidst humming, everything humming, floorboards to the attic. But it is not humming. They are words, language in other forms. A whole world within, without.

As she walks out the door and down the steps, she is finally, completely at rest. Turning toward the back field, she raises up the bird and releases, and it is she who is rising, rising through dusk, through icy gauze of winter, awaiting the next.

