A SECOND COMING

Canadian
Migration
Fiction
ESSENTIAL ANTHOLOGIES SERIES 9

A SECOND COMING

Canadian Migration Fiction

edited by

DONALD F. MULCAHY

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.
To all who braved the unknown

to make this amazing place, Canada, their home;
to all who tried but failed to do so;
to any who lost their lives in the process
of trying to become Canadians;
to my wife, Iris; to Lynne, Angela and Paul;
and to Brennan, Alyse and Hayley, whose very identities
are, in part, attributable to immigration.
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The book you see here is really only half a book. The original migration anthology consisted of a mix of fact and fiction, a choice my dear wife had warned me might turn out to be an awkward formula. Later, acting on the advice of the publishers, I separated fact from fiction and created two books—a factual anthology of essays, memoirs and creative non-fiction, and this fictional one. Although the initial intention was to create a literary anthology of works by established immigrant writers, the project’s mandate soon morphed from strictly literary to all-inclusive, an outcome that was dictated not only by the collection’s ongoing need for more writers, but also by the assorted variety of writers who showed an interest in participating. I eventually concluded that a more diverse roster of writers might well be seen as reflecting the diversity in Canadian society; might even be considered a metaphor of sorts for our complex multicultural population and its varied voices. Canadians are, after all, as varied as pebbles on a beach.

I had not wanted to destroy the original 60-writer format, but it ultimately became a publishing necessity. Then, later, I suspected that perhaps the most interesting, most creative, and perhaps the most appealing works to readers might well be those of writers
who chose to fictionalize the emigration/immigration experience. After all, isn’t it easier to recall and relate real events than to have to create them, from scratch so to speak, in one’s imagination? As someone familiar with both genres, I happen to believe that it is.

Providing Canada and the emigration/immigration themes were dominant, the actual subject matter in these stories was left to the author. The fact that there will always be plenty of stories related to the act of relocating to another country is a given. The journey is never easy; no guarantees are offered. But to get such a promising new start as Canada offers can be much like being born all over again, a little like experiencing a second coming perhaps—hence the title of this book.

If you’re anything like me, you probably hate long introductions. Books are meant to be read and enjoyed, not to be pontificated over, endlessly. So, let’s get this intro over with.

I am immensely and everlastingly grateful to all the participants herein who submitted their creations to this anthology. Writing, to them, as to me, must surely be a labour of love. This is their book.

And I will be forever indebted to Michael Mirolla and Connie McParland, and to Guernica’s editors and staff, who made a book of quality out of a somewhat raw manuscript. And I must thank Susan Ouriou for her invaluable translations from French.

I am grateful, as always, to my patient and loving wife Iris, not only for her primary editing of the text, and all my writing in fact, but for her unflinching forbearance in light of becoming, not so much a golf widow, as a virtual ‘literary widow’.

My immeasurable thanks to all involved for making this book possible.

—Don Mulcahy
1972: By the time Angelo Leone pulled into his parents’ driveway the snow was coming down thick and wet, bringing with it the promise of freezing rain. During the few months he had been away at the University of Toronto, the memory of winter in his northern Ontario hometown of Copper Cliff had dimmed. Pulling up the collar of his less than adequate leather jacket, he grabbed his holdall from the trunk of the 1970 Volkswagen and hurried toward the back entrance of his house, cursing the weather as he slipped on the walkway. His family was expecting his arrival, although he knew that the delay caused by the snow squalls would have caused his parents, his mother especially, no end of worry.

“Christ, it’s good to be home,” Angelo exclaimed, closing the door quickly behind him and brushing the snow off his hair.

“Enough with your parolace!” Caterina Leone admonished, rushing out of the kitchen to greet him with a slap on the arm followed by an affectionate hug and kiss. “No more respect for your religione?”

“Come on, Ma. I’m not in the house two minutes and you’re already hitting me. How ya doing Dad?” He held out his hand to his father, who pushed it away and embraced him as well, bestowing on him the traditional kiss on either cheek. Behind his father was his diminutive grandmother.
Now his father expected a report on his progress at university. He cleared his throat nervously and proceeded to casually inform his family about his studies, deliberately not mentioning that he was failing one course. All they needed to know was that he was fulfilling a dream they had never realized for themselves in the old country, the dream of getting a university education, made possible after years of restrained spending and personal sacrifices.

Angelo finished his coffee and then rose. “I wish I could stay and talk longer,” he said, “but there’s something I have to do . . .”

“What do you mean?” Caterina’s voice rose in alarm. “You’re not going out in this weather?”

“I am going out, but I’m not driving, so don’t worry, Ma.”

Angelo showered quickly, alternating between singing the Stones’ “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” and contemplating the evening ahead. Dabbing the razor nick on his chin, he went downstairs to say good-bye.

“Angelo!” His mother appeared in the hall. She motioned toward the living room. “Come and say hello to our visitor.”

Angelo grimaced, but she nudged him forward. He complied reluctantly, mentally setting a two-minute timer to do his filial duty and preservation of the family’s _buona figura._

As he entered the living room his peripheral vision took in the opened bottle of _Vecchia Romagna_ and several glasses on the coffee table, and his father and Nonna engaged in a lively discussion with the guest.

When his eyes focused on the latter, Angelo froze. The man he despised most in the world was sitting in his father’s favourite chair, meeting Angelo’s eyes unblinkingly, as if he had every right to be there: Father Joel, his high school math teacher and basketball coach.

Angelo wanted to spit in his face. He heard his mother’s voice again, but the words didn’t register. He stood rooted to the spot,
feeling the same churning in his stomach that he had felt every time Father Joel had crossed his path in high school.

What the hell was he doing here? Angelo wanted to confront him, expose him for what he was, let his parents know that this outwardly pious, Bible-spewing representative of Christ was the lowest form of humanity around. Correction ... Father Joel was less than human.

Angelo stared at him boldly. There was nothing this bastard could do to him any more. He saw the priest’s slate grey eyes flicker and narrow slightly, a trait Angelo had come to know well. If he had learned anything in high school, it was how to read Father Joel.

“Aren’t you going to say hello?” his mother murmured to him in their native dialect, obviously embarrassed at his lack of manners. This time the words registered. Without breaking his gaze from Father Joel’s, he smiled coldly and said, “Our time will come, Father Joel.” Impervious to the puzzled looks of his parents and Nonna, he turned away.

“I’ll be back later, Ma,” Angelo said, trying to make his voice reassuring as he swept past her. “There’s something I have to do.”

He noticed his mother glancing out the living room window, no doubt worried that he might be driving.

Angelo headed toward one of his favourite hangouts, a bar called Duster’s. Nothing about it reflected a western theme. Duster was simply the name of the owner.

In the twenty minutes it took him to reach the bar, Angelo tried without success to get Father Joel off his mind. He scanned the dimly lit interior. Practically empty. Not too many people ventured out in this kind of weather—unless they were hard up for alcohol, like the guy slumped at the end of the bar, nursing a bottle.

In a way, Angelo felt relieved. He didn’t want to see or talk to anyone he knew until he had a handle on his feelings.

“Give me a draft on tap,” he instructed the waiter, and slapping some coins on the counter, he moved to the other end of the bar and sat down, rubbing his hands together to warm them. He glanced at his watch. There was no venturing home until he was certain that prick had gone.

He took a gulp of his beer, wondering what would have happened if he had stayed. Could he have stayed, maintaining his composure and not allowing the events of the past to shatter the pleasant tête-à-tête between the reverend and honoured parishioners? Never.

Angelo could usually exercise self-control when he put his mind to it, but on his home turf, in front of his unsuspecting, blindly faithful family, he couldn’t wear the mask of hypocrisy and be civil to their guest.

So he chose to leave, at the risk of angering his family at such an obvious display of indifference to a man of the cloth. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea massima culpa,* Angelo thought mockingly of his years as a devoted altar boy.

He waved the waiter over and ordered another draft. As his fingers drummed a silent tune on the polished counter, his eyes wandered to the television set in one corner. A hockey game: Ken Dryden of the Montreal Canadiens blocking a shot by Boston’s Bobby Orr. Something to keep his mind off Father Joel.

***

Angelo’s eyes narrowed to better focus, but as the ice play resumed, the figures on the screen became blurry and morphed into high school basketball players. The St. Dominic Dinosaurs, whose players were mockingly referred to as ‘ankle biters’ by opponents, were participating in a much needed practice.

The first string was running their near perfect left hand lay-up drills. The second string, of which Angelo was a member, was trying to get a handle on a zone defense. The coach was asking them to switch hands as they passed off from one guard to the next.
The whistle shrieked and the play stopped. Father Joel’s faded grey shirt was sweat-stained and smelly. His face glistened with perspiration under white hair that was cropped short. Ominous grey eyes focused on Angelo and his partner David.

“No, no, no! You guards have been told too often. When you exchange the ball, the guards switch hands. You dribble with the outside hand. Do you know what that means, Leone?”

“Yes, Father,” Angelo replied in a genuinely repentant tone.

“Then come up here and demonstrate to the rest of these ladies how it’s done.”

Angelo felt his face flaming as he proceeded to carry out Father Joel’s instructions.

The whistle blew. Angelo’s stomach churned. Father Joel could reduce the toughest jock to holy ashes. His unforgiving eyes were pinned on Angelo again.

“Take your right hand and stick it into your jockstrap.”

“Wh... what do you mean, Father?”

Father Joel closed the distance between them, his thick brows furrowing. “Are you trying to be a smart-ass, Leone? Didn’t your good Italian parents teach you to do as you’re told?” He grabbed Angelo’s hand and covered it with his own before sliding it down Angelo’s shorts to his crotch. “Now leave this hand here and dribble with your other hand.” And letting go of Angelo’s hand, he gave Angelo’s testicles a squeeze before pulling his own hand out.

His steely gray eyes were riveted on Angelo. “Did you get all of that, or do I have to show you again?”

Stunned and humiliated, Angelo fought back tears. He wanted to simultaneously hide and vindicate himself by punching out the bastard. Somehow his feet shuffled away from the priest, his shoulders sagging in temporary defeat.

“That’s why you’re second string. You’re a loser. A quitter. No guts, no glory.” Father Joel’s words struck him like flint arrows.

At least I don’t fondle boys and pretend to be something I’m not, Angelo wanted to shout back. Aware of the nervous whispers of some of the other guys, Angelo willed himself to walk across the gym, feigning aloofness. He wouldn’t give Father Joel the satisfaction of knowing how weak-kneed he felt. He reached the locker room and immediately had a hot shower, anxious to rid himself of the feeling of Father Joel’s touch. One of the senior players came in to get a basketball out of a closet and shouted to Angelo, “How does it feel to be one of Jolly’s boys?” before returning to the gym, laughing.

Angelo cringed. It was a grapevine fact that Father Joel had his favourite ‘boys,’ and endowed them with special privileges, like sailing in his boat. These were nicknamed “Jolly’s Sailors.” Some were ridiculed covertly, some were pitied, especially the greenhorns in Grade Nine.

Angelo had never felt comfortable with Father Joel’s presence in the shower room after a game or practice. He would stand there, arms crossed, watching the boys with the pretense of dishing out praise. “Attaboy, MacLean! You really ran that zone defence well!” Or: “Good stuff, Diego! I’m convinced you’re going to be my high post! You’ve got the size and the technique to be the number one rebounder in this league!” Sometimes he even asked if the guys wanted their backs rubbed down with soap.

When Angelo heard the rumours about the real reason Father Joel frequented the shower room, he had been filled with revulsion. His mind had initially negated the possibility that the rumours could be true. After all, Father Joel was a priest. A respected icon. A spiritual representative of Christ. Yet, as time passed, he noticed disturbing signs that gave credence to the rumours: Father Joel’s gaze fixed on the sleek, naked buttocks of Tim Shilling in the shower; his hand brushing against Marty Costantino’s muscled thigh; or even the more deliberate embraces with which he endowed his star players.
Secretly fearful that Father Joel would single him out, Angelo had either showered very quickly or made some excuse to leave early after a practice or game. Even in math class, he had a difficult time concentrating, with the priest’s eyes scanning the room like a hungry predator.

Today’s attack in the gym had been swift and merciless. Not bothering to dry his hair, Angelo grabbed his gym bag and sprinted down the hall. Glancing back, he caught sight of Father Joel through the window of the gym door. *Goddamned pervert.* Outside the high school, Angelo broke into a run.

Still seething with pent-up anger, Angelo thought of ways to explain to his Italian immigrant parents what had happened. He had heard about one guy by the name of Joe Maldini telling his dad about Father Joel touching him in the shower. Joe’s dad freaked, accusing Joe of being a protestant—never going to church—and a pervert, concocting sick stories about a man of religion. Father and son had almost come to blows.

Angelo didn’t know how his parents would react if he told them about Father Joel. One thing he knew for sure: his basketball days were over. He would never, could never, take a step on the same court with Father Joel. *Unless it was to kill the bastard.*

Three

Angelo realized he was slurping the last of the beer froth. He raised a hand. “Bring me another beer, please. No, never mind. Make it a double scotch.”

He woke up on Christmas morning feeling empty and restless. He spent a few minutes pacing around his room, and then, with a sigh of resignation, went downstairs to give his parents and Nonna the official holiday greeting and their presents.

“*Buon Natale!*” Nonna shouted, painfully close to his ear. “Now let’s open the *regali.*”

“Can the presents wait until after my first coffee, Nonna? I’ll be able to appreciate them better.”

“*Va, va!*” She gave him a less than gentle push toward the kitchen. Afterwards, Angelo had to credit the coffee his father had spiked with brandy for giving him the strength to keep a straight face when he opened the gifts from his grandmother: an enormous bottle of Brut, a two-piece set of thermal underwear and two pairs of thick woollen socks she had knitted herself.

After accompanying his family to St. Paul’s Church for the early mass, during which Angelo’s head felt as if it would burst from the unusually zealous choir outpourings, he spent the afternoon dozing on and off in his room until he was called down for the evening meal. Two days into the New Year, he headed back to the university. He decided that there was no point staying home when he could be doing something useful on campus, like trying to get a handle on the philosophy course he was failing.

Three

Angelo’s interest in his courses waning. History and philosophy seemed to fade in importance when compared to the immediacy of everyday problems on campus and, on a larger scale, in the country and the world.

His thoughts fluctuated between the clear path his parents wanted and expected him to take—a university education—and the other path, the nebulous one, which he couldn’t even define.

“I feel like I’m at a crossroads in my life,” he told his room-mate. “I’m not sure where I’m going, but I know I have to make some kind of a decision.”

Norm, who was enrolled in math and sciences, soared above Angelo academically, so Angelo was surprised when he admitted that he was struggling with the decision to return the following
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The only prerequisites were basic carpentry skills and a desire to be a part of an international support system.

"Hey, Angelo," Norm said, with a smile, "are you dreaming about all the Italian girls we're going to meet?" Without waiting for a reply, he added, "Maybe you should teach me a few Italian words. They might come in handy. The only words I know are fettuccine, spaghetti, ravioli, linguine ..."

Angelo laughed at Norm's attempt to pronounce the words. He ordered a second meatball sandwich, and while he waited he looked at Norm with mock seriousness. "Welcome to Italian for Beginners, Normie. Are you ready to begin Lesson One?"

***

A few days before the spring break, Angelo and Norm still hadn't received application forms. "I'm not going to worry about it," Angelo said. "If it happens, it happens, and if not we'll have to look at our options again for next year."

"I guess you're right."

"Hey, how would you like to spend February study break at my place?"

"Are you serious, man? I wasn't looking forward to going home."

"I wouldn't have asked otherwise."

"Your parents wouldn't mind?"

Angelo laughed. "My mother loves feeding people. Be prepared to gain ten pounds while you're there."

***

To Angelo's surprise, his mother and father were not home when he and Norm arrived.

They sniffed appreciatively at what Angelo promptly identified as spezzatino, veal stew with wine and mushrooms, that he knew
would be accompanied by polenta, a hot cornmeal dish. A muffled exclamation came from another room, followed by quickly approaching footsteps.

“Angelo mio!” Nonna shouted as she entered the foyer. “Thank God you arrive sano e salvo. I recite an extra rosary for your safe arrival.” Beaming that her prayers had been answered yet again, she squeezed Angelo’s cheeks firmly with her fingers, before kissing them soundly. Angelo returned the kiss and, rubbing his cheeks from the impact of the pinches, he introduced Norm.

“Norm Bailey? What kind of name is this?” she asked Angelo in their dialect before turning to their visitor. “Nice to meet you,” she said, smiling, and shaking his hand with a grip that Angelo could tell surprised Norm. “I hope you no mind if I call you Normano,” she said, her hands gesturing in front of her. “It—come si dice?—it jump out my mouth more easy.”

“It rolls off her tongue easier,” Angelo interjected at the sight of Norm’s confused look. Nonna’s accent was still pretty strong, even after living in Canada for ten years. Some of her grammar still needed a little polishing.

“Uh ... not at all,” Norm replied.

“Where’s Ma and Dad?” Angelo asked.

Nonna’s welcoming smile faded, and she made the sign of the cross with the black rosary she kept in the pocket of her black sweater, mumbling Latin words that Angelo remembered from his altar boy days.

“What’s the matter, Nonna? Where did they go?”

Nonna motioned for Angelo and Norm to follow her into the kitchen and sit at the table. They complied, Angelo waiting patiently for Nonna’s inevitable, long-winded answer. Even the simplest question drew a convoluted response from Nonna, with a flourish of gestures and often ear-splitting exclamations.

“They go to the funeral home,” she said. “I stay home so you no worry when you get back. We go after, Angelo, when Mamma e Papà come back. Or maybe first we eat, and then we go. O Dio buono.” She scurried to the stove to check the stew’s progress. She lifted the lid and stirred the contents with a wooden spoon, turned down the heat and put the lid back, leaving a space for the steam to escape.

“Who died, Nonna?” Angelo asked, wondering if it was the parent or grandparent of any of his friends from the neighbourhood.

Nonna returned and sat down, picking up her beads. She was so small her feet barely touched the yellow linoleum floor. “You never believe it, Angelo! Such a good man, with big heart. Every year he collect lots of money to give to the poor people, and help the missionari in those countries you see on the televisione, you know, those poor black people with no clothes and starving bambini with big bellies.” She shook her head sadly. “Another buon cristiano gone.”

“Nonna, who died?” Angelo urged. Nonna could ramble on indefinitely.

Nonna stood up and walked over to Angelo. “You know that priest, Angelo, at San Domenico high school. We always give when he come to our house,” she said. “We no have too much, but he always appreciate everything. ‘Even a dollar will help feed the village,’ he used to say. You know, Angelo, he teach you at San Domenico.”

“There were quite a few priests who taught me there, Nonna. Do you remember his name?” Angelo’s mind filed through the older priests from high school. There were only two that he recalled getting involved in charity work for third world countries: Father Sebastian, a kind, elderly priest who taught religion and coached the debating team; and Father James, a more crotchety old priest who taught biology and always seemed to smell of formaldehyde.

Nonna’s face, wrinkled further in concentration, relaxed as the name came to her. “It’s Father Joe, Angelo, Father Joe!”

Angelo felt his stomach churn. He stood up and stared at her in disbelief. “Are ... are you sure, Nonna?” he asked, his voice unsteady. “He couldn’t have been more than forty.”
“Sì, sì, I’m sure,” she replied, nodding her head emphatically. “I tell you, is true, is in the newspaper. I go find for you.” She hurried off, murmuring, “Such a young man to die of a heart attack. The poor studenti who found him.”

Angelo turned away and looked out the window at the bleak, grey sky. A strange feeling hammered in his chest, and he inhaled deeply. Nonna had never been able to pronounce the ‘l’ in Father Joel’s name.

***

Cars were streaming in and out of the funeral home parking lot. Angelo guided his Nonna protectively through the crowded foyer, and followed the stream of people shuffling toward the parlour. While his Nonna recited a rosary with an old-country patience he couldn’t fathom, he chewed gum and tried to ignore the lady behind him, whose cloying perfume was bringing on the same reaction he had to ragweed. And she was so bloody loud, extolling the virtues of the good Father with timely sobs and sniffles. The man beside her kept saying, “This too shall pass, my dear. This too shall pass.”

When the casket finally came into view, Angelo deliberately avoided looking at it. It was only when he and Nonna had reached the kneeling pew in front of it that he knew he could no longer avert his gaze. He waited until Nonna had said a prayer for the deceased, his eyes remaining focused on the rich mahogany casket with the gleaming brass handles until she rose and moved toward the line of mourners related to the priest.

Caterina and Giancarlo came home minutes later. After the embraces and introductions, they sat down and enjoyed the savoury stew and polenta slices with a bottle of homemade wine, followed by a salad and torta di frutta that Caterina had made at Christmas time.

Angelo’s appetite had waned once Nonna dropped her bombshell. His mother was so busy catering to a beaming Norm that she had failed to notice Angelo emptying half his serving of stew back into the pot right after she had filled his plate.

His thoughts shifted disturbingly to the traumatic scene between him and Father Joel in the gym. He found it a struggle to stay impassive as he ate, while his feelings alternated from a red-hot anger to a deep, gnawing regret.

Father Joel had done an excellent job, he thought bitterly, of keeping the seedy part of his life a secret. There was a chain of silence among his students, and even Angelo could understand how shame and fear of the consequences could prevent a boy from telling his parents or anyone else the truth about the priest. Hadn’t he himself kept silent? How many others had kept silent as well? How many immigrant Italians would have believed a story about a deviant priest?

Angelo’s coffee tasted as bitter as the resentment brewing inside him. He was glad at least that superstition had prevented his family from talking about the dead priest during supper. When Giancarlo rose from his chair, signalling the end of supper, he brought up the question Angelo had dreaded. “You take Nonna to the funeral home?”

Angelo knew he had no choice. He nodded curtly and, excusing himself, went upstairs to show Norm the spare room in which he would be staying. Norm knew nothing about Father Joel, and Angelo had no time or desire to tell him about it. At least not at the moment. “It’ll be an early night for me,” Norm told Angelo. “The long ride here and all that delicious food have done me in. I’m beat.” He looked at Angelo. “Looks like you could use a good rest yourself. I don’t envy you having to go to the funeral home.”

“I won’t be long,” Angelo muttered as he walked away.

***
Still kneeling, Angelo’s eyes finally rested on the waxen face of the priest, flushed with more colour in death than it ever had in life. He stared at the closed eyelids, and the thin lips that could no longer sting. Angelo’s eyes travelled slowly down from the white collar of the priest’s black cassock to the waxen, overlapped hands gripping a rosary. The memory of those hands had filled Angelo with revulsion many times in the past.

Angelo noticed that the people behind him were watching him expectantly as they waited their turn. He slowly turned back to the corpse and focused on the closed eyelids while making the sign of the cross. “May you roast in hell, Father Joel,” he murmured, “for all of eternity.”

Feeling suddenly as if the walls were closing in around him, Angelo rose from his kneeling position. Bypassing the line of family mourners at the end of the casket, he caught up to his Nonna. Suddenly he felt someone clasp his arm. He turned and met the gaze of his old biology teacher from St. Domenic High School, Father James, his face etched with wrinkles, his eyes black and impenetrable. “I recognized you, son, but I’m afraid I can’t remember your name. You’re ... ?”

Angelo stared at him for a moment. “One of Jolly’s boys,” he said without flinching. Pulling his arm away, he guided his Nonna out of the funeral home and into the crisp, fresh February air.
for herself and, besides, she had no hope left. Maybe it was fitting, she considered fatalistically. They had met in a crisis. Another crisis was now splitting them apart.

Weeping more openly at the possibility that she might not see him again, she retreated into the memory of how they first met.

It was Tom’s second day in Spain and his first in her city, Barcelona. He’d been drawn to a crowd watching a demonstration against the dictator who then ruled her country and was dying, but not quickly enough. The demonstrators shouted slogans while keeping a collective eye on the riot police who were observing from a line of grey Land Rovers, and occasionally firing rubber bullets into the area the demonstrators held. A girl near Tom, young, sixteen or seventeen years old, yelled something at the police and two of them jumped from a Land Rover. They grabbed her, hauled her towards their vehicle and flung her face first into the side of it. The girl crumpled, unconscious.

Standing near Ana, Tom leapt forward impulsively, as if to confront the police. One of her friends stuck out his foot and tripped him. She and two or three others picked him up and dragged him deeper into the crowd. They took him away through the winding alleys of the city’s Gothic Quarter, and bought him cognacs in a bar to calm him because he was trembling with indignation at what the police had done.

Ana translated what her friends were saying to this foreigner because she was the one whose English was best. After a couple of cognacs the Canadian grinned and told her he was an anarchist. She had not translated that because her politically sophisticated friends would have considered him naïve. Already she was protecting him. That night she took him home with her.

Now there was no one to stop him. Arms waving dramatically, he charged once more into battle, guaranteeing, Ana thought, that this time both of them would become victims of his self-styled anarchism. Which of them did that make more the fool, she wondered—Tom for his behaviour or her for loving him? She watched him hover over the official who, in a state of contained rage, was scribbling furiously on a form.

Then Tom grabbed her hand. Waving the form like a flag stolen from an enemy army, he led her out of the room. In the hall he put his arms around her and lifted her off the floor. “We did it!” he said with that grin of his. “You’re in! All we have to do is get married within three months.”

She turned her mouth away from his, broke free and ran to the door marked Women. For twenty minutes she stayed inside crying out her confusion and thinking out her fear. When she emerged, Tom was sitting on the floor, his head against the wall. As she waited for him to stand a smile crept across her face. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him hard.

_Querida mama:_

As I told you in my first letter, which you probably have not received yet, the weather has been so cold I’ve been afraid to go outside alone. I’m trying not to be disheartened but it’s difficult, and in more ways than just the weather. It is so different here with Tom going to work and me staying all day in this tiny, empty apartment. (We have no furniture yet and only a double sleeping bag and a piece of foam to sleep on.) It was much more fun in Barcelona with me working and coming home to him.

This is Tom’s third day at his new job. Last night he spent hours complaining about it. He couldn’t think of anything else. So far, he hasn’t shown any interest in looking up old friends.

We have a car already! Tom bought it from a man at work, someone he barely knows. It’s big and green and ugly and old but apparently it’s powerful. Tom wants to take me into the Rocky Mountains in it! Can you imagine being lost in Canada in the
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midst of an Arctic Vortex in a car that suddenly won’t work? Me neither.

I heard Arctic Vortex mentioned by the weatherman on the TV we bought—Tom said I had to have TV. I’ll let you know later what it is. I don’t want to ask Tom, I want to find out for myself.

But don’t worry. I’ll be fine.

Hug a palm tree for me!

Besos,

Ana

She had seen no one on the street all morning. Perhaps people didn’t go walking when it was so cold. But boredom and a growing sense of claustrophobia were making her irritable, and she determined to go out and mail the letter to prove she wasn’t a prisoner of the weather. She put on two of Tom’s T-shirts and her heaviest sweater. She put on the toque, and a scarf, and she pulled on the woollen gloves she wore in Barcelona on those days in January when the temperature wasn’t much above freezing.

Her cloth coat was fine for a Spanish winter but she knew as she slipped it on that it would be like a flimsy rag out there. Looking at herself in the bathroom mirror, she laughed. She was in a good mood now. She felt like someone in a Russian novel. She would think of her excursion as an exotic adventure.

As she opened the building’s door a car went by, its exhaust visible. Visible, for God’s sake, she thought. As visible as her breath suddenly was. She choked on the thin cold air, gasped, then coughed. Her eyes ran and her eyelashes became coated in rime. For a moment she panicked, thinking that if she closed her eyes once she would not be able to open them again, then settled down when she wiped them and the rime came off on her gloves.

She began to walk. Her foot slipped on ice and she almost fell. She coughed again then inhaled deeply. It was like inhaling razor blades. She walked on, looking down, her heart pounding. She decided not to turn corners so as not to become lost. If she got lost she might die.

She thought she saw a post box at the next corner. Walking on, she tried to forget about her burning ears, her toes that might already be frozen.

It wasn’t a post box. It was a newspaper box. It dawned on her that she didn’t know what a post box looked like in this country.

A short way ahead she saw a woman at a bus stop. When she got to her, Ana asked about a post box and the woman directed her. “Three blocks this way then a block that way then a block that way,” she said, gesturing quickly, and Ana thought she might as well walk to the mountains as five more blocks today.

“I never imagined cold like this when I was in my country,” Ana said, torn between the need to keep moving and the desire to communicate with someone, anyone.

The woman said defensively, as if Ana had insulted her personally: “It’s not cold. Just you wait. There’s worse than this to come.” She asked where Ana was from and proceeded to list the things that made Alberta the best place in the world to live in.

Ana was amused, thinking the woman was joking. She asked, teasingly: “Do you really believe that? Just because you have no volcanoes or earthquakes or hurricanes or bullfights and your food is always safe to eat? Do you think freezing to death while waiting for a bus isn’t a natural disaster? It must happen all the time, no?” But the woman seemed not to understand, or not to want to.

And then, because she had an urge for a steaming bowl of café con leche to warm her stomach, Ana asked the woman if there was a bar nearby. Staring straight ahead into the empty street, the woman replied archly: “I wouldn’t know.”

Ana understood that she was offended. She wondered why but thought it prudent not to ask.
Querida mama:
I don’t know for certain why Tom is jealous but jealous he is. Yesterday I walked out to mail your letter and because it was so dreadfully cold I stopped at a small grocery store to get warm. In the sleeping bag last night I told him about that. He became upset but would not tell me why so I made a guess. I calmly explained to him that I find it stimulating to challenge the elements and that for me meeting new people is entertaining. You know me, always wandering off on my own and starting conversations with people I encounter.

I told him he should understand how I felt because he’d done the same in Barcelona but all he said was: “Please don’t remind me of Spain.” I know he misses Spain badly. I suppose he’d rather I have my adventures here with him than by myself but he had countless adventures in Spain without me.

Anyway, there was only one person in the store when I walked in, utterly desperate for a refuge. He was the owner, a young Chinese man who told me he came from Brunei on the island of Borneo. I thought of jungle and impossible heat and couldn’t imagine a place far different than Canada or anyone more exotic until a second man appeared out of the cold. This one was wearing a turban, A Sikh, he had a full black beard and dark, sharp eyes.

He joined our conversation and turned out to be a pleasant man. He was a taxi driver and apparently often stopped at that store. The owner offered me a plastic cup of coffee which I drank to have something hot inside me, even though it was café americano, weak and foul tasting.

When I told Tom that the Sikh man gave me a ride to the post box and then back here, for free, and that he invited me to have tea one day with his wife and that I was going to do that, his eyes grew cold and he turned his back to me. I told him I would like to draw the Sikh man’s portrait (because, mama, I feel like drawing again which, as you well know, I haven’t done since university). Even when I told Tom, who values education, that the man was writing a dissertation for his doctorate on the psychological effects of the attitudes and behaviour of alcoholically drugged passengers on Indo-Pakistani taxi drivers in a Canadian city, he did not relent and we went to sleep without saying goodnight.

Tom’s reaction must be due to the fact that I’m starting to have friends. Male friends. Ya sabes. Pues, another letter soon. I wonder if you’ve replied to my first one yet?

Besos,
Ana

They sat on the floor before plates of spaghetti topped with Ana’s homemade sauce. She was dressed in an outfit that had always, in Spain, drawn Tom’s interest. Yet tonight, even with the bottle of Rioja half gone, he was morose. When he did speak it was only to say he hated his work, which was selling home water purification units at a shop in the suburbs. “I’m not the salesman type,” he said.

“I know you’re not a salesman,” Ana replied, shifting her legs so a little more flesh became visible in the shadows inside the dress, “and I hate to see you working as one since you dislike it so much. But it’s only been a few days, amor. You’ll find something else soon.”

“No job here will be good for me,” Tom said. “I’m not at home here.”

“But we’re going to be married here, amor,” Ana said. “And we have to live here. Are you forgetting so soon? You couldn’t find a job in Spain and you didn’t want to live on my income any longer. We came to Canada because you said that only here could you find a job that would support us when we were married. Don’t tell me you’ve changed your mind.”

“No, I haven’t. But I hate it here.”

“Because of the job.”
Wondering what other changes might occur in him, she tried not to imagine him among Canadian women.

He turned from the window and came back and sat beside her and told her he was sorry. Because they were unable to go beyond the worry and the sadness they only held each other, with no kisses or whispers or caresses to surrender to in the barren room, while the wind bit at the windows and walls.

They bought cold weather clothes for her and she went for a walk every day, pulled outside as much by the desire to measure up to the elements as the simple need for exercise. One morning she saw, in the window of a used bookstore, a picture book of the Rockies. She bought it and took it with her to a coffee house she had found that served a decent café au lait. Tom had often talked of his love of the mountains. She sat for an hour, captivated by the photographs.

She had tea with the Sikh couple and wrote to her mother that the wife was charming, as were their two small sons. “Their house is decorated as I imagine it would be in India,” she said. “I felt like I was entering a foreign world within a foreign world.”

She said everything was going as well as could be expected with Tom, and knew when her mother read that she would wonder what was wrong.

The big green car was warming up. There was a haze of black smoke around it. Holding a knapsack that contained sandwiches, a thermos of strong coffee and her camera, Ana stood inside the back door of the apartment building and looked out at the parking lot. She was excited and feeling adventurous. Tom had been happy last night. They’d gone to a Thai restaurant and he’d talked for a long time about how much the mountains meant to him as a child, and how they gave him the feeling they belonged only to him, though no one could ever own them. He’d said that tomorrow, Saturday, was going to be a special day. It was a wonderful evening, and a wonderful night. She’d made a mental note to tell her mother in the next letter that she was certain Tom was deeply in love with her.

“Because it isn’t Spain.”

“But, love, you couldn’t live in Spain any longer. You were broke and becoming depressed.”

“I was not depressed,” he said testily. He lay on his back and closed his eyes. Then, raising himself on an elbow and pouring out the last of the wine, he asked the bare wall: “What stupid impulse ever made me think I could be a salesman?”

As she watched him toss back the wine, she tried to contain her growing anger. It occurred to her that he might say next: “If it wasn’t for you...”. If he said that she knew she’d lose control, walk out into the weather, call her taxi-driving friend from the grocery store and, tomorrow, buy a plane ticket home.

She tried another tactic to see if she couldn’t bring him out of his mood. Coming around behind him, she began to massage his neck, but as if to free himself from her touch he got to his feet. She watched him walk to the window, where he stood and stared at the windy darkness. She thought of the Arctic Vortex and imagined it as a whirlwind that would suck him out through the window and into the night.

“I wish we were back in Spain,” he said unhappily.

Suddenly she understood what was behind his words. Her heart sank as it did in the immigration officer’s room. Tom was telling her what he probably had not yet articulated for himself. He was saying he was afraid the job would change him, that he would no longer be the free spirited, intuitive anarchist she had loved in Spain. He was telling her he was afraid of that, and at that moment she was afraid of it too. His days here were too routine, the job too strictly ruled. There was no room for excitement or creativity. Even so, she suspected that once this world had him completely in its grip it would not let him go again. Deep down, she thought, he must know that. If he was fighting against being settled in Canada, it could explain his reluctance to buy even the most necessary furniture, she mused.
Then Padma said slowly, in a measured voice: “So, you’ve become a true westerner, Thomacha. You marry, you divorce, you remarry. How is that like the death of my son?”

Thomas didn’t know how to answer, where to begin. He didn’t even bother to mention that no other person was involved in the breakup of this marriage; that he was not involved with any woman now. It occurred to him then that most people—whether in Canada or in India—try to resolve for themselves life’s great puzzles, with a little knowledge, a little less wisdom, a lot of ignorance, and a lot of prejudice.

“It will take too long to explain, Padma. Even then, I don’t know if it will make any sense. Maybe some other time.”

They embraced, tentatively, with tenderness. But something was missing in that embrace. Thomas walked fast, out of the office, through the labyrinthine corridors of the building, and across the street to the taxi stand.

That was when he saw the boys: two skinny fellows in rags, sitting in the dust at the foot of a tree. They were making soap bubbles from a dented, soot-lined aluminum pan. The rainbow-coloured bubbles stayed in the air for but a moment before Delhi’s heat burst them. Thomas stared at the boys. The boys returned the stare, then slowly bared their teeth.

Even this morning, long after, Thomas couldn’t decide whether they had smiled or jeered.

Acknowledgments


Licia Canton’s story, *The Motorcycle*, was previously published in Italy, in the Italian literary journal, *Rivistalunaspecie*.

Saros Cowasjee’s *Strange Meeting* was read on CBC Radio and was published in *Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Vol. XLV1. No.2) in 2002. It is included in his volume of short stories called *Strange Meeting and Other Stories* (Vision Books, New Delhi, 2006).

Caterina Edwards’ *Identity* was previously published in *Alberta Views* magazine, Sept/Oct. 2003 edition, and it appears here with permission from the author.

Inge Israel’s *Emergency* was the winner in a Kaleidoscope Books contest.
Biographical Notes

Rosanna Micelotta Battigelli was born in Calabria, Italy and immigrated to Canada with her family when she was three. She has received four Best Practice Awards from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association for her unique strategies in literacy, conflict management, and helping pupils who grieve. Her stories have appeared in Canadian anthologies, including Mamma Mia! Good Italian Girls Talk Back (ECW Press, 2004) and Women Writing 3: Journeys (Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2007). She received an OAC Writer’s Works-in-Progress Grant for La Brigantessa, a recently-completed novel set in Calabria in post-Unification Italy (1862).

Wade Bell has published A Destroyer of Compasses, No Place Fit for a Child, and Tracie’s Revenge (all with Guernica Editions). His work has appeared in many magazines, nine anthologies, and on radio and the net in Canada, Japan, Spain and the U.S. He has worked for The Canadian Radio-Television Commission and in the Alberta Oilfields. His play What Happened to the Girl? (Pumphouse Theatre, Calgary) was the winner in the Alberta One Act Play Festival in 1994 in the category of Best Original Script. The North


Don Mulcahy’s story, A Certain Numbness, appeared online in the April 2014 edition of the Cyclamens and Swords Newsletter, Israel, as an earlier version titled, Numbers.

Saskatchewan River Book, stories set in Edmonton and Jasper, was published by Coach House Books. In addition to his present residence in Edmonton, he has lived in Ottawa, Barcelona, Spain, and Calgary. He is a graduate of Carleton University.

Licia Canton is the author of the short story collection Almond Wine and Fertility (2008). She is also a literary critic and the editor-in-chief of Accenti Magazine. Her stories and essays have been published in English, French and Italian. She has presented her creative and critical work at universities, literary festivals and book fairs. As (co)editor she has published several collections of fiction and nonfiction: The Dynamics of Cultural Exchange (2002), Adjacencies: Minority Writing in Canada (2004), Writing Beyond History (2006), Reflections on Culture (2010), Beyond Barbed Wire (Essays) (2012) and Behind Barbed Wire (Creative Works) (2012) and Writing Our Way Home (2013). A member of the Writers’ Union of Canada, she was a director of the board of the Quebec Writers’ Federation (2007-10) and President of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers (2010-14). She holds a Ph.D. from Université de Montréal and a Master’s from McGill University.

Elizabeth Cinello was born in Italy and raised in Toronto. She has been active in the city’s arts community as a performer, writer and cultural animator. Her writing appears in newspapers, magazines and in online publications. Her story, Food Companion Wanted, won the Accenti magazine writing contest in 2011.

Saros Cowasjee has a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Leeds, U.K., and he immigrated to Canada in 1963 after working as an assistant editor with the Times of India Press, Bombay. He joined the English Department at the University of Regina, retiring from there in 1975. His published works include critical studies of the Irish dramatist Sean O’Casey and the Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand, as well as several anthologies of Raj and Indian fiction published by Harper Collins, Oxford, and Penguin Books. He has also published two novels, Goodbye to Elsa and The Assistant Professor, two volumes of short stories, and a screenplay, The Last of the Maharajas.


Caterina Edwards’ latest book, her sixth, is a literary noir called The Sicilian Wife. Her previous book Finding Rosa: A Mother With Alzheimer’s/ A Daughter’s Search for the Past won the Writers Guild of Alberta Award for Nonfiction, the Bressani Prize for Writing on Immigration, and was shortlisted for the City of Edmonton Book Prize. She has also won a WGA Award for Short Fiction for a collection of stories The Island of the Nightingale, and the Edna Staebler Award in 2013 for her personal essay on Moldovan migrant workers. Her play Homeground was chosen to represent Canada in an international radio competition. Caterina Edwards: Essays on Her Works was the first book published in the Guernica Editions series on Canadian Writers. Whatever the genre, Caterina explores the
O’Hagan Award for the Short Story. She lives in Edmonton, where she teaches English and Writing at Concordia University of Edmonton, and is currently at work on a novel.

Susan Ouriou is a Calgary-based literary translator, fiction writer and interpreter. Two of her translations—“The Road to Chlifa” by Michele Marineau and “Necessary Betrayals” by Guillaume Vigneault—were short-listed for the Governor General’s Award for translation. Her first novel, Damselfish, was short-listed for the WGA’s Georges Bugnet Best Novel Award and the City of Calgary’s W.O. Mitchell Best Book Award.

Ron Romanowski is a Winnipeg poet, prose writer and playwright. His book of poetry, Sweet Talking, was published in 2004. His work has also been published in the literary journals CV2 and Zygote and in anthologies, including Under the Prairie Sky, No Choice but to Trust, The Six-Pack from Heaven and Witness. He has read his work on CBC radio and his short play Gassed won an honourable mention at the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival.

Summi Siddiqui is an inter-cultural travelling storyteller and teacher. She has performed her stories at the Harbourfront Storytelling Festival in 2011, 2012 and 2013. She was also a finalist for the ‘Storytelling Slam’ at The Writer’s Community of Durham Region (WCDR). Growing up in a family of poets, writers and artists, educated in London, India, Paris and Italy, Summi has immersed herself in different cultures and stories from all over the world. She has organized lectures, workshops and storytelling sessions in Canada, India, Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Oman. She lives in Ajax with her husband, two daughters, and a hamster named Dil.

Mathew Zachariah retired from the University of Calgary in 2000 after more than three decades of service, and is now Emeritus Professor of Education. He came to Canada in 1966 and became a Canadian citizen in 1973. His academic specialty was the comparative sociology of education. He has taught, researched and published extensively in the areas of race relations, multicultural
education and international development. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Race Relations Foundations from 2003 to 2006. During his student career in India and the United States, he received numerous awards and prizes. The most recent of his awards was in 2005—The Alberta Centennial Gold Medal, for his contributions in the area of human rights, multiculturalism and diversity. He has been listed in the Canadian Who’s Who since 1986. His avocation is writing essays, articles, poetry and short stories. One of his short stories won second prize, and was published in the Calgary Herald in 1986. His long poem, “My Place? My Home?” was published in Sense of Place: A Catalogue of Essays (Nickle Arts Museum, 2005). His book, Making Anew My Home: A Memoir was published in 2014.