

GIROTONDO

Concetta Guzzo-McParland

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Girotondo

Concetta Guzzo-McParland

Girotondo is the Italian name of the children's game, ring-around-a-rosy. The word *giro* has connotations in Italian, that this novel develops as symbolism. *Giro* may be translated as a turn, a tour or a circle, so *fare un giro* is to take a short ride with the aim of returning to the starting point. *Gira e rigira* is to go around in circles; *mettere in giro*, to spread rumors; while *una presa in giro* is to be taken for a ride or to be fooled. With these nuances in mind, the novel presents a group of people whose traditional lives have been disrupted by the process of immigration, and who live a somewhat disjointed existence.

In presenting the story of three women of different generations, all living in Montreal but connected by their origins in the same Italian village, and who have been traditionally kept silenced, the novel aims to reveal that the harmony of community was fractured as much by the mind-set present in the village of their past as by the realities of adjusting in a New World.

Added to the protagonist's search for her true identity and for self-realization is her obsessive need to write and record the phases of her family's immigrant journey. Through a discussion between an editor to whom she shows her work and the publisher of an ethnic press, the novel also attempts to raise questions related to the writing of the immigrant experience, as well as about living it.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my thesis advisor, Terence Byrnes, for his patience, support and guidance throughout the long and often confusing process of piecing this novel together. I would also like to thank my two thesis readers, Mary di Michele and Kate Sterns for their thorough reading of the novel and their much valued comments.

GIROTONDO

By

Concetta/Connie Guzzo-McParland

*Giro giro tondo
Com'e' bello il mondo*

Round and round we go
How beautiful the world is
(Italian children's song)

From: cathya@hotmail.com
Sent: July 25, 2004, 12:00:05
To: aurorapublishing@net.com
Subject: Submission

Attachment: girotondo-prologue.doc.

Mr. Pastore,

Here for your consideration is a sample of my writing. It is the prologue of a novel, which is set in Montreal in the early 1980s, and which tells the story of three women connected by their past. Woven into the story are the phases of my own family's immigrant experience as it followed the pattern of mass immigration of other southern Italians in the late fifties.

I saw the name of your publishing house in The Canadian Writer's Market, and I understand you specialize in publishing first-time writers of Italian origin. I have just finished a writing course called Writing for Fun, and the instructor suggested I look up small presses such as yours. I have never been published, but a personal essay of mine appeared on the "Oh Canada!" page of the April 1998 issue of Canadian Living Magazine.

I believe you know a personal friend of mine, journalist Antonio Amoruso, who has worked for you in the past. He has the first 660 pages of the manuscript, which he has promised to edit for me. I'm still working on the ending. I'll send you a copy of the novel by mail, but, maybe, you can contact Antonio if you'd like to get his opinion on it.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Cathy Anastasia

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.com>
Sent: July 28, 2004, 7:43:55 AM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.com
Subject: FW: Re: Submission

Attachment: girotondo-prologue.doc.

AA,

Do you recognize this woman or the writing? I'm not especially keen to publish another confessional, another first-hand immigrant-experience story, but I'm badly in need of an English publication to get some funding from the C.C. In the Canadian publishing world, bilingualism is something to be shunned at all costs, and I've gone out on a limb for too long trying to publish in three languages. I've learned my lesson on Bridge Building 101: do not interfere in the rift between the two founding nations. This sample is a little too sugary for my taste, but not too badly written—it might meet parameters set by Heritage Canada. But... Writing for Fun? Canadian Living Magazine? Oh Canada? Am I scraping the bottom of the barrel? Should I bother reading the rest of it if she mails it? You know long novels bore me, and 600+ pages may be more problematic to publish on a government grant. But if you think it's worth my while, could you polish the manuscript and cut it by half before sending it?

Ciao
F.

PS: Saw you at the Ethnic Studies conference. You disappeared after the first session—or are you still avoiding me?

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Sent: August 15, 2004, 9:15:35
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca
Subject: Submission—pre-prologue

Attachment: mulirena.doc

Dear Franco,

I most surely recognize the woman and her writing. The manuscript in question has lingered in my desk for many years, but you already know I'm the world's greatest procrastinator. I find it surprising that the writer took the initiative to send you a sample without contacting me first, but she can be as determined as I can be lackadaisical, and I've stalled on my promise to look after it. Don't bother reading her copy. It's full of typos and grammatical errors. I'll edit it before sending it out to you.

On re-reading the prologue, I believe that, with some aggressive editing, the novel has some potential for publication, and it may offer a welcome addition to your catalogue of academic texts on post-emigrant culture, but then again, I'm leery of how easily we bow to the content-based parameters set by Heritage Canada, and overlook their ploys of dismissing works from the margins as superficial and inconsequential, but I guess bills need to be paid, etc., etc.

Back to the novel, I've known the writer all her life. She gave me the manuscript to edit a good fifteen years ago. Franco, after all the years we've worked together, I know your thought processes well, so I'll answer your questions before you ask them.

Why did I put this novel to sleep for so long?

The thickness of the manuscript and my innate laziness may have played a big part, and, come to think of it, the writer never sent me the epilogue she promised. But, also, I must confess that its content didn't always excite me. After years of editing texts for Aurora Publishing, that dealt with issues of ethnicity, identity and immigration, I must have suffered from literary ennui or, to use a more current term, burnout. How many stories about a boat crossing the ocean could I endure, or unleash on the reading public, before they started to seem redundant? And a third reason: I may have been too closely associated to some of the characters to be able to look at the work for its own merit and to make an honest assessment of it.

Do I have a change of heart after all these years?

Well, there is something about marking the half-century since our mass departure from Italy that makes even the most jaded of us want to revisit the experience, and maybe take stock of its significance. At the Ethnic Studies conference I was struck by the intensity of the discussions by participants from visible minorities, who are, relatively speaking, new arrivals to the country. Meanwhile, I found myself sitting back and cringing at the mere mention of the e-word. Though some of the interventions took on a *dejà vu* rhetoric, and I did leave after the first session (sorry, I didn't have time to chat with you—I had business to look after), it became obvious to me that the story of

immigration did not end with the closing of Pier 21 in Halifax. They may have turned that recipient of human cargo into a museum, but the mass translocation and cultural displacement of people goes on and on. Only the modes of transportation have changed with the times.

I saw this novel develop in bits and pieces throughout the years, and I will try to summarize as well as I can how I've become so closely tied to it.

About 35 years ago, when I first came to this country on a visitor's pass, the writer, who was an acquaintance of mine—a young *paesana*—offered me a sample of her writing, a few stories about Mulirena, the village of our birth. In fact, you may remember the day you and Carole brought me to Expo 67, I met and introduced her to you. At the time, her request for my opinion surprised and annoyed me, as it presented me a conundrum. Franco, how seriously would you have taken a hairstylist-turned-writer, with little formal education, trying her hand at writing about a village on the other side of the world? And how candidly critical could you have been without hurting a friendship of many years? I glanced at the stories, put them aside, and avoided getting back to her. In retrospect, I believe I may also have been evasive because her budding sensuality and youthful exuberance sparked a sensation of curiosity in me. I became intensely aware of her soft skin and plump breasts as I kissed her on the cheeks and held her in a friendly hug. She was barely 16 at the time, and a close friend of the family, so you must understand my need for propriety. I know you're chuckling right now, Franco. You once accused me of being a stuffy, anal-retentive fart, a flag-bearer for high-minded morality. But I was young once too—and a little stupid, I might add.

She made a tentative effort to ask me about the stories the next time we met, and again I tried to evade any serious discussion about it. I still remember part of the conversation.

"Why Mulirena?" I asked curiously. "Four houses and four cats. What's there to write about?"

"I want to preserve my memories," she said gravely.

I replied that the only thing worth preserving is *giardiniera*, and even then, if it's not eaten within a couple of years, the vegetables lose their texture and become vinegary or rancid.

I tried not to betray my annoyance at her insistence. She left Mulirena when she was a child. She had been raised in Montreal. What could she possibly remember that was of any consequence, I thought, that had not been conditioned by years of watching American sitcoms? I told her kindly that going out to discos, taking up yoga, and even joining a bowling team would provide more satisfaction to a modern, Canadian-raised girl like her than would rehashing quaint tales about an isolated village, one like hundreds of others along the hilly spine of Southern Italy. I had run away in disgust from that place and the last thing I wanted to do was read about it.

A quick scan through the pages she gave me revealed an abundance of anecdotes and reminiscences—images of picnics with friends, of wheat fields dotted with red poppies swaying in the breeze, of the harvesting and crushing of olives—that had little story line.

I suggested gently that she might want to write a memoir. I knew she had suffered a great loss a few years before and I thought the exercise might be therapeutic.

“A memoir...” she repeated, her voice trailing off, as though trying to ask me what I meant without actually asking the question.

I explained that, for some, writing about the major events of one’s life—especially painful events—could be part of the healing process.

“I’ll see,” she said hesitantly. “I only thought of showing them to you...to see what you thought... I just wanted to put down on paper the things I remembered about Mulirena—before they’re forgotten. But... I don’t really want to write about my life...It’s not that interesting.”

I found her sincerity mixed with naiveté charming, and—I must confess—I did hug her a second time. I told her to rewrite one of the stories as an exercise, and to make it interesting enough for others to want to read—to use her imagination and creativity.

“Don’t be afraid to invent,” is the only advice I could give her at the time. Back then, you well remember, I was a journalist, looking for work. Writing fiction was never my forte, but I understood the process well.

I found myself explaining how truth and reality get twisted a hundred different ways before it makes any sense on paper. To this, she didn’t respond, but she looked at me intently, as though to absorb it all.

We saw each other a number of times that summer. I was a tourist, and she took it upon herself to give me a tour of Montreal, and I didn’t want to offend her by refusing her offer. I found the city, bustling with the fever of Expo 67, exhilarating. We visited Man and His World, and spent a glorious Indian-summer afternoon together at La Ronde amusement park. Yes, Franco, my moral flag did waver somewhat in the whirlwind of the roller-coaster rides, but it still stood, proud and straight, at the end of the day. I thought she had given up on getting my opinion on her writing, but on the way home, as she left me off at a bus stop, she pulled a notebook from her satchel, and held it against her chest. It was a story about the sea voyage, she said, and she seemed unsure of whether or not to give it to me.

I was in a rush and told her I’d read it when I got back to the apartment, and thanked her for the tour and for being such a good little guide.

“It’s been my pleasure. It’s what I like to do best,” she said with a shy smile.

To my surprise the writing had some literary merit, but once again, I neglected to call her. I had many personal issues of my own to deal with. You do remember the hard decisions I had to face, such as getting married to Carole, getting a landed immigrants visa, looking for a full-time position, adapting to a new country, and our own friendship, Franco, suffering a painful set-back. I had little time for my young friend. She may have been insulted by my silence. She made no effort to see me or to resume our discussions about her writing.

I met her at social functions once or twice after that but, luckily for me, there were always people around us and no opportunity to bring up the subject.

But in the early 80s, personal events brought us together again, and she took the opportunity to come and see me. She told me she had decided to work on a novel. And, she confessed, recent events in her life had triggered an interest in the old reminiscences, and a compulsion to tie them together into one story.

“What are you writing about...this time?” I asked.

“Oh, a mish-mash of things, but mostly about Mulirena and my immigrant experience,” she said.

I had been afraid she would say that. She then asked me to verify some facts—people's names, some dates—to fill in some of the gaps in her memory, as though her gaps and my memory would necessarily be synchronized.

Franco, you know that I only write if I get paid. And, my feelings on writing about the past are best expressed not by a writer but by an architect, Paolo Portoghesi, whose analysis of modernism's purist break with history I've just read. "The past whose presence we claim is not a golden age to be recuperated," he wrote. I put a cross on my own when I came to live in Montreal, and it bored the hell out of me to read about other people's. And Franco, need we go over our differences of opinions on the labeling of "minoritarian writing?" You've secured government grants for the publication of poetry, essays and novels written in English, French and Italian. You've shamelessly embraced the required multicultural parameters. Do the academic labels make it less marginal, less minor to the mainstream? As representatives of cultural communities, we jumped onto the multiculturalism bandwagon too readily, I believe. How easily we forget that multiculturalism started off as a political ploy to defuse separatism in Quebec while appeasing us "others." We must ask ourselves if, in the long run, we did ourselves a disservice for the sake of paying the day-to-day bills. How many Italian texts have I have edited, and how many translations from French or English into Italian have I done? How many copies of those books have you sold in this country? How many will ever be read in Italy? In the past, some of our friends called multiculturalism a containment strategy. That rang especially true for the "ethnic" publishing industry. How many books can your basement hold, Franco?

At the time, I—speaking as an expert on the subject—told her that the immigrant experience story has been done countless times already. Quite frankly, reading about nostalgia for an innocent villager's past gives me gas pains because I remember a time back home when people tore at each others' throats for a bucket of water. And some sold their souls for a visa to America.

"Well...yes, I guess, but... must we label it so?" she asked. "It's not only about that."

Franco, you know that, if a story has a departure, a crossing and a landing, it's going to be labeled an "immigrant narrative," whether or not we want it to. Impatiently, I told her as much.

"Every story is different," she persisted. "It just happens to be about people who emigrated from a place called Mulirena. It could be about anybody, anyplace."

Ha, ha! A little Universalist in the making, I thought. And I told her not to worry about forgotten facts, to invent whatever she did not remember.

"That is what you told me the last time we spoke," she said, "but then you never got back to me."

I apologized for the negligence, and explained that I had become preoccupied with events and circumstances.

"I understand," she replied. "So did I."

I noticed how her soft features had hardened somewhat with the years. She had a sad look but she spoke more confidently than ever before, and handed me something meant only for me. I asked her about the story on the crossing, about how seriously she had taken my advice about inventing.

She smiled, a little too mischievously, I thought, and avoided my question. “I’d like to build a story around the past and more recent events,” she said. “But I don’t know how far to take it... when to end it.”

“Endings are tricky, but not as difficult as... beginnings,” I remember telling her. I also warned her about the very small percentage of writers who get published. I wanted to save her the humiliation of rejection. I never told her, Franco, that each one of my attempts at creative writing had landed in the wastepaper basket.

It was a real challenge to sort through the manuscripts she brought me, and I gave up after the third notebook. Apart from a distinctive, undecipherable handwriting, her flashbacks, digressions and jumps from one place to the next at the speed of thought gave me motion sickness.

I returned her notebooks and told her to start anew, on a word processor this time, and to find some way of tying it all together, to give it some shape and form.

“You’re a hair stylist,” I told her jokingly. “When you give a haircut, you don’t cut the back before the front...”

“But, I do,” she said with so much assurance that it made me defensive.

“No, no, you must have a finished shape in mind, and a systematic method of getting there, of blending it all in, of making sense of it all,” I said emphatically.

She nodded in agreement, and I was pleased that I had found such a simple metaphor to explain a difficult writing concept. And they say you can’t teach writing!

For a few months afterwards, she earnestly brought me chapter after chapter of new writing. She had undertaken to write a novel that combined her revised reminiscences about Mulirena, with life in Montreal at the time—a particularly intense period for her and for some common friends of ours. I detected that the writing had some veiled autobiographical elements but, I must admit, even though I know her personally, I had great difficulty distinguishing fiction from fact. She was serious and a fast learner, but didn’t have a clue about literary criticism, or the then-current debates on diasporic writing—the texts on ethnicity, identity politics and interstitial cultures that you continuously sent for me to edit. But I was conscious and weary of the topics her story so naively dealt with, so I just put the submissions in my desk drawer, and waited for her to give me the nod that it was all finished. So, I must admit that her e-mail to you jolted me, but then, maybe, this is precisely what she had in mind.

I’ve distanced myself from this novel for twenty years. But now, with all the rhetoric on ethnicity I’ve been hearing, the timing may be right to try out a new approach. The lack of academic contamination may be propitious—as an experiment between us, that is. It will be interesting to see which point of view will rise to the top, universalism or ethnicity in this writing untainted by theories—virgin writing, so to speak.

Her writing in English has a childlike enthusiasm that is quite refreshing. Though there’s nothing new under the post-colonial sun, I’ve been drawn into her world in the re-reading. But her writing still exasperates me: she wrote on instinct and could never keep to a straight narrative.

I’ve contacted her since receiving your e-mail, and told her that my intervention in editing will be to redirect her meandering ways, to put some order in her mixed bag of anecdotes, observations, and editorializing. I’ll take the liberty of changing most of her narrative from the first- to the third-person, except for the childhood stories, which she wrote as a teenager, and categorically refuses to change.

She told me, “For the rest, do what you think is best. You’re the writing expert. All I know is hairstyling!”

The story is complex enough as is, but I have felt compelled to contribute my own sociological and historical perspective of the periods it covers. Here and there, I’ve added my own essays: some were published throughout the years in the *Gazzettino Italo Canadese*, and some were written especially for this novel. The rest of the text which is not clearly signed by me or by her may be read as a co-authored effort, though she wrote the first draft.

Franco, in spite of our philosophical differences, and the personal frictions between us, I do respect your literary sense, and I would appreciate your opinion on the manuscript as I send it to you. As for its potential publication by Aurora, I would take the responsibility of negotiating conditions with you on behalf of my client. If you will permit, I’ll add my own exposition on Mulirena, the place at the root of it all, which I believe should appear before the prologue.

AA

MULIRENA

By
Antonio Amoruso

Before mass emigration, Mulirena was a village of fifteen hundred souls. “Four houses and four cats” is how its inhabitants referred to it after they left. Like many other mountain villages, it was built at the top of a steep, winding road that came to a dead end. A first-time visitor could only wonder why anyone would settle there in the first place. One either became resigned to the sleepy pace of the village or looked for a future elsewhere—like many of the men who made it back from the war, and had seen new places and people.

“Here, there is no *avvenire*,” someone said. They meant *nothing new or exciting will ever come our way*.

Someone else added, “We must leave for the sake of the children,” and this pronouncement became the mantra for an exodus. Not that the children ever complained, for, in post-war Mulirena, they were the least deprived.

The story was very different during the war years, when the Fascist government rationed bread, flour, oil and sugar at subsistence level, and raw hunger was suffered by all. In spite of Il Duce’s call to greatness, basic hygiene and sanitation were greatly neglected, and lice and ringworm became endemic. The women were left to fend for themselves. They had to take care of farms, animals, the old and the young. They worried about the lack of news from husbands, sons and brothers fighting in unknown places and for unknown reasons. They were kept awake at night by sirens and occasional bombings.

But they were still better off than those living in the northern cities. Many refugees from those shelled-out places sought refuge in the desolate villages, and avoided starvation by sharing wild field greens, rough yellow cornbread, and gritty polenta with the villagers.

“In the *paese* you never starve,” people said. This was their only consolation.

A decade after the fall of Fascism, life in the village should have resumed its placid pre-war pattern. But the strong odor of DDT mixed with the stench of urine-soaked diapers in the damp, whitewashed bedrooms of stone houses must have been nauseating and stifling for the returning soldiers who married, procreated and saw no reward in sight for their years of combat against and for the Germans. Mussolini’s failures and defeat had dealt a heavy blow, not only to the regional economy, but to the psyches of men who had been pumped up with dreams of returning to the glory days of a mythical Roman empire. They replaced the Roman salute by another well-known Italian gesture—that of slapping the right arm while bending it at the elbow—also directed toward Rome. Too much had been shaken up in the natural order of things in Mulirena for life to resume as serenely as it had been before the war.

Until the Second World War, isolated from the rest of the world by geography and the lack of good roads, Mulirena had functioned largely in the feudal-like system of its early origins. The history of its early development was compiled in 1970 by the town’s parish priest, Don Antonio Persico. He painstakingly searched the church registers, inventories, records of visits by bishops, and the diocese archives in Nicastro. A more political and social perspective to the town’s history is unfortunately unavailable, as a suspicious fire at city hall in July 1933 destroyed many important documents. But this is another story. If told, it might reveal the power that some old families still maintained in

the village at that turbulent turning-point in the history of modern Italy—not to mention the arrogant displays of force used by proponents of the Fascist ideology.

As far back as 1595, Bishop Pietro Francesco Montuoro, after a visit to the area, wrote five lines in Latin that refer to Mulirena as a *casale*, an enclave of rustic farm homes. *In casale Mulirena una tantum parochialis ecclesia non consecrata sub Sanctue Luciae invocatione invenitur. Eius paochus de Fatio, curatus solus ibi est presbiter. Incolentes 570.* His report confirms that, at the time, there existed one parish church consecrated with the name of Santa Lucia, that the pastor's name was de Fabio, and that the village inhabitants totaled 570.

The territory was owned by absentee landlords from the Kingdom of Naples. In 1601, Mulirena, along with the surrounding territory of present-day Tiriolo and Gimigliano, were sold to Count Carlo Cicala, of Genovese origin and living in Messina, Sicily, for 80,000 ducats. In 1630, he was given the title of Prince of Tiriolo by King Ferdinand IV of Naples. Prince Carlo was succeeded by his son Gionvanbattista, who in turn, had two sons: Carlo, who died without descendents, and Cesare, whose son Giovanbattista had a son Carlo, who had a son Cesare, and so on and so on.

Feudalism in the kingdom of Naples would only be abolished by law in August, 1806. The name of a descendent of Prince Carlo—Luigi Cicala, 7th Prince of Tiriolo and Duke of Gimigliano—appears in the official documents of the period.

Early church documents included censuses of people and houses. Three classes of people are mentioned: titled *dons* of aristocratic families, *mastri* or tradespeople, and peasants called *villani*. Even in the language of the period, this last term for the proletariat had disparaging connotations.

What brought early inhabitants to settle and to form a *casale* in this part of the Appenines, which does not have particularly fertile lands, seemed to have been the fine sand from its rocky soil. The legend is that the town's name is derived from *megghio rena*, best sand, which in dialect would become Migliurina. Mulirena may have been adopted because of its easier pronunciation, or in reference to the mules, *muli e rena*, used to cart the sand from the river bed and up the mountain roads to the town proper. The sand also provided the raw material for making stone. The men of the village developed a reputation as fine stonemasons, *muratori*—builders of walls.

As such, the restless men of the village first found jobs rebuilding the war ruins of Cassino, Naples and Rome. Then they gravitated toward Milano and Bolzano. There, wages were paid more regularly than in the southern cities. But, the men still complained that the cost of city living made it impossible for them to settle their families there. So the men came and went, while the women and children remained alone, and rarely traveled beyond Amato, the nearest town.

Unlike the pre-war immigrants who went away for a few years and then came home with small bundles of money, when the floodgates of immigration to the Americas opened, the men bought one-way tickets. Women and children were left behind for years; old promises were broken and friendships severed for a chance to break free from the old order, and to be renewed by an ocean voyage—to leave as a larva and to arrive as a butterfly! But the metamorphosis would not be so easily achieved. Once menial jobs were found, stomachs filled with cheap food, houses furnished with garish furniture, the yearnings for the simple life at the *paese* began, and... I've had to read about it in English, French and Italian!

From: Franco Pastore<aurorapublishing@net.ca>
 Sent: August 21, 2004, 2:00:50
 To: aatravel@sympatico.ca
 Subject: Re: Submission–Pre-prologue

AA,

You were always long-winded. Fat chance you'll cut the novel in half after that long exposition! Two prologues might be a tad crowded, don't you think? Why not write your own novel, you lazy bastard!

I told you long novels bore me, but I'll look over the rest of your friend's manuscript (or is it yours? I'm still not too clear on that one), if you send it to me in small doses. I'm somewhat busy in the next few months as I'm in the process of putting some final touches on my book of essays on ethnicity and globalization, to be published soon. Unlike you, I don't dread the e-word.

Anton, your moral and professional uprightness has both amazed and irritated me over the years, but as I read your letter—with curiosity and amused disbelief—it made me want to take the first train out of Vancouver and kick you on your Italian-imported marble pedestal. But, as you know, I'm a pragmatist. Marble is very hard on the toes. And, on reflection, I realize that our differences of opinion are not philosophical, so much as strategic.

On the merit of multiculturalism, I have no moral qualms about using the institution as a cash cow to pay my bills. I agree somewhat, with you and with many of your separatist friends, about the motives that inspired it. But if the institution creates a no-man's land, a third solitude for our artists, as has been claimed, then I say we get out of it the only way we know how—the Italian way! We have a moral duty to cut a dent into the mainstream smugness, and to profit by it at the same time. After all, they asked for it!

I'm a pragmatist and a believer in free enterprise, but I'll quote none other than your friend Antonio Gramsci: "Possibility=Freedom." My friend, do not dismiss in such a cavalier fashion the literary production of Aurora Publishing, of which you have been a part, and which has helped pay some of your bills, too. There's no free lunch anywhere, especially in this part of the world. The institutionalization of ethnicity may be the price to pay for representation—of which a little is better than none. What else can I say?

Our different approaches may also be due to our personalities, our upbringing and education. I was born in the uncultured Seault, lived in Quebec until the nationalists took control of the cultural scene. You came here as an adult and were educated in classic Italian. You were adopted as one of their own by the same Quebec literati that booted me out. As for the question of not selling my books in Italy, you're right. Italians, in general, don't know we exist, though that may be changing—for purely selfish reasons on their part. The Italian politicians and industrialists have awakened to the reality that more Italians live abroad than do in Italy, and they will want to close the circle and woo us back to the homeland—if only to control the influx of undesirable immigrants to their

shores. The shoe is on the other foot. I agree with you that the story of immigration never ends!

Rather than curtail Italian-language writing, I still encourage our writers to stick to their roots, and to start writing in dialect. Of course, the *Italianisti* among us will suffer a heart condition at the pretentiousness of us peasants, but it might cause a ripple in the ocean of the mainstream literary industry. And for those who, like your friend, can't write in Italian, let them twist the English language around to suit their needs for once! Tell your friend not to shy away from "*italianese*" expressions and syntax. Talk about strategy! (You brought up the word, AA, and by the way, no offense intended, but your English has always sounded a bit affected to me.) She's your *paesana*, but I find it ironic that I should relate to her writing more than you do. But like her, I have been raised in the Multilingual Tower. Wouldn't that make a good name for a horror movie?

Above all, do not discourage her from improvising for heaven's sake! After all, in the hodge-podge world we live in, AA, it's time to admit that there are countless ways to skin a cat, cook a kettle of fish... write a novel. The only problem I foresee is the length of the finished work, especially if you insist on adding to it. As to the quality of the writing and its publication, I'll put aside our past personal conflicts and will reserve judgment until I've managed to read the whole manuscript.

Beginnings are difficult, but where you take them is most important. For me, the journey is everything!

Franco

PROLOGUE

By Cathy Anastasia

Spring 1955—Palm Sunday

As I stepped out from the lily-scented church where I had just received Communion, the soft April wind made the ruffles at the hem of my new organza dress flutter above my knees. It made me think of butterflies and of the feathery wings of the cherubs painted on the sky-blue church ceiling. I felt light and airy. As though sensing my desire to fly off, my father, Giuseppe, who was walking behind me, clutched my free hand. His was a mason's hand, used to handling stones and gritty mortar, and it felt coarse. In my other hand, I held up my blessed palm, a large olive branch that a neighbor had brought from the country the day before.

Sundays were always special in Mulirena, but Palm Sunday was a child's dream. The olive branches we children brought to be blessed at Mass were heavy with homemade *cullarielli*, hard doughnut-shaped cookies glazed with white sugar and tied with ribbons to the branches. My mother had even managed to attach a few store-bought candies to the slender olive leaves. The branch had to be held up firmly, without tilting, or I might lose some of the sweets. Father's thick hand and the weighted palm kept me well anchored on the church square as we waited for my mother and brother to make their way out of the crowded church. The whole family, including aunts, uncles and cousins, was expected for a late lunch at the home of my paternal grandparents, *nonno* Luigi and

nonna Caterina. The day had all the prospect of a never-ending feast. And, at the end of the day, I would not feel let down, for there would still be a full week of preparations to look forward to before Easter.

Palm Sunday held the promise of Easter. In this morning's sermon, Don Tommasino had spoken about Christ's exaltation through the streets of Jerusalem. It was Christ's most joyous day, the priest had said, his one day of celebration before the anguish of Gethsemane, the pain of Calvary, and then the glory of the Resurrection. The priest went on and on about the Resurrection, but I lost interest in that part of the story. I believed it, because the priest said you should. But holy pictures of a resurrected Christ flying to heaven in a cloudburst seemed odd to me, and not as real as a crowd of villagers carrying Christ on their shoulders, cheering him on, and waving olive branches in the air.

Practically all the villagers, wearing new spring clothes, had been at this morning's Mass, even the peasant families who lived on the farms and who only came to town on special occasions. The ladies and children sat in the pews, while the men circulated in the back and along the sides. The young girls compared new dresses; the kids eyed each other's goodies; and, the young men ogled the girls.

Adding to the festive atmosphere was the fact that most of the men who worked in the cities were in town just for Easter. My father was home from Milano, where he worked all year long. He had come to finalize the paperwork for his visa to immigrate to Canada. It was the last Easter the family would spend together in Mulirena.

I watched the church entrance as my mother, Teresa, finally made it through the throng of parishioners bottlenecked at the narrow door. Then, she stopped below the steps to adjust her clothes—the usual gestures performed by women wearing the *pacchiana*

regional costume, upon leaving the church. First, she lowered her black velvet *mancale*, her shawl, from her head to her back, instinctively fluffing the festive ribbons dangling from the shoulders of her vest, and then she straightened out the *mandile*—a satiny, rectangular head-covering, bordered with lace, held up in a straight line by two braided buns across her crown. She then picked up the floor-length, pleated skirt by the hem, gathering it below her hips, and tied it in the back, creating a large knot on her behind, like a bustle. This heavy wool skirt was always let down at church and at funerals, but the women ordinarily wore it gathered up. Underneath this skirt, they were well covered by two other layers of clothes: a red flannel garment wrapped tightly around a long, white undershirt. It was a colorful but cumbersome costume, which swaddled and confined the women, obscuring the natural contours of their bodies.

Those who still wore it were called *pacchiane*. The name seemed to impose on these women of Mother's generation a reserve and seriousness of demeanor—not to mention the weight of extra chores, such as gathering wood, and picking olives and chestnuts, which the younger women were not expected to perform anymore. My 33-year-old mother had been wearing it since the age of 12; wearing it for the first time had meant that she had become a woman. The generation that followed hers stopped this tradition. Now, whenever she had to go to a city, she borrowed clothes from one of the younger girls, but changed back into the costume the minute she returned home. She told me she felt naked and strange without it. To me, a *pacchiana* sitting on a doorstep, with her *gonnella* all crunched up in the middle and sticking out in the back like a tail, looked like a fat hen hatching her eggs.

But today, Mother, slim and erect, looked regal, and she beamed with pride as she joined Father and me, as we earnestly waited for her. The fourth member of our household, 11-year-old Luigi, was nowhere to be seen, however. Mother shook her head, and with a resigned smile, said that there was no point in looking for him. He was probably home already. "He runs like a flash of lightning; you can't hold him down," she said, and Father chuckled.

The three of us made our way down the hilly road toward home, exchanging greetings with the other villagers. Comare Rosaria, our next-door neighbor, whose olive groves had provided the branches for the palms, joined us, and soon the two older women walked together, whispering to one other, while Father and I lagged behind. He had struck up a conversation with Amadeo, the village band director, who stopped walking whenever he wanted to emphasize a point about the problems of running a first-class band in a village where most of the older musicians had either left or, like Father, were planning to leave. He complained that the young guys didn't want to know anything about *solfeggio* or the study of arias. They only wanted to play tangos on their cheap, out-of-tune accordions, he said. He made me laugh by doing a little dance number, playing an imaginary accordion. Then Amadeo raised his two hands in exasperation as a gramophone blasted from the shop of Pietro, the tailor.

The shop was wide open and full of men who had probably gone in to settle the bill for their new suits. Easter was the busiest period for Pietro. From inside the shop, his son Totu waved at me, but I couldn't wave back. I was still lightly holding onto Father with one hand and balancing the palm branch with the other, so I just smiled at him. Totu used to pass by my house all the time, since he was courting my neighbor Lucia, and he

could never resist pinching my cheeks or teasing me. His uncle Tommaso, who had a car and often drove to Catanzaro, had bought him some new records. The season's favorite pop singer, Georgio Consolini, whined the popular *Terra Straniera* in a sweetly melodic, plaintive fashion that was meant to melt your heart.

“With a voice like that he could be the next Beniamino Giglio,” Amedeo said.
 “But he wastes it on these *canzonette*... *Mah!*”

Then the song screeched to a stop, and was replaced by another, sung in a woman's chirpy voice. The sound filled the neighborhood and followed us as we sauntered down the cobbled street toward the square where my family lived. It was an infectious song, which incited young girls to open their windows to the new sun, to new loves and to their dreams. I had heard the song a couple of times already, and knew all the words:

*Aprite le finestre al nuovo sole, é primavera, é primavera
 Lasciate entrare un poco d'aria pura
 Con il profumo dei giardini e prati in fior*

*Aprite le finestre ai nuovi sogni, bambine belle innamorate
 E forse il più bel sogno che sognate
 Sarà domani la felicità*

*Aprite le finestre ai nuovi sogni, alle speranze, all'illusioni,
 Lasciate entrare l'ultima canzone
 che dolcemente scenderà nel cuor.*

(Open your windows to the new sun, it's springtime, it's
 springtime
 Let in some pure air
 With the scent of gardens and meadows in bloom.

Open your windows to new dreams, beautiful girls in love
 It may yet be your most beautiful dream
 Tomorrow will bring you happiness.

Open your windows to new dreams, to hopes, to illusions
Let in this last song
That will sweetly descend into your heart).

The Paese

Mulirena was built on a hill, so we were forever walking up and down. Approaching it from the nearby town of Amato, the whole length of the village looked like a pyramid of whitewashed houses with red roofs, with one church's bell-tower forming its peak, and another church squatting at the lower edge. Once, a visiting bishop, who had come to administer confirmation, had, in his sermon, compared the town to a large family living in a multilevel house of many rooms, held together by the two churches. What the Bishop, an outsider, may not have realized was that the two churches were called, not by their proper names, but by *a ghiesa e supra*, the church at the top, and *a ghiesa e sutta*, the church at the bottom, and they kept the townspeople apart, much more than uniting them. The main parish church, Santa Lucia, which was located on the hill, was frequented by the Christian Democrats, the well-to-do, and friends of the only priest in town. The church at the very bottom of the valley, Madonna del Rosario, was favored by those who opposed the Democrats and the priest. During election periods, functions held at either church were boycotted by half the town.

Amato, the nearest town, was no further away than the length of a soccer field, but the two towns faced one other across a deep ravine. The road that led to Mulirena from Amato, and from the rest of the world, was built in a horseshoe shape. It ran along

the ravine on Amato's side for about a kilometer, and then turned sharply across a bridge and then sharply again toward Mulirena.

A kilometer off the road on the Amato side, just before the bridge, stood the Timpa, a low, wide mountain that had been quarried for as long as anyone could remember. This was the furthest that we walked before feeling that we were entering the territory of Amato. The residents of Amato considered us *cafoni*, uncouth mountain peasants, while the Mulerinesi snickered at the Amatesi for being pretentious snobs who were dying of hunger, *muarti e hhame*. The two villages were like Siamese twins joined together at the neck but wanting badly to keep their distance one from the other. If one town sneezed, the other, jolted by the vibrations, would sneeze back harder.

We girls never ventured as far as the Timpa alone. It was more a place for boys to meet at night, to sneak a smoke and find privacy. During the day at the Timpa, there was always a cloud of dust swirling around the beaten-up trucks that regularly drove in from Amato, loaded the dusty crop of rocks and gravel, and then drove off to Marcellinara and its freight trains. No one ever asked what the stones were used for. Every afternoon, sirens went off to warn people to go indoors. Then the mountain was dynamited and rocks would burst up like fireworks into the sky. It was only logical to use the Timpa for real fireworks on the feast of Santa Lucia. Then, everyone gathered across the ravine to watch and applaud as the mountain exploded with lights.

The bridge at the bend of the horseshoe was built high over a cleared section of the ravine. Immediately after the bridge, the road turned toward Mulirena, and from it, one could see the top of a long, stone staircase that gradually descended into the gorge. At its base lay the Funtanella, the town's communal fountains, and everyone's favorite

meeting place. Some liked to claim that this structure was built by the Romans, but the town was founded in the sixteenth century, and why would the Romans have bothered to build anything so deep into the mountains? At the center of the structure was a long, carved wall. Water flowed from the mouths of its gargoyles and chubby-cheeked faces and into a shallow, waist-high basin. The water jugs were placed in the basin to be filled with spring water, which was renowned for its clearness and coolness, and which was preferred to the water from the aqueduct. From the two sides of the fountain wall ran a system of long furrows, all along the sides of the ravine, and into which the water overflowed. Some of the water fell into low troughs for watering animals. Most of it was channeled into a more recent addition: a large, cement basin separated into four smaller ones, which were used by the women for washing clothes.

This was the town's gift to the women. Before the basin, the women carried the *lessiva*, the heavy straw baskets in which the dirty clothes had steeped in a mixture of water and ashes from the fireplaces, to the river, la Fiumara, which was a long way from town. Now the weekly wash at la Funtanella had become a social event for the women, who chatted, laughed, and sometimes sang, as they washed. The little girls went along and were given small items to wash, while standing on rocks.

Coincidentally, or so it might seem, groups of men—especially single men—took their *passeggiata* at the same time as the women did their laundry or filled their jugs with drinking water. But everyone understood that the Funtanella was the place to see and to be seen by the opposite sex. The men would walk, arm in arm, sometimes speaking in whispers to one another as though talking about forbidden matters, and sometimes arguing loudly about politics. They always stopped on the bridge. The women would be

scrubbing away on the concrete washboards below, trying to get the dirty laundry as white as possible—their husband's shirts, the baby's diapers, the long strips of white cotton used for swaddling babies like mummies, the heavy bed sheets, their own long white shirts, and those mysterious diaper-like squares of white cloth that they hid at the bottom of their baskets. No matter how hard they beat those *pezze*-rags, or rubbed them over the hard slabs until their knuckles turned red and cracked from the cold water and the caustic homemade soap, the women could never get rid of the shadows of the stubborn, brownish-red stains.

From the bridge, the men smoked, joked, argued and pretended indifference to what was going on below, but, depending on who was there, their gazes would dart down to the watery women's domain, down the winding steps to a floor made of ancient stones that were round and smooth from years of wear, that were also mossy, wet and very slippery.

The line of homes along the road along the periphery of the town started at the bridge. These homes enjoyed cool breezes in the summer but biting winds in winter. Their long balconies overlooked the Timpa, the cypresses of the cemetery in Amato, and the ravine. The town's garbage and bedpans had been dumped into the ravine for ages; but, all one saw, looking over the edge, were the thick bushes and the trees growing at a slant over the precipice. Along the whole length of the ravine, a stone parapet, as high as a child's shoulders, provided some protection for the children and a favorite place for men to sit and cool off on hot summer nights. It was also a great spot to wait for people to come in and out of Amato.

The road continued into the main street, Via Roma, which went down toward the poorer part of town in one direction, and, in the other, up a series of cobblestone steps to the upper church

The main piazza, at Piano Valle, sprawled just below the cobblestone steps, and was the dividing line between the upper and lower parts of town. In this area stood the school, city hall, and many shops. But it was Anselmo's bar that was the center of attraction for the men when they were in town. They sat on the chairs outside, sipping coffee and talking politics all day long. During the heated election periods, from a balcony above the school, the Christian Democrats and their adversaries shouted their *comizi*, which incited applause, catcalls, and occasionally, fistfights. In quieter times, during the major religious feasts, people brought chairs from home and sat around the piazza to watch the movies that Don Tommasino projected on a large, open-air screen.

Via Roma ran like a herringbone all along the spine of the village, with narrow alleys projecting off either side and then breaking up into other smaller alleys. Here and there, along this main street, were little squares, not quite piazzas, of which there was only one, but little enclaves of houses built around flat common areas and drinking fountains. The people who drank from the same fountain were identified by these neighborhoods, which in dialect were called *rughe*. They helped each other during harvests, and in times of crisis, but also fought and argued with each other—much like brothers and sisters. On summer evenings, the women congregated around one of the doorsteps, reciting the rosary, gossiping and telling stories, while the kids counted stars and chased fireflies. As night fell, going from one *ruga* to another was like crossing boundaries.

The *ruga* in which I lived, midway between the piazza at Piano Valle and the Church at the top, was called Piano Don Carlo. There were six families living in this square, which opened up onto the main road on one side and onto an alley on the other. Don Luigi, a descendent of Don Carlo, lived in the corner, L-shaped house with entrances on the road and on the square. Connected to Don Luigi's house was a row of houses, in which lived Mother's uncle Gaetano and his large family, then our family, and then Comare Rosaria and Compare Anselmo with their teenaged daughter, Lucia, and their two sons, Alfonso and Pietro. These four homes, had at one time, been part of the same mansion that had housed Don Carlo's family, as well as his horses, donkeys, chickens and pigs. We all still kept some chickens and a pig in the lower parts of each of our houses.

Directly across from our house lived Antonio, *u Gobbu*—the hunchback—with his sister-in-law Maria and a nephew. The rest of his family had immigrated to the United States, but he had been refused a visa because of his disability. Antonio never set foot outside his home, but he knew everyone's business. His house was a meeting place for all the unemployed young men who had nowhere to go. Maria was always heard complaining that she couldn't wait to join her husband in Brooklyn and get out of that den. Antonio spent most of the money his parents sent him from America on books and magazines and gramophone records. He also liked to entertain the neighborhood children who played with his nephew.

Next to Antonio's, and diagonally across from my house, lived Anna, *a pazza*—the crazy one. Her house had seen better days. It had been bombed during the war and they had never repaired it. The old woman and her husband made do with one room that

was no better than a stable. She had not always been crazy—only since the war. Her son was one of a handful of men who had never returned from the war. It was assumed he had been taken prisoner in Germany. The villagers were not too surprised by Anna's deterioration; it was accepted as almost normal that a mother would be so distressed; so, they just let her be.

Girotondo

As we reached Piano Don Carlo, Amedeo stopped talking about his problems and left. Father and I joined Mother, Comare Rosaria and Maria, who stood around the fountain. One could even sit on it since it was already dry—the water from the aqueduct was shut off in the middle of the day. As the days got hotter, the water supply was shut off earlier and earlier each day, and by the middle of summer, the fountain became a seating area.

I was getting restless just standing there, when I caught sight of an itinerant photographer walking slowly up from the alley with his heavy equipment on his shoulder. I nudged my mother. She suggested that the family have a photograph taken, since we were all dressed up. It would be the last chance for a family portrait before Father's departure. Also, in anticipation of her own emigration, Mother would soon be trading in her costume for regular clothes. My brother Luigi, true to his impulsive nature, and much to Mother's annoyance, had already changed into his summer shorts. Father was in his new brown suit, which would accompany him to the new country. My new organza dress was baby blue with crisp flounces on the bodice and hem.

The photographer, after carefully aligning his camera on a wooden tripod, first placed Father and Mother side by side, and then placed Luigi on Mother's right, with her hand gently resting on his shoulder, and me on Father's left, his arm hugging me firmly. The others watched, and after the picture had been taken, Alfonso and Pietro teased Father about his new suit and his impending trip. Everyone had an opinion or a comment.

"They have coffee cups as big as *pisciaturi*," Pietro said.

"But don't think that their coffee is like ours," said Maria. "Santo wrote to me that it's like drinking dishwater. But they drink liters of it each day because they work day and night. All he does is work, eat, and sleep."

"That's what he tells you, Coma," Pietro joked. "But they say that American women go crazy for Italian men."

"No, my Santo doesn't do things like that."

"Isn't that what he went there for? If you have work, food and a bed, what else do you want?" Comare Rosaria added.

Professore Nucci, a friend of Father's, walked up the hill and joined the discussion. As usual, he started a quarrel. He was not really a professor; he just liked to be called that. Once, someone heard him introducing himself to an outsider as *Professore* Nucci, and the title had stuck. He was still a bachelor at thirty, and lived with his two spinster sisters, who looked after him. He received a small stipend from the town for doing minor secretarial work, but he spent most of the day walking up and down the main street in a pensive mood, his arms behind his back, and holding a baton in one hand. Sometimes he would just stop, look up into the air, and move his head as though he were reviewing a musical score. He played the clarinet and was the assistant of the village

bandleader. He liked to think of himself as a *maestro* too, so sometimes they also humored him with that title. He had no relatives overseas to sponsor him, so no chance of ever being able to immigrate anywhere.

“I wouldn’t go there if they paid me in gold,” he said about Canada.

“Don’t worry *professò*; they only pay for professors like you in Mulirena. Everywhere else you have to work,” said Alfonso, who had a bone to pick with city hall for having refused him a position. Everyone laughed. The professor pretended not to hear them, and cornered Father, who was again holding me by the hand.

“Peppé, let’s be serious. Are you really going? What do you think you are going to find there?”

“Beh...work. I’m going there to work, like everyone else.”

“But do you know that they build their houses out of wood there?” he asked. “*Legno*,” he added, stressing both syllables for effect.

“*Professò*, you don’t have a family so you don’t know how it is. For me it’s an opportunity.”

“Mah! Are you joking? What opportunity? You are a *ma-stro*. You have worked in stone all your life, you have built palaces in Milano out of granite and marble, and now you are going to build *ba-rra-cche*. Mah, I don’t understand. You are a smart man and a musician. Let these *cafoni* go there.”

“Beh, if they give me work, I’ll build my own house out of cement and marble,” answered Father. I was surprised at how enthusiastic he sounded with his friend. At home, the evening before, he’d said that, when he received the official papers in Milano,

he'd been almost sorry he had initiated the immigration procedures. "I didn't jump up and down like the others, as if I had won the lottery," he'd said.

The professor made a last, grand gesture with his arms, addressing everyone now. "*Pa-ne e ci-po-lle!* I'd rather eat bread and onions all my life and enjoy this sun. Where else are you going to find a day like today? *Pane, amore e fantasia,*" he said with a flourish of his baton, repeating the words of a popular song that seemed to fit the drift of what he was trying to say, even though its meaning was lost on everyone else but him. He resumed his perpetual walk in the too-tight, too-short, beige cotton suit that he had worn for years.

Some of the younger kids were playing *Girotondo*. Mother took my branch and told me to go ahead and join them.

Maybe it was the song about spring and sunshine, that had filled the air, but by some magic, I watched as, one by one, all the kids and the adults from the *ruga*, as well as others who happened to be walking by, join the circle. The circle got so large it covered the whole square. It went around and around, past Comare Rosaria's house, where Compare Luigi and his daughter Lucia sat on the balcony waving at us. I could see Antonio spying from a corner of his window as the singing got louder and louder. I was in heaven! I kept looking at the adults' faces. I couldn't believe that everyone—including my mother and father—were playing like children and singing our song.

We ran around the circle, singing, "*Giro giro tondo, com'è bello il mondo.*" And at the end of each refrain, "*Casca la terra, tutti giu' per terra,*" we all fell down on our bums, laughing. We'd get up and start again, each time the circle turning faster and faster. But then, in an instant, everything changed! Just as we were finishing the last phrase for

the third time, someone pointed in the direction of old Anna's house, broke the circle and ran away.

“Watch out, *a pazza, a pazza, u pisciaturu.*”

People panicked. Old Anna came out of her door, running, carrying a big chamber pot and yelling at us to stop making noise. She hurled the contents of the pot at the crowd. Everyone scattered in different directions. I followed the spray of clear liquid in the air, then called and called, “Come back; it was only water.” I had expected that the singing would resume but no one came back.

Why had everyone given up so easily when the song had been so beautiful? I watched Mother go inside our house. Father disappeared into the alley, motioning downward with his arms, as if saying to me, “Don't bother me with this anymore. It's children's stuff. Leave me alone.” I felt so angry, angry at the old woman and at her son in Germany for ruining my feast, and especially angry at Father for dismissing me so callously. I cried like a baby when I found myself standing alone in the middle of the square.

PART I

It's the first week of October 1980, and images and people from around the globe and even from outer space creep in and out of Cathy Anastasia's consciousness and hyperactive imagination as she is fed the daily buffet of news by CTV and CFCF television:

...Voyager 1, the unmanned spacecraft, continues its epic journey toward Saturn, after having successfully photographed Jupiter from a distance of 349,000 kilometers. Its mission is to probe the planet's complex structures of moons and rings.... In the US, the election race between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan heats up as Reagan appeals to religious fundamentalists in a campaign speech... The Mariel boatlift, called the "freedom flotilla" lands hundreds of waterlogged Cubans onto the Florida coast. The exodus of 125,000 Cubans has given Miami the largest Cuban population outside of Havana...In the Middle East, Iranian air strikes against Baghdad hit a nuclear power plant... President Sandro Pertini meets with party leaders to put together Italy's 40th government since the Second World War. Italian Communist Party leader Berlinguer renews his demand that Communists be included in a new government. There have not been any Communists in an Italian cabinet since 1947...In Canada, in a historic speech, Prime Minister Trudeau unveils the "Canada Act," which would give Canadians control over their own Constitution... In Quebec, 2000 illegal immigrants from Haiti are offered amnesty, allowing them to file as landed immigrants... A summary of the Duchaine Report, commissioned by the provincial government to look into the circumstances around the October Crisis of 1970, is leaked to the press....Gerard Niding, once the chairman of Montreal's executive committee, appears in court to answer criminal charges of fraud, breach of trust and corruption in connection with construction work for the 1976 Montreal Olympics...Teachers' unions across the province are threatening the government with massive school disruptions...In Montreal, a hit man guns down a well-heeled Moroccan, Jean-Guy De L'Epine, a suspect in an international drug ring... An unnamed woman is found beaten unconscious on her kitchen floor, a victim of domestic violence...

On the morning of Friday, October 3, 1980, after her usual routine of showering, having breakfast, scanning the morning paper, and ransacking her closet, Cathy gets dressed for work...

Week 1

Friday October 3, 1980

How's Your Bird?

Nothing fit her properly that morning. Everything she tried on hugged and pulled. Stonewalled by her full-length mirror, Cathy seemed unable to get on with her day. The mirror frame unnerved her as much as her reflection in the mirror did. For the first time since she had unpacked it, she saw that its warm rosewood finish clashed with the yellowed, light-colored wood of the bedroom furniture that had once belonged to her parents. Maybe, she thought, it was time for her to dump the old set and invest in one that matched with the mirror. Frugality was not her overriding concern, though. Buying a mirror with Sean has been one thing, but convincing him to buy a brand-new bedroom suite, especially one that was so perfectly coordinated, would pose a bigger challenge. In any case, they both preferred an eclectic mix of styles. But on that particular morning, the clash of colors irritated her.

Jean-Pierre's voice from the kitchen irked her as much.

"Are you ready to go, old chap?" she heard him ask Sean.

JP, as he preferred to be called, was *pure-laine* Quebecois; the British vocabulary and accent had been adopted after a year's study at Oxford.

"We're on our way," Sean yelled from the kitchen. Cathy, not wanting to be seen in the dress she had on, just yelled back, without opening the door. "OK. Call me and let me know how it goes. Drive carefully."

JP was a close friend of Sean's, and had stayed with them overnight on one of his frequent visits to the city. Because he worked as an aide to the federal Liberal member of parliament, Nicola Di Principe, from the Montreal East riding of Anjou, he frequently drove into Montreal, especially during the Referendum for Quebec's independence. Di Principe was a key party organizer who worked relentlessly to raise funds and boost up the fortunes of the Federal Liberal party in Quebec. He had been instrumental in helping Pierre Trudeau make a comeback after the Conservative minority government, and helped him lead the party to victory, winning 34 more seats than in the 1979 federal election. He had also headed the Committee for a United Canada during the Referendum campaign, and had been credited with delivering the ethnic vote to the "No" side in his riding. Jean Pierre confirmed what had been speculated in the papers for weeks, that Di Principe would be appointed ambassador to the Vatican, and Jean Pierre was seriously considering running for office in a by-election for his boss's vacant seat. Over dinner, Jean Pierre had talked Sean into going to Ottawa with him to meet some key Liberal supporters. He had also tried to convince him to take a leave of absence from his teaching job and to work with him, in the event of a by-election.

But Sean had not jumped on the idea. During dinner, he had said, thoughtfully, "It'd be a real change in direction for me, from education to politics. I don't know if I could stomach it, working for the federal liberals... especially after the War Measures Act."

"C'mon Sean! Get out of that sixties haze, and wake up to the realities of the eighties," JP interrupted, as he refilled his glass with the Ontario wine he had brought. "This rehashing of the October Crisis is all nonsense. The people of Quebec spoke out in

May, and well over 59% gave us a vote of confidence. The PQ and separatism in Quebec will soon be ancient history. Anyway, even if you want to pursue a career in education—and not just a job, which is what you have now—politics is not a bad training ground.”

Sean remained quiet, and JP added, “You know I have lots of contacts, so why don’t you switch your major to Political Science?”

Sean was at Concordia University, working towards his Master’s degree in Philosophy, while working as a substitute teacher in Montreal. In spite of JP’s many contacts, Sean had been unable to secure a full-time teaching position, and the prospects of landing one were becoming increasingly dim.

“The Liberal party, at either level, is looking for young refined candidates with ties to the ethnic communities,” JP continued. “Just like you. Work with me on this one, and I’ll get you hooked on politics. Teaching in Quebec has become a dead-end profession.”

Cathy observed how, as was typical, Jean-Pierre had dismissed her presence, even as she served him a dish of milk-fed veal *scaloppini*. If she was Sean’s “ethnic” tie, as JP referred to it, the least he could do was to include her in the conversation.

“Would he be working mostly out of Ottawa?” she asked.

“It would all depend on what position I would fit him into,” JP replied. “But if the election is called, he’d be more useful at the grassroots level here, working the Italian constituents in the riding since he knows the language.”

“Well Sean’s idea of speaking Italian is to add vowels to French words—*la tabla, la chaisa, la porta*—and well, sometimes it works,” Cathy laughed. But Sean was too immersed in thought to find the comment funny, and JP rarely laughed at her jokes.

It didn’t take Sean long to plan the weekend trip to Ottawa. He called in sick early in the morning, so he could get a ride with JP. Had they waited until the following day, Cathy could have gone with them, but JP needed to be in the capital for a function on Friday evening, and Cathy had a meeting with her school principal in the morning. It would also have looked suspicious if both she and Sean had called in sick since they both worked for the same school board.

However, she would have appreciated it if Sean had said something like, “Too bad you can’t join us, Cat.” Instead he hadn’t even asked for her opinion about going away for the weekend, and he and JP had talked and drank scotch until way past her bedtime. Sean had fallen asleep on the living room sofa, while JP slept on the sofa-bed in the den, as he usually did when he was in town.

Cathy had been almost grateful to sleep alone, preoccupied as she was with the meeting on Friday morning at school about Carmy, one of her students. The last time JP had slept over, she had been tense and had told Sean to keep his noisy lovemaking down a bit.

“The apartment walls are paper thin,” she had whispered. “JP will hear us.”

“His ears are not that sensitive,” Sean had said.

But that had been the last time that Sean had reached out for her in bed.

Cathy had been in a bristly mood since the day before, when her department head, Nick, had asked her to call Carmy's parents and confirm their attendance at the meeting, since he had been unable to reach them. They were family friends of hers, and when she'd called, Lucia, Carmy's mother, had sounded as if she were half asleep and had forgotten about the meeting.

"I'll tell my husband, and see what he wants to do," she had said.

"Let me know if you can't make it," Cathy had said, strongly suspecting that they might not even show up after all the trouble she had gone to, speaking up for Carmy, who had moved to her school a month before.

Cathy hadn't seen Lucia in years, and felt awkward having to see her again under the circumstances. She sensed that, even if Lucia and her husband showed up, the meeting might not bring them good news.

Placing fifteen-year-old Carmy in her class had been the subject of a disagreement between Nick and Cathy. Cathy had stayed awake most of the night, thinking how to make her arguments with him, knowing that it would probably be futile. No matter how logical her reasoning was, he always seemed to gain the upper hand.

The problem, she thought, was that she wasn't much good at strategy when dealing with people like Nick. She believed in good faith, and expected fair play from everyone. However, next to Nick, who played every move like a cool chess player, her insistence on impartiality always looked obstinate and petty, and her gripes, those of a naïve do-gooder. It felt to her that the more she complained, the more she pushed herself into a picture frame that Nick had already drawn for her.

Carmy's presence in her class was disarming enough; she didn't want to butt heads with Nick about it.

"What did you expect from Lucia's daughter?" Cathy's mother, Teresa, asked when Cathy told her about the problems Carmy—Carmelina, to Teresa—had created in class. In Teresa's mind, characters and destinies were predetermined by the family one was born into.

Teresa had even tried to discourage Cathy and Sean from taking her bedroom suite when they moved in together, afraid that some of her dead skin cells in the mattress would contaminate Cathy with her bad fortune. Cathy, however, also saw her mother's argument as another feeble attempt to oppose their living together without the benefit of marriage, after her earlier, stronger protests had failed.

"At least change the mattress," Teresa had insisted, though it was as spotless as the first night she had inspected it, twenty-odd years before.

It was the same furniture that had awaited Teresa when she had crossed the Atlantic with her two children, to join her husband Giuseppe in the new country. Lucia, who had been the daughter of their next-door neighbor in Mulirena, had traveled with them. She had been not much more than a teenager then, almost the same age that Carmy was now. On the evening of their arrival, she and her new husband had eaten with Cathy's family. Before retiring to their new bedroom, Lucia and her husband had sat next to each other like the strangers they were, nodding as Giuseppe bragged about how he had purchased all of his home furnishings in one shot— including dishes and cutlery— one evening after work. Cathy could still remember her father's satisfied smile when Teresa had seen the furniture for the first time, lightly stroking the long dresser, the

highboy and the night tables. After a three-year separation one from the other, her parents must have felt like newlyweds in the brand new marriage bed. What sweet promise it must have held for them!

As Cathy got ready for work, Teresa's dresser, next to the sleek, freestanding mirror from the Danish House, looked ready for a flea market. Worse, the unmade double bed next to it reminded Cathy of a bargain table of used clothing. Piled all over it, like rags, were the clothes she had taken from her closet, tried on, and found unsuitable that morning: a royal-blue, knit skirt with matching beaded top, flared black pants, a couple of blouses, and a Diane Von Furstenberg wraparound dress.

Scattered next to her pillow, underneath the clothes were some magazines and a book, *The Betrothed*, which she had looked at while trying to fall asleep. But she hadn't been able to get through the first pages of this English translation of *I Promessi Sposi*, by Alessandro Manzoni, which she had borrowed from the library at McGill University, where she was still taking classes toward a BA in vocational education. She had searched for the book the evening that Lucia's daughter had shown up in her class for the first time. Was Cathy hoping to reacquaint herself with the girl's mother all over again? She had first read the book on the boat while traveling with Lucia. Now, she had been surprised to find an English translation of it. The prose, however, had felt stilted and forced, and didn't even help her fall asleep. In fact, she felt agitated from it. In between her worries about the meeting, she tried to remember whether she had stored her thick Italian copy in the old green trunk that was in her brother's basement, or in one of the boxes of unpacked books that were in the apartment building's common storage closet. She fell asleep half-dreaming of rummaging through box after box of used books.

“How’s your bird?” boomed the DJ from the clock radio on the nightstand, his voice accompanied by echoing bird sounds. Like any good morning man, he tried hard to jump-start the groggy brains of those who, like Cathy, had to be out of the house and into rush-hour traffic before eight. The need for repetition must be drilled into the students at radio school, Cathy thought. The morning man had blared the time, the weather and the traffic report half a dozen times since her clock radio had jolted her out of bed an hour before.

Normally she’d be out of the house by now, but after all the outfit changes, she still didn’t look or feel right. Of all days to look so bloated, she thought, as she glanced out the window for inspiration from the weather. Outside, it looked like a flawless Indian-summer day, jewel-bright and clear. Lucia had been slim and petite as a young woman, Cathy remembered. She wondered how much she had changed, or if she had become as matronly as some of the other forty-year-old women from the village whom Cathy met at weddings and funerals. She looked back in the mirror and cringed at how frumpy and pudgy she looked in the beige, linen dress. She should stick to tailored suits, she thought. Only a week earlier, in the store fitting-room, the same dress had looked casual and crisp, perfect for this transitional time of year, between leisurely summer and dress-up fall. But in the morning light of her bedroom, its light color and fabric seemed to accentuate every one of her curves that needed camouflage. Cathy could not bring herself to leave the house so nakedly revealed. What would Lucia think of her as a woman? Cathy had been only nine years old when they had traveled together.

Cathy’s body seemed to change shapes and sizes from one day to the next. Would it ever settle? She returned to the closet, but found little else that was worth trying. On her

way back to the mirror, she picked up a small blue disk from the night table, next to a half-full glass of water, and took her pill. It must be the artificial hormones—taken regularly and diligently to prevent a woman’s body from doing what women’s bodies were meant to do—that were thickening her thirty-year-old waistline and rounding out her hips.

Cathy had been on the pill for almost six years—since she and Sean had been going out together and had planned on finishing their studies and doing a bit of traveling before marrying and having children. According to this plan, Cathy should have been off the medication by now, but she and Sean were still tiptoeing around many of the smaller issues of life together, let alone starting a family. A few months earlier, the day after they’d brought the new mirror home and almost ordered new furniture, she had decided to give her body a break from the contraceptive and had stopped taking it. Her hormonal system had gotten so skewed, her dermatologist later explained, that it caused the skin on her face to erupt in hundreds of tiny volcanoes of inflamed pustules. Sean encouraged her to stay on the pill.

“It will kill two birds with one stone,” he’d said. But considering the frequency of their lovemaking, they hardly needed to worry about birth control.

After the traffic report, the radio announcer’s tone turned serious and he read the news flash, a repetition of the headlines she had already heard while having breakfast with Sean and Jean-Pierre: the gunning down of a drug-ring suspect, and a domestic violence story on a street whose name was familiar to her—it was just a few blocks away from where she lived. But the name of the victim in the marital dispute was not

mentioned. However, they did say that the family involved was connected to Jack Russo, a well-known underworld figure who often made the news.

Jean-Pierre had been surprised by the coverage the story received. "It's unusual that they should report a domestic quarrel when there are no confirmed deaths involved," he'd said. "Connected families don't take it out on their women and children. They settle their private affairs differently, wouldn't you say, Catterrina?"

"I wouldn't know," Cathy said, not bothering to correct his mispronunciation of her Italian name. "But I can't believe them tying such a story to the Mafia," she added. "It must be a really slow news day."

"Would you call it an ethnic slur?" Jean-Pierre asked. "I'm only asking because I want to understand how an "ethnic" would perceive the innuendo."

"It's not an innuendo when they report a family squabble and make it sound as if it's a mob hit. Actually, I find it funny. What I was trying to say is that news departments have a set of stock stories they rehash on slow news days... and they must have run out of those today."

"Such as?" Jean-Pierre asked. He had a habit of putting Cathy on the spot whenever she tried to make an original point in a conversation. Sean looked up from reading the paper as if to check out how she'd respond.

"Well... conflict in the Middle East... the Quebec government's disputes with public employees..." Cathy stammered. But she went on, "Urban crime in the city, and now domestic violence in the home. The news these days has not only become predictable, but... categorizable? Is that a word?"

“Yes,” Sean answered, folding the paper. “Maybe ‘generic’ might be a better term, but urban and city mean the same thing, and domestic and home are also synonyms.”

“Whatever. You know what I mean,” Cathy said, and then got up to get dressed. Whenever Sean put Cathy on the spot, especially when Jean-Pierre was around, she became completely inarticulate, so she preferred to walk away and leave them alone.

When she heard the story on the news for the second time, she wondered whether the reason the names of domestic violence victims and their assailants were rarely divulged was to protect their privacy or to sanitize the stories broadcast between screeching bird calls. After all, who wants to dwell on the charged emotions that lead to marital quarrels and on the ugly specifics of wife battery on their way to work?

“Five minutes to the hour,” the radio man reminded her. It was 7:55 already! Still facing the mirror, she lifted the two shoulder seams with her hands, and figured out the solution—shoulder pads! She grabbed a blouse from the heap on the bed, snipped off its shoulder pads with nail clippers, fit them under the dress’s shoulder seams, and secured them with a straight pin. The larger shoulder pads lifted and squared the shoulder line making her hips look less prominent. It was enough of an improvement to give her the confidence to go face Nick, though she hoped no one would squeeze her shoulders, as the pins made her feel like a prickly pear.

She collected the pile of *Vanity Fair* magazines from the bed, and then walked the length of a short hallway into the kitchen. As she grabbed her purse and car keys from the dinette table, she noted, with annoyance, how neat and tidy the kitchen was, compared to

the mess in the bedroom. Sean had tidied up before leaving. He always did, and was becoming as predictable as the news, Cathy thought. The way Sean corrected her choice of words in front of JP made her feel as if he was trying to apologize to his intellectual friend for her poor command of the English language. She should have retorted that at least her accent was genuine, and not a put-on like JP's.

In the morning, Sean had come into the bedroom very early for a change of clothes and to tell her that he'd be away till Saturday or Sunday. With so many regular teachers on surplus, even his position as a substitute teacher was not very secure. A degree in philosophy would hardly prepare him for a more secure career so maybe JP's suggestions had some merit, Cathy thought. She had listened to the two chattering away in the kitchen while Sean tidied up and she washed and dressed. They'd left without JP even saying goodbye, and she wondered if Sean had resented having to clean up after her. But who had asked him to? Cathy thought. It had made her feel uncomfortable from the beginning of their living together, to see him put away dishes, wipe counters and scour the sink with cleaning powder the minute they finished eating. She wasn't certain whether she should see this as a token of courtesy or a criticism of her housekeeping ability. One evening, she had asked him to please leave the dishes in the sink; she would do them in the morning.

"The world will keep on turning even with dirty dishes in the sink," she had said jokingly.

"That's a fine philosophical thought," he said. "But this is the way I like to live. I don't like clutter around me, and I don't need to be told what to do," he replied.

To avoid a confrontation, she'd said "Sorry," but with as much sarcasm as one word could possibly contain.

Cathy finally closed the door to the apartment and rushed to her car. Her three-year-old 1977 Pinto was parked outside the apartment on Cartier Street. She threw her purse and magazines on the passenger seat and started the car. There were so many thoughts going through her head, so early in the morning, that she felt as if she were in one of those wind-up toy cars that leap away from one's hands the instant they touch the floor, and run wildly around the room, smashing against walls and spinning in circles.

Carmy and Lucia

Carmy Mancuso was a special-education student who had been placed in Cathy's class on a trial basis, at the beginning of the school year. Carmy and her mother had moved into the city after living most of their life in Sainte-Rose, Laval, in a housing development that Lucia's brother's construction company had built. An only child, Carmy had spent most of her high-school life in special-education classes, mostly due to her poor behavior and poor attendance. In her fourth year of high school, the guidance counselors of the French school she attended informed her parents that they could no longer help her. They suggested an alternative day-program for school "phobics" in a hospital setting, either at Sainte Justine's or at the Montreal's Children's Hospital.

Cathy had laughed when she heard this new term, and figured that half of her school's population—students as well as teachers—could be labeled school phobics.

Lucia's mother, Rosaria, and Cathy's mother called one other *Comare*. Sometime in their shared village past, someone in each family had served as godmother to the other. Cathy never could keep track of all the *Comare* relationships, since they could go back a generation or two. Also, since Lucia and her family had moved to Laval, they had isolated themselves from the rest of the *paesani*, so she had seen even less of her than she had seen of the others. Then, at the end of the last school year, Cathy had been surprised to get a phone call from Lucia, who, as a last resort, had begged her to intervene for her daughter and accept her in her class.

"Catariné," she had pleaded, calling Cathy by her childhood name. "I don't know what to do with her anymore. They want us to go to a hospital and meet there every week with some people. Her father doesn't want to have anything to do with it, and I don't know enough French or English to understand anything. But they'll only accept her there if we agree to go as a family."

Cathy said she'd speak to the guidance department about it and told Lucia that the only problem might be her switching from the French system. The language laws made Carmy ineligible for English schooling, since neither of her parents had attended school in Quebec. While Italian parents and school administrators in Saint-Léonard opposed the law and formed classes of illegal students, Carmy's parents had left Carmy in the French school system. Also, at Cathy's school, the special-education students were still kept separate from regular students, though the guidance people spoke of integrating some of them into the regular stream.

According to Lucia, the main problem with Carmy was that she never took to the French school. When she started, she spoke only some Italian and the English she had

learned from her cousins in Montreal and from watching American cartoons on television.

Lucia explained, “The minute she went to the French school, she became a *babba*. She didn’t want to do anything. Then they put her in the special classes. But *babba* she was and *babba* she remained. I’ve had nothing but problems with her. But when it suits her, she can be very smart, and she won’t let a fly pass by her nose. Her father says it’s the fault of this bastard country we live in. I think that the country has nothing to do with it. It’s destiny that has to go this way. Look at yourself. You and your brother were raised here without a father and you never gave your mother any heartbreak. Maybe if she learns a trade like you did...”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Cathy had replied.

“Do me this favor. Our mothers were like sisters. They shared their sleep. Don’t you remember our *ruga*? I can still see you with that big pink *nnocca* in your hair. Your mother kept you like a jewel. You were always so clean and well dressed. We didn’t have much then, but we had everything that we really needed, didn’t we?”

The mention of that large pink bow, in dialect, had the power to transport Cathy to another life, for an instant. Sometimes a scent, a song or a picture could also spark an image out of nowhere. Yet, whenever she saw other *paesani*, of her parent's or even of Lucia’s generation, at weddings, funerals or first communions, she had stopped associating them with this other life. In their solidly built, all-stone, ceramic-tiled duplexes in Saint-Léonard, Lasalle and Rivière-des-Prairies, they had constructed for themselves and their families an existence that was far removed from their past one, and

yet, not quite in-step with the present. They worked and functioned in broken English, broken French and broken Italian, and had become “ethnics”—an entity unto themselves.

To Cathy, this older generation seemed to have become quite smug in this newly forged identity. To her surprise, when she started working at the school, she'd found that the younger generation—her students—seemed just as comfortable with it. It was Cathy's age group, the eager beavers, as she called herself and her friends who tried to straddle both sides of the fence, who had mainly felt the uneasiness of their predicament.

But Lucia seemed unchanged. She still spoke to Cathy as if she had just stepped off the balcony in Mulirena and called her at her house to give her some figs or cherries that her mother had picked from their large fruit orchard. This was the Lucia she had known before the trip. How could she refuse her a favor?

The Roadrunner

The yellow Pinto sped around the quiet neighborhood before turning west on Jean Talon Street. As usual, traffic was congested, and Cathy became more restless with every green traffic light that she missed. The car picked up speed as she turned onto Querbes Street, and into the working-class district of Park Extension. She turned on Durocher, on St-Roch Street, and then, made an abrupt stop. The automatic, metal-paneled door to the parking garage of William Hingston High School, which was usually wide open, was closed. This entrance to the side of the massive, cement-and-brick building, which sprawled over half a block, was at the end of a low incline, and to open it, she needed to get out of the car and insert a key into a small metal box on the wall next to the door. The

door had always been kept open for the morning rush. She couldn't remember when she last had to use her key, and she had never even noticed the black graffiti of Alice-Cooper-look-alike masks scratched into the paint.

She was fumbling in her purse for her garage key when she saw Mike Burns in her rearview mirror. He was the tall, lanky assistant principal in charge of student discipline. He pulled up behind her and got out of his car, keys in hand and walked to the box. Like Aladdin's cave, the huge, dark, low-ceiling car lot opened up for Cathy, Mike and the string of cars that had collected behind them. She drove directly into her reserved parking spot, and then walked briskly toward the exit door that opened onto a staircase. She was afraid of being late, so she didn't dawdle to wait for Mike, even though he usually volunteered tidbits of information about what was happening at the office. She walked down the stairs briskly, but Mike caught up with her partway down. He wasn't nicknamed "Roadrunner" for nothing. He was the only assistant principal who literally ran after the students who "joked" (the students' term for skipping classes). He was known to march into pool halls and snack bars around the school, and drag the students back to class, threatening to call their parents at work.

"What's with the closed door?" Cathy asked as they walked down the stairs.

"New directives from Mrs. C. She's tightening the screws...too much vandalism in the garage. You'll read about it in the bulletin."

Cathy turned her head to look directly at Mike and said, "Frankly, I think she's paranoid. Vandalism won't happen in the morning rush. I have a meeting with her this morning about Carmy. Any idea why she called it?"

“No. I wasn’t informed of it. Any problems that I’m not aware of? You seem worried.”

“I have no problems, but others insist on creating some,” she replied, and then continued in a low voice. “You know what I mean. Nick will do anything he can to undermine whatever I do... to put stumbling blocks along my path.”

“Oh, him....Well, Cathy, I know you’re friends with Carmy’s family, but is it worth all the fuss she’s created for you?”

“What fuss?” Cathy asked, raising her hands as though exasperated. “It’s Nick who created a fuss just to win his point. She’s doing OK as far as I’m concerned. And if she’s left alone, she’ll be fine. I was supposed to give Mrs. C. a report only in a month’s time, so I don’t understand the reason for meeting this morning.”

“Neither do I. It can’t be serious though or I’d have heard about it. Whatever it is, just stick to your guns, Cathy,” Mike said cheerfully.

“Ah, no matter what I do lately, Mike, things seem to get twisted around, and are made to look different than they are. Do you know what I mean?”

“Well, it’s the situation we’re in, Cathy. Student numbers keep going down, and everyone is nervous about their jobs. Everyone is looking after themselves these days.”

“Yes, but some people have no sense of fair play. No need to play dirty. It’s the nastiness that burns me up!”

The door at the bottom of the narrow staircase opened onto a cavernous room that was stocked with unused school furniture. Initially, the School Board’s plans had included an indoor swimming pool to be built in this area, but for some reason the plans had been put on hold.

Mike stopped there for an instant, as though wanting to make his point more privately. He said in a low voice, “No use complaining, Cathy. You should apply to be department head, get involved in school affairs, so the wrong people don’t get the upper hand. You know who I mean?”

Cathy hadn’t given the department head position any serious thought. But, as Mike was hinting, Nick would most surely get voted into the position again, despite the fact that he knew little about the department and that he and Mike didn’t get along too well.

It bothered Cathy to think of it, but all she could say was, “Yeah, but I don’t know if I’d have much of a chance, with the new administration and all. And you know how the department is—all those guys—would it be worth the bother?”

“You won’t know until you try, Cathy. Don’t sell yourself short. You’re as qualified as any of them, and the students like you. Anyway, it never hurts to apply, and it shows that you’re interested. That’s what I mean. You’ve got to look out for yourself, too. There’s a lot of politicking going on.”

“I’ve heard that before. You’d think they were running the FBI, for Christ’s sake. It’s only a school, Mike.”

“Yes, but look at the size of it!”

Other teachers were breezing by, and Cathy and Mike whispered their conversation as they walked into the school’s receiving area, which looked more like a large warehouse or manufacturing company. Their voices were almost drowned by another garage door, located up a ramp on their left, which was opening up for a supply truck. The truck would drive down onto this below-ground level, which also led to the

automotive classes. Cars that were serviced by the apprentice mechanics were parked here. The place, which was being used to store rusty old cars that had been donated or bought cheap for parts, resembled a junk yard. Teachers who came to this area from the indoor garage had to walk down the stairs, and then, to reach the school's basement level, had to step up onto a low loading dock, the height of about three regular steps. Wooden boxes were placed at the foot of the dock to assist short-legged teachers like Cathy. Mike took Cathy's elbow to help her climb the steps but she brushed him off, afraid he might touch her shoulders.

Sensing that he might have been offended by her brusque movement, she said, "I'm OK, Mike. I'm used to this by now." She added, "You'd think that with all the money they spent on this building, they'd have designed a better entrance for teachers, something more elegant than this."

"There you go, Cathy. You think about elegance when everyone else thinks money and practicality. You're the eternal idealist, aren't you?"

"Three cement steps is all I'm asking for, Mike, instead of these wobbly pieces of wood," she said, laughing. "I'm being practical here—and safety-conscious."

From the dock, Steve Pinchak, the head teacher, on supervision duty, walked toward them. He was tall, with a large chest, and carried his bulky frame around the school as though ready to take on an army of rowdy students.

"Mike, leave the pretty teachers alone," he said, putting his arms around Cathy. "Hi, beautiful, when can I get that appointment?"

His body radiated a dank heat. Cathy squirmed and wiggled her way out of the bear hug while continuing to walk, and almost tripped. Mike Burns came to her rescue. “Easy Steve,” he said, as if he were reprimanding a student. He helped Cathy regain her footing.

“It will be another while for the appointment, Steve. Give us another month at least,” Cathy said.

“I’ll give you all the time you need, Hon,” Steve replied, following them.

“Keep to your post, Steve,” Mike Burns said in a joking tone.

“Yessir,” Steve replied, snapping his hand to his forehead in a salute.

“Have a good day, Steve...and Mike,” Cathy said, as she turned left toward her classroom.

Mike walked closer to her and whispered, “There’s the problem, Cathy. Too many clowns in this school.” He turned right toward the elevators while she walked alone toward her classroom.

WHHS

William Hingston High School, built in 1972 and named after the first English-speaking mayor of Montreal, was conceived as a new breed of polyvalent high school. It offered technical-vocational workshops as well as business and general academic

education. It was modern Quebec's bold version of the principle of the little red schoolhouse that taught everything to everyone under the same roof.

Cathy had been hired to teach in the vocational department after working in industry for a number of years, and she couldn't get used to the transformation of the school buildings she had known. Her old high school, St. Pius X, had been a fairly large school too. She remembered long corridors with lockers on each side, orderly classrooms with neat rows of clean desks, and windows that opened and closed. That building had smelled of chalk and pencil shavings—not car grease and exhaust fumes.

The entrance at WHHS felt improvised, makeshift, and she often compared it to the schoolhouse she remembered in Mulirena. There, an ancient, thick, weather-beaten door, which had turned black over the years, led into an open courtyard with empty stalls that, at one time, had housed the donkeys, pigs and chickens of the household. She could still recall the lingering smell of damp earth and manure. From the courtyard, the children would go up a flight of stone stairs that overlooked an orange tree in the back of *U Gobbu's* home. The classrooms had large balconies that let in the sunlight and the scent of oleanders from the adjacent houses. She could still hear the incessant chattering of the housewives, and the robust voice of the village crier who interrupted lessons to announce the arrival of the fishmonger or other itinerant merchants. The schoolhouse, in the center of Mulirena, had been converted from a large home. But WHHS, which was designed from scratch by architects and engineers with a multimillion-dollar budget, had a greater population than the whole village of Mulirena.

WHHS was built on a residential cul-de-sac, on a stretch of land between the C.N. railway tracks and the backyards of a row of duplexes and low apartment buildings. East

of the school, on the other side of the tracks, was Jarry Park, home of the Expos baseball stadium until the 1976 Olympics. Despite its proximity, the park was not used much by the school. When the Expos played there, students would get free tickets for the opening games, but the stadium was used primarily for tennis tournaments—not a sport that particularly interested these students. Because of the railway tracks, the park and the stadium were accessible by a high overpass, right in front of the school's main entrance. The climb up the concrete stairs seemed to deter students from crossing to the other side on a regular basis. At street level, the park's greenery was half hidden by wild bushes all along the track's protective fence, and the stadium's backside looked like a cement mound with lights. The school building had no green space around it. Until one drove right into it, on Saint-Roch Street, it was hidden from view by the sheds, lines of laundry, and vegetable gardens of the residents of Durocher Street, which crossed Saint-Roch. When Cathy first drove by the new building, the bunker-like structure stood out—out of place, an anomaly, not what she had expected to see in this residential area.

On the first day of school, the teaching staff and support personnel almost filled the sparkling new auditorium where they were welcomed by the principal, Mr. Barnett, and his three assistants. Cathy felt excitement at being part of this new concept in education, and she sensed the same from the rest of the youngish staff. The principal extolled the new facilities: state-of-the-art auditorium, gym, music rooms, labs, shops and, in the future, swimming pool—not to mention the convenience of free indoor parking. Each of the three assistant principals took a group of visitors on a tour of the building, which was spread out over five floors. First, they were shown the academic classrooms on the top floor. The floor, which had staff rooms at each end, a large lounge

for teachers, and the chaplain's offices and a chapel, looked most like a school to Cathy. From its east-facing windows, one could look over Jarry Park and the seats of the stadium. The third floor, reserved for business education classes, science labs and darkroom for photography students, also looked impressive. On the main floor, at street level, they were rushed through the more operational parts of the building: administration offices, gym, students' lockers and entrance with a large foyer in which students gathered at recess and at lunchtime. The basement level provoked the most interest and curiosity among the teachers. After being guided through the cafeteria and home economics classes, they admired the shining stainless steel equipment of the professional kitchens for the cooking classes, the mirrored beauty salon with rows of hairstyling chairs for the hairdressing courses, and the industrial sewing room that looked like a small factory.

“Aren't kids today lucky?” the guide asked, and they all agreed: “We never had all this when we were at school.”

Cathy couldn't help noticing, though, how the lower floor with its bare cement-block walls had remained unpainted. As they went further down a set of stairs to the greasier shops—plumbing, construction, automotive, the boiler and storage rooms and the janitors' quarters—the windowless rooms appeared drab and claustrophobic. On that first tour, no one else seemed to notice this discrepancy, and Cathy assumed that, like the swimming pool area, this section would eventually be completed. However, the walls were never painted. Over the years, students had embellished them with their own graffiti artwork.

During recess and lunch, students congregated mainly on the sidewalks, or on a cement terrace adjacent to the backyards of the Durocher Street homes. However, when

inside, the permanently closed double-pane windows—meant to conserve energy—also sealed it off from the smells and sounds of the streets around it.

WHHS was a self-contained little hamlet with its own rhythm, timetables and rules of conduct—rules dictated by the assemblage of 2500 adolescents and by over a hundred teachers who, by and large, had never known any other world than the world of adolescents and schools.

Less than a decade after its inauguration, a malaise had set in among the staff—the same feeling of insecurity felt by the English population in Quebec in general, since the coming into power of the Parti Québécois government. The same government that employed English-speaking teachers and paid their salaries was also actively moving to make their jobs obsolete. There was an ever-dwindling pool of elementary-school students to draw from. During registration each year, each department fought to attract and secure the most students. Some academic teachers questioned the value of the shop classes and talked about how keeping them running was a waste of public money. The physical allocation of space to various departments—with the academic classes given on the top floor and the vocational classes in the basement—had helped establish a hierarchy of values that had set in people's minds, and along with it, animosity and Lilliputian-like confrontations bred by insecurity. As the government had started renegotiating some teacher's contracts, teachers across the province had been warned by their unions to get ready for a dirty fight.

The ethnic mix of the school had also changed with time. At first, the school population was primarily of Italian descent, Greek students not being allowed into the Catholic system. Since this law was changed, more and more Greek Orthodox students,

along with Muslims, Hindus, and a wide variety of ethnic groups had given the school a low-income, multi-ethnic, inner-city character. A vicious cycle had set in, and as with all cycles, it was hard to determine what started first: was it the teachers' malaise and indifference that contributed to students' restlessness or the other way around? In any case, WHHS had gained a reputation as a troubled school in need of help. The school board had decided that, like the dysfunctional families of many of its students, the school needed an intervention.

Mr. Barnett had a reputation as a flexible, teacher-friendly administrator who believed in settling disputes with gentle persuasion and diplomacy. During the good times, both teachers and students had liked him. Then, however, his soft administration style was blamed for the chaos that prevailed after the first few years. Mrs. Champagne, or Mrs. C, as she was known, was determined to tighten up the ship at any cost.

How's Your *Uccello*?

Most of the shop classrooms on the basement level were already opened, with teachers and students chatting before the start of classes. Cathy hurried toward Room 105. She should have gone up to the office on the next floor to pick up her mail and daily bulletin, but she decided to go straight to class, to avoid being considered late.

Cathy finally arrived at her room, the professional hairdressing class, and managed to open the door as the first homeroom bell rang. Two students, Franca and Fotini, both always on time, greeted her in the corridor. The others would trickle in slowly before the second bell.

Franca, alert as usual, noticed Cathy's new dress, "Oh, new dress! Do we have something special today, Miss?"

"Shouldn't every day be special, Franca?"

"Yeah, but if every day is special, then there are no special... special days. You know what I mean?" Franca said.

"You got me there, Franca, but it's too early in the morning for these discussions," Cathy replied.

"I think the teacher had a late night last night. She looks tired," Fotini said.

Cathy was used to students commenting on her clothes and speculating about her private life. During the summer before her first day of school, she had traveled to Italy and bought a whole new wardrobe there. On her return, she wore *longuette* skirts well below the knees—a trend that was not yet fashionable in Montreal. One student told her, in confidence, that a group of classmates was spreading the malicious rumor that she covered her knees to hide her bow legs, perhaps a result of too much lovemaking. She'd shared this innuendo with Sean, who had become very friendly with her since they had worked together organizing the first student fashion show. He had laughed out loud in the cafeteria when she confided that not only had she been unattached for years, but that she must be the only 25-year-old virgin in the city.

"In the country," Sean had added.

It was easy for Cathy to confide in Sean then. He seemed to be receptive to anybody and anything. He was part of the group of young teachers that Mr. Barnett claimed to have hand-picked from a large number of applicants. But Cathy hadn't paid any attention to him when she'd first met him. He had looked like a student himself, or an

earnest teacher-in-training. He had been hired as one of three permanent substitutes. When he showed up at school each morning, he never knew which teacher's shoes he would be filling. Because he substituted in every department, he became one of the best-known teachers in the school—and one of the most popular among the students. On days when he had no substitution duties, he still hung around the school, and was a frequent visitor to the hairdressing class. In the middle of his first year, he convinced Cathy to help him organize the fashion show. By the end of the year, they had spent a lot of time together and had started seeing each other outside school.

Cathy looked at Fotini without answering. Then, she placed her things on the desk and asked the two girls to set up a comb, a spray bottle and a mannequin for a demonstration. She walked back to the corridor, but not before checking her reflection in one of the many mirrors on the walls. Her face looked strained and dull. Beige was definitely not her color; she should have worn a scarf for contrast. She stationed herself in front of the door. She watched the procession of vocational students scurrying to classes, and waited for her own class to fill up.

When the polyvalent school opened, everyone, including the academic teachers, had found the school's mix exciting, and they had cooperated with each other in extra-curricular activities. While working with Sean in the fashion show, Cathy had coordinated the assistance of teachers from English, art, music, printing, photography and even science, to present a production that had parents, students and Mr. Barnett raving for weeks. Eight years later, these same teachers kept to their staff rooms, and ran out as soon as the bell rang. Student activities were organized by a paid principal's aide in charge of student life.

Cathy couldn't pinpoint when things had started changing for the worst at WHHS. The team spirit that had brought Sean and her together in the first place, also proved to be short-lived, maybe a flight of fancy, she thought, judging by the number of disagreements they were having.

Some of the other students—Angie, Voula, Olga and Christina—made it to class on time, but Linda, Gina and Carmy were not in yet. Cathy joined the class but left the door open. Students were considered late only after the teacher had closed the door.

The hairdressing shop and classroom had the same unfinished look as most of the basement. Counters that held rows of mannequin heads ran along three walls. These were used instead of patrons to practice basic hairdressing skills. Four shampoo sinks were installed along the fourth wall. Over the counters and shampoo sinks hung a row of round mirrors that reminded Cathy of portholes. Through them, she could see all the students' movements reflected, no matter where she stood. The students had decorated the unpainted walls between mirrors with a collage of hairstyle photos, which kept falling off the rough cement walls. A reception desk with a telephone, located in the center of the room, gave the class the appearance of a professional hair salon, even though the students wouldn't be ready to receive clients until just before Christmas, and even then, only one day per week. A poster on the reception desk had been hand-drawn by students: *Studio 105—The Amazing Beginners*.

As the students filed in, they sat on the heavy, hydraulic hairstyling chairs that had been pushed into the center of the room, beside the reception desk and facing the teacher's desk and a movable chalkboard. They had chosen to use this area for the theoretical lessons rather than move to and from one of the regular lower-level

classrooms. When they started working on clients, the hairdressing chairs would be moved back against the counters.

Cathy looked at her watch. It was past time to close the door. Nick, the acting department head for the technical-vocational section, peeked into the classroom and, with a broad smile, handed Cathy the daily bulletin, which he'd brought down from her mailbox at the main office. *He's smiling too brightly today*, Cathy figured. She had learned to read his smile. And now, it was uneven and lasted too long. She noticed the upper lip raised too high, the lower lip that looked squarish, and the immobile jaw. Morphology was part of her curriculum; she knew all about facial muscles, and how some of them cannot be made to lie. The amount of false radiance that is forced out of a smile has a direct correlation with the degree of deception behind it. His smile told her to keep her guard up. She didn't even trust the small, thoughtful gesture on his part. It could be construed as a statement that technically, she'd been late since she hadn't had time to pick up her mail herself before coming to class.

"Don't forget the meeting. Did the parents confirm?" he asked her with the same disconcerting smile.

A group of male students, who obviously listened to the same radio station as Cathy, made chirping bird sounds as they passed by. Nick turned to them and told them to keep quiet.

One of the boys responded, "How's your *uccello*, sir?" and they continued down the corridor, making the same loud sounds.

"What a zoo," Nick said, shaking his head.

"Well, at least they're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed," Cathy said, forcing a laugh.

“You can say that again! Is Carmy not in yet? Is she still coming in late?”

“She’s not in, but she’s been getting much better lately. Yes, I did call the mother to remind them. She hopes the father is able to make it,” she replied.

“I hope so, too. God, what’s with these special-ed students? If they’re not absent they’re late,” Nick said, and left, shaking his head.

Cathy shuffled the papers on her desk and took attendance.

The hairdressing group, now in Grade 11—their last year—was made up of nine students, all girls. Four of them—Gina, Linda, Voula and Christina—seemed to be cut from the same cloth: tight jeans, knit tops barely covering their midriffs, long, below-the-shoulder hair with a center part, heavily made-up eyes, and pouty, glossy lips. Linda was rumored to be an aspiring nude dancer; Gina, to have had some type of affair with a married teacher. Based on their appearance, if not on their ability, the four would probably find employment in the stylish, trendy downtown salons. The three other girls—Franca, Angie and Fotini—were more modestly dressed, family-influenced, and conservative. They aspired to work in the prosaic, little neighborhood beauty salons along Park Avenue, and maybe eventually, to own one.

Carmy stood out from the rest of the class, and made very little effort to fit in. She was as slim and shapely as most of them, but her tight pants were a grungy, black polyester fabric, rather than trendy jeans, even though she could afford to buy more stylish clothes. Cathy found it surprising that Carmy had befriended Linda and Gina, the two most fashion-conscious students in the group. Carmy’s hair was short and curly, with no definite shape. Heavy and unshapely eyebrows gave her a somewhat sinister look, but

it was her thick lips that stood out as her most prominent feature. The lips pouted not in the self-conscious, sexy fashion of the other girls, but in a perpetual sneer.

Cathy had yet to figure out what lay behind that sneer. Did it disguise hatred, fear, mistrust, or just a bad hereditary disposition? Her mother's temper could be easily provoked from what Cathy remembered, though she could be coy and pleasant when it suited her. Her uncle Alfonso was known to short-circuit easily. Cathy remembered that, as a young man in Mulirena, he was always at odds with the others around him. Since he'd settled in Montreal, he had developed a real estate business, and had become wealthy in a short period of time. Cathy didn't know Carmy's father personally since he wasn't from their village. She had seen him a few times in the early years after arriving in Canada. She had spoken to him on the telephone the week before, but he had not sounded very friendly. Cathy had almost lost her temper with him. She had heard that he was a loner and didn't socialize much with the rest of the *paesani*. He was a contractor and worked closely with his brother-in-law Alfonso. Between the two of them, they had built and sold many of the new residential developments in Laval.

When she first met Carmy, Cathy wondered whether anyone would ever be able to break through her façade, or whether anyone would ever care enough to try. Carmy certainly didn't make it easy for anyone to take a liking to her. Her first interaction in the class had not been very promising. Considering the trouble that Cathy had gone through to have her placed in her class, and considering their family acquaintance, Carmy didn't show any sign of appreciation. When Cathy asked her to put her gum in the wastebasket before coming to class, she could swear that she saw Carmy mouth the word "bitch" as she reluctantly threw out her gum.

Cathy had given her the usual talk about class rules and regulations—the dos and don'ts— personal cleanliness, punctuality, dress code, no gum chewing, no swearing, no loud talk or gossiping between students. “Always pretend there are clients present, even when you are just working on the mannequins or on each other's hair. Always act professionally,” Cathy told her, as she handed her the short uniform smock that was part of the dress code.

“Why should I wear that ugly thing?” Carmy asked.

“Well, everyone in the class has to wear it. It's more professional.”

“Nobody sees us down here in the basement. This is not a professional saloon.”

“You mean salon.”

“Salon, saloon. What's the freaking difference?”

“There is a difference,” Cathy replied. “Using the right language when speaking with the public is very important. People will judge you by the way you speak. This business is all about impressions and image. A saloon is a bar... like in the westerns. A hairdresser works in a hairdressing salon in English, and a *salon de coiffure* in French.”

“Oh, now you teach languages too?” asked Carmy with a smirk.

The rest of the class had laughed, and judging from the look on her face, Carmy enjoyed the attention.

Cathy thought the exchange had gone far enough, and tried to wrap it up. “I think we're getting off the subject here. So look, Carmy, you have two choices. Wear the uniform and stay in this class, or don't wear the uniform and go back home.”

But Carmy wasn't ready to give in. "It's bullshit! This is a pretend place with pretend clients," she said loudly, pointing to the mannequins on the counter. "You've been saying it yourself. So just pretend I'm wearing it."

Well, maybe, this kid is much smarter than she looks, Cathy thought, and wondered whether Carmy also thought of her as a pretend teacher.

Cathy couldn't stall closing the door much longer. She looked at the daily bulletin and read the first part meant for teachers. It asked teachers to lock the garage door as soon as they had entered the garage, to avoid vandalism, since some problem students had been spotted there. She then read aloud the section for students:

For students:

This is an important notice regarding the recent vandalism in student bathrooms. A teacher supervisor will be assigned to each of the student bathrooms during recess and lunch breaks. Toilet paper dispensers will be installed outside the bathroom doors, where they are visible to the supervisors. Students are to take their toilet paper before going into the bathroom stalls.

"No way!" "I can't believe this!" "Are they for real?" the students interrupted.

Cathy quieted them down, and continued reading:

If this measure doesn't stop the abusive use of toilet paper, we will then be forced to ask students to bring their own paper from home.

We also want to remind the Tech-Voc students that they are not permitted to use the teachers' bathrooms on the basement level.

This last warning provoked groans and more complaints from the small group.

"Oh Miss, you mean we've got to go all the way to the other end of the school, even if we have a bathroom right in front of the class?"

Cathy thought the directive was unreasonable and difficult to monitor, but she said, "That's precisely what it says. Don't expect me to open the teacher's bathroom anymore."

"That's not fair. They're treating us like kids."

"Girls, don't complain. You are lucky to have bathrooms. When I went to school, we had a hole in the floor for a bathroom."

"What century was that, Miss? You don't look that old."

The hole in the floor did seem to belong to a different century to Cathy and she was often amazed to think about how different the world she had inhabited as a child had been.

Carmy was still not in. Cathy would have to close the door and mark her absent. Maybe she would be coming later with her parents, Cathy thought.

She took a last look down the corridor before closing the door, and saw Linda and Gina running toward the class. They were late as usual. "Don't close the door, Miss!" Linda pleaded. Cathy impatiently motioned to them to hurry up.

"Miss, did you hear the news?" Linda asked. They both quickened their steps in their high-heel shoes, their breasts wobbling in their tight knit tops. Seeing Cathy's blank expression, they both blurted out, "Carmy's mother..."

"What about Carmy's mother?" Cathy asked.

"She's at the hospital," Linda blurted out as she reached the door. "Carmy called us this morning and told us she was found beaten, and is almost dead. Her grandmother found her on her kitchen floor... Her head was smashed by a stick or something."

The morning news! Now Cathy remembered why the street name had sounded familiar. It was Comare Rosaria's address—Lucia's mother. Her address was on the registration forms Cathy had helped Carmy fill out.

“Quiet!” Cathy yelled at the students who had huddled around Linda and Gina, who were repeating their morning conversation with Carmy. She asked them to open their Standard Textbook of Cosmetology, Chapter 11, on Finger Waving, and to start reading it quietly. Then she looked up Comare Rosaria's number and called her on the class phone.

After the fourth ring, an uncertain, elderly voice answered. “Allo.”

Cathy was sure it was Carmy's grandmother. “Allo, Comare Rosaria?” Cathy said in dialect.

“Yes and who are you?” the woman asked.

“I'm Caterina, Teresa's daughter.”

“Ah, Catarinella? *Bella mia*,” she said, almost wailing.

“Yes, why didn't Carmelina come to school today?” Cathy asked, trying not to sound alarmed.

“Ah, Catarinella mia, what has happened to us? What has happened to us?”

“What happened?”

“My Lucia... yesterday, I found her half dead... beaten on the floor...and she's still unconscious.”

The Finger Waving Lesson

For the morning's class, Cathy had planned to use a mannequin head to demonstrate direct finger waving, a hairdressing technique that had gone the way of the flappers and of prohibition. But after speaking to Rosaria on the phone, she was edgy and couldn't concentrate. She took the thick *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology* from her desk, and leafed through it for a few minutes. The book had an accompanying workbook. Cathy asked her students to open it to the fill-in-the-blank exercises on finger waving, and to copy the answers directly from the textbook, a mindless exercise that would keep them occupied while she sat at her desk, thinking.

Comare Rosaria, with a voice choked with emotion, had barely managed to explain that, the previous evening, she had returned home after visiting her son Alfonso, to find Lucia unconscious on the kitchen floor. Carmy had been out with her friends. She suspected Lucia's husband was responsible, but he had disappeared. She explained that Lucia had moved from her home in Laval to live with her mother in Montreal, when Carmy had started school. Her husband, unhappy with the decision, had called constantly, trying to convince Lucia to return home. The old woman hadn't had any news about Lucia since the previous evening. Carmy had gone on foot to the nearby Jean-Talon Hospital, and Comare Rosaria was waiting for Alfonso to come drive her there. The old woman kept repeating herself, and Cathy told her that she would call later to speak to Carmy.

Cathy tried to remember her call to Lucia the previous evening. She had spoken to her at around four-thirty. By early evening, Cathy had almost wanted to call back, but then had become busy preparing dinner for JP and Sean. She figured she had done her duty by calling once. Could her call to Lucia about the meeting, or a call Cathy had made to Carmy's father a week earlier, have sparked an argument between them? She felt guilty, even though she still had no idea what had actually happened. Why was it, she thought, that she should still feel responsible for Lucia's welfare?

Linda and Gina kept whispering with the other students, despite Cathy chiding them to work quietly. The class couldn't settle down, but Cathy still needed a few minutes to get herself together before starting her lesson. She thought of informing the school principal, but then decided to wait for the meeting. Maybe the office had already been called and knew more about it than she did. She also dismissed the idea of telephoning her mother yet, afraid to hear, "What did I tell you about getting involved with Lucia and her husband again?"

The workbook exercise couldn't sustain the students' attention until recess, so Cathy forced herself to give the demonstration on finger waving, as she had planned. She asked the students to form a semicircle around her and around the mannequin that had been prepared earlier. To make the lesson more relevant, she pulled out pictures from *Vanity Fair* magazines she'd found in an antique store. It showed some fashion plates of the flapper era, the models sporting perfectly waved hairstyles.

Cathy liked to introduce this lesson by talking about cycles in fashion, and about how hairstyling, as well as fashion in general, reflected the changing mood of a period in history, usually a decade. It took that long, she told them, for a look or a shape to be

conceived of by the trendsetters, adopted by a few avant-gardists, take hold and become popular with the public, and then die down and be replaced by something new.

“Like everything else, fashion trends come full circle. They go through a cycle of birth, growth, and death. The rule is that ‘fashion stops being fashion when it becomes fashionable.’ And then, the wheel of fashion starts turning again.”

Reading from her notes, Cathy lectured on how the clothes and hairstyles of the Roaring Twenties had represented the spirit of merriment and abandon that overtook America during the era of jazz, prohibition, speakeasies, and the advent of movies. The twenties also saw the beginning of hairdressing as a profession practiced in commercial establishments.

"Until turn of the century," she told them, pulling out more pictures, "women still wore long dresses, frilled lace blouses, and long hair tied in a bun—the Gibson Girl look. Women pinned up their hair on their own, or if they belonged to the privileged class, they had attendants, seamstresses and private hairdressers at their beck and call. The First World War had changed all that. As more and more women worked for the war effort, they needed more practical clothing. In the New World especially, there was a movement toward greater freedom for women, and the Suffragettes fought not only for women's right to vote, but also for their right to cut their hair. The first women who cut and bobbed their hair were considered disgraceful. Clergymen preached from the pulpits, ‘A bobbed woman is a disgraced woman,’ and incited the public to treat them as outcasts, as a threat to society and the family.

“But women kept on cutting, curling and coloring their hair against public opinion and they haven’t stopped since... and lucky for us,” Cathy concluded.

“Miss,” Franca said, waving her hands excitedly. “I found a name for our salon. It’s perfect. You just said it.”

“What is it?” Cathy asked.

“Cuts, Curls and Colors.”

“That’s a catchy name,” Cathy replied. “You’ll have to make a poster.” The whole class seemed to agree. They had been searching for a new name to advertise their services. “Amazing Beginners,” which had been used by the previous group, had offended some of the students.

“The old name makes us look as if we don’t know what we’re doing,” Franca said.

“But let’s go on with the lesson,” Cathy said, and tried to wrap up the introduction, as she felt the class getting restless. She told them that Irena Castle, an American dancer, was one of the first women to wear her hair cut and waved, and that soon, others followed the trend. New products for coloring and perming hair were also being mass produced. The new techniques required skill and training. Thus, professional salons were established, and hairdressing became a recognized profession.

“Good thing. What would you have done for a job, Miss?” Franca asked.

“Well, who knows?” Cathy replied.

“Fashion designer,” Fotini said. “I can see you doing that.”

“Let’s go on with the lesson. This isn’t about jobs,” Cathy said impatiently, and then absentmindedly sprayed some water on the mannequin head.

Her mind had wandered to images of speakeasies and bobbed hair, and to the stories that her grandfather Luigi had often told the family during Sunday lunches in

Mulirena, about his life in America in the early thirties. He had immigrated to the US at the insistence of his brothers-in-law who worked on the building of the Brooklyn Bridge.

“They called us dagos,” he’d remember. ““You got a knife, dago?” They always asked us if we wanted to go in and see a movie. That’s what they called us Italians: dagos. But that was before Mussolini made the world respect us.”

He had left New York for a while, and gone searching for lighter work in the farms of Upper New York State. He'd even traveled to Canada for a short stint, and told his family about how he took part in a Fascist parade in Montreal, wearing a black shirt.

“Italians there were different—less American. They were not ashamed of showing their black shirts there,” he repeated time and time again, as he drank his wine, and spoke of dumb men in baggy pants and half-naked women, "with short hair and even shorter brains."

Cathy continued the lesson. “Finger waving is the most basic of hairdressing skills in that it is performed with only a comb and the fingers of both hands,” She spread her right hand, with a waving comb grasped between her thumb and little finger.

Then she passed one hand over the other and said, “Most of all, this exercise teaches both hands to work together. One hand must follow the other, and know instantly what the other hand needs. This is the most important and difficult first technique to master.”

Cathy always waited at least a month or two before covering this lesson, to give students a chance to develop their manual dexterity through other exercises. The technique itself was simple enough to describe, and she drew a zigzag pattern on the board.

“To form a wave with your hands and comb, you must move the hair from one direction to another, like this, forming a zigzag pattern. But for the wave to stand out, you must accentuate the ridges and indentations...but not too much, or it will look distorted.”

She showed them many different waved styles, which varied depending on the way the hair was parted. On the mannequin, Cathy demonstrated the Pompadour style, which was a waved head of hair with no parts and one continuous unbroken wave. Starting at the center of the forehead, she commented on each movement: “Shape the hair in a semicircle with the right hand and comb; press with the middle finger of the left hand; as you shape another semicircle in the opposite direction, a ridge is created; press and accentuate ridge with middle and index fingers of the left hand, but don’t exaggerate; now shape another semicircle, like a valley, in a direction opposite to the first one; another ridge; another valley and so on.”

“It looks easy when you do it,” Angie said.

“This part is easy, but the secret is to move and hold the hair firmly enough to form a pattern without forcing it. The difficult part is to continue the wave along the whole surface of the head. The width of the wave can change. In fact, it’s more interesting when it does.” Cathy demonstrated how the wave opened up at the crown and then tapered off toward the sides.

“You mold it to the shape of the head. And depending on the length, thickness and texture of hair, and the size of the head, each style can look different.”

Cathy instructed the students to practice the first two movements on their own mannequin to get the feel of it. She walked around correcting their postures, the angle at which they held their combs, the stress they used to pinch the ridge of the wave between

their two fingers. She repeated her instructions to each student as she guided their hand and comb movements. Some students picked it up almost instinctively, and wondered what all the fuss was about. Others were all thumbs, and couldn't coordinate their two hands to work as one.

“One hand follows the other. Each hand must complement the other,” she repeated.

Lack of eye-hand coordination is what psychologists call some people's inability to perform these types of manual exercises. Cathy could tell from this first try which of her students had the potential to become good hairstylists. They displayed ease in forming smooth, well-balanced and clean waves, without too much help from her. But no matter how hard some tried, their attempts ended up looking like forced, zigzagged clumps of sticky hair. Others lost patience and never bothered to practice beyond the first lesson, saying the technique was outdated anyway.

She wondered what it was that made some people find the perfect balance of give and take, pull and push, while others could only manage to widen the irregular gaps between each other, until their differences drew them into an irreconcilable abyss. Looking at the drawing on the board, she wished she had a better trick to help her struggling students, and realized that the zigzag drawing was all wrong—it looked like rows of triangles and was too pointy to illustrate the rounded and fluid movements of a wave. Zigzagging also implied uncertainty, a stalling of sorts, a going forward and retreating without a clear destination. But her drawing skills were as limited as her verbal ones, and she wished she had the right teaching device to express the beauty of the undulating line, flowing freely into peaks and valleys, unbroken, endless...

Carmy Was Here

At recess, Cathy walked up to the main office, where Mrs. Champagne and Julie, the guidance counselor, were waiting. To her surprise they hadn't been informed of the morning's events. Mrs. Champagne confirmed that the secretary had called Carmy's house to check on her absence but had received no answer.

Nick joined them. He had heard the story from Linda and Gina during recess. "It seems the family is... well-connected, Cathy," he said with a smile.

"I think that's an exaggeration. Carmy's father and uncle are in business and they have contacts with all types of people."

"What kind of business?" Mrs. C asked.

"Construction and real estate."

"Aren't they also in the importing business?" Nick asked. "Calabria Foods belongs to them, I believe."

"Oh, that's the younger uncle who looks after it," Cathy said. She had forgotten about Pietro, Lucia's younger brother, whose company imported food products from Italy and sold it wholesale.

Mrs. Champagne went straight to the point of the meeting.

"Well, I have already met with Julie and Nick, and they have decided to send Carmy back to her own school board. This was the reason for the meeting. This new information makes me think that the sooner the better."

“Why?” Cathy asked, looking at Julie. “It’s only been a month, and Carmy seems to be getting along fine.”

“Well, there are just too many irregularities with this student. I would never have accepted her in the first place. She’s from another school board, has no eligibility certificate, and is a problem student. To top it all off, yesterday, I received a report that she vandalized the teachers' bathroom. And it had been made clear to her that, at the slightest violation, she would be out of here. She was warned.”

“Are you sure about the vandalism? She did ask for permission to go to the teacher’s bathroom... I opened it for her. It was during class time. I thought that it would be less disruptive than to send her to the end of the hall.”

“Yes. You know now that students are not to use those bathrooms. And please, try not to let students out of class during regular class times. There is no supervision in the hallways then.”

“Yes, of course. But are you sure that it was her... about the vandalism, I mean. Are you sure it was her?”

“You’ll go and check it out for yourself and you’ll see that there’s no doubt. Now this new development does present a problem. How seriously was the mother hurt? Do you know?”

“No, the grandmother couldn’t give me too many details. It sounds as if Carmy's mother is out of danger, but she may still be unconscious.”

“I’d say it sounds like she got a good beating. It’s too bad. I’ve seen these cases before. Unfortunately, the wives rarely press charges once everything boils over, and they

return home. Chances are the family wants to keep it quiet, or someone would have called this morning to inform us.”

“Carmy lives with her grandmother, who doesn’t speak English, so I doubt that she even thought of calling.”

“Her uncle’s family could have taken the time to make a phone call if they had been concerned,” Nick added.

Mrs. C continued, “We haven’t been informed officially, and no names were given in the news, so we don’t know what has happened. What I fear is that if Social Services get involved they may try to keep Carmy in school until her mother gets better, and then it will be more difficult to get rid of her later.”

She looked at Julie and said, “Julie, don’t inform them. The meeting was called a few days ago. By the time Social Services receives the school’s report, the mother may be back home.”

“I don’t understand why we can’t give her another chance, especially given the circumstances,” Cathy said.

“Cathy, I know you mean well, but it can be argued that this student needs real professional help, which you cannot give her. But I want her out primarily because she’s a problem student, not because she is a learning-disabled student. We have enough problem students of our own without taking on the problems of other school boards. These are not the types of students that we try to attract to our school, and quite frankly, Nick is right. We will never promote your courses and our school properly when we have to deal with these problems. You’re not trained for it. If the family wants to keep the

whole thing quiet, it's their choice. And if rumors are true about the family, why get involved further with these types of people? We'll proceed as planned."

Cathy didn't know what else to say. She looked at the others. The counselor sat there with a grave expression, but didn't dare make a comment. Nick didn't have to say anything. He had already had his say, no doubt, and he seemed pleased with the new developments.

"Maybe I should try to call the family again?" Cathy asked.

"Not in the name of the school. I am sending them a report making the same suggestion that the last school made. She needs help that is not available at the school level. It's up to her parents to make the effort to see that she gets help. They obviously can also use a bit of help themselves."

As the others left the office, Cathy wondered whether she should stay behind and try again to convince Mrs. C that, in spite of how things appeared, Carmy and her family were not a threat to the order she was trying so hard to establish. Cathy was trying to find the right words, but Mrs. C cut her short.

"By the way, Cathy, this is not a formal reprimand, but it would be appreciated if you would try to come in a few minutes before the students. It would set a more professional example for them. And do try to stick to the rules about the teachers' bathroom. We are not out to win popularity contests here."

There was not much else Cathy could add. She noticed a pile of application forms for the position of department head, on the desk. Undoubtedly, Nick had brought his in on time. She kept hers in her purse. She didn't think it was the most opportune time for her to apply. As she left the office, one of the shoulder pads felt loose, where her purse

strap had hung. The pad was about to slide down her back. The linen dress was full of creases, and stuck to her thighs.

She thought of going to Julie's office to try to speak to her about the decision, but Nick was hanging around the corridor.

"Do they have any ideas about the beating?" he asked.

"The grandmother seemed too distressed. I didn't want to pry too much."

"Well it's not surprising,"

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you know that her mother wanted to separate from her husband? That's why they moved to the city, you know. It wasn't just for Carmy's sake. Carmy was just an excuse for her to leave her husband."

"How do you know that? You don't know the family."

"Oh, Cathy, Cathy, you're so naive. I know more than you think. Carmy was beginning to talk to the girls. Hers is a pretty mixed-up family. Well, you must know; you're related to them."

"I'm not actually related to them. We're just friends. You know, *paesani*."

So he had heard it from the girls, Cathy guessed. She had noticed Linda and Gina spending their recess and lunch breaks in his classroom lately. Maybe she was not as naive as he thought.

"Imagine, after twenty years of marriage, she decides she wants a divorce. She's put up with him for twenty years, and now that they're getting old, she wants to leave him. Can you blame him for the whack on the head?"

The male teachers often made obnoxious remarks in jest, just to shock the ladies and get them started. This time Cathy didn't even bother to humor Nick with a smart remark. She felt queasy and somewhat undone. She walked away from him.

She tried adjusting the shoulder pad, but it had slid down her back, and she couldn't find it. Before going to the bathroom, she stopped at the cafeteria for coffee and a pastry, hoping to appease the nervous worm gnawing inside the pit of her stomach. Life without Carmy in her class would probably be a lot easier. But, whether or not the two of them were related, Carmy was part of Cathy's world, one she so hated letting go of, giving up, giving in. Somehow, she would have to find some way of holding on to Carmy!

There were still two minutes left before the end of recess. Cathy went into the teachers' bathroom to slide her dress off and find the errant shoulder pad, and to check on whatever vandalism Carmy was accused of having committed. She broke into a broad smile when she saw **CARMY WAS HERE** written in bright red marker, in large scrawl, and unmistakably in the girl's handwriting.

Without hesitating, Cathy walked straight to the classroom to call the social service agency.

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Sent: August 30, 2004, 9:00
To: aurora publishing@net.ca
Subject: info on school

Dear Franco,

I've faxed you an article that I found in my archives, and that appeared in *The Montreal Star* on Thursday, November 16, 1972, on the inauguration of WHHS, the school at the center of the story.

The photo that accompanies the article may not come through very clearly. It's of Cathy, my friend, the writer, whom I know as Caterina Anastasia—the usual shifting of name/identity that occurs in this country. She's surrounded by a group of smiling teenage girls and some mannequin heads. It's an interesting picture, as it's almost difficult to distinguish the teacher and the girls from the mannequins.

I was present at the inauguration of the school, along with other representatives of the ethnic cultural communities: Nicola Di Principe, who was still in provincial politics; Jean-Pierre Picard, his assistant and an aspiring politician; and other local and provincial dignitaries. Reporters from *Pulse* news, *The Montreal Star* and other mainstream media were also present. I'm certain that Picard's skills as PR man for Di Principi had a lot to do with the inordinate amount of attention that the school opening received. I had just started the *Gazzettino* and received an invitation to cover the event for the Italian community.

Di Principe, Picard, and the school principal—a Mr. Barnett—all seemed very chummy, which made me wonder, even then, whether this friendship had been instrumental, if not in the building of the school, then at least in creating a brouhaha around the inauguration.

At the time, I couldn't help but ask myself how it had been possible to erect such a mammoth English institution, in a period in which French school boards were scrambling for students to keep their existing schools open. English families were not procreating any faster than French ones, so it all had to do with the cunning of the English school administrators, who received with open arms the influx of Italian immigrants into their schools in the late fifties and early sixties. I've done some reading on this subject, and would you believe that, in the sixties, a new English school was built every six months? Apparently, the English religious authorities convinced the Montreal Catholic School Commission that the new immigrants would be absorbed into the Protestant school boards if they didn't make room for them. Talk about influence of the church! Now this generation, the children of immigrants, find themselves cut off from the language of power in Quebec—a lost generation!

In retrospect, WHHS's eight-year plan proved to be short-sighted, and I would say that it showed total disregard for the political realities of Quebec at the time. Study after study proved the potential extinction of the French language and culture in Quebec.

Luckily the PQ managed to take the bull by the horns in time to protect their language and culture with Bill 101—the Liberals' Bill 134 was nothing but a halfway measure, meant only to appease French sentiments. Of course, it would not have taken a very elaborate study to realize that the effects of limiting access to English elementary schools would be felt at the high-school level four or five years later, and therefore, that a school like WHHS would become a white elephant after only a few years of activity. And a waste of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. If I remember right, the school closed its doors in 1989—only 17 years after its opening—and I rest my case!

At the inauguration, I was very surprised and delighted to meet my *paesana* there. She had just been hired to teach a hairdressing course. This was the first time I had seen her after our day at La Ronde, in '67. She had become an attractive and chic young woman. I was quite impressed by her demeanor, and I complimented her on her elegant clothes.

"Bertucci's in Catanzaro," she said. "I went on a shopping spree there."

She had just returned from a trip to Italy, and had visited her grandparents in Calabria. But we didn't have a chance to exchange more than a few desultory remarks about the school and about our respective families in Mulirena.

"No one's left there," she said. "The place looks like a ghost town."

That place had always felt like a tomb to me, but her words had a strange effect on me. I got a sense of the absurdity of the two of us standing in the foyer of this cement-and-brick monument to Quebec modernity, yet encoded with the blueprints of centuries-old traditions from such an incongruous place, Mulirena, unknown to everyone present but the two of us. I wanted to broach the subject of her writing, but felt sheepish for having ignored her for so long. I just mumbled that I had been so busy with setting up the business and the newspaper that I had had no time for keeping up with friends.

"Yes, I know...there's never enough time. Congratulations on your new business. I've been just as busy myself. And now, I have to take courses for a teaching degree."

"Congratulations to you too. You've done well. Who would have thought I'd see you here?" I said.

"It's a small world, isn't it?" Caterina said with a nervous giggle and a smile.

Then Picard interrupted us. He arrived with Di Principe and asked for a photo, and I obliged.

Franco, what do you think of the manuscript so far?

Incidentally, look at page 78, at the reference to the Fascist parades in Montreal during the 30s. Maybe the digression needs to be cut, but I left it just so I can pose the following question: is it not a shame and a scandal to have to be reminded of this Fascist tradition in Montreal every time we attend a function at the Mile End Church? Something should be done by the Italian community to wipe this stain off its reputation. What do you think?

AA

From: Franco Bastone <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
 Sent: September 1, 2004, 3:00:03
 To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
 Subject: Re: Info on school

Antoine,

Yes, I've read the first chapter, and it does pique my interest, but I still don't quite see where it's going. It covers a period of time that is of particular interest to me. As you know, I also started becoming involved in publishing Italian Canadian writers in the 1980s. What was it about the eighties that made us baby boomers want to become entrepreneurs? Isn't that also the period when you and Carole finally called it quits?

I'll answer your last question first. The reference to the *fascio* activities in Montreal brings to mind not memories, for I wasn't around for any of it, but the controversies surrounding the internment of 300 or so Italians in Petawawa. Trudeau's War Measures Act of 1970 spawned a commission to study its effects on a handful of people, but who has ever taken notice that the War Measures Act of 1940 was adopted on the same day that Mussolini declared war on the Allies? In one single day, hundreds of Italians, many of whom were full-fledged Canadian citizens, were declared *enemy aliens* and were arrested and detained in camps like criminals, for the sole reason that they were Italians. No one spoke up about ethnic profiling then!

Antoine, can you imagine those stuffed black shirts in Dieni's musical band, parading and playing *Faccetta Nera* on the feast of Saint Anthony, as having the know-how to form a fifth column, as the authorities feared?

Like you, I resent the manipulation of some of the church leaders of the time, who immortalized Il Duce over the altar at Notre-Dame-de-la-Defense Church, under the pretext of honoring the Concordat. But it's part of the history of the community. Can we erase history by painting over a painting?

I think we should be a little more tolerant of that early wave of immigrants, who saw the Duce as the savior of Italy and as a defender of Italian honor abroad. After all, many came here in the early twenties, when he was garnering the respect of many world leaders. He was perceived as being the first Italian leader to give emigrants a sense of dignity, when he passed the decree to call them *Italiani Oltre Oceano* and not emigrants. Is it ironic, coincidental or suspicious that, almost a century later, Italian politicians are trying to gather Italians living abroad into a block, under the appellation of *Italiani Nel Mondo*, and to give us the right to vote in Italian affairs? I don't know about you, but I don't trust their motives. (And doesn't Berlusconi strut like Il Duce?)

I've done a bit of reading myself. (See *Fascism and the Italians in Montreal* by Salvatore.) The French-Canadian elite of the period, and the proponents of nationalism—those like Groulx, Duplessis and the clergy—feared communism most, and they were great supporters of the ideals of Fascism, especially the cult of authority. They probably longed for a French-Canadian Duce, a leader to free them from the upper-middle class, the *Anglais*, and the urban lower-middle class: the Jews. Money and ethnic votes, anyone?

I find your take on the school situation quite biased. Maybe a certain manipulation occurred on the part of the English church administrators, but their French counterparts (and I base this opinion on the oral reports of earlier immigrants) didn't welcome the children of the early immigrants with open arms. When the nationalist bean counters finally woke up and realized how much ground the English system had gained, and suddenly needed the numbers to keep their schools opened, Italians were not too flattered by the Piper's call to switch language sides. They figured that, as tax-paying citizens, they had acquired the right to choose whichever language they saw fit to educate their children, who were born in this country. When does someone stop being considered an immigrant?

Our children became the pawns in the linguistic tug-of-war between the children of the two founding nations. But let us count our blessings. We have come a long way from being called dagos, enemy aliens, Italians Across the Ocean, and now Italians Around the World. What will the children of our children be called?

Franco

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>

Sent: September 1, 2004, 3:23 :01

To: aurorapublishing@net.ca

Subject: Re: Re: Info on school

Yes, Franco. Carole and I parted ways a few months before these events unfolded, but we had grown apart long before that. I'll deal with your last question when I have more time.

A

Friday evening, October 3, 1980

Sean and JP

Cathy returned home from work to a spotless kitchen and to a bedroom in a state of total disorder. She thought of Sean and JP chatting in the morning, and of Sean placing dishes and utensils in their proper places while she dumped clothes on her bed, oblivious to the tragedy that had developed at Rosaria's home. Lucia and Carmy had preoccupied her all day, and Sean had taken a backseat in her mind. Feeling paralyzed by ill-fitting clothes or worrying about a job prospect seemed so insignificant compared to the life-and-death situation Lucia was in, but Cathy's fixation with her physical appearance was a frivolity she could never rise above, a personality flaw that niggled at her every day as she put clothes back into her overstuffed closet. As for Sean, she didn't expect him to call from Ottawa, though she had asked him to; he wasn't the type to pick up a phone just to let her know he had arrived.

"Never had to do it," he told her the first time she was upset at this lack of consideration toward her.

The den in which JP slept had also been tidied up that morning. The only sign that someone had used it was that some books had been rearranged on the shelves that lined the room. JP may have skimmed through some of the books while trying to fall asleep. Whenever he stayed with them, JP seemed to take over the apartment, and Cathy was always on edge, making sure everything was up to par. To prepare for his visits, she

bought the best cuts of meat, the best cheeses to go with the wines that Sean bought for him. And yet her efforts always felt inadequate.

“He’s discriminating. He’s always lived well,” Sean had said about Pierre’s tendency to breezily criticize the quality of foods and wines. Sean kept reminding Cathy that, while JP could afford the best hotels in Montreal on his expense account, he chose to stay with them out of friendship.

“I think he’s cheap,” she had replied. “Or just an opportunist. He’s been in politics too long.”

JP had been groomed to run for office, and seemed to be assured a successful political career. During Friday’s dinner, he had told them, he expected to visit Montreal more often in the coming months to look for an apartment and to become better acquainted with the constituency, which was made up of a majority of ethnic voters. JP would most likely be running against a Conservative candidate of Italian origin, and he had stated quite openly that his friendship with Sean and Cathy was an asset that the party would want to use.

“Are you ever going to get married, you two?” he had asked as Sean poured him a glass of wine.

Neither Cathy nor Sean had answered since this was a subject the two of them had not discussed in a while.

Cathy wasn’t flattered by JP’s sudden interest in their marital situation. Despite his many visits, she had never developed a close friendship with him. As he talked about their marriage, he swished wine in his glass and brought it up to his nose, as though he were paying more attention to the wine’s bouquet than to Cathy’s reaction to his

statements. He then brought up Sean's possible involvement with the party. But what irritated her was the fact that he seemed to take it for granted that Cathy would also help him in his campaign.

When the telephone on the kitchen counter rang—even before hearing the worried, incredulous voice on the other end—Cathy knew that it must be her mother. She called every day like clockwork

“*Madonna mia*,” she said. “You must have heard about Comare Rosaria at school. How could it be? What did they say there?”

Cathy told her the little she had heard, but her mother knew just as much. By late afternoon, some of the *paesani* had found out about Lucia's beating, and Tina, Cathy's aunt, had called Teresa to tell her.

“Poor Comare Rosaria. She's at the Jean-Talon Hospital. I'll have to go see her. You'll take me, won't you?”

It was a very Calabrese thing to do, to rush to the hospital as soon as the news of a close friend's sudden illness was learned. These visits had become contentious between Cathy and her mother. She felt uncomfortable rushing to someone's bedside, unless they were close family members or it was a happy occasion, like a birth. Each time, Cathy tried in vain to explain to her mother that, if the illness was serious, most people, who were in distress, just wanted to be left alone, and that it would be more appropriate to simply call or send flowers. But, for the Calabrese, the desire to show concern by making themselves physically available was stronger than common sense. By being present, they meant to say, “We will leave everything behind: the cooking, the dishes, and even work if necessary, to be here with you. Nothing in our daily life is as important as the health of

your loved one. You can count on us to be here for you.” Offering assistance by telephone did not quite mean the same thing.

“OK. I’ll take you. I’ll pick you up at about seven,” Cathy said. This time, she wanted to go to the hospital and get more news from the family. She also hoped to see Carmy to tell her to expect a call from the Social Services agent, and to give her advice about what to say.

There were plenty of leftovers from the night before, so she didn’t have to prepare dinner for herself. She considered going to the basement storage closet to look for her Italian copy of *The Betrothed*. Instead, she decided to hang the pile of clothes on the bed back into her crammed closet. Going through the boxes of old books would demand more time and energy than she had after the eventful day—and she still had a long evening of facing Lucia’s family and friends at the hospital ahead of her. She’d look for the book in the morning.

She remembered its heavy feel and its thin pages of small print, which she forced herself to read on the boat coming to Canada. She had read most of it on deck, while keeping Lucia company—sometimes with a queasy feeling in her stomach. Could she have foreseen then that Lucia’s fate would be so dreadful? The book’s heroine was also called Lucia. The book’s Lucia lived in a village with her widowed mother, and was betrothed to marry her childhood sweetheart, Renzo. As a nine-year-old reader, Cathy had given the Lucia of the book the same face as the Lucia she knew, and she imagined that the misadventures of the unfortunate fictional couple happened in the area around Mulirena, territory that was familiar to her. The Milano of Renzo’s tribulations was also familiar: she had often heard her father talk about that city. And now her friend Lucia was

in a near-death coma, and Cathy knew so little about how her life had unfolded after they had traveled together on the boat.

Since she had been living with Sean, Cathy had seen less and less of her family and friends from the village. But that Lucia's immediate family would be associated with the mob, as was suggested by the media, was simply impossible as far as Cathy was concerned. Lucia's older brother, Alfonso, had married into a family known to have a connection, also by marriage, to Jack Russo. But Cathy couldn't imagine Comare Rosaria in the company of such people, any more than she could imagine her own mother cooking for and entertaining known criminals. That the private problems between Lucia and her husband were receiving so much attention was clearly a result of the media's penchant for sensationalizing anything remotely associated with Jack Russo, a good-looking, dark-haired man in his fifties, who was reputed to be the head of the Montreal Mafia. He had a criminal record and had, as a young man, spent time in jail for manslaughter. But in recent years, Russo had seemed immune to prosecution despite all the shady dealings attributed to him. Whenever Cathy saw his picture in the papers, she cringed, for he was also of Calabrian origin, like her.

Comare Rosaria

Cathy ate the veal left over from the previous evening, put the dirty dishes in the sink, and then drove all the way to NDG, in the city's west end to pick up her mother. Luckily, after supper, the rush-hour traffic on the Decarie Expressway had eased, and the drive was not as long as usual. The day had been sunny, but the days were getting shorter,

and it was almost dark when she got to the modest bungalow on Trenholme Street. Teresa was waiting for her at the door, wearing the somber face she reserved for funerals and hospital visits. She was already bundled up in her navy-blue fall coat, and in the blue scarf that Cathy had matched for her. Cathy had stopped buying anything but blue for her mother: lighter tones for the summer, and darker shades for the winter.

Before getting in the car, Teresa asked, “*Mangiasti?*” as if they would go back into the house if she had not eaten. One thing Cathy could always count on was plenty of leftovers in her mother’s fridge. When everything was eaten up at a meal, her mother worried that she hadn’t cooked enough. Cathy often found herself worrying about the same thing when she invited people for dinner.

Luigi had been attracted by the established, older homes in NDG when he moved to Montreal. Most of the older Mulirenesi in Montreal had remained in the east end of the city, learning to function in French, while many Amatesi had settled in the west end and spoke English. Their uncle Gaetano came from Amato. At first, he had bought the duplex on Trenholme Street as a rental property, but then he had moved into the lower unit. Cathy stopped there to pick up her aunt Tina, who was also waiting at the front door.

In the car, driving back east toward the hospital, Teresa kept going on and on about her poor Comare Rosaria. Cathy had to remind her that it was her daughter, Lucia, who was beaten unconscious. But Cathy figured Teresa was probably putting herself in her friend’s place, feeling what a mother would, having to witness a daughter’s tragedy. Cathy couldn’t imagine how distraught Teresa would be if something similar happened to her.

Teresa and Rosaria had been friends since childhood, and so had their husbands, who had both played in the town band. Teresa often told Cathy about how the two men used to gather their other musician friends in the evenings and take turns serenading the girls. This tradition of serenading seemed to have been lost after the war. Cathy couldn't remember anyone doing it while she lived there. Maybe it was because most of the young men were away so much of the time.

The Anastasia and Abiusi families had moved in one next to the other after they married, into homes that had belonged to their respective families. People didn't move frequently, and houses remained in families for generations. The way people were connected through houses represented the alliances that families had made throughout the years. Though Teresa and Rosaria were not related by blood, the fact that they had shared this home was a kind of unspoken tie between them. They had been godmothers to one another's children, and they called one other *Comare*.

Rosaria was related to Don Luigi, a major landowner in the village, and she had also owned some olive groves and other land. Before and during the war, her husband, Mario, had worked at city hall and had supervised his wife's properties, which provided them with a livelihood. Aside from Lucia, the family included two sons, Alfonso and Pietro.

Mario's political fortunes had changed with the fall of Fascism, since he had been one of the most loyal followers of the movement, and a friend of the Fascist mayor. He also suffered a war wound that left the right side of his body paralyzed. He could still move around the town but was unable to trek to the countryside by the river to oversee the harvesting of olives. Every year, groups of women from the countryside and from the

village were hired to pick the olives off the ground, one by one. It was back-breaking work. In payment, they received their yearly provision of the dark-green, emerald-colored olive oil. After Mario's incapacitation, his oldest son, Alfonso, tried to take over, but he wasn't cut for the task. Apart from the difficulty of handling so much land, the times were changing. Getting women to pick olives became increasingly difficult. The peasants were emigrating one by one to the States, Canada, Argentina, Australia—anywhere they could. Those who couldn't emigrate left for the northern cities. Most of those left in the villages had relatives overseas who sent money orders in every letter—not huge amounts, but enough for them to buy their own olive oil in the grocery stores. The younger girls stopped going to the country altogether.

As Cathy drove the long stretch of Jean-Talon Street, she listened to Teresa and Tina recount how the fortunes of Comare Rosaria's family had changed since the war.

“She hasn't been fortunate at all,” is how Teresa put it. “After Compare Mario returned, all he could do was walk with a cane to the bar every day and talk politics. Poor Comare Rosaria couldn't keep up by herself, and her children were not much help either.”

Maybe, Teresa said, they had been a little spoiled. Like most of the other young men, the younger son, Pietro, had tried going to Milano to work, but he came back after only two weeks and became the butt of a joke around town.

“Remember the *pasta asciutta*?” Tina asked, and they laughed.

When Pietro came back from Milano unexpectedly, he seemed at a loss to explain why he could not get used to the life of a laborer in the big city. He simply said, “Come lunch, who would cook my pasta *asciutta*?”

The phrase made the rounds, and not a day went by without poor Pietro being asked, “Did you eat your pasta *asciutta* today?”

So, in the early fifties, when most other families were hoping to find a way out of the village, this family had no relatives overseas to sponsor them or send them money. Comare Rosaria was faced with a sick, despondent husband, an ineffective older son, a younger son who drifted around the village without a trade, and Lucia, who spent her days embroidering her trousseau on the balcony, like all the other village girls.

“Once you girls started wearing tight skirts, high heels and nylon stockings, who could get you to pick olives, or even go for wood,” Teresa reminded Tina, who was the same age as Lucia. “It still hurts me to think of those beautiful olives rotting on the ground.”

Fare L'Amore

Outside the hospital, Cathy and Teresa ran into Filomena, a distant cousin of Lucia's husband. The woman tried to speculate on what had happened. She confided that the man, ten years older than Lucia, had been a very strict and jealous husband. She also mentioned the fact that Lucia had decided to stay in the city to be with her daughter against her husband's wishes.

“But surely she knew her husband by now,” Filomena said in the elevator. “Could she not have made other arrangements to avoid problems? And their daughter, Carmelina, has always been a cross to them. Who knows what might have happened? We shouldn’t be too quick to judge things,” she told them.

As Cathy had expected, the corridor near Lucia’s room was packed with family and close friends. Alfonso, Lucia’s older brother, was there, greeting people and repeating the story that everyone had already heard. He couldn’t really explain what had happened because Lucia’s husband couldn’t be found. He told Cathy that Carmy had been at the hospital all day, and was now on her way home. Cathy had missed her. She told Alfonso to relay the message that she would call her in the morning, but she couldn’t tell if it had registered with him.

The hospital staff at the Jean-Talon Hospital was familiar with the habit that some Italians had of filling up patients’ rooms during visiting hours. They allowed only two visitors at a time. Teresa and Cathy and Tina waited in the corridor while Filomena and another relative went in. Tina struck up a conversation with a friend.

When their turn came, Teresa and Cathy walked into the room timidly. Lucia lay unconscious on the bed, connected to tubes and catheters, her face half-covered by a respirator mask. Short wisps of tinted hair with grown-out roots spread out on the white pillow, in between the head bandages, like reddish brown spiders with gray dots. Cathy had not expected to see a stranger, even though she hadn’t seen Lucia in over 15 years. What she remembered was a slim and vivacious young woman with long, curly hair, like a soft cushion of puffy springs around her face. She had been proud of her hair, and it had

been part of her reputation as a village beauty, together with her heart-shaped mouth and spirited black eyes, and a beauty mark like an exclamation point below her lip.

Under the covers Lucia still seemed very tiny and slight. Comare Rosaria sat next to her bed, oblivious to the people coming and going. They shook her hands and kissed her, not saying much. Rosaria moved her head as though grieving for her daughter in the old Calabrese custom, wailing in a singsong trance. *Oh Lucia, Lucia mia... cchi te capitau a ttie... Oh Lucia, Lucia mia...*

After leaving Lucia's room, Cathy and Teresa made their way to a small waiting area at the end of the corridor. It was considered impolite to just pay their respects and leave. Depending on their closeness to the family, people stayed for a while, if only to sit and stare. Only the women sat in the waiting room. The men walked around the corridors or looked for a place to smoke: if they sat with the women, they might have had to talk about what had brought them all there.

Cathy recognized many of the ladies. They smiled warmly at her. Teresa was well liked and respected by all of their *paesani*. She was especially admired for having raised her two children by herself after her husband died at a young age. In their eyes, this family had done very well for itself, except maybe for the fact that Cathy was living with someone without being married.

Many of the ladies were Lucia's contemporaries, maybe only a decade older than Cathy, but they looked and carried themselves like middle-aged women. These were the women seen scampering out of buses on their way home from working in the factories around Chabanel or Saint-Laurent Streets, Cathy thought. In drab-looking clothes, with no hint of make-up, they were nondescript, almost invisible, as they rushed toward home

thinking of the evening meal, the washing, the ironing, the preparing of lunches for the next day. This routine was rarely broken for the sake of a leisurely outing by themselves—only to visit ill friends or to attend a funeral.

As she looked around the room, Cathy tried to remember what they had looked like in Mulirena. They had been young women then. She remembered Rosalba, who was sitting across from Cathy, with her sister Antonietta. Their family had lived next to the church. Rosalba looked after the kindergarten kids, and was her Catholic Action group leader. She had played the mother in a play about Saint Bernadette; Cathy had been the saint. Rosalba had also had a beautiful singing voice, and had led the children's choir. Once, these women must have been as preoccupied with their appearance, with boyfriends, with finding and securing their happiness, as any other young women from other places, other times. As they sat on their balconies embroidering their pillowcases and sheets with delicate little flowers, hearts and butterflies, they must have daydreamed about the nights when they would share those worked linens with a soul mate made to measure for them. How many found one? Lucia certainly hadn't. Now in their late thirties, the women Cathy saw seemed like efficient, selfless, almost asexual housekeeping machines, whose personal aspirations and desires were not worth talking about, nothing but silly, insignificant nonsense next to the needs of their families. Who would ever be interested in their stories?

Tina had been a close friend of Lucia's, and she returned from the room and sat next to Cathy with moist eyes. She was Cathy's youngest aunt and she liked chatting with her. She was usually very talkative and jovial, and as soon as she sat down, a whispered conversation began.

“Alfonso says she might be in a coma for a long time,” she said, wiping her eyes with a tissue.

“*Madonna mia*, I still can’t believe it,” replied Teresa.

“Who would have believed it?” said Rosalba.

After a few minutes of silence, Tina whispered to Cathy, “Maybe you don’t remember, Cathy, because you were so small when you came here, but Lucia was one of the most beautiful girls in the village.”

“I remember,” Cathy replied softly. “I spent eleven days with her on the boat.”

“It’s true, you traveled together. What an ugly destiny she’s had,” added Rosalba.

“I don’t want to think of that trip. But who could have known, then?” said Teresa, almost apologetically.

“When she was young, in Mulirena, she could have made love to anyone that she wanted,” said Tina. Then she added, in case Cathy hadn’t understood what she meant, “Making love for us didn’t mean what it means for you here, Cathy.”

The women all laughed. “In Mulirena, we made love without touching each other,” said Antonietta.

Cathy knew what they meant. *Fare l’amore* was what the ritual of courtship, as it had been practiced for centuries in that part of the world, was called. Even though many marriages seemed arranged by families, in reality most of the young people did some preliminary selecting and arranging of their own. In the very restrictive society of the village, where women and men, and even boys and girls, knew how to keep their distance, sexual tension and interest started very young. Most preteen- and teen-aged girls, strolling to the Fontanella to fetch fresh spring water in the evenings, were

conscious of the long glances that the young men gave them. Messages and love notes were delivered by younger brothers or sisters, who were given a few goodies to keep them secret from parents. Once some interest was kindled, the young man would station himself under the girl's window. If she were keen, she'd peek out or come right out onto the balcony. They might exchange a few words, but mostly, they communicated with their eyes and gestures. Whenever anyone saw a young man slouching against a wall and looking up at a balcony, they said that the couple *faceva l'amore*, was making love. Some couples did this for hours at a time, each day for years, before they were ready for an official engagement and marriage. When the families were agreeable to the relationship, they pretended not to notice the young man gawking at their window. Though, sometimes, if the girl spent too much time on her balcony, they might threaten to shower the young man with dirty dishwater, or worse. However, if the family objected to a particular suitor, or had other plans for the girl, this wooing had to be kept discreet.

In the waiting room, the women chatted quietly among themselves. The sound of their voices and of Rosaria's wailing, which was audible from the patient's room, made Cathy drowsy. She leaned her head against the cool wall. She closed her eyes and remembered a time and place in which Lucia was a young woman making love, and she was an eight-year-old girl sitting on a doorstep, playing and watching...

The Package from America

By Cathy Anastasia

In a secluded square, during the most somnolent time of the day—between the end of the midday meal and sundown—I sat serenely on a doorstep, pouring and re-pouring water from a small water jug into tiny teacups. I wore a satiny red skirt with a pink lace trim at the hem, a white cotton blouse with a Peter Pan collar and a small black bow. My thick, chin-length brown hair was kept neatly off my face by a large pink bow. The clothes I wore and the toys I played with are vivid focal points of this picture. Remembering them still gives me a feeling of pure delight and joy.

I usually hated these uneventful weekday afternoons, when the usual slow pace of the village became even slower. Since most adult males were away working, the town was left with old people, women, children, a few aimless young men with no occupation; and shopkeepers who closed their shops for the siesta.

The women were not siesta takers, did not even know the meaning of the word. On this late summer afternoon, when the air was beginning to cool, my mother and Comare Rosaria had left for the countryside, looking for twigs and dead tree branches. This was an almost daily task for the older women of Mulirena. By the mid-fifties, oil lamps had given way to naked light bulbs hanging from the ceilings, but the hearths for cooking and the braziers for heating still had to be fueled through the tireless energy of the women. I would normally have wanted to tag along to look for wild violets in the woods, but that day, I chose to stay behind, still in awe of my new clothes and of the toys

that had arrived from far away the day before. So I sat on my doorstep, serving a lavish banquet to a large gathering of friends.

My next-door neighbor, Lucia, was also home. The young women of the village helped around the house—with the cleaning, cooking and sewing—but the hard work was relegated to the older women. I was left in her care, but chose to play at my doorstep. Totu, a tallish, slim young man with a soft, languid gaze, who came this way almost every day, interrupted me. He was home for the summer from Rome, where he had finished his first year of university. He just said, “Catariné,” pinched my cheek, and let out a short whistle. Almost instantly, Lucia opened her shutters and peeked out. Totu fixed his gaze on the window and found his customary spot under the door of Antonio U Gobbu’s house, across from Lucia’s. Their courtship had become furtive. He only came when her parents and brother Alfonso were not home.

As Lucia peeked out, Totu asked in a loud whisper, “Any news?”

“As of this morning, nothing yet,” answered Lucia. “But why should you care?”

“I care more than you’ll ever know. I’m telling you, Lucia, when it comes, I’m going to throw myself off the bridge and into the ravine.”

No one took these kinds of threats seriously here; it was just an expression of desperation.

“Stop saying silly things like that,” she replied. “Just tell me; what should I do? I have a family and two brothers on my back. You tell me what I should do.”

“This place has become a prison,” he replied, evading her question.

“Just give me the signal and we’ll run away,” she said.

For the rest of the time, no more words were spoken; or if there were, I didn't hear or I don't remember. They made love with their eyes, he, slouched against the door trying to make himself invisible to passers-by; she, half-peeking from the window.

I guessed that they were waiting for something from Don Giuseppe, the mailman. In a town in which practically every family had someone living far away, the sight of his stooped figure was awaited with great anticipation. He delivered twice a day: once in the early morning and once in the late afternoon. Yesterday, he had brought my family a notice for a package—a package from America. Mother had an old aunt who had immigrated to Brooklyn before the war. As soon as the war had ended, she had started sending packages of used clothing. She would ask her neighbors for their discarded clothes, and send every piece she was able to gather. We were as likely to find a garish satin party dresses as oversized men's underwear. Years later, we would laugh at the thought of those ugly American clothes. But at the time, we considered ourselves to be the best-dressed kids in town, and the only ones to wear pajamas. The most exciting part of receiving these packages was the surprise that came with them. We never knew what we would find, but a small piece of America seemed to be discovered and taken possession of, a little at a time. Yesterday, as I unfolded a red satin skirt, a set of four play teacups fell out. The elation I'd felt at the sight of such an unexpected gift still had me floating in the clouds on this drowsy, early summer afternoon. Meanwhile the two lovers, and the rest of the village, were waiting, in suspended animation, for something from Don Giuseppe.

The most anticipated piece of mail was a large official envelope stamped from Rome. It was *l'Atto di Richiamo*, but we called it *a chiamata*. It was the official request to

report to Rome to obtain a visa for America, which came after an immediate family member had been approved as a sponsor. Any country on the other side of the ocean was called America. For many, receiving this letter was comparable to winning a lottery. The fortune of whole families was expected to change. My own father had emigrated two years before, and it was only a matter of time before my family was also called.

Little by little, activity was resuming around the square, and Totu thought it wise to leave. Within a few minutes Mother and Comare Rosaria, carrying large loads of dried wood on their heads, and talking in low voices, made their way toward the house. They carried themselves with straight backs, but walked with the slow, resigned gait of the village's older women in their layers upon layers of heavy clothing.

As they approached, I heard Comare Rosaria sum up her conversation, the way the women always did here: "What can I say, Comare Teresa, the world is made like that and there is nothing we can do to change things. We all want the best for us and our children. Whatever is meant to be will be."

"That's the way it is," was my mother's predictable answer. "We can't change fate. But don't worry, God will provide."

As she passed by me, Comare Rosaria said, "Your new clothes are so pretty, Catariné. Did Don Giuseppe pass yet?"

"No, he hasn't passed yet."

The women unloaded their bundles. Mother had a little bouquet of wild violets for me, which she had carried from the woods. I placed them in my little jug and the doorstep was now transformed into a luxurious garden of sweet-smelling flowers.

Don Giuseppe finally arrived. He had nothing for my family; but the smile on his face as he walked toward Comare Rosaria told me he might have something special for her. Standing in the doorway, she opened the large, brown envelope and shouted excitedly, “*A chiamata! Lucia, Lucia, a chiamata!*”

The call for Lucia had not been sent by a family member. Their family had no one to open the doors of America for them. Lucia was being sponsored by a man who lived in Montreal, and whom neither she nor her family had ever met.

News of this latest call soon traveled down the narrow street to the central piazza, where most of the young men were either sitting at the bar, sipping coffee, or playing billiards. As the sun turned the sky into a mellow burnt orange, Totu came up the street toward Lucia’s house. This time he didn’t stop to pinch my cheeks. He let out a short whistle, then a second and then a third, but Lucia’s window remained shut. As he passed by me, slouching, I saw his wet eyes. He made me think of a wounded dog.

My brother Luigi was back from the tailor shop where he spent every afternoon, and Mother called us in for a light supper. The first church bell had just rung, telling people to get ready for evening Benediction and Rosary. A second bell would advise us to start leaving the house; and then a third would announce that the evening function had begun and that leaving now meant we would be late. I collected my treasures, and with the wisdom of all children raised in Mulirena, I wondered if Lucia was afraid to come out because her mother was home, or because she had decided she’d better stop making love to Totu now that she had finally received her call to America.

The Superstyle Factory

A lull had fallen over the women in the waiting room, each engrossed with her own thoughts and reminiscences. Tina nudged Cathy's arm. "I heard her daughter is in your school. They say she's not as pretty as her mother."

"I don't know if she'll stay in school now..."

"What else is she going to do? They say she's given her mother a lot of trouble. She takes after her father's race—*tamarra*."

"We never saw much of her husband," Antonietta said to Tina. "Did you know him well?"

"Who knew him? No one knew him, until we came here. He came from Serra San Pietro on the other side of the mountain—real backward people. After they moved to Laval I rarely saw them."

"But when Lucia worked at the Superstyle with us, she never said anything bad about him. Do you remember?" Rosalba asked.

"They were just married." Tina answered. "What could she say, except that he always had to have his way?"

"Our men are all the same," Filomena said. "What can we say? One has to find a way with them, but I guess she never could." She got up and went to join her husband in the corridor.

"Look at what she got compared to what she could have had," Tina said loudly after Filomena had gone.

“And to think that the other one came here only a few years later,” Rosalba said in a whisper.

No one had mentioned Totu’s name yet, and they looked at each other for an instant without saying anything.

“I saw him this summer,” Tina said. “His travel agency is not far from here. He gave me a good price for my trip to Italy.”

“They made love for a long time,” Teresa added. “I can still see him leaning against U Gobbu’s door. Piano Don Carlo was never the same after they broke up, but they weren’t destined.”

Tina turned to Rosalba. “Why were we in such a rush to get here? What did we think we would find? We all found work at the factory for fifty cents an hour...”

“Yes, we all ended up there at first, said Rosalba. “Remember, Cathy? The Superstyle factory. You worked there too one summer.”

“How could I forget?” Cathy asked. “I cut threads at the finishing table with a bunch of fat Syrian ladies... also for fifty cents an hour.”

“They didn’t pay much but the work was light. I changed after the first year and made a little more in the coat factory with piecework, but I had such an ugly *bossa* there...she was always behind our backs!” Rosalba exclaimed.

“Those were other times.” Teresa said. “We had no other choices.”

“*Grazie a Dio*, things have changed now. As soon as my daughter got a job at Bell, she insisted I quit working,” said Rosalba.

“You did well,” replied Antonietta. “I’m going to be quitting soon too. There aren’t as many Italians left in the factories anymore, you know. They’re full of black

people now. They come from Haiti, from... from...I don't know where they are all coming from, but they're coming in herds."

Teresa replied, "Antonié, the world is a wheel, *gira e rigira*, and we're always in the same spot."

"Se, se, Teré, you're right... you're right. They have to eat too." They all laughed, and then the room turned silent for a few minutes. Teresa suggested that it was time to leave and the three women said their goodbyes.

Cathy's apartment was only a block away from the hospital; so on their way down the elevator, she thought maybe her mother expected Cathy to invite her and Tina for coffee. She told them she was very tired and would take them home right away. She hadn't said anything about Sean being out of the city. But in fact, Cathy felt exhausted after the day's events and was happy that Sean wasn't home. What could she tell him about the day and about this evening? He would probably make some sarcastic remark about making love, Calabrese style.

Outside on Jean-Talon Street, in the noise of the traffic whizzing by, Cathy felt momentarily confused as she tried to remember where she had parked the car. With the sun down, the air had grown very chilly, and she hadn't thought of bringing a jacket. Everyone seemed dressed for the oncoming winter, except Cathy and the group of Italian men smoking and gesticulating animatedly in front of a café across the street from the hospital. Many of them had bronzed faces from a summer spent working outdoors, and they seemed immune to the cold. The women crossed over and walked toward them. A slim, tall, still-good-looking man with soft, sad eyes came forward and smiled at them. He shook hands with Teresa and Tina, but he tapped Cathy on the cheek.

“You’re always the same, Catariné—*sempre in gamba, eh?*”

The then and now became a blur of memory that she could almost touch and hold for an instant, and then let go.

Fare L'America

By Antonio Amoruso

I have been asked the question: What will the children of the children of immigrants be called in this country? Who will claim them as their own? When does one stop being considered an immigrant?

When Italians in post-war Italy decided to pick up and leave their villages in droves, they did so hoping to give their children a better future than the one they envisioned in their own home. To achieve material success was their main goal, and they worked relentlessly toward that objective, overcoming physical hardships with true survival instincts. No job was too menial or degrading as long as it paid a regular salary. Men who had never held a pot in their hands found themselves working as dishwashers, short-order cooks, bakers, orderlies at hospitals, and considered themselves lucky to have found secure and clean indoor jobs, that protected them from the intemperate Canadian weather. Those who were less fortunate bundled up and worked as bricklayers, plasterers, landscape specialists, and road workers, providing the raw labor to construct the houses, roads and buildings that changed the face of North American cities. Meanwhile, the women kept the motors of the sewing machines running in the clothing factories. Some success stories in the fields of construction, food and fashion have become legendary, but most people saved pennies until they became dollars, all the while building clean, comfortable homes for themselves, with abundant storage space for conserving homemade *prosciutti*, tomato sauce and jars of pickled vegetables.

It should be admitted at some point, that Canada made an excellent return on its investment by accepting these immigrants, for they rarely burdened the welfare system, and contributed much to the tax coffers (with a very few minor exceptions, who managed to swindle both the government and their own people, unfortunately soiling the reputation of the majority).

I must admit that the question of the children's future has not kept me up at night. I have no children of my own, and the ones I see around me don't seem overly preoccupied with existential dilemmas, busy as they are planning elaborate wedding parties, driving the latest cars, and acquiring expensive homes in suburbia. For fifty years now, we academics have been pondering questions that have never crossed the minds of the majority of the people involved. The laboratory project of emigration, in which we willingly participated, was a random and makeshift one from the very beginning. Neither the Italian authorities nor the individuals concerned stopped to reflect about the long-term emotional and mental effects on them or their children before undertaking such a momentous step. The decisions to leave for good were no more than knee-jerk reactions to the post-war sense of failure and hopelessness. For the Italian government, it was the easiest solution to their pressing economic problems, and it made the economic boom of the sixties that much easier to achieve. Italy's silence about its own history of emigration is the ultimate avoidance of its responsibilities. The country has never faced the significance of the exodus of millions of its citizens, even today, as its own immigrant problems are being debated.

From 1945 to the 1960's millions of Italians emigrated to North America, Australia, Argentina, and Venezuela- 500,000 in Canada alone. Some emigration had

occurred long before that, but not at the same rate and not with the same intensity. Before the Second World War the trend was for some men to go to America for a few years, accumulate enough dollars to return home and buy a piece of land or build a home. Many old men in Mulirena had a smattering of English words in their vocabulary, along with stories about building the Brooklyn bridge, about living in the slums of New York and the Bronx, about brawls with black men the size of giants, about being called dagos by big, dumb Americans who treated their own families like strangers, about frozen noses and ears in barren, frigid Canada. They were always stories about a living hell made bearable only by the knowledge that they would eventually return to the *paese*, to faithful wives who dedicated their lives to their families, to children who obeyed their elders. Mussolini encouraged them to return to the homeland, while at the same time extolling the virtues of colonizing Ethiopia. The song *Faccetta Nera* promised nothing less than to make Romans of the sweet black-faced children who looked adoringly at the Italian invaders, ready to fly into their arms and drape themselves in the red, white and green.

However, a few hardy souls had adapted, and remained in the new countries. They would feel vindicated in their decisions to stay with every story they heard of the humiliation and devastation left behind by the war in Europe. After the war, they became the fortunate ones who had avoided the hardships, and they felt an obligation to help those back home by sending money and packages. As soon as the immigration laws permitted, they started sponsoring family members. Meanwhile the image of America had changed dramatically, with Hollywood films showing beautiful blondes in slinky dresses tap-dancing their way up stairways and into heaven. A floodgate opened and a human chain of people followed each another across the ocean. Sisters sponsored brothers, who

sponsored wives, who sponsored their brothers and sisters. Very little was known about the new countries they were going to: what they'd do there, where they'd live, how they'd learn a new language, what new customs they'd have to adopt, how their children would take to new friends and new schools.

Thousands found themselves in Canada, believing they were going to the United States. The geographical location was of little interest because what they were after was a mythical land of instant riches, success, and maybe a little glamour. Whole villages were evacuated in a short period of time. People were in a frenzy to leave, afraid of losing out on their chance to *fare l'America*—make it big. Some husbands lived alone for years before sponsoring their families, missing on the experience of seeing their children grow up. Some mothers left their infant babies with grandparents so they could work unencumbered for a few years. Many young men and women left their childhood sweethearts for marriages of convenience.

Those who had the least to leave behind ran the best chance of making it. For others, the ratio of gain to loss was greatly skewed in favor of loss from the beginning. Issues of displacement, abandonment, adaptation were not permitted to be raised at the starting point of the race. But it would be too simplistic to believe that this frenzy of human movement from small agrarian Mediterranean communities to the impersonal and cold cities of North America would leave its participants unaffected. The high incidence of insanity among first-generation immigrants is telling of the chaos that displacement entails.

The question I've often asked myself is: Can any amount of wealth make up for leaving a first love behind?

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: October 4, 2004, 10:00
To: aatravel@sympatico.ca
Subject: your last piece

—interesting—but what's with the sudden sentimentality in the ending line, Antonio?

Franco

Saturday morning, Oct 4, 1980

The Notebooks

On Saturday morning, Cathy lingered in bed with the weekend *Gazette*, but couldn't concentrate on it. On page three of the newspaper, next to a picture of the drug-ring suspect who was killed the same day as Lucia's beating, a short article reported that the police were investigating Lucia's husband's disappearance. Once again, they tied Lucia's family to Jack Russo. The two stories, placed side by side, gave the impression that they were somehow connected. But how could they be? Cathy thought. What did anyone know about Lucia, and about the circumstances that had tied her to a husband who would ultimately beat her into a coma?

As a pot of coffee brewed, Cathy went down to the basement of the building, where she stored her out-of-season clothes and old books. She found the box containing her Italian books, and at the bottom, the composition notebooks she had kept from her elementary and high-school days. Underneath it all, she found hidden manuscripts of stories she had written long ago.

She opened the familiar copy of *I Promessi Sposi* to a bookmark—a blank postcard of the Rock of Gibraltar—and she felt as though she had reconnected with an old friend. Armando, or Armano as he liked to be called, a steward on the boat, had given her the postcard as a souvenir. Cathy got the same feeling when she picked up a prayer book with a mother-of-pearl cover, and her father's manuals on masonry, which he had studied in Milano.

Cathy gave these books a place of honor on the center shelf in the den, by moving some of Sean's books and stacking them on the lower shelf. She leafed through some of the thin composition notebooks, and smiled at the remembered battles with her seventh-grade teacher, Sister Maria Vincentia, who insisted that she change her small spidery handwriting to the large, slanted and looped, North-American-style calligraphy. Each page of her seventh-grade composition notebook was stamped in red: "Writing Must Improve." The nun had even given her a guide sheet with slanted lines to place under each page, and the last pages of the notebook seemed written by someone different than the first ones. But the stories she had written later as a teen were quite illegible, even to her. She had long forgotten the pleasure she had derived in writing them.

She had started jotting down notes and observations during the boat crossing, and for a few years after settling in Canada, she had kept up the habit of writing about her life in Mulirena. But after she got enough nerve to show them to someone, she remembered feeling embarrassed by the simple language and childlike tone of the writing. She had thought of destroying the notebooks, but instead had stuffed them away in a box, hoping no one would ever find them. Over the years, she thought of them, now and then, always with a nauseous feeling in her stomach, as though she had buried something that might still be alive.

In the last while, in the evenings before falling asleep, she had taken to reading through Sean's books on philosophy and literature. She had always been an avid reader, but her reading was not as focused as Sean's, and she read bits and pieces of subjects that intrigued her momentarily. She ended up with a scattering of information on various topics, but no thorough knowledge of any. In the last two years, since working toward her

BA in vocational education, she'd had to prepare papers on theories of learning, psychology and testing. She'd also tried keeping up-to-date on fashion by reading current magazines. She had had little time for books of a more literary nature. But now that she was on her last leg of her degree, she was looking forward to reading for her own enjoyment. She especially loved reading in Italian. Maybe that is why she couldn't accept a poor translation of Lucia's and Renzo's struggles to fulfill the promises of their betrothal—or their destiny as Teresa would explain it.

Cathy could never quite understand what to make of the concept of destiny. It was like a mystery of faith: one believed it without needing to understand it. Did Italians make more of it than other people? Her father referred to it as *la forza del destino*, after his favorite Verdi opera. Cathy wondered if Lucia's blow to the head was a consequence of having resisted the force of her destiny, or of having succumbed to it in resignation. How could one know if one's destiny was worth fighting for, against all odds?

Saint Bernadette

By Cathy Anastasia

When I had my First Communion, and later, every time I went to confession, Don Tommasino urged me, "Pray that you become a saint."

Maybe Don Tommasino said this to everyone he confessed, but he singled me out enough times to make me feel that he was grooming me for sainthood. When I was not in school or at Adelina's, the seamstress' shop, I spent my free time in church. Even before I could read, I belonged to the Catholic Action Movement. One could belong to this group from childhood to adulthood; each age group was identified by a different name, from the *Piccolissime* to *Donne*. Boys and girls met separately once a week with a group leader who read stories about saintly people who dedicated their lives to the service of others. Every month we received a magazine from Rome, which taught us about the Catholic missions in Africa, South America, and many other parts of the world. There were rules and regulations, and each year we were given different *parola d'ordine*, words to live by. The ones I remember best were *Saper Sorridere Sempre*—know how to smile always. The saintly life was what we were taught to aim for, so each night I prayed, "God, help me become a saint."

I didn't envision myself as just any old saint, one who just prayed, went around blessing people and performing miracles, but rather the type who earned her crown through acts of charity and heroism. We kids used to exchange holy pictures of saints, the way kids in North America exchanged baseball cards. Santa Maria Goretti was one of my

favorites. She was a young girl who let herself be beaten to death rather than succumb to a rapist. Naturally, she was the patron saint of chastity. One picture of her was worth two or three ordinary ones. It was the same for Saint John Bosco. He was everyone's favorite because he was the patron saint of children. He helped wayward kids find their way. In his picture, he was surrounded by young people staring at him adoringly— like a teen idol.

While I was still in kindergarten, and still a *Piccolissima*, Don Tommasino chose me to recite a poem in church on the occasion of the Pope's birthday. Mother read it out loud to me until I learned it perfectly. But when I was on the altar, standing on a chair in front of the microphone, and I saw the sea of faces looking up at me, I panicked. For a few instants my mind went blank. Then the priest came up next to me and whispered the first line of my poem, "*Noi siamo le Piccolissime del nostro buon Gesù...*" and I was able to recite the rest. Afterwards I ran to my mother and hid my face in her lap, ashamed that I had forgotten my lines. But that didn't deter Don Tommasino from putting me on stage one more time.

On a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1955, the priest came to speak to us at one of our meetings. He gave us the happy news that a big celebration was planned in October for the feast of the Rosary. For a couple of years, the town's masons had been building a new house for the priest. It had a connecting theater and a grotto with a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes outside the church that was at the top of the village. As part of the celebration, a play of the story of Saint Bernadette would be put on to inaugurate both the grotto and the theater. We all whispered with excitement at the plans, while Don Tommasino took our leader, Rosalba, aside, and she nodded at everything he said. Then

in front of everyone, he called me. “Caterina, you’re going to be our Saint Bernadette.” Rosalba would play the part of Bernadette’s mother; the other parts would be assigned the following week.

That afternoon I walked home with a copy of the play, and with the feeling that I had been singled out as special. Mother and my neighbors in Piano Don Carlo were just as excited as I was. The only thing I was unhappy about was that my father would be leaving for Canada a month before the performance, and wouldn’t see it.

Rosina, an older girl who lived in an alley not far from my house was asked to play the Madonna. She had been chosen because of her long, blond hair and gray-blue eyes. Some of the older church ladies snickered when they heard she was playing the part. “Couldn’t they have found someone better?” they asked.

Rosina’s mother, Assunta, was from outside the village. She was known as a *giruventula*—a busybody—because she effortlessly went from house to house talking to people. She also had the reputation of having been quite loose in her youth. Assunta and her husband worked for Don Luigi, the wealthiest landowner in Mulirena, and Rosina did small chores for his wife, Donna Rachele.

Rosina’s two closest friends, Lucia and my youngest aunt Tina, also made fun of her accepting the part. “Isn’t she a little too old to be in a play?” Lucia had said one day at the shop of Adelina, the seamstress.

But Rosina only shrugged when she heard about Lucia’s comment. She was turning cold toward her two friends, she said. And she could do as she pleased since her parents didn’t object. There had been rumors that Rosina had flirted with Totu, Lucia’s

boyfriend, and that Lucia's older brother didn't approve of his sister being seen with Rosina.

We practiced for weeks in the new theater, learning the life story of Bernadette Soubirous, a French shepherdess who had lived a hundred years before our time. I had to wear a scarf around my head, and a long peasant dress. Rosina had Adelina order white satin fabric for her long dress and a wide blue sash.

We were told by Don Tommasino that Bernadette led a poor and simple life; yet, the Blessed Virgin chose to appear to her, and revealed many important things to her. She appeared in a grotto, in a golden-colored cloud. Over a six-month period, Bernadette had eighteen apparitions, but many of the people from her village disbelieved and persecuted Bernadette and her family. "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next," the Lady said during one of her apparitions.

As Our Lady, Rosina didn't have very many lines; most of my conversations were with Rosalba, who played Bernadette's mother. She tried hard to convince Bernadette to disavow what she had seen, for fear that others would think her crazy. But Bernadette persisted in believing in the visions. Because she didn't want to forget what the Lady told her during the apparitions, Bernadette once brought a pencil and paper to write down her words. But the lady said, "What I have to say does not have to be written down. Open your heart to the message of love."

In one of the most important scenes, depicting the ninth apparition, the Lady asked Bernadette to dig a hole in the ground, and to drink from it and bathe in it. I had to pretend to dig, and then I splashed water from a pot on my face. As I acted this part out, I closed my eyes and imagined the stream where my mother and I used to stop on our way

to the mountains to look for wood. It was a rivulet of clear running water that was hidden in the underbrush; but whose babbling we could hear from a distance. We used to drink by cupping water into our hands. Sometimes on the water's edge, I'd find the tiny spring violets that smelled so sweet, and on hot summer days, we would splash and cool our feet in the brook before the last part of the trek up the mountain. In Lourdes, the watering hole turned into a spring with healing powers, which has since attracted millions of pilgrims.

I had no problem memorizing my lines but, time and time again, I was told to raise my voice. Some of the church ladies would sit in the last row of the theater and yell out for me to speak clearly and loudly, until they could hear me.

We had been rehearsing together for three weeks when, one day, Rosina didn't show up. Don Tommasino explained that the ladies had decided it would be more effective to have a real statue of our Lady on stage, and to have one of the women stand behind it and say the lines. I felt sorry for Rosina, who was very upset when I saw her at Adelina's. She still had to pay for the fabric for the dress that was only half finished.

"This town is full of jealous vipers," she said, tears welling in her eyes.

A few days later, Rosina was rushed to the hospital in Catanzaro, and stayed there for a week. There were many rumors going around about why she had to stay in Catanzaro for so long.

"I hope it's not because of the play or the dress," Adelina said. "I didn't charge for my time cutting it and basting it, but I had to charge her for the fabric."

“Rosina has had other things on her mind besides the play,” one of the church ladies replied. “Good thing we thought of the statue. Imagine having someone like her play the part of the Virgin Mary.”

“Yes, but they should have told her before I ordered her dress. What is she going to do with a long, white satin dress now?” Adelina said.

“Tell her to keep it for her wedding, though who knows if she will ever marry now,” the lady said. “I feel sorry for her, but she’s the *giruventula*’s daughter. What could we expect?”

The ladies had decided that, during the first apparitions, the statue would remain covered by a veil and that only the voice would be heard. When it came time for the final scene, all of the people in the play, plus a few extras to represent the villagers, knelt in front of the covered statue, to witness the last apparition. I spoke in a clear voice: “What is your name?”

The statue answered slowly and gravely, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” The veil dropped and a light shone on the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. Everyone gasped. Then, they got up and applauded and threw candies and flowers at us.

For the ending, Don Tommasino told everyone that Bernadette had entered a monastery, where she lived in humility and prayer till her death. “The saint of Lourdes was the saint of penance and the saint of prayer,” he said. “She is a shining model for all girls. She was a modest and simple peasant who, through faith and humility, achieved the highest level that is granted to anyone; she became a saint.”

Backstage, one of the church ladies planted a wet kiss on my cheek. “*Bravissima, Caterinuccia*. I had goose bumps when the veil came down.” And from then on, until I left for Canada, when I walked by, people would say, “Here comes our Saint Bernadette.” Had I stayed in Mulirena, that would probably have been my nickname for the rest of my life.

Spring Fever '73

Since he had begun working on his Master's degree, Sean was forever shuffling books from the den into the bedroom, where he liked reading, propped up in bed in the mornings, and into the living room, where he worked in the early evenings while Cathy prepared dinner. He was quite possessive of his books and he insisted that they not be disturbed from where he left them. Cathy hoped that he would not notice her having rearranged the ones on the center shelf.

If Cathy had believed in destiny, she would have had to wonder what forces had conspired to bring her together with the blond Sean, three years her junior, a man of small stature, who had been raised in an orphanage in Winnipeg and who had come to Montreal via Saskatoon, Toronto and Ottawa. She often thought about what an unlikely couple they made.

Cathy would never have thought of Sean as a possible husband or even as a casual date if she had met him outside of WHHS. So she had to credit the spirit of the first English mayor of Montreal for having brought them together, or maybe Mr. Barnett, who had handpicked all of his teachers. Physically, Sean was not her type. Throughout her adolescence, Cathy had daydreamed about the tall, dark, and enigmatic men who were the staple of the Italian *fotoromanzi* she collected. In high school, when she read *Wuthering Heights*, she felt captivated by the presence of the shadowy Heathcliff, and had fantasized about love affairs that swept her up, above the trivial cares of life. Images of the windswept English moors, echoing with the calls of the tormented lovers, merged

with remembered stories about ruthless brigands hiding in the Calabrian hills, and about the women who followed them, leaving everything behind for the love of their lives. What would it be like to feel the kind of passion that outweighed the comfort of home, the security of family? It seemed that the greater the despair of ill-fated lovers, the greater the ecstasy that awaited them at the end.

When Cathy and Sean had first become friendly, he seemed surprised that she was not seeing anyone. “A nice Italian girl like you! I’d think you’d be hooked up by now.”

“Excuse me,” she had replied in mock indignation. “What makes you think that all Italian girls are just looking to get married?”

“I must confess that I haven’t known many Italian girls, and I apologize for the cliché,” he said, looking contrite and uncomfortable.

In truth, since she had turned twenty, there hadn’t been very many knocks on her door, or calls for dates on the telephone. And yet, she felt as if she was at her prime. She was slimmest when she first met Sean—a perfect size eight—what the fashion industry labeled as petite—in height, that is. Her hips and thighs would probably look more well proportioned on a taller frame, but she could camouflage them with the proper clothes. She was continuously on a diet, conscious of the peasant-like squatness she’d inherited from her father’s side of the family. Sean had once made the joking comment about her aunts: “If they were two inches taller, they’d be square.”

But thanks to her hairdressing experience, Cathy knew how to minimize her defects by maximizing her good points. She never wore jeans or low-heeled shoes, and as long as her hair was shining and her face well made-up, she felt confident that her chunky

legs wouldn't be too noticeable. Sean didn't seem to mind her heavy-set thighs, or at least he never mentioned it.

From the age of fifteen until her early twenties, her *paesani* had considered her a good catch, and she had been courted by a string of young men. But she had turned them all down. "You never get attached to anyone," her mother complained.

Teresa had no other way of explaining Cathy's refusal to have anything to do with the succession of serious young men with yearning eyes and tender hearts, who wanted to do things properly, with the respect due to such a well-respected family. They followed customs, and sent relatives to her house as go-betweens, making it clear that marriage was their only goal.

One evening, when she was barely eighteen, a neighbor—a Sicilian—paid her family a visit. He came on behalf of his brother to ask for her hand in marriage. After listing his brother's business achievements in the asphalt business, and his qualities of character, he said to Teresa—without even looking at Cathy: "Think about it. There's no rush to marry, but by next week we'd like to know if she can be introduced to the family."

"They put the cart before the horse," Cathy complained to her mother, who didn't understand what the problem was.

"Isn't it better to deal with someone who is serious about marriage, and not only thinking of joking around?" Teresa said.

"What if I don't like him? How can I pull back after the whole family has been involved?" Cathy said, and she refused the offers every time. She especially spurned the young men who seemed to have all the right qualities for a good potential husband: in

their eyes, she saw her future too perfectly mapped out and circumscribed. What would they make of her quirks and whims? She might as well have taken her unspoken childhood dreams, sealed them in the green trunk that they had brought from Mulirena, and dropped it into the ocean forever.

Finally, after a number of such intercessions, word got around that Cathy was too difficult, and no one approached the family.

Dating was one of those North American institutions that Cathy had missed out on as a teen. There was no corresponding word in Italian for being picked up at home by a man who opened the car door for her, who took her out for dinner and a movie, and then gave her a goodnight kiss after bringing her back home. In high school, she had not even been allowed to go to school dances, let alone date.

At twenty-five, she felt awkward around men, especially those she felt most attracted to. She often asked herself what a girl in a large city needed to do to meet an interesting man, short of advertising oneself in the classifieds or, worse still, parading one's wares in the meat markets of discos and bars like Diane Keaton in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. That movie confirmed Cathy's distaste for the smoky nightclub scene.

Her courtship with Sean turned out to be anything but conventional. They were both swept up by the enthusiasm of their first teaching job at WHHS. There was a young staff and the school offered such a variety of activities for teachers as well as students, that it felt like a new world had opened up to her. After the first month, Sean and a group of senior students went around recruiting teachers to supervise a fashion show planned for the spring. It would be the first big event featured in the new auditorium, so Mr. Barnett was especially keen and supportive of the activity. It didn't take much effort from

Sean to convince Cathy to coordinate it, especially since she saw it as a project for her hairdressing class.

Sean had promised to help out, but the project turned out to be a bigger undertaking than Cathy had imagined. Because she had a car and he didn't, she found herself doing most of the tedious work: driving students around the city; scouting for clothes, shoes and accessories; finding and carting furniture for props. After the Christmas holidays, they spent more and more time together after school, and he often ended up having dinner at her house. He lived with two roommates in a basement apartment in the McGill ghetto downtown, and he ate out most evenings. Cathy lived in an apartment with her mother in the east end of Montreal. Her brother had already married and had moved to NDG.

Teresa tried hard to get used to the idea of Cathy bringing home a friend, who happened to be a man. "He's just a friend," Cathy's mother would tell her relatives, who happened to see him there. She would shrug, "Do you understand anything?"

One Sunday, in early March, they had spent the afternoon at Sean's place, finalizing the odds and ends of the show that would be taking place the following Saturday. His two roommates were out, and for once, his apartment was quiet. It was a warm day and Cathy was wearing a summer T-shirt and a long, loose skirt. They had snacked on cheese and bread that she had brought with her, and drank a bottle of red wine, which made her feel sleepy. She wasn't accustomed to drinking more than half a glass of white wine. She lay down on his bed to rest before going home for the evening.

Sean put on a Leonard Cohen album, one of his favorites, and tidied up before joining her. She noticed him lying next to her, but she kept her eyes closed. The whispery

monotone of the poet's voice and melancholic tone of the song about Suzanne taking him down to the river had Cathy practically dozing, when Sean turned around and put his face on her chest, like a child needing comforting. She felt a sudden rush to embrace him and to be embraced by him, but all she could do was stroke his hair. He caressed her breasts, and she was overwhelmed by the desire to offer them to him. But she waited for him to lift the T-shirt, remove one breast from the bra cup and kiss it greedily. His other hand moved up her bare legs. Before pulling down her panties, he asked, "Do you want this?"

She hadn't expected anything to happen, but it felt natural, and she answered, "Yes." There was no piercing pain, no outbursts of joy, only a mellow, drowsy sensation of pleasure. It was as if she had fallen asleep on the beach at the end of a sun-drenched day, lulled by the repetitive sounds of the rise and fall of the ocean, then jolted slightly by the soft shifting of the wet sand.

"You're so soft and cuddly," he'd said, snuggling against her back. Her cheeks felt flushed, as though caressed by the setting sun. Or maybe it was just the warmth from the red wine. Neither of them mentioned that it had been her first full sexual encounter.

During the next week, the details of the last-minute preparation for the fashion show was the subject of all their conversations. The fashion show had brought together not only Sean and Cathy but most of the other creative people on the staff. They helped with the choreography, music, lighting and photography. Cathy used her class time to design hairstyles and make-up. On the eve of the show, she worked with her students backstage on each model's hair and face.

Over five-hundred people attended the show, and many more were turned away at the door. Sean welcomed all the special guests, including Pierre who was there as a representative of the local MP.

Mr. Barnett was especially proud of the show's success. "This production has set the bar for all future events. It shows the extraordinary talent of our dynamic and young staff, and the close cooperation between teachers and students."

The only hint of conflict between teachers and students was over the selection of a name for the show. All along, the students—and Cathy—had used the name *Spring Fever '73*. But Sean thought it too quaint and common, and after numerous other suggestions, he came up with *Spring Spectrum '73*. The students agreed halfheartedly, just in time for the printing of the program.

Cathy didn't get to see any of the show, and at the end of the evening, couldn't feel her legs for all the running that the backstage work required. And, after the event, the English teacher in charge of the school paper asked Cathy for an article about organizing the event, and Cathy spent an evening writing about her experience of bringing together staff and students.

"It's very good, but the syntax needs some work," the English teacher said after reading it. She then changed it all around, until finally, Cathy couldn't recognize it as the article she had written.

In June, Sean and Cathy attended the school's first graduation dance as a couple. Cathy, who had never attended a prom dance before, was as excited about it as her sixteen-year-old students, who had thought of nothing else since the fashion show. And

by the end of summer Cathy and Sean were spending all of their free time together, their relationship smoothly and effortlessly slipping from being colleagues to friends to lovers. The differences in their upbringings and lifestyles didn't seem to matter. When she was with Sean, Cathy was so engrossed with the present that, for once, her past was all but forgotten. Once, she asked him how he felt about being with someone of a different culture, and Sean quoted John Lennon. They should imagine themselves to be people "with no country and no religion too...living for today." Neither Sean nor Cathy dwelt on what their lives had been, or on where they were headed.

Apart from saying that his mother had left the family when he was three years old, and that he was subsequently sent to an orphanage, Sean never spoke much about his childhood. In high school, Sean had gone to live with his father, but because he didn't get along with the woman his father had married, he was shifted to his paternal grandparents' house. After high school, he left Winnipeg for Saskatoon, and then moved east. He lived in Toronto, and then in Ottawa. There, he made the acquaintance of JP, obtained a degree in English Literature, and started a Master's Program in Philosophy. In time, his birth mother had reconnected with him, and he spoke to her on the phone from time to time. He seemed to hold no rancor toward her. When Cathy first knew Sean, she especially liked that his mood was always even, that no heavy, dark clouds rested over his head. Around him, she too felt weightless.

The Non-Wedding

By the start of the new school year, Cathy and Sean were talking about getting married in the summer, but without announcing it to anyone. Sean didn't believe in the conventional rites of engagement and marriage, especially as practiced by Cathy's Italian friends. They spoke of a possible marriage as one of the many things they would do together, such as traveling to Europe on a Eurail pass and staying in youth hostels, or backpacking and camping their way across Canada.

But after the summer passed, Sean neither proposed nor brought up the subject of marriage, and their traveling plans were also put on hold. Sean had become preoccupied with his dwindling career prospects and he decided to return to university to complete his Master's degree. In the fall, Cathy also registered at McGill University to obtain a bachelor's degree in education, to raise her educational level on the teachers' salary scale. Cathy spent time at Sean's apartment, but never overnight, and he often accompanied her to family gatherings, but the topic of marriage was only raised by her relatives.

"When are we eating the *confetti*?" they'd ask Cathy.

"They're in no rush," Teresa would answer them." They want to finish their studies." She didn't press Cathy with her own questions.

Another summer came and went. One day in late October, Cathy's uncle Gaetano, who was married to her aunt Tina, offered Cathy some books. Gaetano owned a duplex on Trenholme Street in NDG. The lower duplex had been occupied by a professor from

Loyola College, who disappeared without notice, with three months' rent unpaid, and leaving behind his worn-out furniture and, in his living room, wall-to-wall shelves of books on theology, philosophy, literature, history, psychology and other scholarly subjects that Sean found impressive. He and Cathy both fell in love with the homey place and with the street, which, at that time of year, was resplendent with fall foliage.

“Take whatever you want,” her uncle told her. “What you don’t want, I’ll put into the garbage. The whole place smells moldy and I’ll have to fumigate it.”

“No, no, don’t throw them out,” Cathy said. “I’ll take them all.” She and Sean planned to go back with boxes and move the books into Cathy’s room. That evening they talked about the value of the books and of the semi-antique furniture, and about how ignorant it was of her uncle to suggest throwing them out.

“I’d love to live in that duplex,” Sean said. “Maybe we can just move in, as is.”

“We move in?” Cathy asked, incredulous that he still hadn’t understood the impossibility for an Italian girl like her to live with a man without being married.

“Why not? It’s too good an opportunity to let slip. I’m spending less and less time in my apartment anyway. Why pay the extra rent?”

“Because I don’t think it would go over big with my mother,” Cathy said, and then added, as an afterthought: “What happened to the marriage plans we had in 1973?”

“How will a church ceremony and a piece of paper change how we feel for each other? Living together is commitment enough.”

Cathy regretted having asked the question. She felt as if she was proposing to him. All along she had been ambivalent about a full-fledged commitment to Sean and, if it wasn't for her family, she would have liked the idea of living with Sean for a while.

As she had expected, both Teresa and Luigi thought she had lost her mind to even consider it. “Are you crazy?” Teresa said. “We’re not English. Maybe it’s OK for him, but not for us. If he doesn’t want to get married, tell him to find someone else to live with him.”

“He’s afraid of the commitment. It’s understandable. Look at his family history,” Luigi said, and tried to convince Cathy to at least compromise for a civil wedding. “Just for the sake of the family and the *paesani*. You know how they’ll talk.”

“I don’t care about the *paesani*,” Cathy insisted.

“You’re really hardheaded and selfish,” Luigi told Cathy. “Think of Mother and what it will do to her.”

Teresa had already accepted the fact that they would not have married in the Catholic church. Sean was a non-practicing Anglican, and Cathy attended Mass twice a year, at Christmas and Easter. So in practical and philosophical terms, their different religions didn’t pose a problem for either of them. But Sean agreed that, on principle, a civil wedding would be fairer so that neither of them would have to compromise on the church chosen. He said he’d consider it but only after living together for a while.

Once the topic of moving in before marriage was brought to the table, it didn’t seem like such a taboo subject anymore, and Cathy decided that it would be the best solution for her and Sean. Marrying him seemed a bigger hurdle to undertake. And she had grown to passionately dislike the elaborate and tacky Italian weddings that she was forced to attend with her family. For once she took a firm stand with her mother, and she and Sean went to her uncle’s with a month’s rent as a deposit for the duplex.

But to their surprise, Gaetano had changed his mind about renting the lower duplex. He said he and his wife had decided to take it for themselves, but he offered them the furniture and all the books. Cathy suspected that Teresa had helped him make that decision, and she started looking for other available apartments in NDG.

Meanwhile Teresa was spending more and more time at Luigi's home. She took care of the baby who had been born the previous spring, so that Rita could return to her bank teller's job. Luigi convinced his mother to move in with them permanently, so that, by the end of October, Cathy found herself living alone without actually having to move out. Teresa took Cathy's single bed and left her bedroom set behind since it wouldn't fit into the spare bedroom at Luigi's. Sean started spending some evenings at the apartment and eventually, when his lease was up, he moved in his few possessions. But he also spent time visiting his friends out of town, especially JP, who lived in Quebec City, so that it wasn't clear where he actually lived. It was tacitly accepted by everyone that Sean spent time in the apartment, though it was hardly ever mentioned. Teresa however told Cathy to buy a new mattress for the set she left behind, especially after she saw the rest of the mangy furniture that they moved from the Gaetano's duplex. When Cathy removed the plastic sheeting that Teresa had kept over her mattress, it was like new, so Cathy just vacuumed it and kept it.

Sean was disappointed at losing the NDG duplex, but consented to the new arrangement because it was inexpensive for him. The only furniture they bought was a set of bookshelves, with which they lined the room that Cathy had used as her bedroom. They bought a sofa-bed for visitors, especially for Jean-Pierre, who visited often, and they turned the room into a study/den.

“I’ve never liked cheesy Italian weddings,” Cathy explained to her friends. “The hall, the photographers, the bridesmaids. I never wanted all of that. Eventually we’ll have a simple civil ceremony with a few close friends.”

“We’ll get married when Sean finishes his studies,” she told her mother.

As far as her *paesani* were concerned, Cathy pretended that she was living alone, and that Sean was only a frequent visitor. He had developed the reputation with her family of having lived like a nomad before, moving in and out of friends' homes, and the chances of any of the *paesani* visiting Cathy late at night were very slim, especially without her mother there. Though this duplicity about their living situation had at first seemed humorous to them, it made Cathy stumble whenever she was asked about her marital situation. But she was grateful that, at least, she hadn't had to move her things out of the house against her mother's wishes.

Sunday morning, October 6, 1980

On Synchronicity

Sitting on her side of the bed, the thick weekend paper on her lap, and Sean's papers and books strewn all over the bedspread, Cathy could hardly move. On his side, Sean had propped his philosophy textbook, from which he was taking notes, against her thigh. Now and then, he referred to other books piled between him and Cathy. Cathy had given him the barest of details about the incidents involving Lucia and Carmy, but he was too lost in his work to respond to the news. Since he had returned from Ottawa late Saturday evening, he had been walking around immersed in thought. He told her that he was considering JP's offer seriously and that he would be looking into the technicalities of asking for a leave of absence from teaching. Meanwhile, he had an assignment due for his philosophy course, and was using a number of books to research his topic, "*Synchronicity-Integration, Wholeness and the Self.*"

"What is it about?" Cathy asked .

"It's about the interconnection of unrelated events, which in turn, presumes unity in all things," Sean explained.

Lately Sean had piled the night tables with books on Jung and his theories. On the bed were *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, and *Jung, Man and Myth*.

Cathy had leafed through some of them and had been intrigued by the drawings of mandalas.

“How do the mandalas fit into all of this?” Cathy asked.

“The mandalas provide the symbolism for the concept,” he replied.

“How do you pronounce the name?” she asked, pointing to Jung on the cover of *Jung, Man and Myth*, which she had opened.

“It’s Jung, as in Yung,” Sean said.

“Jung,” she said to herself. “As in Yin and Yang.” She admired a picture of a geometric diagram—of circles within circles contained within squares broken up into triangles; the different shapes forming similar patterns that multiplied into other patterns—a seemingly infinite variety of possibilities within one frame.

The title above the picture read, “Mandala painting by Jung 1927,” and under it were Jung’s own words: “Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is: ‘Formation, Transformation, Eternal Mind’s eternal recreation.’ And that is the self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well, is harmonious, but which cannot tolerate self-deceptions.”

Cathy stared at the picture for a few minutes, as though hypnotized by the bursts of shapes and motifs.

“Gee, I’ve been drawing mandalas without even knowing it,” she said, thinking of her tendency to doodle circles within circles whenever she sat with pencil and paper at meetings or in classes. “I’d like to read more about it,” she added. “Which of these books do you suggest?”

“The theory is much more complicated than it sounds, though—very dense and difficult to understand; you can’t get it in one book,” he said, as he took the book from her hands. “I need to look something up.”

Cathy told herself she'd have to read up on Jung and mandalas herself since Sean wasn't being very generous in sharing his wisdom.

It was well past noon. Cathy had skimmed through the Saturday *Gazette* and had lingered over the Books section. She had taken to reading the reviews every week, and at times, she would cut out those that sounded interesting. Sometimes she'd even go out and buy one of the reviewed books, but mostly she collected the articles and placed them in a folder marked, "Books to read."

"You're taking up all the space," she said, as she tried to fold a section of the newspaper.

Sean looked up from his notes but said nothing. As she shifted her body to tear out the newspaper page she had been reading, his philosophy textbook closed.

"Sorry," she said. "We either get a queen-size bed, or you do your studying from a desk, like everyone else."

"Aren't you going to your mother's for lunch?" he asked.

Cathy placed her pillow where her thigh had been, replaced the textbook against it, and then slid out from the bed. "I guess I better get going," she said. Then, as she walked toward the dresser to put the cut-out article in the folder, she added: "I really think it's time we look at that furniture set we saw at the Danish House."

"What's wrong with the one we have?" Sean said, looking up from his book. "I thought it had sentimental value to you. You're the one who wanted to keep it. It's still in good condition."

"I thought it'd be for a short while, until we could afford something better," she replied.

He shrugged and went back to his reading.

Cathy knew that, for Sean, getting a new bedroom set meant having to rethink about the possibility of marriage. She didn't want to seem as though she was trying to pressure him, especially while he was going through this difficult career change, but she really wished she could just go out and buy a new bedroom set.

Considering its low-budget quality, her parent's furniture had endured well. For years, Teresa had cleaned and rubbed it every Saturday morning with a lemon-scented polish, but the original color may have suffered from this over-diligent use of furniture wax. Perhaps, Cathy thought, a color stripping and a re-staining were all that was needed to salvage the set, which still looked modern with its play of basic rectangles in birch veneer. The short, slanted, spindly legs, painted black gave the utilitarian wooden boxes a dainty and precarious appearance. What an odd choice, Cathy had often thought, for a man of her father's temperament to make. She imagined her stockily built father, wearing his bricklayer clothes, and with specks of white cement in his hair and on his hands, alone in Meubles Legaré on Saint-Hubert Street, selecting beds, tables, a stove, a fridge, and frilly curtains for over the kitchen sink.

"I better get dressed," she said. "Are you coming?"

"No, I'm really into this now," he said, pointing to his books. "If I go out for lunch, I'll lose my focus."

It was the usual Sunday morning routine. While Sean, and most of the city, lazed in bed, Cathy forced herself to get dressed and drive to her brother's house in NDG for a one o'clock lunch with the family. Before they moved in together, Sean had been only too happy to join in the family tradition, and to eat platefuls of pasta, but he broke the

practice when he started taking courses. He always seemed to have a paper, a class presentation or an exam coming up, and for which he needed to study. And he said he couldn't enjoy company when he had something on his mind. He encouraged Cathy to go on without him while he spent the best part of the day in his shorts, moving his textbooks and notes from the bed to the kitchen table, and then later, to the living room sofa.

"But doesn't he have to have lunch?" Teresa asked the first time Cathy showed up by herself. But Teresa quickly accepted Sean's need to stay home on Sundays in the same manner that she accepted his other reasons for not complying with family customs. "He's English," she explained to herself and to her friends. Teresa would only consider a major snowstorm or an illness to be acceptable reasons for Cathy to stay away from lunch, but she always packed plates of leftover food for Cathy to bring home to Sean.

With all that had happened in the last week, Cathy felt the inclination to stay home and sort through some of the notebooks she had unpacked the day before. But didn't want to worry her mother with her absence.

"It's funny how stories continue in real life without us noticing," she said, as she looked into the closet for something to wear.

"What are you talking about? What stories?" Sean asked.

"I'm thinking of my *paesana*, Lucia, and what has happened to her. Twenty years ago she was a young girl promised in marriage. She left her boyfriend of many years to come here. Back then, I thought that was a story in of itself. I even wrote about it once."

"Oh yes... your writing days. Did you write in Italian?"

"No, what makes you think I wrote in Italian? Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that, once a story has been written, you'd think that would be it... end of story, right? I

never gave the characters another thought. But for twenty years, these people have continued living their lives without anyone ever thinking that it was a continuation of a story that started years ago. Now these people make the local news, and it all sounds so banal—no hint of how it started... then.”

“I really don’t know where you’re going with this, Cat. People make news all the time. Stories are happening all the time. When is... then?”

“I’m thinking of the beginning of this story...the past...and how real-life stories never quite end. Yet, they’re only stories if they get written down because you have to have an ending. But a real-life story keeps on going. Someone once told me that beginnings are more important than endings. But how—or when—do you give an ongoing story an ending?”

“I’m having a hard time following your logic. You’re going around in circles... as usual. First of all, stories don’t always have to be written. They can also be told orally, or sung, as in ballads. Your story sounds like an Italian opera—husband is jealous, accuses wife of cuckolding him, kills wife, cries, and sometimes kills himself too. It’s material for a Calabrese soap opera.”

“How come it’s called a tragedy when Shakespeare does it?”

“Shakespeare? Well, if you insist. Shakespeare was a genius in his use of the English language. So, be careful of how you talk about him. It’s not so much the story that’s important, but how it’s told. One’s tragedy can be someone else’s melodrama. In any case, Cat, just so you know, this story is not that interesting for the general reader. It’s been done a few times before, and the ending is quite predictable.”

“Everything has been done before. *Gira e rigira*, we say,” Cathy said while walking toward the kitchen. “Maybe a tragic ending is predictable because it’s the easiest one to write.”

“OK, whatever you say, Cat. Are you going to put on another pot of coffee before you go?”

Cathy unscrewed the espresso coffee pot, washed it, and filled it for the second time that morning. Sean would drink it all without eating anything. Food had become so unimportant to him. All day, he drank coffee, smoked, and studied without showering or changing out of his shorts. Cathy was happy to leave the house. If she did the same and stayed in her housecoat all day long, by the end of the evening, she’d be in a real funk.

While she dressed, she thought again about how little she had noticed Lucia’s life unfolding since she had written about it. How many of its old characters had kept active roles in it? And how strange to become reconnected to her at this point in her story. And at what point was it exactly? Was this its ending? If it was, Cathy had missed its buildup, its resolution, and its denouement, as she had read about in *How to Write a Novel*, which she’d borrowed from the school library a while back. What if this was not an ending yet but another beginning? Cathy resolved to keep tabs on whatever happened next, and to try to find out, or guess, what may have happened in between. If she or someone else didn’t, it would seem as if none of it had really happened. But how far back should she go to try to understand it all?

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>

Sent: October 20, 2004, 12:00:01

To: aurorapublishing@net.ca

Subject: submission

Attachment: ofolivegroves.doc

Franco,

Sorry for the emotion of that last submission— I'll keep an editorial distance from now on, even if some of the issues are charged with old angers and resentments. Here's an unbiased representation of the history of village politics. Hope the names and facts are not too confusing.

AA

Of Olive Groves and Summer Fires

By Antonio Amoruso

Piano Don Carlo, where the Anastasia family lived, bore the name and legacy of Mulirena's sixteenth-century landlord, Prince Carlo Cicala, and of his descendents. The L-shaped row of houses that faced the road and the square had once been one large mansion. Over the years, it was subdivided. By the 1950s, the short end of the L, facing the uphill road, still belonged to the family's direct descendent, Don Luigi; the homes on the longer end, facing the square, belonged to Teresa's family; and, the last home next to the alley was occupied by Rosaria Abiusi's family. The backs of the houses formed an enclosed courtyard with an orchard, which was accessible only to Don Luigi, who was also the town's pharmacist. His home still had all the semblance of a mansion, with a protective stone wall around its entrance, a front courtyard, and large rooms with high ceilings.

Rosaria Abiusi was a first cousin to Don Luigi; her mother and his father were brother and sister, but she was far from enjoying the same wealth and prestige he did. Lands and ancestral houses were generally inherited by first-born sons. Daughters, and especially daughters of daughters, were destined to be shortchanged in this system. The house where the Abiusi family lived still belonged to Don Luigi, and Rosaria had to pay a small yearly rent, just as Teresa paid her brother Pietro a small rent for living where she lived, since it was assumed that he would inherit it after their mother died. However

wealthier families often used parcels of lands as dowries to secure good husbands for their daughters. Rosaria, an only child, had inherited a small but prized piece of property, which her own mother had received in marriage. The rightful ownership of this small piece of flat land near the river, the *Fiumarella*, had been a contentious issue between Don Luigi's and Rosaria's parents throughout their lives, because the water from the river had to pass through this property to get to the larger orchards inherited by Don Luigi. The relationship of the cousins was far from amicable, and Don Luigi still treated them as usurpers. Furthermore, Rosaria's husband, Mario Abiusi, who had been welcomed into the family in spite of his lower social standing—he had been a shoemaker at the time of his marriage—had become a thorn in the family's side because of his political leanings.

The Cicala family had traditionally been staunch Christian Democrats while Mario, dissatisfied with the inefficiency of the party that had been ruling Italy, flirted with most of the other parties that opposed the Christian Democrats: the Republicans, the Fascists, the Liberals. During the war, he had aligned himself with the ruling Fascist mayor, Don Amadeo, and his retinue of men. He became one of the most faithful henchmen of these men, who were considered thugs by his Christian Democrat neighbors in Piano Don Carlo.

For a long time after the war, Don Luigi had lost interest in maintaining his lands. A married couple, Domenico whom everyone called Micu and Assunta, lived in the large *casale* on the property as indentured laborers. They lived rent free and ate from the fruit of their labor, though the first harvest was always reserved for Don Luigi and Donna Rachele. Don Luigi's practice as a pharmacist gave him enough to live on until his only son, Don Stefano, started studying medicine in Bologna, requiring plenty of cash. Micu

and Assunta also struggled to have enough of the olives picked, pressed and sold, until Don Luigi struck up an association with Tommaso *U Generale*, who had inherited the nickname General from his father who used to wear his First World War medals at every occasion. Tommaso was neither a peasant nor a *mastro* nor a *don*, but an entrepreneur. He ingratiated himself with Don Luigi by using more modern means of picking olives, and helping to secure laborers for him. He also had found a market for the remnants of the dried-up, crushed olives and pits, which came out of the press looking like large cartwheels of cork. Tommaso made money by selling it in the cities where it was processed and used for fuel. He installed large nets under every olive tree, which meant he needed less labor to pick olives, and he paid those who worked for him in money rather than with a few jugs of oil, while the Abiusi's olives rotted on the ground.

The sharing of the water for the vegetable orchards created the most conflict between the Alfonso Abiusi and Tommaso. Alfonso made it difficult for Micu, Tommaso's right-hand man, to use the water. Rosaria only maintained a small vegetable patch for their family and didn't need all of the land. Tommaso had even offered to buy out their land, but Alfonso said he'd rather starve than give up the rights to the water and the land that belonged to his mother.

Tommaso drove around the town in a small truck that he also used as a taxi service for the town. He charged a small amount to drive people to the city when he had to drive there for his own dealings, so the fares more than paid for his gas. Since the death of his parents, Tommaso had lived alone in the family home. His sister Raffaella, who was married to Benito, one of the town's many tailors, and who had one son, Totu, went in every day to look after his housecleaning, and brought him cooked platters of

food for his meals. Being unmarried and childless, Tommaso treated his only nephew as his son.

The jealousy and animosity between Tommaso and Alfonso could be traced back to their fathers and to an incident that created an unbridgeable chasm in the town: a fire at city hall in the summer of 1933. *U Generale*, Tommaso's father, had consistently refused to get a membership card for the Fascist party. Mario Abiusi was one of the mayor's men who went around at night and forced cod-liver oil down the throats of those who still resisted the Fascist movement, and who reported any hint of criticism of the party.

One evening in July 1933, city hall went up in flames. The church bells rang in alarm at about 10:00 p.m., and the whole town rushed to watch the building burn—the flames were uncontrollable. That same afternoon, *U Generale's* wife had told her neighbors that, on her way home from her farm, she had noticed a group of the mayor's men walking suspiciously around the building. In the early morning, after everyone had gone to bed to rest, those same men stormed into the homes of *U Generale* and of others like him, who had been considered enemies of the *fascio* and arrested them for having set the fire that destroyed city hall. Mario Abiusi was the witness who sent *U Generale* into exile for months. He declared that he had heard *U Generale* swear, "Italians should all get together and burn their city halls in protest, if that *cornuto* of Mussolini doesn't stop talking about war and raising our taxes."

Though a number of years had gone by since this incident, these old wounds were reopened at every election period, with the town splitting into two factions: the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. The Democrats had a stronger hold on the town after the end of the war. The Fascist party was outlawed, and the other titled family of the town led by

Don Amadeo, so powerful in the Fascist's heyday, scurried to make new affiliations with the Liberals, the other lawful political party opposed to the Christian Democrats. Don Luigi had spent time studying out of town and was not as politically motivated as the rest of the villagers, but Tommaso was ingratiating himself more and more with the province's Christian Democratic party and intended to run for mayor. He openly discussed his political aspirations for his nephew Totu, and paid for his studies. Alfonso Abiusi, and to a lesser degree his younger brother Pietro, opposed with a passion that bordered on hatred whatever political aspirations Tommaso *U Generale* harbored for himself or his nephew. Don Luigi's business dealings with Tommaso also infuriated Alfonso. He couldn't stomach that someone like Tommaso, who had had nothing before the war, now ran the land that was part of his family's history, and was making money from it too. Out of spite, Alfonso ridiculed Totu, who had gone to university and whom he called *u signurinu*, in front of his sister Lucia, who had been Totu's first and only girlfriend in Mulirena.

Sunday Lunch

The minute Cathy walked into her mother's kitchen, Teresa dropped a package of pasta into a big pot of boiling water, and as the water was brought back to a rolling boil, she stirred it with determination and concentration to prevent the glutinous strands from sticking one to the other. The steam billowed over the hot stove, and floated through the small kitchen like warm fog. This was part of her Sunday ritual: sitting around the kitchen table, grating pungent parmesan cheese, and cutting fresh Italian bread, all the while watching her mother intent on stirring, tasting, straining, and then returning the pasta to its cooking pot and drenching it in red tomato sauce before serving it.

Cathy spoke to her mother by phone every day, but she preferred to talk about anything of importance, or of a touchy nature, during these relaxed Sunday lunches, when the topic could be bounced off her brother and sister-in-law Rita. The meal was not very elaborate; this was not the time to try out the recipes that Cathy had been experimenting with, and had passed on to her mother. Cathy's discovery of coq-au-vin, chicken cordon bleu, and coquilles Saint-Jacques had been appreciated by her food-loving family, but only as a change on Saturday evenings. For Sunday lunch, no one expected or ever wanted Teresa to prepare anything but a simple pasta dish with a *ragù* sauce of beef cubes and little pork spareribs for extra taste, some vegetables, a green salad, and some fresh fruit and *amaretti* cookies with coffee. For a special holiday, the pasta was often stuffed and served with roast veal or lamb or both.

Cathy's brother, Luigi was a part-time musician who directed the choir at Notre-Dame-de-la-Consolata Church. After mass, he often stopped at *Pasticceria San Marco* on the corner of Jean-Talon and Papineau to buy cakes and pastries for dessert. This, too, had become a ritual for him, who believed in safeguarding family traditions—especially culinary ones. Lunch lingered well into the late afternoon, and relatives often dropped in with news about other *paesani* in the city, other parts of the world, or those left back home.

As a boy and a young man, Luigi had worried his mother because he was hyperactive and impulsive. His first girlfriends had all been French-Canadians, and he had even dated a light-skinned and attractive Haitian girl for a while. He made fun of the Italian girls that Teresa used to point out to him, especially the chubby, round ones.

“*E’ tunda tunda,*” he kidded his mother.

Then he met Rita, a slender blonde from Campobasso, who was easygoing and agreeable to all the family obligations—a perfect match for both Luigi and Teresa. They married and bought a home in NDG. A year later, a daughter was born. When Cathy went to visit Rita at the hospital after the birth, she jokingly asked Rita what name she had decided on for the baby, knowing full well that her brother, who had hoped for a boy to renew their father's name, would most certainly want to maintain the tradition of naming both first children after the husband's parents.

Rita, still euphoric after the birth, answered cheerfully. “I didn't decide on a name, but all of your relatives did. I swear to you, every one of them has come to the hospital asking me, “How's Teresina, how's Teresina?” Tell me, what other name could I choose?”

Rita started referring to the baby as Terri to avoid confusing her with her mother-in-law who lived in the same house, but Luigi and Teresa called her Teresa. As the first baby in their family, Terri had certainly taken center stage, and the food was served only after she had been fed and put down for a nap. Even Cathy—who usually found it as annoying to listen to her married friends blabbering about their babies’ every action as she did listening to the Canadian teachers at school carrying on about their cats and dogs—even she had taken to the placid and smiling baby’s charms, and found herself looking at toys and baby clothes when she was shopping. That morning, Cathy brought Terri a quilted crib blanket in a white-and-red gingham pattern. She hadn't been able to resist buying it; it looked so homey and comforting.

During the meal, the conversation turned to Lucia and Carmy. Teresa feared that Carmy might cause problems for Cathy at school. “You shouldn’t have taken the responsibility of someone like her,” she warned Cathy.

“What do you mean, *like her*? You haven’t even met the girl.”

“I don’t have to meet her. From what I’ve heard she’s been nothing but trouble to her own parents. They say she’s savage like her father... but I remember Lucia when she was her age. Her brother had to pull her by the hair more than once before she got married... And remember the voyage? It seemed to last a hundred years because of her.”

“Ah, the voyage,” said Cathy. “What took you so long to bring it up? We always end up talking about the voyage.”

The boat trip from Naples to Halifax, which they had taken with Lucia more than twenty years earlier, was always referred to as *u viaggiu* and was brought up frequently. Lucia, a young woman traveling alone, had been placed in the care of Teresa.

“If we have to talk about it...” Cathy added. “You never got out of bed the whole time. I was the one stuck looking after Lucia, and I was younger than her.”

“Yeah, but remember? We spent our time in first class because of her... connections,” Luigi said smiling.

“And I was the one to worry about her,” Teresa said. “The worries were mine, not yours. You were too young.” Then, she added, as if she had been given a new heavy load to carry: “And now I have to worry about her daughter?”

“Why would you worry about her daughter? You’ll worry about anything, whether there’s reason for it or not.” Cathy rarely argued with her mother anymore, but this time, she couldn’t help herself.

“If her daughter is anything like Lucia, you have reason to worry,” her brother said. “Don’t think that Lucia has been a saint with her husband. She probably deserved what she got.”

This last remark from her brother got Cathy even more worked up than her mother ever could have. “And how would you know that? she asked angrily. “Were you in the same room with her and her husband when he beat her unconscious?”

“We still don’t know if it was her husband who hit her,” he said. “And anyway, you don’t always have to be there to know certain things. You can tell from the start how things are going to end up. *Il buon giorno si vede dal mattino*—the start tells the outcome of the whole story.”

“Tell me...since you’re so good at reading other people’s motives. What story does this outcome tell?”

Cathy's question had been addressed to her brother, but her mother answered instead. "Let's say her husband is a devil... maybe he's a difficult man. But a bad and a good never make something bad happen. It takes two bad people to have a fight. Women should keep the peace in a home. If you know your husband is a certain way, you just avoid arguments, especially big ones."

Cathy expected this type of reasoning from her mother, but she still became agitated when she heard it—especially when her brother who, like Cathy, had been raised in Montreal, seemed to agree with it.

Luckily her Aunt Tina came in then, along with Rita who had gone to open the door for her. Tina lived only a block away, and often walked over on Sunday afternoons. As she realized that they were arguing about Lucia, Tina said: "You're talking about Lucia? *Povarella!* I still can't believe it."

"*Se, se, povarella,*" Luigi said, mimicking Tina's tone. "You all still believe that she was a helpless victim, but I remember that she could always take care of herself... when it suited her." He got up and left the table.

Tina replied in Luigi's direction. "Oh, we talk and we talk but we don't know anything." Then turning toward the women sitting around the table, she said: "Even then, people talked and talked. Remember Teré? If it hadn't been for people's bad tongues, she probably would never have married this man. We were only a handful of people but we all know what the *paese* was like—full of envy and jealousy."

"Envy and jealousy..." Those were the exact words that Cathy remembered Lucia saying a few months before leaving Mulirena. At the time, Caterina had just delivered a letter that Totu had written from Rome, and sent to Antonio U Gobbu's house. After

reading it, Lucia opened her back window, which overlooked Don Luigi's courtyard, where her friend Rosina was shelling peas for dinner. She yelled, "I'm taking the first boat available and getting out of this place. The rest of you can rot here until you're green with envy and jealousy." She banged the shutters as hard as she could.

Rosina replied in a barely audible monotone. "You can go to hell for all I care... you and all of your race."

Lucia reopened the shutters and screamed out in a frenzy, "*Puttana e figlia de puttana!*" Then, when she got no response, she reopened the window and screamed: "I'll be the one getting married in a white dress."

Rosina kept shelling peas, as though not one of those words had touched her.

Teresa put on a second pot of coffee for Tina, while Cathy and Rita cleared the table. Then, after she'd checked that the baby was still sleeping soundly, Rita said she would do the dishes. From the basement, the women could hear Luigi practicing scales on his trumpet, as he always did after Sunday lunch. The three women sat around the table, and talked about the old days in Mulirena, and about the events that had led Lucia to marry Pasquale Mancuso from Serra San Pietro. Teresa and Tina rolled off names and nicknames, and events, some of them from before Cathy was born. Cathy couldn't always pin a face to those names, though they still conjured a picture of where the person had lived, and the family to which he or she belonged.

"In the *paese*, we were like cats and dogs," Teresa concluded.

"And we criticize our neighbors here for acting like strangers?" Tina asked. "Isn't it better to be with strangers? At least they leave you in peace, and nobody notices what

you do. We were all related one way or another, and yet, if we could have, we would have slit each other's throats. Who knows? Maybe if the two families had been civil with each other, Lucia wouldn't have ended here with the Sampietrese."

"Your father always said that Mulirena would be a paradise to live in, if only the people wouldn't treat each other like animals," Teresa said, looking at Cathy.

"The summer he left was the last good summer we had," Tina said. "Everything changed after that."

"Let's go sit on the balcony," Teresa said. "There's nice air out there."

The three women took their coffee cups and moved to the deck at the back of the house, overlooking a small vegetable garden on one side and a playground with a swing on the other. Usually Cathy ran home after coffee to do a few chores, and to prepare her lessons for the upcoming week. She felt uneasy thinking of the coming days at school, as the situation with Carmy was still unresolved. Pasquale hadn't been found yet, and Lucia was still in a coma. Sean was too absorbed in his work to listen to her preoccupations, so she decided to stay for another while, and listen to her mother and aunt, who did most of the chatting. The fuzziness of the past cleared as the women talked, as if their words were sharpening the focus of a lens.

Summer of 1955

By Cathy Anastasia

In the summer of 1955, my father was preparing to leave for Canada. He had come home to Mulirena from Milano at Easter and stayed. It was the longest period that he had spent with the family that I could remember, and I discovered things about my father that I had never noticed before. He liked reading as much as I did and, for someone with only a fifth-grade education, he could discuss politics and music as well as Don Luigi, Tommaso, Amadeo and the other more educated men of the village. He liked to peruse a thick book on ornamental architecture, with pictures of different styles of stone columns, cornices, and friezes, that he had studied from in Milano.

In the evenings, Father took it upon himself to give reading lessons to one of mother's cousins, who lived next to us and was illiterate, and by the end of the summer, the thirty-year-old man could write his name and read from my second-grade reader. My mother's other two cousins, who worked in Rome as tailors, were also in town for the summer *ferie* and in the evenings we would all gather at their place. The men played *briscola* and the women played *scopa* with the children. After the card games, Father took to reading from a book on the true-life story of the bandit Giuliano, who hid in the mountains with his girlfriend until he was betrayed by one of his men and was gunned down by a *maresciallo*. After reading the first chapters, Father assigned roles from the story to himself and my cousins and they each read the dialogue that belonged to their

characters. Father played the bandit Giuliano, whom everyone admired for his daring and generosity toward the poor peasants who helped him dodge the law.

During the day, Father spent most of his free time walking with his friends and discussing politics, though he was not as passionate about the topic as some of the others. He was in a delicate position, as his father who lived in the lower end of the town was a staunch supporter of the Liberal party, Mother's family were Christian Democrats, and he got along well with Zio Pietro. As young men, he and Mario Abiusi had also been close.

What his friends thought of him seemed very important to Father. The only time I remember my parents arguing was when Mother found out that Father had lent money to a friend. Father insisted that friendship was more valuable than money. Mother agreed about the friendship, but only if the friend was trustworthy. This friend never worked, was rumored to cheat on his wife, and had taken advantage of Father's generosity before, without repaying him.

"What upsets me is that you believe everything your friends tell you," she argued.

"And you worry about a few lire when I'll soon be working in America," he replied.

"I don't like counting my money until I have it in my hands."

Father kicked a chair against a wall. "You women are always right." He went out to meet his friends at the bar.

Before that, I had never known my father to get easily upset, but a few days later, he was livid when a clerk at the post office told him he was too busy to serve him. Father also lodged a written complaint and started a petition to have my second-grade teacher removed from Mulirena for incompetence after I told him that we used to spend the day

in her class chasing flies. Both times, Mother told him that he was wasting his time, but Father said that people in Milano would never put up with the inefficiency of public workers as they did in Calabria.

“Your father doesn’t like to be taken for a fool,” Mother would say.

Tina was my Father’s younger sister. A younger brother had died working in Milano while under his care. Father had to travel to Calabria to give his mother the news of the fatal accident, but had had to bury his nineteen-year-old brother in Milano since the cost of transporting the body was prohibitive at the time. This all happened before I could remember any of it, but the death left a wound in my father family’s heart that would never heal. I always remembered my grandmother dressed in black and with a sad, drawn-out look on her face.

His older sister, my aunt Rosa, had settled in Montreal, and she was the one who sponsored Father and made it possible for him to emigrate. The summer he left, Tina was seventeen years old, and often came to Piano Don Carlo to join her friends, Lucia and Rosina, at Lucia’s house.

The three girls were like sisters. They had been friends since the first grade, and Lucia and Rosina had been desk friends throughout school. In Italy, school desks were built for two, and friends were usually allowed to share the same desk, and they called one other *cumpagne e bancu*. I shared a desk with a girl called Rosetta, who had been my best friend. Desk friends developed a very close relationship with one other. They shared the same inkwell, borrowed one other’s pencils and erasers, learned to read each other’s handwriting, found ways to cheat and copy from one other. However, if during the course

of the year, there was a fight between the two friends, having to sit so close to one other became hell.

The three girls' grade school education had stopped after the fifth grade. For high school, the *medie*, they would have had to travel to the provincial city of Catanzaro, and none of their parents could afford it. After the fifth grade, a girl's only possible occupation was to work for free for the local dressmaker in exchange for learning the trade. Neither Tina nor Lucia was particularly adept at sewing. They spent time chatting at Adelina's, but I don't remember either one of them ever doing any sewing. However, I often saw Rosina sitting on Donna Rachele's balcony, mending clothes. Every evening, without fail, the three girls dressed up and walked to the *Funtanella* for fresh water.

Rosina spent a lot of time with Donna Rachele. She was the daughter of Domenico and Assunta, who looked after Don Luigi's olive grove and lived in the large *casale* on the farm. Since he was running Don Luigi's business, Tommaso *U Generale* had also inherited the services of Rosina's family. Domenico still ran the farm, but spent more and more of his time working in the press and going to the city. The couple, who had two other children younger than Rosina, were fully dependent on Tommaso for their livelihood. Tommaso settled the family in town, in a small house that belonged to him, not far from his own house, but the couple often spent the night at the farm. When they did, Rosina slept at Donna Rachele's.

Rosina had never really worked on the farm, and had attended school in the village. As a child, she slept at Donna Rachele's to keep her company as Don Luigi was often away. As she got a little older, she did little chores around the house, though she was never considered a maid. Rosina was as well-groomed as any of the other town girls.

She had fair skin and was very pretty. Her straight, light-brown hair and large, light-gray eyes set her apart, but her fragile beauty was somehow tarnished or diminished by the fact that her mother was a peasant, a *Ciociana*, originally from somewhere near Rome. Assunta had a reputation of having been quite loose when Domenico, after his military service in Cassino, married her and brought her home. The gossip around town was that she had probably slept with Don Luigi, and the reason he was so kind to Rosina was that he felt a fatherly love toward her. Rosina had a very friendly disposition and went in and out of people's houses with more ease than was usually considered acceptable, but this was easily explained by the fact that her mother was a peasant and an outsider. Even local people who lived on farms all the time seemed to live by a different set of standards. Because the houses of Donna Rachele and Lucia were connected at the back, when Rosina was a child, she had always gone in and out of Lucia's house, and was not shy about eating there whenever she was asked. "They live like *zingari*," was the usual comment from the townspeople.

One day, Assunta came to my maternal grandmother Stella's grocery store to buy shampoo. At that time, shampoo was a product that they had just started selling in Mulirena. Assunta said it was for Rosina, not for her...as though she had to justify buying such an extravagant product to the other ladies there. When she left, the women looked at each other and said, "See? A few years ago she was living like a gypsy for Don Luigi, and now she's buying shampoo for Rosina."

A zingarella or little gypsy is what Comare Rosaria called Rosina, who was very tiny as a young girl. As Rosina grew older, she and Lucia developed a close friendship.

However, Alfonso, who was a very protective older brother, wasn't too happy to see Lucia being so close to her.

In the summer before Father left, Tina used to come to Piano don Carlo almost every night for a *passeggiata* with Lucia and Rosina, and they would bring me along too. I was a useful little helper since I distributed all of their love notes back and forth. Each of the three girls had a boyfriend courting her. By the time they were fifteen or sixteen, it had become common knowledge that Tina "made love" with Alessandro, a young tailor who lived near her and who looked like Rossano Brazzi, the actor; Lucia with Tommaso's nephew, Totu; and Rosina with Gennaro, the blacksmith, who was a close friend of Alessandro. When the three girls passed by the boys, either on the way to the *Funtanella* or on the bridge, one of the boys would hand me a candy with a little note around it, which I passed on to one of the girls. I knew to keep the notes secret, especially from Lucia's brother, who was known to have a bad temper and to dislike Totu. Once, when he caught the two whispering together in the alley next to the house, Alfonso dragged Lucia by her long hair to the house and kicked her inside, saying as he shut the door, "Stay inside and don't let me find you going around like a *zingara* again." But this didn't keep Lucia from going to the *Funtanella* the next evening and giving me a note to pass on to Totu.

Alfonso always seemed angry at someone. I never saw him smiling. Totu was an innocent bystander. He and Alfonso had never had any arguments, but Alfonso disliked him by extension because he was Tommaso's favorite nephew. But he couldn't stop Lucia from seeing him. Totu was considered one of the best catches for any girl. He was good-looking, smart and had a future ahead of him.

That same year, Totu was talking of enrolling at the university in Rome to study law, but his uncle thought he should study accounting in nearby Catanzaro. Totu argued that, in southern Italy there were too many *ragionieri* out of work. But Tommaso convinced Totu that it was more important to stay close to home and build up friendships in the provincial city. In the end, he said, it would be the connections he had that got him a position, not the degree. Lucia said that Totu had agreed to consider accounting only for the sake of staying closer to her.

In late September of that year, Father left for Canada. He left town so often that I didn't even remember the actual parting. We all knew that the absence would be a short one, that he would call for the family as soon as he could. Mother kept telling everyone that, for her, the main advantage of Father going to Canada was that the family would be able to live together in one place.

One day, in the piazza, as he passed by Tommaso's car, Father had jokingly said, "When I get a big American car, I'll call for you. And then you'll learn how to drive like one of the *americane* in the movies. You can be whatever you want there, a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor."

"I want to be a teacher," I had said cheerfully.

With the coming of fall, the routine that the three girls had followed during the summer also changed. Alessandro, Tina's boyfriend, joined Teresa's cousin Domenico in Rome to work as a tailor. He left at the beginning of September. Gennaro, who was a year older than the other two boys, was called for his military service in Bari. Totu was the only one who remained in town. He traveled back and forth between Catanzaro, where he studied, and the village, where he helped his uncle when he was not busy. He

still had time to walk by Lucia's window during the day and to join his friend *U Gobbu* at his house at night.

Life in the village always changed after the summer, when many of the men went away. The girls didn't go to the *Funtanella* as often because the water from the aqueduct was more plentiful, and the weather became wet and drab.

Before leaving, Alessandro had gone to my grandparents' house to speak officially to grandfather about marrying Tina. The two families had exchanged visits and presents, and the two became officially engaged. With her boyfriend gone, Tina didn't come to see Lucia as frequently. It wasn't considered serious for an engaged girl to be seen roaming around town. Rosina had told her friends that she didn't want to have anything more to do with Gennaro. But when he was home on leave, he still spent his days underneath her window.

"You can't go from one boyfriend to another," Tina warned Rosina. "People will talk."

By this time, Rosina regularly slept at her own house, since Donna Rachele had taken a boarder, Signor Gavano, who had replaced my third-grade teacher. That's when the "voices" started. I always found it amusing that people referred to village gossip as "voices," as though vicious rumors were started and spread by some faceless force from the sky. I had already started rehearsing for my role as Saint Bernadette, and in it, the villagers all made fun of Bernadette and the "voices" she claimed to hear.

Rosina was beginning to develop a reputation as being too "free," and Alfonso forbade his sister to be seen with her. He accused her of going to *U Gobbu's* house late at night, and always when Totu was there. At first Rosina defended herself, saying that she

had only gone there to deliver fruits and vegetables that her father had brought late at night from the farm, and her friends had believed her. Alfonso also claimed that Totu and Rosina had been seen together on the road to Don Luigi's farm. After that, there were many angry looks and words exchanged from the balcony between Lucia and Totu, and many exchanges of notes.

Totu assured Lucia that it was all a lie, and even Rosina swore to Lucia on the head of her youngest brother that she had never spoken to Totu about anything except maybe his uncle's business. Things cooled between Lucia and Rosina, but they still spoke to one other. But then, Rosina was suddenly removed from the Saint Bernadette play, and she did something that had the whole town talking—and who could stop the malicious “voices” then?

After Mass, on a Sunday in late October, Rosina went into Don Luigi's medicine cabinet, and swallowed a bottle of pills. Donna Rachele became hysterical, and alarmed the whole neighborhood when she found Rosina in a daze, and the empty pill bottle on the floor. Don Luigi was not in town, but the teacher, Signor Gavano, made Rosina vomit and carried her like a rag doll down to the piazza and into Tommaso's truck. They rushed her to Catanzaro, and she stayed in the hospital for almost a week. When she returned home, looking pale and gaunt, the story that circulated was that she had been found to be pregnant, and that Tommaso had arranged for an abortion.

Two days after her return, her father, on a drinking binge, was heard yelling outside the *osteria*. “My hunting rifle is ready for *U Gobbu* and his lazy, good-for-nothing friends.”

The same week, Totu suddenly left for Rome to study law, even though he had started classes in Catanzaro a month earlier. I saw the note Totu sent to Lucia. He told her not to believe the malicious rumors. But Lucia couldn't understand the sudden departure and she tore up the note. There was no proof that Totu had anything to do with Rosina, but what Lucia found strange and suspicious was that, if Rosina had really been pregnant, she had never told her two friends. They were still friends, and they used to tell each other everything—especially Rosina, who was so frank and open. When Rosina came back from the hospital, she stopped speaking to them, and she never denied anything.

“If she did it,” Lucia said, “She did it out of envy, and if she didn't do it, she refuses to deny it out of envy too.” Rosina and the two girls stopped speaking to each other and considered themselves enemies.

With Totu in Rome, Tommaso went back and forth between Rosina's and Gennaro's parents, negotiating as only he could. Gennaro was still in Bari when all this happened but, by the end of the month, he came home on leave, and he and Rosina were married in a subdued and quiet wedding, early on a Sunday morning before Mass. The priest wouldn't marry Rosina in a white dress, and her family didn't insist on it—proof to everyone that the stories about her being pregnant were true. She wore the little suit that she had worn at Easter with a shawl over it. Donna Rachele, Tommaso and Signor Gavano were the only ones to attend the family aside from the two families. The two men signed the marriage register as witnesses, and then went to their respective homes. The bride and groom had Sunday lunch with their families at Rosina's house. After lunch, Domenico went to work at the oil press and Rosina, Gennaro and his family walked to the

far end of town where they lived. The next day, the groom went back to complete his military service while the bride remained with his family.

Another commotion was created at my grandparents' home a few weeks later when Alessandro wrote to Tina from Rome to break their engagement. He said he felt too young to be engaged, that he had to think of his future in Rome first.

"It's all excuses," Grandmother said. "He found himself a Romana." Time after time, the young men who went off to the cities left their girlfriends in the village for new girlfriends.

"But we were engaged," Tina cried.

From Montreal, Father wrote Alessandro a very angry letter. He felt personally betrayed by him. He then wrote to Mother, saying that he might have to call for his sister before the family. Luckily there had never been any reproaches about Tina's behavior with Alessandro, so it was likely that she would find another boyfriend in Mulirena, but just the same, the break-up felt like a blow to the family's honor, especially since they had been engaged. He felt it would be best for her to start fresh in a new place.

"At this rate, it will another ten years before we're called," Mother said glumly after reading Father's letter.

"How could someone change so quickly?" Tina asked Lucia.

But after barely a month of living in Rome, Totu also sent Lucia a letter, saying that they should forget one other, that he needed to concentrate on his studies. He stopped writing.

Mother was in a foul mood when she heard the news about Totu and Lucia. “You’d think these men had never seen women when they go away, and get bamboozled by the first city *zingara* who comes their way.”

The *passegiate*, the love notes, the stolen glances, the whispered promises became memories for the girls. It seemed as if suddenly all the men had either broken their pledges or given up on them. They had all but disappeared from our lives, and the rain that started pouring from the grey November skies seemed to drench the air with the sadness of the women’s tears.

Piano, Piano

The women had been so busy chatting that they didn't notice that Rita had washed and dried all the dishes and cleaned the kitchen. She reappeared with Luigi and the baby, the three of them dressed to go out. Tina, who had come especially to see the baby, took her from her mother and started making all kinds of baby talk. Then Rita and Luigi went on their way to see Rita's family for the afternoon. As they left, both Teresa and Tina said, "Go, *piano, piano*." Cathy thought that if her family had a coat of arms, their motto would be "Slow and Easy."

After they left, Teresa took a platter of grapes from the kitchen counter, a small bowl of nuts and a large bottle of Seven-Up from the fridge, and returned to the balcony. Cathy got up to stretch her legs and then the three women sat again and continued talking about Rosina and Lucia.

"If it hadn't been for what happened with Rosina, things might have turned out differently," Tina said.

"That Tommaso...he took care of everyone," Teresa said.

"Remember how he drove around in his *camioncino*? He even made money from that, but what did it bring him?" asked Tina. "He never settled down and he hustled all of his life. Maybe if he'd had a wife and children ..."

"We are all born with a destiny," Teresa said. "But it was Tommaso who saved that girl. If it hadn't been for him, she might have ended up working in Catanzaro as a housemaid."

“What saved her was Argentina, not Tommaso,” Tina said. “It was only after they went to Argentina that the town stopped talking about her. In town she would always have been treated like her mother. She’s never gone back to Mulirena. It’s as if people who went to Argentina got lost. I’d like to see her one day. Who knows what she’s like now?”

Cathy, too, wished she could have known more about Rosina. All she remembered about her were her gray eyes and light-colored hair, and the blue satin sash that she was going to wear at the play.

“But at least Tommaso made sure she got married,” replied Teresa.

“Tommaso always thought of everything, but he made a mistake when he sent Totu away. He just made people talk more. Maybe it would have been different if Totu had never gone to Rome. Rome ruined many men,” she said bitterly.

Cathy looked at her aunt and wondered if, after all the years, the hurt of having been treated so terribly by Alessandro had lessened. Tina got up and said she should be getting home. Her two sons would soon be coming back from a football game and would be hungry, and she couldn’t trust her husband to cook a meal if his life depended on it.

It was already five. They had chatted for over three hours. Cathy also got ready to leave and Teresa quickly got up to prepare a package of food for Sean. As Cathy and Tina left, Teresa also cautioned them to go *piano, piano*. “Especially you with the car,” she told Cathy.

Driving home, Cathy made a mental note to go visit her Aunt Tina more often. Her own story had also continued without much notice from Cathy or anyone else.

Seeing Lucia, her family and the many other *paesani* at the hospital a few days earlier had awakened the desire in Cathy to start writing about the past again. She had some notes, some facts, some hearsay, but there were so many gaps in her understanding of what might have happened. She only knew the women's side of the story. Maybe it was time to go visit her *paeano*, the journalist, the know-it-all, the "pope" as she had nicknamed him, who published the *Gazzettino Italo Canadese*. Though he worked near her school in Little Italy, she hadn't spoken to him in years—was it fourteen, fifteen already? She would go to his place of work and finally ask him a few questions about Mulirena, and maybe about Rome.

To: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: October 13, 2004
From: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: submission

Attachment: totu's rome.doc

Dear Franco,

Her visit to my office surprised me. She hadn't changed much over the years, though she had a strained look on her face. But her spontaneity and her smile felt like a breath of fresh air after the unfortunate and squalid happenings of those past weeks. This is the note I sent her, together with a piece I wrote for her on Rome, which I'm including in the manuscript. It's the only work of fiction I haven't yet discarded.

Caterine',

You don't mind if I call you by the name by which I know you best, do you?

I apologize if it has taken all of these years for me to respond to your earlier writing, but I remember that period, when you first submitted your work, as a very frustrating one for me. I'm one of those people who can't walk and chew gum at the same time. I had so many personal concerns then, that I could not devote the time you and your writing efforts deserved, and I was too embarrassed to admit that I lost the last manuscript. Then we both went on with our own lives with partners—natives from this side of the world—and I assumed that, for you, finally, the past had lost its fascination. But you're as persistent as ever and very kind to give a helping hand to our friend's daughter. Let us hope that Lucia will soon come out of her nightmare.

I'm still quite ambivalent about returning to a time and place that was the source of great upheaval not only for our individual lives, but the collective destiny of thousands of Southerners like us.

You asked me to fill in some gaps for you. I can't say that what I remember will necessarily be of any use to your story. But here's my fictionalized take on what Totu would have experienced going to Rome for the first time in the fall of 1955.

Totu's Rome

By Antonio Amoruso

When Totu was confronted by Rome for the first time, he was overcome with vertigo. The city was loud, brash, and in constant motion. After a sleepless night on the train with nothing to eat, his first sight outside Stazione Termini was of dozens of city buses spewing fumes and swerving in and out of the bus terminal. Cars and motor scooters sped by, honking their loud horns in a cacophony of city noise unlike anything heard in the village, where only the occasional herd of sheep, one car, one small truck and one motor scooter would upset the quiet. Catanzaro's traffic seemed trifling in comparison. He asked for directions to the palazzo on Via Merulana, where his friends Domenico, Santo and Alessandro lived. He knew it would only be a short distance, but the directions he was given seemed complicated. As he walked past gray stone buildings, fountains and statues built to the scale of giants and gods, Totu took in his first glimpse of Rome's obsession with the colossal and its reputation for things eternal. Next to them one could not help but feel the limitations of human measures and one's own smallness.

Throughout the train ride, he had felt like a limp and ragged marionette pulled by the strings of petty village politics. This sudden trip to Rome, spurred by his uncle, was unplanned, and he was uncertain of what he was expected to do here. He did not know if he would even be allowed to enter the university and in what course of study. He had not even had time to inform Domenico of his arrival, or his friend would have been at the station to meet him. Luckily he was sure to have a place to stay, sharing a room with Alessandro, who had come to Rome a few weeks earlier, but still, Totu was barely out of

his teens, away from home, and alone for the first time. Stuck in the middle of traffic at a busy intersection, he wondered what he would get out of this city.

“You did well to come here,” Domenico said after the initial shock of seeing him, and after hearing his long explanation about the reason for the last-minute decision. “You’ll see. Everything’s different here.”

“No kidding,” Alessandro added. “Here you can breathe. Rome is something else!”

“And the women!” Domenico said winking at Alessandro. “Ask Alessandro about the women, and how many conquests he’s made already.” Alessandro grinned in response. He looked slimmer and wore his hair differently—a long chunk of wavy hair falling on his eyes.

“Eh,” he added. “Rome will always be Rome!”

“Rome was, is, and probably always will be a city built as a monument to the egos of conquerors,” Totu said. But he and Alessandro were thinking of different conquests.

In time, as he explored more of Rome, Totu would observe how each epoch had left its landmark structure on the city: the arc of Augustus, the Coliseum, St. Peter’s Basilica, Castel Santangelo, the Monument to the Fatherland in Piazza Venezia. Is it not significant, Totu mused, that Mussolini’s humiliation, his hanging head down while people spat in his face and kicked his shins was made into a public spectacle, not in Rome, but in Milano? The image that had remained of Il Duce in Rome was that of the young leader, virile and proud, who had stood on a balcony at Piazza Venezia in 1922, and called to his countrymen to follow him. This legacy had remained associated with the all-white marble building, layered like a wedding cake, which overpowers the square

with its bulk, and which was built as if just in time for his March on Rome. Twenty-six thousand people gathered in the square to cheer him on that day, and millions of Italians in Italy and abroad believed they had found the man to return them to the glory of Rome. Throughout its long history, Rome had never conceded defeat.

The young men were in Rome thanks to Domenico, Teresa's first cousin, who had come a few years before, having heard that good tailors were in high demand. Most men from Mulirena went to Milano, where they found jobs as stonemasons, carpenters or just plain *manovali*—assistants to the *mastri*. To save money, the men lived together in makeshift quarters on the periphery of the city, and returned home only for major holidays. Because of the exorbitant cost of decent housing, few could hope to bring their families there. It became a commonly acceptable way of life for married couples to live apart for years, and to only see each other at Christmas, Easter and the summer *ferie*.

Because of the roughness of their work, and because of their speech and peasant manners, Southerners were nicknamed *terroni*—of the earth—by the Northerners. Most of these Southerners dreamed only of making enough money to feed and clothe their families back home, and to buy a new suit for themselves with which to impress the *paesani* on their visits to the village.

Those who went to Rome were of a different class. They were skilled artisans, mostly tailors, of which there were many in Mulirena. Their long apprenticeships in tailor shops and their years of painstaking needlework served them well, and proved valuable in a city that favored custom-tailoring. Domenico found a job and a place to stay near the train station, and he soon had a following of loyal clients who appreciated his meticulous workmanship, not only for men's suits, but for ladies' *tailleurs* as well. Tailored ladies'

suits were very popular at the time, and coordinated well with the short “*alla maschietta*” haircuts of the fashionable *Romane*.

Domenico had spoken of his good fortune in Rome to his friends during their *passeggiate* in Mulirena. After only a few months of working there, he befriended a fifty-year-old widow named Marcella, who owned an elegant apartment in Via Merulana, not far from the shop which was near Santa Maria Maggiore. She offered Domenico a room in her large apartment, and he accepted on condition that he could bring his brother Santo and set up his own shop there. She accepted, and he called his brother, also a tailor, and they started working together. Word got around of how well he was doing that Alessandro decided to join them. Whenever other *paesani* traveled to Rome for their visa, Domenico always met them at the train station and offered them a place to stay.

The apartment on the second floor of the palazzo faced Santa Maria Maggiore church. Domenico had described in such detail that, when Totu arrived on his own, it was as though he had already lived there. It was reached by an open elevator with wrought iron doors; it had a large foyer with gilt mirrors, a hanging chandelier, and a dining room with heavy, ornate furniture. A small kitchen, a bathroom and four bedrooms were lined up along a dark corridor. By all accounts, the apartment on Via Merulana seemed to belong to Domenico, though his legal or business relationship with Marcella was never made clear. He shared a room with his brother, but he freely went in and out of the room of Loredana, Marcella’s nineteen-year-old daughter—especially during the afternoon siesta, which they took religiously every afternoon. For Domenico, having acquired accommodations in such a palazzo made him feel as if he had made it in Rome, and he never considered going back to live in Mulirena.

Alessandro followed Domenico, who hired him and gave him lodging in the same apartment. When Tommaso decided to send Totu to Rome, Totu knew he could count on Domenico for a place to stay. With the two extra men, the apartment was filled to capacity. When someone else needed a bed for the night, they opened folding beds in the foyer and dining room.

Loredana had her own bedroom. She worked as a *commessa* at an UPIM not far from there, and she introduced the group of young men to her circle of friends. She also helped Totu find his way around the university's bureaucracy. She had failed the first year of university in *Lettere*, and was happier working at Italy's largest department store. The young men and Loredana's friends went out in groups, took rides on motor scooters, and went to the cinema. When Alessandro arrived in September, it was still warm enough for them to go to the beach in Ostia. Like Domenico, he took to the new Roman life immediately. He had been one of the best-looking men in Mulirena, and had been nicknamed Rossano Brazzi as he had an uncanny resemblance to the movie star.

"In the *paese*, you can only talk to girls in sign language," he told Totu, trying to explain his decision to leave Tina. "You get a chance to touch one only after you marry her. And what if there's nothing worth touching?"

"Marriage is like a melon," Domenico said, quoting the words of a Neapolitan song. He added his own interpretation: "It can turn out sweet and juicy, or it can turn out bitter and green. You only find out when you cut it."

To lie on a beach in Ostia, next to a semi-nude *Romana*, to be touched and caressed by one, and to be looked on as a demi-god in this city, with its images of cavorting satyrs on every piazza, was a heady experience for Alessandro. He immediately regretted

having committed to Tina, just before being exposed to this bounty of delights. He felt that the most honorable thing to do was to break off the engagement as soon as possible. Other men with similar experiences chose to keep and marry their Mulirenese girlfriends, while continuing to enjoy the favors of the more liberated city women in Rome.

“I want a future in Rome,” he said. “Like Domenico.”

For Totu, the quarrels he had left behind seemed as insignificant as the squabbles between the pigeons that littered the city's many squares. And yet they continued to weigh on him. He sent letters home for Lucia. He mailed them to *U Gobbu's* house, from where they would be delivered by one of the neighborhood kids, either Caterina or her brother Luigi. The exchanges were always angry. Lucia was upset at his sudden departure. In every letter, she mentioned Rosina and the gossip about them that persisted in the town. Totu insisted that there had never been anything between him and Rosina, and that his decision to go to Rome was due to his uncle changing his mind about his studies. He did admit however, that Tommaso had also feared that Rosina's father, out of ignorance, might do something crazy and hurt Totu. The man was a heavy drinker and was known to lose his cool easily.

Totu managed to get admitted to the university, but in *Lettere*, for the first year. He would have to work his way toward entering Law later. At first, he partook in the outings and activities of the group headed by Loredana and Alessandro, who had become a pair before his arrival. After his initial curiosity, Totu found her and most of her friends insipid and shallow, and he became bored with their company. He joined them only when they went to the cinema. His studies took up much of his free time and he had to count on his uncle for spending money. Tommaso badgered him with news of provincial politics

and expected Totu to keep up his associations there and to also make new connections in Rome.

Lucia also wrote with more insistence, especially after Alessandro broke his engagement to Tina. “Are you also going to fall for a *Romana* too?” she asked. She wanted to know whether he’d return to Mulirena for Christmas, and if he would talk to her family about an official commitment to her. But for Totu, having to face her Fascist father, her sleazy brother and his own opportunist uncle in the same room, to discuss his future proved too much of a challenge for his sensibilities at the time.

In the first few months of living in Rome, Totu couldn’t shrug off the feeling of inadequacy that he had brought with him. Rome overwhelmed him with its ostentatious assertiveness. He never knew what to say or do next, and felt pulled in many different directions. All he wanted was to find a niche in which to hide for a while. In school, he had to struggle to keep up with the others, whose language proficiency was far superior to his, and he was not sure he would ever make it to Law school. Thus, his uncle’s constant urging to make political contacts in Rome infuriated him.

“This is not Catanzaro, where you know everyone,” he wrote Tommaso.

His uncle replied: “If you stay in *Lettere* you’ll end up teaching elementary school in some forsaken mountain village—if you’re lucky enough to find a job, that is. If you can’t get into Law, then you may just as well return here next year, after things have cooled down.”

In time, Totu connected with a group of Political Science students, and attended discussion meetings with them. A nucleus formed, and they met more and more regularly after classes and late into the night. Totu finally experienced a sense of belonging with

this community of intellectuals, that had never known before, especially in Mulirena. In fact, their discussions made the policies of the Christian Democratic Party, for which his family had fought, appear as corrupt as the backroom tactics of Don Amadeo and his gang. They read and studied the writings of Antonio Gramsci, especially his *Prison Notebooks*, on the Southern Question. He was won over by Gramsci's ideals of creating an alliance between the peasants of the south and the workers of the north. As a student, his role was clearly identified: an elite of "organic intellectuals" who would form a new historic bloc and bring about a new social order in post-Fascist Italy. The Party became his religion, his obsession, his only love.

He wrote to Lucia: "Rome is full of beautiful and available *Romane*, but my mind and heart are taken up by other interests and concerns that you would not understand. If you want more of a commitment, find yourself another puppet. For now I want to end to this story, with you and all of Mulirena." Ending his relationship with Lucia represented a clean break from Mulirena and the first step out of an inertia from which he wanted badly to escape.

He wrote his uncle: "You are all becoming puppets of Rome and care little about the plight of the south."

"Am I paying all of this money for you to become a Communist?" Tommaso wrote back.

"Don't worry," Totu answered. "I'm looking for a way out. I won't be a parasite forever."

To feel that he had arrived, Domenico found room at the palazzo. Alessandro set out to conquer as many *Romane* as possible. But Totu's deep desire was to make the city his own, if only he could conquer his paralyzing fear of Rome itself.

From: Franco Pastore aurorapublishing@net.ca.
Sent: October 15, 2004, 3:12 PM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Fw: Re: submission

Antoine,

I appreciate your efforts at writing fiction, and your take on Totu, but the little pompous amoeba is beginning to get on my nerves. What kind of name is Totu anyway? I know of Toto', the Neapolitan buffoon who tried to imitate Charlie Chaplin with his bowler hat and little moustache. Come to think of it, Becket's Godot is also modeled after Charlot, a French Charlie. Maybe your friend knows more than we give her credit for, or maybe I'm making too many connections— the result of spending an inordinate amount of time with my nose stuck in books. But I laud your attempt to bring some personal experiences to the writing. It makes it that much more realistic. But I would change the name of the love interest.

Franco

PS: I've never asked you, but I'd be curious to know where, and at what stage of your own life, you became immersed in the writings of Gramsci? Were you ever a card-carrying member of the Communist party, or are these questions too delicate to ask?

Week 2

Wednesday morning, October 8, 1980

The Bad Air

Sean lay still in bed, watching Cathy dress. He was taking the morning off to meet with an officer from the Human Resources Department to discuss his request for a leave of absence.

“How many times did you change this morning?” he asked her.

“It’s hard to know what to wear at this time of year,” she answered nervously.

She hated being watched while she was getting dressed, especially this morning, after arguing with Sean about Lucia and Carmy.

Five days had gone by since her call to the Social Services Agency, and Cathy hadn’t yet heard from them or from the administration. The day after the hospital visit, Cathy spoke to Carmy on the telephone, and informed her of Mrs. Champagne’s decision. That had been the last she had heard from the student.

“Who gives a shit?” Carmy had said, sounding indifferent and far away. “I wouldn’t be coming to school now anyway.”

“No, it’s important that you come back to school soon—as soon as possible,” Cathy told her, and she warned her to expect a call from Kelly Morrison, the caseworker to whom she had spoken. She told Carmy to keep it confidential.

Pasquale was still free and nowhere to be found. His absence incriminated him more than anything else. But, from what Cathy had read on domestic violence, it would be hard to prove when the victim couldn't or wouldn't testify. Lucia was still in a coma, though the doctors believed she would be coming out of it soon. The only bit of information that Carmy had volunteered when Cathy spoke to her was that she and her grandmother would be moving to Alfonso's home in Laval. Comare Rosaria was afraid to stay alone in the city since the incident. As if bad fate couldn't follow her to Laval, Cathy thought.

The news of Lucia's attack had spread through the school once it became known that the story involved Carmy's mother. In spite of Carmy's seemingly taciturn personality, she had developed a small circle of friends outside the class, and they were incensed by her expulsion from school.

"It's not fair, with what she's going through," Linda said.

Cathy tried to discourage the gossip surrounding Cathy's family, but speculation about the story continued, and she couldn't prevent herself from listening to it, especially in her own class. Suddenly the character of Lucia's husband, her desire to get out of the marriage, and their connection to Jack Russo had become public knowledge, with the students giving the story their own twists. Linda and Franca had an argument about whether or not the husband was justified in striking his wife if she had provoked him.

Then Angie, one of the shyest students, one who rarely spoke up, had a scoop of her own. Her mother, who knew Lucia's husband's family, had been at a function at the Casa d'Italia a month earlier, and had seen Lucia dressed like a twenty-year-old. But, the student added, it wasn't so much the dressing up that had been suspect. After all,

everybody dresses up at these affairs. But Lucia had been dancing with a couple of men, dancing as though she were single, while her husband looked on.

“She looked like his daughter,” Angie said.

“See?” Franca said. “She was probably flirting or having an affair and he found out. What do you expect? She’s been married for twenty years. Why hasn’t she tried to leave him in all that time?”

“Flirting is not having an affair, for crying out loud,” Linda answered. “Everybody flirts at parties.”

“Oh yeah? Speak for yourself, Linda,” Franca said, and the remark sparked laughs and more comments from the rest of the class.

Oh yeah, Cathy thought. Lucia could be a flirt all right! She remembered her black eyes, piercing and direct when she was upset, but flirtatious when she smiled. But this sudden appearance on the community banquet circuit baffled Cathy. Lucia's brother Alfonso and his wife had many connections in the community, and they attended many social functions, but Lucia and her husband had been known as a recluses in their Laval home. They were rarely seen together at social functions unless it was a family gathering or a funeral. Why the change? Cathy was curious to know.

Then, early on Wednesday morning as she started getting dressed, Sean asked Cathy if she thought the beating was due to a settling of accounts. “I heard that your friend’s husband and her brother are well connected,” he said.

“What kind of stupidity is that?” Cathy replied. Among her family’s acquaintances, it was known that Alfonso had many friends with criminal reputations, and there was often talk that he must have had some help from them in getting rich so

fast. But it was just gossip. He sold and bought real estate, and this was an industry in which one could do well on one's own.

“JP is somewhat concerned. It seems that both men have ties with some underworld figures...including Jack Russo.”

“Why the sudden concern about my family's friends?” Cathy asked.

“He's in politics and is planning on running. It doesn't take much for the media to make connections,” Sean said.

“Connections with whom?” Cathy was puzzled and irritated by the comment.

“Well, in politics one has to be very cautious. I'll be working for him. I wouldn't want you and your family to be associated with this woman's problems or her family.”

Cathy put her hands up in exasperation and pulled off a top that she found too tight. “I can't believe what you're saying after living with me and knowing my family so well. We're not even related to the Abiusis, and even if we were, does being friends with them mean that we're partners in crime? What do people know? And the idea of a settling of accounts...Really! Tell JP he's watched too many mob movies.”

“No need to get worked up, Cat.”

“I only get worked up when people talk about others without really knowing what they're talking about. Anyway, if JP isn't comfortable being seen in this house, he'll do me a favor by staying away.”

“JP is going out of his way to get me involved in his work. It could be something good for me. I'm just repeating what I heard. Actually, he's reacting to what's been written in *Allô Police*.”

“Well, if you believe *Allô Police*, Italians are always settling accounts. We’re either the best or the worst accountants around. This is purely a domestic matter, I’m sure,” Cathy concluded. Then she settled for a long, loose, brown blouse that covered her hips.

As she left the house, Sean told her not to expect him for supper as he’d be spending the afternoon at the Concordia library to do further research on his paper before going to his Wednesday night class.

As Cathy waited for her class to fill up, Mike Burns made a point of sticking his head in the door to tell her that the administration had sent Carmy’s family a letter advising them of her dismissal. The usual procedure would have been to telephone the parents and call them in for a conference. He was afraid that the letter might have been overlooked in the turmoil. Cathy sensed that Mike was angry at this lack of consideration and at the fact that he wasn’t consulted at all, even though he was the assistant principal in charge of discipline.

“We always criticized Mr. Barnett for being wishy-washy,” he said. “But he always acted like a gentleman and respected people’s feelings.”

He then caught Cathy off guard and asked her why she hadn’t applied for the position of department head yet. He reminded her that she should have done so before the end of the day. Cathy hadn’t given this any more thought. Mike told her that Nick was the only applicant.

“Let’s not let the wrong people get the upper hand,” he said before dashing off, and before Cathy had a chance to respond. He had made that comment before.

Cathy had lined up a demonstration on permanent waving, but had to postpone it until after recess because the key teacher, Steve, had called an impromptu staff meeting for the morning break. The purpose of the meeting was for the union representative to brief the teachers on the labor negotiations taking place with the government. Teachers across the province were gearing up for a strike to defend the right, acquired under a previous contract, to determine their own level of capability, whereas the school boards wanted to set up systems to assess accountability. Instead of a general strike, the different unions across the province were proposing surprise sporadic walkouts in different schools each day. This would create more confusion for the school boards than a one-day protest strike, and would get more news coverage for the teachers.

At the meeting, Cathy sat next to Bruce. He had sought her out as he came into the auditorium to tell her that Kelly Morrison had called him to inquire about Carmy. "They should reinstate the girl, for crying out loud," he said. "Have you spoken to the family? I understand you know them well."

Cathy had to whisper, as the meeting was starting. She found herself mumbling and not talking as clearly as she would have liked. This happened to her whenever she spoke to someone she admired or was attracted to. Yet Bruce had a soft, relaxed manner of speaking, and seemed truly interested in helping out. He looked at her straight in the eyes with a curious and an almost startled expression at what she had to say about her visit to the family and her call to Kelly.

Then Steve's voice boomed across the room, "Be ready to walk out at any time!" and Cathy and Bruce stopped talking to listen to him. They were told that notice would only be given early in the morning of a walkout. Each teacher was given a list of

telephone numbers. The plan was for teachers to call the next person on their list, after having been called by the previous one. This system had to be explained a number of times before everyone understood it. Cathy listened and wondered how some of those teachers managed to teach math and science to a class of thirty students every day, when they themselves couldn't seem to grasp the notion of chain telephone calling.

"I'm not too confident that this plan will work," she whispered to Bruce. He laughed lightly, looking at her, but she kept her gaze on the speaker.

By the time the end-of-recess bell rang, the meeting was still going on. Some teachers got up to leave but the Keyteacher, whose task it was to act as a bridge between the teachers, the union and the administration, asked everyone to remain seated. "We will stay out of class for as long as it takes," he said, raising his voice over the microphone. The speaker taught Geography and Personal and Moral Education—the new name for Religion. He was a big man who had always appeared like a friendly bear to Cathy, so his serious, confrontational tone wasn't very convincing to her.

"Something else needs to be discussed in the presence of the union representative," he added. "The b-a-a-a-d air in the school!" Again his words resonated over the auditorium, because he enunciated each word slowly and gravely while holding the mike so close to his lips that he seemed to want to eat it. This time Cathy looked up at Bruce and they both grinned, trying to suppress a laugh.

For the last couple of years, while Mr. Barnett was still principal, many teachers had complained of persistent headaches and dizziness. Some blamed it on the poor quality of the air circulating through the ventilation system. Mr. Barnett kept promising that expert studies would be conducted, but nothing was ever done. But in the dispute

against the government, Steve, prodded by a number of other teachers who hadn't taken kindly to Mrs. C's administrative style, wanted the issue brought out in the open. They had suddenly taken the position that the administration was too concerned with student discipline and hadn't given enough attention to the health and welfare of teachers. A heated discussion ensued about what protest measures they should take. The more militant teachers believed that the problem should be broadcast as loudly as possible, now that the public's eyes would be on them; others thought that it should not be spoken about in public at all, because in the end, by badmouthing the school, they would only be hurting themselves. The more ethically minded teachers were concerned about the example they were setting for their students by playing dirty with their superiors. "How will we face our students after all this is over?" someone asked, while the militants rolled their eyes and snickered.

With Bruce sitting next to her, Cathy listened to this debate with only half an ear. She liked Bruce, but in spite of his being easily approachable, he unsettled her a bit. Susan, one of the secretaries, had had her eye on him, and once remarked to Cathy that Bruce had a tendency to undress the ladies with his eyes. "I fear he may be a womanizer," she said, but still pinned her hopes on the fact that, though he lived with someone, he wasn't yet married.

At the time, Cathy remembered thinking that she didn't mind being undressed of her layers by someone as gentle-mannered as Bruce. But now sitting next to him, she wished she didn't have to talk at all. For Cathy, words could be both a burden and a barrier. Without knowing anything about him, Cathy had a hunch that Bruce might be the type of man who would know you just by being next to you. Steve went on about the bad

air, the administration and the union, but Cathy lost the drift of what was being said. Her mind was distracted by Bruce, wondering why the touch of her arm brushing against his made her feel as if they could easily melt into each other without saying much.

The meeting ended with the union representative promising he would bring the matter of the bad air to the attention of the union executives. "Something will most definitely be done to force this administration to clean up the air as well as their act!" he boomed.

As everyone applauded, Bruce said to Cathy, "When Carmy comes back, we should get together. I'd like to help you plan a system of monitoring her progress."

Cathy nodded in agreement and smiled broadly but mumbled, "Sure. That would be great."

After the meeting Cathy walked down the stairs with Cecile Campeau, the Home Economics teacher. She was to be the live model for the perm lesson, and had been the first to come forward when Cathy advertised for volunteers in the daily bulletin. Cecile was a middle-aged, tall and large woman. She dressed well and generally conservatively, except for her colorful scarves and interesting costume jewelry. Unfortunately, she was not blessed with great hair. It was baby fine, limp and sparse, exposing her large bony forehead, and making her face appear angular and masculine. She had a very resolute manner of walking and talking, and as they walked downstairs, she couldn't contain her disgust at the unreasonable attitude some of the teachers had toward Mrs. C.

"*Ben franchement, j'ai mon voyage!*" she said, shaking her head and raising her shoulders. "*Ils sont pires que des enfants, ces messieurs là. Qu'ils donnent une chance à la pauvre femme, mon Dieu.*" Cecile believed that if Mrs. Champagne played hockey and

drank beer with the men every Friday night, like some other administrators, they would never have brought up the subject of the air at this time.

Nick and his buddies were walking behind them. They also disagreed with what had been decided about the walkouts, but only because the plan would penalize teachers where it hurt the most: their pocketbooks. Cathy listened to their comments without participating in the discussion.

“We’re playing into the government’s hands. It’s what they want us to do.”

“We’re too polite. Look at the bus drivers: they’ll get what they want.”

“And what about the policemen and the firemen? How long did they stay on strike before the government caved in? A few hours at the most!”

“But we don’t have the same bargaining power. The longer we stay out, the more money they save.... to pay for that Olympic pit on Sherbrooke East.”

“Or the referendum.”

“Yeah, and who gives a damn about a few out-of-work English teachers anyway?”

“Not our education minister, that’s for sure—the separatist bastard.”

“Wait till the janitors get hit! They’ll close down all the schools in Quebec. They’re the ones we should be getting on our side. They have all the power around here. They know the school inside out.”

Nick and his friends kept talking animatedly as they walked into the staff room, while Cathy looked for her classroom keys, and continued walking with Cecile past two more classroom doors. Cathy could picture the men huddling in the staff room, concocting plans and schemes.

The Perm Lesson

Cathy settled Cecile on a hairstyling chair and asked the students to form a semi-circle around her. They moved quickly and seemed keen. For the last three weeks, they had spent hours sectioning, rolling and winding permanent rods on the lifeless mannequins. Their movements had become repetitive, slow and disinterested. Cathy sensed that they needed to be pulled out of the lethargy they were slipping into. They were just about ready to move on, and watch how real straight hair could be coaxed and shaped into something different than what it was meant to be. Before starting the demonstration, she told them that the challenge of perming was not in just getting hair to curl—a home perm kit could do that—but to get it to look more natural than the natural.

“A bad perm is ten times worse than no perm at all, and a damaged head of hair is damaged for good. Only a haircut can heal it. So the trick is to learn how to tame the natural shape of the hair gently, without force.” Cecile sat and listened, absorbed by what Cathy had to say. She would be getting a free perm and a hairdressing lesson in the bargain.

While Cathy arranged her tools on a movable trolley, she asked the students to analyze Cecile’s hair, write down their observations on a client record card, and decide on the proper selection of lotion and rod size. The students looked at the hair; some touched it timidly and asked Cecile a few routine questions. She then asked Franca to wash Cecile’s hair while she looked at their notes:

Hair porosity: moderate

Hair texture: fine, soft

Hair condition: dry and brittle

Hair elasticity: poor, limp

Client's desired result: firm curl

Suggestions: regular lotion for fine hair, pink or gray rods, processing time between three and ten minutes.

Cathy could not disagree with any of their observations. That Cecile had fine, limp hair was visible to anyone a block away. The terminology and suggestions were straight out of the notes from the Standard Textbook of Cosmetology. But as she handled the hair, her own fingertips told her another story, and she worried about following the book's recommendations.

Each year, this was the part of the course that really stumped Cathy. At this point, she always seemed to lose credibility with a few students, those who needed pat solutions to problems, that were straight out of the book. Teaching and practicing perm-setting techniques had been fairly easy. The hair on the mannequins was all the same texture and in the same condition. And students liked reproducing the setting patterns from the book diagrams. The rods were set in neat straight rows, "like Russian soldiers at a May Day parade," she liked to say. The clear-cut exercises were easy to follow and required little thinking. She could let them work by themselves while she sat at her desk and planned the upcoming class or, more often than not, looked at fashion magazines or home decor magazines.

As Cathy cut Cecile's hair, she felt a slight coarseness in the texture of her fine hair, a coarseness that she knew had the potential to frizz. And even if it didn't frizz, she suspected that, if she followed the directions to a T and ended up with the firm curls

Cecile had requested, Cecile would not really be happy with the results. Cathy visualized the tight curls springing up around Cecile's large forehead, leaving it exposed and hard.

It was only a hunch and she couldn't decide if it deserved an explanation. One could never be certain of how this type of hair might react. Or maybe Cecile would not really mind a very curly perm. She sensed though that Cecile was not as staid as one would think. She had a playfulness about her and a *joie de vivre*. At parties, she was the first one to run to the dance floor, and those colorful scarves told Cathy a lot, too. A looser curl around the high forehead and nape would give her a little touch of softness, even youthfulness, and bring out that playful quality about her.

You don't need much with hair—irregularly cut bangs, a few capricious wisps—to bring out something in the client's personality that she herself doesn't know how to express. You have to sense it and give it to her as a surprise gift, and then watch her smile in the mirror at the end.

"Girls, I have a hunch that the pink rods are out of the question," she told the class hesitantly. "Even the gray might still be too small. I'm afraid her hair might frizz."

"But won't the white be too big?" asked Franca.

"Yes, so we need to improvise along the way," Cathy said.

She used the gray rods but took thicker sections of hair than usual, and rolled the hair loosely, almost messily. As she reached the hairline, she also left out a few loose strands, uncurled. She decided to go with her hunches and feelings.

"Miss," said Franca. "Whatever happened to the Russian soldiers?"

"I've told them to relax," Cathy answered.

"They look drunk to me," Linda said.

The students laughed, while Cecile looks puzzled. *How do you explain a hunch?* Cathy wondered. *How do you teach students what you feel with your fingertips?*

She wanted to tell them about all the variables to consider when dealing with the Ceciles out there, the variables that are not spelled out in textbooks, and how when all variables are taken into account and hunches acted upon, the results are never guaranteed. She also wanted to warn them of the times they'd see disappointment in the client's eyes, despite their efforts. And how the whole day would feel like a failure. But how do you ever prepare someone for that?

More and more, Cathy realized the futility of the pursuit—so much labor for such a short-lived effect. *Some art!* she thought. After all that pain and deliberation, within days, the hair would grow out of shape, curls drop, colors fade, and there would be nothing left but the tenuous hope of the hunch—the brush of the arm that seemed to awaken you from a long slumber and that carried you off in a new dream.

But all she told the class was, “Every client has her own set of individual needs. Their needs don't always fall into neat categories. Think of all the variables. Your success in hairstyling depends on understanding the client's individual needs.”

The students looked at her as blankly as she had spoken, but she couldn't think of the right words to explain what she felt. She added, “Try to find that special touch that makes the client feel special and different, even if only for the moment that she sits on your chair.”

Cathy couldn't tell whether her explanation made any sense, but Cecile nodded in agreement. She was probably hoping that her fine, limp hair would be transformed into dense, thick tresses. *Such expectations!*

The perm was wound and the lotion applied. Cathy took a test curl immediately and told the class that the processing time would be a few minutes longer than suggested, given that she had used a very loose setting. She gave them permission to stretch their legs and take a break. Cecile had her eyes closed so Cathy let her rest. She went to sit by the reception desk and leafed through some old magazines.

She felt a bit annoyed at herself for not having consulted with Bruce more often while Carmy was in her class. He must have a keen knowledge of people and what made them act or react in all kinds of different ways. She browsed through a *Ladies' Home Journal* and stopped at an article with pictures on how to transform a large pantry into a breakfast nook. The thought of a home of her own was becoming very appealing to her. *Home and Gardens* inspired her the most. There was a beautiful picture spread of white wrought-iron furniture in a sun-drenched garden terrace, under an awning. The table was set in yellow and blue china on a white linen tablecloth. It looked as fresh as a spring bouquet of tulips and daffodils.

Maybe, she thought, living in a house with a garden like that would make me feel *sistemata*—her mother's word for being settled down. By all accounts, she'd been as good as married for two years. Would new furniture and a garden make a difference?

She remembered to check on the perm, and noticed Mrs. C looking inside the classroom through the small window on the door. Cathy didn't know whether to open the door for her, or ignore her and acknowledge Mrs. C's prerogative to just look in and check on things. Cathy pretended not to see her. After a few instants, the principal opened the door and walked in with a smiling young woman. Mrs. C looked disapprovingly at Cathy, who was standing by the desk on which the magazine was still open at the garden

picture. Cecile, with her eyes closed, a plastic bonnet on her head, and lotion dripping down her neck looked alone and deserted. She was surrounded by the empty chairs and by tools, implements and dirty towels still scattered all over the counter. And the girls, who were busy playing with their hair and make-up, sounded like a bunch of hens in a coop. Cathy tried to attract their attention and called them to order but with little success. They were unconcerned by the presence of their school principal and a visitor.

Mrs. C introduced the visitor. "This is Kelly Morrison from Social Services. This is Cathy Anastasia. May we have a few words with you?" She seemed to be looking for a safe place to speak.

"Yes, but I need to check on the permanent," Cathy said, pointing to Cecile. "I've just given a demonstration. I'll be with you in a second."

"We'll wait for you in the corridor," said Mrs. Champagne, and walked out with Kelly, who was looking around the classroom curiously. Most people were amazed to see a hairdressing salon in a regular high school.

Cathy managed to gather the girls around Cecile again. She showed them how to take a test curl. The perm was ready and she instructed Franca to rinse, blot dry, and apply the neutralizing lotion. She joined Mrs. Champagne outside, but not before begging the students to keep the noise down.

Mrs. C spoke in a strained voice. "Kelly came to discuss the Carmy... situation. Given the circumstances, and the fact that Carmy's mother is still hospitalized, we have decided to take her back in."

"I understand," Cathy said. "Good."

“In the next few days, however, we will have to sit down together, with Bruce, Nick and maybe Mike, to set out some ground rules for Carmy to follow, if she is to be successfully integrated into the regular stream.”

“Yes, of course. I’m available at any time,” Cathy said.

Kelly spoke, using the slow, soft tone of voice of those who work in the caring professions: “Cathy, I understand that you were making some progress with Carmy. What happened is unfortunate: both the graffiti and...her mother’s beating. But with these cases, it’s one step forward and two steps back. She won’t be an easy case to handle. Do you feel up to taking her back?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“You’ll need some help though, Cathy. The person you should be working with most closely is Bruce McNicholl. He’s a good person and very knowledgeable about problem students.”

“Yes. He already offered his help.”

“Good. But don’t expect her in this week, though. There is a problem with her living accommodations. Her grandmother refuses to stay alone in the city. I am trying to find a foster home to place her in from Monday to Friday... closer to school...to make it easier for her to attend classes.”

“Oh, I doubt that her family would allow her to stay in a foster home...a stranger’s home... like an orphan,” Cathy said, expecting that this would be the response from Carmy’s family.

“Well,” said Mrs. C. “I don’t think they’ll have much choice in the matter—if they want to keep her in school that is. She’ll have to attend regularly.”

“Of course, attendance is compulsory,” said Kelly. “Cathy, since you know the family, maybe I could ask you to accompany me and translate the next time I visit them. I found it very hard to get through to them.”

“Absolutely. Anytime... Look, this is only a thought...” she added instinctively. “I could probably have Carmy stay with me for a week or two while her mother is at the hospital. I have an apartment not far from the school. I could drive her in the morning.”

“Oh, do you live alone?” asked Kelly.

“Yes. Well, my fiancée comes over at times, but I have a spare room. My apartment is not far from where she lived with her grandmother.”

“It’s certainly something to consider, but I’ll have to clear it with a few people—especially the family,” said Kelly.

“Oh, I’m sure that the family won’t have any problem with it.”

Mrs. Champagne didn’t seem to be listening anymore. She didn’t remark on the suggestion. Her eyes were all over the place, watching teachers and students walk by, questioning their every movement with her stare.

“I’ll contact you as soon as I clear things up with everyone. Cathy, thank you for your help,” Kelly said, and then left with Mrs. Champagne.

Cathy returned to class. The perm was completed, the rods removed, the hair rinsed. The students oohed and aahed at how softly and naturally the curls fell. Cecile’s fine and—now—wavy hair was quickly dried into shape and she seemed genuinely pleased with the results. She gave Franca a tip and thanked Cathy profusely.

“You should wear it like that all the time; it makes you look younger,” Franca said, already displaying the qualities that would make her a very successful hairstylist.

“Maybe I’ll get Miss Anastasia to come to the house every morning and do it for me,” she replied. She left, patting her hair and smiling, and closed the door behind her.

“For once she doesn’t look like a dork,” Gina, blurted out.

Cathy laughed with the rest of the class, then asked the students to tidy up and go back to their mannequin work until the end of the period. To keep them occupied, she gave them a time test—to try and finish a perm setting in half an hour, then in twenty-five minutes, then in twenty minutes, and so on. This usually added an extra bit of interest to the exercise and would keep the students busy for an indeterminate amount of time.

Cathy thought about the rash offer she had just made. Sean might not approve, and how would she explain his presence in the apartment to Carmy’s family? She figured that Carmy could sleep on the sofa-bed in the den. JP, however, wouldn’t be able to stay overnight on his visits to Montreal, but it would only be for a week or two at the most. But what made her feel most nervous was that Carmy hadn’t really opened up to her. Their rapport had been very formal. Cathy called Linda to her desk and asked her if Carmy had told the girls anything about her family situation. Linda said that when they went to Nick’s class during recess and on lunch breaks, Carmy often complained about how she didn’t get along with her family.

“Miss...” Linda said. “I don’t think her mother is all there, to tell you the truth. I met her once and she seemed spaced out... really out of it. And her father is always busy with work. Carmy is really alone. Maybe that’s why she acts up, but she’s a riot outside class.”

“Have you seen her much after school?”

“One day we brought her to the club just to cheer her up,” Linda added.

“What club?” Cathy asked.

“You know, the club we go to—on the corner of Clarke and Park. Le Bar à Go-Go.”

“Why there of all places? Isn’t that a strip club?” Cathy asked, alarmed.

“Yeah, but it’s not what you think. In the afternoons, they give dancing lessons.”

“Is that where you’ve been taking your jazz dancing lessons?” Cathy asked. She had heard the students talk about taking jazz dance classes.

“Yeah, me and Gina. They give us free lessons.”

“Who are ‘they’?”

“Jackie and George, from the club.”

“Why would they give you free lessons?”

“Well, they might hire us...as dancers... later on, after we graduate.”

“Do your parents know you go there?”

“Not really. But it’s not what you think, Miss. In the afternoons, it’s a regular bar. For us it’s just a place to learn how to dance.”

“Was Carmy taking dancing lessons, too?”

“No, she just came to look. She says she’s always liked jazz dancing but wasn’t allowed to take lessons.”

Cathy became more worried the more she spoke to Linda. The club in question was partially owned by Jack Russo, and was known to be a hangout for some underworld figures—not the type of place she wanted Carmy to frequent, especially while she stayed with her. She was also miffed that Carmy and the girls seemed to have opened up in

Nick's class, that they had confided in him and not in her, and that they had discussed the club with him.

Cathy thought of her visit to the hospital a few evenings before, and tried to figure out who in the family Carmy most resembled. Not her delicate mother nor her grandmother nor her uncles. *She must be her father's daughter*, Cathy thought.

The Reading Glasses

A few weeks before, Cathy had had a conversation with Carmy's father, Pasquale, that had left her unsettled for several hours. After having Carmy in her class for three weeks, it became obvious to Cathy that Carmy was practically illiterate. She even brought in a French hairdressing manual, but Carmy could hardly read a few lines, and couldn't answer in writing any of the exercise questions at the end of each chapter. Cathy had discussed the problem with Bruce, and he'd suggested that maybe she should find a way to question her orally when it came time to mark her.

One day, Cathy had asked the class to copy some definitions on hair structure that she had written on the board, but Carmy made no move to do the work.

"Carmy, why aren't you copying the definitions?" Cathy asked.

"Miss, I can't see," she replied.

"You're only a few feet from the board. How can you not see?" Cathy felt exasperated that Carmy might be playing games with her.

"I can't see, like, I need glasses. I can't see," she repeated touching her eyes with her hands.

"You need glasses? Then why don't you wear them?"

"I don't have any. The old man doesn't want me to get them. You know how they are, Miss. He thinks I won't find a husband if I wear glasses."

As usual, Carmy had the rest of the class laughing at her remarks, but Cathy knew better than to laugh. She took her aside and asked her to tell her about her eyesight problems.

“It’s an old story—since elementary school,” Carmy said.

Her eyesight, she explained, had been tested in her last year of elementary school and a letter had been sent to her house saying that she needed to get glasses. Her parents ignored the letter, and then she changed schools. Two years later, the high school nurse informed her parents, also by letter, that her eyesight needed to be checked. Her parents never made an appointment. Eventually, a second nurse intervened but couldn’t get through to the parents and eventually just gave up. Her parents, Carmy said, never attended school meetings unless they were called in to discuss a problem.

It seemed that there were so many other problems that the eyeglasses somehow slipped the attention of the school authorities.

“My father really thinks that girls don’t look normal with glasses,” Carmy said.

Cathy couldn’t believe how such an important need could go unnoticed for so long, both by the school authorities and her family.

“I’ll have to inform the nurse and make arrangements to have your eyes tested,” she’d told Carmy.

“You can have them tested, but it doesn’t mean I’ll get glasses. You don’t know my father. *Testa dura Calabrese*,” she said knocking her head. Those were the first Italian words Cathy had heard her say.

“What if I speak to him?”

“Good luck, Miss.”

Cathy first called Lucia, who knew about the problem but somehow didn't seem overly concerned.

"I have never seen her open a book," she said. "With or without glasses. I don't think that it makes a difference. But if you think it's important, maybe it's better if you speak to him. He never listens to me, anyway."

"The problem with Carmelina... it's not the glasses," the father said, talking to Cathy laboriously in Italian rather than in dialect. "Carmelina has always been pigheaded and lazy. The glasses are just an excuse."

"But if she can't see, she can't read."

"Tell me. Can you guarantee me that if she gets glasses she'll learn how to read?" he asked.

"No, that I cannot guarantee. But I can guarantee that if she doesn't get them she will never be able to read. *Signor Mancuso, Carmelina é in-al-fa-be-ta!* " Cathy was beginning to raise her voice. She felt her face flush with anger. *The girl is illiterate!*

In the end, Carmy's father had agreed to have her eyes tested again, and the next day Cathy had the school nurse arrange an appointment. Cathy had been mostly upset at the father, but as she thought about it more, Lucia's behavior seemed also inexcusable. Where had she been all this time? None of it made any sense to her. If anything, these people—her people and Carmy's people—had the major fault of smothering their children with love. Even when they failed you, you somehow felt obligated toward them

and loved them back. But in Carmy's case, Cathy sensed a neglect that wasn't common. As the old lady, Rosaria, had put it, "What had happened to this family?"

Now, with a mother in a coma, a father who had disappeared, and an elderly grandmother with whom she could hardly converse, Carmy would certainly need someone to look after her, besides Linda and the girls at the club. Cathy would never have guessed that Carmy was interested in jazz dancing— she moved so awkwardly—but then, what chance had she had to cultivate a love of dancing, even if she had had the aptitude? Cathy thought of the irony of labeling someone like Carmy "special" and then making her feel like a misfit. Imagine the distortion in the child's mind! Any hint of difference, any little spark that might have made her stand out from the bland and the uniform had probably been snuffed out of her before it had any chances of shining. Sometimes, though, small fires are the most difficult to extinguish. Maybe, in Carmy's case, it was this spark, repressed and buried for so long, that had turned into a sneer.

The Stink Bomb

At lunch, Cathy walked toward the cafeteria and heard a stir of voices inside the Tech-Voc staff room. Besides the usual staff members, she heard the booming voice of Steve, the key teacher. When she peeked in, she saw Steve and two janitors, including one she had never seen before—sitting around Nick's desk. When they saw her, their conversation stopped. Steve waved at her.

"Come on in beautiful," he said. "Join the fun. I've always said that tech-voc has the prettiest teachers." The others ignored his comment.

“Hello Steve,” Cathy replied. “I’m not staying. I’m going for lunch.”

Bowing his head and smiling, Nick said, “Congratulations. I heard about your friend coming back.”

“News travels fast,” Cathy said, also with a smile. She waved at the group and walked up the stairs.

She had decided to follow Mike Burns’ advice, and bring her department head application form to the office before going for lunch. If nothing else, it would show her interest. She gave the application form to Susan, the secretary, rather than hand it personally to Mrs. Champagne. Susan had just seen Cecile’s hair and wanted to know if Cathy could use another model.

The two were working out an appointment, when everyone in the office raised their heads from their desks and sniffed. A sickening smell had suddenly permeated the air. Soon, office doors were opening. Mrs. Champagne and the other administrators came out with worried faces, sniffing the air like everyone else. Mrs. Champagne moved quickly toward the foyer in front of the students’ lockers, where students were scurrying, getting their lunch bags or putting away their books. Cathy heard a commotion and stepped out of the office to look. The students all seemed to be in a frenzy, from the chubby first-year students in tight polyester pants, to the seniors in their expensive torn jeans and Led Zeppelin T-shirts. Holding their noses, they squirmed and talked excitedly, as if they had been, at the same time, the butt of and the perpetrators of a huge practical joke

“Stink bomb! stink bomb!” they kept repeating. The stink, though, continued to waft through the ventilation system, so it was clearly not a student’s silly prank. The

principal returned to her office. After a couple of minutes, an intercom message was heard:

“I want everyone’s attention, please. All teachers report to your end-of-day supervision duties. I have just received instructions from my superiors at the school board to dismiss classes for the afternoon. There will be no after-school activities. All students are asked to leave the school building immediately. I repeat, all students please leave immediately, but in an orderly fashion. Teachers without supervision must also leave the building. The school will be thoroughly inspected.”

A loud roar of approval rose from the foyer. Everyone flowed out of the hallways with big happy-face smiles at the unexpected afternoon off. Cathy walked down to her room and noticed that the Tech-Voc staff room was empty, and then she briskly walked up into the garage. Teachers ran toward their cars, as excited as the students. Some were shaking their heads; all were smiling.

Soon a small traffic jam formed inside the garage as everyone tried to drive out of their spaces at the same time. Cathy was stuck in her spot while a line of cars drove slowly past her. Someone honked. It was Bruce. He rolled his eyes at the craziness of it all. Cathy shrugged her shoulders and raised her hands in helplessness at being unable to move. He stopped his car, got out, looked behind him and motioned to the others to back off. The line of cars backed off, enough for her to slip out of her spot in front of Bruce. She waved to thank him, and felt a sudden urge to jump over and hug him.

Inside the car, it felt hot and claustrophobic. Cathy rolled down her window and heard a cacophony of noises—the clanging of doors opening and closing, the revving-up of engines and the blaring of car horns—sounding like annoying noisemakers at the end

of a party—bouncing off the cement walls, floors and ceiling of the garage. The smelly fumes gave Cathy nausea. She finally drove out into the open, but her eyes, accustomed to the dim garage, were blinded by the sudden, brilliant sunlight hitting her car window. She squinted, and for an instant, felt disoriented. Where was she?

She remembered Mulirena, remembered walking home after school with Signor Gavano, her third-grade teacher, who lived close to her house. Out of nowhere, images of people and places from the past seemed to pop into her mind, as though they had been there, around the corner she just turned.

She regained her bearings and inched her way out of the garage driveway and into the street. She waved to Bruce in the car behind her as they turned in opposite directions.

Park Ex

The scene outside the school was chaotic but festive. Over two thousand jeans-clad teenagers, with shiny skin and stringy hair half-covering their faces, poured out of the school entrance and into the residential street, already narrowed by cars parked on both sides. They filled the street as though they owned it, without any regard for the cars coming out of the parking garage and trying to maneuver their way toward the main thoroughfare. The students circled and hugged the cars, pounded on the hoods and knocked on the windows to get the attention of their favorite teachers, and then give them V signs or a thumbs-up sign. The early dismissal and the carnival-like atmosphere was

making Cathy feel jittery. She felt as though she should be doing something special with the chunk of free time.

The crowd had dispersed by the time Cathy reached the corner, but she still drove slowly and absent-mindedly. The green light turned orange and she came to a full stop, ignoring the impatient honking from the driver behind her. She faced Jean-Talon Street, with its constant east-west flow of traffic. Cathy must have crossed this street thousands of times in the past because it cut through every area that she had lived in or worked in since coming to Montreal. Many groups of newcomers to Montreal gravitated to this commercial street. The district around the school, Park Extension, or Park Ex as everyone called it, had been appropriated by Greeks and by immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries.

Two of Cathy's students, Linda and Gina, with glossy, pouting lips, and with their eyes all made-up, waved at her as they crossed the street on a red light. She wondered whether they were headed toward Charlie's, their hangout and their name for Le Bar à Go-Go. She could have offered them a lift, but that was the last place she wanted to go after an early dismissal. And besides, they were on the other side of the street already.

Cathy could not decide where to go next. She asked herself whether she should turn left toward her apartment, or turn right toward the Town of Mount Royal and go window-shopping at the Rockland Shopping Center. The weather had been balmy the past few weeks and she hadn't yet given any thought to fall and winter clothes. The other teachers wore the same clothes, year after year, but she liked to have something new at the beginning of each new season. The kids at school were into grungy clothes and hadn't taken to the disco craze yet, but clothes in general were getting glitzier and dressier. The

gauzy skirts and afghan tops that she'd worn until only a couple of years ago looked like quaint costumes from another era.

Rockland Center had recently been renovated. It was transformed from a small outdoor strip mall, with 50s-style, undulating plastic awnings over store windows, into a luxurious, three-level indoor mall. It housed some of the most exclusive fashion boutiques in the city and, since Cathy had been working at WHHS, she had been doing most of her shopping there, usually on days on which she had two or three consecutive periods off. The food court on the basement level had become a favorite lunch place for teachers during *journées pédagogiques*—professional days which the students had off—so they could meet and discuss pedagogical matters. They usually took long lunches: the men at the taverns close-by; and the women at the shopping center. She thought of going to eat there, but after all the stop-and-go driving, the prospect of searching for a parking space and lining up for fast food in the windowless and crowded food court was not appealing.

At Rockland Center, the two major stores—Eaton and The Bay—as well as hundreds of exclusive shops were packed tightly into a city block that separated the Town of Mount Royal from the poorer east end of the city of Montreal. The cost of homes in this part of town was prohibitive according to some of the teachers who were house hunting. Cathy liked the tranquil atmosphere of this town within a city, and she liked that each house was different from the one next to it. But she wondered whether she would ever be able to afford a house there. She might have to settle for a garden in a more affordable community, like many of her teacher friends. One thing was sure, though. She was not moving northeast, like her *paesani*, to the new developments, with rows of

monotonous duplexes and triplexes, built by Italian contractors who had made a bundle of money in the cement and asphalt business.

Cathy thought that maybe T.M.R. appeared more inaccessible than it really was. Maybe it was the high fence, well covered by hedges, that ran along its boundary from Jean-Talon to the Metropolitan Expressway, where the Rockland Center stood facing one of the busiest traffic circles in the city. Cathy understood that the rational reason for the fence was to control traffic into the residential community. If she had been a resident there, she would probably have wanted a fence too. But whenever she was stuck in traffic, she couldn't help but see the Rockland Center as a fortress with a moat around it, protecting the Town of Mount Royal from its poorer neighbors.

Apart from a discreet Eaton sign on one end of the mall and a La Baie logo on the other, there was little to suggest that the brown brick walls contained a shopping center—no crass, illuminated signs, but only a discreet, French-only Centre Rockland in gold-embossed lettering. Many of the center's merchants originated from places where everyday trade was conducted out of dusty open-air stands, and where prices were always to be haggled over. But this was no ordinary marketplace. In the center isles, natural light poured in through high skylights, but it was subdued lighting. Cool polished marble and brass fixtures always made Cathy think she was entering a sanctuary, a commercial cathedral catering to the buying habits of upper-middle class. *No, she thought, the afternoon was too bright and sunny to waste it in a church.* As the light changed back to green, she turned left onto Jean-Talon and headed home.

In contrast to the fashion boutiques at Rockland, the little shops on Jean-Talon Street looked as if they had never seen the hands of professional window dressers. One

store in particular, on the corner of Wiseman, always caught her attention. To Cathy, there was something odd in its French sign, *Nouveau Acropolis: Vêtements Pour Toute la Famille*, in blue and white letters—the colors of the Greek flag. Many of the household goods on display—the embroidered tablecloths and brocade bedspreads—look imported and would have been right at home in any remote Mediterranean or Greek mountain village.

Cathy wondered what the owners of *Nouveau Acropolis* could have been thinking in choosing such a grandiose-sounding name for a dry goods store. Were they hoping, with just a name, to establish their own new Acropolis on the corner of Wiseman and Jean-Talon, or of importing a tiny bit of the old one? In any case, Cathy thought it was a useless attempt to hold on to their past!

The store's window was crammed with children's clothes hanging limply on hangers—First Communion dresses, baptismal gowns, formal boys' suits with bow ties. The housewives of the area, some of whom still worked at menial jobs, spent small fortunes on these clothes so their children could be displayed at weddings and at family functions like trophies. Whenever she saw these expensively dressed children, Cathy wondered how often they would be reminded of the sacrifices their parents had made for them. She had heard this refrain often enough in her own family.

Cathy impulsively stopped her car and parked it in front of a Greek restaurant, *Miss Park Ex*. She felt like buying souvlaki and eating it on the street. She wouldn't have minded walking to Jarry Park, to join someone on a tree-lined walkway, just as they did in the Italian or French movies she watched on late night French TV. She really wanted to talk about everything that had happened that day, but to whom? Bruce would probably

have made a good listener. But she couldn't just go up to him and say, "I'd like to talk"—she would have felt silly. In any case, it was not like her to open up to just anyone like that. And he had seemed as much in a rush to get to his suburban home as the others had.

Without bothering to roll up the window, Cathy got out of the car and entered the restaurant. She was hit by a surge of hot air, permeated with a mixture of smells that she could not identify. Miss Park Ex was really a greasy spoon, as well-known for its all-dressed pizza as for its Greek fare, but she ordered the *souvlaki*. She knew the owner, Costa. In his twenties, he was a graduate of WHHS and ran the restaurant for his father. The short-order cook looked familiar too, but she couldn't think of his name. She could have sworn that she had just seen him in school, in the Tech-Voc staff room, but he didn't seem to recognize her, so she figured he just looked like one of the janitors. She told Costa to go easy on the *tzatziki*. He replied, "Got you, Miss," as if he were still in school. Discipline was pretty lax there, but students still called all the women teachers "Miss" and all the men "Sir."

"You're expecting a busy night," she said, pointing to the empty pizza boxes, ready to be filled and delivered, that were stacked on the counter in a leaning tower that was about to tip over at any minute.

"E-e-v-e-r-y night is a busy night here," Costa replied, dragging himself around, as he gave the order to the cook who worked behind him, moving from the pizza oven to the hot plates, to the toaster.

On the menu above the counter were plastic-laminated pictures of a jumbo hot dog, a hamburger, and a club sandwich, each on a plate garnished with heaps of French fries and coleslaw. The restaurant was long and narrow, with booths on the wall opposite

to the counter and cooking area. The wall above the banquettes was covered with tinted glass squares, undoubtedly to give the bowling-alley-narrow space the appearance of more width. The place was stuffy, and after a few minutes, Cathy could distinguish the heavy smell of cheese melting over pepperoni sausage, the meat sizzling on the hot grill, and Costa's sweat. The wall-to-wall carpet, judging by its stains, looked as if it had not been cleaned in years, and must have absorbed and retained all the smells, and probably a few more.

"I can imagine the stink," Costa said. Noticing Cathy's puzzled expression, he explained. "I heard they stink-bombed the whole school, Miss. I freaked when I heard it. It was bound to happen, sooner or later."

"You've heard already?" asked Cathy.

"Here, I hear everything, Miss. If parents only knew what goes on at that school, they'd freak out, but... say the truth, Miss. We were never that bad. We talked about doing things like that, but we... we just talked...but today... It's bad in there, Miss, say the truth." Costa had become animated, and he moved and spread his arms as he talked.

"Oh, it's not as bad as it looks, Costa," said Cathy. "Most of the kids are OK. You know how it is. It only takes a handful..."

"Then it's the teachers? I think there's too many dopeheads in there. Me, I think it's the fault of the dopeheads and the pushers. It's bad. A whole generation of kids, and families too, are being ruined, not just the school. Believe me, Miss. Me, I hear everything in here."

The cook stopped fidgeting and, with a spatula in his hands, came closer to the counter, trying to cut into Costa's ranting, "I hear they want to lock up all the doors. Pretty soon they'll be hiring guards," he said and returned to the grill.

Costa looked back at him and replied, "Well it's about time, George. They gotta do something about those pushers. They're pushing dope on secondary kids these days. What do you expect the school to do, welcome them in with open arms?"

"Yeah, Costa, and you think that's going to stop the kids from getting the dope? It's supposed to be a school, for Cris' sake, not a jail." George seemed angry. He stuffed the meat into the pita bread, wrapped it in wax paper, and threw it on the counter, while Costa rang the cash register.

Costa whispered, "George here works at the school as a night janitor, and doesn't like all the changes this new lady principal is trying to make."

"Didn't I see you in the Tech-Voc staff room just a little while ago?" Cathy asked.

"Yeah, I just returned from my night shift," he replied morosely.

"You can tell how hard he works at night. He comes straight here, nice and rested. Eh George?" Costa said, laughing.

"Were you ever a student at Hingston?" Cathy asked George.

"No, I went to the Protestant school. They didn't want us in the Catholic schools," he said glumly.

"Have a seat, Miss. I'll bring you a drink. What do you want to drink? A coffee? A Coke? The drink's on me," Costa said cheerfully.

"Nothing, Costa, thanks anyway. I feel like eating outside."

There was no way she'd eat in the restaurant. The first booth, next to the window, was occupied by three Greek men smoking, sipping coffee, and having their own conversation. The other booths looked dark and dingy. She felt the men looking at her, but she couldn't tell whether they were staring appreciatively, the way Mediterranean men do, as if appraising every woman they see as a potential bed partner, or whether they were simply looking at her because she was in their line of vision. She couldn't tell by their tone of voice either and couldn't understand a word of their conversation. In an Italian bar, she would have known the difference. She paid for the *souvlaki* and walked out, unfolding the wax paper so she could take a bite.

She walked slowly as she ate, dawdling in front of each store window, but there was not much to look at in that stretch of street: a bakery with piles of cookies drenched in white sugar; a butcher shop with pink legs of lambs hanging on hooks; and, on the corner, a tavern with two handwritten signs, *Bière en Fût*, and *Femmes Bienvenues*. The tavern had just been transformed into a *brasserie*, and ladies were welcome. She felt self-conscious, walking alone on the sidewalk and eating. The *souvlaki* was tasty but too greasy for her liking, and she couldn't finish it. She folded the wrapper, dripping with garlic sauce, into a paper napkin, threw it into a wastebasket, and returned to the car.

She crossed Park Avenue, drove under a CNR underpass, and entered Little Italy, where many pre-war immigrants had settled. Cathy lived east of here, past the open-air Jean-Talon market where, as a pre-teen, she'd gone with her mother every Saturday to buy fresh vegetables and fruits and even live chickens. Sometimes, her father, who was not a big frequenter of bars, used to come with them and go to the Italian café bars on Mile End to meet friends and discuss jobs. Cathy smiled to herself as she remembered the

time a cackling hen had tried to escape from the bag her mother was holding, on a crowded bus. When they got off the bus, Cathy was fuming at her mother, who laughed at the incident, and who kept on laughing when Cathy threatened to refuse to go food shopping with her anymore, unless she promised to buy her chickens killed, cleaned and bagged, like everyone else.

Maybe she should drive toward Charlie's, Cathy thought, just to see whether Gina and Linda were headed there. But she decided against it, and passed by Saint-Hubert Street, where she had shopped as a teen, and then passed Jean-Talon Hospital, where Lucia was still in a coma. Carmy and her grandmother might be there. She could have gone in to speak to them about her offer to let Carmy stay with her, but she thought it might be better to let the social worker handle the request.

At the next stop sign, Cathy turned left on Cartier Street. It was early afternoon, so there was plenty of parking in front of the low apartment building in which she lived. She parked her car, collected her purse and a bunch of papers from the front seat, and went in.

The apartment was flooded with sunlight, and every speck of dust on the furniture and windowpanes seemed magnified, but she was in no mood for housecleaning. She felt the urge to call her mother, and find out the latest news on Lucia's condition. But then, she'd have to tell her about the early dismissal and the stink bomb. The word "bomb" would have had her mother in jitters for days. And she'd be just as worried about the possibility of Carmy going to live with her. Cathy poured some coffee, left over from the morning, into a glass, stirred a spoonful of sugar into it and added an ice cube. She took the morning paper and decided to sit on the balcony overlooking the backyard and alley.

One of the apartment tenants had tended a vegetable garden in one half of the yard, and all summer long, had swamped Cathy with more tomatoes, zucchini and string beans than she'd been able to eat by herself. Sean only ate a few vegetables as side dishes for meat. The plants were wilted and yellowed and needed to be cut off, but there was still a lot of green parsley and basil left. She couldn't concentrate on the daily paper but the warm sun felt good on her face as she closed her eyes and sipped the iced coffee. She wondered what Bruce's live in-girlfriend looked like, maybe tall and thin with long unkempt hair. Maybe she wore jeans and T-shirts to parties. He had never brought her to any staff events. Cathy knew very little about him.

Suddenly, she was thinking about the store, *Nouveau Acropolis*, and about how much it reminded her of the only shop in Mulirena that sold men's shirts, white muslin cottons, and the floss used by girls to embroider their trousseaux. Her neighbors often sent her there with color samples to buy floss for them on her way to and from school. The small store was dark and cool and had its own particular smell, which she associated with the bolts of new cotton and the smooth silk threads that begged to be transformed into borders of delicate flowers and multicolored butterflies.

Signor Gavano had also smelled of clean cotton. She hadn't heard a single word about him since she left Mulirena twenty-odd years ago, yet he made an appearance in her thoughts from time to time, and he was never alone. A trigger like the dry goods store she'd seen through the glare of a bright sunny afternoon would usually trigger a string of other characters and events that, at one time, had played a big part in her life, but that were later relegated to these cameo appearances. Her world then just *was*. It was going to *la Funtanella* with Lucia and other older girls every evening to fetch water in the two-

handled clay jugs that they carried, not on their heads like the older women, but balanced on a hip, which forced them to walk with a slanted and languid gait. At times, the spring water gushed in tiny torrents out of the mouths of the stone gargoyles; at other times it just trickled down. And sometimes, in the arid spells of summer, the mouths were dry, gaping holes, making the gargoyles look like the catechism book pictures of the desperate, damned souls destined to be thirsty forever. But the flow of the *Funtanella* was never questioned then. At the oddest times, she replayed the past in her mind, like a bedtime story that children read over and over again, each time finding new pleasures or new questions to ask. Although in time, these memories had become less frequent, they came accompanied by small pangs of discomfort, a tightening of the chest. She remembered having read that, for some, having had a happy childhood was almost as painful as having suffered a bad one. It left a persistent ache of yearning, like the grief for a lost love.

Signor Gavano

By Cathy Anastasia

In Mulirena, school was dismissed at lunch every day. Signor Gavano, my teacher, used to engage me in a little guessing game as we walked home.

“Signora Maria is having *minestra* today,” he’d say. “But it smells different than usual. What do you think it is, Caterina?”

I would take a whiff and answer expertly. “I think it’s the zucchini flowers. I saw her carry a big basket from the farm this morning.”

“Signora Assunta is frying *pipe e patate*... again. Didn’t she have that yesterday?” I liked the way he pronounced the dialect expressions.

In the summer, fried peppers and potatoes were a very common meal, and one of the easiest to detect, unless the fishmonger had been in town. Then, from every other household, there emanated the sizzle and odor of tiny smelts frying in olive oil, and I would nod and laugh each time he repeated “*pisci friuti*.”

As we reached Piano Don Carlo, the game changed slightly. He would say, “You were right yesterday—it was *pasta e ceci*,” or “You were wrong yesterday, it wasn’t *pasta e ceci*.” Then he’d continue, “Now think hard, Caterina. If yesterday I had *pasta a faggioli*; Tuesday, *pasta e fave*; Monday, *pasta e rape*; what do you think I’ll be having today?”

“*Pasta e patate*?” I might have ventured with a smile. Donna Rachele, his landlady and cook, had a very limited and predictable repertoire.

“Ah, maybe, but...there is a faint aroma of broccoli coming from up there. It could also be *pasta e broccoli*. I’ll tell you tomorrow, but whatever it is, it will be delicious,” he’d say with a wink and a little squeeze on my shoulder. I’d turn toward my house and he’d walk up one house further to where Don Luigi and Donna Rachele lived.

I remember Signor Gavano in tones of tan and sand. It must have been because he wore a tweedy jacket with little brown and beige squares. His hair was tawny blonde: fine and straight, and parted to one side. His pants and shirts were always impeccably clean and well pressed, and he spoke the most limpid Italian I had ever heard.

He called me by my baptismal name, Caterina. I was Catarina or Catarí to my family, and Catarinella to older friends and relatives, who used it as a term of endearment. Somehow the one vowel change made the name sound less genteel and pretentious, two affectations that most villagers—and especially my mother—tried to avoid. I didn’t particularly like my name or its variations, and I especially disliked being called Caterinuccia by our neighbor, Donna Rachele, and by the ladies who worked at church and pretended to speak a better Italian than anyone else.

“The flat, fertile farmlands of the Pó valley are irrigated by a system of gigantic sprinklers.” This was the first sentence in a geography lesson that Signor Gavano presented to the class, and which I still remember. He came all the way from the Piemonte region, near the French border, to teach a third-grade class in our out-of-the-way village, whose name was not even on the map of Calabria. Teacher surplus had been a problem in Italy for ages, so this was not unusual. He left his wife and family behind, and boarded at the home of Don Luigi—one of the few homes in town with running water and a regular bathroom.

I don't remember my first-grade teacher well, except that she was pregnant, and left in the middle of the year. She was replaced by a teacher from Catanzaro. This new teacher was big-breasted and had the haughty posture of all the *signore* from the city. She was always hot and tired. She would sit by her desk, which was on an elevated platform, and fan herself, complaining about the flies, while the class ran around in circles. Once an inspector from the city school headquarters came to visit. The teacher had tutored us for days on how to answer his questions. She had instructed us to always look at her hands, which would be crossed behind her back. If the inspector asked a math question, she would stand or bend her waist strategically to give us the right answer. When the inspector asked how we liked our new teacher, I was the only one to confess that I liked the other one better. The Signora taught us second grade too, and the chances were that she would bring us through to fifth grade, as it was the tradition in the schools there for a teacher to take the same group from the first to fifth grades.

One day, this teacher asked the class to study a passage about love of country from the book *Cuore* by Edmondo De Amicis. In the evening, I read it over and over; and by the next day I could recite it by heart. The teacher, impressed, paraded me in front of the third-, fourth- and fifth-grade classes to show off how well she had taught her student. Walking into each class, I felt nervous and afraid that I would forget everything. But each time I stood on the elevated platform in front of the teacher's desk, I was able to recite:

Perché Amo l'Italia da Edmondo de Amicis

I love Italy because my mother is Italian, because the blood that runs through my veins is Italian, because Italian is the soil in which are buried the dead for whom my mother weeps, and whom my father venerates. Because the city where I was born, the language that I speak, the books that I read, because my brother, my sister, my friends and the people that I

live with, and the beautiful nature that surrounds me, and all that I see, that I love, that I study, that I admire is Italian. Because.... Because...

From that day on the *Signora* gave me preferential treatment. Most days, she would bring her torn and flimsy sheets, her husband's worn-out socks and undershirts, and have me sit on the large balcony to do her mending, while the other students had to repeat the addition and multiplication tables, ad nauseam. I had the company of the housewives who chatted from one balcony to the other, and exchanged notes on what they were cooking for lunch. During the summer, my father, who was home from Milano, wrote an official complaint to the school authorities and circulated a petition around the town to have the incompetent teacher sent back to where she came from.

Whether it was as a result of the petition, or because of the teacher-surplus situation, or simply because it was meant to be, the gentle teacher from Piemonte, Signor Gavano, came to teach me third grade. He never expressed any scorn about the condition of the schoolhouse or the town, which must have been a world apart from where he came from, and he called all the women, including the peasants, *Signore*.

Donna Rachele was a short woman with a head of white, wiry hair and since she had once taught school, she still wore around the house the shiny black smock with a white collar that all the women teachers wore in class. She came from a titled family, so she didn't go fetch wood or sit outside with the neighborhood women on summer evenings. Her tiny black-and-white figure was a constant presence in the neighborhood, however, since she spent most of her days on the balcony, chatting and commenting to passers-by in a cheerful but affected Italian.

“If only she’d keep her mouth shut as tight as her wallet,” my mother used to say when she heard Donna Rachele pontificating to anyone who would listen.

Almost every evening, Donna Rachele would send me for an errand or a “little courtesy,” as she called it. She would call out from the balcony in her shrill voice, “Caterinuccia, *una piccola cortesia, per piacere,*” and would instruct me, in her schoolmarmish tone, to go buy one hundred grams of *mortadella*, or four anchovies, or two slices of *provolone* cheese for the evening meal. Grandmother, who owned the grocery store, would write a credit note on a thick register and then would try to collect at the end of the month. Since Signor Gavano lived with them, Donna Rachele increased the portions slightly, but grandmother wondered how three grown people could eat so little, and I was upset that a Donna would be so cheap.

From her balcony, Donna Rachele liked to brag to everyone that she never even had to make Signor Gavano’s bed or clean his room. He, unlike the men in the village, cleaned after himself. Donna Rachele even whispered to Mother that in the evenings, she often saw him make the sign of the cross and bend his head in prayer before going to bed. In Mulirena, showing religious piety was reserved for women and children only.

The third-grade geography lesson on irrigation had an impact on me only because I could not imagine what gigantic sprinklers looked like or how they functioned. I had never even seen a small one. Also, for the first time, I had a first-hand account of someone from another region of Italy, which seemed like a foreign country altogether.

The farmlands around Mulirena were far from fertile or flat. The village itself was a huge hill surrounded by other hills. Except for the potted plants on balconies, there was very little greenery in the town itself. It seemed that every inch of space had been covered

in stone by the town's *muratori*, stones that shone white in the summer sun, burned your feet, but turned gray and damp in the winter's rainy season. *One huge house*, the bishop had called Mulirena. In fact, there were no lawns or picket fences separating one home from the other. Each house was attached to the other and, because of the elevation, the roofs of some homes were at the same level as the front entrances of others. If ever anyone forgot a key, all they had to do was jump from a neighbor's rooftop onto their balcony or into a window.

Signor Gavano also taught the class that the first settlers who came to Mulirena were looking for good-quality sand to use for bricks and cement. *Where did they find the sand?* I wondered. The only sandy area I could think of was at the *Timpa*, but it was more like a fine dust that blew over the ravine and dispersed into the air. I often tried to imagine teams of peasants dressed in sixteenth-century clothes, trying to gather the fine grains of sand and contain them in sacks to carry away on their donkeys.

At about the same time that Signor Gavano was telling us about the history of the sand, I found out that my family would soon emigrate. I thought it would be a good time to change my name, and I asked my friends to call me Rina, short for Caterina and *miegliu rina*. My girlfriends made a feeble attempt at it, not enough for the new name to catch on. Once I had arrived in Montreal, I remained Catari at home, and at school, I held onto my official Italian name even though it was often mispronounced as Catherina. I can't remember at what point my friends and acquaintances—everyone but my family—started calling me Cathy.

In Mulirena, my world centered on the school and the parish church. The main church building was named after its patron saint, Santa Lucia *Vergine e Martire*. My

family lived close to the upper church, and we children spent a lot of our free time there. We never missed Mass on Sundays, and every night, we went for the Rosary and Benediction. In the month of May—the month of Mary—I went to Mass and Communion every single morning before going to school. That was followed by the month of June, which belonged to Christ. There were also different novenas before each major holiday.

Walking uphill from this Church, one reached the upper outskirts of town. The wide dirt road, flanked by rows of tall cypresses, led to the *Calvario*, a hill with three crosses, the cemetery and the aqueduct. Because the aqueduct was at the center of a large grassy field, the kindergarten kids and the summer day-campers often went there on picnics, walking in neat rows, all wearing blue cotton uniforms and starched white caps, and singing songs in unison.

This was also the road that led to the only piece of land that belonged to my mother, a small portion of a *Muntagna*, the highest mountain in the area, that was dense with chestnut trees—ancient and tall trees so high they seemed to touch the sky. In the summer, the walk to the mountain was a hot trek. But once we arrived, it was the shadiest, coolest and most peaceful place on earth. It was on our way up to this land that we always stopped by the brook to splash cool water on our faces. Then, while Mother picked chestnuts, gathered kindling, or after rainy days, looked for mushrooms, my brother and I played out the battles of El Cid and other Roman warriors that we saw in the movies that Don Tommasino showed on a large outdoor screen on feast days.

Besides the chestnuts, which were the area's most plentiful produce, and the prized mushrooms, not much else grew on the mountain itself. On its steep sides, some farmers managed to hoe little plots, but irrigation was next to impossible. The flatter

farms that had a shallow river, a *Fiumara*, flowing through or nearby had a very rudimentary system of irrigation. The river water, when it was not dried out in the summer, was diverted, channeled and contained into huge cement vats. The water from these vats was distributed sparingly, when necessary, through furrows in the soil, and directed toward the orchards. I remembered how carefully my grandmother would unblock a hole in the vat to let out the water, and then guide it lovingly through the furrows, like she was spoon feeding a feverishly thirsty child.

Because this water had to travel through different farmlands, some fierce battles were fought over the right to use it. Relatives, even brothers and sisters who often shared connecting farms, were known to come to blows, and even kill each other over this precious lifeline.

I understood the concept of Signor Gavano's sprinklers only when, during my first summer in Montreal, I first saw those crazy little grass sprinklers that turned wildly, spewing water on the lawns around my neighborhood. Then I remembered Signor Gavano and imagined the rich green farmlands of Lombardia and Piemonte, kept dewy and nourished by the gyrating flow of water. Besides teaching me about the Pó valley and the lakes of the north, he showed me how to speed-read a book by reading the first sentence of each paragraph and scanning through the rest. He also arranged for my class to correspond with another third-grade class from his home city, Alessandria, and we all had pen pals with whom we exchanged letters and pictures.

When Signor Gavano heard that I was leaving for Canada, he joked sadly that soon he wouldn't even have a job in Calabria because the kids were all going away. Of Canada, he taught us about its forests and lakes, and its abundance of fresh running

water—undoubtedly what he had learned from his old geography books. One day, he showed us a map of Canada, colored green for forests, with splashes of blue for the lakes and rivers. Then he placed a miniscule boot-shaped piece of paper next to it, to show the difference in the sizes of the two countries. He spoke of “*un immensità di spazii*,” and the word “immensity” took on the shape and color of the silent forests of Canada. There was no mention of cities or people, as though Canada was only land and water.

Signor Gavano went back to his home at the end of third grade, but returned in the fall to teach the fourth-grade class. By then, the town had embarked on the construction of new public buildings, and the school was moved from a converted house in the center of town to a new, separate building, which it shared with the municipal office. It was built on an open field, *il Campo Sportivo*, a sport field used mostly by boys to play soccer or ride their bicycles. The new classrooms didn’t have any balconies, but their large windows faced a wheat field, with stubby fig trees scattered here and there. When the midday sun hit the windowpanes, the whole classroom seemed to sparkle as it was engulfed in brilliant sunlight.

I remember the day I went to say goodbye to my fourth-grade classmates and to Signor Gavano. It was at the end of January. The wheat field, which in summer had shimmered a flaxen yellow, dotted with red poppies, was now reduced to wet stubbles of straw, and the fig tree branches struggled and bent with the wind and the rain. Signor Gavano took my hand and held it in his. He looked into my eyes and wished me *un bel avvenire*.

“You’re going to a big country,” he said. “You’ll have many opportunities. But don’t forget us. After all, Italy too is a big country.”

He had crystal-clear, aquamarine eyes.

I loved him, I've often thought, though at first, the insight startled me. And I have looked for him wherever I have been.

Wednesday afternoon, October 8, 1980

Sean and Cathy

Since Sean would not be home for supper, Cathy made herself an omelet and ate it while watching Pulse News. The stink bomb incident at WHHS made it onto the Six O'clock News. WHHS was located right behind the CFCF-TV station, and the school's exterior was often used as background when they covered school-related news items. Now, the short shots of the students' early dismissal made it seem like a riot or a siege had taken place on the streets of Park Ex. The news also covered reports of teacher walkouts in the West Island's Baldwin Cartier School Commission. There, 11,300 students had also been given the day off. The West Island teachers' negotiations were being followed closely by teachers all across the province, as they would set a precedent for the 35 other school commissions that had not signed contracts yet.

Cathy spent most of her evenings at home alone. Sean was out every Monday and Wednesday evenings, taking courses, and she was out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Friday evenings were usually spent shopping for groceries, clothes or household items, but if Sean expected to go to Ottawa most weekends and leave on the six-o-clock bus, they'd have very little time to do things together.

Their first year of living together had been a whirlwind of shared activity. They attended antique auctions and bought a few pieces of old furniture that they planned to refinish during the summer, but never did. Cathy read books on gardening, since the

apartment had a large backyard, and the landlord had given Cathy a section of it to do as she pleased. They even installed some grow lights in the spare room and tried to grow flowers from seeds in dozens of little pots. On Saturday afternoons in the winter, they often drove to the Laurentians to go cross-country skiing, and they scouted for cottages to rent the following summer. They spent their salaries as soon as the cheques were cashed, because they shopped on impulse and ate out frequently. They were like two kids let loose in a huge department store to spend as they pleased, especially Sean who had always had to scrimp—and who still owed the government for his student loan. By the end of their first winter together, Cathy felt they needed extra spending money. She didn't want to touch her savings, which she hoped would eventually provide a down payment on a home, so she decided to put her hairdressing skills to good use and went to work for her old employer, Charles Haute Coiffure, every Friday evening and Saturday.

In the spring, Cathy had planted the weak seedlings she had tended so carefully all winter, but they looked miserly next to her neighbor's garden, which transformed over Victoria Day weekend from bare gray soil to full bloom. She made a mental note to buy her plants at the farmer's market the next year, and save herself a lot of work and dirt around the house.

The run-down furniture and the makeshift greenhouse had given the apartment a dumpy appearance and had prompted Cathy to start looking for new furniture. They had never refinished the semi-antique furniture they bought in their first months together, and, by now, they'd lost interest in the project. They both agreed that the place needed a few modern pieces for a more eclectic look. In mid-summer, they went shopping at the Danish House, looking for ideas. A Brazilian rosewood bedroom set caught Cathy's eye.

They opted for a slim, full-length mirror that had the same warm, reddish rosewood tone, and that elegantly stood at an angle on its base. They took the mirror right away and said they would think about purchasing the rest of the furniture that went with it. Then those plans were put on hold as Sean became more preoccupied with his courses and with his dwindling career opportunities.

It seemed to Cathy that, since they had moved in together, their relationship had entered a new phase: that of roommates. They had started out as colleagues, became friends, and enjoyed a short stint as lovers before assuming the role of playmates. But then, they had both lost interest in playing house. They still shared the same living quarters, but spent little time together. They ate at different times; when one came in, the other went out. And Sean spent his weekends at the library or immersed in reading and in writing papers. She gave up her Saturday job at the salon, fearing that it might contribute to their growing apart, though the salon still called her to help them out during very busy periods. With so little time with one other, their sex life slackened, then almost stopped completely, and they argued more and more.

Their quarrels started in the first winter, when Sean's friends started taking over the house, especially on weekends. When Cathy returned home from working at the salon, she often found Sean entertaining his friends, with beer and wine bottles scattered about the apartment. Cathy couldn't decide whether to call her house Central Station or the Grand Hotel. It seemed that every acquaintance Sean had made on his travels across Canada came to visit. They parked their knapsacks in the corridor and slept on the sofa or in sleeping bags on the living room floor, as if they were in a youth hostel. Some were chain-smokers; others smoked pot, though not in front of her; and, they all drank lots of

beer. She stopped inviting her family over for dinner, saying that with her work and the weekend job, she was too tired to cook. Cathy had always liked company, but these visitors not only took over her home but also her life. Most of them stayed a few days on their way to somewhere else, but the most habitual guest was JP, who stayed with them whenever he was in town from Ottawa, and he was more demanding than the rest.

Cathy's relationship with her family was also becoming strained. Sean resented it when Luigi and Teresa popped in unannounced. He complained that their privacy was being invaded.

"What privacy?" Cathy wanted to know.

"The privacy to live our life as we want, and not by rules dictated by your narrow-minded relatives."

Her relatives had always pampered him, and he had always enjoyed the attention, but was not as keen to fulfill all the *doveri*—the family obligations—that were part and parcel of belonging to a close-knit Italian family. Accompanying her to funerals, baptisms, first communions, and hospital visits was out of the question for him, and Cathy never insisted on it. Busy as she was with school and her part-time job, she found excuses for herself too. Her family blamed her for not caring and for becoming distanced from them. They excused Sean for his flightiness with the usual "He's English." But they seemed to imply that she should know better. Why was she becoming so English? Sean then stopped going to her mother's for Sunday lunch, except on holidays. Teresa didn't insist on that one. She may have felt some trouble brewing and didn't want to place more stress on the couple.

Their best moments together were when they made plans for the immediate future—never long-range ones. They mapped out a trip to Europe for the following summer, after Sean finished his courses, setting an itinerary from Spain to Portugal to Italy for this trip, and leaving England and France for another. But Cathy didn't place too much faith on Sean keeping his word when the time came, especially if he got involved in JP's political campaign.

Cathy looked around her kitchen, and thought about putting away Sean's books and papers, which were scattered all around—in the event that someone from Social Services paid her a visit to check out the place. Even if Carmy didn't move in, the spare room needed a good clean-up. Bookshelves along three walls contained hundreds of books, which Cathy had arranged by topic. The room contained Sean's books on education, literature and philosophy, Cathy's hairdressing textbooks, and the Italian and English books on various interests, which she had bought over the years. Mostly, though, the shelves were stocked with the old books that Cathy had inherited from her uncle Gaetano. Cathy believed that it was those books that Sean was so fond of, that had settled their relationship like nothing else before—or after. But Sean had shown no interest in sharing his knowledge with her, as she had hoped would happen naturally.

As Cathy took some of the books from their night tables and placed them back on the shelves, she wished she had pursued studies in literature and writing, rather than taking career-oriented courses in vocational education. She put her stack of notebooks on the bottom shelf. Her writing experience had been short-lived. In high school, she wrote a few short stories, but when she reread them a few years later she had found them quaint and old-fashioned. Who would want to read about life in a village where the highlight of

the day was to walk up and down the streets, or get water from an outdoor fountain? She never showed them to Sean. The one and only time she had shared them with her *paesano*, the journalist, the know-it all, she had regretting daring to do so. He never even bothered to speak to her about them, let alone help her publish them.

When Sean came back home, Cathy was still in the den, putting books in order.

“You’re still up?” he asked in surprise.

“I decided to tidy up the den,” she said.

“What’s the occasion?”

“Actually, maybe...we may be having a guest,” she said.

“Is it actually or maybe? There’s a difference between the two words, you know.

What do you mean, Cat?”

“I mean that maybe my student, Carmy, the one whose mother is at the hospital, may have to stay here for awhile. She actually needs a place to stay in the city, so maybe she might stay here with me.”

“How did that come about?” Sean asked, sounding annoyed.

“Her social worker and I talked about it...and I offered her a place.”

“You offered her a place without discussing it with me?”

“It would only be for a couple of weeks, until her mother leaves the hospital, and I was wondering if you could stay at one of your friends.”

“Cathy, you didn’t think this one out very well. Her mother is in a coma, and you have no idea how long it will be. I could stay at a friend’s for a day or two, but not for a couple of weeks. You know how I feel about getting involved with this family. I could have been consulted on this.”

“You never consulted me when you brought your friends in.”

“I thought that had been settled. You showed your objection well enough, and I’ve stopped inviting them over.”

“JP comes over unannounced all the time.”

“Pierre is not just a friend. He’s like family to me.”

“This girl is like family to me.”

“You never saw her before this September and she’s family? I have a problem with that. Anyway, Pierre is expecting to stay here after the Thanksgiving weekend, so I hope the den is free by then.”

“Well, thanks for the advance notice. If Carmy is still here by then, Pierre will have to go to a hotel. He can afford it.”

“And your mafia-connected student can’t?”

“She’s a sixteen-year-old girl, and...her mother is in a coma... and... she can’t even talk to anybody for crying out loud.....and...”

“And, and, and. You can’t even talk straight, let alone think logically.”

“I can’t think logically? It’s your illogic... that’s making me lose my words. You’re so...” As Cathy tried to find the right words, she started kicking the sofa-bed in frustration.

Sean shook his head saying, “My illogic? That’s a new one.” He walked away into the bedroom. Cathy followed. As he shut the bedroom door behind him, she pitched one of his books at him. She went back to the den and threw herself on the sofa-bed and had one of her muffled crying fits and fell asleep.

Thursday, October 9, 1980

A&V Construction

Cathy and Kelly Morison had arranged to drive out to Alfonso Abiusi's house on Thursday afternoon to discuss Carmy's return to school and her living arrangements. But when Cathy left the house, after preparing a quick dinner of rotini with meat and tomato sauce for Sean, she didn't mention to Sean that she was going to meet with Carmy's uncle at his house. Since their spat about Carmy the evening before, they had not spoken to one other, so she just mumbled that she was going shopping before her Thursday evening class, and left Sean preparing for another weekend trip to Ottawa to meet with Jean-Pierre and his election committee.

Jean-Pierre had given Sean the responsibility of updating a list of Italian-Canadian community leaders and media personalities. The week before, Sean had asked for Cathy's input, but she had not been much help, as she had been distancing herself from the Italian community for a number of years.

"Don't you know the guy who publishes that left-leaning community paper?" he had asked.

"That's Antonio Amoruso," she had answered. "But don't expect him to help out in a liberal campaign. He sided with the PQ in the referendum."

Cathy had stopped listening to Italian programs on the radio, and watching community-based TV programs and she didn't read any of the Italian newspapers, but she

had heard about Antonio's stand on the referendum from other *paesani*, who had been more amused than surprised. He had been known to take radical positions before.

On the way to Alfonso's house, Cathy explained to Kelly that Sean was living with her, and asked if it would pose a problem. It would not be a problem to her personally, Kelly said, but she'd have to mention it to the family.

"He's away most weekends anyway. Maybe you can just mention that he spends time at the apartment periodically," Cathy said timidly.

"Well, I'll have to be clear about it," Kelly said. Then, as they drove into Alfonso's driveway, she exclaimed, "It's quite the place."

"He's in the construction business, and he's done very well," Cathy explained.

Alfonso lived in a luxurious, two-storey home in a new subdivision in Duvernay, Laval. The home was surrounded by empty lots still covered in underbrush, and his front yard looked newly landscaped—the bare rock garden, and the rolls of turf piled in front of the garage revealed that work was still in progress. A short distance away, a row of other homes under construction bore a large sign, Habitations A&V Construction. The A stood for Abiusi and the V for Vaccaro, the name of his partners and of his wife's family.

By all accounts, since Alfonso had arrived in Montreal a couple of years after Lucia, he had been very successful, both in business and in his personal life. He had married into the Vaccaro family, who were well established in Montreal's Italian community. One of his brothers-in-law was a notary, and another, a lawyer. Years before, the family patriarch, Johnny Vaccaro, who came from the Naples area, had had a business relationship with Pasquale on a project to sell farmland in Laval, and gear it mainly to newly-arrived Italians. The sales pitch then was that, in time, the land would be rezoned

as residential and be worth many times the price the buyers would pay for it. Cathy's father and all of her relatives had each bought one lot, which they still owned. Only those lots had never been rezoned as promised, and they could still not be built on. So her relatives, not wanting to see so much land go to waste, resorted to driving out there twice a week in summer, dragging large demijohns of water to irrigate the rows of tomato and vegetable plants that they planted.

Alfonso had met the Vaccaro family through his brother-in-law, Pasquale. For a while after he arrived, Alfonso used money he borrowed from Pasquale to set up an importing company that sold Italian food products—olive oil, cheese, salami. Alfonso made some important connections with the owners of restaurants, bars and nightclubs. That was when rumors started that he was receiving "help" from some of his friends, who used strong-arm tactics to convince restaurant owners to buy exclusively from Alfonso. None of this was ever substantiated by any complaint or police investigation. Once the business, Calabria Foods, had taken off, Alfonso assigned his brother Pietro to look after it, though he still maintained an active interest in the company.

He had, meanwhile, married Dominique, and became a partner in her family's business of buying underdeveloped land in the north and east areas of the city, and building and selling homes. Pasquale had been the main contractor for their projects, but as the developments became larger, his firm couldn't keep up with the growth, and Alfonso had to rely on better-organized construction companies. But Pasquale was still involved in some of the smaller projects, generally for repairs and maintenance.

Cathy had never been to Alfonso's house, and neither had her mother, but they had heard about the pricey home into which he had just moved with his wife Dominique

and their two school-aged children. He had gravitated toward his wife's side of the family rather than the *paesani*, who by and large led very simple and humble lives. He spoke more French than English, like the Vaccaros, and like most of the earlier Italian immigrants to Montreal, who had attended French schools, and spoke French to each other.

When Dominique answered the door, it looked like she had been expecting them. She led them past a large marble-tiled foyer into the carpeted living room, which had a mirrored wall, a marble fireplace and modern furniture. She then walked stiffly up a circular staircase and called, "*Alfonso, vos amis sont ici,*" and disappeared into the top floor.

Rosaria appeared, walking up a staircase that must have led from the basement. She and Cathy kissed one another and exchanged pleasantries in dialect. When Cathy asked news of Lucia, Rosaria shrugged and wrung her hands. "The same... the same," she said. "Who knows if Santa Lucia will give us a grace and make her open her eyes again?"

"Let's hope," answered Cathy.

Alfonso came down the stairs and shook hands with both women. He told Cathy that Lucia was receiving the best care they could possibly give her. "The doctors are very optimistic," he said self-assuredly.

"Let's hope," Cathy said again.

Then Alfonso asked, "What's going on at that school? I hear they had a bomb scare?"

"No, No. It was just stink bombs...nothing serious," Cathy answered.

“Still.... They expelled my niece for drawing on a wall. What will they do to the students who caused all that mess, shoot them?” he said.

“There were bombs in the school?” Rosaria asked, alarmed.

Cathy tried to explain, in halting dialect, about the stink bombs placed in the ventilation system. Stink bomb was one of those English words that Cathy found impossible to translate.

“*Madonna mia*, the things these kids come up with,” Rosaria said. “They’re really terrible.”

“That’s not the work of kids,” Alfonso said in English. “It’s an inside job.”

“They’re investigating it,” Cathy said, and then changed the subject. “Is Carmy home?”

“I’ll call her,” Rosaria said, and walked toward the open door from which she had just come. “Carmelina, come upstairs,” she called.

Meanwhile Kelly was explaining to Alfonso the reason for their visit. She told him that, if they agreed to let Carmy return to school, they would have to sign some papers making Cathy a guardian—like a foster parent—for the weekdays on which the girl stayed with Cathy. She also told Alfonso that Cathy’s fiancée sometimes stayed overnight in the same apartment. If the news surprised him, he didn’t show it. He looked at Cathy and said, “I didn’t know you were engaged, congratulations.”

“It’s not official, but we’re getting married as soon as he finishes his studies.”

“I understand that your fiancée is a close friend of Jean Pierre Picard. I know Picard quite well,” Alfonso said.

This didn't surprise Cathy since she knew that he had been active in community events organized by the Liberal Party of Canada.

"Oh, I didn't know you knew JP, but he and Sean, my boyfriend, have been friends for years," Cathy answered wondering whether she should also mention something about the possibility of a byelection and Sean's plans of working for Jean Pierre. But Alfonso seemed to be well informed already.

"I know Jean Pierre from some fundraising events we've been involved in...good party man... but a big mistake in having him run in the byelection," he said. "The Conservatives will be pushing an Italian...someone with a big reputation in the community. It's going to be tough for a non-Italian."

Cathy looked at Kelly shuffling papers from her briefcase and tried to shift the conversation back to the business at hand. "I don't get involved in any of this political stuff," she said. "Kelly here has some papers that need to be signed."

In highly accented English, Alfonso then asked the reason for all the paperwork. As Cathy had expected, he said that Carmy didn't need foster parents. He'd agree to let Carmy stay with Cathy since they knew each other well, but if the process was too complicated they'd have to find a school closer to home.

Before Kelly could answer, Rosaria interrupted and said she'd go make some coffee, but asked if they'd like something to drink first, but they all declined. Then Kelly turned to Alfonso and told him that not all schools offer the type of program offered at William Hingston High School, and not all programs are offered to special students.

"They have made an exception for her, as a pilot project, so it's a good opportunity," she said.

Carmy walked up from the basement, dressed in the same black pants and top as she wore at school. Without looking at her, Alfonso said that, for sure, the girl could learn something else besides hairdressing if she put her mind to it.

Kelly held out her hand to Carmy, which she accepted hesitantly. Kelly said, "Hello, Carmy, I'm Kelly Morrison. I'm here to finalize your return to William Hingston. First of all, do you want to go back to the hairdressing class?"

"I guess so," Carmy replied.

"I must tell you that, if you go back, there is a set of rules you will have to follow."

Carmy shrugged her shoulders.

"You must follow all the school rules," Alfonso said forcefully. "Do you understand?"

"OK, OK," she said. "Any rules for stink bombs?" she asked with a snicker.

"Let's hope they have rules for real bombs," Alfonso added, with a sneer.

"Well, I'm sure they'll find the people responsible for that," Kelly said. She removed some papers from her briefcase. "But, do you really want to go back to the hairdressing program, or would you rather do something else, maybe in a school close to your home?"

"There's no school close to here. There's nothing close to here. We're in the boondocks," she said, pointing toward the window.

"Her aunt could drive her anywhere else," Alfonso said. "If she wants to...But I leave it up to her."

“I wanna go to Montreal,” Carmy answered quickly, crossing her arms over her chest.

“You’ll have to behave,” Alfonso said. “So you won’t make your grandmother worry.”

“And you’ll have to sign a contract with Mrs. Champagne,” Kelly said.

“Who, me?” Alfonso said, surprised.

“No, No, Mr. Abiusi. Carmy will have to sign her own contract with the school principal...It’s school policy after an expulsion. If she breaks any other rule, she’ll be expelled for good.”

Alfonso seemed amused. “Oh, maybe I’ll have her sign a contract, too...And my kids too, while I’m at it.” He smiled for the first time.

Carmy shifted her feet and seemed impatient to leave.

“That will be all, Carmy,” Kelly said. “I’ll be in touch with Miss Anastasia.”

Carmy waved her hand, then slipped back down to the basement

Kelly explained to Alfonso that Carmy’s expenses would be covered by Social Services, and she showed him the forms to fill.

He seemed amused again. “I don’t have time for that. I’ll cover all her expenses. I don’t need the government. Carmy is not an orphan. She has us.”

“Then maybe it’s best to discuss here and now how Miss Anastasia—I mean, Cathy—will be reimbursed for her expenses...food, clothing, transportation. Paid weekly? Monthly?...”

“Eh! Monthly? Yearly?” he said impatiently. “It won’t last that long. Don’t worry, we’ll arrange everything.”

“Yes,” Cathy said. “No need to worry about food expenses. We’ll settle it between ourselves.”

“But we must sign the guardianship papers. Those are a must.” Kelly pulled out a long form, which she had already filled out. Just then, Rosaria came back with a tray fragrant with espresso coffee and almond cookies “It smells good,” Kelly said, and put the form back into her briefcase.

While they drank their coffee, they went over the travel arrangements. Alfonso or his wife would drive Carmy to Cathy’s home every Sunday evening and pick her up on Friday afternoons. Kelly reminded them that the coming Monday school would be closed for the Thanksgiving holiday, so Alfonso would be driving Carmy on Monday evening instead. Cathy suggested that Carmy come in earlier on Monday afternoon and have Thanksgiving dinner with her and her family. Alfonso replied that he would leave it up to Carmy, and that they’d call each other on Sunday evening to confirm. Cathy chatted with Rosaria and explained, in dialect, that she had no reason to worry about Carmy, that she would take good care of her.

“I trust her with you. With someone else, maybe not. But with you, yes.” Rosaria smiled. “*Bella mia*, it seems like just yesterday you were a little girl yourself, playing in Piano Don Carlo.”

Then they left, after kissing Rosaria and shaking hands with Alfonso.

On the way home, Kelly asked Cathy if she felt comfortable not having clarified the paying of expenses. Cathy explained how hard it is for Southern Italians to talk about money among family and close friends. They firmly believe in the give and take, and even if things are not always clear, it usually all comes out in the wash.

“Shoot!” Kelly said at once. “Alfonso forgot to sign the guardianship papers.”

Cathy laughed, “You forgot, not Alfonso. That guy doesn’t forget anything, but I think he has an aversion to signing papers. He’s a real wheeler-dealer, but he’s accustomed to conducting business on the honor system.”

The Gypsies

By Cathy Anastasia

December would have been a dismal month in Mulirena if it hadn't been for the feast of Santa Lucia. It was celebrated on the 13th with a three-day fair during which the town was invaded by pilgrims, merchants and gypsies. The piazza outside the upper church, which was named after Santa Lucia, was transformed into a market with stalls selling everything from pots and pans to earthenware to ribbons and special sweets. The market ran all the way up to the Calvario, where farmers met to sell and buy livestock. The squeals of pink piglets being held tightly around the waist to be carried home were heard throughout the three days, since almost everyone in town bought a baby hog to fatten and slaughter the following February. People waited all year for the fair to buy new braziers, copper pots, clay water jugs, and hard biscuits—*mustaccioli and susumelle*—to eat at Christmas.

A few people came to show their devotion for the Saint, to repay graces received or to make special vows, especially if they suffered from eye problems, as Santa Lucia is the patron saint of eyes and light. The story we learned in Catechism class was that Lucia of Syracuse, an early Christian who lived around the year 200 AD, had vowed her life to Christ. She rejected an arranged marriage to a pagan bridegroom, and for this, was arrested and persecuted. First, they tried forcing her into prostitution, but when the guards went to get her, they couldn't move her—not even with a team of oxen. They tried lighting a fire around her, but the fire would not flame. They finally succeeded in killing

her by stabbing her in the throat with a dagger, after tearing her eyes out of their sockets. But the legend has it that her eyesight was restored just before her death. In statues and holy pictures she's shown carrying two eyeballs on a small platter in her left hand, while in her right, she holds up an olive branch. She's venerated as both a virgin and a martyr.

December 1955 started out wet and blustery, and it snowed a few days before the feast. It had rained buckets for days on end, then it turned cold and the water in the drain pipes crystallized into icicles and around the houses. Then, a light blanket of snow covered the rooftops. The snow always melted on the ground, so Mother reached over Comare Rosaria's rooftop from our kitchen window to fill a bowl with snow. Then, she sprinkled some sugar and cold coffee over it to make *scirubetta* for me, Luigi and my desk-friend Bettina, who came over every afternoon to do homework with me. Signor Gavano, who was our new teacher at that time, gave us lots of homework.

The older girls, Lucia and my aunt Tina, rarely went out anymore, mortified and inconsolable as they were because their boyfriends had abandoned them. Tina blamed and cursed Rome for her misfortune; Lucia blamed Mulirena and its bad tongues.

A caravan of vendors started coming into town a few days before the fair to set up their stalls. They had to be accommodated in homes since there were no inns. The church remained open for people who had nowhere else to sleep, but many had established friendships in the town over the years, and made arrangements with them. A family of merchants, two brothers and their mother, who sold aluminum pots, stayed at Lucia's house. They came from Serra San Pietro, a village located high in the mountains. Their dialect was rough and their manners unpolished, even though the brothers had lived in America before the war, and had made some money there before returning to Italy to set

up their businesses. In the past, they had bought olive oil from the Abiusis, and Alfonso had had other dealings with them. One of their brothers had remained in Canada and, according to them, was making a fortune as a contractor in Montreal. He was still single even though he was in his early thirties, because he didn't want anything to do with the girls there. His mother told Comare Rosaria that even the Italian girls who had settled in Montreal were too modern for him. "*Moglie e buoi dai paesi tuoi*" was an old saying in our parts; it meant that wives and oxen were best chosen in one's own village. On their first evening in town, Alfonso was seen arguing and negotiating with the two brothers at the local osteria until late at night, in his usual style of conducting business.

The only group of visitors to the fair that didn't need accommodations were the gypsies. They were the first to show up. They came in large numbers and camped out in the open fields, sleeping in makeshift tents, in doorways, or on the bare floor of the church. The women wore long skirts and colorful scarves with fringes, dangling earrings and necklaces. They carried dirty babies on their hips and went around the town asking for money to feed them. In exchange, they would tell fortunes, remove an evil spell—the *malocchio*—or give one. Though some people used their services, no one trusted them. Many small household items mysteriously went missing when gypsies managed to trick their way into a home. Mother didn't believe in the evil eye or the gypsies' magical powers to predict the future.

"If they know how to tell fortunes, why don't they improve on their own, instead of going around begging?" she used to say.

However, I was especially intrigued by how they lived. You couldn't tell who was married to whom. They spoke a funny Italian and, among themselves, an incomprehensible dialect.

"Where do they come from?" I wanted to know. But no one ever seemed to know the answer. "Where do they go from here?" Nobody knew.

On the first day of the fair, a group of gypsies passed by Piano Don Carlo asking the women if they needed to have their pots soldered. A young girl, about my age, followed them, holding a baby on her hip. She smiled and waved at me and I wished I could talk to her, to ask her about school and about where she lived, but Mother shooed them off and wanted nothing to do with them. She admonished me, as she did each chance she got: "It's better not to start talking to them. They have their ways. They'll make you believe that day is night, night is day. You'll never win with the *zingari*."

The following day, I was at the fair with my friend Bettina, and we went in the church to warm up. She wanted to show me a magazine, a *fotoromanzo*, that she had borrowed from her older brother. In the church, I spotted the young gypsy I had seen the day before. We smiled at one other again and the girl came up to us.

"Ciao," she said. "What's your name? Mine is Maria."

We introduced ourselves. "Where do you come from?" I asked. She shrugged and asked if she could look at the magazine. While leafing through it, she asked if we would be going to the fireworks the following night.

"Yes, do you want to come with us?" I asked.

Bettina nudged my leg, warning me not to get too friendly with the girl, but Maria answered quickly that she'd join us. She said we should wait for her on the road across

from the Timpa just before the fireworks started. She then asked if she could keep the magazine for the day.

“It’s my brother’s,” Bettina told her. “I can’t give it to you.”

“I don’t want to keep it, just look at it today. I’ll bring it back tomorrow at the fireworks. But if you want it before, come and see me at the aqueduct, where I’m staying.”

“We can pick it up when we go to the fair, after Mass,” I said, looking at Bettina, and Maria was off before Bettina could answer.

“What will I tell my brother when I get home?” Bettina asked.

“Tell him you lent it to me.” I said.

The morning after, on the day of the feast, Bettina came by my house early. She said she wanted to go to the aqueduct before Mass, to get her magazine back. It’s your fault,” she told me. “You got too friendly with her.”

“We’ll get it. Don’t worry.”

We walked past the vendors, who were busy setting up their stalls for the busiest day of the fair, when many outsiders came for the day. We walked past the pigs, chickens and donkeys for sale. Farmers were already inspecting the animals, comparing, bartering and haggling over prices. The family from Sierra San Pietro was busy laying out their pots and pans on a table, while Alfonso, wearing a new suit, leaned across the table and spoke animatedly with the oldest brother.

Wearing our new woolen dresses, long, thick stockings, and ankle-high shoes, we walked quickly to the field in front of the aqueduct, near the cemetery, where a band of gypsies had camped out. There too, some farmers were negotiating with a gypsy over a

donkey. Other men were sitting soldering old copper pots, while women sat around nursing babies, stretching out their hands whenever someone passed by them.

We spotted Maria who was holding the same child she had carried the first day we saw her. She walked next to the man who was selling the donkey and who seemed to be closing the deal. One of the farmers took a wad of money, counted it, and passed it to the gypsy, who then passed it to Maria to count again. When she nodded, the farmer took the donkey by the reins and walked away.

As we approached her, I was going to speak to the girl nicely, but Bettina went up to her and said brusquely, "I want my magazine."

"I'll bring it to you at the fireworks. I told you already."

"My brother wants it this morning," Bettina said.

"I don't have it. I lent it to my friend."

"You told us we could come and get it anytime we wanted."

"How can I give it to you if I don't have it?"

"Where's your friend?"

"She had to go to Amato with her father to buy a donkey. But she'll be back this afternoon. Wait for me before the fireworks. I told you already."

We had no choice but to leave without the magazine, and to join our mothers at church for High Mass. We didn't tell them that we had walked all the way to the aqueduct by ourselves.

After Mass, Comare Rosaria invited Mother and me to her house before lunch to have a drink in celebration of Lucia's name day. She served us a glass of homemade

sweet yellow liqueur, which tasted like *Strega*, and some almond cookies. Lucia seemed animated but distracted, as though something was on her mind.

“Lucia has found a nice boyfriend,” Comare Rosaria said, as though she was making fun of her.

“Don’t you start telling everyone about a boyfriend,” she said, sounding annoyed.

But Comare Rosaria explained that, the previous evening, Lucia had consented to consider an engagement to her guests’ brother from Canada. His name was Pasquale. At first, Comare Rosaria said, neither she nor Lucia were excited about the proposal, especially because of the age difference, but the Sanpietresi convinced them to at least think about it. Their brother, they said, was a serious and hardworking man who had built his own business there, and who owned a house and a car. Alfonso believed that Lucia would live like a lady there, and wouldn’t need to go to work like many of the other women who emigrated. He had thought through all the details. The groom would have to pay all the expenses related to the wedding and the trip. After listening to all of her brother's arguments, Lucia agreed to correspond with the man and to send him her picture, but she would only make the final decision after meeting him in person. Pasquale was expected to visit his family in the summer. She didn’t want an official engagement until then.

“If it’s destined, it will happen,” Mother said.

“He’s serious and settled, not like these young men around here who don’t know what they want,” Comare Rosaria explained. “They go to the city and forget everything. I know this family and they’ve always kept their word. And in a few years, she can sponsor her brothers in America.”

“Then maybe we’ll all be in Montreal one day. You too, Comare Rosaria,” Mother said.

It was exciting to think that one day we could all find ourselves in a new place. Already Father had said he would sponsor Tina before us, after what happened to her.

“You’ll go with Tina, then,” I told Lucia.

“Who knows when—and if—it’s going to happen at all. For now it’s only talk,” she said and left the room.

Comare Rosaria whispered, “In the last three months she’s become like a ghost of herself. She doesn’t eat or talk to anyone. At least this man will keep his word.”

“Don’t worry. They’re young and have a whole life ahead of them,” Mother said.

Then Comare Rosaria showed us the picture that the Sanpietresi had brought with them to show Lucia. It showed a small man sitting on the hood of a big white car. His teeth looked especially white and large against his suntanned, bony face.

When we got home, Mother said, “I can’t see Lucia married to that Sanpietrese.”

At the fireworks, there was no sign of Maria. We looked and looked, and Bettina was upset and cried. She’d told her mother about losing the magazine, and she had warned her to expect a good spanking from her brother. I told her to blame me for it.

Lucia and Rosaria were at the fireworks, accompanied by their guests from San Pietro. People kept congratulating Lucia on her name day, but some also shook hands and congratulated the woman from San Pietro.

“It’s hard to keep things secret in this town.” Comare Rosaria whispered. “They gave her a gold necklace and bracelet, and they want some guarantees before leaving that she’s as serious as they are, so unofficially, they’re engaged.”

The morning after the feast, the town started emptying of all its visitors. Again, I walked with Bettina to the aqueduct, but Maria’s family was nowhere to be seen. Bettina cried again, but her problem seemed small compared to that of the farmer who had bought the donkey the day before. He was screaming and cursing at the remaining gypsies because they couldn’t tell him where to find the man who had sold him the animal. His new donkey had disappeared during the night while he was at the fireworks.

When they heard the stories down at Piano Don Carlo, they all made fun of us girls for loaning something to a gypsy and expecting to get it back, but, they especially laughed at the farmer who had bought a donkey from a gypsy and then left it unattended.

I still pressed Mother for some answers. “Is it possible that after all these years no one knows where the gypsies have gone?” I asked again.

“You’re really hard-headed,” Mother said impatiently. “They’re *zingari*! How can I explain it to you? They’re people without a home. That’s why we call them *zingari*.”

Montreal, December 15, 1955

Cara Teresa,

It has been five months already since I left, and I can't tell you how much I miss you and the children and all of my friends. My health is good and I hope that you and everyone else are also fine. Here the days are getting long for me, since most construction stops in the winter and I have no work. I spend the day reading the newspaper, walking around the house, playing with my nephew and helping my sister cook dinner. The poor woman has a house full of men, eight in all, counting her boys, and she never stops with the washing, ironing shirts, cooking and preparing lunches for us. The little money we give her for our board hardly pays for all the food we consume. Sometimes in the afternoons I go to an Italian bar in the hopes of making some contacts and finding work. I've just made the acquaintance of a Calabrese who has made lots of money and runs a band that plays at processions and Italian feasts. I already went to practice with them once, and for me, it's a good pastime. With Francesco, we're planning on starting an orchestra to play at Italian weddings, and if it works out we can make a lot of extra money. I have a lot of company, and for that, it's better than living alone as I did in Milano, but the work here is not the same. The *muratori* here don't know the difference between a cornice and a frieze and the contractors know even less. I just got my card as a bricklayer, but I won't be using it until next summer. The little bit of work I did since I got here is not enough to give me marks to collect *chômage*, which is what they pay to those that don't have work. So I keep my eyes open and go begging for any small repair job. But they pay in cash without declaring me, so I can never collect unemployment insurance if they lay me off.

I'm still upset at Alessandro and how he made fools of us all. I wrote and gave him a piece of my mind. I also wrote to father and we've decided that I should try to sponsor Tina as soon as I can, but rest assured that I'll make whatever sacrifice to call for you as soon as possible after that, hopefully by next year. It's the only reason I took this step in coming here in the first place, to give you and the children a better life. If I can only get through this first winter, then next summer should be easier. With my bricklayer card I get paid up to three dollars an hour, and if I work most of the summer, I'll make enough to rent and furnish an apartment and call for you. I'm still paying the government every month for the loan on the boat trip, and I have to show I have enough to sponsor Tina and you.

Give my regards to your family and don't neglect to take the children to visit my father and mother every Sunday afternoon, and don't be too strict with Luigi. Let him use his bicycle once in a while. Tell him I'll buy him a better one when he gets here. I'm glad that Caterina likes her new teacher. Here, there are parks everywhere, with swings and all kinds of toys for them to play with in the summer, but don't think it's all a paradise—winters are long and hard for everyone.

I'm sending you a money order for ten dollars, which should last you till next time I write. Buy the children some candies and oranges for the *Befana*, and buy my parents some coffee and sugar. Buy three packs of cigarettes and give one to your brother, one to my father, and one to my friend Amadeo, when you see him. Tell him that the first piece of music that the band plays here when we go marching is *Faccetta Nera*, but nobody complains. In fact they applaud, and the Canadians smile and don't know any better. I wish I could send more but whatever I saved has to last until I get regular work again.

Dear Teresa, we're very, very far. I can't even ask you to be with me by looking at the moon every night at ten as I used to from Milano, for when the moon is out here the sun is still shining bright over there. I can't wait for this long winter to be over and have you in my arms forever.

Kiss the children for me. With all my love,

Giuseppe

Friday, October 10, 1980

Nick and the Gang

Classes resumed normally on Friday morning, but during homeroom period, Mrs. Champagne announced over the intercom that there would be a meeting of both students and teachers, first thing Monday morning, to discuss the stink bomb incident. "The authorities will be investigating the case all weekend long. Those responsible for the disruptions will most certainly be brought to task," she said.

The students laughed. "Good luck, Miss!" Linda said at the end of the announcement.

During lunch, Nick had called Cathy into the staff room to ask her if she wouldn't mind having an informal departmental meeting to discuss Carmy's reintegration into the program.

Cathy explained that she had already discussed it with Mrs. Champagne, and that they planned to meet with Bruce and Mike Burns sometime in the coming week to coordinate their efforts.

"I'm not interested in discussing our departmental business with Bruce and Mike Burns," Nick said. "They have their own agendas; we have ours."

"Let's keep our own business to ourselves," added Ralph, the Electro-Technology teacher.

Carmy's placement in Cathy's class as a Special Education student had been problematic for the rest of the department from the very beginning. Nick had not been

happy that the student was accepted, especially since he had not been consulted. Cathy explained that it had been done informally since she knew the family, but Nick complained about the decision any chance he got.

At the lunch meeting, he repeated the same complaint. "They slipped the student in without consulting the department, and now they took her back without our input...like we don't count. What is the point of discussing things with us after the fact? With everything that's happening in the school, I would never have accepted her back."

Cathy answered that what was happening in the school had nothing to do with Carmy, and since she would be signing a contract with Mrs. Champagne, if she didn't work out, she'd be asked to leave.

"And you don't see anything wrong with that?" Nick asked. "I'm more worried that she will work out. Then, they'll have ten others like her lined up for us."

"This school was built to improve Technical-Vocational education. Not as a dumping ground for Special Ed," said Ben, banging his fist on the desk. Ben was the plumbing teacher, and one of the more vocal teachers. "How can we promote our courses if they start dumping the retards and discipline problems on us?"

"Oh, c'mon guys, you're making too much of a big deal over one student," Cathy said. "We want to increase our numbers, yet we refuse students. It doesn't make sense. You know that eventually we'll have to accept Special Ed students to survive as a department, whether we like it or not."

The other teachers in the room were non-committal. They could easily be swayed by the most persuasive speaker. The two automotive teachers, just sat there, drinking their morning coffee, and didn't seem to care one way or another. Nick, Frank and Ben

were the most opinionated of the bunch. They stuck together, and saw every issue as a battle between them and the academic departments.

“We refuse other people’s problems,” Nick added, in his measured and controlled voice. “Let them experiment with the academic teachers. If they place those students in our classes, the regular ones will never take us seriously. They already consider our courses to be Mickey-Mouse courses anyway. Personally, I have never complained about small classes.”

“And don’t you see the trend?” added Frank. “They’re trying to turn all of Tech-Voc into Special Ed. Next thing you know, they’ll put us on surplus if we don’t get a Special Ed diploma. Do you wanna go back to McGill again for another diploma? I don’t.”

“To you, Cathy, this is about accommodating one extra student, a friend of the family,” Nick continued. “To us it’s about the direction we want our department to take. You’ve got to see the whole picture. Let’s forget the ego trips or trying to win popularity contests with students and administrators. Anyway, you’re not really doing her any favors. You and I know she’ll never become a hairdresser. Can you see that girl ever working in a beauty salon with that ugly face?”

Since the number of students in the Tech-Voc department did not warrant a full-fledged department head, Nick, the woodworking teacher, had been unofficially acting as one. Nick used to teach gym full time in an elementary school before his position was cut. When he transferred to the high school two years before, he had volunteered to teach a woodworking class, and had since transferred to the Tech-Voc department, even though he still taught one gym class. With the shifting number of enrollments, this was not

unusual. At WHHS, there were Geography teachers teaching Biology, Math teachers teaching English, and just about anybody could be asked to teach Religious, Moral and Sex Education. With the popularity of hairdressing, and the increase of students' numbers in the last year, Tech-Voc was entitled to a full department head. Nick had made it obvious that he expected to get the position.

Like many teachers at Hingston, Nick was also ethnic. He was of Italian descent but had been born in Cairo and had lived in France before settling in Montreal. To Italian students, he claimed he was Italian; to others, he sometimes claimed he was French, or half-Italian and half-French. He spoke impeccable French, as well as Italian and Arabic. Whatever his real roots were, he was endowed with Mediterranean good looks. He was of medium height, with a very muscular body. He had dark, wavy hair that he kept short and away from his face. He had a suntanned complexion and a radiant, expansive smile. His dark eyes were small but his gaze was penetrating and inquisitive.

Nick had a certain self-assurance and charisma about him. It didn't take long for the others in the department to gravitate toward him. After being at the high school for a while, he had started to spend all his free periods in the Tech-Voc staff room and had become part of the department. A clique of teachers congregated there in the mornings, at recess and at lunch, for coffee and small talk. Nick pontificated about the issues of the day, both political and school-related, and the gossip was constant.

Little by little, Cathy had noticed how Nick's form of gossiping was different from the usual, harmless, idle talk of the others. She detected a subtle but consistent pattern in his modus operandi. Maybe she felt that she understood where Nick came from better than anyone else, but when he slipped innuendoes or unconfirmed rumors with a

seemingly innocent, joking manner, Cathy stopped laughing and sometimes questioned his comments. Their original attraction had turned to mutual antipathy. Because he still taught a class of gym, he always walked around in his gym clothes and running shoes. He had a tendency to sneak up on people. He reminded Cathy of the little green lizards that used to slither out of nowhere when she and her mother searched for wood in the countryside around Mulirena, on the hot summer afternoons.

After the meeting, Cathy became more resolved than ever to keep Carmy in her class. It felt good to stand up to Nick and his gang, but another motive seemed to be slowly taking shape. She thought that Carmy's presence, despite her sulking behavior, might actually add a spark of interest to her teaching. She looked forward to meeting with Bruce to discuss a course of action for dealing with Carmy, and to put to use some of the teaching strategies she had learned about in her classes. Bruce had already complimented her on the small improvements that Carmy had been making before the graffiti incident.

"You have worked a small miracle," Bruce had commented when Carmy started attending regularly. And that is when she had first noticed his tall frame, and how his imposing presence filled the room.

The comment also made Cathy think that maybe her destiny and true missionary vocation were finally catching up to her. *Maybe in a roundabout way*, she thought, *Carmy's been placed in my class to get me back on track*. After eight years of teaching the art and science of hairdressing in this "pretend saloon," maybe her career would take a different turn. If the project with Carmy worked out, she thought, she would gladly accept other similar students, maybe go for a Special Ed diploma, study psychology, social work, family therapy, and use her skills to help troubled teens—a modern day

female Saint John Bosco. Maybe Carmy was meant to be. So what if Carmy never made it into a beauty salon as a full-fledged hairstylist? Was Montreal in such dire need of hairdressers? Cathy felt that her responsibility was to her students, not the hairdressing industry. She even started to hope that she would get the position as department head. *Mike is right, I'm as qualified as those other clowns*, she was thinking as she left the staff room.

As she drove home on Friday afternoon, Cathy continued to feel excited by the changes that seemed to be coming. She thought about how once, during one of their heated arguments, Sean had called her and her relatives “ignorant peasants with simple-minded values.” Sean spent his weekends reading Jung and Nietzsche. The books on his night table had such titles as *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Meanwhile, Cathy had spent her leisure time working at a beauty salon for extra spending money. Maybe it was time she looked at other options, Cathy thought, maybe she could even take university level courses and study what she loved doing most, reading and writing. Maybe it was time to start putting some order in the notebooks she had kept hidden for so long, and try again to string a story from it all.

From: Antonio Amoruso<aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Sent: November 1, 2004, 11:00:35 pm
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca
Subject: Submission

Attachment: spring-summer1955.doc

Franco,

My friend's compulsion to write is typical of her generation, and I would guess that we will be seeing more and more children of immigrants want to record their experiences for posterity, either to purge themselves of guilt, of perceived hurts, or to pay tribute to the life work of aging or dead parents. Survival came first, acquiring of wealth next, but still for some sensitive souls, the hunger and thirst has not been abated. Is it that the pain of the journey still needs to be justified, or is it a search for that elusive place in the sun?

As you know, I've always scorned the diarrheic confessional recounting of personal experiences. It may be of therapeutic value to the writer, but these narrations contribute nothing to the community's body of literary works. I don't mean to denigrate the past efforts of Aurora Publishing, Franco. The production of academic texts has been impressive, and so has been the outpouring of poetry books. But the autobiographical accounts published so far, the obsessive retelling of events as they happened, have generally failed in creating literary characters to portray universal truths. This is why I encouraged my friend to invent, invent, invent.

You asked me about the name of one of the characters. Totu is the Calabrese nickname for Antonio, the same as "Toto." I suppose she may have chosen it because practically every family in Mulirena had an Antonio. I haven't questioned her choice of names or edited any of them. We critics tend to see more than what the writers intend—especially with naïve writers such as this one. I'll only give her credit for trying hard to create a very realistic setting for her fiction. She did once tell me that she read Verga. She may also have been conditioned, without actually being aware of it, by the trend for neo-realism in post-war Italy. But let us remember that this is mainly a work of fiction.

As for my own involvement with the Communist Party, there's little point in talking about it here. It seems like an eternity ago. I'll only say that an important period in my life disintegrated right before my eyes with the TV images of the Wall crumbling down. But my first discovery of Gramsci's writings opened my eyes to the inequalities of the social system in Italy. But living there became unbearable after I realized that we had deluded ourselves, believing that, just by talking about it, we could make a new class emerge in post-war Italy. If only some heed had been paid to our ideas, we might not have witnessed the rise of the Red Brigades in the 80s and the violence this spawned. I

left when I understood that change would only come about through violent revolution, and I'm by no means a revolutionary at heart.

Sorry it took so long to answer this time, but I do have a day job, which keeps me busy at this time of year. The *Gazzettino* has become more of a hobby, and it hardly pays for itself. I still do the odd translation, but not enough to pay for the creature comforts that I'm ashamed to admit I've become accustomed to.

By the way, Lucia is also a very common name for a girl, it being the name of the village's patron saint. I'm quite pleased to see that the writer has made an effort to treat her writing as a work of fiction. Here's my contribution, which might provide more insight into the phenomenon of village rumors, and their impact on the actions, or lack thereof, of the principal actors in this saga.

Antonio

VILLAGE RUMORS

By Antonio Amoroso

In Mulirena, as in any other village, rumors were ingested, ruminated, digested and then passed on as an accepted form of reality, from which the subject of the rumor could no longer retreat, since perceptions were considered to be more important than truth.

In the summer of 1956, the “voices” around the village were all talking about Totu and Lucia, and the people around them. At Adelina’s shop, at U Gobbu’s house, at the bar and the *osteria*, around doorsteps, and during the nightly *passegiate*, conjectures abounded regarding whether or not the two would find a way of getting back together again, despite the stumbling blocks that Alfonso and Tommaso had thrown their way, and despite the fact that Lucia was as good as engaged to someone else.

When Totu came home for a few days at Easter, and visited U Gobbu’s house, he walked right past Lucia’s window without looking up, while she must have been steaming with anger inside the house knowing he was across the way, and had made no attempt to see her.

“It’s as if she never existed,” her friends at the seamstress’ shop said. “After all those years, the least she deserves is an explanation.”

Totu had been heard saying, “The war criminals in Nuremburg are being brought to justice, but Mario Abiusi and the Fascist thugs of our village are still free. Shame on our political system!” When he said it, he had pointed at Lucia’s window.

“He knew who Mario Abiusi was when he started making love to her,” Lucia’s friends commented.

Lucia spoke more and more about her prospective fiancé. He had written to her that he’d acquired a large number of plots of land in Montreal, that he expected to develop into rows and rows of *villette*, real *casette in Canada*—houses built just like those in the song that everyone around the village sang. However, Lucia still insisted that her engagement was unofficial, and she would only agree to make it official after Pasquale’s trip to Mulirena in the summer.

To Lucia’s boasts, Totu had responded, “Men sell their souls; women their bodies for gain and profit.”

Lucia’s friend, Tina, had a new suit and coat sewn, in preparation for being called by her brother in Montreal, and Teresa worried that if Giuseppe kept spending his money on clothes for his sister, he would never be able to send for any of them. But in the spring, Giuseppe wrote that he had resumed working regularly, and that the proceedings to sponsor Tina were moving very quickly. By the beginning of May, she went to Rome for her visa and soon after, left for Montreal.

“It won’t be long before Lucia joins Tina in Montreal. You’ll see! What future does she have here, after the way Totu treated her?” the women in Piano Don Carlo said.

In June, at the end of the school year, Totu came back from Rome again, and a few days later, at the bar, he and his uncle Tommaso argued in the presence of many of their friends.

“You’re a big disappointment!” Tommaso burst out. “After all I’ve done for you! Your grandfather was exiled and had his whiskers pulled off, one hair at a time, because he wouldn’t belong to any political party and you—my nephew—a member of the communist party! What a slap on the face!”

“It’s the only party that cares about workers,” Totu replied.

“It’s people like me who look after the workers by creating jobs,” Tommaso screamed. “I help them put bread on their tables. Not your communist friends who just talk and talk.”

“Bread maybe, while you and Don Luigi eat *capiccolli* and *prosciutto*,” young Totu responded.

“What an ingrate! You’re studying this nonsense on my back, instead of becoming an accountant or lawyer and earning a decent living. What are you going to do with a degree in *Lettere*?”

“I’m going to be a journalist,” Totu said loudly, making sure that everyone in the bar heard him.

“Another deluded fool with dreams of glory!” Tommaso laughed. He threw some money on the table and left.

For weeks afterward, each time Totu visited U Gobbu, Pietro Abiusi played *Addio, Sogni di Gloria* on his new gramophone, full blast.

Totu spent more and more time at his friend's house and in his courtyard, which overlooked Lucia's window, while she spent her afternoons on her balcony, embroidering her trousseau. She and her brother Alfonso were often heard arguing over the promises that had been made by Pasquale, who wrote that he had had an unusually busy period at work. He had started selling the plots of land, and had a quota to reach before the end of summer. The marriage plans would have to change—they would have to marry by proxy, like many others had done before them.

"I'm not like many others," Lucia told her brother. "I'm not a peasant who has to marry at any cost."

The women and the rest of her family warned her: "You can't break your word with the family. If you do, you're finished. No one will want to touch you here in Mulirena."

Meanwhile Pasquale's family come to visit every Sunday, and Rosaria complained to the neighbors that she had to force Lucia to be civil with them, while Alfonso discussed new business opportunities with Pasquale and his brothers. Pasquale insisted that a fortune could be made importing Italian food products, especially the locally produced ones such as olive oil, cheeses, salami.

"The American food is worse than garbage," they quoted Pasquale as saying.

Tommaso laughed when he heard about their plans. He bought up the land that others abandoned, and produced and bottled olive oil, which he then sold to dealers in the cities. "*Io faccio l'America a Mulirena*," he said. He'd make his fortune in Mulirena.

Alfonso traveled in the surrounding areas with a new scooter that Pasquale had paid for, but kept a close eye on the comings and goings of Lucia and Totu.

Rosina's husband was still doing his military service, but he was on leave frequently, and came to the village. Yet when Rosaria became pregnant, tongues started wagging about the possible identity of the father.

"It's not fair," Adelina said. "Why don't they leave the poor girl alone? One wrong deed seals a woman's reputation for good here... I'd like to cut their tongues off," she added, waving her long seamstress' shears. Despite Adelina's protests, Rosina's reputation and fate had been decided long before, and very few actual circumstances were needed to confirm them.

Rosina still went to Donna Rachele's, to do small jobs, and at times walked to the farms tended by her parents. During one of these excursions, a woman who lived near the cemetery saw Rosina getting into Totu's Fiat at the outskirts of town. The woman passed on the news to someone else, who told Lucia.

"So you can't deny it now. It's all true what they've said," Lucia wrote in a note that was delivered to Totu.

He scribbled back, "What right do you have to question my every movement when you've chosen to sell yourself to a man you don't even know?"

When Lucia received this response, she opened her back window and the whole neighborhood heard her scream at Rosina who was shelling peas behind Rachela's house, "*Puttana e figlia de puttana.*"

"Why don't you take your anger out on someone else?" Adelina screamed at Lucia the following day.

"Who am I going to take it out on?" she answered. "Who will listen to me?"

Pasquale had started proceedings for her call and Lucia didn't do anything to stop the process.

Adelina and the other seamstresses agreed, "Rosina is not the problem between them. His uncle and her brother are."

Late at night, at U Gobbu's house, some of Totu's friends tried to concoct a few courses of action that would allow the couple to get out of Tommaso's and Alfonso's grip—elopement was considered, but Totu thought it too unpractical and uncivil. Only ignorant peasants did this, as a way to force a family to accept a marriage they didn't approve of—never an educated man. "We're not living in the middle ages," he told them. Another time, he complained, "I have no money of my own to set up a home. Once I become a journalist, I'll get out of this hole. But until I do, I have to prostitute myself like everyone else around here. I have my career to think about."

"I have my family to think about," Lucia said, when she heard his comment.

But the two still exchanged messages and long glances.

"I can't take a decision on my own. If only he'd give me a signal," Lucia told her friends.

"If it's destined, it will happen," Adelina said at the shop.

But once the visa notice arrived from Rome, asking Lucia to come to the Canadian embassy, it seemed too late to reverse the plans. A month later, Lucia traveled to Rome with her brother and received her visa to leave for Montreal anytime she wished.

"I can't send her to a stranger's house, while she is an unmarried woman," Rosaria told the neighbors. So they planned a wedding by proxy before the end of the summer.

Around that time, Giuseppe wrote to Teresa, saying he would soon send for her and the children. So Teresa offered to look after Lucia, if she waited to travel with them on the same boat.

The villagers echoed their perceptions of the truth. In the process, roles, motives and intentions were assigned, that may or may not have been there from the start. But once they had been voiced out loud, they compelled the protagonists to live up to their buildup or lose face. Of course, figures of heroic proportions might have risen above a fate dictated by idle gossip, but the time of heroes was already past.

Summer 1956

By Cathy Anastasia

A Wedding in White

Lucia married at the end of July, a few weeks after my confirmation. I wore my white confirmation dress as I walked behind her holding her long, white veil. Marrying by proxy meant that someone had to stand in the place of the groom in the church. Lucia could have chosen to go through a civil ceremony at city hall, and then to celebrate the religious wedding in Montreal, as many others had done. But she insisted on carrying out the full event in Mulirena. "I know no one there," she said. "It had been promised that I would marry here, and I'm marrying here."

She planned the whole event as though Pasquale would be present. He paid for it all, including the food, drinks, her dress, shoes and flowers. She wanted to have the best wedding that Mulirena had ever seen, and the whitest. Evelina sewed a slim, white satin gown, and spent hours covering by hand the tiny buttons that went all the way from her neckline down to below her waist. She had copied the dress from a magazine picture of the Duchess of Wales on her wedding day. Lucia carried a bouquet of white orange blossoms, and had the longest veil I had ever seen on a bride, and which I had to hold up as she walked to church.

Comare Rosaria worked all week baking cookies and frying three types of *bracirole*—croquettes made with meat, potato and rice. Pasquale's family arrived a day early and took over the whole house.

“Poor Comare Rosaria,” Mother said. “She has to shoulder all that work by herself.” The woman had to cook for, and accommodate, over a dozen people, all by herself, at the same time as she got everything ready for the wedding feast.

The morning of the wedding, the house was filled with guests, who were served coffee, *biscotti* and different liquors—*Vermouth*, *Anice*, *Strega*, and *Mille Fiori*. The bride's father, paralyzed on one side of his body, couldn't walk all the way to the Church, so Lucia was accompanied by Alfonso from the house to the Church of Santa Lucia. They were followed, procession-like by the groom's older brother, Matteo, who was the best man, and who was accompanied by his wife, and then by Comare Rosaria and her younger son, by Pasquale's parents and other members of his family, and finally by all the other guests. Mother and the older women wore their own wedding costumes, similar to their ordinary ones, except that the long skirt, bodice and ribbons were made of pastel-colored satin, and their *mancale* was white. It was one of the few occasions they had to wear it, and it would be the last time Mother ever wore hers.

As the procession advanced slowly toward the church, people threw rice at the bride from their balconies and windows, as a symbol of good luck, prosperity and fertility. In response, family members threw *confetti*, white candy-coated almonds, at the people watching from the sides of the street. Children ran along the side of the road, trying to catch as many of the *confetti* as possible.

Don Tommasino celebrated the Mass and blessed the bride and her brother as if he were the groom. Alfonso and Matteo signed the register as witnesses. Then, Lucia's veil was raised from her face and she walked back out the church with Matteo, who stood in for his brother. As they left the church, the bells rang out in celebration and rice and *confetti* were showered all over the piazza, and everyone walked back in the same order as before.

For the reception, Lucia had not wanted a full-course meal. She considered it too old-fashioned and *cafone*. But Rosaria insisted that she at least serve the *bracirole*, which were passed around on platters by the children. They served the guests the same drinks as in the morning, along with trays of homemade cookies and store-bought *amaretti*. At the end, they passed out glasses of sparkling wine with slices of a white wedding cake that had been bought in Catanzaro. The guests all left with a *bomboniera*, a pretty porcelain bowl that held more *confetti*, wrapped in white tulle. Those who came from outside the town left in the evening. Lucia's new in-laws invited her to go stay with them for a few days, but she chose to remain in her own house.

The day after, Teresa and Maria discussed the wedding in Piano Don Carlo, in front of U Gobbu's house, raving about the cookies, the cake, the wide variety of liquor, and the *bomboniere*. "Comare Rosaria prepared a beautiful feast, Mother concluded. "Nothing was spared."

"Except for a plate of pasta and a groom in the bed," U Gobbu called out from his window, from where he had listened to everything they'd said.

“Be quiet,” his sister-in-law whispered, afraid that Comare Rosaria would hear. “They’ll have enough time, soon enough, for both.” Then she told Mother: “Men can only think of two things, their stomachs and bed.”

“They have their whole life ahead of them. Let’s hope it all goes well, for Comare Rosaria’s sake,” Mother said.

Shattered Water Jugs

It seemed that the whole town was changing that summer. To make up for their earlier arguments, and to outdo Alfonso's new scooter, at the beginning of the summer, Tommaso had bought Totu a brand new Fiat Topolino, with which the young man sped up and down Via Roma like a crazed bee. After Lucia’s wedding, Totu walked straight past Piano Don Carlo on his way to the piazza. I missed the candies he used to give me in exchange for delivering his messages to Lucia. His absence of his presence in our neighborhood, and Lucia’s marriage to someone else felt peculiar to me. Alfonso’s Vespa scooter provided the only motorized competition to the Fiat, but the scooter had an advantage over the car—its ability to race through the narrow alleys and uphill, cobblestone street that led to Piano Don Carlo and to Lucia’s window—now out of bounds to the revved-up Fiat and to Totu.

Also during that summer, mother’s cousins, Mario and Santo, came home from Rome, and took to driving with Totu to the beach at Catanzaro Lido. Luigi begged to go along, but mother was afraid that the older boys wouldn’t watch over him properly. On one excursion, she relented and allowed Luigi go along with the three young men. I

watched enviously as she packed a picnic lunch for the boys, lecturing Luigi on not going swimming unless someone held him by the hand, warning him not to trust sea water because it could pull you in, the minute you put your feet in it.

“You’re going this one time,” she told him. “But don’t think that you’re going with them every week. I know what you’re like. You never look before leaping.”

Mother needn't have worried about Luigi making a habit of going to the beach, for when he returned in the evening, with a sour, sunburned face and a welt on one cheek, he swore he never wanted to go along with that bunch of show-offs again. He blamed both the sunburn and the bruise on Mario, who was known to have a quick temper. First, Luigi recounted, they insisted on stopping for espresso in the bar at Amato, and they stayed there for almost an hour, showing off the new car, which, unlike Tommaso's old Lancia, did not need to be cranked up to start. Then, at the Lido, they parked the car within sight of the beach, but far enough away that what Luigi could see of the sea was a thin, undulating, blue-green line. Once the young men had changed into their swimming trunks, they asked Luigi to sit on the pavement next to the car to make sure no one touched it, and to wave at them if any *carabinieri* came by. They promised they would take turns relieving him, but he sat steaming with impatience—and from heat—for what seemed like hours. Finally, he couldn't take it any longer, and he waved wildly toward the beach. Mario, perspiring and as red as the Fiat, came running toward the boy, and seeing no emergency or *carabinieri*, landed a heavy slap on the side of Luigi's sun-sensitive face, leaving his hand-print. Luigi cried and complained that he was hungry and thirsty and needed to go to the bathroom so badly that his stomach hurt. Mario dragged him to the beach, pushed him into the ocean, yelling at him to pee as much as he wanted,

and called him a *cretino* for tricking him like that, when he could have just pissed anywhere along the bushes that bordered the parking spot. If it hadn't been for Totu, who jumped into the water to help him, Luigi said, Mario would have left him alone to sink.

Mother was livid at her cousin, but seemed almost satisfied that Luigi had had a bad time. "What did you expect to find away from your house?" She told him. "Don't you know that things always sound better than they really are?"

That summer, Anselmo's bar had also brought in the first ice-cream maker. Until then, for a summer treat, we kids had had to settle for sucking on an ice cube, unless we walked to Amato for a *gelato*. In the evenings, the young people, instead of going to the *Funtanella* for water, had taken to going for a *passeggiata* and a *gelato* in the piazza. We girls changed into our best clothes, and arm-in-arm, walked up and down via Roma, acknowledging the other girls with a nod, but ignoring the boys whose paths we crossed.

Since my aunt Tina had left for Canada, Lucia had no other company to go out with, so she expected me to accompany her on these evening walks. She held me by the hand as we walked down toward the piazza as if she were taking *me* for a walk, until my friends Rosetta and Bettina joined us. Then, the four of us would buy our ice cream and walk up again to accompany Lucia back to Piano Don Carlo.

The women who sat on their doorsteps frowned at Lucia for going out like that, especially since she was married, and criticized her family for permitting it. "If Lucia's in-laws had lived in the town," they said, "Rosaria would not have been so lax." But the woman was too easy-going and too busy caring for her sick husband to notice that Lucia was taking all these liberties.

The only family member who still had some control over Lucia's movements was Alfonso, but, in the evenings, he was usually away in the nearby villages, riding his scooter.

Some of the older women even objected to unmarried girls parading up and down the piazza, but *nonno* Luigi, rather than disapproving of us, had actually entertained us one evening. He gave Lucia a proud report on Tina, who had found a good, clean job in a *fabbrica* in Montreal, sewing women's light lingerie. Then he bought each of us a lemon-flavored *granita*, which we ate sitting outside the bar, like the men.

My evening *passeggiate* with Lucia ended after the feast of Santo Francesco, which was celebrated in Amato, at the end of July. On the Sunday evening of the feast, our piazza was quiet, since most of the younger people had gone to Amato, where some singers were performing in the square. Surprisingly, Lucia didn't seem interested in going. I would have gone with Rosetta and her family, but Mother said she had too much on her mind to be worrying about me being out until late at night. After our usual ritual of going for a *gelato* at the piazza, Lucia decided to pick up our *vozze*, and go to the *Funtanella* for water. We filled the ceramic water jugs and then, she insisted that we walk toward the *Timpa*. There, we sat on a stone for a long time. It was as though she was waiting for someone. It irritated me that Lucia never talked when she was alone with me. She had become closed in with her own thoughts, and acted as if I wasn't even there.

The sky turned to dusk and the cypresses of the cemetery at Amato were discernable only as tall shadows against the twilight. I felt uneasy there. I was never comfortable walking by the *Timpa*, even in daylight. The sheer size of the scooped-out mount, with its exposed rocks jutting out all around, made me feel small and helpless. I

asked Lucia to take me back home before it got too dark, saying that mother would be alarmed by our absence.

Just then, we heard a car's engine. Lucia straightened up. The car sped past us, then doubled back and parked on the side of the road next to the *Timpa*. Totu came out of the car, and walked quietly toward a path in the ravine that led into the *Funtanella* from this side of the road. Lucia told me not to worry, that she would only be a few minutes, and then she joined him, leaving me alone in the semi-darkness. I prayed that they wouldn't go far. I listened for their every movement to distract myself from the fear of being alone. Mixed in with the sound of crickets, coming from the ravine, I soon distinguished Lucia's animated voice, Totu's quieter monotone, and then Lucia's sobbing. With each rustling of leaves, I hoped to see them emerge from the narrow path in the ravine, which was becoming darker and darker. Then the jerky vroom-vroom sound of a scooter coming from Amato drowned out all other noises, and, as it neared the *Timpa*, filled the air with what seemed a crescendo of doom. I should have tried to hide when Alfonso rode by, but there were no bushes in the wide open space of the quarry and I was paralyzed with fear.

Alfonso saw me, sitting there alone with the two *vozze*. He stopped his scooter and got off. He asked where his sister was. I answered that she was at the *Funtanella* getting more water. Just then, Lucia appeared, walking up the path, and I was relieved that Totu was not with her. But Alfonso was not so easily fooled; the Fiat was parked not far away, and Lucia, with red, teary eyes, was not carrying any water.

"I went for a drink of water," she said, wiping her mouth with her sleeve.

Alfonso took my *vozza*, and hit it against a stone smashing it to pieces, the cold spring water splashing on my legs, making me jump nervously.

“The water from the *Funtanella*... You have to forget once and for all.” He paced his words. “You’re going to America and you’re never going to drink it again. Do you understand? And if you don’t understand...I’ll make you understand. You’re going to America in one piece, even if I have to smash your head like this.” He hurled the second *vozza* against the rocks, then jumped back onto his scooter and rode off as noisily as he had arrived.

I felt as shattered as my broken *vozza*, which my grandfather had bought for me at the fair of Santa Lucia, years before. I picked up a couple of shards, as if trying to put it back together again. Sobbing, Lucia promised to buy me a new one at this year’s fair in December. I told her not to bother. Didn’t she realize that we would be leaving a month after that, and what would I do with a *vozza* in America? Without waiting for Totu to reappear we set off for home, both sobbing softly all the way.

When I arrived at home without a jug, I had to tell Mother what had happened. Instead of being upset at Alfonso, she said, “How can she be so *caparbia*? I hope to God she changes her head in the next couple of months.” After that incident, Lucia stopped coming out in the evening. Then in September, all the men went to their jobs in Milano and Rome, and the *passeggiate* at the piazza stopped.

From: Franco Pastore aurorapublishing@net.ca
Sent: November 1, 2004, 11:32 PM
To: Antonio Amoroso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Subject: Fw: re: submission

Antonio,

Your comments and condescending attitude about the outpouring of books at Aurora Publishing and their lack of “universality” still irritates me. I remember the heated panel discussion we two had in the early eighties, at a Toronto conference, on the emergence of Italian Canadian writing. Pier Giorgio di Cicco had just published his *Roman Candles*. I felt it was a breakthrough anthology for Italian Canadian writing. You kept on insisting that there could never be an Italian Canadian literature, because of the lack of literary traditions etc. etc. ... the usual tirade of highbrow art against low art. Do these ideas not run contrary to Gramsci’s criticisms of the chasm that existed between Italian intellectuals and the masses? Is not the nucleus of the universal found in the heart of the individual? Granted, you had to rummage through piles of amateurish writing, but writing traditions need both time and money to flourish, and we’ve been short of both. Let us give our writers credit for what they have achieved, with minimal help from the literary establishment in this country, and absolutely none from the native land.

You know I’ve never minced my words with you, so I must tell you that I find your behavior vis-à-vis this writer quite odd and even somewhat suspicious.

It was during the period that your friend was submitting her writing to you that we were having our most heated debates. Back then too, your persistent argument was that not enough fiction was being produced—yet you never once mentioned to me that someone you knew was churning out some semblance of a novel. Even if the quality of this work was not up to your highly cultivated standards, you could have mentioned the efforts being made to fictionalize a personal immigrant experience. Why did you never mention it to me, when all of our discussions centered on this very issue?

Was there / is there something troubling you about this story?

F

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Sent: November 15, 2004, 2:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca
Subject: Submission

Attachments: end of first half.doc

Franco,

Some people are just less effusive than others, and maybe, more complex. Without falling into easy stereotyping, I can easily say that Calabrians are generally tight-lipped about divulging their personal sentiments. We don't broadcast our inner thoughts as easily as you Campobassani. Maybe I never mentioned my friend's writing at the time because the sexual attraction that had been kindled when I first met her in 1967 was still present as an unspoken encumbrance between us. And for me avoiding rather than facing troubling situations head-on, that has always been my coping strategy.

I was cold to Italian Canadian writing then because of its quality and, mostly, because by and large the first batch was being written in Italian, which precluded its distribution both here and in Italy. Where's the market? Italians are not interested in our books. In Italy today there seems to be the beginnings of an interest in Canadian literature, as we saw at the last book fair in Torino, but strangely enough, one of the most popular writers there is Mordechai Richler, an ethnic writer in his own right, but not exactly of Italian stock. Why are they so keen on Richler? Maybe because he has been able to transcend the local, something that our novelists have not yet been able to do. You have published some first-rate poets, but you know that poetry doesn't have a wide readership anywhere in the world. I admire your efforts at promoting IC writers against great odds.

And as for me, Franco, there is nothing troubling about this story, except for my reluctance to act on any revolutionary impulses I may have had. I don't believe in heroes in the publishing field either.

Sorry, if I've not been capable of condensing this manuscript as you had asked, but the first half is soon coming to an end.

A

Saturday, October 11, 1980

Fool's Work

Cathy spent the weekend cleaning and preparing the apartment for Carmy's stay. She changed the sheets on the sofa-bed, which were still there from the last time JP had stayed over. She dusted the books on the shelves, and put all the stray ones in their right category. Then she picked out the books that Sean was likely to use most, and brought them to their bedroom. For herself, besides the thick *I Promessi Sposi*, she chose a few other books from her "to read" list to keep on her night table: *I Malavoglia*, by Giovanni Verga and *Il Gattopardo*, which had been made into a movie with Claudia Cardinale. She considered removing her stack of notebooks from the bottom shelf, but it was very unlikely that Carmy would bother to read through them, and even if she tried, the handwriting was undecipherable.

She then undertook the mammoth task of taking her fall and winter clothes from the storage boxes under the bed, and exchanging them for the summer ones hanging in her closet. This was a chore she went through twice a year since her closet could not contain all of her clothes. Whenever she bought something new, she didn't necessarily throw away something old, so over the years, her closet space had kept on shrinking.

"You hoard things," Sean complained.

"And you throw everything away," she retorted.

She found it especially difficult to throw away her old clothes. They reminded her of the changes in her life, the ups and downs, the weight gains and the losses. Some

pieces of clothing had never even been worn, and still had a price tag on them. They had been mistakes in judgment. She had either been carried away by a sale price, or had purchased them in a panic before a special event, fearing that she had nothing else appropriate to wear. Also, she realized, at times she had compromised too easily, accepted what was available for fear of being without. Once the clothes made it home, she rarely returned them. There was always something she liked about them, and she always thought that, maybe at a different time in her life, she might find a use for them. *It must be my immigrant background*, she thought, *this squirrel-like compulsion to hoard things for a rainy day*. Overall, it seemed to her that she was always moving books and clothes from one place to another.

Lavoru e pazzi—fool's work—is what her mother would have called it—like the aimless tasks given to people in mental hospitals, with no set purpose but to keep them busy and out of trouble.

Her bedroom furniture depressed her, and she wished she had bought the set that she and Sean had seen at the Danish House. She had enough money in her bank account for a down payment on a house, so she could easily have afforded to buy the set on her own, even if Sean hadn't agreed. She planned to discuss it with him whenever they would be on better speaking terms. For now there was still Carmy's stay to iron out, and she was glad that Carmy would only be coming in on Monday so she'd have a chance to prepare him. Their last argument had never been resolved, but she figured she was right, and had no qualms about her decision, only a nervous feeling in her stomach about having to argue with him again. The apartment was just as much hers as his. In fact it was more hers, since she had contributed more toward it. If he could invite JP whenever he wanted,

she could accommodate a friend in need. As far as JP was concerned, she wished he'd stay in Ottawa, or go to a hotel when in Montreal.

If Sean's constant visitors had behaved as if they owned the place, Jean-Pierre always acted as if he owned Sean. When Cathy first heard about Pierre, Sean described him as a kind of mentor, who had helped Sean straighten out his mind, while he lived in Ottawa. She first met him at the school's inauguration, but neither one had paid attention to the other. The first time he visited Sean after he and Cathy had started seeing each other, she had prepared a special meal for him at Sean's place. When Pierre had walked into the kitchen to greet Cathy, who was all flushed from cooking, he'd looked her over and said, "So this is the Italian *mamma*." In spite of the jovial tone of voice, Cathy had sensed a disapproving look in his eyes, and she'd disliked him immediately.

As he visited more frequently, Cathy had become aware that Sean changed his manners when Pierre was around. And now, during the week, Sean had submitted his request for a leave of absence from his teaching job. He was almost certain he'd get it, with so many surplus teachers. And with Sean working for him, Pierre would be visiting more regularly. Cathy began wondering whether her role as Sean's roommate was also being challenged .

Even with the apartment vacuumed and the furniture polished, it still looked like a third-rate hotel lobby. Kelly had inspected it at its worse, before the clean-up, on Thursday evening after their visit to Alfonso's, and yet she complimented Cathy on the various interesting pieces of flea-market furniture. But Alfonso would most certainly think of her place as a beggar's home, compared to his semi-mansion. Homes were considered the most obvious symbol of success for someone like Alfonso and most of her

paesani. He had certainly achieved what he had aimed for. He had become wealthy by exploiting two of the most basic needs of immigrants: their craving for authentic foods, and their dream of owning a piece of land and a home worthy of an ocean crossing.

On The Way To Halifax

By Cathy Anastasia

We left Mulirena on January 31, 1957—on the same day that the first TV set was brought to the town. I spent the rainy January afternoon with mother, Luigi and Zio Pietro, shuffling the insides of our bulging suitcases, agonizing over what to bring and what to leave behind, while a constant stream of people came by, bringing more pungent-smelling parcels to add to the pile of what was left to be packed. They came with letters tied to packages of homemade cheeses, salamis and even dried oregano, to be delivered to their close friends and relatives in Montreal. Zio grumbled with each last-minute addition, and Luigi and I grew impatient because we wanted to go out and see the TV set that Anselmo, the bar owner, had received that morning, and that everyone who came by was talking about.

But then, Rachela, who worked at the butcher shop across from the bar, told us not to bother, that Anselmo had turned the TV off and sent all the gawkers away. She had watched the commotion from her shop that morning. Anselmo's sons and the bar regulars had unpacked the set impatiently, taking turns adjusting and tuning it, only to stare at fuzzy snow and jumpy white lines. She finally went over and yelled at them to at least turn off the ear-piercing sound, if they were going to stand there, transfixed like *babbi* in front of it, for the rest of the day. Anselmo explained—to her and to the crowd that had gathered around—that the sound proved that the set was in good working order. He invited everyone to return later when the television would truly come to life. He would

serve free *espresso* and *bibite* while they all watched the one and only program scheduled that evening, *Lascia o Raddoppia*, a game show that all of Italy was raving about. Of course, by then, we would be leaving for Santa Eufemia to catch the ten o'clock train for Naples. I felt like I was leaving a party just when things were beginning to happen.

A curious feeling had been hanging over me since we'd started preparing for our trip—a vague sensation that the town itself, like us, was changing into something different than what I had known all my life. The start of winter had been milder and had seemed less somber to me than usual. In the fall, grandmother Stella had wrapped green tomatoes from the summer's bumper crop in newspapers, and they had ripened slowly. It was unheard of, she said, to eat red tomatoes until the end of January. Mother spoke less and less of the war days, when all they'd had to eat were wild field greens and a few thin slices of rationed yellow cornbread. Now the cornbread was baked at Grandmother's store, and was white and plentiful. And, for snacks, she spread it with *formaggino*, the triangular-shaped little creamy cheeses wrapped in silver foil.

Since we had received our visa, there wasn't a day that someone didn't offer me something to eat or drink and say, "Eat the *capicollo*—or the fig, or the chestnuts—while you can, for you're never going to see them again."

While Mother reminded me of all the good things around us that we would be leaving for good, she also smirked at the desire for luxury that was sweeping the village. "*Che lusso!*" she'd say, whenever we allowed ourselves a new indulgence.

The Amatesi had not only gotten their ice-cream maker before the Mulerinesi. They had also been able to watch the black-and-white television screen at their local bar almost a full year earlier. Many of the men and boys had walked to Amato every

Thursday evening to watch *Lascia o Raddoppia*. In the game show, contestants were asked, what seemed to most people, impossibly difficult questions on geography, history, politics, and literature. After a first correct answer, they won a large sum of money. They then had to decide whether to walk away with their winnings—*lascia*—or take a chance with another question and double the loot—*raddoppia*—if they answered correctly. If they were wrong, they lost everything. The show's host was Mike Buongiorno, a suave, good-looking man, who had gotten the name Mike after a short stint living in New York. The day after each show, the talk around the town was of how much money had been won or lost. Most of the amounts, in the millions of lire, sounded astronomical and unreal to the villagers. It was not only Amato, but the whole nation that was glued to the TV set every Thursday evening, watching millions of lire flow into the hands of the winners, who became millionaires and instant national celebrities.

In Mulirena, part of our newly felt prosperity was due to the dollar bills that my father and other men sent in each letter to their families. This allowed our mothers to buy us children *formaggini*, *gelati*, and new clothes.

But now after two years of living apart, our family would finally be together. And Lucia would be traveling with us to join the husband she had never met. We would be boarding the boat, The *Saturnia*, in Naples on the first of February. We would arrive in Halifax eleven days later. Mother could not speak of the voyage without her eyes widening with panic. She had never ventured beyond Mulirena unaccompanied. And now, she would have to cross an ocean, in the depths of winter, alone with two children and Lucia, who was becoming more and more difficult as the departure date neared. Lucia had continued her evening outings about the town, wearing her new clothes, as

though she were still single. And she had constant run-ins with her brother Alfonso. This had reinforced Mother's view that Lucia was both unreasonably headstrong—*caparbia*—and a tease—a *civetta*—to boot. These were two serious and dangerous faults in a new wife.

As the weather had turned colder, our minds had turned to the upcoming voyage, and mother had set out to do what everyone else before her had done to prepare for it. She found a buyer—Maria Angela—for her wedding costume. Traditionally, the women were buried in their wedding clothes. During the war, many brides had borrowed one other's costumes since the materials needed to make them had been quite expensive. Now, as more and more women shed the traditional garb to go to America, they sold it for a few lire to those who remained without one of their own. No one thought of taking the traditional *pacchiana* clothes along as a souvenir; they were much too voluminous and cumbersome to pack.

Worrying about the trip had made mother lose weight. When Adelina took her measurements for two new dresses, Mother, deprived of the layers of clothing the costume had provided, hated herself in the mirror. "*Paru na sarda asciutta,*" she said in disgust, comparing herself to a dry herring. Despite trying on other colors, Mother chose only blue for both dresses, blue being the only color she found neither too drab nor too showy. She also insisted on the same style of modest round collar on both pieces. She also had to be measured for a bra, which, as a *pacchiana*, she had never worn. Because her breasts were almost non-existent, Adelina and her assistants stuffed the cups with leftover lining material, and then laughed as they watched Mother scream in protest because the two cups turned out too pointy.

I was also measured for a new dress—a pleated, brown woolen one with long sleeves—and a red wool coat. Lucia kept Adelina working nights. She ordered dresses, skirts, a suit and a coat.

Mother started wearing the new dress two weeks before leaving, just so she could get used to them. The next thing that needed attention was her hair. She had let her braids dangle to her shoulders, but father had written that she should have her hair cut and permed. Since there were no hairdressers for women in Mulinera, Zio had Tommaso drive us to Catanzaro. Mother's hair was not as thick as most of the other women. As long as she had kept it braided and puffed on the sides, this deficiency had not been too obvious, but as soon as the male hairdresser cut it to a short chin-length, it just fell flat and separated at the crown, showing three bald patches, the results of carrying heavy loads on her head for years. "*Paru na gallina spinnata,*" she told the male hairdresser.

From the expression on his face, he seemed to agree that she looked like a plucked chicken. "Of course, you need a permanent," he said. Zio left us there and went to attend to other business, while I sat and watched the whole procedure. The hairstylist rolled her hair on rods and then attached each rod to a clamp connected by a wire to a machine. I sat on the edge of my chair until the hairdresser finally disconnected mother from the dangerous-looking contraption. What if she needed to get up and run out of the store? I thought. When the permanent was finished, the hairdresser flattened the tightly-curved hair at the crown with some pomade, and then arranged it like a halo around her face and nape. Zio came back with a green cashmere hat and a small blue purse, both for me. Then we joined Tommaso at a bar, he offered us a *latte di mondorla*, a sweet white drink made from almond milk. As we walked back up from the piazza in the late

afternoon, I felt like a new person, wearing my new hat and carrying my empty purse around my wrist. Mother looked very much like a city woman in her new dress and permed hair.

Mother would never be able to make her hair look that good again. After a few days, it lost its halo shape. And when she tried washing it, it curled out of control. “*Mo paru na crapa,*” she said, and said she wished she could pull it all off since it made her look like a goat.

As she packed the trunk and suitcases, Mother again wanted to pull her hair out—in exasperation this time. Besides our few clothes and mother’s trousseau of bedspreads, embroidered sheets and pillowcases, we had to find good hiding places for the heavy *capicolti*, *sopressata* and sausages. Everyone knew by now that cured meats were not allowed in Canada, yet everyone took chances sending it, since they felt that this was what their families were missing and valued most. The going joke was that if the meat was confiscated, we should just eat it all in front of the customs agents. After all, there was no law against eating smoked salami before entering the country. The first bit of news that the villagers were anxious to hear was if their salamis had made it through customs.

Mother could not refuse anyone. “If you refuse one then you have to refuse them all.” So we spent the last week stuffing the trunk and suitcases, and weighing them in the grocery’s store scale since we were only allowed a specified maximum weight. The trunk was locked, tied and sent in advance, but the suitcases remained opened until the day of our departure.

On the last Sunday, Mother took out the only piece of jewelry she owned, a gold rope chain given to her by my grandparents on her wedding day. She tied it around the neck of the statue of the Madonna del Rosario as an offering and a plea to help us through the long sea voyage.

On the day we left, I went to school for the last time to say goodbye to my classmates and to Signor Gavano, but I only stayed for the first hour. The day was rainy and cold. While in class, I refrained from crying though my eyes welled up with tears when a few of my classmates gave me small gifts: embroidered handkerchiefs, doilies, photographs of them. The day before, Don Tommasino had also given me a prayer book. To my brother, who had been an altar boy for so long, he gave a copy of *I Promessi Sposi* to read on the boat.

On my way home, I passed the bar, where everyone was waiting for the television to be delivered. I didn't stop because I had promised Mother I would go straight home and help repack the suitcases. As I walked up the hill, Rosina's mother, Assunta, came out of her house and waved at me to come inside. Her house smelled of cabbage and pork rind. She wiped her wet hands on her apron and planted a kiss on my face. "*Oh Catarinella, mia,*" she said. "So I won't be seeing you walk up anymore."

Then from her apron pocket, she pulled out a small *sopressata* wrapped in an oily paper, and insisted that I take it. "I'll come and see your mother later, but give her this to pack. If they take it, they take it. If it passes, then you'll eat it with my love when you get there." Then she kissed me again, and said, "*Va, va, bella mia, e bona hurtuna.*"

I walked up, holding back the tears, holding on to the little gifts that my friends at school had given me.

By late afternoon, my grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins had started congregating at our house. At the end, Zio, swearing, had to get Luigi to stand on each suitcase so he could close them and tie them with a cord. By the evening, the house was packed with people and the conversation centered on the TV show that they would soon be watching. When the time to leave got close, Grandmother Stella started crying, and Zio got upset at her. “They’re going to America, not a funeral.”

But then, when Tommaso came with a couple of other men to get the suitcases, Zio started wailing like the others, embracing Luigi like he didn't want to let him go—even though Zio would be traveling with us to Naples. From all that crying, I got the feeling that we were leaving Mulirena forever.

The train station at Santa Eufemia looked strangely unfamiliar in the dark of night. When Tommaso’s car stopped, I wondered why everyone was proceeding to get out at what looked to be another one of the farmhouses we had seen along the way. I had taken a train there twice before, to go to Rome for our visas. But both times it had been daylight and summer, and the white-stucco train station, with its rows of pink oleanders along one side and a palm tree on the other, had buzzed with the usual noises of trains and people jostling to get on and off.

The ten o'clock train for Naples was not there yet, but Tommaso and Zio rushed to move the suitcases onto the platform as though we were late. Tommaso said he’d leave right away, seeing that Zio was with us. He shook hands with Mother, hugged my brother and pinched me on the cheeks. Lucia stood back from us, not making any move to shake hands with him. As he walked away, he bent his head at her direction and said, “*Buon*

viaggio a tutti.” Everyone became silent again. Lucia had not said a word in the car either, and had looked blankly out the window the whole time.

It had rained here too and the air was chilly. Mother hugged both Luigi and me to her body to keep us warm. After a few minutes, a family from Amato arrived by a car, and come to join us on the platform—a man, and a young woman who was holding a sleeping child in her arms. I didn’t know them, but Zio struck up a conversation with the man. He was the woman’s brother and, like Zio, he was accompanying her to Naples. She would be taking the same boat as us, but then would remain on the train for another two days to go to Winnipeg to meet her husband, who had left just before her two-year-old son was born.

“*Allora,*” Zio said to the man. “You’ll soon be going to Winnipeg too?”

“*Se vvo Dio,*” he answered.

The woman smiled and nodded at Zio, as she shifted her weight, rocking the heavy child, whose head rested on her shoulder. Though she didn’t talk to anyone, the woman had a constant smile on her face. She was so unlike Lucia, who neither cried nor smiled.

The sleeping child kept everyone quiet, but the silence was soon shattered by ringing of bells announcing the arrival of the Espresso train. It arrived so quickly and noisily, expelling steam on the rails, that Mother instinctively stepped back, hugging us closer to her. Zio, who took trains all the time, was the first to run toward it, dragging the two heaviest suitcases. We all followed him. He took the first empty cabin and arranged the suitcases on the shelves over the seats. The train, which was coming from Sicily, was

not very full at that time of night, but judging from the amount of baggage in the corridors, most of the other passengers were headed for the same boat trip.

Zio found another empty cabin for himself and Luigi, so that we three ladies would have plenty of space to stretch out. We used our coats as pillows. Lucia lay on one seat, my mother and me on the other, with our heads on opposite sides. I hardly slept, though. The whistling and the screeching of wheels as the train approached each station kept me awake. We had passed these cities twice before and their names had become familiar—Benevento, Amantea, Salerno...

On our other trips during the summer, we had passed rows and rows of tenement buildings, built so close to the tracks that we could almost touch their balconies. I had noticed the peeling, stained stucco, the piled-up garbage. But the neighborhoods had teemed with life. We saw women hanging clothes on these same balconies, the sheets and underwear flapping in the wind, while in the streets, small boys in sandals played soccer and waved at the train. Now, I thought of the people sleeping in the dimly-lit apartments. They'd wake up in the morning to their normal routines: the children would go to school; the men, to work; the women would go about their chores. They would know nothing of us, who had passed this way for the last time, sliding past them so quickly in the night—as if we were in hiding—on our way to Halifax.

Sunday, October 12, 1980

Sunday Lunch

At lunch on Sunday, Cathy and her mother had as big a screaming match about Carmy moving in with her, as they'd had when she told the family she wanted to move in with Sean. This latest disagreement was somewhat connected to the first because, with Carmy staying with them, Cathy's and Sean's living arrangement would become public knowledge. As long as it had been kept hush-hush from the *paesani*, their living in sin hadn't seemed real. Even though most of her closest relatives suspected that Sean spent time at the apartment, now the shameful situation would be flaunted to everyone. How would Teresa explain that she had allowed it?

"You know I've never cared about what the *paesani* think," Cathy argued.

"Because you're *caparbia*. You only care about yourself," Teresa replied.

Cathy left the kitchen and ran to the back balcony to cool down, afraid she'd break down crying, and she never made any sense arguing when she was upset. She understood Teresa's concerns, but to be accused of being selfish always incensed her.

"And you're in good company with that girl," Teresa screamed from the kitchen. "She's probably just as *caparbia*—like her mother. Aren't you afraid of the responsibility?"

“She’s only sixteen years old,” Cathy answered back, glad that the attention had switched to Carmy. “I’ll be able to handle her. It’s what I do all day long.” She returned to the kitchen.

“What does Sean say about all this?” Teresa asked. She also had calmed down.

“Well he’s not too excited about having someone at the apartment, but it’s only for a short period,” Cathy said.

“See? What did I tell you? Already she’s creating problems between you two,” Teresa said, a worried look on her face.

“Why do you see problems? This is not a problem, just a disagreement between us.”

“To me it’s a *pazzia*,” Teresa replied. “There must be other schools closer to her house. Let her uncle worry about it. You know, you also have to deal with him, and he’s not the easiest person in the world.”

Luigi walked in on their conversation, coming up from practicing his trumpet in the basement. “You’ve heard what they’re saying in the papers about Alfonso and Jack Russo,” he said. “There must be something there that we don’t know about.”

“The papers always exaggerate everything,” Cathy replied.

“There must be something,” Teresa repeated. “I always said that he became rich a little too fast and too easily—for someone who knew nothing about the construction business. Your father was a *mastro*...”

“Hey, you don’t need to be a *mastro* to do well here,” Luigi interrupted. “Look at all the people who have made it big. Most of them are illiterate. At least Alfonso is a good businessman, and that, we can’t take that away from him.”

“He only became a businessman here,” Teresa said. “In the *paese*, he couldn’t do anything right.”

“He probably got a little push along the way,” Luigi said.

“In any case,” Cathy said. “He told me not to worry about any expenses.”

“For that, he won’t remain behind,” Teresa said, meaning that, more than anything else, her *paesani* hated feeling indebted to others, and would always find a way of repaying a favor. By the same token, they remembered when one was not paid back. Talking about Alfonso had taken the pressure off Carmy, and when Rita came into the room with the baby, they all sat down to lunch and ate quietly.

The Marriage Proposal

In the early evening, Sean entered the apartment and dropped his heavy knapsack on the kitchen floor. He looked around, smelling the air. “It smells of lemons,” he said.

“It must be the furniture polish I used,” Cathy answered. He seemed in a good mood.

“This place hasn’t been this clean in months. You must be expecting *paesani*,” he said.

Cathy resented the remark but didn't want to start an argument. She answered calmly, “Yes, Carmy is coming in this evening. Her uncle is driving her here, and will pick her up on Friday.”

“Who’s paying for her upkeep?” he asked.

“Don’t worry. Her uncle will take care of everything.”

Sean went into the bedroom and noticed the pile of books on his night table. “Why did you put all of these books here?” he asked.

“I took the books you’re more likely to use from the bookshelves, in case you need them when Carmy is sleeping in the den.”

“That’s presumptuous of you. How would you know which books I’ll need? What if I need one that’s not in this stack?” he said, but didn’t sound as upset as Cathy had feared.

“You’ll just knock on the door and go in and get it, if it’s important, or wait if it’s not,” Cathy answered, in a composed tone of voice.

“Who needs this shit now, when I have all of this work to do?” he said, raising his voice.

“No one will keep you from your work; don’t worry,” she replied calmly.

Sean then told Cathy that Pierre had confirmed he would definitely be coming into town the following week.

“The room better be vacated by then,” Sean said.

Cathy couldn’t keep her voice down. “And I’m supposed to kick my friend out because Mr. Big Shit is coming to town?”

“Mr. Big Shit is coming to town to help me organize a fundraising event- a costumed Ball for Halloween. It will be in honor of Di Principe’s new appointment and at the same time raise funds for the next byelection. The fundraising event is a project he gave me, and I’m getting well paid for it. So, do I still sense a note of resentment?” Sean said with a half-smile.

“You know how much JP bugs me,” Cathy said. “He looks down on me as if I were some ignorant peasant—with his nose up in the air, just because he has a big job in government. I wonder how he’s used his nose all these years to get where he is.”

Sean seemed amused by the last remark. “What do you mean by that?”

“Well, this is something I’ve wanted to ask you for a long time. How come JP has never married? Is Pierre normal...I mean, is he gay?”

It was Sean’s turn to raise his voice. “That’s a stupid question, and you have no right to ask it. What’s normal anyway? Are you considered normal? Am I?”

Since immersing himself in philosophy, Sean would turn every question into another question, without ever giving a straight answer. This tendency annoyed Cathy the most.

“You asked me if my friend was connected, so I have the right to ask whatever I want about JP,” she said.

“Is that the same thing to you? Can you not make a distinction between the public and the private?” Sean said. The she told him about Alfonso knowing Jean Pierre and what he said about him running in the byelection.

“JP knows a lot of people. Sure... there’s two camps in the party. The Italian side would rather see another Italian run, but they’ll get used to the idea,” Sean said. Then, holding his chin, he said pensively, “I did some thinking while I was on the bus. I think it may be time for us to make some important decisions.”

“Such as?” Cathy asked, puzzled at his change of tone.

“I think I may have a chance to get a long-term position out of this political job. I think we can start thinking about getting married,” he said, looking at the floor and

nodding his head, as though agreeing with his own decision. “Yeah, I think it’s about time,” He went on looking at the floor and stroking his chin.

Taken by surprise, she opened her eyes wide and moved her head back, as if she were doing a second take. “Gee, is this a proposal?”

“It sure is,” Sean said. He kept shaking his head and pinching his chin and shuffling his feet, as he usually did when he was nervous. Then he sat down. “I’ve been thinking of how little stability I’ve had in my life. It’s time I plant some solid roots.”

“It’s quite a sudden change... in your thinking, I mean,” Cathy said. She sat down facing him, and tried to read his pensive expression. She had not looked at him straight in the face for a while, but his eyes were still focused on the floor.

“We grow. We change, and I feel I’m entering a new phase in life.” He looked up. “Aren’t you happy?”

“Yes, of course,” she said. “It will simplify things...and it will make my mother very, very happy.” She smiled.

He got up. “Then it’s a deal!”

Cathy got up too and hugged him. “When are you thinking...Can I announce it to everyone?” she asked.

“Of course...I guess just after the holidays. Di Principe will be taking his new position then, and a by-election will be held in March, so it would be good to do it just after Christmas—before I get too busy working on JP’s campaign.”

Cathy put her hands to her face. “Wow, so soon! I can’t believe all this is happening now. So much change.”

“On that note, I’m going to bed,” Sean said. “I’m beat.”

Cathy moved towards him and then kissed him. She felt elated. "I hadn't expected this," she said.

"Your mother will be especially happy when she hears that we're getting married in a Catholic Church," Sean said, as he moved towards the bedroom.

"Are you serious?" Cathy answered, following him.

Sean began undressing. "We might as well go all the way."

"Oh. I have to do a few things for tomorrow's Thanksgiving dinner...My family is coming, and I've also invited Carmy...but. Alfonso has to call to confirm what time he's coming in to drive Carmy," Cathy said. She had been preparing Thanksgiving dinner for the family for the last couple of years. She still needed to take the turkey out from the freezer to defrost overnight. She felt as if she should also be undressing and sliding into bed next to Sean. "I'll come to bed in a few minutes," she added.

"It's OK," Sean said. "I'm pretty tired, anyway."

"OK. Good night then. We'll talk more later." Cathy kissed him again.

After filling the sink with cold water and placing the frozen turkey into it, she sat in the living room, and turned on the TV, but she was too excited to pay attention to what was playing. Alfonso had said he'd call, so she would wait a while before calling herself. A few questions had crept into her mind, that she wished she could discuss with Sean. Would he convert to Catholicism? What kind of reception would he agree to? *Things are finally falling into place*, she thought. She could finally make good on her promise that Sean and she were planning to get married.

When half an hour later, the phone had not rung yet, Cathy called Alfonso's house to check on Carmy's arrival. He answered and said that he'd only be driving into town

later in the evening, so she should not expect Carmy for dinner. Then she prepared for the night and slid in on her side of the bed, next to Sean, who had already fallen asleep. She needed to relax, and wanted to read, but didn't want to turn on the light and wake him up. After a few minutes, she got up quietly and took *I Promessi Sposi* to the living room. She lay on the sofa and leafed through the book, becoming reacquainted with the characters who had kept her company twenty-five years earlier. They soothed her nerves, and she fell asleep.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: November 30, 2004, 10:00 AM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Fw: re: submission

Dear AA,

It's only the first half? This is really a saga.

About "complex" characters...allow me an observation. I'm surprised that you've let your friend use Manzoni's book to keep her company. I haven't read the book myself—too darn long—but you must be aware of Gramsci's criticism of it? He didn't think much of Manzoni patronizing the proletariat by taking on a distant attitude toward the humble main characters, denying them of any interior life or power of reflection—unlike the "complex" characters of the cultured classes.

To return to the question of finding a market for our writers, the question that begs to be asked is this: Post-war Italy gave thousands of its most humble citizens the boot—excuse the easy pun. Fifty years later, politicians want to give us the right to vote. But are they ready to open up their hearts to the stories that have spawned from that gargantuan kick in the butt?

F

THE VOYAGE

Saturnia

By Cathy Anastasia

The journey that began on the first of February, 1957, at the train station in Santa Eufemia, was due to end at Windsor Station in Montreal, twelve days later. In between the two train rides, the ocean crossing was to take ten days. I planned to keep a diary of the sea voyage, so that I could write about it to my friends back home. No one else I knew had done this before. It was as if people left for another world, and once they were there, the passage itself was forgotten, like a bad dream. We heard about the seasickness and about passing customs, but nothing about what it was really like to live on a ship for ten days. The idea of writing came to me when, a week before leaving, I received a perfect ten on my last composition assignment. There was also a note from Signor Gavano telling me to keep up the good work in the new country. I decided to pack the notebook along with a book of prayers and a copy of the novel *I Promessi Sposi*, which Don Tommasino had given to my brother and me to read it on the boat, if bedridden with motion sickness.

To savor my perfect mark, I doodled with the 0 of the ten, sketching rays around it like a sun. Then I drew a larger sun next to it and numbered it like a clock from one to twelve, for each day of the journey. I thought I could circle a number at the end of each day, as I wrote about it. That the total duration of the trip fit inside a perfect circle like a clock was the happy coincidence that made the voyage and writing about it feel like a game and filled me with excitement. For a few days afterwards, I kept on playing with the drawing of twelve small suns inside a larger one, and then dividing each day into

hours and another twelve smaller O's. If a twelve-day trip required so many loops to recount, I wondered how many circles inside other circles it would take to write about all the hours of one's life. Surely one would need a sphere as large as a planet to contain all the stories on earth.

Days 1 and 2

Day 1 blurred into Day 2 because we had traveled from Calabria to Naples by night and arrived in the early morning hours on the day of the boat departure. It was two o'clock in the morning when Zio came into our train compartment, pulled the suitcases down from the racks above our heads. He yelled, "We're in Naples!" as if he were warning us as much as waking us up. The handling of the baggage during our time in Naples had become a real preoccupation for him.

"Naples is full of *scugnizzi*" he'd said. "They're worse than gypsies. Don't trust anyone to touch the suitcases. Stay next to the baggage at all times."

As a matter of fact, even at two o'clock in the morning, half a dozen porters circled around us as soon as we'd stepped out of the station. Zio shooed them off like flies, but then he negotiated with an older man, who took the heaviest suitcases and walked us to the nearest hotel. I felt like I was sleepwalking, but had to keep pace with the old man and Zio, both of whom walked briskly past the other passengers, who were also haggling with the porters.

The hotel, which was only a few meters from the train station, looked dark and dirty. Three women with bright red lipstick were huddled together at the entrance,

seemingly trying to keep warm. They seemed to be arguing, their hands and cigarette smoke moving nervously up and down to the rhythm of their loud voices.

“We’re in good company,” said Zio.

Mother and Lucia made faces at one other. “At this time of night? In this cold?” Mother said in disbelief.

“We all have to make a living,” the porter said, as Zio paid him. Then the man went toward the women and joined in their discussion, as if he knew them well.

“We’re only here for a few hours,” Zio said apologetically.

I slept soundly, sharing a room and a bed with Mother and Lucia, while Zio and Luigi slept in the room next to us. At the first hint of daylight, we dragged ourselves out of bed and took turns using the smelly bathroom in the corridor. From a rusty nail on the wall hung strips of cut-up newspaper that were to be used as toilet paper. We pulled on a chain to flush the toilet, but it didn’t do anything. Mother splashed some cold water, which trickled from the faucet of a stained sink, over my face, but stopped short of using a towel to wipe it dry.

“Don’t touch it,” she said. “Who knows who else has used it.” And we walked out of the hotel, hungry and shivering with cold. We lugged our own suitcases back to the train station. From there, we took a bus for the port.

Even though I was groggy, I looked out from the bus, wanting to see Naples. But the city too was still half-asleep, as were the street sweepers who moved lethargically, pushing garbage from one side of a curb to another. The shops were all closed, but the street vendors were setting up their stalls. Some were ready for business, sitting next to small lit-up furnaces, bundled in heavy coats and shawls, offering cigarettes, magazines,

small toys. They called out loudly to passers-by in the Neapolitan dialect. They sounded like they were singing. The bus sped directly to the port, and I was surprised when it stopped right next to our ship.

I had seen pictures of the *Saturnia*, and of its identical twin sister ship, the *Vulcania*, on a poster on Zio's walls in Mulirena. He processed all the paperwork for people who emigrated, and handled their traveling reservations with Italian Line, the shipping company that provided the passage for the trips. The two ships took turns coming and going between Naples and Halifax. Third-class, in winter, was the cheapest way to travel. The poster showed the whole Italian Line fleet of ships, including the brand new *Andrea Doria* and its sister ship, the *Cristoforo Colombo*, two luxurious liners that did the Naples-to-New-York route. When, during the summer before our departure, the *Andrea Doria* sank just before reaching its destination, Zio went in mourning for a few days, as if a family member had died.

On the poster, the *Saturnia*, photographed from a distance and surrounded by an expanse of ocean, had looked like a boat we made by folding paper. It was long and slim, its hull painted black, and the railings and outside upper decks, white. But as we approached it, so close to the pier, we could hardly see the water behind it. We faced an enormous black wall with tiny portholes that looked like hundreds of small, mysterious eyes. I had to close my own eyes in fear of the immense shape before me. Mother made the sign of the cross.

“There's as many people in that boat as there are people in all of Mulirena,” Zio said.

The departure was scheduled for ten o'clock. Zio arranged for the luggage to be brought aboard and then said we'd go to get something to eat nearby. He knew his way around; he had accompanied many other families before us. We passed by a cart selling oranges, and I nudged my mother to get me one. Zio went up to the cart, and with hands in his pockets, asked the price.

"*Cento lire*," answered the woman.

Mother hit her brother's arm from his pocket. "Are you crazy?" she said. "Paying one hundred lire for an orange? What is it made of, gold?"

"*Ebbé*," replied Zio. "We can all share it."

"And pay one hundred lire for a slice of orange that won't even reach your throat? Let's go," she said, and she yanked me away.

At a bar in a narrow street off the pier, we all had *caffè e latte*, a steaming cup of coffee with foamy milk, and a *sfogliatella*. These are a specialty here in Napoli," Zio said.

I had never eaten one. When I bit into the flaky, crusty pastry filled with sweet custard and candied fruit, I forgot all about the orange.

For his military service, Zio had spent time in the navy. So he took us on a tour of the pier, pointing out to Luigi the different types of sea vessels with foreign names and flags. We followed them, I holding Mother's hand, and Lucia, walking behind all of us, uninterested and mute. Then before we headed back, Zio stopped at a stall, and before Mother had a chance to protest, bought Luigi a harmonica.

A procession of people was already boarding the *Saturnia*, dragging bulging cardboard suitcases, and parcels held together with string. There were only a few couples

traveling together. Mostly, it was either men alone, or women with children. Zio had special permission to come aboard, and help us settle into our cabins. As I set foot onto the gangplank, I was taken aback by the sound of hard metal underneath my feet. We walked cautiously down narrow steel stairs, holding on to cold railings. The ship resonated with the sound of hundreds of footsteps, of hand-luggage thumping against metal stairs, of children crying, mothers shouting, and of cabin doors opening and shutting in the hidden corridors below us. Luigi walked quickly and excitedly in front of us, rattling his metal harmonica against the railings, which unnerved both Mother and me.

“There’s not enough noise, that you have to make your own?” she said. “Stop it and wait for us. I’m getting a headache already.” The more we went down, the narrower the corridors and stairs became. When we reached the lowest level, we were held up by the huddle of people stopping to read the small numbers next to each cabin, and by the luggage, parcels and infants blocking the way. We finally found our cabin with our suitcases already inside it.

The cabin had three bunk beds, and was larger than I had imagined it. Another passenger, a thin, older woman with a brown, furrowed face and gray hair tied in a bun, was sitting with two infants on the lower berth closest to the door. She introduced herself as Giuseppina, from Frosinone. The children were her two granddaughters—the first was three years old, and the other, four and a half, but they both looked much younger than their ages. The woman’s daughter had left the infant girls behind so she could work unencumbered and make enough money to send for them. Now that there was another child on the way, Giuseppina would go live with her in a place called Windsor and keep babysitting the children. Luigi was allowed to stay in the same cabin as us. Zio went to

check that the woman from Amato, who was traveling to Winnipeg with her child, was also settled into her cabin, not far from ours.

A steward dressed in a white jacket showed up. He was a tall man of about thirty, broad shouldered and husky, with dark, wavy, brillantined hair that was combed away from his face. He spoke Italian with a Roman accent. "I'm Armando," he said. "But call me Armanno." He sounded very friendly as he looked over everyone over from head to toe. In his white uniform and white gloves, he looked like he might be the ship's captain paying us a visit. He checked off our names on a list, then looked at the tags on each suitcase on the floor. He placed the bags next to the beds.

Pointing to Mother and Giuseppina, he said, "The two *signore* should sleep on the lower beds. The two children can sleep with Grandma or on the top berth. If they fall, they won't make as much noise. The boy can climb up too." Then he bowed to Lucia. "The *bella signorina* will decide whether to sleep on the top or on the bottom, as she pleases." I wasn't given any choice, or any attention.

Giuseppina, who in a few short minutes had not only told us all about herself and her daughter, but had inquired about all of us, answered sternly. "There's three *signore* in the room. *La bella signorina* has a husband waiting for her in Halifax."

Armando answered quickly, his eyes on Lucia. "*Ammazza!* They married you off before your first communion?"

Zio had just come back and shot back at him, "But, what kind of questions are these? Show some respect please, or I'll report you."

"Report me for what? For asking a question? You people are so hotheaded. It was only a question. Here I see things of all colors....I'm just curious, that's all." He left, and

then quickly returned. "Lunch is served from twelve to two," he said, and told us how to get to the dining room and lounge.

"He was just trying to be friendly. He didn't mean anything by it," Lucia said, sounding annoyed at Zio. He quickly retorted, "*Mah*, what business is it of his when you got married?"

"Don't trust these *chiaccheroni* from Rome," Giuseppina added.

Zio inspected our suitcases and our beds, and satisfied that everything was in order, said he'd have to leave. We all followed him up to the ship's deck, while Giuseppina and the girls stayed in the cabin. Zio hugged all of us and left quickly before we had a chance to cry. "I'll stay on the pier until the ship departs," he said, walking away. Then before descending the gangplank he turned and added. "Luigi, I beg you, eh. Take care of your mother and sister."

From the deck, we watched the group of people assembled below, looking up at us, waving their handkerchiefs and blowing kisses. They formed an island of raised arms, surrounded by a swarm of people in motion pushing baggage-loaded carts in all directions, running toward other ships or away from them, like ants going around an anthill. White pigeons hovered over us all. The whistles and sounds of other ships deafened our ears. We spotted Zio, first fumbling in his pocket, then waving his handkerchief with the others.

The *Saturnia* finally blew its foghorn and started moving away slowly, as if held back by heavy weights. The waving became frenzied for awhile, and then calmed down, until only a few die-hards kept it up. We kept on looking until we could no longer

distinguish the white handkerchiefs from the flapping wings of the restless seagulls scavenging for food around the pier.

After accompanying Mother and Lucia back to the cabin, Luigi and I followed Armando's directions and explored the ship. We looked into the dining room and admired the chandeliers and the rows of tables, all dressed in starched white tablecloths, and topped by hundreds of shiny glasses and dinnerware.

"If this is third class," Luigi said, "Imagine the luxury in first class!" We sank into the sofas in the large lounge, the first and only hint of softness in that huge palace of steel. The beds had felt hard and the cabin had been dimly lit. I decided that this is where I'd come later to read and write my notes.

Back on-deck, we watched the waves get higher as the boat moved deeper into the ocean. "Wait till we get to the middle of the ocean—the waves will go over these decks," Luigi said.

All at once, he seemed to know all about ships and fish. When we spotted something jumping over the waves, he was sure it was a swordfish. "This is nothing," he added. "Wait till we see sharks and whales!"

We lost track of time, and when we went down to our cabins, the others were waiting for us to go up for lunch. Mother was upset at us having stayed away so long by ourselves. It was nearly two o'clock when we sat at a table and were served pasta and thin cutlets by a waiter, Nicola, from Naples, who kept offering us seconds.

"What service!" Giuseppina said.

After lunch, I wanted to stay in the lounge with the prayer book that I had brought with me, but mother said we should all go back for a rest, and we returned to the cabin.

Lucia had chosen the third lower berth, but I didn't mind climbing the small ladder to the top. It was more private and I could see all the others, except Lucia who was below me. Our bunk beds were set next to the wall, and I arranged my purse, my book and notebook against it. My mother and brother took the beds in the center of the room, while Giuseppina and the girls were at the other end against the wall closest to the door. I handed my brother his book, *I Promessi Sposi*, which I would have studied in high school had I stayed in Italy, and then started reading the prayer book. I knew most of the prayers by heart and they didn't mean anything anymore—just words we had repeated so many times before. I asked Luigi if I could look at his book since he hadn't opened it yet.

He was practicing a tune on his harmonica, cupping it in his hand to muffle the sound. "Keep it," he said. "I'm not spending my time here reading a book. Anyway, I know the story already."

Everyone knew the story of Lucia and Renzo, two people betrothed to each other but who were prevented from getting married by a powerful man. I started reading the first page. The print was so small, I could hardly see it in the dim light of the cabin. "*Quel ramo del lago di Como che volge a mezzogiorno tra due catene non interrotte di monti, tutto a seni e a golfi, a seconda dello sporgere e del rientrare....*" The first sentence seemed never to end, and I fell asleep before finishing it.

Day 3

We didn't go to dinner that first evening on the ship. I fell asleep after the heavy, late lunch and slept right through the night. When Armando woke us all up the following morning, I was confused as to what day it was. He was cheerful and not at all upset about

his exchange with Zio the day before. He had brought three large oranges, which he gave to each of the three older ladies.

“*Buon giorno, signore e signorine,*” he said. “You slept very well. But don’t think of spending all of your time in bed. My advice is for you to stay up as much as you can, even when the weather gets rough.”

“How much rougher than this will it get?” asked Mother timidly.

“Eh, what do you expect? It’s February. Wait until we cross the Big Rock, then the dancing will begin.”

“*Oh Dio mio,*” said Giuseppina and made the sign of the cross as if to pray for salvation.

“*Mah che Dio mio!* Blame your dear husbands for sending you out in the ocean in the middle of winter... Beh, if I had beautiful wives like you, I’d want you with me as soon as possible too. But just think, in less than twelve days, you’ll be with your husbands. When you feel like throwing yourselves off the deck of this ship, just think of the joy of being in their arms.” He smiled.

“What a *chiaccherone!*” Giuseppina answered. “But remember, we’re serious women here... with children.”

“And I’m the most serious waiter on the Italian Line. At eleven, after breakfast, you should all come on deck for a safety drill. And *ragazzi*, after lunch, be sure to stay on deck. We will be approaching Gibraltar, and you’ll see the Big Rock.”

“If we look at the water, we’ll get sicker. I’m staying in bed,” Giuseppina said.

“After what I just told you? That, Signora Giuseppina, is the worst thing you could do. There’s only one way to survive the ocean: dance with the waves. When you

feel a wave coming, instead of saying, ‘*Oh Dio mio,*’ and making the sign of the cross, say, ‘What a beautiful wave, let me jump on it... the higher the better.’ I tell this to all my beautiful *signore*. Some believe me, but some don’t.”

“Eh, go ahead and joke at our expense. It’s easy for you to joke. You’re used to this,” Giuseppina replied.

“Do you think it’s easy to get used to living on something that moves back and forth, up and down, all the time? Do you think my stomach is made of steel? Eh? You’re doing it once and you’re complaining! Try doing it all year long in this *casino*, and then you’ll see how easy it is! Believe me, *Signora* Giuseppina, listen to my advice, learn to dance with the waves, I say. It’s the only way to survive! Now I have to go. Don’t think that you’re the only *belle signore* that I have to take care of. *Ciao ragazzi*, remember to come up and see the Rock.”

“But why did we have to get someone like him?” said Giuseppina after he left.

“I think he just likes to joke around with everyone. It’s his character,” said Mother.

“*Si, si*, that’s what you think, but that one is hungry. Who knows how long he hasn’t eaten?”

To me Armanno looked well fed, and there was lots of food on board, so I presumed that Giuseppina meant something else. But I didn’t ask.

Breakfast was coffee with warm milk and some sweet breads, and we all ate well. Then all the passengers met on deck. Luigi and I kept trying to guess what type of fish we saw jumping out of the sea. Lucia chatted with Margherita from Amato, who smiled all the time and carried her infant son on one hip as if he had spawned from her side. After a

while the two young women separated from our group. The ship's crew members came on deck with lifejackets on their arms. Armando went straight to Lucia and Margherita, and helped them put on lifejackets. Giuseppina nodded at my mother as if to say, "See? What did I tell you?" But then he came to us and did the same.

The captain of the ship introduced himself and welcomed us. He told us to pay attention to the safety instructions and left. Everyone laughed and joked about the life jackets.

The attendant pointed to the small boats roped on the side of the ship and told us that they would slide off the sides and into the ocean in case of an emergency. Women and children would be the first to go down.

"What will these little things do for us if the boat sinks?" Mother asked, removing her lifejacket.

"They'll hold us up in the water until help comes," said Luigi. "Unless the sharks get us first, or maybe the whales."

"Gioppetto was saved by a whale," I supplied.

"Sure, sure, believe in Gioppetto!" said Mother. She held little faith in the boats or lifejackets to be of any use in preventing us from drowning.

I had visions of the Andrea Doria being gashed on its side by an icebreaker, then tilting sideways before collapsing completely, like a soldier shot in the heart. Fifty-two people died in that shipwreck. And it had only happened that past July. Zio had given us all the details, and shown us pictures from the newspaper. Half the rescue boats had tipped over before people could get into them. I knew that mother must have been

thinking the same thing, judging from her white, drawn-out face while everyone else laughed at the instructions.

As soon as the drill was over, the two older ladies went back down to the cabin, and asked us to bring them some bread for lunch. They didn't think they'd come up. Mother was afraid that she'd feel the movements of the ocean as she walked up and down, and would get sick. "I don't feel too bad yet, but I don't want to take a chance," she said.

Luigi and I could already see a difference in the height of the waves, and I tried to imagine lifting myself up with their movements. I had never been on a boat before and had never swum in the sea. The only time I had passed by the beach in Catanzaro Lido with my family, Mother had held me so tightly that my wrist hurt.

The two younger kids stayed with us for lunch, but didn't eat anything. I tried playing with them, but they sucked their thumbs and cried for their grandmother. We went back down with Lucia and brought some bread and cheese.

Then, Lucia decided to go on deck with me to see the Rock of Gibraltar. As soon as we left the cabin, Mother called me back in. She said in a soft voice, "Stay close to Lucia"—as though I was supposed to look after the older girl and not the other way around.

The deck was full of people who had come up to take a look. The sky was a little hazy as if wanting to rain. At times it was hard to tell where the waves finished and the clouds began. Luigi was the first to notice the shape that looked like a huge whale in the distance. "*A roccia, a roccia,*" he yelled.

At first the Rock seemed like a shadow that appeared and disappeared in the mist. Then, it became more pronounced. Though from far, it was hard to see any details, its size and shape were nevertheless those of a mountain. Armando showed up behind us, and suggested that we go up to the first-class deck, because the view from there would be clearer. We followed him up happily, as both Luigi and I had wanted to see what first class looked like. Besides being higher, the view, as far as I was concerned, was the same—except that there were fewer people around us.

As we got closer to shore, black-skinned men in small boats rowed toward us. They were Moroccans, Armando said. They sold colorful scarves with pictures of the Rock of Gibraltar and other souvenirs. They pushed up a small basket on a long stick with the purchased item, after people had put their money in. They made a couple of sales, mostly to the men.

Looking toward the Rock, I was overcome with the same feeling of fear as the day before when I had stood next to the ship. I turned my head and watched the people in first class. They were better dressed than the ones below.

After a while, I became accustomed to the shape of the Rock of Gibraltar before me. The small boats returned to shore and the people on deck slowly dispersed. Armando stayed with us and started a conversation with Lucia. Luigi had made friends with a couple of boys who took turns playing his harmonica.

“I’m going to check out the lounge in first class,” he whispered to me before he took off with them.

I sat on a bench with the thick book I had brought with me. All through the train ride, Lucia had hardly said anything, and had seemed immersed in her own thoughts. I

figured that she was very sad traveling alone without her family, and I wondered if she still thought about Totu. She never once mentioned his name—yet they had been sweethearts for as long as I could remember. I was still confused by what had happened between them, but I didn't dare ask her any questions. It was not appropriate for someone my age to be nosy about such matters. Now, I noticed how animated she looked, listening to Armando. She still didn't speak much. She mostly laughed at Armando's jokes or nodded at him. I heard him say, "But tell me, you never answered my question yesterday."

"What question?"

"How long have you been married?"

Lucia mumbled that it had only been a few months.

"Then why didn't your husband wait for you?"

"My husband was not there when I got married" she said. "I married him by proxy."

"So when did he leave Italy?" Armando seemed baffled.

"Oh, years ago... I've never met my husband. I only know him from a picture."

It took Armando a couple of instants to answer, and then he blurted out loud, "*Ho capito!* Then I was right yesterday. I'm never wrong about these things. You're still a *signorina*."

Lucia shrugged and looked into the water.

"*E va bene... capita,*" he answered. "These things happen. I've seen it before—many times. You're not the first one. But you're by far the prettiest. Your husband has won the *totalcicio*. He'll be a happy man when he sees you in person."

Then seeing that she was silent, he changed the subject. “Look at that piece of rock. It looks close, yet we can’t see it clearly. I’ve seen it I don’t know how many times in the last five years, but whether the weather is clear or hazy, it always looks the same to me. I’ve never been able to see its color or to see if anything grows on it. I ask myself, mah, what purpose does it have? Is it a mountain? Do people live on it, or is it just this mass of rock stuck in the water?”

He paused for a few instants and then continued. “A couple of times, on clearer days than today, it looked as though I would be able to see more of it. But just when I thought it was becoming clearer, the boat started backing off and the Rock became blurred again. It’s as if the captain does it on purpose to tease me. Who knows? Maybe one of these days, I’ll get on a boat with the Moroccans and I’ll get to see it up close.”

He seemed to realize he was carrying on a conversation with himself. He said, “Open your mouth.”

Lucia seemed puzzled, but opened her mouth anyway. “I just wanted to see if you have a tongue. You Calabrese are the quietest women I have ever met. *Ebbé*, I better go down to the dining room and get things ready for dinner. Come back here tomorrow morning, between ten and eleven, and maybe we’ll have a *chiaccherata*—now that I know you have a tongue. If you shut yourself up in that room, this boat will seem like a tomb.”

She smiled and nodded. He turned and seemed to have noticed me for the first time. “You, *Calabrisella*, don’t listen to the old ladies. Their heads are filled with *stupidaggini*.” Then he stared at the book I was holding on my chest. “*”Ammazza*, you’re reading *I Promessi Sposi* at your age?”

I hadn't read much yet, but I tried again after he left, while Lucia stood leaning against the railing, looking toward the Rock. I skipped the first few pages, which were full of descriptions of the countryside around Lake Como. I decided to use the reading method that Signor Gavano had taught me in third grade. I read the first sentence of each paragraph. If it sounded interesting, I read the rest; if not I went on to the next one.

The first character to pop up was Don Abbondio, the parish priest of the area, who was taking a stroll in the countryside and reading his breviary. I pictured Don Tommasino walking up toward the cemetery on his late-afternoon walks. In the book, the priest's reflections are interrupted by the sight of two *bravi* who work as henchmen for the most powerful landlord of the area, Don Rodrigo.

The priest, noticing them out of the corner of his eye, tries to avoid them—he trembles just to see them—but they stop him and ask, “You’re intending to marry Renzo Tramaglino and Lucia Mondella tomorrow?”

“We’re just servants of the public,” Don Abbondio answers in a quavering voice.

“Look here,” says the bravo in a low but solemn voice. “There’s not going to be any marriage, not tomorrow or any other day.”

Lucia shook me by the shoulder and said we should go down. “Don’t say anything about the waiter talking to us,” she said. I had already figured that out by myself.

At supper, the dining room was full. Margherita asked to join our table as she didn’t feel comfortable eating with people she didn’t know. We had pasta and meat again but nobody touched the meat. The elderly Neapolitan waiter tried to make everyone

laugh. He told us to eat as much as possible in the first three days, to build up a reserve for the rest of the trip, when we wouldn't want to look at food. At the end of the meal, Armando came by our table with a napkin full of bread rolls, cheese, and fruit. He told us to take them with us to our room in case we felt hungry later on.

Mother said, "He's a nice man; he's very thoughtful." To which Giuseppina replied, "A little too thoughtful, if you ask me."

"He's very handsome, though," Margherita said. "Don't you think he looks like Amadeo Nazzari?"

"What are you laughing at?" my mother asked me. I hadn't realized I was laughing to myself—not because of what Margherita had said, but because I was remembering poor Don Abbondio in the book, shaking in fear and calling out the name of his housekeeper, "Perpetua! Perpetua!" after he had an argument with Renzo about postponing the wedding, and inadvertently dropping the name of Don Rodrigo. I liked the author's comment about Don Abbondio so much that I copied it in my notebook: "*People of far greater importance than Don Abbondio have more than once found themselves in situations so unpleasant, and been so uncertain of what to do next that they found the best expedient was to take to their beds with a fever. Don Abbondio did not have to search around for this expedient, as it came up of its own accord.*"

Day 4

The two older women would only come up for lunch, and then went straight back to bed. They were already feeling seasick, but they forced themselves to walk up once

during day for some fresh air. The two little girls never left their grandmother's side, and always sucked their thumbs. On our third day on the boat, Margherita had sought out Lucia, but Lucia had brushed her off quickly, as she wanted to go to the first-class deck, but didn't feel right, she said, bringing others along. Luigi spent time playing ping-pong or cards with his friends in first class, carrying his harmonica everywhere he went. I was stuck to Lucia, who met Armando regularly at ten. I wished that they would meet to talk in the lounge so that I could sit comfortably on a sofa and read my book, but they spoke standing up, leaning against the railings as if meeting there by accident. I had become so engrossed in the story of Lucia and Renzo that all I wanted was a place to sit, read and copy in my notebook the parts I liked best: *"Her long black hair was divided over her forehead in a fine white parting, and wound round behind her head in multiple plaited coils, pierced by long silver hairpins which splayed out almost like halo-rays, as are still worn by the peasant women of Lombardy. Around her neck she had a necklace of garnets alternating with filigree gold beads; she wore a fine bodice of flowered brocade, with the cuffs open and laced with gaily-colored ribbons, a short silk skirt with tiny tight pleats, scarlet stockings, and a pair of slippers also embroidered in silk."*

Getting dressed on her wedding day, the Lucia of the book had looked very much like a young *pacchiana* in her wedding costume, except that in Mulirena, the skirt was ankle-length. Both my mother and grandmother had worn a garnet necklace choker.

This story was happening in Lombardia at the same time that our town was being founded by people from the north. Signor Gavano had given us a history lesson on the Kingdom of Naples ruled by the Spaniards. Piano Don Carlo was named after Prince Carlo of Messina, in Sicily, who had been made a prince by the Kingdom of Naples.

When I read about a “*Most Illustrious and Most Excellent Don Carlo D’Aragon, Prince of Castelvetro, Duke of Terranuova, Marguis of Avola, Grand Admiral and Grand Constable of Sicily, Governor of Milan, and Captain General of his Catholic Majesty in Italy,*” I wondered if it was the same Don Carlo after which Piano Don Carlo had been named, or maybe a relative.

Don Rodrigo and his strongman Il Griso were also Spanish. Maybe the same landlords who had controlled the lives of the poor in Lombardia, like Lucia and her mother Agnese, were the same that sent teams of peasants down the Appenines looking for sand, and then had them cultivate olives and chestnuts for them.

I skipped all the long historical and descriptive passages, as I was only interested in the story, which I imagined happening in Mulirena and in the countryside around it. It could have happened to my own mother. Widowed Agnese especially reminded me of my own maternal grandmother, Maria Stella. They were both always cheerful and didn’t let anything get them down. I had heard that, before the war, in Mulirena, Don Amadeo and his gang used to go into people’s houses at night, forcing cod-liver oil down the throats of men who refused to get a membership card for the Fascist party, and that they had torched city hall so they could blame their enemies for it—something that Don Rodrigo’s *bravi* would be capable of doing. Don Abbondio I imagined as part Don Tommasino, but mostly Ntonarello, the town’s drunk and buffoon.

The priest gives Renzo all the excuses in the book not to marry him as planned. When he runs out of excuses, he reverts to Latin. “*Error, conditio, votum cognatio, crimen.*”

“Are you making fun of me?” interrupts the young man. “What do you expect me to make of your latinorum?”

But Renzo hears rumors that Don Rodrigo has made a bet with a gentleman friend that he will have Lucia for himself, and that, with Il Griso’s cunning, he is planning to kidnap her. The wedding party shows up at Don Abbondio’s house late at night with two witnesses, to trick the priest into performing the ceremony.

Renzo announces, “Your reverence, in the presence of these witnesses, this is my wife.” But before Lucia can recite her pre-rehearsed formula, Don Abbondio rudely flings the table cover over her head and face to stop her, and shouts at the top of his voice. “Perpetua! Treachery! Help! Out of this house! Out of this house!” The sacristan hears the screams and rings the church bells in alarm, arousing the whole village. The couple and Agnese have no choice but to flee, for fear of Don Rodrigo and his men.

Lucia seeks safety in a monastery in Monza, until things quiet down. She has never left her village, and when she gets on a boat on the banks of the Adda River in the middle of the night, she looks around her at the familiar landscape she is forced to leave and weeps quietly. *“Farewell home, where sitting among her secret thoughts, she had learned to pick out from all others the sound of a footstep awaiting with a mysterious awe. Farewell, house that was still not hers; house at which she had so often glanced hastily in passing, not without a blush; house in which the imagination had pictured a perpetual calm, unending life of married bliss. Farewell, church, where in her soul had so often found serenity in singing the praises of the Lord; where a ritual had already been prepared by a promise; where the secret longing of her heart was to be solemnly blessed, and love ordained and called holy: farewell!”*

The two little girls kept us awake most of the night with their sniffing and crying. They were sick with fever, and Giuseppina tried singing them to sleep, then cajoling them. Then, she started talking to God out loud. “*Dio mio*, do me this grace, don’t let anything happen to them until we get there. If you want them, take them after we get there.”

I started feeling sick to my stomach myself, but not enough to throw up. After the girls finally fell asleep, I dozed for a while but woke up again in the middle of the night. I heard the other beds in the dark cabin creaking slightly from the rocking of the waves. I could hear Mother tossing in her bed, and the old woman coughing and making strange sounds with her throat, as if she was trying to spit. I couldn’t believe that only two days earlier, I had been with my friends and family in Mulirena. Now here I was in this hard bed that bobbed up and down like a wooden raft, sleeping in the same room with people I had just met, as if they were part of my family. At about this time in Mulirena, we would have been awakened by old Ntonarello, who walked home late every night from the *osteria*, and who rattled his cane on the cobblestones, and sang over and over the refrain from a song he had made up. “*Ntonarello nu more mai; Ntonarello nu more mai.*”

“Ntonarello will never die,” he sang, and because I had heard his song so often, I believed it to be true. How I wished that I could still be sleeping on the lumpy, corn-husk mattress I had shared with my mother, that was all hollowed out to the shape of our bodies, and that held us snugly like a cocoon.

Day 5

The waves rose higher and higher as the weather grew rainier and windier. Mother and Giuseppina had stopped going to the dining room altogether, as they vomited up whatever went into their mouths. Large tin pails, which Armando emptied whenever he came, were kept next to each bed. We brought them dry bread to eat, but they only wet their lips with water. They only got out of bed to go to the toilet. As my mother walked to the bathroom, steadying herself on the walls, and wearing the thin slip that she slept in, she looked like the skinny ghost of her former self.

We had all tried to find out what worked best to prevent us from throwing up. Luigi and Lucia were the only two in our room who had not yet complained of feeling sick. While nauseous, I had not yet vomited. We figured it was because we spent so much time in first class, but at night, we were stuck in the room with all the vomiting, and with Giuseppina and the crying girls, who always seemed to have a temperature.

The advantage of sleeping on the higher berth was that, while I heard the sounds of retching into buckets, at least I didn't have it raining down on me while I slept. The top was also better lit for reading and writing. At times, reading in bed made me feel more nauseous, so I reserved my journal writing for the evenings, and read mostly in the first-class lounge. When I couldn't fall asleep, I tried to imagine what my new home would be like. But I had so little to go by that I couldn't really picture it. Mostly I tried to think of all the things about my life in Mulirena, that I would miss the most. I figured that maybe if I wrote about them, I could somehow hold on to those memories. When I remembered picnics I had taken in the countryside with my girlfriends, the picture that swept through my mind was of tall red poppies swaying in the breeze against the yellow wheat fields.

That image was all light and softness. I relived the processions on the holiday of Corpus Christi, when I had been chosen to dress up as a crusader. I had walked next to the priest, scattering rose petals at his feet as he shook incense at the onlookers, who kneeled, with their heads bowed in prayer. Would I be doing any of those things anymore? What would I write back to my girlfriends and to my pen pal from Piemonte when I got there? These images kept my mind off the seasickness, and then, I wrote about them in a different section of my notebook.

Along with Lucia, we spent as little time in the cabin as possible. Even if my stomach felt continuously unsettled, I still accompanied Lucia to the dining room and to the first-class lounge, where she and Armando met for a few minutes during his break, every day. And even when she was not chatting with Armando, we sat in the lounge, and most people there spoke to us as if we were first-class passengers.

By now, Lucia and Armando were always whispering to one other, and it reminded me of the afternoons when Totu spent hours leaning against the wall facing Lucia's window and the two of them exchanged glances and gestures. In the evenings, I also wrote about those afternoons in Mulinera. At the time, who would have thought it would end like this? Lucia and Totu had seemed destined to be together forever, like Lucia and Renzo, in the book.

After each session with Armando, Lucia usually told me, "There's nothing bad between us, we're just friends." Once I heard Armando blurt out impatiently, "*E va bene*, I understand you can't, but what harm is there in being friends? I'm not asking you for the impossible." In Mulinera, a woman could only be friends with another woman, and a

man would never have asked that question. I tried to sit away from them as much as I could to read my book.

Our absence on the third-class deck must have raised some suspicions. Margherita came to the cabin a few times to check on how Mother was doing and asked us where we spent our time since she never saw us up on deck. When Lucia answered that we had become accustomed to going to the first-class lounge, and that she should join us there too, Margherita answered, "No, I'm fine where I am. Armando asked me once, to go up too, but I told him no. That one tries to make it with every young married woman he sees. Who knows how many he's had. He thinks that we're all whores, just because we've been away from our husbands."

Meanwhile, the other Lucia is safe in the monastery run by a nun, La Signora, whose real name is Gertrude. Poor Renzo encounters one complication after another as he travels through Milano. He enters a city with flour and bread scattered all over the ground because just before he arrives, the famished population, accusing the authorities of hiding bread and flour from them, loots bakeries and granaries. "*Renzo found himself this time in the very thick of the tumult, and not carried there by the tide, but of set purpose. At the first suggestion of bloodshed he had felt his own curdle within him.*"

I like Renzo best of all. He is bitter about his helplessness in the hands of the powerful Don Rodrigo, but he is all heart, sincere and kind, and means to do no harm. He has a knack, though, of talking and drinking too much for his own good, and he unwittingly becomes mixed up in the turmoil and is wrongly suspected of being one of the ring leaders of the revolt. But he has a great sense of humor and makes fun of others

as well as himself: *“Ooh!” said Renzo, “he’s a poet, that one. So you’ve got poets here too. They’re cropping up everywhere nowadays. I’m a bit in that line myself, and can let out some peculiar... but that’s when things are going well with me.”*

I was pleasantly surprised to read that Renzo considered himself a poet. But the author had this to say about it: *“To understand this nonsense of poor Renzo’s, the reader should know that among the common people in Milan, and even more in the country, the word “poet” does not mean what it means among all respectable folk—a sacred genius, an inhabitant of Pindus, a votary of the Muses: it means a peculiar person who’s a bit crazy, and talks and behaves with more wit and oddity than sense. What an impertinent habit this is of the common people’s of manhandling words and making them say things so very far from their legitimate meaning! For what, I ask you, has writing to do with being a bit crazy?”*

Day 6

All of us in the cabin had been awake most of the night, as the ocean had been very stormy. My mother and Giuseppina moaned the loudest however, since they hadn’t eaten for days. They kept on making vomiting sounds, but had nothing to throw up. In the morning, the three of us, Lucia, Luigi and myself, still managed to get up to go for breakfast. “Where are you going?” Mother asked weakly.

“Upstairs. I can’t take it in this cabin anymore,” answered Lucia.

“How can you even think of eating?” Mother asked.

Armando, as usual, came in to check on us and to empty the buckets. He brought dry bread, and tried to cheer us up. He had wanted to bring Mother to see the doctor since

she was the sickest but she said the thought of walking up all those stairs made her feel sicker.

“This trip has to end soon. So many other people have made it. How many days are left?” she asked.

“You have four-and-a-half days left. You’ve made it past the midway point—the point of no return,” Armando said in his cheerful tone.

“Has anyone ever died of seasickness?” Giuseppina asked.

“You sure know how to cheer everyone up, Signora Giuseppina. No one I know has died of seasickness,” he answered. “But a few people have tried to cure themselves by throwing themselves overboard. But I assure you that the treatment doesn’t work.”

“What are you saying?” she asked, as if taking his joking seriously.

“I’m saying that different people will try different things and some would rather throw themselves to the sharks than live in misery. But to each his own medicine. And who can stop them? Sometimes it’s the only way to survive.” Armando spoke so seriously that he even confused me for awhile.

He continued, “I say to everyone: if you want to throw yourself into the ocean, that’s your business. I only help those who stay on board. ‘*Si salve chi puó*’, as we say in Rome. Just remember, if you fall in, you have to fend for yourselves, hold on to whatever you can that will keep you afloat—a shred of wood, a plate, a fork... anything. Grab anything you can.”

“But who is talking about falling into the ocean? Now you really want to scare us,” Giuseppina said.

“You have already fallen in, *signore e signorine*. Remember, *Si salve chi puó*, and a bit of laughter helps too, eh? But you women are too serious. Always ready to cry but never to laugh,” he said as he left.

“Did you understand anything? The more he talks, the less sense he makes,” Giuseppina said after he left.

Then mother asked again, “How can you even think of eating after the night we’ve had?”

Lucia answered as if piqued by the question, “I have to go up for air even if I don’t eat. We’re all going to die if we stay down here.”

“No one has ever died of seasickness. Even your friend Armando said so,” Giuseppina answered as she walked to the toilet.

Mother then called Lucia to her bed and whispered something to her.

“I’ve done nothing wrong,” Lucia blurted out loudly. Mother tried to shush her, not wanting Giuseppina to hear her.

“Maybe there’s nothing wrong to you but things can happen. After all he’s a man,” Mother said weakly.

Just then, Giuseppina came out of the bathroom and Lucia stormed out of the cabin with tears in her eyes, saying, “Even on this boat I have to meet malicious people.”

“But who is malicious?” asked Giuseppina.

“*Madonna mia*,” answered Mother. “I thought I knew her well, like a daughter. When will this voyage end?”

“We’ll be on land in four days. The worst is over, Teresa. Then your husband will be meeting you in Montreal and you’ll all be together.”

“When I get to Montreal, I’ll make the sign of the cross and no matter what I find there, I’ll never make this voyage back again. I swear it on my dead father.” I had never heard my mother swear on anything before, but it was like her to swear not to do something. And how could she sound so final about never going back to Mulirena?

I was still in the room, getting my things together. Mother said, “Go and stay with Lucia. All I need now is for something to happen on the last days.”

I finally got angry at Mother for sounding so helpless. “Why don’t you get up from bed and stay with her yourself if you don’t believe her? Do you think that the ocean will swallow you up just by looking at it? You’re always afraid of everything. And look at you ... you look like a ghost. You’re worse than Don Abbondio!”

“That’s the way I’m made, I can’t change that,” she said.

“Who’s Don Abbondio?” I heard Giuseppina say as I also stormed out of the room to join Lucia.

When Armando saw us in the dining room, he came by and hugged us both. “*Bravi, ragazzi*,” he said. “I’ll see you later in the lounge.” Then he sat with us since the dining room was almost empty. “Get ready for action. The Saturnia is beginning to dance. Did you feel it during the night?”

“I felt a bit sick during the night. I had to get out of that cabin, and away from that old witch,” said Lucia.

“You’re in the worst part of the boat, but you’re welcome to use my cabin in second class anytime you want. I’ve told you before.”

Then he turned to me. “Do you know what this boat is named after, Caterina?”

I shook my head, but then took a guess. “Saturn?”

“Of course Saturn, but which Saturn? There’s the planet—the one with the ring around it—and there’s the Roman god. I’m Roman, so I say it’s for the god. As a matter of fact, they say that Saturnia was the name of the village where the god Saturn lived in the Capital before it became Rome.” Armando was really animated talking to me. Lucia just sat there and looked bored, but I was really interested. “*Allora*, the Saturn, the god, ran away from his kingdom in Greece and flew to Rome... like everyone does... *Roma, Roma, captut mundi!* How I miss it.”

Then he turned to Lucia. “If you’re not comfortable in your cabin, you can always use mine. I’ll sleep at the top and you sleep at the bottom. It’s simple, you know.”

“You’re crazy,” she said laughing.

“We Romans are all crazy. We like to live, that’s why. It’s in our blood. Now the ancient Romans, they really knew how to live it up. They had a festival every year called Saturnalia. *Eh, capito?* Sa-tur-na-li-a. They drank and ate like pigs. Imagine what *baccanale!* Everything was turned upside down.”

He turned his body around to face Lucia straight on, and looked concerned. “You were feeling a bit sick last night? Let’s take a little walk, it will distract you.”

Before she could answer, he turned back to me. “Saturn was the god of the vine, but also the god of the underworld, the night. The Vulcania is named after Vulcano, the god of fire and light. Eh, we Romans know all about these gods. I could tell you a lot more about it... what Saturn really symbolizes and so on. But you were probably thinking of Saturn, the planet with the circle around it. It’s named after the same god. They’re one and the same. Now Lucia and me will be back in a few minutes. You can wait for us in the lounge. I want to distract her from feeling sick.”

Lucia got up and said, "We won't be long. Wait for me in the lounge."

Then, as they left, I heard Armando say, "I still can't believe how someone her age can read so much and so fast. Too bad though. She should have made friends with girls her own age."

I was really annoyed at him for being so surprised at my reading and at my age, and for talking about me as if I wasn't even there. I wanted to tell him that I had started fourth grade already. Signor Gavano had once called Mother to school just to tell her how advanced I was for my age. Just because my spoken Italian was not as perfect as his, because I spoke with a Calabrese accent, he probably expected me to be a dummy. It wasn't my fault I wasn't born in Rome with all of his gods and goddesses. He probably thought of himself a god too, or a pope with all of his preaching. Lucia could have said something. She knew about my perfect tens in school, but if she could forget Totu so easily and forget that she was married to another man, I couldn't expect her to speak up for me.

I went to the lounge by myself and sat curled up on the sofa, feeling queasy. I liked what Armando told me about Saturnia, though, and I hoped he would pick up on it another time. I thought of the planet Saturn and I couldn't imagine how big a circle it had around it. I pretended to try to ride the waves, as Armando had told us, but even in first class that morning, the boat lifted me up and then threw me down. My stomach didn't seem to have time to adjust to the movements, and when the boat came down, my stomach was still up. After a while reading, I felt that lying in bed would probably be best, in case I had to vomit. I didn't want to embarrass myself in the lounge. But I

couldn't go without Lucia, so I read a few pages, and then closed my eyes for awhile. I reopened them again to read a few more pages, but felt more and more nauseous.

Lucia was safe in the monastery; however, the mother superior, Gertrude, was a nun like no other. She led a double life, carrying on an affair with a shady character, Egidio, who lived next to the monastery. The innocent Lucia is sent out on an errand, and is tricked and carted off to the castle of L'Innominato, a man so powerful and evil that the author could not even name him.

I felt sicker and sicker, and really wanted to go to our room and lie down, so I decided to go look for Lucia. She wasn't on deck, or in the dining room, or in the first-class or third-class lounges. What was I supposed to do, run around the ship looking for her? And Armando wondered why I didn't make friends with girls my own age. After a while, I was so frustrated that, not knowing what else to do, I went to the dining room and looked for the Neapolitan waiter, and asked him if he knew where Armando could be. I told him I had to give him a note from a friend.

"At this time," he said. "Armando could be in a hundred places around the ship. But you can slip the note under his cabin door." We had passed by that section of the ship before, when Armando had showed us where he slept.

When I got there, I could hear noises, but I didn't have the courage to knock. I was sure that Lucia was in the cabin, so I sat in the corridor and forced myself to read my book. I waited for her to come out. At least I knew where she was.

I skimmed through long passages about the life of the l’Innominato. He was powerful and evil, and nothing made him happy. Then a holy man of the church entered the story: Cardinal Federigo Borromeo. The book had so many stories to keep up with that I skipped whole chapters. All I cared about was finding out what would happen to Lucia in the hands of the l’Innominato.

She pleads with him, “*God forgives so much for one deed of mercy!*” In her prison, Lucia prays and prays for help. “*Rescue me from this danger; take me back safely to my mother, oh, Mother of the Lord! And I make a vow to you to remain a virgin. I renounce my poor Renzo forever in order to be henceforth yours and yours alone.*”

I was utterly disappointed at this turn of events. Even if Lucia was saved, she would not be reunited with Renzo. What kind of ending would that be?

I leafed through the book to see what Renzo was up to. He was at a different place each time I spotted his name. First, he was arrested and handcuffed, then he was running free in the fields. On one page, he was working with a cousin, Bartolo, and on another, with Tonio. He was in Monza, then he was going back to Milano to look for Lucia and Agnese. The thing I liked best about Renzo was that he never gave up on his search—not like Totu who ran to Rome and left Lucia alone when the rumors about him were spreading in Mulirena. Maybe Rome got to Totu’s head too, like Armando.

As if the famine and rebellions were not bad enough, the area around Milano has suddenly become infested by a plague, which spreads as fast as did the invading

barbarians from the north. Renzo is still searching for Lucia. "*Ceased everywhere were all sounds from shops, all noises of carriages, all cries of street vendors, all chatter of passersby; only rarely was that deadly silence broken by anything but the rumble of funeral carts, the lamentations of the poor, the moaning of the sick, the shrieks of the delirious, and the shouts of the monatti.*"

The *monatti* are the only people allowed to enter infected houses and cart away the dead. They move with bells on their ankles and take the law into their own hands, robbing the dead or the nearly-dead. Rumors are rampant that *untatori* are purposely spreading infection with plague-tainted objects. Renzo ends up in the *lazzaretto*, a place set up to contain the thousands who are infected with the black skin blotches of the plague, often to die of hunger, but most often, from thirst.

After I had been reading for about forty minutes, the door opened and Lucia and Armando came out.

"Ah! Who do we have here?" Armando said. He made a little salute. "Caterina, our little guard. I must say you have done your job well. I'll give you a medal at the end of the trip." And then, looking at the book, he added, "Make that two medals if you finish the book. Listen Caterina, jokes apart, I'll give you a prize at the end of the trip if you can prove to me that you have really read the whole book. I'll ask you some questions on it. Agreed?"

Meanwhile, Lucia looked flustered and embarrassed. She took me by the hand to lead me away before I could answer Armando, but I still nodded at him in agreement.

"We better go," she said. "Before they have the whole ship after me."

But when we got back on deck, she stopped and looked into the water. "I feel like throwing myself off," she said.

"Throw yourself off if you want," I said. "I'm feeling sick. I want to go to bed."

She continued as if she hadn't heard what I said. "Don't think it's because I've done anything wrong. It's because I'm afraid of what I'll find when I get there."

"You'll find the husband you married," I said impatiently. "What do you expect to find? Did you forget you're a married woman?"

"What, I even have to listen to you now? It's not enough I have to hear that *beffana*, Giuseppina, and that *smorfia* Margherita with that smirk on her face all the time? I'd like to slap her face if I could."

"What did she ever do to you? Just because she said that Armando goes with everyone. She's right. Do you really think that Armando loves you?"

"Who is talking about love, you stupid thing? And what do you know about life? You're not even ten yet. You think you're smart just because you're good in school?"

"I'm smart enough to know that Armando is taking you for a ride, but you don't know it."

"What do you know about what I know? You make me laugh. All you know is what's in that book."

"At least in the book Lucia and Renzo love each other, and they won't go with anyone else."

"That's a book. It's not real, you stupid thing. They can write anything they want in a book."

“Stop calling me stupid. You’re stupid, not me. If you really loved Totu, you shouldn’t have married someone else.”

She slapped me as soon as I had said it. “What do you know about life, you?”

The slap took me by surprise, and I didn’t know what to say. She turned her back to me, holding on to the railing and looking down into the water.

“Throw yourself off and see if Armando will jump in to save you,” I said, crying. When she didn’t answer I added, “I’m going to bed. What am I supposed to tell the others?”

“Tell them I’m sick and want to stay here for awhile,” she said in a quieter voice.

I started going, but Lucia called me back. “I didn’t do anything wrong. You’re just too young to understand. It’s possible to be with a man and not do anything really wrong, you know. We were so ignorant in Mulirena. I’m telling you, Caterina. I haven’t done anything wrong. Believe me. Maybe I should have.”

I didn’t know what to believe. The other Lucia would never have done anything like that. All she had wanted was a life with Renzo, in a small house in the village, and she had been deceived by her priest and by the nun who was supposed to help her. Whom could she trust anymore? Whom could anyone trust? This Lucia had gotten married in a church, had made a vow, and before even meeting her new husband, was already with another man. If that was not wrong, then what was? But she’d sounded so sincere; she’d had tears in her eyes when she told me she hadn’t done anything wrong. But I didn’t believe her anymore. Maybe my mother had been right about her all along. As I walked toward the cabin, I had to hold onto the railing. I felt dizzy and sick. I couldn’t wait for this trip to be over and to walk on solid ground again.

When I returned to the room, I found Luigi, Giuseppina and the two kids in their beds as usual, but my mother's bed was empty.

"I finally convinced her to go to the infirmary," Luigi said. "I brought her there, and they'll kept her there for the night. She's too weak."

Why had I not been here to take her to the infirmary, instead of my brother having to do it? "I want to go see her," I said.

"No," replied Luigi. "They're all sleeping. You'd just be in the way. She's better off there than here."

When Armando came down, he saw me crying. "Don't worry," he said. "Your mother is better off sleeping up there. There's a doctor and a nurse watching over her. They'll give her something to regain her strength. She hasn't eaten for days."

"I want to go see her." I felt so guilty for having stayed up so long and for having blasted her about Lucia.

"You shouldn't go now; they're all resting. But first thing tomorrow morning, I'll bring you there myself. You have my word," Armando promised.

I went back to my book, but I couldn't read anything. Finally, I dozed off.

Day 7

In the middle of the night, I heard Armando come to my bed. He whispered, "Come with me."

I didn't want to make him wait, so I got up in my slip. I took his hand, and went with him quietly, trying not to wake the others. We went down a staircase. *Funny*, I thought, *I didn't think the boat had a deck lower than ours.*

“The hospital is way, way up,” Armando said. “But we need to go down before we go up. We still have a long way to go.” I saw *monatti* coming into the houses, *monatti* coming out, carrying burdens on their shoulders. I should have taken my shoes, my coat, before leaving. I didn’t even have underwear on. I touched my bum and it was naked. I walked along a long corridor. Some of the cabins were open, but so dark I couldn’t see any people inside or even walls—only emptiness. I screamed when, inside one, I saw huge columns rising, like in a church. “*Untatore, untatore,*” people screamed, while a priest all dressed in gold held up a gold ostensorium that sparkled like a sun. *It must be the feast of Corpus Christi.* I looked for the procession.

“Let’s run out of here,” Armando said. A mother kissed a baby girl on the forehead, then laid her down as if putting her to bed. “Good bye, Cecilia! Rest in peace.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Finally, we’re in Milano,” Renzo told me.

“Good,” I said. “Where’s my father?...I want my mother. I stayed out too long. I want to see her before she dies.”

“Sure, sure,” he answered. “Come with me and you’ll find your mother and your father.”

“You’re tricking me,” I screamed. “*Chiaccherone, chiaccherone.*” A wave as high as the boat raised me up to the ceiling. The boat bobbed up and down and I felt very sick, but I kept myself from vomiting. I was too embarrassed. I saw litter made up of rags, rotting bandages, infected straw.

We tried running up a brown hill but we kept slipping backward, sliding on the brown vomit that flowed down like mud. *Giro Giro tondo...*I heard a bunch of kids

playing, running round and round, covered in brown vomit and shit, while an old woman threw a pot with yellow piss at us. Here and there lay corpses...*lamentations of the poor*. From holes in the brown mountain emerged people in brown sackcloth, their heads covered in brown hoods. They carried stretchers on which naked bodies were dumped one on top of the other. *Shrieks of the delirious; the shouts of the monatti*.

A surge of warm vomit made me reach for the bucket, but it was at the foot of the bed and I threw up all over the blanket. "Ma," I tried yelling, but no sound came from my mouth.

I didn't want to wake everyone up, so I folded the slimy wet cover away from me. I lay back again, but it was so cold without the cover. I scrunched myself up into a ball, and pulled my slip down to cover my naked bum and legs.

"Get ready," Renzo said. "We're finally going to see it."

"So this is the Rock," I said.

The filthy *monatto* went up to the woman to take the child away from her.

"No," she said. "Do not touch it yet."

"O Lord," exclaimed Renzo. "*Draw her to you. They have suffered enough! They have suffered enough. Lucia? Agnese?*"

A woman put her head out of the window. "*Monatti, commissioners, anointers or devils?*"

"*Lucia, Agnese?*" Renzo asked every face we saw, all of which were muddied with dirt and vomit.

“When will I see my mother?” I cried. I started running away in a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys, but no matter how hard I tried, I was going nowhere, my slip rode up above my hips and I was cold and completely naked and had nowhere to hide.

I heard muffled voices in the room. I opened my eyes and saw Armando walking slowly toward my bed, holding Mother by the arms.

“Caterina,” he said. “Wake up. I have a surprise for you.” I tried to pull the cover over me but it felt sticky and damp. Mother was smiling.

As she came to kiss me, she felt the folded-up blanket. “You’re throwing up too, now? I finish and you start?”

“I had a bad dream,” I said.

“See, Caterina,” Armando said, “I always keep my word. I went to see her this morning and she insisted on coming back down here. I tried to convince her to stay up, but you Calabrese women are all the same—hard headed!”

“You look better today,” Giuseppina told my mother.

“You’re joking,” she replied. “*Paru na morta.*” Then she went over to kiss Luigi, who was just waking up. She acted as though she had been away for a long time. Then she asked, “Where’s Lucia?”

I looked beneath my bed and saw that Lucia’s bed was empty. I didn’t remember hearing her come in after I had gone to bed. My heart leaped into my throat in a rush of panic. I remembered leaving her on the deck, staring into the water.

“She must have felt really hungry to get up this early,” Armando said. “That one gets hungrier and hungrier the stormier it gets.”

“Go and see where she is,” Mother asked, not sounding too alarmed.

I got up, washed, and went looking for Lucia. I felt better now that I had finally thrown up. I had been so happy to see Mother back, but now I had to worry about Lucia. Had she stayed out all night, or had she come to bed and then gone out again? Had I dreamed that Armando came into the room, or had he really been there?—“Come with me,” he had said. Had he been speaking to me, or to her?

I passed by the deck and went to the dining room, but there was no sign of Lucia. Then I ran to the first-class deck and lounge, but still no Lucia. I contemplated going to Armando’s room, but as I walked down the stairs, I heard her call me from the top deck.

“Where have you been all night?” I asked her when she came down.

“I slept on the sofa in the lounge. I couldn’t take it in the cabin with those two little pests, crying and sniffing, and everyone vomiting all over. I got up in the middle of the night and went to the lounge.” She sounded normal.

“It scared me when I didn’t see you in the room. I was afraid something had happened to you.”

“What could have happened to me?” she asked.

“That you had jumped into the water and died.” I replied.

“I died when I set foot on this boat,” she said pensively.

“I heard Armando come into the room during the night. Did he come to get you?”

“No, I haven’t seen him since yesterday afternoon. You must have been dreaming.”

Later, I decided not to ask Luigi or Giuseppina if they had seen Lucia come to bed the night before. If they had noticed her absence, they would have mentioned it. But I didn't believe her fully, either. In Mulirena, if a single girl spent a night away from home with a man, she was forced to marry him within the month, in a non-white dress to show her shame. How could Lucia face her husband, I thought, if she had spent the night with Armando? Would her husband not find out?

But I never asked the question. Maybe, I thought, I'd soon wake up in Mulirena, and laugh with relief at such a crazy dream. Armando, Giuseppina and the two whining brats, the Rock, the plague, the seasickness would have been nothing but a bad, jumbled-up dream.

Day 8

Giuseppina and the two girls, and Margherita and her baby made it to breakfast. Even with the two ladies there, Lucia managed to sneak away at ten to speak to Armando.

"Let's go for a walk," she asked me, and left them all sitting there, staring up at us.

We didn't discuss our argument of the day before. It was as if it hadn't happened. When Lucia and Armando went for their walk, I didn't follow them. Even though the weather had turned colder, the sun was strong enough in the middle of the day for me to sit on deck again and read my book. Armando had told me again that he would have a gift

for me if I finished the book. With about two hundred pages left unread, I cheated and went straight to the end.

“Business went like a charm. Before the first year of marriage was over a fine baby saw the light; ...and, as you can guess, it was given the name of Maria. Then in the course of time, came I know not how many others of both sexes; and Agnese was busy carrying them here and there...Renzo was determined that they should all learn to read and write, saying that, as the swindle existed, they ought at least to profit by it themselves too.”

Renzo spends many a night recounting his adventures to his brood and the lessons that he learned from his misfortunes. He and Lucia come to the conclusion that *“when trouble comes, whether by one’s own fault or not, confidence in God can lighten them and turn them to our own improvement.”*

Having read the ending, I felt satisfied. I decided to skim through the rest of the book backwards and look over some of the boring parts I had skipped.

Day 9

The sea was becoming calmer; the air, sharper and clearer. I spent most of the morning on the first-class deck going back and forth in the book. I was reading a passage on the second-to-last page when Margherita, Giuseppina and their kids joined me.

“Before we landed, we wanted to see what first class looks like,” Margherita said. She then asked me if I knew where Lucia was. I explained I had left her in the lounge, as she was too cold to stay on the deck.

“What does she do there all by herself?” Giuseppina asked. I shrugged.

“*La bella vita* is going to stop soon,” she said. “Wait till she gets to Montreal,”

They asked me if I wanted to go have lunch with them, but I said I’d wait for Luigi and Lucia. I was anxious to let Armando know that I had “more or less” finished the book. I knew that, at around this time, he’d be going back to his room to get ready for lunch. I went straight to the top of the stairs where he would pass, and waited for him.

“Ciao Caterina,” he said when he saw me. “Lucia is looking for you.”

“I came to tell you I finished the book,” I said.

“Good,” he said. He seemed surprised and in a rush, and I realized that I had caught him at a bad time. “If you wait for me here, I have something for you,” he added.

After a few minutes he came back with a card in his hands. “I won’t have to test you. I believe that you finished the book. You’re not the type to lie. I can tell. It’s impossible to find a medal on this ship, but take this as a souvenir.” It was a blank postcard of the Rock of Gibraltar.

“I didn’t write anything on it, because I want you to remember the place and not me when you look at the card.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Now I have to run. Everyone is beginning to eat like wolves again, and the dining room is like a zoo. Caterina... you’re an ace!” He pinched my cheek, and he was off.

The color picture of the Rock was beautiful. A bright ray of sunlight shone on one side and was reflected in the water. White seagulls perched on its edges and the waves around it were white and foamy like clouds. But that was not how I remembered the Rock. The place in the picture was clear and sharp-colored, a place one could easily see and touch. What I remembered was a blurry and mysterious mountain that, no matter how hard you reached for it, would always recede beyond your grasp. Even Armando had doubted he'd ever get to that place.

I put the card in my book. They'd both be a reminder of the voyage. I couldn't really tell if what he'd said had been sincere, or whether he just hadn't taken the time to write me a note. With Armando it was difficult to tell what was real and what was not.

Day 10

On the day of the landing, I wore two sweaters under my coat, but Mother warned me not to stay on deck, or the cold would make my hands fall off. She was still very weak and had difficulty going up and down the stairs, so she told us to call her just before landing. She was not as curious as Luigi and I were to see land as we approached. Neither was Lucia, who spent most of the morning with Armando. For once, I didn't have the book with me, as we had packed everything up the evening before. But anyway, I wanted to stay on deck with Luigi and his friends and not miss the first sighting of the new country, even though we were only expected to land after lunch.

During the last couple of days, Lucia and Armando had laughed at one other like two playful friends, making jokes at one other's expense. She had been looking at her husband's picture—a smiling man of small stature, with dark, curly hair, sitting on the

hood of a big car—and had shown it to Armando. He joked about her learning how to drive the big car, and about spending time in her big, new home, like a *signora Americana*, while he would have to go up and down the ocean on the boat, cleaning up after the seasick passengers. When she asked him if he ever went to Montreal, he answered, “Are you joking? It’s almost a two-day trip by train, and whom would I know there?” She gave him her address anyway, which she had written on a small piece of paper. He put it in his uniform pocket, and I wondered how easily he’d lose it. With me, he had never resumed his lesson on the meaning of Saturn and Saturnia, but I figured I could find out by myself once I was in school.

Father would not be meeting us at the port, but Lucia’s husband was expected to be there. Lucia showed up for lunch dressed in the new brown wool suit that she had reserved for meeting him. Around her neck, she wore a scarf that I had never seen before, blue and bright yellow, with a picture of the Rock of Gibraltar.

“What a beautiful scarf,” Margherita commented. “I’m sorry I didn’t buy one from the Moroccans. I’ll never get the chance again.”

“That’s why I bought it,” Lucia said, feeling the silky smoothness of the scarf with satisfaction. She looked at me, smiling as she said it, as if to make sure I wouldn’t reveal her lie. I knew she had not bought it herself, and she knew that I knew. But I never told her or anyone else that Armando had also given me a gift. The way she caressed her scarf and the look on her face made me think that receiving it had made her feel special too. So I smiled back at her to assure her that she could trust me with the small deception.

When land became visible, we joined the other passengers on the third-class deck. I kept my hands inside my coat pockets. Though we could see our breath rise up in the air, and though the cold was sharp and icy, it was not impossible to endure. As the ship neared the port, I looked for signs of having arrived in Canada, and especially for snow. I saw patches of white in the fields beyond the port, but the ground on the pier was clear and cement gray. The trees and bushes were thin, bare and also gray. Our first view of the harbor was of a place different from any I had ever seen before. But nothing about it stood out or made Luigi exclaim in awe.

“These buildings are not that high. They look like boxes made of cardboard,” he said.

I noticed how flat and empty Halifax seemed, compared to the noisy chaos of Naples. It was what was missing that made it look so different—no mountains, no color, little noise, few people. Some men were working around the pier in heavy jackets, wearing hats that covered their ears, but there were no large crowds of onlookers waiting for us. The people on the deck were just as quiet as we were, as if they didn't know whether to be happy or sad yet.

I went down with Luigi to get Mother while the ship anchored. Armando and the other steward were busy helping everyone disembark, and arranging for the handheld luggage to be given over to the porters who were waiting at the bottom of the gangplank. When we passed by Armando, he stopped and came over. With his usual bow and smile, he said, “*Addio care Signore e... Signorine.*”

A short man, wearing a heavy winter jacket and ear muffers came up to us. He must have recognized Lucia from her photo, since he came straight to her and said, “*Benvenuta, sono Pasquale.*” He clumsily shook hands with all of us, including Lucia.

“*Piacere,*” each one of us said.

‘How was your trip?’ he asked.

“Not bad,” Lucia answered, wearing her non-smiling look.

He took her arm and moved on, since we were blocking the way. I could tell by Lucia’s stiff walk that she was not very happy. Her husband was even shorter than he had seemed on the photo, and his legs looked really funny and skinny under a jacket that seemed inflated like a balloon.

Giuseppina and the two girls, and Margherita with her baby on her hip, had already walked briskly ahead of us. Everyone seemed to be in a real hurry to move ahead. A line of attendants directed us toward a large building directly in front of us. It had a large number 21 above its wide entrance, and I smiled at the coincidence of the inverted 12, for our twelve-day trip.

We couldn’t keep up with the others in our party, and we inched our way slowly forward. A smiling woman in a uniform stopped us and gave us kids a brown bag. We stopped to look inside the bag and found some crayons, a coloring book, and a pair of woolen mittens, which we put on right away. “*Grazie,*” Mother said weakly. She crossed herself as we took hold of her arms again. She still wobbled.

“When will we get there?” she asked.

Luigi and I looked at one other and laughed. We answered at the same time. “Ma, we’re here already.”

PART II

In the third and fourth week of October 1980, a few new names and faces join the previous week's parade of images, which our main protagonist is trying to contend with in the second half of the novel...

Voyager 1 discovers more moons around Saturn... The Washington Post and the New York Times report that Ronald Reagan is leading in states with enough electoral votes to give him the election... Missiles are reportedly being used in the Iran-Iraq war... Anti-American sentiments said to be on the rise in Iran since the war with Iraq began... Miami Beach city commission says it cannot pay hotel bills for 1500 Cuban refugees... Boston appeals-court decision paves the way for the Carter administration to move Cuban and Haitian refugees to Puerto Rico... In Italy, the Communist-led auto workers' union pickets factories of the Fiat car company in the sharpest upsurge of Italian labor unrest in years... Italian police swoop down on the Red Brigades. Anti-terrorist police arrest 21 people, 20 of them suspected members of the Red Brigade urban guerrilla gang, as part of a three-month investigation into terrorism in northwestern Italy... Teachers in Montreal's west island walk off the job and the school board retaliates with a lockout... About 2000 striking teachers in Quebec are legislated back to work by the National Assembly with the threat of stiff fines... Hundreds of Montrealers are forced to hitchhike, take cabs, or find other means of transport as about 180 city transit drivers take part in a one-day work stoppage... In Montreal, Rocco Violi, younger brother of one-time Montreal godfather Paolo Violi, is gunned down in the kitchen of his Saint-Leonard home. His two sons, one aged 11 and the other apparently in his late teens, are in the kitchen with their father when he is shot. Police have no motive for the killing.

WEEK 3

Monday, October 13, 1980**Thanksgiving**

When the radio alarm clock went off at 6:00 a.m., Cathy woke up with the awareness that her life was about to take a new turn. She remembered Sean's marriage proposal, and Carmy's arrival later on. Change, or the anticipation of any type of change, always made her smile inside. From the living room, where she had slept, Cathy heard Sean hit the on/off button of the alarm clock, as the high-spirited voice of the morning man blared. It was Thanksgiving Day and a school holiday, and Cathy should have deactivated the alarm the evening before. She considered moving to the bedroom for a couple of hours, to cuddle up and sleep in next to Sean, but decided to get up as usual and get a head start on her day. She had a lot on her mind, with Thanksgiving dinner to prepare and the other projects that had percolated in her head throughout the night. In fact, she had slept restlessly. The book she had been reading before falling asleep still lay between her and the sofa. She placed it on the coffee table, and went to put on a pot of coffee.

It had been a while since Cathy had woken up with such a sense of excitement. She reviewed the conversation she had had with Sean before going to bed, to make sure it had been real and not just part of the jumbled dreams she'd had during the night. Sean's proposal had come at the perfect moment. She would be announcing her impending

marriage to her family at Thanksgiving dinner, and it would make it easier to explain Sean's presence in the apartment to Alfonso and Carmy.

Marriage to Sean would not alter her day-to-day routine much. It was not as if he would sweep her off into a different life than the one she had known since living with him. But marriage would at least lift her from that makeshift, almost clandestine, space in which she had been living. She had only kidded herself into believing that, somehow, the arrangement would free her from the constraints of her rigid upbringing. Instead, it had weighted her down and she had yet to experience the carefree existence she had anticipated. Cathy could finally make good on her claim to her friends that she and Sean would eventually marry.

A fifteen-pound turkey, dunked in the sink, waited to be stuffed and roasted. They would only be five at the table—six counting the baby—but the preparation required to cook a turkey was the same whether for five or for a small clan. Except for the cranberry sauce, Cathy would be preparing everything from scratch, from the zucchini and apple soup to the sausage stuffing, and to the pumpkin pie for dessert. Thanksgiving was not an Italian tradition and she was the only one in her family who had mastered roasting a succulent turkey. The first time her mother had cooked turkey for Christmas, it had come out dry and tasteless, and Teresa had wondered what the fuss about turkeys was all about. Then Cathy had learned that it was all the side dishes, the trimmings and sauces, which accompanied the bland turkey meat, that made the meal special and so festive.

Cathy moved quietly in the kitchen, not wanting to wake Sean up. She checked that she had everything she needed for dinner, and then jotted down a timeline for the

cooking. She'd only need to start preparing the turkey at noon, and during the seven hours' roasting time, she had plenty of time to schedule in the rest.

She had the whole morning to herself, and she was anxious to look over the notebooks in the box in the den—the notebooks she had kept hidden for so long. Part of her life had remained buried in that box. Now, through Carmy, Lucia had re-entered her life, Cathy thought it was time to face up to its contents once and for all: to revive her writing if it still showed signs of life, or to discard it for good.

One of the thoughts that had recurred throughout the night was an idea that she had had as a teen, but had never pursued: to collect the different stories into a book that would tell one bigger story. She had been too painfully shy then to even formulate her intentions out loud, especially after she had given a manuscript to her journalist friend and he had completely ignored it. “Childhood nonsense,” she had thought after she had written her last story and, crying, thrown it into the box.

During the night, as she had fidgeted and turned on the velvet sofa, cameos of people and places had floated around her, as though turning on a giant Ferris wheel, dissipating into the air and then reemerging, superimposed one over the other. So many circles, so many stories! All fragments of the same life! To find connections between the various parts and to make sense of it all became her overriding concern, though the task felt daunting. There had been too many breaks in her life, too many false beginnings. But if she could fill in some of the gaps, tie the beginning to an ending, then maybe the pain of the fractures might slowly heal.

The conversation around the dinner table first centered around the baby and then, after she had fallen asleep, on the food. Cathy waited until everyone had served themselves some of the meat, vegetables, stuffing and cranberry sauce before announcing that she and Sean were thinking of getting married in the coming months. She couldn't tell whether her mother was really happy about the news, for Teresa only nodded and asked: "You're having a civil wedding?"

"No, no. We're getting married in a church," Cathy said.

"A Protestant church?" Teresa asked timidly.

"Catholic... at the Consolata," Sean said emphatically.

Luigi beamed with pleasure at the news, and he said he'd speak to the priest, Father Albanesi, if they wished. Sean agreed to marry in a Catholic church, but he hoped he wouldn't have to convert to Catholicism—only because he wouldn't have time to follow the required classes.

Then they discussed the reception and who they would invite. Cathy insisted it should only be the closest relatives—aunts, cousins, and a few friends. But even that meant close to one hundred guests.

"Can't we cut out the cousins?" Sean asked, and Cathy repeated his question in dialect for her mother.

"How can you not invite first cousins?" Teresa answered, as Cathy had expected. "Some are like brothers and sisters, and we invite one, we have to invite them all."

"We'll help out with the expenses, but you have to include the cousins," Luigi added.

“There’s still time to think about it,” Cathy said. Talking about the reception made her nervous and she didn’t want any disagreements between Sean and her family at the dinner table. She would have to sort all that out herself, so she changed the subject back to food and to her first pumpkin pie, which she had baked that afternoon from a recipe taken from the Gazette food pages.

“*Torta de cucuzza*,” Luigi translated for Teresa, and they all laughed. It was both a novelty and an oddity for Teresa to eat pumpkin as a dessert.

The doorbell rang as Cathy was getting ready to prepare coffee, and Alfonso, carrying a small suitcase, arrived with Carmy. He sheepishly handed Carmy the suitcase and said, “Here, try behaving as I told you.”

“Come in for a coffee,” Cathy told Alfonso with a big smile. “My mother and Luigi are here.”

“Oh, it’s quite late, but I’ll come in for a minute to say hello to Comare Teresa,” Alfonso said. But before stepping in, he handed Cathy a wad of money, and whispered, “I gave Carmy enough spending money for the week. Here’s something for the rest of her expenses.”

“No, no,” answered Cathy, too embarrassed to take the money. “Don’t worry about that.”

“OK. We’ll arrange everything at the end,” Alfonso said, following Cathy into the kitchen.

Alfonso didn’t sit down for coffee, but shook hands with Teresa and Luigi, and was introduced to Sean.

“*Complimenti,*” he said to Cathy after Teresa mentioned that the two would be marrying shortly.

“I know one of your friends: Jean-Pierre Picard,” Alfonso told Sean. “Give him my regards.

“Sure,” Sean said. “He should be coming in next week.”

“For the ball?” Alfonso asked.

“That’s correct,” Sean nodded.

“Then we might see each other then,” Alfonso said.

Cathy noticed that her mother seemed pleased that the two men had a connection. It would give Sean more credibility in the eyes of her *paesano*. The only dark cloud still hanging in the air was the fact that Lucia was still in a coma. There had been no significant change since the last time Cathy and her mother had seen her.

“Let’s pray to Santa Lucia,” Teresa told Alfonso as he left.

“So Alfonso knows Jean Pierre?” Luigi asked.

“JP knows a lot of people in the Italian community, from working for Di Principe,” Sean answered.

“And Alfonso knows a lot of people too,” Luigi replied.

Cathy brought Carmy into the den where she had already opened up the sofa bed.

“Maybe this is not as big as the room at your uncle’s house, but this is where you’ll have to sleep,” Cathy said.

“It’s OK,” Carmy answered, looking around the room. “You have a lot of freaking books in here, though. Have you read them all?”

“Not quite,” Cathy answered. “Come and have dessert with us.”

Carmy sat quietly, looking at the large piece of pie in front of her.

"It's pumpkin pie. The filling looks gross, but it tastes quite good," Cathy said.

"Do you want ice cream on it?"

"No, it's OK," Carmy said, but she seemed cautious about eating the pie.

"I'm trying to figure out who she looks like," Teresa said, looking at Carmy.

"I don't see a resemblance with your mother's family," Cathy told Carmy. "You must take after your father's side."

"I look like myself, I guess," Carmy answered, tucking a strand of curly hair behind her ear.

"Let's hope Santa Lucia will grant us grace," Teresa repeated. And then, turning to Carmy, said, "Be good in school. Your grandmother already has enough on her mind."

Cathy darted her mother a look, as if to discourage her from saying more.

But Teresa continued, "When she was your age, your mother was like a daughter to me."

Winter 1957

By Cathy Anastasia

Our new home was a basement apartment on 10th Avenue in the east end of Montreal. Father had sublet it from an acquaintance, who'd had to move out before his lease was up. Father said he was very lucky to have found an apartment at this time of year, as most leases in Montreal were signed from July to July. When we saw the three-story red-brick building, Luigi and I looked at one other and sighed with relief that our new home was not one of the desolate shacks we saw along the stretch of country between Halifax and Montreal.

The train ride had taken six hours longer than expected, and we arrived at the apartment close to midnight. Passing customs had turned out to be the easiest part of our journey. None of our luggage was opened or searched. A custom officer with a red freckled face and white eyelashes glanced at us, and quickly marked an X on our suitcases with white chalk. He signaled to us to sit on benches, where we waited to be called by other immigration officers, who stamped our passports without even asking us any questions.

Pasquale had slipped through the gates to come meet us at the pier but wasn't allowed to stay with us. He tried to explain to the custom official that he had done this so he could translate for us, but he seemed to have problems being understood, and had to show his identification papers.

“No one speaks French here. In Montreal, they all speak French,” he said before being told to wait for us to clear customs. It seemed strange to me that he spoke French, but not English.

While waiting to board the train in the cavernous hall of the immigration office, Pasquale offered to buy us something to eat. “There’s nothing to eat on the train and it’s a long ride,” he said.

Mother took out some dollars that Zio had given her in Naples, and she asked Luigi to go with Pasquale to buy some bread. The two came back with a loaf of sliced bread, two apples, and three bottles of Coke. Mother squeezed the bread, which was the whitest bread we had ever seen, and said, “But it’s not cooked.” Throughout the years, she must have baked thousands of round, heavy loaves for her mother’s store. She knew all about good bread.

“That’s the way bread is here,” Pasquale said. “But in Montreal now, we have a good Italian bakery.”

Lucia had resumed her silent demeanor and said nothing as we all bit into our crisp apples.

When we finally boarded the train, it had started to snow softly. It was only five in the afternoon, but it was already dark, and once inside, we could not see out the windows. The moist, thick glass reflected our tired faces. We still had a long way to go—many of us were going to Montreal; others were headed for Windsor, Toronto, Thunder Bay, or Winnipeg.

The train slogged along slowly, stopping suddenly every few miles in the midst of open fields. People wondered whether there was some malfunction, since it took as long as an hour at a time before the train would start up again.

“At this rate, we’ll get there for Easter,” Mother said.

We all felt hungry. Mother took out the small *sopreassata* that Assunta had given me on the last day in Mulirena, and with my brother’s penknife cut it into thick slices. She offered it to Pasquale, who wrapped the spongy white bread around each slice and ate it heartily. We all did the same.

“*Mangiamu all’Americana*,” Luigi said. We all laughed as we sipped our Cokes and ate our *sopressata*, American style.

“This you won’t find in Montreal,” Pasquale said of the salami.

The stop-and-go pace of the soot-covered train lasted all night long.

“I’m surprised. We have better trains in Italy,” Luigi said.

Tired as we all were, we slept most of the long night. In the early morning, in the deep freeze of February, my brother and I were transfixed by the snowy winter landscape unfolding before us, mile after mile—nothing but fields, farmhouses and barns that seemed to me, covered in white cotton sheets, like furniture in deserted mansions.

“Where are all the people?” we asked, and seriously feared that the home that awaited us in Montreal would also be an eerie, ghostly barn buried in snow.

When we finally arrived at Windsor Station, we said goodbye to Margherita and Giuseppina, and we were surprised that the train stopped indoors. There was no sign of our father or anyone else waiting for us on the platform. We followed Pasquale and Lucia up a staircase, where we were met by a hoard of people, waving, calling out names and

blocking the way, even though a guard kept pushing them back. Finally, my father and my aunt Tina squeezed out of the crowd, grabbed our hand luggage, and we all kissed and cried.

“What happened to you?” Father asked Mother. “You’re all bones.”

“It’s a miracle I’m still alive,” Mother said, and crossed herself.

There were two cars waiting for us, one driven by my uncle, the other by a friend of Pasquale's. Aunt Tina convinced Lucia to stop at our house for something to eat before being taken to her new home. My uncle Tony drove our family in his gray, boxy Pontiac, through the illuminated streets of Montreal. It snowed on the windshield, and the city looked sleek and wet. All the tiredness left my body as I watched the multicolored lights of store windows blinking on and off. Our car moved smoothly, and we waited quietly and patiently for traffic lights to change colors. When Uncle Tony stopped and told us we were home, I felt thrilled to have made it to the big city.

My aunt Rosa, Father’s older sister, had prepared a feast for us: chicken soup, pasta, meat and all kinds of pastries. Before we sat down to eat in the kitchen, Father gave us a tour of the apartment, which he had furnished all by himself. A large, brown furnace had a prominent place in the center of the hallway. It was the first thing we noticed when we came through the door, and Father told us not to touch it or we’d get burned. We could hear and smell the fire blazing inside its belly. Father explained how it was fed by an oil tank in a shed at the back of the house, and that a pipe ran from the furnace to the ceiling, and snaked its way along the long corridor and into the kitchen. The living room was still bare, with a folding bed in a corner for my brother. My bedroom was sparsely furnished with only a bed. The kitchen was complete, with an

electric stove and a boxy fridge, but Father was especially proud of the main bedroom, with the cream-colored birch bedroom set, with its black, lacquered legs set on a slant.

“It’s elegant and modern. We’re young too, no?” he said winking at Pasquale and Lucia. “After the summer, I’ll get a TV and a chesterfield, and then we’re complete.”

“We have plenty of time for that,” Mother answered. “Let’s be happy for what we have.”

After coffee was served in the largest cups we had ever seen, Lucia and Pasquale left with their friend.

“I had expected someone different for Lucia. He’s a bit of a *cafone*, but he’s a good man. Here, the less educated you are, the more money you make,” Father said of Pasquale, who had spoken of the land he had bought for development in Laval. Father had agreed to think about buying a lot, too. “Land is the surest investment,” he said. “It never loses value.”

As far as housing was concerned, we could have done worse than Tenth Avenue, even though the apartment was in the basement, and the snowbanks partly blocked our view from the windows.

Father decided that, because the English school was a long walk from our house, it would be best to wait out the rest of the school year. I spent most of the winter months watching our neighbors’ legs passing by our windows, and seeing the large Kik bottles, and silver-foil pouches hanging from their hands. After I asked Farther what the pouches contained, he bought me a bag of potato chips to taste. The saltiness jolted me at first, but when I had finished eating the bag, I wished I had more. From our kitchen window,

which looked into our backyard, I watched children tumbling like balls on the snowbanks, all bundled up in red snow pants, scarves and mittens.

After our first week in Montreal, on a mild day, Father took us to Saint-Hubert Street to buy galoshes that we could slip over our shoes, so we could walk to our aunt Rosa's house, where my aunt Tina lived. Hers was a full house, what with her four sons and with uncle Tony's two brothers who also boarded with them. Father had also lived there before we came. Every Saturday night, we all sat in front of their TV set to watch Hockey Night in Canada, wrestling, and then The Juliette Show. The first time we watched the show, Father told us that an Italian, a Maestro D'Agostino, not only led the show's musical band but was married to the star, Juliette. She was a bubbly blonde who smiled broadly and wore strapless and puffy dresses, cinched at the waist.

"See, it takes an Italian to put on a good musical show in this country," Father said.

"But she can sing," my aunt said. "I like her voice."

"I like her arms," Francesco, one of uncle Tony's brother, added. He was also a musician, and with my father, had started a band to play at Italian weddings.

The other major weekly outing with Father was a walk to an Italian grocery store on Belair Street. It was run by a large Sicilian family. The parents had just bought a farm, where they made the fresh ricotta and Italian cheeses that were sold at the store, while the sons and daughters ran the city business.

"You'll see, this family is going to make a fortune because they work together," Father said.

They were talking about selling the store, though, to help out the parents at the farm, and then selling their cheeses to other stores and restaurants. Father would rather have walked a longer way than go to a closer Italian store because he liked the way he was treated by the Sicilians.

Mother stayed home for only two weeks, and then insisted she go to work in the factory with Aunt Tina. It was light work, making ladies' lingerie, and Father didn't object. He was unemployed because he worked in construction and the winter had been one of the coldest on record. But he went out every day to meet his friends on Dante Street, and he brought back an Italian newspaper, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, published in the United States. In the evening, we all listened to the Italian program on the radio. Father especially enjoyed the political commentaries of Camillo Carli, who lambasted the policies of the golf-playing US President Eisenhower. The news was rife with stories of the Hungarian revolution, and of children and women dying in the streets of Budapest. They made me relive the frightful images of the plague-infested streets that Renzo had walked through in his search for Lucia.

Luigi stayed home too, but after school, one of our four cousins—the one who was his age—would come by and they'd go out together. Luigi befriended Francine, a French girl who lived in our building, and my cousin, who went to French school, would translate for them. With no TV in the house and everyone out, I had lots of free time on my hands. I read the day-old Italian newspapers for news of social events happening in New York and Brooklyn. The paper also featured a serial story about outlaws hiding in some hills, and I cut out each installment to paste in a notebook and make a book out of

them. I wrote letters to my friends back home, telling them that the best time of day was the evening when the family was together and we listened to Italian songs on the radio.

I also liked it when my uncle's brother, Francesco, who played the guitar, would come to the apartment accompanied by an accordion player and a saxophonist. With my father on trumpet, they would practice Latin American tunes in our empty living room. My brother and I would sit on the cot and listen to the music, and to the arguments between Francesco and Father over the rehearsals.

Also, in the evenings, a parade of traveling salesmen found their way into our apartment, offering products and services that we had never heard of before: One man spread stainless steel pots and pans all over the kitchen floor. Another vacuumed the mattresses with a tissue over the vacuum nozzle to show how well it sucked nearly invisible dead-skin cells, and asked us to imagine how well it would clean our floors. An impeccably-dressed insurance agent from Venice came to offer advice about investing for the future and about buying life insurance.

One evening, Pasquale came over, accompanied by a well-known personality in the community, whose name, Jack Russo, was mentioned regularly in the local Italian newspaper. They had pictures of a development project in Laval, and sold lots for next to nothing, promising that in a few years they'd be developed into a model city called *Citta Verde*—Green City. They convinced my father to arrange for my uncle and his brothers to attend a meeting the following week.

"*Qui tutto fà brodo*," my father used to joke. "Here everything makes soup," he said about the mishmash of dialects and improvised occupations of these visitors who had immigrated from different areas of Italy a few years before us, and whose badly-spoken

Italian betrayed their peasant background—with the exception of the insurance agent. My father, and my uncle and his two brothers all bought land without needing to see the actual location, and Father even bought a life insurance policy from the Venetian. But my mother couldn't be sold on the magic power of stainless steel, or on the vacuum's ability to make her a better housewife. She served these people drinks, coffee, cookies, and even the special homemade Calabrese sausages that we had smuggled from Italy. After they left, Father always found something funny to say about each one, and that had us laughing for days.

During the day, to pass the time, I tried to take up drawing as a hobby, but all I managed to draw were geometric shapes. I spent hours fitting circles into squares and squares into circles. After going over the notes I had taken on the boat, I started reading *I Promessi Sposi* all over again, forcing myself to plow through the boring parts, since I had nothing else to do. I cried through the chapters on the plague, thinking of the misery of the people of Hungary who had to flee from their homes. It was lonely not to see or speak to anyone for hours on end, and I found solace in the fantasy world of the brigands, and of their lovers who left all behind to follow them. Afraid I'd cut myself and faint, Mother left lunches all prepared for me to eat. For snacks, I discovered the pleasure of Oreo cookies, and developed a special liking for peanut butter sandwiches. The brown wool dress I had brought from Italy got tighter and tighter, until I couldn't button it anymore.

A feeling of sadness hung over me most of the time, especially after I had finished re-reading *I Promessi Sposi*. Agnese, Lucia, and Renzo had become like family to me.

They all found each other in the end, but their time and place seemed to be pulled further and further away from me

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: April 3, 2005, 11:00 AM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: Submission

Attachment: chapter 2.doc

Franco,

You asked me about Manzoni a while back—you're right about Gramsci's criticism. Though his program was to create a popular literature and language, his perspective remained that of an aristocrat looking down on his own characters, as a benefactor would look down on his humble, children-like charges.

Tell me what you think of our writer's personal stories. She seems to be sliding toward the memoir, though she set out to write a novel. I've just sent her an email asking her to be less autobiographical in the next ones.

AA

Franco, what do you think of the lifting of the publication ban surrounding the Gomery inquiry? I estimate we will be hearing a real tale of rampant Liberal Party political corruption—bribery, kickbacks, illegal campaign financing— the likes of which we have never heard before... all in the name of Canadian unity!

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: April 3, 2005, 11:30 AM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Re: Submission

Dear AA,

I don't understand why you discourage your writer from writing a memoir. Her last story lends itself well to the genre. I'd let her be. Are you showing your usual bias for experimental texts, and trying too hard to hide any reference to ethnicity? I think you may be imposing too much pressure on a first-time writer by encouraging her to fictionalize her own life. In any case, one can also invent in a memoir, as long as it brings out truths. But is this what you are afraid of?

Yes, the juicy details of the sponsorship scandal have hit the fan. It's very unfortunate that one of the key players is Italian, and seems to be taking all the heat. Don't try to tell me that the other parties are guiltless of similar practices. It sounds as if payoffs were also made to the PQ. Hope the press will show some restraint and won't have a field day at our expense.

By the way, I received a hard copy of the pre-edited novel. I must say that I much prefer reading a book on paper rather than on a screen.

F

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: April 3, 2005, 1:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: Re: Re: Submission

Franco,

I've always shied away from memoirs for our writers because the same tired themes are repeated over and over again. As far as truth goes, my concern is to enlarge our own reality, to rise above the personal and aim for literary truths that will lead to universal truths. That is the ultimate goal of my editing.

And speaking of truths closer to home, I firmly hope that the Gomery inquiry will unearth the cesspool of corruption that holds up the Liberal party of Canada, even if the stink comes from one of our own.

A

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: April 3, 2005, 1:33 PM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Submission

Very lofty ideals, Antonio. What was that about Manzoni looking down from above?

Tuesday October 14, 1980

“Everything’s New on Saturn”

On the radio's morning call-in program, the topic of the day was whether the astronomical amount of money spent on space exploration was justified. “We should take care of our homeless before exploring empty air,” a woman said in a thick Slavic accent.

The evening news had carried earth-based photos of Saturn, released by the spacecraft Voyager 1. The photos showed a subtle face of glowing yellow surrounded by bright rings. It showed both Jupiter and Saturn as multilayered globes, but unlike Jupiter, all the discoveries made on Saturn were new.

“We’re involved in a very exciting adventure. Everything’s new on Saturn,” the scientists stated.

The space probe had been cruising toward Saturn ever since it had swept by Jupiter 20 months earlier, and was startling scientists with one discovery after another. They assumed that Voyager would confirm the existence of other moons around the giant planet, which is second only to Jupiter in size.

Cathy, who had always been fascinated by the mystery of Saturn and its rings, couldn’t wait to see what photographs of the rings would reveal. Maybe it was all empty air, like the clouds one flew over in transatlantic flights, but Cathy, who would never think of calling a radio talk show, disagreed with the last caller. Whatever the rings might contain, whatever the cost, they were certainly worth exploring. It seemed like a logical progression that one day people would be traveling through space and inhabiting new

planets, just as the first settlers and then waves of immigrants had followed the navigators across the oceans. Where would she, Sean, the radio announcer, and the lady with the thick accent be if Christopher Columbus had been deterred by costs from following his hunch about the roundness of the earth?

Sean was already in the kitchen, having his milk and cereal, and reading the morning paper as seriously as usual. He was never at his best in the morning, but then, he had to wake up to the uncertainty of not knowing what the day had in store for him.

“You’re up bright and early this morning. Does your guest need a wake-up call?” he asked Cathy as she walked into the kitchen.

“I’ll give her another thirty minutes, until I’ve showered,” Cathy replied. She looked into the fridge, wondering what Carmy would want to eat for breakfast, and took out a loaf of sliced bread.

“Why did you sleep in the living room?” Sean asked. Cathy had again fallen asleep on the living room couch.

“I wanted to write, and didn’t want to keep you awake,” Cathy answered, and was glad that Sean didn’t ask what she was writing.

On Thanksgiving morning, she had organized her stories and notes into piles according to the periods they covered. Then, in the evening, after the family had gone home and the kitchen was all cleaned up, she had stayed up late trying to write a beginning paragraph. But nothing pleased her. She re-read the introduction of *I Promessi Sposi* as an inspiration and it discouraged her even more. That book too had numerous individual stories, but Lucia and Renzo’s love story tied them all into one. What had seemed like such a promising writing project in the morning felt like a delusional pipe

dream late at night, and all she had managed to do was juggle papers from one pile to another.

“Don’t wait for me for dinner. I need to go to the library after school. I’ll grab something out,” Sean said, without looking up from his reading.

“I kind of hoped you’d have dinner with us tonight,” Cathy said, standing by the table.

“Us? I thought that this set-up with Carmy wouldn’t necessitate changes to our normal routine,” Sean said.

“It’s not only for that. I had hoped that, before dinner, we’d go order that bedroom suite we saw at the Danish House.” She had decided that, since she and Sean were to marry, she wanted her own, new bedroom set.

“Oh, that can wait. I really need to go to the library and focus on my paper,” he said. He put down the newspaper and walked to the bathroom. But before closing the door, he stopped and added: “But what’s there to look at? We saw the furniture already. Order it if you want, but you know I don’t have that kind of dough. You’ll have to pay for it with your own money.”

“Yes, of course,” she answered.

She put two slices of bread into the toaster and stood by the counter waiting for the toast to spring up. She had enough money to buy the furniture outright, but for how long would they still be thinking in terms of “yours” and “mine” instead of “ours”?

There was only one bathroom in the apartment, so she had to wait for Sean to come out. He was always up before Cathy since, as an itinerant substitute teacher, he

always had to be ready to go to any school belonging to the school board, some of which were quite a distance away.

Cathy knocked on Carmy's door. "Wake up Carmy. It's Tuesday morning." She heard Carmy mumble, "OK," but then didn't hear any more movement.

"We can't be late, Carmy. I'll give you another fifteen minutes, until I take a shower."

As Sean came out of the bathroom, Cathy asked him, "Are you still going to go on with your courses? How about your thesis?" He had worked hard on his proposal, and she hoped he'd complete it.

"Well, I only have the paper on Jung to finish for this session," he answered. "But if a by-election is called before the beginning of the next session, I'll have to put everything on hold again."

"You should try to finish the thesis," she said. "Political life is very unpredictable, you know. Anything can happen. There's no guarantee of a future in it." She didn't want to discourage him, only to be realistic about the prospects.

"Well Jean-Pierre has made a future out of it, and it hasn't done Di Principe any harm either," Sean said. "Of course. They're career politicians. I don't know if I can be like them." He went into the bedroom to get dressed and locked the door.

Cathy knocked on Carmy's door again and then stepped into the shower. She closed her eyes and let the water release the tension that was beginning to take hold of her again since she had woken up. "Jung as in Yin and Yang," she said to herself and thought of a drawing: a black and white circle separated by a wavy line, with a black spot within the white section, and a white one within the black. The two mirrored shapes resembled

intertwined lovers lying on a bed. Would Sean start reaching out for her again once they had a new bed, instead of both of them curling on their sides, facing away from one another, their backs merely touching? He had been closed in his own world for quite a while. In their first years together, he spoke freely about his thoughts and dreams, sometimes too much so, Cathy had thought, as he had expressed aloud whatever crossed his mind. She hoped that the new job, and a new bedroom set would jumpstart their life together.

She finished shampooing her hair and lingered, eyes closed, letting the warm water run down her face. She would have to ask her mother what to do with the old set. It wouldn't fit into Teresa's small bedroom, but could her mother bear dumping it after all the years of loving care? Teresa had discouraged Cathy from using the bed, had considered it a carrier of bad luck— maybe because it had seen death.

Cathy's father had struggled on it, gasping for air, in the middle of the night. The three of them, Teresa, Cathy and Luigi, shook him by the shoulders, tried to bring him back into consciousness. The bedroom was heavy with the sound of his laborious breathing. When the ambulance attendants arrived with an oxygen mask, the first thing they did was open the window. Then, they sent everyone out of the room and closed the door. Her mother, moaning in fear, rocked herself on the edge of a kitchen chair, her arms crossed over the chest, as she listened to the groaning and the pumping of the attendants in the closed room.

"I wasn't born lucky," Teresa would say later, when talking about her life.

The old bedroom set had had its day, Cathy thought. And if she had listened to her mother, she would have bought a new one from the beginning. But everything would fall

into place in its own time, she believed. And the right time was now that she and Sean were getting married for real.

When Cathy came out of the bathroom, wrapped in a terrycloth robe, and wearing a towel around her head turban-style, she found Carmy in the kitchen, already dressed in her black pants and a brown turtle-neck sweater. Sean was in the living room collecting his books.

“What do you usually eat for breakfast?” Cathy asked.

“Toast and Nutella.”

“I have toast, but no Nutella. I’ll buy some on our way back home.”

“That’s OK,” Carmy said.

“Do you want some cheese instead?” Cathy asked.

“Cheese for breakfast?” Carmy asked, making a face.

“I eat cheese for breakfast all the time,” Cathy said, as Sean came into the kitchen, ready to leave.

“I have to go. Goodbye ladies,” he said, and left with his backpack heavy with books to read on the bus.

“I didn’t know he lived here,” Carmy said.

“I had mentioned it to your uncle. He didn’t tell you?”

“He never talks to me. Probably thinks I’m retarded or something.”

“What about your grandmother? She didn’t say anything?”

“No. I don’t think she knows or she’d have said something. She doesn’t believe in this type of thing.”

“Well, Sean and I will be getting married soon, very soon. This is only a temporary setup since his lease was up and there was no point in signing a new one for a couple of months.”

“Still, that wouldn’t be a good reason for my grandmother.”

“I know. You might be warm in that,” Cathy said, pointing to the turtleneck. She put a cereal box and milk on the table.

“I’ll be fine,” Carmy said.

“I have to dry my hair this morning, so you’ll have to be patient and wait for me. Make yourself some toast or have cereal and milk. Pretend you’re at home. You can use the bathroom now if you need to. I’ll dry my hair in the bedroom.”

She had a blow dryer and make-up products set up on her dresser. From the open door, she could watch Carmy’s movements around the kitchen as the girl poured herself some milk and cereal, then sat and waited quietly while Cathy dried her hair, got dressed, and applied her make-up. Carmy’s curly hair looked as if she hadn’t combed it since the night before. It had the wiry texture that lent itself to being shaped into an afro if layered properly, but the back was too long and flat in proportion to the crown hair, which looked like a bird’s nest on top of her head.

“So this is what you do every morning?” Carmy asked as they walked out of the apartment.

“It’s what most people do in the morning, shower and get ready for work.”

“I take a bath at night,” Carmy said. “Or I would never be ready for school on time.”

“Well, we’ll have to make sure we get to school on time from now on. Neither of us can afford to be late.”

They both sat quietly in the car for a long stretch, until Carmy said, “Students talk about you at school. They wondered about you and Sean, if you two were engaged or what... And how long it takes you to get ready in the morning. Now I know....a long time, a very long time.”

“It wasn’t that long. I had to dry my hair, but I don’t blow-dry my hair every morning... only twice a week.”

“It always looks so perfect,” Carmy said. “Every hair in place.”

“It’s because I know what to do. You’ll learn too if you stay in the class.”

“I don’t know I want to,” Carmy said. “I mean... it’s a lot of frigging work.”

“Well, everything takes effort... We did well this morning. We’re early for a change. It’s normal for students to gossip about their teachers. I remember doing the same thing when I was in school.”

“Well, my grandmother thinks you’re a saint,” Carmy said.

“A saint?” Cathy laughed.

“Caterina this, Caterina that; that’s all I’ve heard from her since I’ve been in your class. According to her, you’re the most perfect being that walks the earth. But I guess she didn’t know you were shackled up with your boyfriend.”

“She knew me as a little girl, and...well, we girls were all expected to be saints in Mulirena,” Cathy said.

“Phew! Am I ever happy I was born here,” Carmy said.

Cathy stopped in front of the school garage and let Carmy off.

“It’s best for you to enter the school through the students’ entrance,” Cathy told her.

“That’s good. I have to go to my locker anyway,” Carmy said.

“But don’t be late for class,” Cathy insisted.

“Don’t worry, Miss.

Cathy followed another teacher’s car into the parking garage, and thought that, in spite of all the dire predictions, Carmy would prove everyone wrong.

Sundays on Tenth Avenue

By Cathy Anastasia

It was always on Sundays that I felt the most restless. Anticipation kept me edgy for the better part of the afternoons. When the day ended much like any other, disappointment set in, week after week, with the realization that my enthusiasm and my Sunday clothes had been for nothing.

I was barely thirteen; I had been shifted and dislodged from another place; and, the queasiness that had overtaken my whole family while crossing the Atlantic had become for me a constant companion. I felt as if we had disembarked but never arrived. We had landed on a shaky, movable dock—a no-man's-land—safe from storms but neither here nor there. I wanted badly to go to shore, go somewhere less confining, run free and do things. But I was stuck in transit, and the gap between where I was and where I wanted to be was as wide as the ocean.

We had been living on Tenth Avenue for four years, and a predictable Sunday routine had been established, and I was helpless in changing it. With my mother, I would walk to the French church, Sainte-Bernadette, on Seventeenth Avenue, to fulfill our Sunday obligations, while my father and brother stayed home. They only came to church on special occasions when we all walked to the Italian parish on Papineau Street. The Mass at Sainte-Bernadette was a formality—in and out in under forty-five minutes.

“It still counts,” my mother would say, even though she had not understood one word of the sermon.

The ragù and tomato sauce for the pasta simmered slowly all morning while we were at Mass. My father kept it stirred, tasting it frequently, dunking chunks of bread into it and seasoning it with the spices and herbs—nutmeg, cloves, rosemary—that he had learned to use when working in Milano. After lunch, my father, and brother might go practice their scales on the trumpet. Later, my brother, who was as fidgety as I was, was allowed to go off with his friends. I would be left alone with my mother to tidy up and to just mope around, sulking at having nothing interesting to do. At the very most, my aunts and uncles might drop by for a visit. My cousins, all males, were not much company since they were only interested in hockey and wrestling.

I often wondered why we had left Italy at all. Unlike Jewish immigrants or Hungarian refugees, we had not escaped political or religious persecution or even dire poverty. But having been sponsored by relatives to come across had felt like winning a prize, a reward. It was as if a millionaire uncle or aunt had opened up their mansion to us with a bountiful buffet all set out for us to pick and choose from. How could our parents have refused their invitation? We left in hordes, looking for better feeding grounds. When I watched the graceful formations of geese flying south every fall, only to come back home in the spring, I thought how much rougher and less elegant our own transatlantic passage had been. Ill-informed, and even inadequately dressed, we had set out, in the deep of winter, in third-rate cabins in the bowels of a large ship, and retched all the way from the Rock of Gibraltar to Halifax.

I spent most of our first winter in Montreal looking out of our basement windows at the snow-covered Tenth Avenue. After the spring thaw, I ventured out on my own and

made friends with the French kids who lived in our building. I emerged chubby and round like an inflated soccer ball, and felt clumsy and shy.

Tenth Avenue was at its best in the spring when, coming out of its winter hibernation, it blossomed with crocuses, tulips and daffodils. The scent of lilacs permeated the length of the street. From our building to the other end of the block, on Jean-Talon Street, stood rows of similar small, white, clapboard homes that, we later heard, were built by the Canadian government for war veterans. They seemed reproduced from a child's simple crayon picture: triangle roof, square box body and windows, white picket fences, trellised arbors on the side for climbing clematis. Once the spring bulbs had run their brief course, the homeowners, mostly English speaking, seemed to spend most of their free time cutting lawns, trimming hedges, and grooming and decorating their little rock gardens with petunias, begonias, wooden figurines and pink flamingoes.

By the beginning of our first summer, the owner of the building, a tall, broad Polish man who liked our family—or so he said—offered us the third-floor apartment, which had a balcony. Sometimes in the evenings, I would sit on the balcony with my parents, who watched the homeowners fuss around their little playhouses. My mother admired how meticulously the men worked, while my father thought they were fools.

“*Il Polacco*—the Polish man—now he is smart,” my father kept saying about the landlord. “He has only lived here maybe less than twenty years, and he owns an apartment building. These people have lived here all their lives, have gone to war and all they have is a wooden box. They can play all they want with these little flowers but it's still a box. Their flowers don't even smell good.”

I wanted to speak up for the lilacs, but with Father there was no point, since I could already guess his response. “The lilacs, you smell them once and they are finished, not like the oleanders that grow everywhere and last all summer long.” He was always comparing. Whether he spoke about the weather, houses, food, flowers, Father was always comparing Montreal to Milano.

My father, whom relatives and friends now called Joe for short, had become portly and solidly built. Working as a bricklayer, he had the ruddy complexion that comes from exposure to the sun in the summer, and frost and wind in the winter. He had a large forehead with a receding hairline, prominent red cheeks, and a dimple on his chin. He looked like a jolly ice-cream vendor, who would give second scoops for free. In Mulirena he had been known as a good-natured friend, who could never refuse anyone a favor. When he returned from Milano, he always came back with small toys and candies for the children, and I still remembered the promise he had made me before he left Mulirena: “You’ll go to school, become a teacher or a doctor or whatever you want to be.”

In the summer, he played with the Dieni musical band, which played at all the religious feasts on Dante Street, and when we went to a family gathering, he brought his trumpet with him just in case someone asked him to play it.

“Joe, give us a *Carnival of Venice*,” someone would inevitably ask.

With his large, sweaty forehead and his puffy, red cheeks, he looked like a white Louis Armstrong, blowing his horn to the applause of his friends. Now he practiced his scales more out of habit than necessity. The band he had formed with my uncle Tony’s younger brother, Francesco, had played only a few Italian weddings. They had played the Latin American tunes that were popular then. They wore silk shirts with puffy sleeves

and took turns playing the *maracas*. When practicing in our living room, my father always seemed self-conscious and unenthusiastic about shaking those brightly painted wooden balls to the rhythm of *Tico-Tico* and *Besame Mucho*. I remember an argument he had with Francesco because he refused to get up from his seat and move in unison with the others at a particular point of the tune. “We look ridiculous, all jumping up at the same time, like grasshoppers,” was my father’s complaint.

But after about two years, the demand for their type of music had dwindled, and they stopped practicing as a group.

“We should have played more rock-and-roll,” Francesco complained.

After buying a lot from Pasquale, Father often met with him to discuss other job opportunities. Pasquale was a general contractor, and had spoken of needing partners if the development project in Laval ever went through. Mother, though, had warned father not to set up his hopes too high.

“He talks too big,” she said. Also she wasn’t too impressed with the other people connected with the project. “How did they get rich so fast?” she asked.

But Father said there was no harm in trying. Pasquale and Lucia often paid us a visit on Sundays. She worked in the same factory as Mother and aunt Tina for awhile, but she quit after the first year.

“I don’t like the men who work there. She can stay home,” Pasquale had told my Father.

But Mother said it was stupid of him to be so jealous since the only men there were the boss, a Syrian man who minded his own business, and some young men working in packing.

But Father wanted to keep up his friendship with Pasquale because of his work. He showed him the papers that proved he had studied masonry in Milano and even brought out the thick books from which he had studied. But whenever he asked Pasquale about the Laval project, he was told that they had to wait until all the lots were sold.

When we first came over, Father still surprised me with little presents when I least expected them. Once he bought me a watch from a traveling salesman at work. Another time, on the first warm day after the first long winter, he came home with a Bat-a-Ball.

But after the first year, he seemed to become sullen and easily upset, especially when he had no work. Then he stayed home, ashamed to be seen by his friends. The more time passed, the more he seemed to lose the sense of humor he was known for, and even when he tried to be funny, he sounded angry to me. So I learned not to argue with him and I spoke to him less and less. My mother was my go-between when I needed to ask him something important.

“And the worst part is,” he kept on about our neighbors. “They think they live in a palace. These people haven’t seen *real* palaces!”

My mother’s spin on palaces was that she never wanted to live in one. “People who live in palaces have bigger problems than us. I’d rather be healthy and happy in a small home like that.”

We didn’t associate much with our neighbors, except for an Italian family who lived on the second floor, and then later, with two other families who arrived the summer after us and who lived on the other side of Belanger Street, above a movie theater. To me, the English people who lived in the little houses were like the American families I saw on

TV: distant from us and not totally real. I imagined their daughters going to proms and school dances wearing crinoline dresses, and flower corsages on their wrists, which their father adjusted for them, with benign smiles, and a “Have a good time, Betty,” as Betty and her date went out for the evening.

Elvis, and all the popular stars of the day stared at me for days on end, from across the street. One side of our apartment building faced the Montrose Theater on Belanger Street, and from my kitchen window, I could almost read the script of the life-sized movie posters advertising the movies that played there. Every Sunday afternoon, I would watch the hordes of teenagers lining up in front of the theater to see *GI Blues* or *Blue Hawaii*. I used to beg my mother to let me go to the movies, but she never once gave in. Who would bring me? Certainly not my parents, or my brother, who had no interest in it either. So every weekend, I gawked with envy at the kids waiting in line, laughing and joking in groups. It’s not as if I was fanatical about Elvis, like Heather, my friend at school, who wore an Elvis button on her coat and carried a small picture of him in her mittens. When we arrived in Canada, the Elvis craze was reaching its peak, and at the age of nine, I was still sympathetic to my father’s opinions. He felt, in no uncertain terms, that Elvis and his success stood for everything stupid and incomprehensible about this side of the world, which was disappointing him more and more. But I still wanted to see what the excitement was all about.

I read all about the current hot stars, in *True Confessions* and *Photoplay*, on my weekly excursions to the A&P store with my mother, though I never had to buy those magazines. We didn’t go to the Italian store on Belair Street as often. The Sicilian family who owned it had sold it to devote all of their time to their cheese-making business, and

my father didn't like the new owners. My mother had taken over the task of grocery shopping and she liked going to the A&P on Belanger Street. I would pick up a magazine at the checkout counter as I got to the store, read it cover to cover as I slowly followed her around the aisles with the cart, and at the end of the shopping trip, I'd slip the magazine back on its shelf. As long as I lived on Tenth Avenue, I never set foot inside the Montrose Theater, but the lives of the stars both on and off the screen, who stared at me from across the street, were as accessible to me as the next issue of *Photoplay*. I also kept up with the Italian counterparts to *Photoplay*: the *Fotoromanzi* and *Sorrisi e Canzoni*, in which I followed the antics of the European jetsetters on the French Riviera, in Monaco and San Remo. At school, not all my Italian friends shared this same interest in things Italian, only the older ones who had come over in their teens and were still behind by two or three years, and would probably not make it to high school. They argued constantly that Elvis and company could not hold a candle to Claudio Villa and Luciano Taioli. Since I liked to keep a foot in both camps, I wasn't always sure which side had the most merit. Without a doubt, the Italians had it on the voice, but Elvis and Pat Boone were much better looking than all of them.

During the first summer, I spent my Sundays playing skipping rope, hopscotch and Bat-a-Ball with the French kids in our building. Sometimes we fought, but I learned to speak French from them. When September came, my father walked us to Saint Brendans' School on 14th Avenue. He insisted that we go to English school; otherwise we would never learn that language. French, he told us, we could learn on the streets of east-end Montreal. In fact, when we registered for school, we already spoke some French but no English. So I was put back two grades into grade three, and my brother, who should

have been in high school, was put in grade four. We teased him for looking as old as the teacher. Some of the other Italian boys were even older than my brother. They smoked and shaved. Mr. Foster, their fourth-grade teacher, who was fresh out of high school and one year of teacher's college, had probably less experience about those things than they did.

"Maybe you can teach *him* a thing or two," my father joked with the boys.

As for me, school was no struggle. In Italy, I had memorized poetry and then on the boat I had read *I Promessi Sposi*. My new English reader had lots of pictures with few words in large print: "ANN RAN, DAVID RAN, ANN AND DAVID RAN." I ran as fast as I could to catch up to them, while my brother was too impatient to even try. He said he didn't like school at all. But he asked Father to give him trumpet lessons and I had to listen to both of them practice together every night. I skipped fourth grade and was promised that once in high school, I would skip one more grade, and graduate with my age group. The summer before high school I felt that my skipping rope days were over, and I got a summer job at the factory where my mother worked so I could have some money for books and magazines.

Pasquale never came through with his business deal. Father had put aside a sum of money and he had even asked my uncle for a loan, but after talking about a partnership for almost two years, Pasquale told Father that his hands were tied. The Laval project never materialized since they had never been able to have the zoning bylaw changed from agricultural to residential. His other partner had other projects in mind, but they all required large investments.

"What do we do with the five lots then?" uncle Tony asked.

“We can grow lots of tomatoes in the summer,” Father joked.

“Bunch of ignorants,” he said later of Pasquale and his friends. “In Italy they only knew how to feed pigs. Here they’ve all become mastri and big businessmen.”

“Leave them alone,” Mother said. “Let them keep their big houses and cars.”

We saw less and less of Pasquale and Lucia.

At school I had made a best friend, Antoinette, who lived in Saint-Michel, which was a bus ride away. I was not allowed to travel there by myself, so most Sundays, I spent listening to the endless trumpet exercises, watching my mother perform her household chores in her church clothes, and reading or talking on the telephone with Antoinette. We talked mostly about the films playing at the Montrose Theater and about high school, which was starting in the fall.

I corresponded with my girlfriends from Mulirena and with my pen pal from Piemonte for the first year or so, but then the writing dwindled until it stopped completely. I started writing stories about my life there, afraid that if I didn’t put things on paper, I’d forget what it was like to have lived in such a different place from Montreal. I already couldn’t remember some people’s names. But I often dreamed of Mulirena. And when I wrote about it, I often wondered whether things had really happened as I remembered them, or whether I was confusing memories and dreams.

Tenth Avenue was real, though.

Nothing much ever happened there on Sundays, but I still slept in hair rollers every Saturday night and wore my best clothes to church—in eager expectation. Wishes and dreams were tender crocuses that dared, bravely, to spurt out of the ground in spite of

the frost and trampling feet. While I lived there, the multi-colored neon lights of the semi-circular marquee of the Montrose Theater blinked on and on with endless possibility.

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: April 7, 2005, 11:13 AM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: submission

Attachment: the hair straightening lesson.doc

Franco,

Do I detect a critical tone in your last question? Are you accusing me, of all people, of intellectual snobbism? I only meant to point out that the direction her personal stories are taking worries me, in that I'm afraid of reinforcing our own stereotypes—the bricklayer Italian father, the submissive wife, etc...I would not want to be playing into the hands of mainstream publishers, who are conditioned to expect the same thing from so called “ethnic” writers. That's all.

A.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: April 7, 2005, 3:05 PM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Re: submission

A,

You, Antonio, suffer from the same phobia as many of our writers, who carry their ethnicity like rotting albatrosses around their necks. A week ago, I attended a literary event on the future of ethnic writing in Canada, and it was pitiful to see the extent to which Italian-Canadian writers will go, to distance themselves from their ethnic smell. Don't want to be pigeon-holed, they said. And many find it as derogatory a term as the N-word in the US.

Despite the fact that the evening was organized by the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers, and that the four guests, all published writers, were all Italo-Canadians, someone from the audience asked, "Is there an Italian-Canadian literature in this country?"

I wanted to respond, "*Stronzo*, what do you think I've been doing the last twenty-five years?"

When will we face the fact that ethnicity in this country is irreversible? It is here to stay and bound to displace the mainstream position in culture. Yet we still look down on ethnic literature as second-rate. We are no longer a minority—ethnic groups make up more than half the population of this country—so let's stop acting like we are. Immigration and ethnicity should not be a quaint memory from our past but an ongoing process.

Are we not local, regional beings before claiming fellowship to the universal?

The question should be how do we uphold our distinct colors and, yes, even our stinks, while contributing to the great universal fabric, without being bleached out by the whitening power of assimilation?

F.

The Hair Straightening Lesson

After Friday's commotion, the corridors at WLHS seemed unusually quiet to Cathy. She moseyed to the office to get the daily bulletin, and on her way down, stopped at the cafeteria for coffee. This was the earliest she had gotten to school in a long time. She resisted joining the group of teachers discussing the previous day's events, since she had nothing prepared for her morning class and needed to get organized. Unlike the academic teachers, who had a different class every forty-five minutes, she had the same small group of students for five periods a day. Some days, the periods were broken up, but today they were consecutive, and that was a long time to keep the students interested or even occupied. At the office, Cathy tried to line up another volunteer for a permanent demonstration, but Susan, the school secretary, couldn't make it. Since Friday afternoon, the office staff had been inundated with extra work, Susan said. And Mrs. Champagne had asked that major changes be made to the teachers' supervision schedules before the end of the day.

"You'll hear all about it at the staff meeting," Susan said. Then she invited Cathy to a Halloween party at a country place she had rented for the winter.

“I’d love to go,” Cathy replied. “But I have a fundraising event—a ball—to go to with my fiancée.”

“Fiancée? I didn’t know you and Sean were engaged.”

“We’re not officially engaged, but we’re planning on getting married soon. But don’t say anything yet.” As Cathy walked down to class, she wished she hadn’t announced her marriage plans to Susan before telling her closest friends first.

Cathy liked giving theoretical lessons early in the morning, when the students were more attentive—or at least sleepier and quieter—and she kept the practical sessions for the last periods. But with no lesson plan, she would have to reverse the order today, and have them work on the mannequins while she looked over some notes about hair relaxing, the next topic on the program, and the logical follow-up to permanent waving.

In class, Cathy pored over the thick program of study provided by the Ministère de l’Éducation, but wasn’t inspired by it. Since the government had taken over the teaching of vocational subjects in public schools, it kept revising the program to keep up with current educational trends. The newest revision presented the teaching of the most basic skills in terms of training goals, competencies, first- and second-level operational objectives, modules, and teaching blocks—all of it charted on a grid of learning focuses with a timeframe for each module. If Cathy followed these guidelines, the second level operational objective under Hair Relaxing would be “to associate the dehydrating effect of the straightening product on the hair with the chemical phenomenon of oxidation and the physical phenomenon of heat.”

Given that reference material relating specifically to the study of hair was next-to-impossible to find, making these lessons relevant could be a real challenge. Cathy

browsed through her stash of photocopied magazine articles, but found nothing even remotely pertaining to the day's topic. She gave up on the lesson plan. Students didn't look forward to theory lessons, and were generally not very curious about the whys and hows of hair behavior. "Why are we studying chemistry?" they'd ask. "All we want to do is style hair."

Cathy read the daily bulletin, which announced a meeting for students at 10:30, followed by one for the staff at the end of the day. It also informed teachers that they could expect a visit from Mr. Burns, who would be giving a school tour to two new support staff members. Cathy figured that the meetings and the visit would take care of at least two periods. Some teachers complained about too many class disruptions, but at times like these, Cathy prayed for them. She would only have the students for about half an hour between the teachers' meeting and lunch, but she needed to find something to do until 10:30.

After the first bell rang, she opened her classroom door. She saw Mrs. Champagne and Nick in the corridor. The principal was taking notes as she walked. She was looking at the walls and pulling off posters advertising various student activities, which she then handed to Nick. As they approached her classroom, Cathy nodded and said, "Good morning."

They both stopped and replied. "Good morning." Nick had his usual big smile, and Mrs. Champagne, a more restrained, polite grimace. Pointing to the handwritten poster on the door, she said, "The poster looks a little shabby. We're trying to clean up this area."

“I’ll pull it off,” Cathy said. “I had planned on having the students make a new one.” She yanked off the poster, which was faded and curled at the edges. It announced, “Free Hairdressing Services by the Amazing Beginners—under Teacher’s Supervision.” This year’s class had objected to “Amazing Beginners.”

As students drifted toward their classrooms, the hallway was as animated as usual. Linda and Gina sauntered into the hairdressing class, along with Carmy.

“Good morning Carmy. Welcome back,” Mrs. Champagne said.

Carmy seemed taken aback by the attention. “Good morning, Miss,” she mumbled.

“Look at the deterioration of this building,” Mrs. Champagne said to Nick, pointing to the hallway with its bare cement-block walls covered with student graffiti.

“Mrs. Champagne, why don’t you let us paint the walls a bright color,” Linda asked. “We can do it ourselves.”

“That’s something we can consider,” Mrs. Champagne said.

Nick quickly answered, “We’ve discussed this before, many, many times. We’d have to paint every few months because you kids won’t learn to respect property.”

The principal didn’t seem interested in a discussion. “Well, I’ll make my recommendations to the board about the clean-up. See you all at the meeting.” She walked away with Nick following her.

As other students walked into class, they all gave Carmy a high five, except Franca and Angie, who sat and waited quietly. After reading the bulletin to the class, Cathy told the students to continue the same exercise as Friday. And for Angie and Franca, who were ahead of the rest, she had a little project—a new poster to draw—as

soon as she found markers and some bristol board. She rummaged inside a supply cabinet for a couple of minutes, then sent Angie to the office with a note for the secretary, to get what they needed.

She watched the others get their hairdressing implements and mannequins ready, as she walked around each student's work station.

"Miss, I permed my mother's hair last night. It came out real good," Franca said.

"That's great Franca. You should all try to practice at home as much as possible."

"But when are we going to practice on real people in class?" Gina asked, whining. "I'm getting tired of these dummies."

"Stop talking about Franca like that," Carmy said. Everyone laughed—except Franca.

"Carmy -" Cathy began, but she was interrupted by Franca: "I wouldn't talk, if I were you."

"I can talk all I want," Carmy retorted.

"That's enough from you, Carmy," Cathy said. "I'll speak to you after class." She added, "Look, I've changed my mind about the exercises. Carmy, how about we straighten your hair?" Cathy had been wishing she could take an afro comb to Carmy's hair since before they left the apartment.

Carmy raised both hands to her head. "No, I'm scared."

"C'mon Carmy," Linda said. "What are you scared of? Go for it."

"Yeah, go for it!" everyone except Franca repeated.

"What if I don't like it?" Carmy asked.

"It can't look worse than it does now," Fotini said.

“Well, thanks a lot,” said Carmy. “But who’s going to do it?”

“Franca is going to do it,” Gina said. “She’s the real expert around here. Pretty soon, she’ll be teaching all of us.”

“No fucking way,” Carmy said, with her two hands on her head, protecting her mass of unruly hair.

“Would you stop it, Carmy?” Cathy said. “I’ll do it as a demonstration. Put your mannequins away. And Carmy, I’ll talk to you after class about your language.”

“Oh, shit, I’m in real trouble now!” Carmy said.

“Language...again...please!” Cathy said, gathering products for the demonstration.

“I only said 'Shit!'.”

“OK, OK, Carmy! Enough already!” Cathy said. She turned to Fotini and asked her to wash Carmy’s hair.

“Oh, no! She’ll pull my hair off!” Carmy whined.

“Don’t worry. You’re in good hands,” Fotini replied, and walked to the sink with Carmy.

Cathy tried keeping her tone good-natured, but she was puzzled and annoyed at the change in Carmy since that morning. She had sat so quietly and seemed so compliant at the apartment. Maybe if her appearance improved, she might feel more confident and less defensive, Cathy thought.

Angie returned with the bristol board and, seeing the students sitting around Cathy in a semicircle, asked, “What’s going on?”

“Fotini is straightening Carmy’s hair,” Franca said.

“You’re jealous, aren’t you, puke-face?” Carmy said, as she sat on the hydraulic chair in the center. She turned to Franca and stuck out her tongue.

“Stop bugging me, you retard,” Franca said, getting up and looking like she was about to punch Carmy.

“OK, girls! Let’s stop the nonsense and get back to business,” Cathy said loudly, separating the two. “I can’t believe you’re acting like first graders.” She waited for the two girls to sit back down in their chairs. “Straightening Carmy’s hair is not exactly what I’ll be doing. The right term to use is hair relaxing.”

“You should have given her some Valium to relax her nerves before bringing her to school,” Franca mumbled.

“I heard that... shit-face,” Carmy said, and tried to get up again. Cathy, who was standing behind her chair, pushed Carmy down by the shoulders.

Cathy took a deep breath. “OK girls. Enough is enough. Let’s get started.” And then to Angie, who was still standing there, holding the bristol board, “Thank you Angie. Put the material on my desk and sit down. I’ll do the demonstration and then you can work on the poster.”

When everyone had calmed down, Cathy drew diagrams of three thin tubes on the board: the first, sharply curved; the second, less so; and, the third, a straight line. The outbursts between Carmy and Franca were making Cathy feel nervous about the demonstration. She feared that some students might interpret this as a sign of favoritism toward Carmy, but the girl did have the right hair for the straightening procedure.

“These are hair follicles, as they look inside the dermis,” she said. “How curly or straight hair will grow out of the skin depends on its shape,” Cathy said. She pointed to

the tightly curved tube. “This is Carmy’s hair follicle.” She drew a tight zigzagged line next to it. “As the hair is pushed out of the curved tube, it takes its size and shape, and grows out frizzy. It’s genetic. We can’t change the shape of our hair follicles. In hair relaxing, all we can hope to achieve is to loosen the tightness of the waves as much as we can, and maybe get something like this.” She drew a wavy line next to the second diagram. “Of course, the more resistant the hair is, and the tighter the natural wave, the less curl relaxing we can achieve.”

Carmy had inherited Lucia’s curly hair. But, whereas her mother’s hair was soft and fine and fell gently on her shoulders, the girl’s hair was coarse and had a wiry feel—probably like her father’s.

“The curly hair gene is dominant over the straight one,” Cathy explained. “In other words, if one of your parents has curly hair and the other, straight hair, you’re likely to have curly hair.”

This statement usually triggered a flurry of questions and comments from the students, but everyone sat quietly. Cathy skipped all the chemical information about the product they would use, except to say that, while straightening was the reverse of curling, the same premise applied. “You need a product that will penetrate into the hair cortex and break the sulfur and hydrogen cross bonds...In other words, soften the hair to the point that it can then be reshaped or rearranged into something else. In the case of a permanent, straight hair takes the shape of the rod; in chemical relaxing, curly hair is forced into a straighter shape by combing it with a fine comb.”

Cathy showed the students the bottle of regular permanent lotion she would be using. “There are two products that will do the trick: ammonium thioglycolate, which is

used in permanent lotion; and, sodium hydroxide cream, which is formulated only for straightening and is more effective, but ...is much more damaging for the hair. So I'll use a regular perm solution." She didn't mention that she didn't have any of the other straightening product on hand.

"Hair straightening is one of the most aggressive hair treatments because the action of combing the hair with such an alkaline and caustic product also damages it and irritates the scalp. And, of course, the finer and more delicate the hair, the greater the risk of breakage."

She explained to the class that hair straightening had been most popular in the early sixties, when women ironed their hair and slept with giant rollers. Then, during the anti-fashion, back-to-nature, make-love-not-war movements of the last decade, the procedure lost favor, and women actually curled their hair to a frizz to achieve the wash-and-wear look. The beauty-care industry was quick to adjust its marketing strategy, and hair care products and procedures were described in gentler, less aggressive terms. Hair bleaching became pre-lightening, color stripping, color removal.

"Judging by the new tendencies in fashion, though, it won't be long before women will want to smoothen out the frizzies again—like Carmy here..."

"This was your idea," Carmy shot back.

"It will look good," Gina said.

Cathy continued. "Notice, though, that products for straightening are now called 'hair relaxers.'"

This was one of the hairdressing procedures she liked the least. It was messy and both types of product smelled like rotten eggs. She sectioned Carmy's hair into four parts and started to apply lotion on the nape of the neck.

"It's a simple procedure. You just apply the product and force-comb the hair. You must force it to straighten, whether it wants to or not. The product breaks the hair bonds; the hair becomes soft and limp and takes on a new shape. You comb and comb until you feel that it's the straightest it can be. Then you neutralize it like a perm."

Carmy's hair felt like steel wool. And to think that her mother's hair had been the envy of all the girls in Mulirena! Cathy remembered Lucia using a wet comb to part it into waves over her forehead before going out for the evening *passeggiate*.

Cathy had everyone take turns combing and smoothing the hair down. "Carmy's hair is in good condition to start off with, and it can stand the trauma. But remember to analyze the hair carefully before starting, just like for a permanent. There is a risk of dissolving the hair at the roots as it is being combed."

"Can you get sued for that?" Franca asked.

"For sure." Cathy replied. "Clients can sue a salon for malpractice."

After the combing, Cathy continued smoothing Carmy's hair with her hands, even though she knew it had reached its maximum straightness. She should have worn gloves, she thought, but it was too late to look for them. The lotion irritated her hands and made them sting. And she was setting a bad example for her students. She accompanied Carmy to the sink, rinsed her hair, and then applied the neutralizing lotion, which she combed

through the hair for five minutes. The hair was then rinsed again and was ready to be blow-dried.

“Even wet, it looks less bushy,” Gina said.

Carmy ran her hands over her hair. “It feels as if I have nothing left.”

“Maybe it’s not as straight as you’d like it,” Cathy said. “But it’s the best we can do without hurting your hair.”

Cathy was happy to have gotten through the lesson, unprepared as she had been, and she hoped that a new hairstyle would cheer Carmy up, and make her feel good about herself.

“Your hair needs to be re-shaped though,” Cathy said, lifting the wet hair with an afro comb. “You could certainly use a haircut.”

“No way!” Carmy yelled. “I don’t want to cut my hair. It’s taken me forever to grow it.”

“It actually looks longer now because it’s straighter,” Cathy replied. “But it’s out of shape. I should trim the ends... just a little.”

But Carmy jumped up from the chair, and pulled the cape from her shoulders. “I’ve had it for now. I don’t want anyone touching my hair anymore.”

“Let me blow-dry it,” Gina offered.

“No, it’ll dry by itself,” Carmy replied.

“But it won’t look good, after the teacher did all that work,” Linda pleaded.

But Carmy couldn’t be convinced to have her hair cut or styled. Cathy gave up trying, and asked the students to work on their own hair before the meeting, or to help Angie and Franca with the poster.

Without proper styling, Carmy's hair would look just as out of shape and as unruly as it had before—only less full. Cathy also realized that, because of her lack of preparation for the lesson, she had forgotten to warn Carmy that the worst part of this procedure was that it had to be repeated every couple of months. Her hair would keep on growing out of her scalp wiry and bushy, just as it had been programmed by the genes she had inherited from her parents. Some battles are constant and never fully won, Cathy thought.

Carmy didn't seem convinced about the results of the hair relaxing, and Cathy felt a twinge of guilt. Maybe helping Carmy find a way to accept her wiry hair and deal with it might prove more beneficial in the long run.

The Meeting

In the auditorium, Mrs. Champagne sat behind a table, on-stage, with Mike Burns and four unknown men. She made a few brief comment about the stink-bomb incident, saying that both the police and the school board were investigating. But then, she went on to state the real purpose of the meeting: to present the students with a new set of rules concerning dress codes, entry and exit, attendance and vandalism. She first introduced police officer Sergeant Provost and fire chief Michel Brunet. Then Mike Burns introduced the two young men next to him as Dave and Stefan, his two new aides. They would be helping him with student discipline. Dave was black, of medium height, with a shaved head, and looked as if he spent a lot of time in a gym developing his muscles. Stephan was taller, with blonde, longish hair and a droopy moustache. He also looked

like a body builder, and Cathy thought the two would make good bouncers in a nightclub or a good wrestling tag team.

Mrs. Champagne took back the microphone and told the students that the wearing of jeans, torn pants, and T-shirts with offensive slogans would no longer be tolerated. She, and each of the level supervisors, would be making rounds in the classrooms each morning for a week, and sending students back home to change if necessary. Dave and Stefan were also instructed to continually check attire of the students in the hallways. Regarding attendance, she reminded the students that parents would be contacted at their place of work if they were not home to receive a call when a student was absent. Late arrivals would be given detention, which was to be served on the same day, in complete silence, and in total immobility. No homework or napping would be permitted during the forty-five minute penalty. No smoking was ever allowed inside the building or in the doorways near the entrances, no matter how cold the outside temperature. All the graffiti inside and outside the school would be painted over by the cleaning staff, and from now on, anyone caught vandalizing school property would be billed for damages.

Cathy sat and listened with her students, and noticed Carmy frequently running her hands over her head. The girl had pulled her hair back into a ponytail, and without the mass of hair covering her forehead, her thick eyebrows looked darker and thicker than ever.

Mrs. Champagne gave the microphone to the Sergeant. “We are monitoring a very serious situation in this school,” he said in halting English. He went on to tell them that the authorities knew of a group of youths—not WLHS students, but outsiders—who pushed drugs and other illicit activities around the neighborhood. Students were warned

to stay away from any outsiders who tried to enter the school. He also advised them that if a student was seen hanging around suspicious characters, the school would be advising their parents. Mrs. C. then explained that Dave's and Stefan's main responsibility was to keep undesirables from entering the school. She explained the plan of action: all the side entrances to the school would be locked, except those that needed to be kept opened from the inside for fire safety purposes. These exits would be supervised by teachers during recess, lunch, and at dismissal, and one of the two aides would be checking them throughout the day. The other aide would be posted at the main student entrance at all times, and would refuse entry to anyone he did not recognize as a student. The students would need to carry their school ID cards at all times, especially until the two aides learned to recognize the students.

The fire chief was simply there to inform them that a fire drill would be conducted in the coming weeks, without any advance notice. He explained the evacuation procedures for each floor. He said that, during the fifth period of that day, a practice drill would be carried out, just to get students acquainted with their nearest emergency exits.

During the presentation, students grumbled and booed a number of times. Mrs. Champagne told them to voice their opinions only after she had her say. When they were finally given the chance, some students spoke up, and everyone applauded them. They complained that the teachers smoked in the hallways and cafeteria, while the students were not allowed to smoke in the building, and that the teachers were also often late. But their biggest complaint was the dress code. They could understand not being allowed to wear torn and dirty jeans, but what was wrong with wearing clean jeans? One girl got up

and screamed, “Why don’t you do something about the tramps who walk around in short skirts up to here?” She pointed to her crotch. “Are they better dressed than us?”

Then the lunch bell rang and Mrs. Champagne dismissed them, stating that she had taken note of all their concerns.

Outside the auditorium, Cathy rounded up her students, who begged her to let them out early since they would not be doing anything important in class, anyway. She insisted that they go back to class. But once they got there, she couldn’t keep them from talking about the meeting and complaining about the new rules.

“Miss, have you heard that there’s a ring that deals with white slavery?” Franca asked.

“No I haven’t,” Cathy said, amused.

“I think you’re exaggerating,” Gina said. “Where did you hear that?”

“The same people who are pushing drugs are also forcing girls to have all kinds of sex with older men,” Franca said.

“That’s not white slavery,” Linda said. “That’s pimping.”

“Well, whatever. But I’ve heard people talking about white slavery too,” Franca said.

Carmy was quiet. Now and then, she looked at herself in the mirror, touching her hair.

Franca suggested that they discuss the ideas that she and Angie had come up with for the new poster. They suggested that they replace the words “amazing beginners” with all of their names. Everyone agreed without discussing it much further, and the two girls went to work alone.

When the fire drill bell rang during the fifth period, Cathy was relieved to run out of the class with her students and to be finished for the day.

After the fire drill, Cathy ate a quick lunch in the cafeteria, and went back to class to prepare her lesson for the following day. She felt drained by a teaching day that hadn't been properly filled with worthwhile activity, the minutes dragging out like penance for her and the students. She forced herself to organize some of her old notes on hair straightening from the *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology*. She adapted them, more or less, to the guidelines of the new program. She still had an hour to kill before the teachers' meeting, so she went to the staff room to catch up on some of the gossip.

Nick was holding court with his usual group of friends. Steve, the key teacher, was also there. They had a copy of the new master supervision schedule and were going through it with a fine-tooth comb, checking that it didn't contravene the teachers' contracts.

"The only thing we can attack," Steve summed up, sounding disappointed, "is the supervision of the side entrances, on the grounds that it's a safety issue for teachers."

"A couple of those exits are pretty isolated. Who the hell do we call in case of a confrontation?" Ralph asked.

"They've covered their asses by scheduling two teachers at a time," Steve replied.

"So one can run for help while the other is being stabbed?" Nick asked.

They jokingly discussed how two teachers should decide who runs for help and who stays. In the case of female and male supervisors, does the male automatically stay to fight while the female runs for her life?

Cathy took a look at the schedule and watched Nick entertain Steve, who was clearly looking for ways of sabotaging the principal's every move, even though, in the morning, Nick had been following Mrs. Champagne around like a puppy.

The teachers' meeting was an anticlimax since everyone knew about Dave and Stefan, and about the new supervision schedule, which had been distributed as they entered the auditorium. Mrs. Champagne conducted the meeting and kept it short. She asked the teachers to look over the new schedule, which would come into effect the following day, and reminded them that the no-smoking rule applied to them as well as to the students.

When she left, Steve took over the meeting. "Count your supervision minutes, and make sure that the total doesn't go over the number of minutes that are in our contract. He asked if anyone had any questions.

Ralph stood up. "Have you considered the safety issue of having to supervise the side entrances? If these outsiders are as dangerous as the police officer indicated, are we not exposing ourselves to danger?"

'For sure, Ralph," Steve answered. "I'm glad someone brought it up. There's a safety issue here for sure. We're put in a position of possible confrontation with these undesirables. I'll bring it to the attention of the union if the rest of the staff decides. But for my intervention to carry more weight, you should all file a complaint right away. See me after the meeting if you want to do it."

On that note, the meeting was called to an end. Some filed out, others lined up in front to speak to Steve. Bruce caught Cathy's attention and waited for her outside the auditorium.

He said smiling. “Did you notice? They have us two guarding the southeast exit on Day Four, Period Five.”

She had noticed.

“Are you lodging a grievance?” he asked.

“I’m not complaining if you’re not,” she replied.

“Is that a come-on?” he asked, looking directly into her eyes.

She laughed, but couldn’t come back with a witty remark, and felt embarrassed so she changed the subject. “Mrs. C. will be setting up a meeting for us...about Carmy.”

“Good. I’m glad to see her back,” he answered. They walked together to the stairs in awkward silence. She didn’t tell him that Carmy was supposed to be waiting for her, at that very moment, to be reprimanded about her earlier behavior.

At the stairs, they went their separate ways. “See you on Day Four, Period Five,” she said. As Cathy walked toward her class she wondered whether Costa and George, from Miss Park Ex, who claimed to know everything that went on at WHHS, had already heard about the two security guards.

Cathy waited in her class for fifteen minutes but Carmy didn’t show up. They had never discussed whether Carmy would go home on her own after school, so she waited another fifteen minutes. She left but drove slowly around the area looking for signs of Carmy. She honked at Fotini and Angie, who were walking together, and when they ran to her car, she asked them if they had seen Carmy.

“I think she went with Linda and Gina,” they said.

“Do you know where they might have gone?” she asked.

‘They usually go to Charlie’s,’ they said.

‘Thanks, girls. See you tomorrow,’ Cathy said, trying not to look upset or preoccupied. She would have a talk with Carmy, not only about her class behavior but about her after-school outings as well.

Charlie’s was a good half-hour’s walk from school, so she might catch up with them if they had decided to walk. She couldn’t stop Linda and Gina from taking dancing lessons there after school, but she certainly would not allow Carmy to go there—of all places. Cathy wished Carmy gravitated toward girls like Franca and Angie instead of Linda and Gina. When Cathy had asked Linda who the owner of the joint was, Linda had replied, ‘I think it’s Jack. He’s the real owner. He comes in and out all the time, but we don’t deal with him. We see Charlie all the time.’

‘You mean Charlie Matteo?’ asked Cathy.

‘Yeah, Miss. Do you know him?’ asked Linda.

‘No, I know of him,’ said Cathy.

‘Well, who doesn’t?’ asked Gina.

Charlie Matteo had gone to Pius X school with her brother, and his name often appeared in the French tabloids, *Allô Police* and *Montreal Matin*. Years before, he had enjoyed a short stint of popularity as a singer in the local nightclubs, and had even appeared in a couple of French TV shows. But it was not only his status as a local *vedette* that had gotten him into the papers. Quite a number of boys from his old high school had also made news in these papers, usually in connection with Montreal underworld activities. These were boys from normal immigrant families like Cathy’s. Their parents held regular jobs and lived modestly, but along the way, the boys had made connections,

either through friends or older brothers, that had pushed them in a different direction than the mundane world of their parents. Even in high school, some of their friends seemed suspect, driving big cars without holding regular jobs.

“Stay away from them,” her mother would tell her brother when he mentioned some of their names. “I’d rather live hidden in a mountain and never see a car than have anything to do with these people.”

Charlie turned out to be one of those people. At school, he was one of the boys who—older than the rest of the class by a couple of years—had never quite fit into regular school life. These boys generally didn’t continue beyond high school, or they quit without graduating, and then found themselves too smart to work at little jobs like their parents, but not qualified enough to do anything else.

After high school, Cathy had often met these old acquaintances, either by chance on the street, or at some function. Many had married Italian girls she knew—girls who dressed expensively and wore thick gold jewelry and large diamond rings. They made small talk about their children and homes like everyone else. If their husbands’ names appeared in the papers or, as was sometimes the case, were arrested and jailed, it was never mentioned. Cathy had even attended a couple of funerals for men her age, who had been killed in circumstances that were not clearly explained by their families, though the papers generally attributed the killings to a settling of accounts. She attended these funerals to pay her respects to a grieving sister or wife, or a mother and father. There were a few families in the community who had a long history of underworld connections, like that of Jack Russo, who owned many of the clubs in the city, and no one felt really sorry when something happened to one of them. But some of the other families,

newcomers like her own family, were clueless and powerless victims of their sons having chosen the easy way out—what her mother referred to as *la mala vita*.

Charlie was connected to the Russo family. There was a distant connection, by marriage, between Carmy's uncle Alfonso and Jack Russo and the papers had picked up on it. Cathy didn't want to have to watch Carmy like a hawk, but she had to refuse Carmy permission to go to the Bar à Go-Go.

As Cathy drove along Park Avenue, she spotted the three girls walking toward the corner of Mont-Royal Street. Cathy stopped the car on the curb ahead of them, got out, and waited for them.

"Eh, Miss, are you coming with us to Charlie's?" Linda asked.

Carmy didn't say anything, but looked annoyed at seeing Cathy.

"I don't think so. Carmy you should come home with me. You were supposed to wait for me, remember?"

"I came by, but you weren't there," she said.

"She did, Miss. Honest. We waited with her," Linda said.

"Well, you didn't wait very long," Cathy replied. "We need to go home, Carmy."

"Miss, we're not far from the club," Linda said. "Let's go in for a few minutes. We'll make you meet Charlie. He's a lot of fun. He already knows we have a cool teacher."

"No, sorry girls. Carmy really needs to come home with me."

"You go ahead. I don't even feel like going anymore," Carmy said to her friends. She opened the car's back door, threw her books onto the back seat, got in, and shut the door.

Cathy drove away, and after a few minutes of silence, decided to reprimand Carmy in the car rather than bring up school-related problems at home. “You know, Carmy, I was very annoyed at you for hassling Franca today,” she said, looking in the rear-view mirror as she spoke, but she couldn’t see Carmy sitting on the right side of the back seat.

“Me hassling Franca? That stuck-up bitch!” Carmy answered.

“You can’t misbehave in class or at school, in any way. You remember Mrs. Champagne’s conditions.”

“You mean I can’t even say what I think?” Carmy asked.

“You can’t start an argument and pick on someone like Franca. And I can’t treat you any differently than the others.”

“I wished you had minded your business this morning and left my hair alone,” Carmy said.

“Why?” Cathy said. “Your hair will look good once I trim it.”

“No fucking way. You’re never going to touch it again.”

As she maneuvered the car back on Jean-Talon, and turned right toward home, Cathy was quiet. She was still hopeful that she’d have an opportunity to cut Carmy’s hair into shape.

“OK,” she said finally. “But there are school and class rules you can’t break and get away with because you live with me. Be reasonable. Students like Franca do what they’re asked to do. You shouldn’t make fun of her.”

“That Franca is going to get it one of these days.”

“See what I mean? You do anything foolish and Mrs. Champagne will send you back to the other school board.”

“They can’t send me back there. I got kicked out of there already.”

“No, they didn’t kick you out. They referred you to a special program at the hospital, which is where you’ll have to go if this doesn’t work out. They’ll keep you there until you’re sixteen, and then they’ll kick you out. Do you see the importance of following all the school rules?”

“Why only me? The place is a zoo, anyway.”

“Worry only about yourself, Carmy, not the others. I’m especially upset, though, at you taking off with Linda and Gina without telling me.”

“I’ve gone with them before, and my mother didn’t mind.”

“Did your mother know you were going to a strip club?”

“My mother didn’t know a strip club from beans. She was on another planet most of the time. Anyway, Charlie’s is not a strip club in the afternoon.”

“Well, I’m responsible for your every move, now,” Cathy said. “You need to check with me from now on. You can’t just take off anytime you want, especially not at a place like that.” Cathy found herself raising her voice.

“Don’t scream at me. You’re not my mother.”

“OK. We’ll discuss this at home.” Cathy lowered her voice as she neared their apartment.

“Fuck. You hard-headed Calabresi are all the same,” Carmy said.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
 Sent: April 8, 2005, 9:00 AM
 To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
 Subject: Re: none

Anton,

Did you see the *National Post* editorial this morning? I practically gagged on my muffin, reading it. “Not only did Adscam cost Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars, it set back public perceptions of Italian Canadians by a generation.”

Imagine! The shady actions of a couple of greedy politicians peddling, of all things, Canadian flags has sent over a million of us back to the “Dago, you got a knife?” days. Half a century of labor, industriousness, contributions made to this country—wiped out!

I wonder: do the French Canadians in the province feel that their personal reputation has been dragged into the sewer because of someone named Guite?

Antonio, I do appreciate political satire, but if I’m making more out of this editorial than I should, it is because I’m also trying to make a point to you and your writer.

In a previous email, you were troubled by stereotyping, the harmless kind, in my opinion, that can also be perceived as representation of one’s traditions. Yet the underworld current that runs through this story propagates a worse type of stereotyping. A public figure with an Italian name gets into trouble and, in no time at all, is portrayed as a Don Corleone. I know. Let’s blame it on Hollywood and the media! But we’re also complicit in the problem. Let me cite some figures from a paper on negative stereotyping in films. Out of 1220 films produced in the US, from the sound era to the present, 31 percent portray Italians in a positive light. The other 69 percent present Italians as “mob characters, boors, buffoons, bigots or bimbos.” And the worst part is that many of the producers of these films are of Italian origin. Did you know that David Chase of *The Sopranos* was born De Cesare? And Francis Ford Coppola didn’t do us any favors either. *The Godfather* saga, for all its artistic merit, has spawned an avalanche of cookie-cutter versions of the mythological Mafia Don, which has blurred fantasy and reality for a generation of our youths, by creating a “mobster mystique.”

The reality: According to 1999 FBI statistics, of 14.7 millions of Italian-Americans, only 1150 of those were criminals—that is .0078 percent of the total Italian-American population. Here in Canada, statistics showed that less than .02 percent of all Canadians of Italian heritage are criminals. In both countries, an overwhelming majority—99.9 percent—of Italians have always been, and continue to be, honest, law-abiding citizens.

Antonio, as a writer concerned with freedom of expression, I resisted joining the movement to boycott the viewing of *The Sopranos* a couple of years ago. However, I’m beginning to wonder whether we’ve been too complacent with the media’s tendency to routinely associate ethnicity with organized crime. And I strongly object to the propagation of this stereotyping in our literature—and particularly in this novel. If you continue in this vein, I may stop reading it altogether.

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: April 25, 2004, 1:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: boycott?

Attachment: chapter 3& 4.doc

Franco,

I don't read the *Post*. Why encourage it? It's only a tool for the right-wing movements sweeping the globe.

And the Liberals have had it coming for years. It serves them right! Of all the well-educated, intelligent, honest professionals from our community, who do they select to run for them? Who do they appoint as Minister of Public Works? The ex-accountant of a renowned drug trafficker. They've put the mice in charge of the cheese and now they complain about the holes. The Liberals have manipulated the cultural communities and bought off their votes for ages, while a few *compradors* have been raking it in.

I'm surprised at how seriously you have taken the lampooning of these characters. Some of it has been in bad taste, I agree. And it shows a lack of originality on the part of the cartoonists, but should the Mafia become a taboo subject for an Italian writer, together with Fascism? Could anyone have made up some of the details surrounding this farce without being accused of stereotyping? Are you serious about having second thoughts about boycotting *The Sopranos*? I've heard that the Sons Of Italy in the US have blackballed some comedian for making fun of his Sicilian mother. Let's lighten up and enjoy the show. I don't think we've heard the last of this scandal involving some of our finest community representatives.

Your indignation at the novel is totally misguided.

A.

Wednesday, October 15, 1980

Day Four, Period Five: Supervision

At WHHS, class schedules ran on a five-day rotating cycle. This meant that the timetable was sectioned into slots labeled Day One to Day Five, instead of Monday to Friday, with each day subdivided into eight periods. When school was closed for a holiday or a snow day, that day's schedule moved to the following day. This way, no classes were ever cancelled, only postponed. The system created quite a bit of confusion for first-year students and for parents who did not always see the logic of Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays not necessarily coinciding with Days One, Two, and Three.

Period Five on Day Four fell on Wednesday, and Bruce and Cathy met in the southeast staircase for supervision. Their task was to keep the doors closed to outsiders, and make sure that students didn't let anyone in during the lunch break. For fire-safety reasons, the doors could not be padlocked, but hardly anyone went into that corner of the building during lunch period.

"What a waste of time...supervising walls," Cathy said.

"I don't mind it," he said, looking Cathy in the eye and leaning against the closed door.

She noticed how tall Bruce really was next to her. His frame seemed to fill the space with his presence. She could hardly see his eyes, though. He wore black-rimmed glasses; his dark, shoulder-length hair almost covered his face; and, he kept an unlit pipe

in his mouth. With his cords and a loose, plaid flannel shirt, he exuded comfort and ease—like the Hush Puppies shoes he wore. Cathy wondered whether he owned a suit; she had never seen him in one.

“You always this laid back?” she asked.

“No point in getting uptight over nonsense. Just go with the flow. At the end, you’re no worse off for it. Maybe the word should be blasé.” He kept taking his pipe out of his mouth as though he were smoking it.

“That’s a good attitude,” Cathy said. She hated making small talk, and as much as she liked Bruce, she couldn’t relax around him, so she veered the conversation around to Carmy. She asked how she was doing in his class since her return.

“Actually, she’s quite subdued. It must be her new hairstyle. You did a job on her, didn’t you?” he said, smiling.

“It still looks awful because she wouldn’t let me cut it into shape,” she said.

“It’s OK. Do you think I need a make-over?” he asked, touching his own wavy hair.

“Well, maybe your bangs can use a tiny trim,” she said, smiling.

“Only if you do it.”

“Anytime,” she giggled. “Just come down to room 105 and I’ll use you as a model.”

“Fat chance of that happening any time soon,” he said. He shook the pipe in his palm as though emptying it.

She remembered the times in the late sixties when she worked as a hairstylist. Mothers used to drag their long-haired teenage sons to her salon, because they refused to

go to their barbers for a full-fledged haircut. She'd have to negotiate between the mother's idea of a trim and the son's. Later, long hair on men became fashionable, but Bruce still maintained the scruffy look of those gentle-mannered but rebellious young men. She wished she knew more about him.

"Where you born in Montreal, Bruce?" she asked.

"No. I'm from the Abitibi region. Val-d'Or to be exact."

"Where's that?" Cathy asked.

"It's up north, way up north, past the La Vérendrye Park."

"I'm sorry, but I don't know where that is, either," she said.

"I bet you've been to Europe a number of times, though," he said.

"Three or maybe four times," Cathy answered, not quite understanding the connection he was making.

"But you don't know where Abitibi is," he stated.

"Well, I've never had a reason to go there, I guess," she said as though making excuses.

"Shame on you!" Bruce said. "You should get to know your own country before traveling overseas. I crossed it with two buddies the year I graduated from teacher's college. It was a great experience."

Cathy almost answered that Canada was only her half-country, but stopped short, afraid of offending Bruce. "But it's such a big country," she said instead. "Where do you start?"

"Maybe your own province?" he offered seriously.

He was right, Cathy thought. She had lived in Montreal most of her life, and yet she knew so little about the rest of the province—let alone the country.

“Back to Carmy,” she asked. “When is her composition due?”

“I’ve given her an extension till next week, because of her circumstances,” he said. Then he asked, interested, “Carmy tells me you like reading, that her bed is surrounded by wall-to-wall books.”

“I’ve always been an avid reader, but I also like writing,” she ventured.

Bruce seemed truly interested. “Yeah. You must have lots to draw on, from your hairdressing experience. I understand that hairstylists are the cheapest psychiatrists.”

“That’s true. For now though, I’d like to put together a book of stories about living in Italy as a child, and about my first years in Montreal.”

He asked her what she remembered most fondly about those early years, and she confessed her compulsion as a teen to set her memories down on paper before they dissolved into oblivion.

He stroked his chin with one hand, and held his pipe in the other, seemingly thinking something over. “You’re wasting your time,” he said emphatically after a few seconds.

She was taken aback by his reaction, and was sorry she had been so forthcoming.

“I mean,” he added, “If you have all of that material, write a novel instead. Don’t waste your time on short stories. They don’t sell.”

Cathy had already started visualizing her book as a smorgasbord of stories. But the thought of trying to string one continuous narrative from it all, without some common ingredient to make it all palatable, still overwhelmed her.

“Oh, I couldn’t possibly write a novel. It seems a little too ambitious for me. I don’t have any experience.” She felt her face flush as she spoke.

“That’s bullshit,” he replied. “If you’re good at spinning yarns, you can write a novel,” Bruce moved closer to Cathy, shaking his pipe at her as he spoke. “Here’s what I tell my students: just pretend you’re telling a story to someone who comes from Mars, who knows nothing of the world you’re writing.”

“I guess that could work if you’re starting from scratch; I already have a lot of different stories, and I need material to connect them,” she said, joining her two hands together. “I don’t know if I can be that creative.”

“Harvest your dreams. That’s also something I tell my students. They’re a real gold mine of material. Good writing is about unlocking our dreams and fears and presenting them to the world. But remember the nightmares as well as the happy dreams... a very scary proposition at times, though. But it’s the creepy stuff that adds the spice.”

She looked at him pensively.

He continued. “I don’t want you to underestimate the work required. It’s a challenging job, writing a novel. You have your work cut out for you. Give yourself at least five years.”

“Wow! That seems like a long time. I wouldn’t know where to start. Or where to finish for that matter.”

“That should not be such a difficult decision. Start from where you are now—the middle—and radiate toward the beginning and the end.” He filled his pipe as he spoke.

Cathy was sorry to hear the end-of-period bell ring. They had spoken for forty-five minutes, and she wished they had more time together. She wondered if Carmy had mentioned Sean to him. He didn't ask, and she never mentioned her impending marriage, or the fact that, during her lunch break, she had driven to the Danish House and ordered new furniture.

"See you next Day Four," she said.

"I'll see you around before that." He nudged her on the arm. "I'm going out for a smoke, but watch this first." He opened the door, and stepped out. He lit his pipe, inhaled deeply from it, and then let out perfectly formed smoke rings. He winked at Cathy as she watched the O's float up into the air.

BACK TO SCHOOL

By Cathy Anastasia

The summer of 1961 had been especially oppressive—the most humid in years—the weatherman said. Walking along the city sidewalks, I had felt the sun’s power hitting me twice: first, as it dropped its heat down to the pavement; then, as it radiated it right back up, smothering my body with sticky wetness.

But summer was finally coming to an end. We could feel it in the crisp breeze as my mother and I went shopping on Saint-Hubert Street during our lunch break from the factory. The late-August sun seemed to caress my face with a warm soft touch. But it failed to lighten my steps.

“What nice air. If it could only stay like this for the rest of the year,” said my mother, trying to engage me in conversation.

I didn’t answer. She was right about the air, but I wasn’t about to agree with her. It was just like her to believe in miracles.

I followed Mother inside Maison Diana, up its circular staircase with the brass railings, past the huge crystal chandelier hanging in midair from the second-floor ceiling. In the bridal and coats department, the saleslady recognized us.

“*Bonjour mesdames,*” she said cheerfully, as though she had been expecting us. She pulled a coat from a rack and helped Mother try it on—for the second time that week. The saleslady buttoned it up, smoothing it lovingly before telling my mother to admire herself in the full-length mirror. My mother looked at me instead, but I gave no sign of

approval. Then she studied the price tag, and from the way she frowned, I could tell that she was seriously considering making an offer on the coat.

“Tell her fifteen, with tax,” she said to me firmly, in dialect.

I shrugged and looked away. I had seen the same intense look on my mother’s face the previous Sunday afternoon, as she stirred the pasta, lifting strands of hot linguine with a fork, and pinching them with concentration, as though catching the perfect moment of done-ness was the most important thing in the world. While I had to stand up to my father by myself.

The saleslady hovered over us and asked, “*Que’est-ce qu’elle veut, ta mère?*”

For once, I didn’t care about finding the right words to soften my mother’s bargaining tactics, the games I knew she played with store clerks. I left her to haggle for herself in her broken French, while I pretended to look at a rack of party dresses on sale.

“*Chenze, madama,*” I heard her say. In the mirror, I saw her lift her right hand, fingers spread out, and shake it three times toward the saleslady, adding, “*Tassa inclusa, okay?*”

“*Mais voyons, madame, ici on a des prix fixes,*” the saleslady answered. Then, she unbuttoned the coat hastily and pulled it from my mother’s shoulders as if to protect it from further disrespect.

Feeling my face flush, I stormed down the stairs. Mother followed me, muttering to herself—“Keep it, keep it, if you think I’m going to pay for your chandelier”—laughing at their fixed prices, and not the least bit bothered by the abrupt treatment. She also took my sulking in stride.

Once outside the store, she tried to speak to me again. "Don't worry about the saleslady. Don't you know that they're all *zingare*? They're used to the haggling."

I gazed at the store window and caught a glimpse of my mother pushing a strand of hair away from her face. She turned her head and said, "I'm so ugly. I look like a scarecrow."

My mother was not yet forty, but she acted and looked like a middle-aged woman already. She was thin, with frail, sloping shoulders and no bust to speak of. In proportion to her top, though, her hips were considerable. Finding ready-made clothes for her was next to impossible. They were either too big at the top or too small at the hips.

"What do you want me to do?" she would plead whenever I became impatient with her shopping. "You know I'm built crooked."

And whenever we found something that fit, she always seemed to find it too colorful, too low-cut or—as with the fall coat—too expensive. Then, she would expect me to translate from Italian and bargain for her, which I usually did, sometimes arguing with her first, when her demands were too unreasonable. But she always relied on me to finish a sale.

What irked me the most about my mother was that, thin and delicate as she was, with the right clothes and a little care, she might look as pretty as the American mothers on TV. But she purposely chose her clothes to make herself disappear—to look so inconspicuous that she'd never even make it as a scarecrow. It didn't help that she kept her sparse, thin hair pinned back with plain black bobby pins around her head. She was very conscious of the bald spots on the top of her crown. It was a constant reminder of the years of carrying heavy loads of wood or water jugs on her head over taut, braided

hair. Her only hint of vanity were her efforts to cover up these smooth, irregularly shaped patches by keeping her hair pinned flat. She was particularly concerned that the *bossa*, the French female foreman at the factory, might notice the premature bald spots when she looked down my mother's head, bowed over the over-lock machine. Her tiny head and face, made to look even smaller by the severe hairstyle and the absence of make-up, made her look rather like a little naked sparrow that hadn't yet grown its feathers.

As we reached the corner at Saint-Zotique, we crossed the street and turned back, as if on cue. This was as far as we could walk and still return to the factory on time. My eyes followed the window display of fall and school clothes on the mannequins. Bottle-green cardigans, white blouses with Peter Pan collars, plaid skirts, red pullovers, gray flannel pants—these all made me think of the pictures on my first English reader, in which two wide-eyed, freckle-faced children ran excitedly, red hair flying in the wind, to their first day of school.

“Ann Ran. David Ran. Ann and David Ran.” I found myself repeating the first English words I had learned to read. They remained etched in my memory, along with the image of a country schoolhouse surrounded by orange and red maples. This time of year always filled me with the expectation of something new starting, rather than anything dying, but this season promised me little.

I walked slowly. I was in no rush to get back to the factory, though I could sense, from my mother's quickening steps, that she was afraid to be late for the bell that would have us all scattering to our posts like a flock of pigeons. It had already been four years since we crossed the ocean and yet, it seemed as if we were still scrambling for crumbs.

My mother offered me a pear left over from her lunch, but I shook my head, and she put it back into the brown paper bag in her purse. We passed by the window of Madame Lalonge's children's boutique, lined with navy blue tunics and blazers, and prop pencils, notebooks and rulers strewn all over the window show floor. The back-to-school shopping spree was in full swing on Saint-Hubert Street, but I had yet to buy a pencil or a notebook. We turned left on Jean-Talon Street, now both walking briskly toward the factory, each red harboring our own quiet thoughts.

My mother had been impressed at how easily I had talked myself into a summer job at the Superstyle Lingerie Company, where she and my aunt had worked since coming to Canada. At the factory, she had been told I should get a social insurance card before applying. But when I called for information, I was told I was not old enough to be issued one. I had counted on the job, so I took matters into my own hands, and asked mother for the factory owner's telephone number.

"You're going to call the Syrian boss?" she asked, stupefied that I would dare.

"Who else would I call if I want a job there?" I asked.

I called and asked him whether he could make an exception about the social insurance card, since I only wanted a summer job. He seemed cheerful on the phone, or amused, and told me to report for work the next day. Two days later, though, he stopped my mother on the stairs and told her, in slow French, that I had to work faster because, by law, he couldn't give me less than fifty cents an hour, even though I was underage. It upset me that he spoke to my mother in French when I was right next to her and I had spoken to him in English just two days before.

The factory was on a side street off Jean-Talon Street, two blocks away from Saint-Hubert Street, the main shopping area in that part of town. The owner and the office staff were all Syrians; the forelady in charge of the operators was French Canadian; but most of the workers were Italian, with the exception of four very wide, obese, elderly Syrian ladies who worked at the “finish” table, which is where I was also placed. Lifting their feet seemed to require more effort than they could muster, so they moved around the large table by shifting their feet and heavy bodies along. They only spoke Arabic to each other and looked at me suspiciously. Our role in the manufacturing of white, pastel-pink, and light-blue nylon ladies' panties was to cut the threads left by the over-lock machines on the seams and crotch.

After the boss' reprimand, I watched the three ladies attentively. After years at this job, they had developed a rhythm to their movements as they got up from their seat, lifted dozens of packaged panties off one bin, carried them to their posts, untied the bundles, cut three threads off each pair of panties, re-stacked them, and finally threw them back into another bin.

By the afternoon, even with all the windows open, the air in the factory became as heavy and condensed as a Turkish steam bath. The women's movements around the table became more labored, their fleshy underarms, which dangled from their sleeveless dresses, flapped against their bodies as they dragged the heavy packs of hundreds of light underwear. But when they sat equidistant around the table, they looked like three massive Buddhas guarding the piles of panties, controlling with nimble hands the movement of the underwear to packing and shipping.

Since I didn't exchange many words with them, I never knew if they took notice of me observing them as coolly as I did. Outwardly, I felt as sticky and uncomfortable as they looked, but it didn't bother me. I knew that by the end of summer my stint at the factory would be over. By the third day, I was going to the bins as frequently as the other ladies, who surely must have reported my output to the boss because he never complained about me again.

Since I'd gotten the summer job, I played less and less with the French kids, who suddenly seemed so much younger than I was. But I spent hours on the phone with my friend Antoinette. At thirteen, I still wasn't allowed to go by bus to her house in Saint-Michel. During her last visit to my house, one Sunday afternoon, she had showed up wearing lipstick and high heels. My father said he didn't trust her parents, who came from Campobasso, and were too liberal and lenient with their three daughters. After that Sunday, whenever the phone rang, he always ran to answer it. Once, five minutes into my conversation with Antoinette, my father pulled the phone out of my hands and listened.

"I know the tricks used by some boys," he said later. "They have their sisters call for them. But you won't fool me."

With Antoinette, I mostly talked about the new high school, Saint Pius X, which we would both be attending in the fall. At the end of June, our seventh-grade teacher had taken the whole class to visit the newly built school. The long corridors with rows of lockers next to each classroom, the large cafeteria and the gym all still smelled of fresh plaster and paint, and seemed ready to contain all the fun teenage activities that my reading of Archie Comics seemed to promise.

Antoinette was two years older than the rest of the class, and one year older than I was. She had her mother sew her a new blue school uniform since the pleated ones sold at the store looked too boxy and babyish for her. We had selected the pattern together: a tight, short tunic worn with a large, elasticized belt. Her mother offered to sew one for me too, but I hadn't been able to go to her house to get measured.

I spent each Sunday afternoon sitting on the balcony, the breeziest part of the house, listening to Father making fun of the people lining up for the movies, or the English homeowners working in the heat, wearing gardening gloves, shorts and sunhats.

More and more, my father was becoming sullen and easily upset, especially about work. In Milano, he had studied masonry, had become a *mastro*, and had worked in marble and granite. I often watched him peruse the thick book with thin onionskin pages containing illustrations of columns, friezes and moldings. Now he laid bricks, row upon row of red or white bricks. And sometimes he had to carry his own loads up the scaffolds because the contractors couldn't afford *manovali* to assist the *mastri*, as in Italy.

"We look like Christs, carrying a cross," he said, about the V-shaped wooden box with a long handle that they used to cart bricks on their shoulders.

That summer, his back had given out, and he often worked in pain, but he didn't want anyone to know, for fear that contractors wouldn't call him during the busiest time of the year. When he didn't work, he was ashamed to be seen by his friends and stayed home, sweating and cursing the humidity.

“*Che bella scoperta!*” he’d say, referring to Christopher Columbus, when he was upset at something. “Couldn’t he have discovered a better country? Here you can’t work in the winter for the cold, and then you die of humidity in the summer.”

Each evening, Mother would rub Heet on his back, and he’d put on a leather vest lined with sheepskin over his bare torso to help the product penetrate better. In the impossibly hot air of the apartment, the combination of smells from the medicinal cream, the wool and the sweat was overpowering. He insisted that the sheepskin vest also helped absorb the humidity.

As the start of school neared, Antoinette reminded me every evening that her mother couldn’t do anything about my uniform unless I went to her house for measurements. As I thought about it, walking back toward the factory with my mother, the heavy black cloud that had settled inside my head felt ready to burst. How could my father and my whole world have changed so much in one summer?

As we reached the factory, my mother made a last effort at conversation, trying hard to cheer me up. “Don’t think that you’re going to cut threads all the time. I’m sure they will make you work on the over-lock machine soon.”

I punched my time card and joined the fat Syrian ladies. We all sat silently, and snipped at loose threads for the rest of the afternoon.

A week before, on a particularly hot and muggy day, Father had returned from work in a cheerful mood. A contractor friend of his was close to getting a big contract in the city's west end, and he'd asked Father to go with him to help give an estimate.

“Teré,” he told my mother. “You should see the house I saw today, in *Westmonte*. Now that’s a house! All stone! It belongs to a big Jewish doctor. I went inside to look at

the ceilings, and I had to take off my shoes; the carpet was this thick! But you wouldn't believe how cool it was inside."

"They have a *ventilatore* to make it cool?" asked my mother.

"What *ventilatore*? The plasterer told me that they use the same furnace that heats it in the winter to remove the humidity. I'm going to try it with our furnace."

"Are you crazy, in this heat? How can heating the house make it cool? You believe everything they tell you."

"You women don't understand anything about these things. It's the humidity that kills us here, not the heat. If you cut the humidity in a house, then it's going to be more comfortable."

My brother was still out at the park with his friends, and I was on the phone in the hallway just outside the kitchen. My mother was busy preparing supper, spreading freshly cut homemade pasta on the kitchen table, which was covered with the white sheet she reserved for this purpose. In the center of the hallway, Father fidgeted around the oil furnace, which had been idle since the spring. He checked the on-off lever, shook the pipe going up along the length of the corridor wall into the kitchen.

Mother looked at me and gestured with her eyes, as if to say, "This is a good time to talk to your father."

I cupped the phone and asked out loud. "What should I tell Antoinette about this Sunday? Can I go to her house for the measurements?"

"We'll talk about it on Sunday," Father answered, seeming overly preoccupied with the furnace. Without my noticing, he proceeded to light it up. As its belly burst into

flames, it started spewing smoke, black soot, and unbearable heat all over the house. I hung up the phone and ran into the kitchen.

“Turn that thing off before we all die,” screamed my mother. “The heat has really made you go crazy!” She quickly folded the sheet to protect the pasta from the smoke that had engulfed the kitchen almost instantly.

We could hear the thumps of my father kicking the stove, yelling over and over, “*Che bella scoperta! Che bella scoperta!*”

“Have you gone crazy?” my mother yelled. She became frantic moving back and forth in the kitchen, then she picked a dishtowel and moved toward the hallway, trying to fan the smoke away. I did the same. She bumped into my father, who tried to pull the towel away from her, but she held on to it. In the skirmish, she tripped, lost her balance and fell right in front of the blasting furnace. I rushed to help her up, and saw father kick her in the legs to get her out of the way, as he moved toward the side of the furnace to turn off the hot lever with the towel. Then he threw the towel at her face and went to sit on the balcony. He had never laid a finger on us before.

Crying, I helped mother get up from the floor and we moved back into the kitchen, opening the back door to let out the smoke. As the air cleared, she checked the cut-up pasta, but it had all stuck together in the folded sheet. I tried to separate the soft, glutinous strands one piece at a time, but she pulled them from my hands angrily and threw handfuls of it in the wastebasket. Then she started pulling at her hair and shaking uncontrollably.

"I'm going to pull the last hairs left on my head if he keeps on talking this nonsense. He's acting like a *pazzo*," she screamed, directing her words toward the balcony. I tried to hold her still.

"What has come over you?" I yelled at the top of my voice at both of them.

From the balcony, father shouted, "Who is *pazzo* here eh? You and your daughter, that's who! Things will change around here from now on. And forget about Saint-Michel on Sunday. And I'll tell you one more thing, she's staying at the factory with you instead of going around with that *puttanella* from Campobasso."

"You're crazy if you think I'm staying at the factory," I yelled back. "I'm going back to school with my friends."

"Don't you scream at me or I'll give you one of these," he said, walking toward me and showing me the back of his thick hand. He didn't need to scream to make his point.

"Stop it now," Mother said. "Let's worry about cleaning up this mess for now."

By the time my brother returned, everyone had calmed down. Father had returned to the balcony while mother and I cleaned up. Then, Mother prepared some store-bought macaroni with chickpeas, and we all ate silently. I figured Father had spoken out of anger, and I didn't want to bring up the subject of school anymore, and start another argument.

"If only this humidity would stop," Mother said at one point, wiping her forehead with her dirty apron. Without realizing it, she streaked her face with black soot.

"Ma, you look like an Indian," my brother said, and we all had to laugh. To me she looked more like a sad chimney sweep.

“In this country, we’re all Indians,” Father added.

The following Sunday morning, before lunch, Signor Paolin, the insurance agent, came to the house. He noticed the black smoke streaks on the ceilings, even though Mother had spent all of Saturday washing the walls. Father told him that our furnace was defective but didn’t go into details. The heat had not relented and Father had, at last, discarded the sheepskin vest, and took to splashing cold water on his torso every hour or so. Even Signor Paolin showed up dressed casually. He didn’t seem his usual self without his suit and tie. He spoke in a curt tone, even though Mother served him coffee and anisette cookies as usual.

“You’re making a big mistake,” he told Father. “In this country, you need as much insurance as possible. What about fire insurance? Anything can happen.” He pointed to the ceiling.

“Insurance is nonsense, an American invention,” Father said. “Why should I kill myself working to pay for something that will pay me only if I die? What kind of investment is that?”

“You still have two school-aged children,” said Paolin. “What if something happens to you? The investment is that, if something happens to you, they won’t be left in the street.”

“They’re able to work,” he said. “My daughter has a job already, and Luigi has started learning a trade. They won’t starve.”

Nothing had been said about school since the last outburst, and I was afraid to bring up the subject. My mother, busy serving refreshments and preparing lunch, didn’t

object when Father went ahead with the cancellation of the policy and signed the papers. After the agent left, Father, organized the papers scattered all over the table. “Nice investment, he sold me. They should call it death insurance policy. If he thinks I’m dying in this country, he’s crazy.”

“Will you stop talking about dying?” mother said, raising her voice.

“Well, I’m telling you, whether you want to hear it or not,” he answered loudly. “I’m not dying in this country! I’m going back to Italy, dead or alive. I’m going back.”

“You’re talking nonsense,” Mother added. “Where do you think you’re going with two children growing up here? Are we going to go back and forth like *zingari*?”

“I should never have come here; I should have stayed in Milano,” he said emphatically.

“Milano! Milano!” my mother mocked. “That’s all I hear. What did Milano ever give us after all the years you struggled there?”

Their voices were getting louder and louder. “You know how ignorant you are?” Father asked her. “You don’t read the papers. I do. Things are booming in Italy today. Have you heard about *il miracolo italiano*? Have you? Even in the *paese*, they’re buying cars, while here I have to beg for work.”

“Who is making all these miracles, when in Italy they’ve thrown all the saints off the altars? We’re not even supposed to believe in them anymore.”

My father laughed. “See how intelligent you are? I’m talking about the economy; you talk about saints. Ehh!” He gathered his papers and left the kitchen.

Mother kept on talking above the sound of running water coming from the bathroom. "All I know is that, at least, here, we're all together. We work, we eat, we have a nice apartment. What else do you want?"

"Well, I've been struggling since the age of twelve. Everyone has to look after themselves. As Mussolini said, '*Chi mi ama mi segue*'."

I started setting the table for lunch. When Father returned, drying himself off with a towel, I asked, "Can I go to Antoinette's this afternoon for the measurements?"

"What measurements? Didn't you hear me? Here everyone has to look after themselves. You're staying at the factory with your mother."

"I'm thirteen years old," I said. "I want to go to school."

His tone was calm. "What's the point of going to high school if you can't go to university?"

University seemed a long time away. "You mean I won't even be going to high school? You want me to stay at the factory and cut threads for the rest of my life?"

"The rest of your life?" my father laughed. "Don't you ever want to get married? You know, it costs here to get married. You don't just go to church, sign papers and you're married. Here, you have to have the hall, the flowers, the cars, the photographers. Ehh! There's no end. Everything we do here costs money. Where do you think I'll get it?"

I looked at my mother for help, but she was suddenly taken up with cooking, and never looked my way.

My father kept talking as if the decision had been taken and the discussion was over. "In five or six years, you'll be married, having children and staying home. School

will have been a waste. Instead, think of putting aside a few thousand dollars for your future.”

I still couldn't believe what I was hearing. And neither my mother nor Luigi, who had just joined us, seemed to react. She kept stirring the pasta, while my brother fidgeted on his seat eating some bread. I threw the cutlery down on the table and walked to the living room crying.

“Hard-headed bull,” my father said in his usual joking voice.

After a while my mother called me. “Come eat your pasta before it gets cold.”

“Eat it yourself,” I shouted. I sank my head into the sofa armrest, and there I spent the rest of that Sunday afternoon.

Now, a week later, the question of school lay hanging, suspended in the humid air of our apartment. I was afraid to cause any more outbursts, but the longer I kept quiet, the more I was giving the impression that I had given in to my father.

The factory bell rang and, in unison, everyone proceeded to brush off the fine nylon dust that infiltrated our hair and clothes and covered our faces, legs and arms.

On our way home, walking toward the bus, mother broke the ice. “Your father is not himself. Don't be so hard-headed with him.”

“He's the hard-headed one. I only want to go back to school. It's not as if I'm asking to go out dancing every Saturday night.”

“That's all we need,” sighed my mother. “What exactly did they tell you when you called for the card?”

“What card?” I said.

“The social insurance card.”

“I couldn’t get one because I wasn’t fourteen yet.”

“So you can only get one in seven months,” she said thoughtfully.

I didn’t answer. I would be turning fourteen in March. What was she getting at?

“If you’re too young to get a card, then you must be too young to leave school,” she said.

I hadn’t thought of that.

“Look, don’t make it seem as if you went around asking, or he’ll get upset again and throw us both out of the house. Maybe if he hears from someone else that you should stay in school, he’ll give in. Don’t let him think that you’re stubborn, though.”

“And what about when I turn fourteen?” I asked.

“Think about today,” she answered. “And God will think about tomorrow.”

At the 92 bus stop, a messy queue of people, mostly other Italian women, inched their way aboard the bus. I was ready to say, “What good is God to us, if we have to worry about each day?” But Mother was pushing her way up into the bus already, even though there seemed to be little room left. I had heard Mother’s answer about God countless times before. I had also heard it from other village women. It had never meant anything to me, just the type of stock answer they repeated. Though I was crowded in the midst of all those working women in the bus, a small crack of space seemed to be opening up for me, and I felt as if I could start breathing again. I saw a subtly different take on the blind faith in Destiny that had irritated me most about the women from the village. If we take control of each day as it comes, whichever way we can, then we don’t

really need to rely on God for miracles. Maybe, I thought, the women have always known this, and they've only paid him lip service out of generosity, to make Him feel good.

The bus sped east along Jean-Talon Street, moving swiftly past the length of shops on Saint-Hubert Street, still bustling with late-afternoon shoppers. I held the overhead handles to keep my balance, but let go of my body by yielding to the stop-and-go motions of the bus. I formulated a strategy in my head.

Two days later, Johanne, Antoinette's oldest sister, called our house. She worked at a bank and spoke Italian very well. She asked to speak to my father and introduced herself as the school's secretary. She asked him why he had not sent in a form confirming my attendance at school. He didn't know of any such forms, he told her. And in any case, I would not be attending school anymore.

She replied firmly that, by law, I was required to be in school till the age of sixteen—we added the two extra years for good measure. The year before, she explained, they had sent the police to a family that had refused to send an underage student back to school.

My father was impressed that the school secretary spoke such good Italian, and as was his habit with people who spoke well, he was very polite. He didn't want to appear ignorant and he said that for sure, he'd respect the law, and I would be returning to school.

"You're going to school, but watch your step, and come straight home every day," he told me.

I knew that he still thought of me as a little too obstinate and unreasonable, but I didn't care. I could already taste the pleasure of going to the Syrian boss to inform him

that I would stop working at the factory to go back to school. I felt confident that the small deception we had devised would buy me an extra year, maybe two. What would my father and the world be like after that? Already he was not the man I had known as a child. Nor was I the same child.

As the summer season drew to its end, the lawns and gardens of the small houses on Tenth Avenue betrayed some neglect. Tall spiky weeds poked above the beds of impatiens and delicate petunias. Everything would soon be yanked out, so the homeowners must have taken a respite before the planting of bulbs for the coming spring, and the burying of rose bushes for the winter months.

Friday October 17, 1980

The New Bedroom

When Cathy and Carmy got home from school on Friday afternoon, Sean was on the phone in animated conversation. A queen-size mattress and a dozen other boxes of different sizes filled the hallway, the kitchen and living room.

“What the hell?” Carmy said, on entering the apartment.

“Shucks,” Cathy said. “I forgot about the furniture.” She had ordered it on Wednesday during her lunch break, but had completely forgotten to mention that it would be delivered on Friday. She gathered from the telephone conversation that Pierre was coming into the city the following day as he had previously planned.

“Thanks for warning me,” Sean said when he hung up with Pierre.

“Sorry; I told you I’d be ordering it,” Cathy said.

“Why this week?” Sean replied. “You knew about JP coming in this week-end.”

“I’m going to do my homework,” Carmy interrupted and walked into her room and shut the door. She seemed uncomfortable when Sean was around and spent most of the time in the den listening to the radio and working on her English and French assignments. The two didn’t see too much of each other, as Sean was out most evenings and she went home every Friday afternoon. Her uncle would be picking her up before dinner.

Cathy moved into the kitchen and Sean followed, telling her that Pierre might stay the rest of the week to see some important people and plan the Halloween fundraising

dinner in Montreal. She was expected to attend the event with him the following Friday evening, even though she was not yet sure what she would wear. It was advertised as a costume ball. It had been a while since she had gone to a party with Sean, so she was pleased about the socializing, but was annoyed by the news of Pierre staying with them.

She said in a low voice, "Fine. But what happens on Sunday evening when Carmy comes back?"

"Maybe Carmy can stay at her place for a couple of days next week. Or maybe at your brother's."

"I can't do that," Cathy answered. "I can't ship her out after only a week here."

"Then Carmy will have to sleep on the sofa when she comes in on Sunday. I can't ask Pierre to give up his room."

Cathy threw down the bags of groceries she had picked up on her way home, and said sharply, "I've had it with Jean-Pierre. When did the den become his room?"

Sean moved to the bedroom and said in a calm voice, "No need to have a temper tantrum. Calm down."

Cathy, hands on her hips, followed him. She lowered her voice. "I'll calm down when I feel like it. I can't understand why he can't stay in a hotel for a few days. He has an expense account. How will it seem to Carmy's family to have another man sleeping in the house?"

"I don't give a damn about what her family thinks. I don't conduct myself in relation to how other people think. This is one of your problems, not mine."

Cathy walked nervously back from the bedroom to the kitchen, kicking the boxes of furniture and mouthing, "Fuck, fuck, fuck." She said, "For once I'm asking you for

some consideration, for something that is important to me, and you put down everything I try to do.”

“Cut the crap. You’re overreacting.” He took a beer from the fridge. “I’m sure we can work this out. But it’s going to be a messy weekend. You could have waited before ordering new furniture. What was the big rush?”

“I was really fed up with the shabby bedroom,” she said.

“Have you thought that maybe the furniture may not be the problem?” he asked, and took a long sip of beer.

“Then tell me what the problem is, if you think there’s a problem, and we’ll try to fix things.” She sat down and motioned for him to sit too. “You’re the intellectual and know-it-all.”

He remained standing. “Please, not now... But I wouldn’t necessarily attribute our problems to things, more to ideas. In any case, if a new bedroom set makes you happy, I’m fine with it. Just get it organized before tomorrow. I have more important things on my mind.”

“Yes, of course, synchronicity and integration,” she said. Then in a whisper, she added, “The fact that we haven’t made love in over a month is irrelevant to you.”

“You’re the one who sleeps on the sofa at night, writing journals or whatever. You wouldn’t understand what’s on my mind, anyway.”

“Try me some time. I might surprise you.”

They were quiet for a few minutes. Cathy asked herself why the initial good feeling of the proposal had lasted less than a few days.

Then Sean said, “Now, from a logistics point of view, where will you put the old set?”

“I’ll call my uncle. We’ll have to find some way of fitting the old furniture into my mother’s basement.”

“You better call him soon or the apartment will get pretty crowded by the weekend.”

She opened one of the boxes in the kitchen. Some of the furniture needed to be assembled, and Cathy wondered if Sean would have the patience to do it.

She called her uncle Gaetano, who came promptly with his pickup truck, and Sean helped him load the largest pieces. Except for the old night tables, the bedroom was left bare.

Cathy was moving boxes into the bedroom when Alfonso rang the doorbell. The mattress, still wrapped in plastic, stood in the hallway. Sean was sitting on the sofa looking over the morning paper.

“Are you moving out?” Alfonso asked.

“No, just getting new furniture, she said. “Any news?”

“Everything is the same with Lucia,” he said. But he had received the shock of his life to hear that his brother-in-law Pasquale was in Italy, in his home town, living with a nephew. “My lawyers are looking into laying charges, but it might be difficult while he’s in Italy.”

Carmy was in the den getting her things and didn’t hear the news. Alfonso whispered to Cathy, “I urge you, make sure she doesn’t go out with those two friends

from school. I hear she goes to a club. I don't want her to have anything to do with the people there.”

“I'm aware of that,” Cathy answered. “Don't worry.”

After Alfonso left, Cathy told Sean about Pasquale's appearance in Italy.

“I heard the conversation,” Sean said. “The soap opera continues.”

“You could have said hello to Alfonso,” Cathy said.

“I don't want to get too chummy just because he's a friend of yours,” Sean answered. “Anyway, JP thinks I should keep my distance from people like him. He might try to use our friendship.”

“You could nevertheless be courteous when he comes by. He's still a friend of the family,” she answered.

Sean walked into the bedroom and didn't answer. “Where do we sleep tonight?”

“You'll just have to set up the mattress for tonight. I'll get Luigi to come in next week and give you a hand at assembling the rest of the furniture.”

“It's going to be a big job,” Sean said. “There must be thousands of pieces. I thought it would have come all set up.”

“So did I,” Cathy replied. “But it's modern furniture. It comes like this.”

She began to unwrap a pork roast she had gotten at the grocery store, to prepare it for the following day's dinner.

“You should have called the Salvation Army or whoever and given all the old furniture away,” *Sean said.*

“I didn't have the heart to do that. I don't know why.”

“So, more things to hoard in your mother’s basement,” he said. “You can’t ever let go, can you?”

Saturday October 18, 2005

The Ethnic Wife

That Saturday morning, the *Gazette* published on the front page that Pietro Russo, brother of Jack Russo, had been gunned down in the kitchen of his Saint-Leonard home. He was shot in the heart, through a window, as he sat reading the newspaper in the presence of his teenaged son. The police didn't have any leads on the shooter, but said that the gunman must have been an expert marksman to have killed Russo with a single shot through the heart from another building. The killing surprised the police. They said that Russo, aged 48, lived in the shadow of his brother and was not very active in the underworld.

“Lots of action going on,” Sean said. “The war seems to be intensifying. I wonder whose feathers have been ruffled.”

The paper included an “underworld organizational chart,” which showed that Jack Russo headed a division that included all of Quebec, some parts of eastern Ontario, and parts of the Maritimes. The division was said to have been one of five led by the feared Mafia chieftain, Carmine Galante, of New York City. A witness claimed that Russo was the “real boss” of organized crime in Montreal.

“I couldn't care less,” Cathy said. The city's Italian underworld figures had become caricatures of characters in mob movies and they hardly seemed real to her anymore.

“It’s strange, though, that a family member was hit,” Sean said. “Doesn't it make you wonder what was said about your own *paesana*?”

“Not at all,” Cathy said dismissively. “This guy must have been involved in his brother’s activities. Lucia most certainly is not a mobster.”

“*Bonjour maman*,” Pierre said when he arrived later in the afternoon, planting a kiss on Cathy’s cheek.

She cringed, as she always did when he called her that, but said nothing.

The cool October weather had prompted Cathy to prepare a roast pork for dinner, along with scalloped potatoes. It was inexpensive and required little fussing. Sean complained when she went all out and spent too much on food when entertaining guests.

“You overdo it. You cook too much,” he would say.

“And you measure everything with an eyedropper,” she’d reply, using her mother’s expression for the tendency to give of oneself in minute amounts.

So she told herself that she would play by Sean’s rules for Pierre’s dinner and bought the cheap roast.

When Pierre arrived, the kitchen was infused with the homey odors of the garlic-studded meat, and the applesauce simmering on the stove. Pierre called her “*Mama*” the first time he met her, and then Sean took to saying, “Yes Mommy,” whenever she tried to set some order in their hurried lives.

Cathy liked cooking. In fact, it was her favorite homemaking duty, and she reveled in experimenting with different recipes, and in serving the food to friends and relatives. If Sean had been more open to it, she’d have dinner parties all the time. But she

didn't want to be fretting in the kitchen for Jean-Pierre, her eyes in tears over chopped onions and her hands smelling of garlic, while Sean and Pierre drank Scotch and discussed some esoteric philosophical topic to which she could not contribute.

As much as she became vexed when the media made it sound as if all Italians were mobsters, she was chafed at being defined only by her housekeeping abilities, as Pierre did. Cathy's mind was packed full of the ideas she had read about. She never forgot a face, an incident or a concept that she found interesting. But, when it came time to pull something out of this treasure chest of a memory, something snagged. She was becoming more and more aware that, despite her mental skills, she had been deprived of a very crucial one—that of remembering the names of things. This was her major handicap, and she tried hard to understand it. Some people are born with poor vision, she thought. Others with impaired hearing. Her impediment was that she could not retrieve words as quickly as she needed them. At times, she could see the shape, the length and even the texture and color of a word, yet it often failed to jump in when she had to verbalize it. Most of the time she could get by, but when Pierre was around, she felt more nervous, and she mumbled. Was it because of her intermittent schooling, of having to function in different languages, or was it a physiological condition with a medical name of its own?

Cathy sometimes daydreamed that one day a cure would be found for her particular condition, and she could take a pill or have surgery, and all the words in her head would flow out of their hiding places and land lightly on her tongue.

Sean had already poured two Scotches by the time Pierre had arranged his things in the den, and they sat in the living room. Cathy couldn't hear their conversation since

she had started cutting the roast with the electric knife. Pierre's background was in political science, more particularly in international relations, but he dabbled in writing poetry, which he shared with Sean whenever they met, and it was one of his poems that they seemed to be discussing.

They continued their conversation while devouring the scalloped potatoes and meat, disagreeing over a line. Their conversation sounded very obscure to Cathy, something about hermeneutic circularity, but she wanted to learn as much about writing as possible, so she listened attentively to Sean.

"The contradictions are quite interesting," he said, "but also problematic. To understand the whole, there must be a connection between the individual words, and to understand the parts, one must comprehend the whole."

"Interesting," Pierre said, looking over his poem.

Cathy tried to figure out what had sounded like a riddle while she cleared the table. As she took Pierre's plate, he said, absent-mindedly, "*Merci maman.*"

She looked directly at his face and said, "I wish you wouldn't call me *maman*, *Mama* or Mommy. I'm not your mother or anyone else's, yet."

Pierre pulled his chair back. "But I don't mean it as a derogatory term," he answered. "You're just so...very motherly."

"How am I motherly?" she asked, and put her hands on her hips.

"Physically, I mean. Look at you. You're round, have child-bearing hips, a moon face, all the traits of the earth mother figure. Ask Sean. He's studying Jung's archetypes. Isn't it right Sean?"

Sean had started putting dishes into the dishwasher and didn't answer.

For once, Cathy didn't feel intimidated by Pierre, since she realized that he didn't know as much as he thought. "What does having a round face have to do with Jung's archetypes? I haven't read that anywhere."

"Have you been reading my notes?" Sean asked.

"No, I've been reading your books. I can read you know."

"Why this sudden interest in reading my books?" Sean asked. "And what are all these notes I see you writing all the time?"

"I'm interested in Jung because of his mandalas. I've had a tendency to draw shapes, especially circles, for years, and I'd like to understand it...maybe use the symbolism in my writing.... I'm trying to write a novel," she finally spluttered.

Sean and Pierre were quiet for awhile, and then looked at one other. Pierre said, "I would think that many people doodle with shapes, and... writing novels. It can be therapeutic."

"Yes, schizophrenics, neurotics, people undergoing psychic dissociation have been known to experience these spontaneous images of mandalas," Sean said with a little laugh.

Cathy sat back at her chair and said firmly, "I don't believe it's only schizophrenics and neurotics..."

Sean interrupted, as he also returned to his seat. Looking at Pierre, he said, "You know, it's especially the fundamental conformity in mandalas, regardless of time and place, that led Jung to explore synchronicity, the meaning of meaningful coincidences. That, in a nutshell, is the focus of my paper."

"I see," Pierre said thoughtfully. "Then, there's more to it than just drawing."

“Yes, mandalas are called the archetypes of wholeness, and, according to Jung, are nature’s attempt at self-healing,” Cathy said, repeating word for word what she had read.

“But I still don’t quite understand how all this fits in with your thesis on synchronicity,” Pierre said to Sean. “What does all this talk of meaningful coincidence say about the world except that the coincidences can be impressive?”

“It means that we are connected at the level Jung called the objective psyche—a shared psyche—not just with one another but with the whole world of nature,” Sean answered as if giving a lecture. “Jung conceived archetypes to be the mediators of the *unus mundus*, the unitary reality that binds us. It’s like the Chinese I Ching—namely, anything that happens is related to everything else that happens at the same time.”

Cathy asked, “I wondered, when I read that. How is that different from destiny?”

Sean turned toward Cathy. “Well, some people think of destiny as magical, with all kinds of invisible forces, but the I Ching reveals our story, and... gives us some advice about how to co-author it.”

“Isn’t that a little scary?” Cathy said.

“What do you mean, Cat?” Sean asked.

“It means that our lives may have a plot and meaning that differs from what we want to be living,” she replied.

“I don’t follow you,” Sean asked.

“Well, when you have these... synchronicities hitting you in the face, you feel you’re living outside your own story.” Cathy was quiet for an instant, thinking of what to

say next, and then resumed. “For example, when I was little, I always wondered what my mother meant by destiny...”

Pierre interrupted, “Speaking of mothers, there’s something I wanted to ask you, if I may.”

“Yes?” Cathy said.

“The girl who lives here. Aren’t you worried what with everything that is happening?”

“What is happening that I should be worried about?” she asked.

“You must have read the papers this morning. It seems to be open season on mobsters. They’re settling accounts and are getting nasty. Family members are being hit.”

“I still don’t know what you’re getting at,” Cathy said, annoyed at his question and at the fact that he had changed subject.

“Oh, stop sounding so naïve, Cathy. This girl may mean trouble for me and Sean. Already, her family has been connected to Jack Russo. You know I’m in the public eye and working for Di Principe. If the papers make any more connections, they’ll have me and Sean connected to Jack Russo too, through you.”

“Through me? That’s too funny for words. Why me?”

“Your name is Anastasia...There’s a Tony Anastasia in the nightclub business who is a close associate of Jack Russo. Do you know him?”

“I know of him. People have often asked me if we’re related, but I have no idea who he is. I never met the man. Anastasia is a common name in Calabria, like Picard in Quebec.”

“Well, names have resonances in the media, which may trigger investigations,” Pierre said gravely.

“Well, don’t forget the infamous Albert Anastasia of Chicago, of Murder Incorporated fame,” Cathy said. “Next thing you know you’ll have me connected to Al Capone.” She laughed.

“Don’t laugh. People, especially media people, never miss a chance to connect politicians with criminal elements, and you saw the papers this morning. There could be a turf war going on.”

“The papers covered the hit of the brother of a known criminal. What does that have to do with me?” Cathy asked loudly. “But you can stop visiting us if you think it might taint your reputation.”

“No need to get defensive,” Sean said. “JP wants to make sure that our names don’t ever come up in connection with Carmy’s family.”

“I find what you’re saying extremely insulting... after the years you’ve known my family,” Cathy said to Jean-Pierre.

“It’s not your family, per se, that would be questioned, but your relationship with this girl’s family.”

Then Cathy remembered. “You already know her uncle Alfonso. He told me he’s going to the fundraising event next week. So what’s the big deal?”

“Yes, I’ve met him at other fundraising events,” Pierre answered. “I meet a lot of people at these things. I suggest you see if there’s any way the girl can return to her home before the fundraiser next week. We will be getting media coverage and we want to be sure it’s positive.”

“I can’t believe you’re asking me this,” Cathy said, looking at Sean for help

“Blame it on the media,” Sean replied, shrugging his shoulders. “Alfonso may be linked to Jack Russo; his niece is living with us; I work for JP, who works for Di Principe. Not a difficult connection to make.”

“I see; you’re afraid of meaningful coincidences,” Cathy said.

“I believe Sean was against the idea of you playing mommy with this girl...”
Pierre shot back.

“So you go around discussing our personal discussions with him?” Cathy asked Sean as she got up.

“There was nothing personal about that discussion,” Sean said. “Take it easy. Don’t get all worked up.”

“Look,” Pierre said. “I don’t want to cause a family quarrel here. I don’t want this girl to cast a negative light on Sean, and on my relationship to both of you. Sean is working for me now, but he may want to pursue a career of his own in politics later. I’d appreciate it if you considered my position, what with an election coming up. Is she returning to her family this week?”

“She’s returning to her family when and if her real mother gets better. Carmy is my friend and she’s staying here. I’m not her Mommy, only her friend. And I’d appreciate it if you called me by my name once in a while.”

“OK, but which name? You have a few: Caterina, Cathy, Cateri, and I’ve noticed Cat lately.”

“That’s because I’ve developed nine lives... The better to deal with bigots like you.” Cathy replied.

“That’s an insult I won’t even dignify with a comment. But when Sean discussed the marriage last weekend, the only picture he gave was that of a serious, quiet and hardworking ethnic woman.”

Cathy didn’t respond for a while. She looked at Sean, but his face was a blank page she couldn’t read. “I see. Now I understand.” She coolly got up from the table. “You discussed our marriage with a committee before proposing to me.”

“I talked it over with some friends. What’s wrong with that?” Sean said, shrugging his shoulders.

“You’ve known some of those friends for all of two weeks! I’m supposed to disown a friend I’ve known all of my life. Carmy will be back Sunday evening and I expect the den cleared by the afternoon.” She nodded at Jean-Pierre.

“We have work to do together,” Sean said. “Be reasonable.”

“You can go out and work with him at a hotel. My house is not a headquarters for Di Principe’s political campaign,” she said.

She took her coat and said she needed to get out of the house. Before leaving, she called her mother to see if she needed help organizing the furniture.

“No, you know your brother,” Teresa told her. “He likes to get things done right away. I kept my small bed, but moved in the dressers. The room is crowded but everything fits. I’ve got lots of drawers but nothing in them.”

“It’s good to have extra space,” Cathy said.

“One of these days we should open the old trunk,” Teresa said. “And check out some of the stuff we brought from Italy. It will be good to take them out and air them.”

“Sure. I have been thinking of doing just that. Are you sure you don’t want me to come over?”

“It’s OK. It’s late. Save yourself the trek in the dark.”

Cathy asked her mother if she’d heard anything else regarding Pasquale’s whereabouts, but Teresa hadn’t heard anything aside from the fact that Pasquale was in his home town.

“He went to hide in the mountains where he came from,” Teresa said.

Cathy went out and walked around the block, but she couldn’t bring herself to go back into the house as long as Jean-Pierre was sitting in her kitchen, pontificating with Sean about what she could or could not do. She circled the block one more time, and then thought of taking the car and maybe seeing a movie to fill the rest of the evening. She didn’t want to show up at her mother’s or at a friend’s at that time of night, and have to explain the reason for her state of mind. If she went to sleep in a motel, Sean might call her mother in the middle of the night and alarm everyone.

Cathy drove around and around the block, not counting the times anymore, her anger rising with each circuit, as she mulled over Pierre’s comments. It became clearer and clearer to her that Sean had proposed to her as a strategy to help him win over ethnic voters. So long as the image of the long-suffering, dutiful, submissive, Italian woman—*Mamma* to JP—was maintained, she would become the token ethnic woman. Worse still, the token ethnic wife—if she was willing to play their game.

Her marriage to Sean would be a deception from the start, yet she had committed herself to him the day they moved in together. She had been happy to announce the marriage, because it would validate, in her family’s eyes, her having lived with him.

Walking out on him now would be considered as serious as a marriage break-up, maybe more so since she had lived in sin.

She found herself swerving toward Jean-Talon Street and stopped at a Harvey's. She ordered a large coffee, sat by a darkened window, staring blankly out. A sad, drawn-out face was reflected back from the glass. Who was she? What was the connection between the person she had been born and the person she had become? Was she really writing her own story or was it being written for her? She sat on the stool, looking out into the night traffic on Jean-Talon Street for over an hour, sipping at the coffee. Then, she drove back home.

The lights were off in the kitchen, and Pierre and Sean were in their respective rooms. When Cathy opened the door to the bedroom, she saw Sean sprawled on the unmade mattress wearing only his shorts, and surrounded by boxes, books, lamps, and the night tables and linens from the old bedroom set. Her life was becoming messier and more cluttered, and the new bedroom was a hostile and unfamiliar territory. How to put any order to it? She closed the door and went to lie on the sofa. There, she finally cried, but her cries were more like wails, trapped and muffled by cushions, sounds that no one would hear.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: April 13, 2005, 9:00 AM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Re: none

Now you're exaggerating! It's not enough that we have real mob characters splashed all over *Le Journal de Montreal*, you have to create some fake ones? What next? A severed horse's head in someone's bed?

F.

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: April 13, 2004, 1:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: submission

Attachment: crimes of honor.doc

Franco,

Read on. I couldn't make this up if I tried!

A.

Sunday, October 19, 1980

Crime of Honor

On Sunday morning, Sean and Pierre were sleeping in when Cathy went to join her family for lunch. Teresa and Luigi seemed eager to discuss the wedding arrangements, but Cathy told them it would be best to wait for after the Halloween fundraising event, when Sean would have more time.

“So you’re going to a ball at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel?” Rita said. “Lucky you!”

“Who would have thought?” Teresa said proudly. “It’s been advertised in the *Corriere*. *Un Ballo in Maschera* they’re calling it.”

“Actually, in Italy *un ballo in maschera* is usually held in February for carnival—not in October,” Luigi said.

“Well, who knows the difference?” Cathy asked. “I’m not even sure I’ll be up for it. It’s not the usual type of costume party. I’d have to buy a new gown.”

“Since when do you complain about having to buy a new dress?” Teresa asked, a worried look on her face.

As had been agreed with Alfonso, Cathy stopped by the hospital on her way home from her mother’s to check on Lucia’s condition and to pick up Carmy. After greeting Rosaria, who sat alone next to the still-comatose Lucia, Cathy went to the waiting room to join Carmy, Alfonso, Pietro, and another frequent visitor, Filomena. The two men listened attentively to what Filomena—a talkative distant relative of Pasquale—was recounting. They nodded at Cathy as she sat next to Carmy, but said nothing, not wanting to interrupt the chatty woman.

“Who knows what’s going through his head; maybe he’s gone completely crazy,” Filomena was saying. Then, noticing Cathy, she waved. “Ciao, Cateri.”

Cathy waved back.

“Crazy or not,” Alfonso said, his voice a pitch higher than usual, “I’ll call my lawyer in the morning, and he’ll have to inform the police. He won’t get away with anything just because he’s out of the country.”

“Is there some news about your father?” Cathy asked Carmy.

“The fool is in Italy... in Mulirena. He’s been arrested,” Carmy said in a monotone voice.

“What a *stronzo*,” Alfonso kept saying, shaking his head, as the others laughed.

“Pasquale has been jailed in Mulirena?” Cathy asked, incredulous.

“He’s been arrested in Serra San Bruno,” Filomena added in her shrill voice. “Not only arrested, but his picture was even in the paper there, in the *Gazzetta Del Sud*.” She then recounted, for Cathy’s benefit, how Pasquale had appeared unannounced in his hometown of Serra San Bruno, at the home of his nephew Alfredo. Alfredo received him with open arms and kept quiet about his presence there, until Pasquale started making a nuisance of himself, inquiring about deeds to the family home and farm lands. “Pasquale insists that the house in town is legally his, because he’s the eldest son. Also he reminded them that it was he who sent his mother the money to completely rebuild the house after the war, so he’s not completely wrong.”

“But that was in 1950,” Alfonso said. “The law has changed since then.”

“The world has changed since then, except, of course, for Pasquale,” Pietro said.

Filomena had heard this news through a telephone call from Alfredo's wife, who told her to inform Alfonso of Pasquale's whereabouts and doings.

"The woman was furious," Filomena shrieked. "Especially when she told me that Pasquale had suggested they draw an account of what they owed in back rent and what they had spent on the house in renovations and taxes so he could pay them the difference. That's when they kicked him out."

Pasquale was forced to go to a hotel in Catanzaro for a few days. Then he appeared in Mulirena to check on his wife's family property there, for which he had also contributed a large sum of money when they first married. At the time, Alfonso had tried setting up a company to export olive oil into Canada and had needed the money to convert an old farmhouse into a processing plant. After Alfonso emigrated, his food business grew in different directions, and he gave up on plans to produce their own oil. Domenico, or Micu, who used to work for Don Luigi, had lived in the farmhouse for years. Pasquale ended up staying with Micu, whose wife Assunta had died years earlier.

"The same law applies to the house on the farm in Mulirena. It legally belongs to the tenant after all the years he's lived there. If he's lucky, the old man may have gone senile and doesn't understand the law."

"We have a lot more interest in that land and farmhouse than he does," Alfonso said. "But after being away all these years, that means nothing in Italy."

"He's hardheaded," Filomena concluded, talking directly to Cathy. "He doesn't understand Italian law. It's a crazy law... not like here. You lose the rights to a house if you don't live there."

“In 1958, before we came here, he sent us—what?—a few thousand dollars?” Pietro said. “Still, it can’t be worth much more now. He’s lucky Micu let him in the house. Imagine those two men living together. One is drunk from morning to night; the other is crazy.”

“It’s not so much the farmhouse in Mulirena that he’s after, but the house in his own town,” Filomena added. “He wants to settle there, he told them, and wants it for himself and his daughter.”

“As if his daughter is ever going to visit Serra San Pietro...especially now. Eh, Carmy, when do you want to go visit your father in the big metropolis?” Pietro laughed, but Carmy just shrugged her shoulders

The local authorities at city hall in Serra San Pietro wanted nothing to do with the family quarrel and they referred Pasquale to a lawyer.

“So how was he arrested?” Cathy asked.

“At city hall,” Filomena said, laughing. “He went back to city hall in Serra San Pietro and started accusing the workers there of corruption. He called them all kinds of names, and said he’d kill them all if they didn’t kick Alfredo out of his house.”

“Imagine the scene he must have made, if they wrote about it in the *Gazzetta*,” Pietro said. “They must think that we’re all *cafoni* here in Canada.”

“They had to call the *carabinieri*, and they sent him to jail in Catanzaro for one night. They named him *Il brigante Canadese*, and everyone is making fun of him now.”

“Not only is he a *cafone*, he’s a real *stronzo*,” Alfonso said. “First he goes to hide in his hometown, where everyone knows him, then in Mulirena, where everyone knows

us, and then he shows up at city hall and has his picture taken for the paper. Wait till I call my lawyer tomorrow morning.”

Everyone laughed except Carmy who had been quiet all along.

Driving home, Cathy asked her how she felt about these new events.

“I don’t know. I feel a bit sorry for the man...now that everyone is making fun of him. Why would he go to the village, of all places? He knew he’d be found out. Maybe he doesn’t want to hide after all. Maybe they should leave him alone.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He talked about that house all the time—now that I think about it—as if it was his real home. I assumed it was his. He always said, ‘my house in the *paese*.’ Sometimes I even told him, “Why don’t you go get lost there, so I won’t have to see you?” But he never went while his mother was alive. Maybe that’s why he thought of going back, to see the old house and her grave before he dies.”

“What makes you say he’ll die?”

“I don’t know. Something tells me that things are going to get bad for him there.”

“You really feel sorry for your father, don’t you?” Cathy asked.

Carmy didn’t answer and Cathy threw a quick glance at her. The girl stared ahead with a blank expression as if she hadn’t heard the question. But then, she said, “I felt sorry for him the night they had the argument.”

“What night was that?” Cathy asked.

“The night my mother was beaten up,” Carmy said absentmindedly.

“What?” Cathy exclaimed. She braked and pulled the car over on the curb. “You never said anything about a fight. What happened?”

“My uncle, my father and my mother argued all evening about land and money. But those three always argued. I didn’t pay any attention to it.”

“Your uncle was there? Then why didn’t you say anything to the police?” Cathy asked.

“Because it’s none of their business,” Carmy said angrily. “Anyway, I went out and don’t know what happened next. Really I don’t. I wish I hadn’t gone out that evening.”

“Why did you say you felt sorry for your father then?”

“I don’t know, but he seemed so alone. My mother left him, and everyone seemed to gang up against him... like now. What a family I had to get! Actually, it’s me I should feel sorry for.”

Cathy wished she had something to offer as a response, but she just looked at Carmy as if to agree with her.

When they got home, the apartment was empty. Pierre had cleaned the den, packed his things, and gone. Sean had left a note saying he would be staying at a hotel with JP for the rest of the week, to work on the Halloween fundraising ball, but that he would call during the week.

In the bedroom, the unopened boxes of furniture had been piled tower-like next to the new mattress on the floor.

NOVEMBER

By Cathy Anastasia

All across Italy, November is known as the month of the dead. The first of the month is the Feast of the Dead; the fourth is the Day of the Fallen Soldiers; and nature does the rest. Mother always set rows of photographs of dead relatives on her dresser and lit as many candles as possible in front of them, as though wanting to lighten up the somber period that followed. She continued to do this each year, in her bedroom in Montreal.

It may be that feelings of loss are most acutely felt in those places with the brightest summer sun, but I remembered Mulirena shrouded in unbearable gloom once the harvesting of grapes, olives and chestnuts was over. The bareness of the trees was matched by the emptiness in the households after the men had gone away to work in the cities of the north or emigrated overseas. There was little in the winter months to look forward to, not even the playful, cheerful whiteness of snow, for there, the rainy season started with the Feast of the Dead and lasted all winter long. The ancient, stony houses felt damp and dreary. And, with the rain, a deep melancholy seeped into the souls of the women and children.

On a bleak, late November afternoon in 1961, a group of people gathered on the outskirts of Mulirena, on the road facing the Timpa, across the ravine—the spot where people came to see others off, or waited impatiently for someone to arrive. The details of this scene were described to me when I returned to the village in 1965. It was a somber and dark gathering. The older ladies, still dressed in the remnants of the *pacchiana*

costume, let their long, heavy, black skirts down to the ground, black shawls covering their heads. The weight of the heavy winter shawls made their heads tilt to one side, giving them the appearance of *Addolorate*—women destined for sorrow and mourning.

The younger ladies, dressed in ordinary clothes, were also in black. The men wore black ties and black armbands. The village band—carrying tubas, trumpets and clarinets under their arms—was clearly not in a festive mood. This group was waiting for someone to arrive.

Across the ocean, the vapid songs of Ricky Nelson, Frankie Avalon and Fabian ruled the hit parade. Elvis was still away in Germany doing his military service, and a younger set of teen singers had taken over his territory. On the day after Labor Day, I started my first year of high school at Saint Pius X, the newest and largest of the English Catholic High Schools in Montreal. Boys were taught by the Christian brothers and girls, by the sisters of Saint Anne; they were segregated into two, separate buildings, connected by the administration offices.

“If I hear reports that you are seen hanging around with boys, it will be the end of school for you,” my father threatened me. As if I needed this admonition! I used to turn scarlet when I came into contact with any member of the opposite sex from the other side of the building. I had been placed in 1A, the class with the highest marks, yet I still mumbled self-consciously in highly accented English when answering questions from my teacher. My Italian girlfriends had all changed their names from Maria to Mary, Antoinetta to Tonie, Giuseppina to Josie, but I still gave my name as Caterina.

I was very puzzled after Sister Mary Rose returned my first composition assignment with a question mark.

“Sister, I didn’t get a mark...like the others,” I said shyly.

“I don’t believe you wrote it,” she said.

The topic of the composition had been the *Autobiography of a Car*, and I had written about an old American Chevy used by a teenager and his friends. A humorous story had just flowed naturally, without much effort, and I had had fun writing it. But I just looked at the teacher and my unmarked composition, not knowing what to answer.

“You don’t talk like that, so how can you write like that?” she asked.

I was mortified. “I can write better than I can speak,” I told her. “I need time to think about words.”

She looked at me with a frown, not quite sure what to make of me. I knew that she could not understand the kind of battles that had been fought in the language department of my brain, leaving behind casualties. Calabrese dialect had resisted Italian, and before Italian had had a chance to take the upper hand, it had been invaded by the French, and then by the English. Unfortunately no one language had won complete control, and no matter what I spoke, words did not flow easily off my tongue. They often failed me, left me stranded in mid-sentence, flushed and embarrassed. So I spoke up as little as possible.

My brother was growing impatient with school and had finally convinced my father that an academic education was not for him. In the spring, he enrolled in a private hairdressing course with a friend. My father was still trying to convince me that I would be better off working at the factory. Things had completely turned around that summer between my father and me. Even though I’d gotten my way about school, we hardly ever

spoke to one other. By the middle of November, though, things were looking up. My hair was being styled almost every day by my brother, who used me as his mannequin. He cut it short, and I was one of the first girls in the class to sport a teased-up hairdo. Sister Mary Rose always joked that one day she'd come in with her hair styled just like me. I had joined the Sodality of Mary, a group that went into the community to perform acts of charity. I had also auditioned for the glee club, and had been given a singing part in the musical play, *Finian's Rainbow*. On the first parent's night, Sister Mary Rose praised my efforts to my mother, and to show that she finally believed me, had my first composition printed in the school newspaper, the *Sartorian*. It was November, 1961. The little rock gardens and trees of Tenth Avenue had sparkled in the vibrant colors and soft warmth of Indian summer, but even that had come to its end.

About a week after parents' night, my aunts Rosa and Tina, and their husbands Antonio and Antonio—both called Tony for short—along with my cousins Pat, Louis, Joe and Sal, came to visit. At such gatherings, when one of the two Joes, two Louis or two Tonys was called, the name had to be qualified by the wife or mother's name. It was clearly due to the tradition of naming children after grandparents that the same few names went around and around in small villages.

On this Saturday evening, my relatives came with an unusual surprise. My paternal grandfather had sent, via a *paesano* passing through on his way to Winnipeg, a recording of his voice with a message to all of us. A community radio station in Winnipeg had sponsored this effort to have parents' voices sent to their immigrant children. Everyone was so anxious to hear the recording that my mother hardly had time

to make and serve coffee before my older cousin Peppe set up his portable record player on the kitchen table. We all gathered around the machine, almost expecting to be transported to my grandparents' black, smoke-filled kitchen, where we used to sit around the fireplace as they cooked over a tripod. As soon as my grandfather uttered the first word, my aunts, who were very emotional, started crying. As for my brother, my younger cousins and I, we could not help but snicker at my grandfather's grandiose and grandiloquent manner of speaking. It was his style to talk to a group as if giving a political speech. Addressing his family on a recording machine microphone, he sounded like a pompous Roman orator, sending us all his *saluti* and good wishes. Then he addressed my father, his only surviving son.

“My dear son, I am speaking to you from our small and poor Italy. Always remember, though, that once we were great and that we will be great again. Destiny has been cruel to us and to our country. Italy fell because we were betrayed. The past is like a wound in my heart. How can I forget the pain of seeing your return?”

At the mention of this incident, my aunts became almost hysterical.

My aunt Maria said, “Oh, I can still see you, as if it were today. What a sight, what a sight!” She was referring to the night my father had returned from war.

My father also broke down as my grandfather went on. “But times are changing here too, and those black days are over. I hope that I will live to see you come back to Mulirena in luxury and glory.”

“What luxury, what glory?” answered my father, wiping his tears. “Do they know that, here, we can't work five months of the year because of the weather?”

“Joe, don’t complain. At least here, when you work, you get paid at the end of the week. Did you forget the summer that we worked in Cassino—like beasts!—and they never paid us a lira?” asked Aunt Rosa’s Tony.

“Things have changed there too, now. It’s not the same anymore,” said the other uncle Tony. “Even Don Tommasino drives a Fiat now. Christ rode on a donkey but our priest now drives a Fiat. How do you like that?”

“A Fiat Topolino!” exclaimed the older uncle Tony. “You call that a car? Compared to a Chrysler or a Pontiac, it’s a tin toy. Don’t kid yourselves. Nothing has changed there.”

“For things to change they need to burn the city hall again—with everyone in it.” Aunt Tina’s Tony said. “And the government in Rome too. It’s always the same crooks who run everything there, from the church to the government. We forget too fast.” He had had communist leanings back in Italy. As a matter of fact, he had been refused a visa to the States because of it.

“You can say whatever you want, To’, but in Mulirena, with a few *lire* a day, you feel like a king,” my father said. “Here, it’s never enough. I’m going back there, one way or another. One day I’m going back.”

“You’re talking nonsense,” replied my mother. “With two children growing up here, where are you going?”

“The children will be old enough to fend for themselves like I did. They will not die of hunger anymore.”

Aunt Tina’s Tony said, “You tell them what Mussolini used to tell us: *Chi mi ama mi seque.*”

“Eh! If you knew how many times I’ve told them that,” Father said.

“Eh, you and Mussolini! We always end up talking about Mussolini,” said my aunt Tina, and everyone laughed.

There was nothing unusual about the bantering. It was always like this when we got together. But I couldn’t understand the reference to my father’s return from the war. When everyone had gone and Father had gone to bed, I asked my mother, “Why would his return be remembered with pain? Weren’t they happy that he had come back safe?”

“Well, there were two returns that your grandfather may have meant. Once after the war, and the other after your uncle died in Milano,” Mother said sighing.

A younger brother, working under Father’s supervision, had fallen from a construction scaffold in Milano, and Father had returned to Mulirena to break the news to his mother. My grandmother had never recovered from the loss, and I always remembered her dressed in black because of it.

“I certainly was happy to see your father come back from the war—no matter what condition he was in,” Mother said. “We hadn’t heard from him in months and were afraid he might be dead. But you know how your grandfather is. He likes to think big. It was always, ‘Mussolini here, Mussolini there.’ He thought that they were going to conquer the world. Instead, your father and so many others returned hiding, in the middle of the night, like thieves. But what else could they do, those poor men?”

That evening I couldn’t fall asleep. I remembered a group picture of soldiers in uniform, in which my father was smiling broadly, his face darkly tanned, and he much slimmer than I had ever known him. I tried to piece together the tidbits of information I’d

heard throughout the years. In a semi-awake, semi-asleep state, I imagined writing a story around my father's experiences in the war.

Two young soldiers face a farmhouse, somewhere in Yugoslavia. They are hiding behind a bush, their shoes are in pieces, their uniform tattered, and they have not eaten in days.

"What do you say?" asks my father. "There is a light. There are people there. I am not throwing them this thing," He is holding a hand grenade.

"That's what they've asked us to do. What if there are men inside, hiding?" answers his companion. *Was he in that picture?*

"Let them hide. Who wants to fight anymore?"

"Then let's just pretend that we never saw the house, and let's go looking for the others. We haven't heard any bombings, so we will meet them for sure."

"If you want to go looking for the others, you go alone. I'm going inside. Look there is smoke coming out. They must be cooking something. They won't refuse us a piece of bread when they see us in this condition."

"What if they greet you with machine guns?"

"If there are men inside, I'm sure that they must be as fed up with fighting as we are. Anyway, we're already half dead of hunger. If we don't eat something, we can't go any further."

"Let's say we go in and they feed us. What then? Will we go meet the others after?"

“We’ll see. But I don’t know. How far up north are they taking us? And what the hell are we going to do once we get there?”

“Yes, but Giuse’, if everyone did like us....”

“Who are we fighting for, anyway. The Germans? The Americans? The Russians? I don’t understand anything anymore. If we throw this grenade into the farmhouse and kill a bunch of women and children, who have we saved?”

After a tentative knock on the door, two frightened women and a child open the door to them. The soldiers put their hands to their mouths, signaling that they want something to eat. The ladies let them in and serve them a bowl of potato and cabbage soup, the likes of which the men had never tasted before.

Then the men put their two hands next to their heads, indicating that they need a place to sleep. The women must surely see in their eyes that these are not malicious, evil-seeking men, but two weary soldiers who just want to go home to their families.

Was it here, I wondered, that they would decide to run back home? Would they ask for or steal large peasant kerchiefs and dresses? How would they make the long journey back home? Trainloads of people, mostly women and children, were pushing for a spot on the trains, carrying sacks of belongings on their heads or over their shoulders. The two soldiers could get lost in the hordes of refugees fleeing the larger northern cities for the rural villages of the south. They must certainly have slept in many farmhouses and animal barns for I had heard that, when my father showed up in the middle of the night at my grandparents' house, to change clothes before showing himself to my mother, he was dressed like a woman, and covered from head to toe in lice.

I had finally fallen asleep, when suddenly I heard my mother's scream. "Cateri, Luigi, wake up! Your father is not well!"

We ran into the bedroom and saw my father breathing heavily. We called and called and shook him, but he would not wake up. He just kept breathing hard, as if his heart was trying to escape his chest.

Soon, some neighbors who had heard the noise, came up and called an ambulance. Within a few minutes, ambulance attendants rushed in with oxygen masks and closed the bedroom door. A few minutes later, one came out to tell us that our father had died of a heart attack. Next, I saw the attendant inject my mother with a tranquilizer to keep her from screaming and crying.

The next week was a blur of people kissing and shaking hands.

"Only forty-two," they all repeated. "He was so young... just when he could have enjoyed his family."

Without any hesitation, my mother decided to spend whatever money they had saved for an expensive casket, a large flower arrangement, and a plane ticket to send my father's body back to Mulirena.

The gathering of people who had waited patiently on the road became animated as they spotted a black vehicle across the ravine, emerging from Amato. My grandfather raised his hands in the air. "My son, my son is here" And they all moved to meet the car.

The hearse moved slowly, turned at the bend, and came into full view, the ornate, Canadian oak casket secured on its roof, and a huge white dove, made of white

chrysanthemums, perched on top, as if reaching for the sky. From there, they formed a procession. The band in front, playing a slow march, was followed by the casket, the men and then the women in black. As the cortege proceeded up the narrow streets toward the church, others joined in, until most of the villagers had come out to see the sad, triumphant return home of Giuseppe Anastasio.

Once the funeral period was over, the question of our staying in Canada was raised. My mother's brother, Zio Pietro, suggested that we go back and that he would look after us since the relatives we had in Montreal were all from my father's side.

"What is a woman alone going to do in a strange country?" my uncle wrote. After initial uncertainty, my mother took the decision all by herself. "No, we are staying here. At least here I have the job at the factory. We won't have to depend on anyone else to look after us."

I was a little disappointed, as I had secretly hoped to go back to Italy. Mother must have been as terrified as ever. But for once, she didn't let herself be bullied by her own fears, and I looked at her differently. It was as if the little sparrow had begun to fly. I had to relent about school, though.

"How can she be so stubborn?" my aunts pressured my mother when I insisted on completing my first year of high school. With no life insurance, the only money we had was my mother's meager salary from the factory. My teachers all came to my rescue and we reached a compromise. No more factory. I would stay in school one more year to obtain the ninth grade leaving certificate, and then take a trade course—perhaps hairdressing, like my brother.

There were other compromises, on account of the mourning. On my return to school, I wore a black blouse under the navy blue tunic and I wasn't permitted to wear lipstick or have my hair styled for a year. I was allowed to stay in the Sodality of Mary, but I had to give up the glee club and my singing role for good.

Sister Mary Rose came to me one day when I seemed distant and absent-minded. "Don't worry too much, Caterina. I know you'll be fine."

I hadn't cried much throughout the ordeal, though the numbness really hurt deep inside. I felt especially sad for my mother and father who had had so little time together in spite of their love for one other and their struggle to be reunited. As for me, I wasn't as much as worried as blanked out. I saw life ahead of me as a series of boxes that I knew held nothing to make me want to run and open them up. I tried to write about how I felt, but the words didn't flow any easier than my tears. One evening, though, I played with a few words that I had jotted down, and formed my first poem in the shape of a tombstone:

November, month of the dead
leaves, soldiers, dreams,
thirst, emptiness, yearning
after the summer sun

WEEK 4

Tuesday, October 21, 1980

Day Four, Period Five: Supervision

Day Four fell on Tuesday. Bruce was already at his supervision post when Cathy joined him at the fifth period. She had seen him in the cafeteria or passed him in the hall a few times since their last chat together, but they had not had the chance to carry on their conversation.

Cathy told him the latest news about Carmy's father and Bruce suggested that the three of them have a meeting to give Carmy a chance to air her feelings.

"She seems to have taken it in stride," Cathy said. "Carmy hasn't mentioned her father at all since Sunday.

"Well, it can't be too cheerful to know your father is in jail while your mother is in a coma," Bruce said.

"Especially when the father put her there," Cathy added.

"People have different strategies for coping," Bruce added. "Don't take anything for granted. She must be suffering inside. Let's meet tomorrow at lunch in my English class."

"OK," Cathy replied. "She's not doing much homework either, but I haven't pushed her."

She knew that Carmy had till the end of the week to hand in an English composition and had offered to help her, but Carmy had refused each time.

Bruce asked Cathy if she had done any serious writing of her own since their last supervision.

“Unfortunately, I can’t get started,” she said. “My mind has been preoccupied with other things.”

“Maybe the timing is all wrong. The best time to write is not when planning a wedding, but when ending one.”

So Carmy had mentioned Sean to Bruce, Cathy thought. She said, “You seem to know all about it...I mean about endings...the relationship kind.” She had heard from Susan that Bruce had lived with someone, who had eventually left him. She was curious to hear more about it.

Bruce did speak openly of having lived with a girl throughout his teacher’s college days. She had also been an English teacher but she had left Quebec to go teach in an aboriginal school in northern Quebec. They had parted ways without any ill feelings. She had needed to seek new experiences and he didn’t love her enough to follow her. He now lived alone and said he liked it that way.

“I’m not a social animal,” he said. “I was raised in the quiet north, where we were cooped up in our insulated houses all winter long, like grizzly bears. I can take the solitude. But I also like what Montreal has to offer.”

Cathy shifted from one leg to the other. She had been leaning against the wall while she listened.

Two women teachers passed by, interrupting their conversation. “You having fun?” one asked. “How many undesirables have you had to hold back today?”

They all chatted for awhile about the labor disputes in the other school boards, the bus drivers' work interruptions, and the rumors, circulating since the meeting with the police chief, about the alleged drug and prostitution rings operating around the school.

“I think they're just trying to alarm us, to justify all of this useless supervision,” one of the teachers said before leaving Cathy and Bruce alone again.

Cathy asked Bruce if he knew Eddie, a past special-education student who had called Carmy at home the evening before.

“Oh yes, the snake. He's a slippery one, that one, a smooth operator—real smart, though—a Park Ex inner-city kid.” He told her that Eddie was one of the first casualties of Mrs. Champagne's policy to kick troublemakers out of the school as soon as they turned sixteen. But he told her not to worry about him calling Carmy at home. He had been in the same English class as Carmy and had even helped her with her English work.

“He was a rarity in this school, one of the few English kids. I think Carmy may have a crush on him,” he said.

“Of course. She had to fall for a troublemaker,” Cathy said, raising her hands and shaking her head.

“Well, maybe she's that type of woman, who would rather run with the wolves,” he said smiling.

Cathy the Hairdresser

By Cathy Anastasia

In July of the summer after my father's death, we moved from Tenth Avenue to a cheaper upper duplex in central-east Montreal. It was on a nondescript street—nothing distinguished it from thousands of other streets like it in Montreal. The upper duplex consisted of a small kitchen, a bathroom, but no defined bedrooms. A wide arch separated an open living area, which everyone called a double living room. We squeezed the living room set and TV into one small section, and my parents' bedroom set into the other, leaving very little walk-around space between the furniture.

We partitioned the bedroom section with a curtain. I slept with my mother on the double bed, and my brother slept in the living room on a folding cot, which we opened every night after rearranging the furniture. In the case of a night fire, my mother and I would have had to jump out of our bed and onto my brother's cot, the sofa and the coffee table before reaching the corridor.

I almost wished we had returned to Mulirena. At the school library, I read in *National Geographic* about the Italian Economic Boom, and in the pictures, everyone looked so well dressed and elegant. Mulirena became the place where I thought about when I was most bored and feeling downhearted.

My memories of the past focused on what was most lacking in my present—dressed in mourning black, cooped up in a claustrophobic dwelling with no privacy, and with little to look forward to in the near future. I desperately wanted to keep a grasp on the sense of wonder and joy that I associated with my happy childhood in Mulirena, and

that had completely slipped away from me. The images were always as luminous as picnics with girlfriends in the surrounding countryside, as sweet and luscious as the cherries and figs we feasted on, and as light and breezy as the ever-present red poppies swaying lazily in golden wheat-fields.

After completing ninth grade, I had followed a hairdressing course at the Academie de coiffure Zaza, on the corner of Saint-Laurent and Sainte-Catherine Streets. Even in my last year of high school, my mother was reluctant to send me by bus to visit my friend Antoinette in Saint-Michel. But now, at fifteen, I traveled each day through areas with strip clubs, X-rated movie theaters, and dubious rooming houses to get to the hairdressing school.

The course was given in French by French-born hairstylist, Monsieur Zaza. Also French were the off-color jokes that other students laughed at continuously. It took me a few months before I became fully comfortable with and able to understand the *joual* expressions and the hidden meanings of the jokes.

My first job as a full-fledged hairdresser had been at a small neighborhood salon in Little Italy, Salone Venere, which had also given me the opportunity to speak and practice my Italian. Already, since living near the Italian church, Notre-Dame-de-la-Consolata, I had been participating in many activities organized at the parish by different members of the Italian community: the choir, an amateur theater group, and a sodality devoted to the promotion of the poetry of Giacomo Leopardi.

This monthly literary group gathered for poetry readings and discussions, and it kindled in me a yearning to continue my studies. Since I had already obtained my high

school certificate by taking evening courses at a high school, I enrolled as a mature student in Italian literature, at Loyola College.

The family salon I worked at for two years was owned by a woman from Friuli. Signora Venturi was not a hairdresser herself, and relied on me to run the place. The salon was not very busy on weekdays, so I worked alone during the week. As long as the place was kept spotlessly clean, I was free to read and do my own work. In fact, the Signora encouraged me to go on with my studies.

It was during the two years that I worked there that I took to writing stories from the notes I had kept during the boat trip and during my first winter in Montreal. As I read my notes, I realized that the few years I spent in Mulirena would be lost and forgotten forever unless I managed to organize my writing. In describing the places, people and activities I remembered most fondly, I had tried to recapture the spirit of the moments I had missed the most. But would anyone else find them as compelling?

I wished I could write a number of individual stories that, once joined together, would tell a bigger story. I didn't know if that would make sense, but it was the way I saw real life: broken into bits and pieces of what and who we become as time passes. It seemed that, at every stage, I could look back at who I had been before, and see someone different. And yet I was the same person. Also, each time I resurrected the stories, I changed them, adding something new that I had not thought of before, and that reflected my growing maturity and knowledge about literature and writing.

The work at the salon soon became monotonous since the same patrons came in week after week. But the part I did enjoy was chatting with the Italian clients, especially during the quiet unhurried weekdays when they all had stories to tell about their lives,

about their voyage from Italy, and about their first years in Montreal. In many ways their stories were like mine, but somehow, in each there was something of theirs that made them different. Some had come as babies and remembered nothing of the trip; others, as teenagers who had left sweethearts behind to follow their parents; and a few came as brides married by proxy to men they had never met. I thought it would be interesting if I could incorporate some of those details into my stories. But I was afraid this would seem like lying or, worse still, like abusing their confidence in me.

It was while I worked in Little Italy that people at work started calling me Cathy. I don't recall a specific moment when the name change occurred or if there was any conscious reason for it. But my boss referred to me as Cathy to non-Italian clients. They in turn asked for me by that name, and little by little, everyone at the salon called me Cathy. At home I was still Catari, and I was Caterina to my old high school friends. I entertained the idea of adopting one easy catch-all name for everyone to use, such as Rina, but it seemed an impossible task to rename myself.

Already I had changed the way I looked. Because of my work. I spent a lot of time playing with make-up and different hairstyles. Wigs had become fashionable and I had fun changing my hair color and length according to my moods.

Still, I had a hard time thinking of myself as a hairstylist, especially when I started studying literature again and since I wanted to write. How was it, I often wondered, while I sat alone in the salon, that, of all the things I had wanted to be, or could have been, I had become destined to spend my days styling other people's hair? The little girl who had played Saint Bernadette in *Mulirena* and who had aimed to become a saint, and the

clumsy teenager who liked reading and writing, had become, of all things, Cathy, the hairdresser.

Wednesday, October 22, 1980

The Canadian Brigand

Late Tuesday evening, Teresa called Cathy to tell her that she had read about Pasquale in *Il Gazzettino Italo-Canadese*, the local Italian community paper, edited by their *paesano*, Antonio Amoruso.

"He printed the same article that appeared in Italy," Teresa said. "I'm really surprised at him. It's not a nice story. There's more to it than what that Filomena told you. I don't know how you're going to tell Carmelina what it says about her mother, but I wouldn't want to be in your shoes."

The story was that Pasquale had been released from jail but then had been brought back for questioning, after Alfonso's lawyer in Montreal made a criminal complaint against him for attempted murder. Pasquale then hired the services of a lawyer, but not before granting an interview to the reporter from the *Gazetta del Sud*, which had covered the story of his first arrest. In his interview, Pasquale accused his wife of infidelity.

Cathy decided not to say anything to Carmy until she'd had a chance to read the article herself.

On Wednesday morning, on her way to school, she stopped at the Agence de Voyage Le Méditerranéen, which also served as the headquarter of *Il Gazzettino Italo-Canadese*, to pick up a copy of the weekly Italian paper, but the agency was still closed. She went to the bar next door, and there, bought a copy of the thin, left-leaning

newspaper, which was usually devoted to editorial criticism of the cliques that had formed in the community over the years.

She scanned through the article with Pasquale's picture as she walked back to the car. His unshaven, bony face, his protruding teeth and dark, wiry hair gave him the look of a caged monkey. The article was a full reprint of the one that had appeared in *La Gazzetta Del Sud*.

CALABRIAN BRIGAND RETURNS HOME FROM CANADA CLAIMS PATRIARCHAL HOME AND HONOR

A Canadian man, wanted for questioning for his wife's near-death beating in Canada, was arrested in Serra San Pietro, in the province of Catanzaro, for disturbing the peace, after he threatened employees at city hall. He is trying to set back the clock on Italian civil law, by proclaiming his right to his ancestral home and his right to plead to a crime of honor committed in Montreal, Canada, on October 1 of this year.

Pasquale Tonnelli, 58, returned to Serra San Bruno after a 37-year absence, where he tried to obtain the assistance of the local authorities to settle his ownership rights to his family home, but they refused to get involved in the family squabble. His 40-year-old nephew, Alfredo Tonnelli, also claims right of ownership of the home, since he has lived in it since 1965 when his father, Tonnelli's brother, moved to Switzerland. Pasquale Tonnelli had been a guest in the house for almost a month, but Alfredo and his wife locked him out after an argument with the older man.

When Alfredo was asked why he locked the uncle out of the house, he said, "He can't buy back the years of work we have put into the land and the house while he has been absent in Canada. He can stay as a visitor for a week or two, but the house now belongs to us."

After a week of living in a farmhouse in the nearby town of Mulirena with another elderly man, Domenico Arcuri, known as Micu in the village, a distraught Pasquale showed up at city hall accusing everyone there of corruption and inefficiency, and threatened to burning down the building unless they moved quickly to settle his claim. They called the *carabinieri*, who arrested him for disturbing the peace, released him after one day, but then detained him again for questioning with regards to the attempted murder charges that were laid against him by his wife's family in Montreal, Canada. Pasquale Tonnelli is the main suspect in the coma-inducing beating of his wife on October 1 of this year.

Tonnelli has secured the services of lawyer Filippo Rizzi, who stated that his client, having dual citizenship, has the right to be tried in the Italian courts,

and who made the surprising claim that Pasquale's alleged crime against his wife was nothing more than a passionate crime to defend his honor. Despite some contradictory decisions with regard to the honor defence in Italy, legislative provisions allowing for partial or complete defence in that context could be found in the penal codes. Honor killings has not been legally abolished in Italy yet.

Surprised by this plea, a reporter visited Tonnelli at the farmhouse for an interview, and asked him why he considered his wife's attempted murder a crime of honor.

"My wife and her family has cuckolded me for years. I couldn't take it anymore."

"What was the incident that provoked the crime of passion?"

"This is an old account. I've kept count of all the lies, and now the whole family has to pay up. My wife was not what she was supposed to be from the beginning."

"But what made you decide to kill her after all these years?"

"She was not what she was supposed to be when I married her, but I never wanted to hurt her. I lost my head and slapped her when I heard things about my daughter."

"What things?"

"*Schifezze*. That's why I came here. To get away from all the garbage."

"How old is your daughter?"

"Sixteen... sixteen years of pain."

Later lawyer Rizzi, interviewed by this same reporter, spoke on behalf of his client.

"My client claims that both his wife and her family have betrayed him for years, in business as well as in personal matters. The alleged crime against his wife was a momentary act of passion provoked by the revelation that my client may not be the biological father of his daughter. He now wants to set the record straight on all the dealings that his own brother, and brother-in-law Alfonso Abiusi, manipulated over a span of 40 years for their own gain, both in Italy and in Canada. He also has some incriminating information against some prominent members of the Italian community in Montreal.

Pasquale Tonnelli is being detained in house arrest, awaiting procedural coordination between Canadian and Italian law-enforcement agents.

"What's with the Italian paper?" Carmy asked, as Cathy returned to the car.

"Your father's picture is in it... the story that appeared in Italy."

"You're not serious. What the hell?" Cathy exclaimed when Cathy handed her the folded newspaper. She had thought of not telling Carmy, but then wondered how many others at school had seen the story.

“Your father seems desperate to say anything to excuse what he did. Don’t believe what’s written,” she told Carmy.

“Look at him. He looks like a monkey, and everyone tells me I look like him. All my life I’ve been told I take after this man,” Carmy shrieked.

“Obviously, he’s very troubled, and said some crazy things.”

“You know I can’t read the frigging Italian. What does it say?” Carmy asked after scanning the article.

Cathy explained the latest situation that Pasquale had placed himself in, but then couldn’t bring herself to mention the last part of the interview.

At a stop sign, she looked at Carmy. “Carmy, your father is very angry at your mother, so he said some nasty things about her... that he hit her... slapped her because... she had been unfaithful to him.”

“He’s gone nuts. She never left the house,” Carmy said, throwing the article in the back of the car.

“Sorry to be telling you this while driving to school. Maybe you want to take the day off, and we’ll talk about it this evening?”

“Now you tell me?” Carmy said.

“Look, I can drive you back. I’ll explain your absence to Mrs. Champagne,” Cathy said.

“How about you drive me by the hospital? I can go to my mother’s room whenever I want. I’ll stay till my grandmother gets there. Then I’ll walk home,” Carmy said.

“That’s a good idea. But be careful getting home,” Cathy said, and gave her the house keys. Carmy had stayed in the apartment by herself for an hour or two before.

Carmy took her knapsack from the back of the car as she got. “Nothing about my parents will surprise me anymore. You know, they lived like strangers. They even slept in separate bedrooms.”

“A lot of married couples do... for different reasons,” Cathy said. “Don’t think about it, Carmy. Try to catch up on your English assignments while you’re at home.”

“Good idea. You’re always thinking.” Carmy got out of the car and walked off with the newspaper in her hands.

Cathy wished she had asked some more questions about the evening her parents had argued. She wondered if Carmy had heard more than she cared to reveal. But she couldn’t do it in the car. Maybe later, at home. As she drove to school, she couldn’t help but do some other calculating of her own, which involved recalling Carmy’s birth date and backtracking nine months. It brought her to the summer of 1965.

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: May 5, 2005, 1:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: submission
Attachment: The Return & Expo67.doc

What would you have done, Franco? When that story fell in my lap, something told me there'd be more to it than just a quaint human-interest piece. Pasquale was a loose cannon, and I figured he'd have a lot to shoot his mouth off about, especially about his wife's family and their connections.

At the time, the most controversial news story in the community was the Miss Italia Montreal beauty pageant. My gut feeling turned out to be right. The scoop brought out a lot of dirt, if you remember, and the *Gazzettino* was quoted in the *Journal de Montreal*.

Do you remember some of the details?

A.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Sent: May 5, 2004, 1:00 PM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Re: submission

Antonio,

I don't remember your fifteen minutes of journalistic glory. In case you've forgotten, I was living in Calgary then, and we were not exactly on the best of terms when I left. I hope you showed some objectivity and restraint.

F

The Return

By Cathy Anastasia

In the early 60s, chartered flights and youth fares made air travel to Italy accessible to many who'd had no hope of returning to the villages of their pasts. In 1965, Mother saw that it would be possible to visit my father's grave, and I happily agreed to accompany her. For \$200 each, we boarded a jet at Dorval airport and made the return trip home.

With the new Singer sewing machine that my mother had bought me, I sewed myself a whole new wardrobe in preparation for the trip, and I spent days shopping for gifts to bring back to the family and friends who remained there.

I looked forward to reading on the seven-hour flight, and sat next to a window to better experience the excitement of approaching Rome in the early hours of morning. But when I boarded the plane, I was taken aback at how tight and claustrophobic the seats were. And, as the plane took off, I embarrassed myself to no end when my stomach suddenly rose into my throat and I vomited all over my lap and my Vogue magazine. I spent the rest of the flight immobile, afraid to move my head from the head rest, and holding an airsickness bag in my hands. My mother, on the other hand, was amused that I was the nauseous one this time.

On the bus ride from the airport to the train station, another form of anxiety overtook me. All I could think about was whether I might have a chance to stop at a shoe store before taking the train to Calabria. All the girls I saw walking in the streets of Rome wore thick platform sandals, while the new shoes I had bought on Saint-Hubert Street in

Montreal were stiletto-heeled and pointy. How could I show myself to my friends in Mulirena? But my mother's cousin who had met us at the airport was in a rush to get us to the station. A national train strike was announced for that afternoon, so we had no time to spare.

Rome's Stazione Termini was as bustling and as crowded as I remembered it, with the south-bound train jammed with *ferie* travelers, short-tempered from the excessive heat and lack of empty seats. The train sped swiftly along the sun-drenched cities and towns. It passed the same pastel-colored apartment buildings with peeling stucco and lines of laundry flying in the air, that were etched in my memory. I looked for small boys in short pants and sandals, kicking soccer balls and waving at the speeding train, but I could hardly see through the windows. We stood, sardine-like, in the train corridor, unable to move for fear of losing the few inches of space we had secured. At each stop, people swore at those of us who were blocking the cabin entrances, while vendors kept pushing stuffed *panini* and bottles of mineral water up through the windows.

Once we passed Naples, the train crowd thinned out, and we found seats in a cabin, where people were chatting, mostly about the labor union strikes paralyzing Italy. The more we sped south, the more the landscape became unfamiliar to me. Had the mountains always been so arid and barren, the trees so craggy and sparse? After a six-hour train ride, we reached Lamezia Terme station, where my uncle Pietro was waiting for us.

"Why didn't Luigi come too?" was the first thing he asked.

Then he maneuvered his little Fiat 500 up and up the steep mountain roads, honking at every turn.

“Here you never know whether you’ll hit a donkey, a herd of goats, or a motor scooter,” he said.

I wondered what inspired the village founders to settle in these out-of-the-way mountains. As we rose higher and higher, a smattering of other villages became visible below us, and before we knew it, we had reached the town of Amato, and Mulirena appeared across the ravine.

I had expected my cousins to be waiting by the *Funtanella* at the bend of the U-shaped road, but my uncle told us they would be waiting at my grandmother’s house. The car stopped repeatedly to greet friends along the way. The cobblestone streets had been resurfaced in dark asphalt. The town piazza and the streets looked a lot narrower and grayer than I remembered, and the flies were a real nuisance. Its funny how I had never once remembered the flies in all my reminiscences.

We entered my grandmother’s house through what had once been the family’s grocery store. It was here that I used to come every day after school to meet my mother, who helped bake the bread they sold at the store. The shelves were now empty, but the heavy wooden counter with the old-fashioned scales had been left behind. My uncle had moved to the city of Catanzaro to open a bigger, more modern store. But the smell of the burlap bags and flour seemed to have seeped into the old cement cracks, and I could almost taste the fragrant, freshly-baked bread and the *provolone* cheese that my mother used to have ready for me as a snack. The empty store was the coolest spot in the house and my grandmother still sat there in the afternoons to do her crocheting and to hold court

with the neighborhood ladies. As soon as they saw the car and the suitcases, they all rushed to greet my mother and me with hugs and kisses, and to ask about their own relatives in Montreal.

A group of young men passed by the store and glanced inside. The gutsiest of the bunch said, "Let's go see the *Americane*. Let's see if they recognize us." They were all good-looking, well dressed and polite. When they left, Angelo, the tallest and best-looking of the bunch looked back. He had light brown, almost blond hair, and large hazel-colored eyes.

My grandmother nudged me. "Do you like him?"

"He seems very nice," I said.

"Leave it up to me," she answered with a wink.

Maybe it was my fatigue after the long trip and the motion sickness, or the jet lag, but from the moment I set foot in the store on Thursday afternoon until the following Monday morning, I moved around as if I were in a stupor, not in control of my thoughts and actions. Whatever happened that weekend didn't seem as if it had really happened to me.

Though we hadn't slept properly for over twenty-four hours, we were unable to lie down and rest as my grandmother suggested. People kept trickling in and out to see us. Comare Rosaria came in with a basket of fruit. Her daughter Lucia was also in town. She had been coming every summer for the last couple of years to be with her mother since Compare Luigi had passed away. Her children were now all in Montreal, and doing well there, and she was also considering moving there. But my grandmother said that Lucia kept to herself, even in the village, and rarely went visiting.

In the evening, at the dinner table, Zio and grandmother told us that Angelo's family wanted to come to the house the following day to see us. "He's leaving on Sunday and he needs reassurance," my grandmother said.

Angelo would be in town only until Sunday, as he had to report to Bari by Monday to start his military service. Military service was serious business, and one could not easily avoid it.

It took me some time to realize that what they were discussing was the possibility of an engagement between Angelo and me. We had planned to stay a month, so I was not against the idea of making some interesting male friendships, especially after seeing the fine specimens that afternoon, but an official engagement on my first afternoon in the village was not what I had in mind.

"I don't want to get engaged to someone unless I get to know him first," I told my mother sleepily before going to bed.

She agreed with me, but explained that they were in a rush because he had to leave town so fast. He was one of the nicest young men in town, worked in a thriving family business in Catanzaro, and was probably the best opportunity I would ever get.

"Just look at him; he's twice your height. Next to him, you look like a little *pallotta*," she said laughing.

I had been very chubby and clumsy throughout my pre-teens, but since hairdressing school, I had lost the extra weight. This summer was the first time I had felt comfortable with how I looked.

The next day was a flurry of activity since guests were expected at the house, so I could not even go out to see my friends. I repeated to both my mother and grandmother that I wanted nothing to do with an engagement.

“Maybe we can write to one another and then we’ll see,” I suggested, hoping to dismiss the issue that way. A pen pal was what I had in mind.

“We’ll see... Leave it up to me,” my grandmother said again.

At dinner, my uncle and Angelo’s older brother took complete control of the negotiations as we all sat around the table. Again I objected to an engagement. But my grandmother said it was normal for a young girl to feel trepidation at such times.

“When I was engaged to your grandfather, I cried for a week,” she said. Had I not told her I liked Angelo? And they knew him and his family so well. There was no risk. Writing to one other without making any commitment was foolish, especially for me, she said. “He’s going to be away for almost two years. We also need a guarantee that he’s serious about the whole thing.”

Only an official engagement would do. They discussed where and when we would be married and I just sat there as if they were talking about someone else. My mother also sat there saying nothing and I was too confused and intimidated to object.

The next day, Saturday, we woke up very early to go to Catanzaro to shop for our engagement rings. I chose a chunky, white-gold model with a tiny encrusted diamond—not because I liked it but because it looked least like an engagement ring. How would I explain such a quick engagement to my Canadian friends?

In Catanzaro, Angelo and I walked alone for a few minutes but we had very little to say to one other. He assured me that he was not interested in me for the sake of going

to Canada. The previous day, it had been agreed that, because of my young age, we would wait at least three years before getting married. Then, he would come to Montreal for the wedding, and we would come back and settle in Catanzaro.

“Don’t worry about that yet,” my mother later whispered to me. “When he comes to Montreal, you’ll have time to decide where to stay.”

The engagement party was attended by only a handful of relatives. My paternal grandparents came, but my grandfather was a little miffed that he had not heard a word of what the other side of the family was cooking up so fast and without consulting him. I just sat there. I felt so tired. I wished they would all go home so I could go to bed.

The next day, Angelo had no choice but to leave after lunch. When we walked together to the church at the top, people came to congratulate us as if we were already married. One of the old schoolteachers who had known both of us could not contain her happiness at the pairing of two such wonderful young people, she said.

For a day, I thought that maybe it was all for the best. But on Monday morning, as my body started feeling like itself again, a heavy cloud settled over me, and I could not feel any pleasure or enthusiasm at being back in Mulirena. 'How could I have let them bully me again?' I kept asking myself. 'Why didn't I just say, No, this is not what I want.'

I spent the rest of the month going to the beach in Catanzaro Lido and shopping for shoes and clothes, except for a week of sightseeing in Rome and Naples with a couple visiting from the United States who offered to take me with them.

The town was animated and full of the young people who worked in the cities during the rest of the year. But as an engaged woman, I spent the best part of my days in the village visiting my grandparents and my boyfriend’s family.

Totu came to town, visiting from Rome, while I was traveling with the American couple, and I missed seeing him. I didn't see Lucia either, but I heard that, one afternoon while I was in Rome, the town was hit by a torrential rain storm. Comare Rosaria came to my grandmother's store, worried about her daughter getting wet and sick. Lucia had had the urge to visit her farmhouse, accompanied by a young cousin. They'd surely be caught in the storm without umbrellas. "She'll catch a pneumonia. She's already skin and bones," Comare Rosaria said.

A bunch of kids collected umbrellas and volunteered to go meet the two. They walked as far as the farmhouse, and when they got there, they only found the young cousin. She took the umbrellas, saying that Lucia had gone walking to the Fiumara by herself before the rain had started, and that she was waiting for her to return.

When they finally returned to the village, the young cousin told the kids that Lucia was really cross at her mother for sending a search party, even though she had returned from her excursion to the river, drenching wet.

I heard the story after I returned from my sightseeing tour, but didn't speculate about Lucia's actions. I had my own problem nagging at me—how do I break up an official engagement when everyone around was so happy for me?

Angelo's letters were frequent, warm and full of plans for the future. However, he felt my coolness toward him. He wrote, "I feel that you are hiding something from me—maybe something from the past? You can tell me. There should be no secrets between us."

I had nothing to hide from him except that, whenever I received one of his letters, all I could think of was my uncle and his brother mapping out *my* life and *my* future, while my mother and I just sat there, quiet and helpless like two children.

Angelo could not arrange for leave, as he had hoped, to see us off on our return to Canada. But he sent me gifts: perfumes, scarves and a beautiful moss-green suede purse, gift-wrapped with a bunch of felt violets, *violette del pensiero*—violets stand for remembrance in Italy. It was a very sweet gesture on his part, except that I had nothing to remember about him, only a harried day of shopping for a ring that I did not even want. We had never even held hands or kissed.

We still had another week's stay in Mulirena and, if we hadn't flown charter, I would have tried to go back home earlier.

Expo 67—Of Men and His Worlds

By Cathy Anastasia

To mark Canada's centennial, Montreal hosted a world fair, Expo 67. It was a most exciting time to be living in Montreal. In the three years since I had finished hairdressing school, I had worked my way up from shampoo girl to junior hairdresser and then to hairstylist. After my return from Italy, I corresponded with Angelo for about six months, but it became obvious to both of us that I could not warm up to him and could not honestly continue with the charade. He made it easy for me. He wrote that, whatever I decided, he would have no hard feelings. If ever we saw each other again in Mulirena, we would still be friends.

The hardest part was deciding how to tell my mother and the rest of the family that the engagement was off. My mother was naturally distressed by my decision. She had instantly considered Angelo as another son and probably loved him as one already. "I can't understand why you could not get attached to someone like Angelo," she said incredulously.

My uncle wrote me a terse letter. "Why did you not think about what you were doing before getting two families involved?"

My mother and brother soon accepted my decision, but Mother swore she would never get involved in matchmaking for me again.

By the time Expo opened, my brother and I had succeeded in setting up our own beauty salon in the city's west end. Our clientele was made up mainly of well-to-do matrons from Westmount, Snowdon, and Hampstead; of nurses and office workers from

the area's two hospitals; and, of the cocktail waitresses from the Crazy Horse Saloon on Côte-des-Neiges Road.

I continued with my evening courses in literature, and I had less time for writing, but I listened just as attentively to the stories of my new clients. Many of them were first-generation Jewish immigrants from northern Europe and survivors of Nazi persecution. When I washed their hair, I often spotted stamped numbers on their arms, which made my own arm hairs stand on end. Not all of them liked talking about their war experiences, and they lived in wealthier neighborhoods than ours, but I felt we had something in common because of we had all made the trip across the ocean.

Because of this, I felt more connected to them than to the Catholic, French-Canadian clients who had lived all of their lives at the foot of, and in the shadow of Saint Joseph's Oratory. These soft-spoken French-speaking clients were very polite, unassuming, and easy to please, but they seemed naive in comparison to the Europeans, and inexperienced about the world—except for the waitresses from the Crazy Horse Saloon. They had as much money to spend as the wealthier clients, and with their flashy clothes and stories about their many romantic adventures, they captured everyone's attentions. One Hampstead client had the habit of walking in with her chinchilla fur coat, and parading around the salon for a few minutes before hanging it up. But, one Saturday, Raymonde, a thin, flat-chested waitress, beat her at stealing the show when, after a month's absence, she walked in wearing a low-cut sweater containing the biggest bosom her small frame could carry.

By 1967, the year of the world's fair, the wave of immigrants from Italy had stopped. Italy was enjoying an economic boom, and a large number of the Italians we

knew in Montreal started making trips back home, with the intention of remaining there permanently. The majority of those who tried to resettle in Italy came back in less than a year. They said they were unable to find their bearings in Italy anymore—the country had changed and become more alien to them than Canada. With Expo 67, Canada attracted visitors from all over the world, and some of our relatives who were still living in Italy came to visit.

Added to all this travel was the illusion of traveling to different countries, which Expo 67 provided. Tickets to the fair were sold as passports. We could skip and jump from pavilion to pavilion—from Canada, to Russia, to France, to Ethiopia, to Czechoslovakia, to Italy, and back to Canada. These countries' pavilions were located one next to the other, and with a season's passport, we could visit them as often as we wanted to, sample their cuisine, and buy jewelry and souvenirs, just as if we had actually traveled abroad.

A special space in this vision of the world containing different worlds was the man-built island, Île-Notre-Dame, which was next to a natural island, Île-Sainte-Hélène. A minirail circled around the islands and went through a giant geodesic dome, through the American pavilion, and to the newly built amusement park, La Ronde. At Cité-du-Havre along the waterfront, they built a unique structure containing apartments, which was called Habitat 67. It resembled a Mediterranean village perched atop a mountain, and reminded me of Mulirena, as seen from Amato. The logo for Expo 67, called Man and His World, was a circle of men with outstretched hands.

“Montreal is such an exhilarating, cosmopolitan city,” said my *paesano*, Antonio Amoruso, who was visiting from Italy. “It seems less part of America, and more like Europe.”

He showed up at our apartment one evening to pay his respects to my mother. He had been staying with friends, and said he'd fallen in love with the city, its different languages and European atmosphere. He'd decided to stay longer than anticipated, and even hoped to look for work. He had taught high school literature for a while, and then worked as a freelance journalist in Rome, where he had been living since his studies. But getting ahead as a journalist in Italy was very difficult, he said, and there was no way he'd want to settle in the *paese*—a cemetery of a place, he called it. He was really impressed by how well my brother and I were doing with our new business. Before he left our house, I pulled out my Italian books, and spoke to him about the Italian literature courses I was taking.

“You still remember Italian, so you know three languages? I'm amazed,” he said.

“Yes I can write better than I can speak, though, in all three languages.” He didn't answer, and looked deep in thought, so I went on and told him I liked writing.

“Oh, do you write poetry?” he asked.

“No, I'm not much good at poetry. I like to write stories, stories about the past, about Mulirena,” I replied.

“Why Mulirena?” he asked, and seemed puzzled. “Four houses and four cats; what's there to write about?”

As a child I had thought him good looking, and I had always remembered him by the languid look of his eyes. But now, as he held his chin and looked quietly at me, I

wished I could spend more time talking to him about all the things I wanted to write about, though I found it difficult to explain exactly why I wanted so badly to do so. But I just mumbled, “I want to preserve my memories,” and was embarrassed as soon as I had said it—especially after he made a joke that pickled *giardiniera* was the only thing worth preserving.

“Would you like to read some of the stories?” I asked shyly.

“Yes, of course, but my English is not very good,” he answered. He had told me that he’d studied English and could read it, but that he spoke better French. That is why he liked Montreal so much.

While I went to my room to look for my notebooks to give him, Mother asked him about my uncle in Italy, and I didn’t have a chance to bring the subject back to writing. But when he left, I gave him three of my notebooks, and told him about Italian Day at Expo, which was coming up soon and during which I would be working as a hostess at the Italian pavilion. He said he planned to be there, and that he hoped to see me.

At Expo 67, each nation had its own day set aside for celebrating its ethnic character. All at once, it seemed chic to show off one’s heritage, and every nation tried to outdo the others in pageantry and folkloric displays. I had been recruited by the Italian Consulate to work as a volunteer at the Italian pavilion for the day. I was to smile and direct the extra-large crowd that would be gathered on account of the presence of the Italian president. I was dressed in a blue uniform, and wore a scarf with the colors of the Italian flag. When I saw Antonio and two friends walk toward me, my heart skipped a beat. He introduced me to Franco, whom I recognized as a writer for the local Italian

newspaper, *Il Cittadino Canadese*, and Carole, a tall, French-Canadian woman with stringy hair, no make-up, and gold-rimmed glasses.

“I can’t get over how grown-up you are; you’re a real *signorina*,” Antonio said. He invited me for coffee at the Italian bar while his two friends checked out the pavilion.

He said he had made some connections in the Italian community, and said he hoped to find a position as a writer in Montreal. I asked him if he had read my stories.

“I looked over many of them,” he said. “They’re full of interesting anecdotes, but they’re not really stories.”

I tried not to show my disappointment, but I didn’t know what to say, so I just sipped at my empty espresso coffee cup.

“Maybe you should write a memoir,” he added. “After all your family has gone through. Just write the story of your family.”

“Who would want to read my memoir?” I asked. I was only eighteen and didn’t think my life had been that interesting. “I don’t want to write about my life, but about the experiences that I have gone through and that are similar to others’. Do you know what I mean?” I wasn’t sure I was expressing myself clearly, or even loudly enough. He seemed to be straining to understand me, so I raised my voice. “I want to write about others too. I want others to see themselves in what I see.”

“*Eh va bene!* I hear you,” he said, also raising his voice, but still smiling. “Then... if that’s what you want, then use your imagination. Invent, invent! Don’t limit yourself to your personal experiences.”

I was happy he'd said that. It's what I had wanted to do all along, but I had believed that one had to stick to the truth to make a story feel real. But before I could agree with him, Franco and Carole returned.

"*Allons-y, mon grand Antoine,*" Carole said, as she slipped her arm in his.

"*Allons-y,*" he said smiling. He looked back at me sheepishly.

That evening, I told my mother about seeing Antonio and his friends.

"Was he with a French girl?" she asked me.

"Yes, and Franco Pastore from the Italian newspaper," I replied.

"I heard from your aunt that he is seeing a French-Canadian woman who works for the company that publishes the Italian paper. He didn't lose any time. He's only looking at fooling around with her while he's here. He's just like his uncle. He'll stay a bachelor all his life." Mother had also heard that Antonio had gone by the factory where Lucia and Aunt Tina worked.

"Maybe he only went to say hello, just like he did with all the other *paesani,*" I said.

"Just the same," Mother said. "With men, you never know what is passing through their heads. I hope Lucia doesn't do anything crazy, with a husband like hers."

I didn't tell her that Antonio and I had decided to meet at the Jean-Talon Metro the following Sunday afternoon to spend the day together. I had suggested taking him sightseeing in Old Montreal first, then going to La Ronde, and finishing up at the Mont-Royal lookout to see Montreal by night. And he'd accepted. I didn't really think a man like Antonio would be interested in a type like Carole—a serious bespectacled woman who smoked non-stop—or in a married woman like Lucia, when there were so many

available young women in Montreal. That evening, I pulled out my story on the sea voyage. I reworked it throughout the week, planning to give it to him on Sunday, to show that I could write a story as well as anyone else.

From: Antonio Amoruso aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Sent: May 30, 2005, 2:00 PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: submission
Attachment: submission: règlement de comptes.doc

Franco,

This will refresh your memory.

I showed as much restraint as a journalist could, under the circumstances.

A.

Règlement de Comptes

When Cathy walked into Mrs. Champagne's office to tell her about Carmy's absence, the principal handed her a copy of the *Journal de Montreal*, which had Pasquale's picture on page two, along with the headline, *Crime d'honneur et règlement de comptes*.

"Read this," Mrs. Champagne said. "Our school has made the news."

The article ran an interview with Antonio Amoruso, editor of the *Il Gazzettino Italo-Canadese*. He repeated the details of the story picked up from the Italian paper. He also elaborated on Pasquale's and Alfonso's connection to Jack Russo. But the objective of Amoruso's investigation was to trace this connection all the way back to the late 50s, when Pasquale, Alfonso, Russo, and Nicola Di Principe—none other than the Liberal Party member of Parliament, who was recently appointed ambassador to the Vatican — were involved in a fraudulent scheme to sell plots of land in Laval for a residential development that never materialized. That Pasquale's construction company had remained relatively small compared to Alfonso's was given as a possible motive for Pasquale's anger toward his wife's family after all these years. Infidelity was just a smokescreen, the interviewer stated. At the end, the article also mentioned that the daughter in question, a troubled youth, had been admitted to William Hingston High School despite the fact that she didn't qualify for English schooling according to the French language laws.

"Nick brought me the article this morning. It's too bad our school has to be mentioned under these circumstances," Mrs. Champagne said tersely.

Cathy had been so immersed in the article that she had all but forgotten that the principal was standing there. “I don’t know what to say,” she finally said, as though coming out of a trance. “I’m sorry. This is beyond reason. I don’t understand what made him report all this.”

“Do you know the reporter who gave the interview?”

“Yes,” Cathy said. “This is unbelievable. Well, I understand that papers always look for the sensational. But all this talk about land and connections to the Mafia is really crazy. Don’t believe it, Mrs. Champagne.”

“It’s not important what I believe, or for that matter, what you believe, Cathy. But since the mother’s beating, this Jack Russo’s brother has been killed. How do we know it’s not all related? And now these revelations. It’s scary! What if Carmy is a target?”

“A target for what?” Cathy asked incredulously. “No way!”

“And what about the schools’ image? Not only are we being seen accepting a problem student from another school board, but also going out of our way to bend the rules for a mafia-connected student. True or not, this is what comes out of the story. Nick was right all along. We should never have accepted Carmy—or taken her back.”

When Cathy didn’t respond, Mrs. Champagne continued. “Well, what more can I add? A fine mess! I’d suggest that Carmy stay home for a few more days, until all this dies down. She can’t possibly be expected to concentrate on her studies with all this going on.”

“I don’t think it’s fair to her. I’ll have to call Kelly and see what she says,” Cathy said.

“No need to do that just yet, Cathy. Let her stay home for another day, and then we’ll speak again. Just make sure she doesn’t get into any other trouble. I hear she’s been seen at a strip club, hanging out with some of your other students.”

“She may have gone with the girls after school, when the club is closed, but never in the evening. I have no control over what my students do after school hours.”

“I understand. But you should have some control over Carmy. How are you two related again?”

“We’re not blood relations. Her mother and I come from the same village. We’re just friends.” Cathy tried not to sound annoyed, but she remembered having said all this to Mrs. Champagne before.

“I see,” the principal said, shuffling some papers on her desk. “By the way, the department head votes are all in. I’ve asked Susan to take a tally, but I haven’t had the time to look at the numbers yet—all these labor problems and disruptions have made me fall behind in my work—but I’ll let everyone know by the end of the week.”

Cathy had applied to be head of her department. The teachers in each department had voted the week before, but Mrs. Champagne had the last word. The votes were only used as an indication, to help her make her decision.

“Take your time, Mrs. Champagne,” Cathy said. “And thank you. I’ll make sure Carmy does her work. She’ll be in on Friday.”

As Cathy walked briskly down the stairs toward her class, the department headship was the last thing on her mind. She was trying to figure out why her friend had blabbed to the papers. It was time to pay Antonio Amoruso—journalist, editor, travel

agent, and PQ supporter—a visit. She had her own score to settle with him, and she planned to do so before the day was over.

At recess, Cathy called her house. Carmy answered.

When Cathy asked her if her family had spoken about the news, Carmy replied flatly. “No, my grandmother didn’t say anything, and I didn’t see my uncle.” Her voice sounded distant and confrontational, and Cathy worried about her being alone in the house.

No one in class mentioned the newspaper story either. These kids did not read the French newspapers, and *Il Gazzettino* was not widely read by their parents or even by the Italian community at large. The official community paper was the thick *Il Corriere Italiano*, which was rich in news about social events, and in pictures of the feasts, balls and weddings that were held each week in the lavish reception halls springing up all over Saint-Leonard and Rivière-des-Prairies.

On her lunch break, Cathy left to go see Antonio, but decided to make a detour to her house to check on Carmy. She found the apartment empty. The den was messier than usual. Books and papers on the shelves seemed to have been disturbed, and someone had clearly rummaged inside the box on the bottom shelf, that contained all of her old notebooks. The piles of manuscripts that Cathy had sorted out and arranged on the weekend had also been handled, and Cathy wondered whether Sean might have come home during the day and snooped through her things. The pages were not in the same order as she had left them. The story she had kept hidden at the very bottom of the pile was on top. She put it in a brown manila envelope and took it with her. It had never occurred to

Cathy to lock up the papers in the den. Carmy had never shown any interest in any type of reading.

When Cathy entered the travel agency, the editor was on the phone. As soon as he saw her, he put the phone down, got up, and put his arms around her. "I'm happy to see you, Caterina. It's been a long time...I can still call you Caterina, right? Or do you prefer Cathy now that you have an English boyfriend?"

"It doesn't matter what you call me, Totu. Or should I call you Antoine to go with your image as a PQ supporter?"

"Just call me Antonio, my real name. No one calls me Totu anymore," he replied.

Cathy pointed to the *Journal de Montreal* on his desk. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's too good a story to let die. It just landed in my lap," he said, with a big smile on his face.

"But this is not just a story. These are your *paesani*, your friends."

"Well, *paesani*, yes. But not necessarily friends. I'm a journalist after all. What could I do?"

"You could have just printed the news, without giving the *Journal* your interpretation of it. Why the interview?" Cathy asked.

"Because truth is not only stranger than fiction, it's stronger, Caterina. If I had plotted the story, I could not have come up with a better scenario. Pasquale's decision to fly back to Italy is the perfect solution to this sordid tale. You'll see. A lot of truth will come out of this, and I'll be vindicated."

“So, that's what you're really after? Vengeance? Blabbing all over the city and claiming to be interested in truth? Your timing makes me wonder about your motives, and whether this has anything to do with your separatist friends.”

“I don't know which friends you're referring to. In any case, I don't think in terms of friends or enemies when I investigate the news, only ideologies. What I do have is a deep hatred for the establishment, for those incompetent crooks in our community who claim to represent me in politics, and for those who walk all over others. Or, maybe it's you who has come here to speak on behalf of your fiancé's Liberal friends? I understand he's working for Jean-Pierre Picard, who might be running in a by-election.”

“I don't give a damn about my fiancé's friends, especially Jean-Pierre. But I'm afraid of people getting hurt by your insinuations. Reputations can easily be ruined by gossip. You, of all people, should know that. It's not fair. Please, don't print any more stories. Some innocent people may be hurt, especially Carmy, Lucia's daughter. You remember Lucia, don't you?”

“What a silly question,” Antonio answered, moving back behind his desk. He added gravely, “People have already been hurt. I can't change that.”

“Well, it has taken you a long time to finally act. And what do you do? Snitch on people who can't defend themselves, like Carmy.”

“That thing about Carmy being an illegal student. Someone else picked that up, not me...I swear.” Antonio placed his hand on his chest.

“Well, you have to accept your share of blame,” Cathy said. “Is this why you're reacting so irrationally?”

“I don’t know what you mean by blame, but when did you become so outspoken? You were so gentle and agreeable when we were together last...” His voice trailed off, as if he were sorry to have brought up the subject.

“Yes, maybe too agreeable,” Cathy answered.

Antonio looked down at his desk for a few minutes without saying anything.

“Caterina,” he said slowly, as though searching for words. “Is there something you want to get off your chest, something of a more personal nature?”

“Yes. There’s some unfinished business between us.” Cathy looked directly into his eyes.

“I know, Caterina. I never got back to you about your writing. I’m sorry, but I was overwhelmed by ...circumstances. And, now that you’re an adult, I can admit that... that I was embarrassed for having been a little forward with you on the day at La Ronde. It felt very awkward... I didn’t know how to handle it.”

“I was mostly hurt that you assumed I wouldn’t know how to handle it. You gave me so little credit. You treated me like a child.” Cathy pulled out the manila envelope from her purse.

“You were a child. Let me guess. Another story?” He got up, smiling, happy to change the subject. “You haven’t given up, have you? You still want to write?”

“More than ever,” she said.

“What do you want to write about this time?” he said, sounding amused.

She hesitated, unsure if she should go on, but then blurted it out. “The past, the present, my immigrant experience, others' immigrant experiences. I want to write a novel around all that.”

The phone rang just before he could reply. He answered and spent a few minutes talking about flight times and dates, before telling the party on the other end of the line that he'd call back.

"Sorry, it's a busy period, what with people wanting to go away for Christmas... So you were saying, a novel, eh? You don't kid around. Is there something I can do to help you out, to make up for my past neglect?"

"Well," she said. "Instead of pulling in different directions, why don't we work together?"

"I don't understand," he said, looking puzzled.

"Well, of all people, you may be the key I've been looking for... to help me write my novel. I'm having a hard time getting started...there are so many gaps that need to be filled—especially the gaps in my memory. Maybe between the two of us, we can tie it altogether, make sense of it all. We can complement one other."

"But the topic has never interested me, Caterina. That's another reason I never got back to you. You want me to help you write your memoir?"

"No, no. I told you, a novel. I want to fictionalize what I remember...but I'm so inexperienced at writing in general, whereas you have done so much work with other immigrant writers. You know what I mean?"

"Well, fiction is not my thing, and even if it were, you'd have to count me out of the immigrant experience story. It has been done countless times already. Quite honestly, I'm tired of it. As for the past... well, it's not the safest place to visit." He held his chin pensively, and smiled. "But with Pasquale back in Italy, who knows?"

“Precisely,” she said, encouraged by his last remark. “I already have most of the material; you have the technique. Between the two of us we can figure out a plan .”

He laughed. “An English writer—I think it was Byron—once said, ‘I have no plan, only material.’” Antonio shook his head. “No, no. What am I thinking? It’s impossible. It’s hard enough to write about one’s memories; imagine trying to synchronize them with someone else’s. I don’t even want to think about it. We’re treading on black ice—it’s more slippery than it seems. As for tying it all neatly together, again it’s more difficult than you can ever imagine. In fact, it’s impossible.” He laughed again.

Cathy raised her hands, exasperated. She asked angrily, “But you couldn’t keep from using Pasquale’s story, could you? You didn’t answer my first question. Are you running for the P.Q. in the next elections?”

Antonio sat behind his desk, and put on his glasses. He became serious. “Let me ask you some questions now, Caterina. What are *you* afraid of? The truth about your fiancé’s Liberal friends? Or maybe the truth about yourself?”

Cathy made a move toward the door, opened it, then stopped. “I have no reason to be afraid of whatever truth,” she said calmly. “Mostly, I’m afraid of unfairly representing the past.”

“Of course, the past, how could I forget? You came with a head full of romantic ideas. Yes, now I remember. The love story of Renzo and Lucia overcoming all. But that was not your fault. Manzoni was inculcated in you, and in everyone else in Italy at the time.”

He got up again, put his two hands together, and shook them up and down impatiently. “Caterina, Caterina, I know you mean well. Write if you must, but forget about capturing an idyllic past or preserving old memories, or about tying it all neatly together. It’s as old-fashioned an idea as... yesterday’s hairstyles, for lack of a better example.”

“It seems to me that styles go in cycles. They keep reappearing, maybe modified a little to make them look new and original, but it’s the same old stuff coming up—at least in fashion. In any case, a few years ago, you told me to go out and use my imagination, to invent, but then you completely ignored me. You never even acknowledged what I had showed you.” She held the manila envelope against her chest.

“Again, I’m very sorry. It was not even a question of liking or not liking. I’m especially ashamed to tell you that I... lost the manuscript. Though I had glanced at it quickly before dropping it...somewhere, accidentally. If I remember correctly, you took my advice—about inventions, I mean—a little too seriously in the story you showed me then. Am I right?”

She smiled. “You make writing sound so difficult. Maybe you’re exaggerating the impossibility. Maybe you’ve read too many theory books.”

“Worse still, maybe I’ve edited too many theory books,” he replied. “Look, I don’t want to dampen your joy of writing. After all, I make my living from it. Give me the new story. I’ll read it, and this time I’ll get back to you. And if I don’t, you know where I am. If it’s any good, I’ll even show it to a publisher, my friend Franco Pastore, for whom I’ve worked. You met him a long time ago, at Expo, remember? Just

.remember, though. *Giardiniera* still gives me indigestion. And stay away from nostalgia.”

“This is not so much a story as a prose poem. Something I had to get off my chest.” Cathy handed him the manila envelope. “It’s the last thing I wrote before I hid everything in the basement, thirteen years ago—after our day at La Ronde.”

“So, there will be no more ill feelings between us?” he asked.

“There can’t be if we’re going to work together. The writing is more important,” she said gravely.

He smiled and patted her on the cheek. “You’re an ace, Caterina. Don’t misunderstand me. I’m happy to see you want to write.” He became pensive again. “After all, we go back a long time. Remember Piano Don Carlo and the lazy afternoons there? You used to sit on your doorstep by yourself and play there for hours.” He took her hand, shook it, and held it for a while. “What a boring place, when you think about it. Nothing ever happened there... Tell me about Lucia’s daughter. She told me she wants to be a hairdresser like you.”

“When did she tell you that?”

“She was here just an hour ago.”

“Why did she come here?”

“She had some stories of her own to tell me about her family—and she also mentioned your obsession with writing.”

“You’re not printing her stories, are you, Antonio?”

“You’re not writing them are you?”

The Roller Coaster Ride

By Cathy Anastasia

I had never enjoyed roller coaster rides until I spent an afternoon at La Ronde with Antonio. It was a perfect Indian-summer day in late September. We had walked in old Montreal in the morning, and then left the car and rode the metro to Île-Notre-Dame. He held my hand as we walked. He squeezed it and said, "Let's go for a ride."

I told him I was afraid of the height, the speed, the force of the wind on my face that took my breath away. But he dared me to go with him on the scariest ride in the park: *Le Monstre*. And without batting an eye, I followed him.

Île-Sainte-Hélène's flaming colors sparkled below us as the train ascended the steep rails to the top of the man-made steel mountain, and then dropped. It was like free falling into flight while holding hands with someone special. After the first drop, I looked forward to the next, and then the next, and I thought I could follow Antonio to the highest precipice without fear.

We ate smoked meat sandwiches, Belgian waffles filled with ice cream. He talked non-stop about his love for Rome, his work in the Communist youth movement, and his decision to leave Italy when, at the same time, his dreams of social equality and of a career in journalism began to fade away. Montreal, he said, made him feel alive. All I had to offer were stories of fussy clients wearing wigs and hairpieces, and fake-breasted waitresses from the Crazy Horse Saloon on Côte-des-Neiges Road.

Walking next to him, I marveled at how magical his unexpected appearance into my life had been, and my imagination soared, thinking of all the things we could do

together. He'd tutor me in my writing, discuss Italian literature with me, and open up a world of words to help me untwist my tongue so that I could claim a language that I had never quite mastered.

It was late afternoon when we finally left La Ronde, and I suggested I drive him to another Montreal landmark, the look-out on Mont-Royal, to see a panorama of Montreal by night. But he thanked me, and said he had to meet other friends. He asked me to drop him off on the corner of Jean-Talon and Côte-des-Neiges. Before he got out of the car, I pulled out my sea voyage story, and timidly asked him to read it.

He seemed surprised, and in a rush, but he told me he'd call me soon and thanked me for having been such a "good little guide."

"It's what I do best," I said, and he squeezed my knee as he left the car.

I was disappointed that we would not spend the evening together, and I was certain he was meeting Carole, the French woman I had met the week before. I knew she taught at the Université de Montréal, so she probably lived in the Côte-des-Neiges area. I drove away with a heavy heart.

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca.
Sent: May 31, 2004, 11:56 PM
To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca
Subject: Well, well!

Attachment: Lost in a Cemetary.doc

Well, well! The great Antonio, the great idealist, the portrayer of universal truths, the champion of social justice is finally uncovered! Where's the prose poem your friend brought you? I've followed your edited version with the hard copy of the novel she sent me, and I noticed that you very conveniently cut if off the text. I've recopied it and sent it as an attachment in case you missed it by mistake.

Do you know what Carole told me—only a week after I had introduced her to you and she had fallen for your doe eyes and mellow voice?

“Franco, je t'aime comme un copain. Tu a un de l'esprit, mais tu es un peu trop réaliste et fonctionnel pour moi. Antoine a quelque chose qui dépasse tout ça... une grande âme. »

And she dropped me like the hot *patates frites* we were sharing.

You never knew this, but she used to call me often, after I left, to confide her frustrations at her inability to access that great soul of yours. I never had the heart to suggest that there was nothing there, and that opportunism may have played the biggest role in your sudden falling in love with her. I didn't want to appear small-minded or even remotely jealous of the snooty stature you soon developed within the literati, which shunned me. It took her ten years to find out what I've always known about you. You're a coward and a fraud, Antonio. And you've been unmasked by your own protagonist!

I'm not gloating, Totu, merely stating what I see on the page and in between the lines.

Franco

(cut off section from The Roller Coaster Ride)

Instead of driving back east, I circled around the first side street, and parked strategically, in full view of the traffic-heavy intersection and Antonio waiting at the bus stop. I watched as he sat on a bench and read my manuscript. I couldn't tell what he thought of it, as his face was shadowed. When a number 92 bus stopped, and then pulled away, my jaw dropped. I saw Lucia run toward Totu, who got up from the bench as he put the manuscript back into the envelope and into his jacket pocket, as if he were trying to hide it. They both boarded the number 65 bus, which would take them up Cotes-Des-Neiges Road and I guessed they were headed for the lover's lookout on Mont-Royal. I had given him the idea, and now he was taking Lucia instead of me. I almost wanted to follow the bus to see where they'd get off, but I was too upset and just drove back home.

I felt fresh resentment for the willowy woman with the heart-shaped painted lips and head of feathery, curly hair that framed her tiny face like an aura, who was, once again, cheating on her husband and getting in my way.

For days, for weeks, for months, I waited by the phone for the call he had promised me. I reviewed each moment of our day and wondered what I might have done or said to offend him or put him off. Had I been too cheerful, too quiet, too yielding to his touch? Maybe I had become too Canadian for his taste, or maybe I had remained too Calabrese. If love was more than he had to offer, why couldn't he just call me—as a friend—to talk about my writing? I should never have given it to him, I thought. It must have been pretty worthless if it didn't even deserve a telephone call.

Then, at the end of October, all my hopes were crushed when I heard that he had entered into a civil marriage with the French-Canadian woman, and that he would be settling in Montreal with her. Oddly enough, when I tried writing about our day together, I couldn't help but imagine Lucia's heartbreak when she heard about his marriage and I felt guilty about what I had revealed in my story about the boat trip. I had only desired him for a week, but he had been her first—and maybe only—love.

As I wrote, I imagined the two of them spending the evening on Mont-Royal. I wrote a prose poem in a trance, and at some point, it was as if I had been there instead of Lucia. When I was done, I threw everything in a box, and put it out of sight, down in the basement.

Lost in a Cemetary

By Cathy Anastasia

“Let's go for a walk,” he said and they left the look-out on Mont-Royal to explore the city forest—all fiery-red leaves that shone like small fires in the moonlight, and that crackled under their feet. They walked along a treed path that led them to a paved road. They crossed the road to pass through a gate and get back into the woods.

She listened to his mellow voice as he talked. He hugged her and they stopped in a clearing. He embraced her and his lips touched hers. He kissed her face, and then his tongue moved up and down, past her opened blouse to her neck and her breasts, before returning to her lips, and to the inside of her mouth, until she completely forgot where she was. She found herself falling on the leaves, the world opening up to moist lips, tongue on tongue, warm hands on legs. She would have followed him to the depths of any forest as he moaned and pulled her head, her lips, her tongue, her mouth to his pulsating skin. She closed her eyes as they rose up and up, and then his body fell down next to hers and they lay quiet, as though asleep on a bed of leaves.

It took them forever to retrace their steps to the lookout, getting lost in the mountain cemetery, in a maze of tombstones, while Saint Joseph's Oratory loomed like a fat, displeased chaperone ahead of them.

“Who would have thought I’d be lost in a Montreal cemetery with you?” he asked.

“There are no tall cypresses here to indicate the way out,” she answered.

As they walked, looking for the path back to the paved road, did they remember the night a little girl sat alone in the twilight, listening for sounds of crickets and moving bodies in the ravine, then being startled by the ominous vroom-vroom of a motorcycle, and finally, the dreadful emptiness she’d felt when she picked up the shards of her broken water jug, knowing it would never be made whole again? If she did recall, she must have kept it all to herself, figuring that, what she remembered, he’d want to forget, and that it wouldn’t matter anymore since they had found each other, at last. All the past hurts, the drought, the yearnings were coming to an end, and all would be healed.

“I’ll call you. I’ll find some way,” he said as she got off the bus to walk her to her mother’s house, praying that the late-evening escapade would go undetected.

For many days, weeks, months, she waited for the sign that he would return her to life. She continued as if nothing had disrupted the monotony of her daily existence, but at times, the weight of the silence pressed so heavily on her fractured heart and soul that she feared she might crack into a thousand bits and pieces.

Sunlight dissolved into blankness as another Indian summer slid past her, leaving nothing ahead but another November and another death.

From: Antonio Amoruso <aatirreno@sympatico.ca>
Sent: May 31 , 2005, 12: PM
To: aurorapublishing@net.ca>
Subject: Submission

Attachment: The Ending.com

Well, well Franky,

Your typical impulsive, irrational reactions! How dare you question my editorial judgement! Maybe I would have included the poem in a later section, or maybe I would have deleted it completely as bad poetry. I'm insulted by your lack of trust and respect. You've resented me from the first day we met. Maybe what you're jealous of is the fact that I've finally completed a novel, something you've never managed to do.

Here's the last part—the writer's Epilogue should follow.

Please call me Antonio from now on.

Antonio

From: Franco Pastore <aurorapublishing@net.ca>

Sent: May 30, 2005, 12:12 AM

To: aatirreno@sympatico.ca

Subject: Re: Submission

From now on, I'll call you Tony-the-Phony.

I've wondered from the beginning why you took on this strange co-writing project. Now I understand! Deep down, you've always wanted to be a fiction writer. But since, at its best, your inventiveness can be rivaled by a third-rate envelope stuffer, an offer such as the one made by your adoring fan must have seemed like manna from heaven. Imagine, receiving page after page of new writing to manipulate and appropriate as your own!

Well, you can take "your" novel and force it up your tight *culo* and never bother me with it again! You got me involved in this ménage a trois. You get me out of it. Find whatever excuse you find suitable to explain to your friend my decision to pull out of this project. If I do it myself, I'll have to spell out to her why her taste in editors is even worse than her taste in men. I also hate sending out rejection letters. I trust you will be tactful and professional, for once.

The last submission has remained unread by me.

Franco

Thursday, October 23, 1980

The Hair Coloring Lesson

As Cathy walked by the office on Thursday morning, Susan, the secretary, waved her over to her desk. "Mrs. C. wants to see you," she said. "But, before you go in. Here's a map to the country place, in case you can make it to the party." She handed Cathy a mimeographed invitation to her Halloween party.

Cathy thanked her, but told her she likely couldn't attend. She had her own Halloween ball to go to at the Ritz. And she wasn't even sure she'd go to that. "Do you expect a lot of people? Is it just for staff?" Cathy asked.

"Mostly staff, but there'll be others too. I convinced Bruce to come with me," Susan answered in a low voice.

"Oh, you mean... come with you, like a date?" Cathy whispered back.

"I don't know if he'd call it that, but we're driving together and he's staying over," Susan said, a happy lilt to her voice. "But anyone can sleep over if it gets late. Just bring sleeping bags if you decide to show up."

Susan had often confided to Cathy her attraction to Bruce, and been working up the nerve to ask him out.

"Wow!" Cathy said. "Congratulations. You finally did it. Well, I'll let you know if I can make it. Thanks for the invite. I'd better go see Mrs. C. before class."

"It's about the department headship," Susan said, and by her tone of voice, Cathy knew she had not gotten the nod.

Mrs. Champagne quickly confirmed her suspicions. She wanted to tell her, informally, before distributing the notice, that Nick would be appointed department head of Tech. Voc.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “But you seemed to have mixed feelings about the position. You even brought in your application a day late.”

Cathy was disappointed but didn’t want to show it. “Well, I wanted to be sure. How did the votes go... May I ask?”

“Of course you may ask. You both received the same number of votes. But sometimes the staff doesn’t consider everything that the job implies, so the final decision has to be mine.”

“I understand,” Cathy said, but she had hoped that the high numbers of hairdressing students, and all the work she had done to build up the department would count in her favor.

Mrs. Champagne must have read her mind and explained. “Ultimately, I based my decision on Nick’s past experience, and on his decision-making and leadership abilities. He was a stronger candidate overall. That’s all.”

“Well, that’s fine, Mrs. Champagne. Thank you for your consideration.”

As Cathy turned to leave, Mrs. Champagne asked. “When do you think all of this talk about Carmy’s father and uncle will die down?”

Cathy couldn’t help but wonder if Carmy’s family had been a factor in Mrs. Champagne’s decision, and if Nick had been feeding Mrs. C. rumors and innuendoes. “Oh, this should be it. I’ve heard that her father is planning to stay in Italy for a while. As long as his wife is alive, they won’t press criminal charges against him. It will all die

down.” Then as she added, “Carmy would like to come in on Friday. Bruce tells me she is quite behind in English...and it’s the Halloween party. It would be good for her to participate.”

“Yes, Bruce made the same request. Sure, let her come in on Friday. It’s only a half-day, anyway. How is her mother?”

“The same,” Cathy said and left the office.

“Sorry,” Susan whispered as Cathy passed by her desk.

Cathy shrugged her shoulders as if to say, “It’s not important.”

Being a department head had never been important to her until Mike Burns urged her to apply, and now, she wished she hadn’t bothered. Having lost to Nick, despite the fact that she had done so much more work for the department and that she had received the same number of votes, felt like she’d just revealed to the world her inability to ever be taken seriously by those who count. Sure, students and other teachers liked her, but when push came to shove, her insecurities, timidity, and lack of the “gift of the gab” would always stand in her way. She’d always remain the attendant, the keen do-gooder who could aspire but never attain.

In class, everyone except Carmy had arrived, and Cathy read the daily bulletin, which announced the upcoming Costume Day and the students’ Halloween party on Friday the 31st.

“Are you dressing up, Miss?” Gina asked.

“I’m always dressed up. Haven’t you noticed?” Cathy answered in a curt tone.

“Where’s your school spirit?” Gina responded.

“Yeah, Miss. Where’s your school spirit?” the class repeated.

Cathy didn't reply. She disappeared into the stockroom to look for the color chart she needed for that day's demonstration of hair coloring. Her school spirit was not at its peak at that moment, she thought.

Linda had volunteered to have some color highlights added to her hair, and Cathy asked the class to gather their chairs around her. She had taught them the preliminary steps for color selection the week before. She picked up the long mass of Linda's medium-brown hair, and asked the students to look at its natural color and to match it to the color chart provided by Schwarzkopf, the tint company she used.

"Go through all the steps by yourselves," she told them, as she handed out a form. "Write down the natural color, the desired color, and the percentage of white hair, natural highlights, and all the rest."

"But, Miss, you're going to choose the color, right?" Linda asked.

Cathy assured her she would.

"Don't worry," Gina said. "She'll make it green for Halloween."

"Don't fool around with my hair. I've seen green hair before," Linda said, covering her head with both hands.

As the students filled in the prepared form that would guide them in the color selection, Cathy distributed a bright diagram of a color wheel, a circle with two intersecting triangles, which formed six smaller triangles.

"Keep the forms and your observations. We'll go back to them after," she told the class. First she would need to give them a few general notes on color harmony.

"Not more notes," they groaned.

“Come on girls. Just a few simple notes on the principles of mixing colors that you may have already learned in art class. This is fun!” Cathy tried to sound cheerful. She told them how important it was to understand color harmony before going on, that tinting hair is not different from any other type of coloring that requires mixing colors, such as painting a picture, painting a house or tinting cloth. “You need to understand these basics so we don’t turn Linda’s hair green,” she said.

“You see? I wasn’t kidding!” Linda said.

Cathy went on to explain that hair-coloring lotions and creams are all artificial, man-made products, formulated to interact with the natural pigmentation of the hair. “There is an enormous variety of color pigments found in the cortex section of each hair—from yellow, to gold, to red, to brown, to black. The predominance of one of these pigments gives hair its color, but even dark brown or black hair will have subtle shades of red, yellow or gold in it, which will affect the outcome of whatever artificial color is applied to it.

“The gold and red pigments are tiny and diffused throughout,” she explained. “They’re very resistant to change and will always rise to the surface. One of the colorist’s hardest jobs is to subdue the gold and the red. Blacks and browns are the first pigments to lift when hair is lightened, but most often the red and gold will remain.” Of course, Cathy, thought to herself, tint manufacturers had found a way out of that dilemma, bleaching the hair until it looked and felt like straw. But that was the next lesson on the program, and Cathy didn’t want to confuse the students.

“You can’t hope to become a hair colorist without some knowledge of the principles of this color wheel,” she said, pointing to the diagram and the triangles colored red, yellow and blue.

Cathy repeated what she had been teaching every year for the last eight years or so. “These are the primary colors. All the other colors on the wheel are a combination of these three. Example: yellow and blue make green; blue and yellow make purple; and, red and yellow, orange. So green, orange and purple are secondary or complementary colors. When these are mixed together, they give us tertiary colors, etc. There is no limit to the number of combinations that these three colors can produce, and the effects they can create. In home decoration, for example, complementary colors are used to offset each other, to make colors stand out. Cool colors complement warm ones and so on. But what concerns us in hair coloring, for now, is how the secondary and primary colors interact when applied to hair.”

“But why would anyone use green on hair?” Linda interrupted.

“Green is more important than you think, and so are blue and purple. They are used to cool down the brassy reds and oranges, and the yellow blondes. Let’s look at the wheel.” She drew an arrow from red to green, from yellow to purple, from blue to orange.

“What is important for us is that colors opposite each other on the wheel can be used to neutralize each other. Now, we’ll understand this best when working on a real head of hair. What is Linda’s natural color?” Cathy asked.

“The closest on the color chart is number 3G—medium reddish brown.” Gina replied.

“That’s correct. She has no white hair, so that’s not an issue for her, yet. What color highlights does she want?” Cathy asked.

“Number 7A—light ash blonde,” Gina said, showing Cathy the color swatch Linda had chosen.

“Miss, I don’t care if it’s not all that light, but I don’t want it orange. I don’t want to look cheap,” Linda said.

No one ever wants to tint their hair to look cheap, Cathy thought. But not everyone knows that there’s a point in hair lightening at which a vibrant red turns into a brassy orange. So it’s one thing to lighten hair, but quite another to give the client the exact highlights she wants, especially an ash or cool highlight.

“For Linda, we should select a color that will lighten by three shades, but that will also cut down or neutralize her natural red pigment. What color is that on the wheel?”

“Green,” they all responded.

“That’s right. Now, each artificial color on this chart has as its basis in one or more of the colors on the wheel I’m showing you, and it’s specified at the top of each column. Now choose the blonde you think will lighten Linda’s hair, and give her the ashiest highlights—or at least the least red ones.” Cathy handed Gina the color chart.

As Cathy looked at the color wheel and arrows she had drawn, an idea occurred to her. She couldn’t wait to sit down and put it down on paper.

After Cathy agreed with the color selected by the class, she asked Gina to put a streaking cap on Linda’s hair, and to start pulling out thin strands of hair with a crochet hook, as they had practiced on the mannequins the week before. The color formula was a tube of no. 9A, Ash Light Blonde mixed with two ounces of 30-volume peroxide. An

added dab of pure green concentrate for extra measure would give the gooey concoction its ghastly slate-green color. It would be left to develop on the hair for 45 minutes, until it lifted and neutralized any hint of natural warmth that Linda's hair had inherited.

Pulling out the streaks would take at least thirty minutes, so Cathy asked the class to work on their workbook assignments while they waited. She sat down, took a blank sheet of paper and drew a circle, and then a triangle within it. She wrote "Cathy," "Lucia" and "Carmy" in bold letters next to the points of the triangle. These would be the primary characters in her novel, the connecting glue that would hold it all together. Why had she not thought of it earlier?

Then she mused about which name would ring truest—Caterina or Cathy? Was changing one's birth name selling out or betraying one's truest identity? She considered the question for a while, and wasn't sure of the answer. What was one's identity if not the agglomeration of all the lives one had lived, throughout the years? The name Caterina sounded right for the past, when there was no doubt about who she was. But then, she had been taken on a long journey, not fully of her own volition, and Cathy was who she had become. Was it fair to deny her those years and that process of transformation? The same applied for Carmelina/Carmy. Lucia had always remained Lucia, in and out of her coma. That was the way it had happened, and there was no use forcing the issue.

What about the secondary characters? There were many to juggle: parents, brothers, no sisters, friends, relatives, husbands and lovers. Each had played some part—some all too well—in silencing, subduing, neutralizing, and even neutering. The women had wanted so badly to find their true counterparts, to feel whole and complete, that they might have neglected to let their own individual colors shine through.

“Miss, I finished pulling out the streaks,” Gina said, bringing Cathy back to reality.

“OK. I’ll mix the color,” Cathy said. She walked into the stockroom where she hoped to formulate the right combination of tint and shade, while bringing out the warmth and beauty that a touch of natural red imparts to hair.

Friday, October 31, 1980

Costume Day

On Friday, Cathy stepped up the loading dock at school and was startled to see Steve aiming a gun at her. He had gun holsters hanging from his hips, and he was wearing an oversized cowboy hat. She stopped and watched him try to grab a passing female student by the bum with his free hand. "Stop!" he shouted. "You're under arrest for indecent exposure."

The girl wiggled her bum, giggled, and walked away, hugging a Raggedy-Ann doll in her arms, and plugging her mouth with a huge toy pacifier. She wore a baby-doll pajama top over nude tights and had a white sheet wrapped diaper-like around her bottom.

A couple of students walking arm in arm watched the interaction with big grins on their faces. One, wearing a ratty-looking woman's wig and a frilly dress, and with red heart-shaped lips said to Steve in a man's voice, "Watch it, sir. Lina's carrying an explosive load."

His partner, most definitely a female with a generous bosom, walked stiffly in a man's striped suit, tie, and fedora. She had a painted-on moustache and was carrying a cigar.

"Where's your costume, beautiful?" Steve asked, as he jumped back beside Cathy and hugged her.

“It’s in the bag,” she answered, lifting a plastic bag and trying to squeeze out of the bear hug.

Halloween celebrations started early in the morning at WHHS. It was Costume Day, a yearly tradition, in which students and teachers were expected to follow a regular day’s schedule, while disguised as their alter egos. Admittance to the students’ dance in the afternoon required a costume; and a prize would be offered for the most creative one. Not all teachers appreciated the change of routine though. Since contract negotiations with the government had stalled, staff morale was at its lowest, and teachers walking briskly toward the first class seemed to have dismissed the yearly masquerade—except for Steve, who was always ready to party. In earlier years, almost all the teachers dressed up, if only with a funny hat or a mask.

That morning, Cathy had packed a caftan, a turban, a peasant skirt and a tie-dyed shirt, as potential costumes for Carmy and her, in the event that Carmy changed her mind about dressing up. The evening before, she had not been agreeable to the idea. Cathy had been assigned a thirty-minute supervision at the students’ party and she thought she might wear whichever one of the getups Carmy didn’t use—though supervising teachers were not obliged to be costumed.

Cathy met Nick as she neared her class. Leaning toward her, he hissed in her ear, “How do they expect us to teach today?”

“Lighten up, Nick,” she replied. “Halloween only comes once a year.” Some of her students and their friends were already waiting impatiently for her to open the door so that they could change into their costumes. All day long, her classroom’s many mirrors would attract students like magnets. She was usually a good sport and would let them

adjust their wigs, and she even helped them with their make-up. But this year, teachers had received strict instructions to stick to the regular class schedules.

“Yeah, maybe once a year we should have a real teaching day in this school for a change,” Nick responded loudly as she opened up her classroom.

“That would be fun, sir, but where would they find real teachers around here?” a student retorted as Nick fled past the classroom toward the office.

Nick looked back. “Eh!” he grumbled. “Are you dressing up as a comedian, Frank?”

“No, a teacher,” Frank said.

“I’ll let you in, Frank,” Cathy told Angie’s boyfriend. “But you need to leave when the first bell rings.”

Cathy put her plastic bag on the desk and then she also ran up to the office to pick up her mail. On the way up, she met Carmy coming down the stairs, surrounded by a group of friends, including Linda and Gina. Carmy was sporting a black studded-leather jacket that didn’t belong to her.

“Hi, Miss,” Linda said, carrying plastic bags. “Doesn’t Carmy look great as a biker? Wait till you see our costumes.”

“I can’t wait,” Cathy said. “The class is open. I’ll be back in a couple of minutes.”

Carmy ignored her completely. The evening before, they had had an argument over costumes, and they both had been silent in the car, driving to school. Cathy had also argued with Sean, and had slept on the living room sofa after the eleven o’clock news, with the excuse that she couldn’t fall asleep on a mattress on the floor.

Sean and Cathy had not spoken to one another since he'd left on Sunday. He returned home on Wednesday evening for a change of clothes and then phoned to order a tuxedo for the ball. His only suit would have been too informal, he said. He told her the ball was shaping up as well as could be expected, considering the latest rumors about Di Principe that had circulated in all the major papers. However, the party men had huddled together in support of the Member of Parliament who had worked relentlessly to raise funds and boost the fortunes of federal Liberal Party in Quebec. The Liberals formed a majority government, and they had nothing to fear for the moment, so the strategists had decided they would brush off the allegations, calling them cheap shots, and the product of the overactive imagination of a third-rate journalist and Parti Québécois supporter.

“We have chosen to ignore the rumors completely,” Sean said. “The ball is going on as if none of this had happened. Di Principe and his circle of friends will be attending.”

However, the federal Opposition party wouldn't let the revelations go unnoticed. In the House of Commons, during question period, on Thursday, a member from Ontario asked whether an inquiry would be called to clarify the allegations about Di Principe's past association with known criminal elements.

The Liberals said they would not dignify the allegations with a response. Mr. Di Principe, they stated emphatically, was a model citizen, a family man, and a role model for all.

When interviewed on the six-o'clock news, Di Principe laughed off the accusations. "Anyone who knows the geography of Italy will see that the Veneto region I come from is very, very far from Sicily and Calabria."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Cathy asked, incensed, when she heard Di Principe's response on tv, as she prepared supper.

"The fool!" Sean said. "I don't understand why he just didn't keep his mouth shut. It would all have been forgotten by tomorrow."

"Well I'm not going to forget," Cathy said. "And I won't give him one minute of my time to help him be re-elected. And I'm not going to this ball."

Sean asked her to reconsider. He didn't want to be all alone with all these people he didn't know. The crème de la crème of the Italian community would be there: politicians, radio and television personalities, business people, and representatives of various organizations. The Italian media had been plugging the event for the past month.

"Count me out," she repeated. "I won't have anything to do with it."

"I don't understand you," Sean said. "You know this means a lot to me. I've been working the whole month to prepare this event."

But Cathy's mind was made up and they didn't speak about it during supper.

Later, when he saw her bring up a heavy box, from the apartment stockroom, and plunk it down on the coffee table, he looked up from his book. "Another box? I'm afraid to ask."

Cathy shrugged and called Carmy, who came out of the den. "It's some of my old clothes," she said, responding to his question as an afterthought. She turned to Carmy. "Let's look through these, Carmy. We should be able to come up with something."

“Oh, I see,” Sean said. “It must be Costume Day at Hingston. How could I forget?”

In fact, it was Sean who had started the Costume Day tradition, when he'd been in charge of Student Life.

Carmy sat half-heartedly on the sofa, uninterested in the clothes Cathy was pulling out of the box—a silk tie-dyed shirt and a long, gauze skirt to go with it.

“You could be a flower child,” Cathy said.

“I don't have to wear a costume,” Carmy replied, her arms crossed. “And if I did, the last thing I'd want to be is a flower girl.”

“No, I mean a flower child—the make-love-not-war kind—a hippie,” Cathy replied. She held the peasant skirt, with its bright shades of pinks, mauves and blues, against her own body.

“Oh, shit. Don't tell me you were one of those,” Carmy said.

Pensive, Cathy folded the skirt slowly. “In spirit, I guess. But I was too busy earning a living to go around protesting. But I wore a frizzy perm. Everyone did then. I bought this shirt and this skirt in Old Montreal and I wore them everywhere.”

“I can't picture you with a frizzy perm and that shirt,” Carmy said.

“Believe me. I even wore it without a bra.”

“No way! I guess my grandmother never saw you in it. She always goes on about what a proper young woman you were—compared to me,” Carmy said grumpily.

Sean got up and plunked some documents in a knapsack. He had a meeting with Jean Pierre to go to. “I remember that skirt,” he said. “I liked it on you. Why did you stop wearing it?”

“Because now it looks like a costume. How quickly styles change.”

“I see,” Sean said. “So it was only a passing fad.”

Cathy looked at him as if to say, Yes, what did you think it was? But Sean was already walking away, toward the bedroom. She said in a low voice, “This skirt would make a good costume for Susan’s party.”

“So are you sure about the Ball?” Sean asked from the bedroom.

“I’m not prepared for it—especially mentally. And I never got a gown.”

“You could easily pick one up at a costume store if you wanted to,” Sean said.

Cathy kept rummaging through the box.

Carmy had sat quietly during Sean and Cathy's exchange. She rarely participated in their conversations unless she was asked a direct question. But now she asked, “So what’s this about Susan’s party?”

“A teacher’s party, up north,” Cathy said, surprised.

“I want to go to a party, too, after school,” Carmy said. Then she told Cathy that Linda and Gina had asked her to join them at a Halloween party organized by Charlie at the club. But she didn’t think her uncle would allow her to go.

“Of course not,” Cathy said. “Why would you even bother asking him? He doesn’t even want you to go there in the afternoons.”

“He doesn’t have to know I’m going,” Carmy said. “I can tell him the school party is at night and I can stay over here for the weekend. You two can do whatever you want.”

Cathy put down the long caftan she had been looking at. She used to wear it as a lounging dress when she and Sean first moved in together. It was voluminous, made of

silky silver fabric, and was still in perfect condition. She wondered why she had put it away. She looked at Sean, who had walked back into the living room. He had overheard. He looked straight at Cathy and shook his head slightly, disapproving of Carmy's request.

"No way, Carmy," Cathy said. "You have the school party in the afternoon, and then you go home as usual." She didn't want to have to worry about her being out late at night—and above all, at the club.

"It's the first time I ever ask you for a favor," Carmy said, getting up. "I can tell him that the school party is on Friday evening. My grandmother said I can stay here for the weekend if you let me. Or if you want, I'll be back before twelve and ask my uncle to pick me up on his way home from the ball."

Cathy had slipped the caftan on over her clothes, and had gone out to the hallway mirror to look at herself. "Carmy, you're being unreasonable. I can't lie to your family about something like that. How long would it take your uncle to find out you had been at Charlie's? You know he knows people there."

"What is he going to do when he finds out? Shoot me? Don't tell me you never lied to your mother about things like that. Were you always such a goody-goody?"

Cathy had found a white turban with a heavy rhinestone broach, and put it on. At one time, inspired by the *Great Gatsby* movie, she had worn it over wavy hair, with the broach over one ear. This time, she positioned the glittering jewelry over her forehead. "Carmy, you make me laugh," Cathy said, looking at herself in the mirror. "With everything that has been going on, I can't let you go out with your friends without your family knowing about it. And I may end up going to my mother's on Friday evening."

Sean, who had been standing around watching and listening, spoke up. "I don't want to be a poor sport, Carmy, but I'll be at the ball. So don't count on me to cover up for you if I see your uncle."

"Who knows? I might even decide to go to Susan's party," Cathy said.

"You'd drive three hours, there and back, for a juvenile Halloween party, but you won't come to the Ritz!" Sean said, shaking his head.

"I'm only thinking about it," Cathy said.

"Well, you've got your costume right there, Queen Nefertiti—another remnant of a past life. Don't expect me back tonight. I'm returning to the hotel." Sean took his coat and books, and left.

"Have a good time," Cathy said in mock friendliness. After he had closed the door, she mumbled. "Stay at the hotel for as long as you want for all I care."

Carmy sulkily turned to go to her room. "Thanks a lot. I'll tell my uncle to pick me up at school then, after the dance."

"You do that now, then—before you go to bed. Call the house and I'll speak to him or your grandmother."

Carmy called from the kitchen phone and carried on a short conversation in French, and then hung up.

"Did you speak to him already? I also wanted to talk to him," Cathy said.

"He wasn't home and my grandmother was already in bed. So I told my aunt."

"What time did you tell her?"

“She said he’ll come when he can, after four. I’ll hang around the school and wait for him there since I can’t do fuck all else.” Carmy went back to her room and slammed the door.

“I’ll call him myself tomorrow, once I decide what I’m doing,” Cathy said. She called Carmy back, and held up the white turban.

“What now?” Carmy asked, annoyed.

“Look at this turban. It looks great with the caftan. ”

Carmy made a face. “Then you wear it, if you like it so much. That’s more you than me.”

“Let’s just see what it looks like on you,” Cathy said, putting the turban on Carmy’s head. She adjusted the broach over Carmy’s forehead and thick eyebrows. “I need to reshape your eyebrows. They’re much too thick.”

Carmy walked to the hallway mirror, looked at herself, and then pulled the turban off. “Shit, it’s too tight. I wouldn’t be caught dead in that. I don’t want to look like the Queen of Nefertiti or... whatever.”

Cathy laughed. “Then it’s perfect, if you think you look like a queen. Costumes are supposed to be the opposite of what you usually dress like. That’s the fun of it, to surprise people.”

“And what do I usually look like, a slob?”

“No. You like drab, unassuming clothes. But that too is a costume, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, Carmy! It’s just for fun. Let me tweeze your eyebrows.”

Cathy had been wanting to shape Carmy's eyebrows for a while, but Carmy hadn't let her. She tried touching them again, but Carmy pulled back. "Get off me. Leave my eyebrows alone."

"You have big, beautiful eyes, but they get lost under those bushy eyebrows."

Carmy frowned. "If I start plucking them, they'll get bushier."

"That's an old wives' tale. In any case, they can't get any bushier than they are already. The first shaping will take a few minutes, but after that, it only takes a few seconds a day to maintain the shape."

"Yeah, that's why it takes you forever to get ready in the morning."

"Well, I care about the way I look. What's wrong with that?"

"Well, maybe I care about the way I look too," Carmy said, trying to imitate Cathy's voice. "Maybe I just don't want to look like you."

Cathy shrugged her shoulders, took off the caftan. She got a plastic bag from the kitchen, and put the turban and caftan in. As an afterthought, she added the shirt and peasant skirt, too.

Carmy followed her around, talking. "What I mean—I don't want to be like you—I mean, you think you're perfect. All I ever heard from my mother and grandmother was how perfect Caterina is. Well, I've lived with you for a month, now. You're not so perfect. Your life is not so perfect."

"Well, the caftan is the best I can come up with. Use it if you like." Cathy went back to the living room, removed the box from the coffee table, and started preparing the sofa for the night.

“You’re just like my mother, you know,” Carmy continued, standing next to Cathy. “When she didn’t like what she heard, she just hid in her room, in her own little world.”

Cathy had never noticed how tall and lanky Carmy seemed next to her. She was practically breathing down Cathy's neck as she spoke, and Cathy felt a sudden urge to be rid of her constant, brooding presence. She impatiently threw a pillow on the sofa.

“Look,” she said. “I’ve had it now. I was just trying to be helpful, helping you find a costume. You could show a bit of appreciation, you know... And there’s no way I’ll cover up for you Friday night.”

“Of course not,” Carmy said mockingly. “That would not be the proper thing to do for a queen like you. I used to think you were really hip, living with someone like Sean. But you’re just like all of the other Calabresi. And you have been trying to change me since I moved in with you.”

“I’ve been trying to help, not change your personality,”

“Oh, you’re just a busybody, that’s all. You always try to change everything. Nothing is ever good enough for you. Look at this furniture. How many times have you moved things around since I’ve been here? And your bedroom—are you ever going to fix it up so you can sleep with your husband?”

“I don’t think it’s any of your business where I sleep,” Cathy said, raising her voice. “I’ve been trying like a maniac to make things more comfortable for everyone. What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, your husband is out of the house every chance he gets. That’s what’s wrong with that.”

“Carmy, just go to bed. And please stay out of my personal life, will you?”

But Carmy seemed determined to go on. She moved closer to Cathy, as though wanting to tell her a secret. “I’ve heard some really good stories at Charlie’s.”

Cathy moved back. “I’m tired of hearing about Charlie’s. Forget about the party tomorrow night.”

She noticed again how, when Carmy frowned, her dense eyebrows closed into one dark line over her eyes. Her black pupils, magnified by the thick eyeglasses, seemed to bulge out of their sockets, threatening and condemning at the same time.

Cathy signed. “What stories?”

“Oh, about the goody-goodies who are not so goody-goody after all. The quiet ones are the ones to watch, they say.”

“Who the hell are you talking about?” Cathy asked.

“That’s for you to guess.”

“Go to bed, Carmy. I don’t have time for games.”

Carmy seemed all wired up and Cathy wondered if she had taken anything. She felt like slapping her, but restrained herself. Carmy couldn’t keep still, moving her arms and hands as she sauntered from one room to the other.

“Make the room roomier, the bright kitchen brighter, my big eyes bigger,” Carmy ranted. “That’s what you think about all the time. What next? My brain brainier? Do you think I’m stupid just because I’m not good at school? You can’t change people, you know—especially not me. But it won’t stop you, because you’re a real miracle worker, a real saint. Let me look for a costume for you.”

Carmy danced around the box and pulled out a skirt. She went to the kitchen looking for something, while Cathy watched. Carmy came back with an aluminum pie plate from under the counter. She threw the skirt around her shoulders and placed the pie plate on her head. “Here’s my costume. Saint Caterina of Cartier Street, performing her first miracle on Carmy Tonelli, special-ed student with bushy eyebrows and a big ass.”

Carmy bowed, holding the pie plate with one hand, and the skirt with the other. Then, she began parading and singing. “Here she is, Miss America....”

She bowed again and the pie plate fell off Carmy’s head and rattled onto the ceramic floor. They both jumped to pick it up at the same time and almost knocked foreheads.

“Oops! I lost my beautiful fucking crown,” Carmy said, picking up the plate.

“I think you’re losing your marbles,” Cathy said. “That’s enough now. Go to bed. Wear whatever costume you like.”

Cathy retreated to the bathroom to prepare for another uncomfortable night on the sofa. When she came out, Carmy had gone to her room. She covered herself up with the blanket, and turned on the news—but lowered the volume to a hum. The sound would help her fall asleep.

But in the next room, the light was still on, and she could hear Carmy making noises of her own. It sounded like she was moving books. Was she doing homework, or snooping into Cathy’s things? She wished she had asked Antonio what kind of stories Carmy had told him.

The next morning, they didn't discuss the costumes. But while having breakfast, Cathy asked Carmy whether she had finished her composition for Bruce's class.

"I finished it, but I hate writing compositions," Carmy said.

"How come?"

"Because I never know what to write. When I write something it sounds so fake."

"Why did you go see Antonio Amoruso on Wednesday afternoon?" Cathy asked.

"I know because I went to see him soon after you did."

"Do you always have to follow me like a shadow?" Carmy said. "I wanted to ask him about my father since he wrote about him. That's all."

"Did you know Antonio before the story broke out in his paper?"

"I know that my mom went to see him about finding a school for me. She said he'd know what to do, that he'd have some connections. He's the one who suggested Hingston, you know. He told Mom you were there, and he told her about the program."

"Have you seen him since Wednesday?"

"No, but he told me to go see him if ever I had a problem—if I wanted to talk anything over with him."

"How come you never talk anything over with me?"

"Because you wouldn't listen. You don't have the guts to stand up to my uncle Alfonso, like Antonio does. So, what's the point? You're worried about doing the right thing all the time."

Cathy cut the conversation short, saying they'd have to leave for school early to have time to get ready for Costume Day. She didn't want to start another argument with Carmy. They drove to school in complete silence.

When Cathy returned to class from the office, the students were scampering around the room, adjusting each other's costumes: a hobo, a Barbie doll, and a blond movie star. Frank was dressed as a gangster. Others were in the stock room, changing. Linda came out wearing a nun's habit, cut strategically low and revealing Linda's ample cleavage.

"I'm a naughty nun, and Gina is going to be a priest," Linda said.

"I doubt you'll be allowed in at the dance with that outfit," Cathy said.

Mrs. Champagne had given strict orders to the teachers to approve students' costumes during first period.

"I rented it for tonight's party from Charlie's. It cost me a fortune, so I'm wearing it!"

"Maybe you should cover up for the school party, though," Cathy said.

"Don't worry, Miss. I saw much worse in the locker rooms," Linda replied.

Gina had been working on spiking Carmy's hair. When she had finished, Carmy slipped the black leather jacket over the black leotard she was wearing. For the finishing touch, Gina applied a heavy coat of black lipstick on Carmy's large lips, making her look even more menacing than ever.

"Now that's you, Carmy!" Gina exclaimed. "Doesn't she look like Alice Cooper?"

"She looks like a bum. I don't think she'll be allowed into the dance either," Franca said, wrapping a white veil around her head.

“And you look like a wimp,” Carmy retorted. “What are you supposed to be anyway, a virgin?”

“A genie, as in “I Dream of Jeannie”. Here’s my home.” Franca pulled a bottle from her purse.

Just then, a tall woman wearing a witch’s hat and a black cape came in. It was Mrs. Champagne. She boomed, “The wicked witch of the west is here. Let me look at you goblins.” She looked everyone over.

“I hate to be a poor sport,” she said, pointing to Linda. “You’ll have to change your costume.”

“Why, Miss?” Linda pleaded.

“It’s in very, very bad taste. This is a Catholic school, girls. Remove it or cover it up. Remember, it’s a regular school day.”

After Mrs. C had gone, Linda grumbled. “Yeah, right, a regular day! What planet is she from? I’m not changing. I’m going out to Jarry Park.”

“If you leave, I’ll have to mark you absent, and you’ll need a note from your parents tomorrow,” Cathy reminded her.

“Sure, Miss,” Linda said, and she and Gina left.

“Wait for me. I have to talk to you,” Carmy said, running out to join them in the corridor. They whispered together for a few minutes and then Carmy returned to class.

Cathy was pleased to see Linda and Gina leave for the day. It was going to be a long, difficult day, trying to keep the students quiet and occupied, and it would be easier to keep Carmy in check without her two friends around.

When the student monitor came by the class, Cathy gave her Linda's and Gina's name cards, along with a note explaining the reason for their absence. The administration would deal with their skipping classes if it wished.

Soon afterward, the school's audiovisual technician brought down the television set Cathy had requested for the first period. She planned to show a film on haircutting—the last hairdressing topic she would cover before the students could actually receive clients of their own. The film might calm the students down for a while. Then she'd have to resort to workbook exercises to keep them busy till recess. They would be off for two periods, and then would come back for only a few minutes after lunch. They would be dismissed early to go to the party.

Throughout recess and in between periods, students kept knocking on Cathy's classroom door, asking for bobby pins, hairspray, and asking to use the mirrors to check their make-up.

The only student who showed up after lunch was Franca, and that was because she had decided to change her costume for the party. "Nobody can tell I'm a genie," she said, removing the long veil wrapped around her head. A friend had given her something else to wear and she went into the stock room to change.

Cathy looked at herself in the mirror while waiting for Franca. She saw a drawn and tired face; her hair badly needed a shampoo. She hadn't had time to wash it in the morning, and she had expected to wear a costume anyway. She put on the turban and then covered it with Franca's veil.

"Miss, those look good together. I wish I had seen that hat this morning."

"Can I borrow your veil?" Cathy asked.

“Sure, Miss, but you have to come to the dance with it.”

Cathy slipped the caftan over her clothes. She fixed the veil to cover her face, except for the eyes, and pinned it to the turban. She felt more secure and confident under the layers of clothes, and behind the anonymity of the veil.

For the sake of students wanting to go trick-or-treating at night, the Halloween dance in the cafeteria was held—to the senior’s disapproval—in the early afternoon. It was open to all levels; so many senior students snubbed it as being too babyish, and left school instead. They knew it would be impossible to check attendance at the dance. A student committee had worked all morning covering the windows and most of the walls with black construction paper and orange streamers. Except for the dizzying strobe lights, the cafeteria was pitch black and, when Cathy entered, she had to stand still until her eyes became accustomed to the dark. Rock music, played by a professional DJ, blared, and Cathy wondered how long she could stand it. It also felt unbearably warm. Cathy walked around the room watching the students dance feverishly, but could hardly recognize anyone.

Supervisors had been asked to look for signs of students being drunk or on drugs. Students continuously streamed in and out of the cafeteria, with the excuse of going for a smoke or to the bathroom, but many went out along the train tracks to drink or smoke pot. Cathy looked for Carmy, but didn’t expect her to stand out in her black leather jacket. Other teachers, dressed in their regular clothes, walked by without recognizing her, and she felt a sense of freedom. The only person who seemed to know her was Bruce. He smiled and said something, but she couldn’t hear him. He signaled for her to meet him outside in fifteen minutes, at the end of their supervision shift.

They walked side by side around the room, and though they hardly knew one another, Cathy felt calmed by his presence, as though they had been friends forever. After circling the room four or five times, they nodded at one other and went out into the corridor.

“I need fresh air,” she said.

“You won’t get it in here. Let’s go outside. But you might be cold without a coat.”

“Are you kidding? I’m wearing layers and layers of clothes. I’m surprised you recognized me.”

“It was the eyes. It’s always the eyes that give a person away.”

It was still light outside, though the sky was a monotonous expanse of murky gray. The clock had been set back to standard time a couple of days earlier, and the days had shortened. Bruce lit his pipe and they walked toward the train tracks. There was a huge hole in the wire fence, through which students crossed the tracks to get to Jarry Park. Bruce held the edges of the broken fence so Cathy could pass through safely. “Watch your robe,” he said.

She lifted the hem of the caftan and moved carefully. Bruce's small, courteous gesture made Cathy feel warm toward him, but also sad at the absence in her life of a man’s tenderness toward her. It had been a while since a man had watched out for her, or had seemed to care about her well-being.

The veil pinned on Cathy's turban had remained in place over her face, but no one seemed to notice her because the park was full of the costumed secondary-four and -five students who had left the party.

"I haven't seen Carmy since this morning," she said, as they crossed the tracks.
"Have you?"

"I saw her at lunch with a nun and a priest. They made quite a trio."

"Was the nun showing some cleavage?" she asked.

"I didn't want to bring it up, but yes, the nun was... well endowed," he said. "In fact, I think she was one of those nuns who see to it that other nuns get none."

Cathy laughed.

"Eh, I made you laugh. That's good."

"But I need to see her—Carmy I mean, not the nun. I have no idea what she's up to."

"She seemed a little high from all the attention, but she was fine."

Cathy walked around nervously, looking around.

"What's the matter?" Bruce asked, holding her by the shoulders.

She felt steadied by Bruce's hands and wished he'd put his arms around her, and just hold her without her needing to say anything.

"I'm worried about Carmy," she said.

"More than worried, you're incredibly sad."

The sky was turning darker by the minute. The next day would be the first of November, the first day of the month of the dead. Cathy hadn't been touched by a man for the longest time. A string of imaginary characters had completely taken over her mind and dreams, but they were like ghosts that drifted and whirled in her imagination on this All Saint's Eve. She could neither hold on to them or embrace them. How much sadder could one get?

“I’m sorry. I’m a barrel of fun, aren’t I?” she said.

“It must be all those layers of clothes you’re carrying, that’s all.”

She looked at Bruce, and shrugged lightly “I can’t help it,” she said.

He squeezed her shoulder. “I know, but lifting layers can be a lot of fun, too.”

She smiled, imagining herself lying in a soft, grassy field with Bruce, like on an endless bed, under layers and layers of white sheets, scented and embroidered with small flowers and multicolored butterflies.

“It gets dark so early now, since we set back the clock.” She crossed her arms, hugging herself. “Don’t you have a party to go to?” she asked.

“Yes, of course, Susan’s. Aren’t you going?”

“I had thought of going, but I don’t think I feel up to the drive.”

“Come with us. I’ll drive,” he said, holding her gaze.

“I don’t think so. You’re driving with Susan, right?”

“Yes. I offered her a lift, but you can come with us. You already have your costume on. I’ll have to improvise.”

“At what time are you going?” she asked.

“Susan asked me to pick her up at her place in the west end after the dance. She has stuff to bring. So I’ll go by her place now and be back here in about forty-five minutes.”

“Susan may not like it.”

“Of course she will. I’ll drive you back too.”

“OK,” she said. “I’ll wait for you at the entrance. Maybe I’ll have seen Carmy by then.”

“Good, let’s go back to the zoo and get our stuff.”

They walked back toward the tracks, and she held on to Bruce’s arm as he held up the jagged metal fence for her to go through.

Pasquale and Micu

By Antonio Amoruso

Just as the ocean tides churned under the full moon on Friday October 31, the wheel of memory turned relentlessly for Pasquale and Micu, causing emotions to erupt, after years of being relegated to passive protagonists. Six hours' difference between time zones meant that it was already close to bedtime in Mulirena, while people in Montreal rushed home from work or to Halloween parties.

Shut inside a cold and humid farmhouse in Mulirena, the two men had taken to drinking and commiserating with one other's misfortunes. Life had not been fair to either of them, they agreed, and wasn't it strange how the same group of characters had meddled in the story of their lives? They had been born in different towns, lived on different continents most of their lives, and yet found themselves together at the end of their roads, sitting under the same crooked umbrella, trying to keep warm and dry as constant drips of rain leaked from the roof over the fireplace. They had eaten cold roasted chestnuts for dinner, washed down by Micu's heavy homemade wine. The host had been too lazy to cook and Pasquale was still unaccustomed to the chore of preparing a meal in someone else's house, and a farmhouse at that.

How long could he last, living like this, Pasquale asked himself. Even with all of his experience in construction, he had to admit that insulating the stone shack before the winter, to the Canadian-home standards to which he was now accustomed, posed an impossible challenge. Maybe he was getting old and soft, or maybe it was his arthritis

acting up, but never, in Canada, did he remember the cold seeping into every cell of his bones as it did when he moved away from this fireplace to go pee or go to bed at night.

Yet, this is what he had dreamed of most of his life in Canada—coming back home to the mountains. He imagined his acquaintances back in Montreal in their comfy, heated dens, their cold rooms, fridges and freezers stocked with all the cheeses, salami and meats that money could buy. He cursed his brothers for having swindled him of his house in Serra San Pietro, and his wife and her family for having cheated him of a life in Montreal. He had no friends, no family, and now, no home left.

Micu drank his vinegary wine from morning to night, oblivious to any bodily discomfort and to his own fetid smell. He didn't know any better, Pasquale thought. He'd never traveled beyond the confines of the province, except during his military service, and that had been during the war.

He had spent the last twenty-odd winters in this farmhouse, keeping warm in front of this same fireplace, and he had never seen fit to repair the leaky roof. Tiled roofs leak all the time, he'd told Pasquale. You move one tile, you disturb a dozen others. Better let them be.

The only common bond between the two men was the rancor they felt toward the people who had played tricks on them. Pasquale figured that he had nothing to lose anymore and it was time to settle the score, if for no other reason than to show the world that he was not the imbecile life had made him out to be.

Before and after the war, until the late fifties, Micu had worked for Don Luigi, who was Lucia's cousin, and thus had become Pasquale's cousin by marriage. During that period, Micu had had many a quarrel with Lucia's family—and especially with

Alfonso—over the use of water and rights of passage on his land, the same land on which Micu and Pasquale now lived.

Pasquale had married Lucia through Alfonso's intervention. During the marriage negotiations, Alfonso had clearly specified that his mother's olive groves would be inherited by Lucia, while the family's townhouse would go to him and his brother. It was the way things were done in Calabria. Houses were left to sons; lands were the dowries for daughters. Pasquale had had no qualms then, about sending money to rebuild the farmhouse, and to add an extension that served as a processing plant for the oil that, with Alfonso, he'd import to Canada. Pasquale built and repaired homes for a living, took jobs at cut-rate prices so he could send his brothers and Alfonso the money they requested. It was like putting money in the bank for his retirement. He'd have a home in his own village and one in the country.

But now, sitting in front of the fireplace and dreading having to get up to go to bed, he thought of how blind and stupid he had been to trust his own brothers—and how ignorant of Italian law. But why had Alfonso—that sly fox—let Micu become the rightful owner— with legal papers and deeds—of the house and land that Pasquale had thought would eventually belong to him and his wife?

Tommaso *U Generale*, who managed Don Luigi's lands, had been Micu's immediate boss and Alfonso's enemy. The rivalry stemmed from way back, from before Micu and Pasquale were even born, from the time of their fathers and maybe even their grandfathers. That's the way it was in the village. Some people were born friends; others, enemies. Tommaso had changed Don Luigi's business to the point that Micu didn't work as an indentured laborer anymore. He was paid a salary over and above his daily basic

needs for food and shelter. Tommaso had moved Micu's family to town and had helped them through some hard times, especially after Micu's daughter Rosina got in trouble. So why, in 1959, did Micu leave Tommaso high and dry, to fend for himself and to work for Alfonso, their competitor?

"I was born a *disgraziato*," Micu said to Pasquale. "That has been my destiny."

"You were also born a *cornuto*," Pasquale answered. "That is what I always heard."

From the very beginning of his married life, Micu had been made to feel as if he had horns on his head—the cuckolding type of horns that villagers liked to make fun of, so long as it didn't affect them or their families. Micu had made the mistake of marrying Assunta, an attractive, fair and tall woman from another part of the country. She was also a peasant like himself, but she spoke and acted like a city woman compared to the costumed village housewives. For years, people gossiped about Don Luigi and Assunta, but what could Micu do about it? His livelihood depended on the richest man in town, and his wife always denied the accusations.

But he was blinded by rage when rumors spread that his daughter Rosina had tried to kill herself because Totu had seduced and then abandoned her. He had raised his daughter like a lady, never expecting her to work on the farm, but she still ended up like spoiled goods, taken advantage of by his boss' own nephew. And when Totu flew the coop to Rome, Micu would have shot the *signorino* on the spot—had he found him.

Micu's anger, however, had been appeased by his wife and daughter, who had pleaded with him not to do anything crazy. Then, the quick marriage that Tommaso negotiated for Rosina made any act of vengeance for her honor unnecessary. Nonetheless,

the shadows had been cast, and Micu kept his eyes and ears open. He began questioning Tommaso's generosity toward his family and he began spending most of his evenings in the cantina because Assunta had expelled him from her bed years before.

When they first met, Micu had told Pasquale, "I remember the year your brothers and Alfonso talked about you in the cantina. It seems like just yesterday. It was the fair of Santa Lucia." He was referring to the time when Alfonso was negotiating his sister's marriage to Pasquale. Micu and the other men who frequented the cantina followed the goings-on like a soap opera.

Now, in front of the fire, Micu, in a half daze, spoke of that time again. "Of all the single girls, Lucia was the prettiest one. Your brothers had good eyes, and recognized a good deal when they saw it."

"And so did Alfonso," Pasquale replied, his eyes half closed.

Micu's and Alfonso's animosity toward one other had broken down during the winter following the marriage negotiations. Why should Micu care about Alfonso's and Tommaso's disputes over water, he thought. He was paid a salary whether it rained or not. And after his sister's marriage to Pasquale, Alfonso's head was full of ideas about his future business dealings in North America, where there was real wealth to be made—not like what was earned hustling oil from village to village like Micu did for Tommaso. Alfonso had pumped up Micu's head too.

Pasquale took his arm out from under the blanket that was wrapped around his shoulders, and poured himself another glass of warm wine. "The import/export company was my idea from the beginning, not Alfonso's," he said. "When I first set foot in Montreal, there was nothing worth buying in the food stores. The bread was like a white

sponge, the cheese was yellow, and they had *baloni* for salami. What shit! And the oil made from corn looked like piss. You couldn't find an Italian *grossetteria* if your life depended on it."

"Mah, what's a *grossetteria*?" Micu asked.

"A store, where you buy food," Pasquale replied.

"Ah, *alimentari*. You talk funny. I don't understand half of what you say."

"That's because I also speak English and French. How many languages do you speak?"

"Eh, how many languages do I need here on this farm?"

And there had been thousands and thousands of newcomers landing every week in Halifax, all craving the same foods that Pasquale missed.

"I could have started a cheese company right there in Canada with all the money I sent Alfonso and my brothers," Pasquale yelled in his gruff voice. "Instead I let the Sicilians beat us to it."

"I remember Alfonso on his *Vespa*, riding around the province like a madman, looking for deals for *sopressata* and goat cheese," Micu said. "Tommaso called him a *ricottaio*. He laughed when Alfonso started working on getting an olive press here. Said he was wasting his money."

"It wasn't his money he was wasting," Pasquale shouted. "They thought that I was finding money in the streets. They never saw me working with frostbite on my hands, while they fixed things up as they wanted to here. But if you can't trust your own brothers, who can you trust?"

"Not your own wife, that's for sure," Micu said.

“Or yours,” Pasquale answered. “I heard the stories too.”

When Alfonso had gotten his papers to go to Canada, he began spending more and more time talking to the peasants in the cantina. He had the land, the olives, the olive press, but no one to make it all work for him. He told Micu that, while working in the farmhouse, he had observed the goings-on at Don Luigi’s *casino* not far from there, and he convinced him that all the gossip about Don Luigi and his wife was false. It wasn’t Don Luigi at all who met his wife there in the afternoons. Alfonso had watched for months, and had seen what happened on the days when Micu was sent left and right to pick up materials, deliver oil, or wheels of crushed olives. One day, he invited Micu to witness it with his own eyes.

They hid behind a tree, and watched as Tommaso—the bachelor, the man who was too busy to get married, who was everyone’s favorite uncle—paid Assunta a visit that lasted all afternoon, while Micu had been dispatched to deliver an order in Catanzaro. No wonder Tommaso treated Assunta and her children with such attention and care. Were any of them his? Who knew?

“On that, I can put my hand in the fire,” Micu said. “The children all look like me.”

“That’s not what I heard,” Pasquale retorted.

“If I didn’t shoot Tommaso like a sick dog, right there and then, it was because Alfonso stopped me.”

“He stopped you only because it suited him,” Pasquale said.

The best way to get even with Tommaso, Alfonso convinced Micu, was to leave him eating dust, leave him to do his own dirty work. Let him look for another lackey and

someone else's wife, Alfonso said. Alfonso promised Micu a share of the profits in the new company if he left Tommaso's employment, and went to live in the farmhouse by the river. There, he'd have the power to cut Tommaso off from the flow of water—and from his wife's favors.

"I did the same," Pasquale said. "When I heard my wife might be fooling around, I moved her to the country too. But my house is a palace compared to this shack."

"It's a shack now, but at the time it was a good deal," Micu said.

Pasquale knew the rest of the story—better than Micu even. But what he couldn't understand was why Alfonso didn't take the legal precautions to prevent Micu from taking over the land and farmhouse.

Once he had arrived in Montreal, Alfonso spent his evenings in the Italian bars that were springing up all around Saint-Michel. When the import-export company started operating, he cared much less about the authenticity of the Calabrese food products, and more about the quality of the other stuff he imported.

Many other people had the same idea as Pasquale, and Italian grocery stores, bakeries and cafes mushroomed as the Italian community in east-end Montreal grew.

"Alfonso never sent me a dollar to work on the oil press," Micu said. "He sent me to see some people, but they weren't in the food business at all. My wife never wanted me to have anything to do with them. She never forgave me for having left a paying job and a house in town, to work as a peasant for Alfonso."

"I didn't ask any questions," Pasquale said. "I kept working like a donkey in my construction company. And even there, Alfonso had to stick his nose in and spoil everything for me."

Before it seemed that practically half of Calabria had moved to Montreal, Pasquale had made some good connections with the small, tightly-knit group of people that made up the Italian community then—respectable professional people: accountants, notaries, lawyers, business people with political connections. He invested a considerable sum buying farmland in Laval, to be resold in lots for a housing development. *Citta Verde*, they called it. They expected that most newcomers would buy a plot of land to build a home on, with enough earth around it to grow their own vegetables and flowers—a community of *paesani*, cut off from the hustle and bustle of the big city, in their own green village. Pasquale had believed in the concept and he spent the best part of his first years of married life going around at night to the homes of newly arrived *paesani*, trying to sell them plots of land. He had been promised that, once enough lots had been sold, he would get the contract to build the homes.

When his brother-in-law Alfonso arrived—young, well dressed, and well spoken—Pasquale had introduced him to all of his acquaintances: the Vaccaro family, the lawyer Nicola Di Principe, who also meddled in politics, young Jack Russo, who owned clubs and the biggest spaghetti house in the city. How was he to know that Alfonso would marry one of the Vaccaro girls, become best friends with Jack Russo, and take over the project that he had been working on?

Pasquale lost face with all of his friends who had bought lots of land from him, only to find out, after years of promises, that the zoning laws would never be changed. He had sold his friends expensive and useless plots of land, not even good enough to grow tomatoes in, unless they were willing to load up their cars with gallons and gallons

of water at least once a week to feed the summer-scorched clay soil. If Pasquale had made any friends, he lost them all then.

With all of his new connections in Montreal, Alfonso had little time to devote to his business partnership with Micu. He assigned his brother Pietro to look after *Calabria Foods*, while he developed Vaccaro's business of land speculation, home building and homes sales, into the lucrative *AV Construction*.

"Vaccaro's construction company got its first big money off the backs of the poor immigrants who invested in a plot of land to build the house of their dreams," Pasquale said. "The trio—Jack Russo, Nicola Di Principe and Ralph Vaccaro—had planned the swindle from the very beginning. They were three of a kind. Ralph had Alfonso doing his dirty work while he retired in Florida. Jack and Nicola continued swindling people. I don't know who's the bigger crook of the two, but I could tell you stories to fill a book."

"No wonder Alfonso was so generous when he came back to the *paese*," Micu said.

Alfonso returned to Mulirena frequently in the beginning. And it was on one of those visits that Micu, with the help of his daughter Rosina, cut a deal with him.

Two years after Rosina had married, she left for Argentina with her husband Alessandro, who had family there. Soon, her brothers joined her because, in Mulirena, there was nothing for them to do, and because their father's business deal with Alfonso had not panned out. Tommaso had hired someone else and his business had proceeded as usual, whereas Micu was left earning a meager living from selling the olives that his wife picked, and from the little money that Tommaso slipped him under the table to let him use the water. If his wife, Assunta, still saw him on the sly, Micu did not know. He was

getting old by then, and was not too preoccupied with such matters. All he needed to keep him company were the two liters of red wine he drank throughout the day, and the few glasses he shared with his friends at the cantina.

Assunta maintained the house in order, grew their vegetables, raised chickens, rabbits and a pig for meat, and sold enough olives for spending money. Their children sent them nothing, as money from Argentina wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. But when Alfonso advised them of his impending visit, Assunta had something ready for him in the event that he planned to evict them.

His daughter Rosina had left a document, which Micu still kept with the deeds of the house and land, that accused Alfonso of having seduced her at the age of fifteen, having promised to marry her, and of continuing to have sex with her until she got pregnant and was forced to have an abortion. The only person who knew all this was the teacher from Piemonte, Signor Gavano, who boarded with Don Luigi. After Rosina had confided in him, Signor Gavano had spoken to Alfonso, and had tried talking Rosina out of getting an abortion, and into telling the truth to clear Totu's name. When she took the overdose of medication, it was as much to alleviate the stomach cramps as to stop the pain of having been deceived. Rosina had listened to her mother instead, and had said nothing at the time—otherwise, no one would have married her. But before leaving for Argentina, Assunta asked her daughter to write it all down, because she was beginning to feel that Alfonso was reneging on his promises to Micu.

“So Alfonso made a *cornuto* of us both,” Pasquale said.

“Yes, but at least I got something from him,” Micu said.

When Assunta presented Alfonso with Rosina's accusations, she asked for nothing less than that the farmhouse and land be put in her daughter's name. Alfonso protested and threatened to kick them out of the house, but in the end, he wanted to keep things quiet. He had married and was traveling to Italy with his wife. His sister had never shown any interest in the farm or the house when she had lived in Italy. What would she ever do with a half-furbished farmhouse and an olive press? So Alfonso signed the house and land over to Rosina and her parents.

"So you see?" Micu said, wrapping his worn-out coat around his shoulders. "This house may look like a dump to you, but at least it's mine. I'm not such a *cornuto* after all. You can go back to Montreal and tell everyone that."

Pasquale finally got up to go to his frigid bed. "Tomorrow is the day of the dead," he said calmly. "I'm going to Serra San Pietro to visit my mother's grave. But before that, I'm going to send a letter to Antonio Amoruso . He writes for the papers in Montreal. He'll let everyone know."

"Antonio Amoruso? But isn't he your wife's old boyfriend?" Micu asked, taking the remainder of the wine.

"Eh, what can I say? I told you. We are both born *cornuti*."

Deceptions and Floating Devices

In spite of Mrs. Champagne's orders to carry on as usual, Halloween turned out to be as disruptive and chaotic as any other WHHS Costume Day. Along with Carmy and most of the school's two-thousand students, Cathy's concerns over costumes, parties and friends seemed to take priority over school regulations and rules of conduct. She never thought of calling home to tell Sean she would be going to Susan's party, or to check out Carmy's story with Alfonso.

While she waited in her classroom for Bruce to swing by the school to pick her up, her thoughts were occupied by the drive to the country and by the party. She worried that she didn't have a bottle of wine to bring, and tried to think of a place nearby where she could buy one—but then she would have had to take off her costume. Would the other teachers be wearing one? Should she keep the caftan and turban on, change into the peasant skirt, or change into her own clothes and dress up at Susan's?

She removed the head covering, but realized that, if she went without it, she would have to wash her hair and then reapply her make-up. She didn't think she would have time, so she tucked her hair back into the turban and freshened-up the eye makeup. Besides, she thought, she didn't have a coat and would be warmer with the caftan. She had noticed that the air had turned chilly, as she and Bruce walked back to school.

Cathy wondered when Bruce would be driving back to Montreal. Was he planning on sleeping in the country? She hadn't thought to ask him. She wondered what would happen to her car if it was left in the garage overnight. She walked to the janitor's

office but found it closed, and then walked around the corridors looking for a night janitor to tell him about the car, but all she saw were the overly excited junior students coming in and out of the cafeteria.

And suddenly, it was time to go meet Bruce and Susan. Cathy didn't want to keep them waiting. Bruce had been so quick to invite her. She thought of the way he had held her by the shoulders, by the tracks. Would Susan mind Cathy cutting into the car ride with Bruce? Was there really something going on between him and Susan, or was it just wishful thinking on the secretary's part? Cathy walked to the school entrance to wait for them, and soon Bruce's car drove up. Susan watched her from the front seat. She called out, "I like that. What a great costume, Cathy!"

"I hope I'm not the only one dressing up," Cathy said.

"Everyone has to. It's a masquerade party," Susan replied.

"I hope I'm not imposing... coming with you, I mean," Cathy said.

"Not at all," Susan said, and she seemed to mean it.

The sky had turned completely dark. The drive up the Laurentian Autoroute was quiet. Cathy had no idea what the party would be like. Sitting in the back seat, wearing her costume, she felt oddly out of place, and suddenly wished she had not agreed to go. If only things were different with Sean, she thought, she'd either be driving with him to the party, or she'd be on her way home to prepare a quiet dinner for two. They'd hand out candy to the neighborhood kids and laugh at their costumes. Afterwards, they'd sit together in the living room with a drink, chat, read or watch TV. Later, they would go to bed and make love. Isn't that what most married couples would be doing on this Halloween night?

Instead, Cathy felt like recoiling into her shell, like a snail, and disappearing. She wondered whether Sean was already at his party, wearing the tuxedo he had rented. It occurred to her that this was the first time that day she'd thought of him.

Bruce broke the embarrassing silence that had settled in the car. "Are you sleeping back there?" he asked, looking into the rear-view mirror.

"No, no, just resting," Cathy said. "Do you drive to the Laurentians often?"

"First time to Susan's place, but I've driven this way many, many times before on my way to Val-d'Or."

Bruce kept looking at her in the rear-view mirror as he spoke, speaking to Cathy as though Susan wasn't there. Cathy felt awkward, knowing that Susan had counted on getting to know Bruce better on this drive.

"Do you have your costume, Susan?" Cathy asked.

"Of course," Susan said. "I borrowed Mrs. C's."

"You're the witch! Every Halloween party has to have one, I guess. What about you, Bruce?"

"I'm not a biggie on costumes," he said.

"You told me you'd improvise one," she said.

Susan looked back at Cathy, and again, she felt as if she had stepped out of line.

"Well, I have a hat in the brown bag next to you. Open it up," he suggested.

She pulled a large yellow hat from the bag and gave it to Bruce. He put it on, and said with a Scottish accent, "Meet Ronald McDonald, Bruce McDonald's rich cousin." They all laughed.

"Are you Scottish... I mean, of Scottish origin?" Cathy asked.

“Primarily, but the seeds of the old family tree have been crossed many times—Scottish, Irish, English, French, German—there’s even some native Indian blood on my mother’s side, but, well, that’s Canada for you.”

Cathy wanted to ask him more questions, but didn’t want to monopolize the conversation, so for the rest of the drive, they chit-chatted about the day at school, the dance, the students. Once they were off the highway, Susan gave Bruce directions till they reached her country place on the lake.

Bruce helped Susan start a fire in the fireplace. Then, he put a BeeGees tape into the tape deck, while Cathy set out chips, pretzels and other party snacks. Then, she got a glass of wine and sat with Susan in front of the fireplace. Bruce went into the bedroom to lie down, saying he needed to rest for a few minutes.

“What do you think of Bruce?” Susan whispered.

Cathy sipped at her wine. “I told you. I like him as a teacher. He’s been very good with Carmy.”

“I wish he’d commit to at least a date,” Susan said. “That’s all I’m asking. But he seems to have wandering eyes when there’s other women around.”

“I haven’t noticed that side of him, but then, I only know him professionally,”

A large picture window faced the lake, but all Cathy could see in the dark was a string of lights on a house across the water. They chatted for almost an hour, until the other guests started trickling in, all costumed and cheerful. As they came in, they walked into the bedroom and threw their coats on the bed, on top of Bruce.

“That big boy can sleep,” Steve said, sitting next to me on the sofa. He was still wearing his cowboy hat.

Soon the bar was well stocked with the bottles that each guest brought, and Cathy felt embarrassed that she had not brought anything. The dining table had been pushed against the wall by Bruce to clear a dancing area. Everyone started dancing, watching their reflections in the picture window. They looked like a bunch of overgrown kids in funny hats, moving their arms and legs to the beat of the Bee Gees.

“Let’s dance,” Steve said, and pulled Cathy up from the sofa. She would rather have remained sitting by the fireplace, but everyone was dancing, moving from one song to the next. They all moved with different steps, and with their eyes closed, they seemed to be dancing to their own inner rhythms. Cathy couldn’t wait for the dance to be over.

Bruce finally came out of the bedroom, but he went straight out to the patio with his pipe. After a few minutes, Cathy left the dance floor, just as Steve was moving to the center of the circle. “I need air,” she said, fanning her face with her hands, but no one seemed to notice her.

Outside, she said to Bruce, “It’s getting hot in there. You don’t like dancing?”

“Ah, I don’t care for this type of music. Let’s walk out to the lake.”

They walked beyond the patio. She tiptoed on the squelchy dead foliage that lined the banks of the lake.

“Care for a swim?” Bruce asked.

“Don’t think so. It looks pretty cold out there, and I can’t swim.”

“It’s a shallow lake, but it’s heavily polluted I would think, what with all of these cottages around it.”

They stood and looked at the water. A full moon shone off and on through heavy clouds. It lit up a bright yellow and brown object in the center of the lake.

“What’s that floating in the water?” she asked.

“Just a loose *pedalo*—a pedal boat—carrying a load of dead branches and leaves. If they don’t pull it in soon, it will be stuck in ice all winter. This lake will be frozen solid in no time at all.”

She crossed her arms tightly, and Bruce gave her his coat. “You’ll catch a cold for sure tonight,” he said.

“Thanks,” she answered, looking up at him, and wanted to tell him how grateful she was for his concern. Instead, she said, “This must be a pretty spot in the summer.”

“Ah, it looks swampy to me. Probably full of black flies. The little bastards will eat you alive. I’ve lived in the bush all my life. I know.”

She looked around the lake and then back at Susan’s cottage. The surrounding chalets were silent, their lights off. The maples, birches and evergreens were indistinguishable one from the other in the menacing shadows of the night. The only signs of life came from Susan’s. Its picture window was all lit up, moist and hazy from the heat of the dancing bodies inside. Their frenzy overwhelmed Cathy—so much effort and energy for such little joy, she thought.

“Are you always this quiet?” Bruce asked.

“I don’t talk much, but I’m not always *this* quiet. I’m feeling down these days. All of the business with Carmy and school, it’s taking a toll.”

“It must be more than that. What are you thinking of?”

“I don’t know...This lake freezing over soon . And the boat, the mud, the weeds all preserved till the spring, and then...” Her voice trailed off. Her limbs were beginning to feel numb from the cold, and she feared total deadness setting in unless she moved. Her whole life, she thought, she had been trekking and trekking for miles, looking for clear water, only to be stuck with this stagnant, backwater pool. “It’s cold. I’m tired. Let’s go back in,” she said.

“No, it’s too loud in there. Maybe we should go for a drive. There’s a bar just off the highway. I need a beer. We can talk.”

“What will the others say? I left my purse on the sofa.”

“Ah, they won’t miss us. Look at them. They’re too busy dancing away their worries. I’ll run in and get your purse. It’s brown suede, right?”

Cathy looked inside and caught a glimpse of Susan’s face looking toward the door. She wondered if Susan had observed them from the kitchen. Cathy looked away, turning to Bruce, who was waiting for her nod. He’d run in, get her things, and then put his arms around her shoulders. They’d walk away from this joyless corner of the woods.

“Sure, why not,” she said.

Maybe, she thought, as they drove away, she should have gone back to the chalet and spoken to Susan, who might feel stranded by their sudden departure. But Cathy had been feeling pulled into a dark swampy waterhole, and the only muffled sounds she listened to were those from her rescuer. The clear-minded shoulds or should-nots would have to wait.

Carmy's Halloween Party

In the late afternoon of Friday, October 31, as the sun's last rays faded into the darkening sky, Carmy, wearing a Jason Voorhees mask, climbed the overpass that connected Saint-Roch Street with Jarry Park—not to cross safely from one side to the other, but to find a secluded spot to sit. No one else bothered to use the overpass; she was alone and she liked it that way.

Her head had been spinning since she had first donned the heavy leather jacket that morning. Wearing it, she'd had to play up to the hard, cold-hearted attitude that the jacket with the metal studs suggested—and it had affected others' attitudes toward her too. And just as she was getting used to it, Gina had convinced her to switch into the *Friday the 13th* horror movie costume.

Carmy realized how much she hated following rules of any kind. She sat, cross-legged, high on the overpass landing, looking down at the tracks, the park and the neighborhood homes. She watched other students parading back and forth through the hole in the chain-link fence below.

The day was not turning out as she had expected. She wouldn't be meeting her uncle after school as she had told Cathy, and she didn't care what her uncle would do when he went to the apartment to pick her up as usual, and find no one there. When she had called his home the evening before, her finger had held down the receiver while she pretended to speak to her aunt. Cathy, too preoccupied with admiring herself and her jeweled turban in the mirror, had believed her.

Lying to Cathy had been easy enough, but now that she had the evening free, she didn't feel like going to Charlie's anymore. Linda and Gina hadn't waited for her and had gone to the club early, while she had stood alone in a dark corner of the cafeteria waiting for something to happen at the dance. Nothing had. The only event of interest had been watching Cathy in her glittering caftan walk around the cafeteria like the Queen of Sheba, while Bruce followed her around like a little dog. Neither one of them had recognized her in her mask.

When the school's costume party had been announced two weeks earlier, she and her friends had planned their disguises and the partying that would follow. For Carmy, it was the first school dance she would be attending. At the French high school she had attended, she and her friends had shunned extracurricular activities—especially parties.

“We'll dress you up like a biker or a rock star,” Linda had decided. “Eddie will freak out for you. And after the baby dance at school, we'll all go to Charlie's.”

Eddie had been expelled for missing too many classes, but he still hung around Carmy and her friends during lunch, and managed to slip into the school. She had hoped that, at the school party, she'd have the nerve to ask him to a concert or a movie. He had written better English than most students in class, but he spoke little and, when he did, he stuttered nervously. Bruce had often asked him to help Carmy with her assignments. She couldn't decide for sure whether he was shy or just quiet by nature and smarter than he looked. He didn't seem to care about being expelled. He had connections outside school and sold them joints.

At lunch, when Carmy had gone to meet Linda and Gina at the park, Eddie had been with them, wearing a heavy flannel shirt over his usual Sex Pistols T-shirt, and sporting a Jason mask.

“You two look scary together. You should come to Charlie’s as a pair,” Linda said.

Eddie generously shared his joint with them, but said he’d hang around the school until the dance was over, and then had to go to his weekend job at the Jean-Talon Market.

“What kind of grass do you sell there?” Gina asked.

“Only the good kind,” he said, removing his mask and revealing a grin.

Carmy liked the way he smiled halfway, nodding his head, and then becoming serious again.

“You can have my mask,” he told Carmy. “It doesn’t really match what you’re wearing, though.”

“Give her your shirt too, you dummy, not just the mask,” Gina said.

It was Gina who had suggested that Carmy tell her family she was going to the school dance in the evening, and then wear a mask at the club so no one could report to her uncle that she had been there.

“That bitch Cathy!” Carmy said. “She won’t cover up for me.”

“I’m surprised at her,” Gina said. “What’s the big deal? Italian girls lie to their families about going out all the time. I bet when she was our age, she must have done it hundreds of times herself.”

Carmy and Eddie exchanged jackets, and Carmy put on the mask. But she missed the weight of the heavy leather jacket. They walked around the park and saw people she

knew, but no one recognized Carmy beneath the mask. It was as if she was not there at all.

Then Gina and Linda said they'd go ahead to the club, but Carmy wanted to hang around with Eddie. The two of them made their way back toward school. Eddie stopped to talk to some students outside the building, as Carmy went in. She figured Eddie would join her inside, but she had waited for almost an hour, and then had returned to the park, but there had been no sign of him anywhere. She'd walked aimlessly along the tracks smoking her joint through a hole in the mask, until she spotted Queen Cathy crossing the tracks with Bruce. She passed right by them as Bruce held Cathy by the shoulders and practically seemed to want to kiss her right there. They never even noticed her watching them. Cathy could pull the wool over other people's eyes, Carmy thought, but she saw right through her. And Cathy, with her head up in the clouds, didn't even realize it.

Carmy had already heard from Linda that Charlie at the club knew Cathy from way back. When Linda had mentioned to Charlie that she took hairdressing at WHHS, he'd asked if a Calabrese hairdresser taught there. He said she was the friend of someone he knew.

"Are you sure it's the same Cathy he's talking about," Carmy had asked.

"Yeah, I said her name and he said he knew her. I figured he meant that they knew each other like *paesani*. Charlie is Calabrese too, isn't he?" Linda asked.

"But not from the same place. Cathy's family wouldn't know anyone like Charlie. They're real squares."

Then, for days afterwards, Gina, Linda and Carmy had spent their lunch hours speculating about how Cathy would have known Charlie, and their fantasizing led to

them creating their own stories. His other club had closed fifteen years earlier, so Cathy would have been their age—fifteen or sixteen years old—when she had known the friend whose name Charlie was reluctant to divulge. Who could it be?

“She writes everything down,” Carmy told her friends. “She keeps diaries. I’ll find out.”

Then she began looking into the notebooks that Cathy kept in a box on the lower shelf in the den. Without making it too obvious, she pulled out a few pages at a time from the bottom of the pile, read through them late at night when she was supposed to be doing homework, and then put them neatly back. But halfway through the pile, she had nothing juicy to report and lost interest in the stories about the village and the people there. It was only when the story about her father was published in the papers that a light went off in Carmy’s head.

“I bet she’s been writing about my family too,” she told Gina, and the next day she went home early to raid the notes, looking for clues about her mother, her father, or whoever her father was supposed to be.

“The little bitch isn’t exactly a little angel herself, you know. And my grandmother thinks she’s so Miss Perfect.”

“What did you find out?” they all wanted to know.

“Nothing I can say for sure,” she said. “I can’t fucking tell if what she writes is true or make-believe.”

There’s the fairy princess, with her Prince Charming, Carmy thought, as Cathy, holding on to Bruce, passed by her on the tracks, on their way back to school. All the smoking on an empty stomach had made Carmy feel nauseous, and she ran to puke

behind the school. She leaned against it with her eyes closed until she felt better. She sat on the ground for another while, but then noticed her vomit and some dog shit next to her, and she sprang back to her feet in disgust. She looked up at the overpass and figured it would be a good place to get away from all of the garbage below.

Did Cathy herself have any clue as to what was real or fake? Carmy wondered, as she sat on the overpass landing, hunched over, with her arms crossed inside the loose shirt to keep warm. In Cathy's writing, there were names of places and people that Carmy recognized. The Lucia who married by proxy to a man from Serra San Pietro had to be her mother, but had she ever been as pretty and vivacious as the Lucia of the notebooks? Her mother slept all day long and kept the windows shut on summer days to keep sunlight out of the house. In their home in Laval, you could never tell whether it was summer or winter outside.

Her mother never took her skating, swimming or to dance classes, like the French mothers at school, and all Carmy did at home in the evenings was watch TV by herself. The only activity her father had ever insisted on was taking her to Montreal's Saturday-morning Italian school after she had started first grade. After the second week, she had refused to get up, complaining of stomach pains. She didn't want to miss the Saturday morning cartoons. But her father wouldn't give up on the idea, and he started driving her to her grandmother's house every Friday evening so that he wouldn't have to get up as early on Saturday morning.

Carmy liked staying with her grandmother, who lived alone. The old woman suffered from arthritis, but still managed to cook special treats for her: *cullarrielli* for Easter, *pigmolata* for Christmas, and always homemade soups and pastas. When Carmy

was little, her grandmother would sing songs and tell her stories about the brigands and vicious bogeymen who hid in the mountains. She would always finish her tales by admonishing Carmy to watch out for evil people lurking everywhere.

In the evenings, Carmy and her grandmother would sit together in front of the TV. They both liked watching the figure-skating competitions. Carmy wished she could dance and move as lightly as those slim skaters who seemed made out of air, instead of skin, bones and fat like she was. Carmy moved like a lump of cement. In high school, her father had refused to allow her to take jazz ballet lessons given by a professional dancer. He said that he didn't want to pay to make a *ballerina* out of his daughter, so that she could go dancing every Saturday night in clubs.

Her father still spoke as if he had just gotten off the boat, and when her mother did go to school on parent night, Carmy was ashamed of the way she spoke in broken French, after all her years living here. Carmy couldn't even miss her mother's presence as she lay in a coma, for she wasn't much different than what she had been at home. Could this same person, who walked around like a zombie or like she was in a time warp most of the time, who seemed to care about no one, not even herself, have been a carefree young woman once, sneaking out to see her boyfriend, and making out with a waiter?

When Carmy had read Cathy's notebooks the first time, she hadn't paid too much attention to the stories. But as she sorted out in her mind what she had read, she tried piecing together people and places. And who was this Antonio who wrote about her father, and who seemed to know so much about her family? She went to see him and all he asked was how her mother was. She had visited him once before with her mother, and

it was he who had suggested she go to WHHS. He had known that Cathy taught there—everyone seemed to know Cathy.

“Come see me if ever you have a problem,” Antonio had said. Then he had gone ahead and splattered her father’s story all over the papers. Was he her friend or enemy?

Carmy had envied Cathy when she had first gone to live with her in her modern apartment, which wasn’t furnished with ornately carved furniture or with sofas covered up in plastic, like the other *paesani*. But she and her Canadian husband were no different from her own mother and father. They hardly spoke to one other and slept in separate beds.

The only thing she envied was the fact that Cathy could write things down. With her new glasses, Carmy could read but she still couldn’t spell. Bruce kept insisting that spelling didn’t matter, that she should write her thoughts down any way she could. Write about what you dream at night, he had said. Write the things you’re passionate about, the things that scare you the most. But whenever Carmy sat down to write, she stared at the blank page for hours.

But the week before Halloween, she had found a way out. While alone in the apartment and with Eddie’s help, she had prepared what she thought was a perfectly written composition on the theme of *Fears and Terrors*—but not the usual kid’s stuff about ghosts and haunted houses. Bruce didn’t comment on it yet, though when she handed it in that morning, he had told her he’d look it over his recess break and tell her how he liked it. Later at the park he nodded at her but said nothing about the composition. Maybe he hadn’t even looked at it, after bugging her for days to hand something in. Maybe Bruce only pretended to be interested in her so he could get into

Cathy's pants—or under that ridiculous housedress she had paraded in all day long. Imagine Cathy wanting to dress her up in that, never giving any thought to what she was really like.

The overhead lights in Jarry Park lit up just as the sky turned dark, and Carmy could see the goings-on in the street below, as clear as day. The neighborhood kids on Saint-Roch Street, all dressed up and masked, were scurrying excitedly from their houses, maybe toward the more residential streets, swinging their orange plastic bags and UNICEF boxes. Eddie had said he still went trick-or-treating in TMR, just like other kids in Park Ex. She should have told him she'd join him later on. When Carmy was a kid, her mother, afraid to let her go to strangers' houses, had only taken her to her grandmother's and her uncles' houses for trick-or-treating.

She was almost falling asleep. She remembered a lullaby her grandmother used to sing to her as a baby. Carmy played it over in her head, again and again.

*O ninna ninna, o ninnarella
U lupu se mangiau la piacerella
O piacerella mia cumu facisti
Quandu intra vucca de lu lupu ghisti*

(O lullaby, o little lullaby
The wolf ate the little sheep
O my little sheep, how you must have suffered
When into the mouth of the wolf you had to go.)

The cement landing felt cold on her bum. Carmy got up. Some of the teachers supervising the dance were out having a smoke. There was Nick, with his usual big grin, chatting away with a fat man who looked familiar. Where had she seen him before? She recognized the big gut spilling out of a checkered jacket. He had wobbled behind her,

Linda and Gina, on their way to Charlie's one afternoon. She had even thought he might be following her, might be one of her uncle's lackeys who did odd jobs for him. Was he looking for her already? He seemed pretty chummy with Nick as they shook hands, but Nick was such a hypocrite. Did anyone know he was also a pervert? He told Linda she had bedroom eyes after he walked into the girls' gym changing room.

She saw Cathy emerge from the school's entrance, and look as though she were searching for someone. Was she also looking for her? Carmy almost waved at her, but then she saw Cathy run toward a car—Bruce's car. What was up with those two? Imagine, telling her not to lie to her family, and then driving away with Bruce. Who did she think she was fooling with that stupid veil hiding her face?

All Carmy had wanted to do on this Halloween night was party with her friends, and forget the confusion in her head. But she just didn't have the heart to pretend to be as lighthearted as Linda and Gina. They were the only friends she had, but all they thought about was dancing half-naked at the club. She wanted to be a dancer too, but a real one. They wouldn't miss her if she didn't show up. Maybe they'd be relieved not to have her tagging after them, looking as excited as a sack of potatoes.

What would her mother be thinking right now, in her comatose sleep? Bruce had told Carmy to talk to her, that she might hear everything being said around her. Imagine hearing everything but being unable to answer. And her father in Italy, would he be in bed by now. And whose bed?

Carmy huddled against the overpass' protective wire fence. One would have to climb over it in order to fly off into the air. She wished she could simply roll herself into a ball and let herself slip off the edge, and dissipate into the sky like a shooting star.

Bruce and Cathy

Bruce and Cathy drove along the country road quietly. As they approached the bar, on a road overlooking the highway, Cathy thought that maybe going to a bar had been a bad idea.

“It’s getting late,” she said. “Maybe we should just go home.”

Bruce stopped the car in the bar’s parking lot. “I have a better idea. Why don’t we go to my place for a chat and a drink? I have a couple of things I want to discuss with you about Carmy.” He patted her on the knee, and his touch felt reassuring.

“OK,” she said. “I’ll stop by your place for a few minutes.”

“But don’t sound too excited,” he joked.

“Sorry. It has been a long day, and I’m worried about my car in the garage. I’m wondering about Carmy too. I hope her uncle met her at school OK. I should have checked with him.”

“Speaking of Carmy, I might as well tell you right now what’s been concerning me for the past week,” Bruce said as he maneuvered the car onto the highway heading home.

“Didn’t she hand in her English assignment?” she asked.

“That she did. But I don’t quite know what to make of it.”

“Why? What did she write about? Did she say anything about the night her parents fought?”

“No, no. Nothing about that. She’s been pretty tight-lipped about that. Maybe too much for my liking.”

“I’ve been wondering about that too,” Cathy said. “Then, what is it?”

“Don’t be alarmed. Maybe it’s all in her imagination. I did ask her to write about dreams and fantasies.” Bruce had a nagging doubt that Carmy hadn’t written the composition by herself. She did admit that her friend Eddie helped her with the spelling, but even taking that into consideration, some of it seemed beyond both their capabilities. And if she did write it, it was troubling.

“What kind of things are you talking about?” Cathy asked. She felt a nervous twitch in her stomach as she realized that Carmy may have been up to something. She had been uneasy about Carmy’s behavior toward her, especially since the day Carmy had returned home by herself. But Cathy hadn’t quite been able to figure out what it was.

“I don’t like showing students’ compositions, but I believe you should read this one. I even considered showing it to the guidance people, but I want your opinion first.”

“I appreciate you showing it to me before anyone else,” Cathy said.

“Of course,” he said. “That’s why I haven’t spoken to anyone else about it.”

They drove quietly to Bruce’s apartment, which was on a side street not far from WHHS. He opened the door, which opened onto the living room. The bachelor apartment was sparsely furnished—a well-worn sofa and chair, low bookshelves made from wooden boards and bricks, and a number of empty wine bottles serving as candle holders. The place smelled of the pipe tobacco Bruce smoked, but Cathy was surprised by how orderly and neat everything was, and at how the apartment had a warm, homey feeling.

“You have a housekeeper?” she asked.

“I’ve lived alone since the age of sixteen. I like a certain order in my life,” he said. “Sit down. What can I get you to drink?”

“Oh, anything at all,” she said.

“I think you’re a white-wine type of person, am I right? I have a bottle of sparkling wine that a student gave me.”

“Don’t open a bottle for me. I’ll drink anything,” she said.

“You’ll settle for anything at all, will you?”

He came back from the kitchenette with a bottle of *Asti Spumante*. He uncorked it, poured the wine in a tall glass, and gave it to her. Then he poured himself a scotch and water, and sat beside her on the sofa.

“Happy Halloween,” he said. “Please drink up. I don’t touch this stuff.”

Cathy tried to unpin the veil from around her face, and Bruce put his drink down to help her. “Yes, I think it’s time you take that veil off. Not that it doesn’t become you, but it makes drinking a bit awkward. May I do the honors?” He removed the pin from the turban.

She giggled. “I can’t believe I’ve kept this on all day.

“Oh, I think it’s been longer than that,” Bruce said.

“Well, it feels longer than that,” Cathy said, trying to keep the conversation light. She slipped the turban off her head, and instinctively brushed her hair away from her face with her hands. “I must be a mess!” she said.

“No, you look good with your hair away from your face. I like it when you pull it into a pony tail. You have a handsome face.”

“Thank you. I thought handsome was reserved for men only.”

“Not at all. You have an interesting face, soft and strong at the same time. Let’s drink to soft and strong.” They sipped their drinks, and then Bruce got up from the sofa to look through his record collection. “Do you have any favorite music?” he asked.

“No real favorites. I listen to all types of music, really: Italian, English, French, pop, classical, jazz....”

As Bruce put on a Buffy Ste-Marie record, Cathy asked, “Can I read Carmy’s composition?”

Bruce pulled out a copybook from a pile on the desk, and opened it to Carmy’s assignment. “Read on and tell me what you think,”

Carmy Tonnelli
Composition for Mr. Bruce McDonald
Night Terrors—The Hawk

Since the first grade, I’ve slept at my grandmother’s house every Friday night and stayed with her till Sunday morning. This habit started so I could attend Saturday-morning Italian school in Montreal. It gave my mother a chance to rest, and gave my grandmother, who lived alone, some company. I stopped going to Italian school after my thirteenth birthday, but kept up the ritual of sleeping at my grandmother’s house on most weekends. She was getting older and had problems walking and needed someone to help her with her chores around the house and with her grocery shopping.

But something strange happened a year ago, after my fourteenth birthday. I’d get up from bed in fright in the middle of the night. I’d walk around the house with my eyes wide open yet fully asleep, and if someone tried to touch me, I’d fight them like a fierce animal, my grandmother told me. The following morning, I wouldn’t remember anything at all. The doctor called it night terrors, and said it was unusual for someone my age. Usually younger kids get it when going through some stressful periods. But he said I’d grow out of it in time. Then one night, I woke up with a terrifying scream, and from then on, the sleep-walking episodes ended. But the memory of that bad dream has stayed with me and every time I think of it, I’m forced to relive the day I met someone so scary I can only refer to him as the Hawk.

The 92 bus was nowhere to be seen; it seemed to have lost its way in the city, whose normal beat had gotten interrupted and skewed by a night of heavy snow. Cars got stuck in their own tracks, spinning ineffectually, then skidding

uncontrollably once they were out of their newly formed cradles. I was afraid of being late for my Saturday-morning class, but then I figured that, like me, everyone else would be delayed. Had this been a normal school day, teachers and students would have snuggled back into their warm beds, after listening to the list of school cancellations on the radio. But Italian school never closed for snowstorms. Classes would be half empty, and teachers still insisted on repeating verb conjugations in tenses I would never have any use for. After years of Saturday-morning classes, I could conjugate verbs by heart, but I couldn't form a sentence in proper Italian if my life depended on it. But teachers didn't expect too much from us students, who spoke a mish-mash of dialects mixed in with English and French. But my father insisted I attend regularly and drove me to my grandmother's house every Friday evening.

When I was younger, my grandmother would walk me to school, but now, at thirteen going into fourteen, I went alone, and when I was too lazy to walk, I would take a bus from Delorimier Street to Christophe Colomb, only three stops away.

As I walked to the bus stop I thought about the immeasurable number of raindrops that had frozen on their way down from the clouds and become lacy and delicate snowflakes—as light and airy as a butterfly's breath. They had fallen softly but consistently throughout the night. I closed my eyes and felt the flakes caressing my face, dissolving into raindrops again. But their steady, uninterrupted falling, in the quietness of the night, had paralyzed a whole city in the first snowstorm of the season.

A group of people were waiting impatiently for the 92 bus. Now and then, someone would step off the curb to look in the distance for signs of it. I decided to cross the street and walk along Jean-Talon Street. Suddenly a late model Oldsmobile swerved from its left lane, and stopped beside me, dangerously cutting off another car. A cacophony of horns roused me from my contemplation of snowflakes and raindrops. I looked at the luxurious car and its driver, who seemed to know me and who motioned for me to get into the car.

Do I know him? I wondered, as I looked straight at his face. He leaned forward, toward the passenger side, stretched out his arm to open the door, and yelled in Italian, "Get in before I have to rip the horn out of that fool's car in the back."

I didn't hesitate. I opened the car door and got in. A brown manila envelope was sitting on the seat. I noticed the name of a legal firm on the corner. He flung it quickly into the back seat. He didn't introduce himself or ask me where I was going. He was intent on maneuvering the car back into his lane, to let the other car by. He did so expertly and with total control, like someone who knew how to get out of tight spots.

"Do you know me?" I asked in my broken Italian, and wondered where I might have seen him before.

"Sure I know you. You're Calabrese, aren't you?"

"Yes, but how do you know that?"

"It's in your eyes—you can't hide it—and in your voice, too."

“OK,” I said. “But how do you know if we’re going in the same direction? You didn’t even ask me where I’m going.”

“On a day like today, it’s not important. No one is going very far. All we can do is hope not to get on one other’s nerves...or to spin our wheels.” As he said that last sentence, he patted me on the knee and looked straight into me, as if he was measuring me up.

Who was he? I wondered. He looked familiar and strange at the same time.

I couldn’t figure out his age—maybe a young forty or an older-looking thirty. He wore a long, dark wool coat over a suit and a tie. Too well dressed to be a laborer or a factory worker, I figured, but not polished enough to be a lawyer or even a clerk. I couldn’t picture him working in an office as a bookkeeper or an insurance salesman. His hair was dense and coarse and the darkest shade of brown, almost black. It was kept in check by a good short cut, the type of hair that could easily get out of control without regular grooming. His skin was rough, with remnants of adolescent pockmarks, and it had an ashen undertone, the color of someone who didn’t spend too much time in the sunlight. I noticed an irregular hollow scar on one corner of his lip—like a deep cut or burn that had not healed properly. His hair grew low on his forehead, into a point. He had a small hooked nose and tiny intense black eyes; he looked like a hawk eyeing his prey.

“Shall we stop for something to eat?” he asked.

“I have to go to Italian school,” I said. “I’ll get off at the corner at Christophe Colomb Street.”

He laughed. “That’s a good place to have an Italian school.” He laughed some more.

I didn’t get the joke.

“Cristoforo Colombo. Don’t you know who he was?” he asked.

“I know who he was. He discovered America,” I said. I had heard my father curse him often enough.

“He discovered America so they could name a street after him and have an Italian school there.” He laughed again.

He had a strange sense of humor. Like when he asked me where my family came from in Calabria, and I told him the province of Catanzaro, he said, “I hope you’re not from Cicala.”

“No, why?” I asked, puzzled.

“Imagine living in a place called Cicala, and being called a Cicalese.” He laughed at the possibility. I still didn’t find that funny, so he had to explain that *cicala*, which means cicada in Italian, also means blabbermouth. Then I laughed too. He was old enough to be my father, and he spoke Calabrese like him, but laughing at nonsense like he did, he acted like a child.

“I’ve been up all night,” he said. “I’m as hungry as a wolf. Let’s go eat.” Before I could answer, he swerved onto a side street and stopped at a snack bar. I didn’t mind. I’d rather have breakfast with him than spend the morning with the bespectacled Italian teacher who scorned my Calabrese accent.

Inside, he ordered eggs and bacon, which he devoured in a few minutes. I had toast and milk.

He said he had to make some important phone calls before driving me wherever I had to go. He owned a club not far from there. "Come with me," he said and took my hand.

"What for?" I asked.

"I need you to keep me company," he said.

It was too late to go to school, and I followed him like a lamb. The *Club Cha-Cha—Danseuses nues* was closed. He unlocked it and we went to a back room. He spoke on the phone at length, raising his voice in French, and seemingly upset at what he heard on the other end of the line.

"That was my lawyer with bad news," he told me. "He can't think straight this morning. A bit of snow and everyone is afraid—everything turns upside down in a snowstorm. Come here, *picciotta*," He took my hand, kissed it and then kissed me lightly on the lips. I had never been kissed before, and it felt delightful and sinful at the same time. But mostly it felt dangerous, especially when he removed a gun from his coat pocket and put it on an end table next to a cot. He said he was tired and fed up with all the craziness in the world. He took off his jacket and pants, and my curiosity mingled with fear.

He caressed my face. "Come rest with me. Don't be afraid. I won't do anything to hurt you. I know what you can and cannot do. I'm Calabrese too."

He fondled me in places I had never been fondled before, and he showed me things I had never seen before. When he finally lay still, after an explosion of sound from his lips, and milky froth all over mine, I felt no sense of shame, only of surprise. And then fear again, when he reached for the black gun on the table and put it under his pillow. I was too afraid to move. Would he shoot me if I ran away?

Instead, he asked me to get a tissue from the counter in the bar. And, after he had wiped himself off, he kissed me on the forehead and told me to lie next to him again. He fell asleep.

After an hour or so, I tapped him on the shoulder and told him I had to leave. He drove me to Saint-Hubert Street, and I walked to my grandmother's home. The snow had stopped and the streets were slushy and dirty. I hated having to lie to my grandmother about missing school. She would be waiting for me with my favorite chicken-and-egg soup, which she prepared whenever it was stormy or cold. But the pang of guilt was short-lived. I smelled his body on mine and I felt a twinge of excitement all over again.

He met me a few more times on Saturdays after my morning classes, and I would tell my grandmother that I had gone window-shopping on Saint-Hubert Street. I would look for his Oldsmobile parked on the corner of the street with both anticipation and panic. He'd open the car and call, "*Picciotta*, let's go for a ride."

I always went. Once he took me to a motel. He didn't ask me if I wanted to go; he just drove to one. He took me by the hand and said, "Let's go in. I need to rest on a comfortable bed." There, he lay on the bed, smoking one cigarette after another and never laid a hand on me, but told me random stories. On his first job at a bakery shop, he told me, he purposely burned a whole batch of bread because his boss had insulted him. Another time, after a bus driver had been rude to him,

he lifted the driver off his seat, threw him out onto the sidewalk, and shut the bus doors. We laughed when he described how the busload of people just sat there quietly, paralyzed by fear, while the bus driver kicked at the closed door.

“Why do you go with me when you can have all the naked girls you want?” I asked him one morning.

“Because you’re a *picciotta*, and different from the others.” Another time, he said passionately as he kissed my breasts, “You’re so small.”

We never spoke on the phone or saw each other at any other time. He was like a phantom that appeared out of a blizzard and then disappeared into a dark corner of my mind until I saw him again. I was afraid when I thought about meeting him, but when he wasn’t on the street corner, I walked home with a hollow feeling inside.

On one such morning, I couldn’t bring myself to go home without seeing him, so I walked to his club. It was closed as usual, but his barman, whom I had seen there before, was on the phone. I knocked on the glass window. He opened the door and told me his boss had gone away on a trip, that I wouldn’t see him for a long time. The next morning, his picture was splattered all over *Allô Police*. He had been arrested for a homicide, which had been committed in the early hours, Saturday before the first snowstorm of the year.

For weeks, the tabloids wrote about the wars that were being fought and the accounts that were being settled. All I knew was that he made me laugh, and that, when I saw his car, my heart skipped. I read all of the newspaper articles and I kept one with his picture, but then I threw it away. The more I looked at it, the more it frightened me. I had no souvenirs or tangible signs left of him, except maybe a constant yearning for something that can’t be explained. I tried to erase his memory from my mind. What good is a memory? You can’t put your arms around it or press your face and lips against it.

After that spring, I stopped going to Italian school. Then, the night terrors started, and ended after the nightmare that woke me up.

In the dream, I found myself walking along Delormier Street on a snowy morning. Each step I took got heavier and heavier as the snow piled high above my hips. Suddenly it got dark and cold. I saw a lit-up bar on the other side of the street, with people laughing and having a good time inside. It looked warm and inviting. A smiling man beckoned me to go over, but I was stuck in the snow.

“My father won’t let me go,” I tried to tell him. I hopped onto a passing bus, and soon I found myself on a train. It sped past sun-scorched mountains and gnarled olive trees growing on their sides. When I got off at a station, I lugged a heavy suitcase and I could hardly walk. *Why did I pack so much*, I thought, as I hiked up a steep mountain, dense with tall chestnut trees that whistled in the wind. Birds flew from tree to tree. I heard a woman singing. It was my grandmother, and I walked toward home.

The farmhouse was a dot in the distance, and when I got there, I knocked on the window, saw my mother with a baby in her arms. She was singing a lullaby: “*O ninna ninna, o ninnarella...*”

“Open the door,” I knocked and screamed, but she just kept singing as if she didn’t see me at all through the glass. I was afraid of the wolves closing in on

me, their howling mouths and sharp teeth sharpened on each tree trunk. But I couldn't run. The suitcase was too heavy.

From the roof of the house, a big bird swept by me, opened up its huge wings and swooped me up into the air. I flew over the farmhouse, the trees, the mountains. I felt light and airy—until I looked up and saw two beady eyes, a hooked nose and a small forehead with a pointy hairline. I screamed and screamed in terror, until my grandmother woke me, and I realized it was only a dream.

The fear of that nightmare resurfaces whenever I picture his face. I never feared once that he would harm me, but I tremble at the thought of being overtaken again by the desire that made me long to kiss, touch and love a Hawk.

Bruce kept his eyes on Cathy as she read the composition. She wished she had kept the veil over her face, to hide the sense of astonishment and nervousness she felt as she read. When she put the notebook down, she smiled weakly, and shook her head.

“What do you think?” he asked. “Should I call youth protection?”

“No, the girl has more resources and imagination than we give her credit for. I wondered what she was up to, working in her bedroom for hours.” Cathy shook her head again.

“Didn't she ask for your help?” Bruce asked.

“No, she was very secretive,” Cathy said. She leafed through the notebook again, and pointed to the composition. “I never saw any of this, but I wouldn't make much of it. Just mark it as a composition. This Eddie—he must be really good. I'd like to meet him; maybe he can help me with my writing too.”

“Phew! That takes a load off my mind,” Bruce said. “But it sounds too real, don't you think? How can we be sure this didn't really happen?”

“Do you ask that question every time you read a composition? You asked her to make something up—to be creative—didn't you?” Cathy realized she was sounding shrill and impatient, so she lowered her voice. “Isn't one of the goals of fiction to create a real

world? You can't go back on your word because of the content. I'd judge the composition on its merit only—as fiction.”

She sipped her wine, and hoped its warmth would quickly move through her body and relax the tension that had kept her on edge all afternoon and evening. She wouldn't mind staying with Bruce for awhile, but she wanted to change the subject of conversation. “At the lake, you spoke of your life up north. What was it like living in a place like Val-d'Or?”

“It wasn't much of a life up there. I left early to go to college, but I went home every summer to work in the mines. I got a teaching degree and I've been living on my own in this apartment, listening to Buffy St Marie... A boring all-Canadian existence, I guess.”

“I like the name Val-d'Or,” she said. “It sounds romantic—valley of gold—like the gold can be picked off the ground, or from the trees. Is it really a valley, with mountains all around it?”

“No, actually it's very flat. You might say the mountains are all hidden underground. That's where the gold lies.”

“What was it like working in the dark mines?” Cathy visualized a coal mine, but had no idea of what a gold mine might look like

“As a student, I didn't work underground. I worked the mill, where the gold is finally poured into bars—each bar weighs two pounds of solid gold. It's the last phase in a hard and messy process...” He moved closer to her on the sofa. He took the copybook from her lap and put it on the table.

She finished the sparkling wine in her glass and Bruce refilled it. She continued pensively. "Extracting gold from rocks—how do they do it? It sounds almost as hard as extracting blood from a stone. How can they even tell there's gold underground?"

"Actually, comparing gold to blood is not a stretch. The gold runs in yellow veins in the walls of the mines," he began, and, as he explained, went to sit on the floor, and looked through his record collection again. "Enough of Buffy," he finally said. "How about some soft jazz?"

"Sure," Cathy said, and sat back comfortably on the sofa, enjoying the soothing effect of the music and the wine.

Bruce returned to the sofa, and continued talking about gold. "When they find it—even minute traces of it—they blast it off the rock, bring it up to mill, mix it with water and crush it until it turns to muck. Somehow the liquid yellow gold gets separated from the dirty slush."

"Interesting process. What happens to the old empty mines?"

"They grow mushrooms in them," he said, his face almost touching hers.

"Are you serious?" she smiled.

"You find it amusing?"

She giggled. "I find it funny. I can picture a bunch of men with those headlights around their foreheads, tapping at lumpy walls in the dark looking for spidery yellow veins—but picking mushrooms?"

"I'm serious," he said in a low voice. "Mushrooms, as you know, don't need light. They grow in dark, damp places—just like mold."

"Too bad they can't grow gold the same way," she said.

“There are still plenty of unexplored gold mines in the north. Canada is a big country. But don’t underestimate nickel and copper; they’re valuable minerals too.”

Bruce removed his glasses and Cathy noticed for the first time that his eyes, which in daylight had appeared light hazel with specks of green, had turned a shade of blue-green. He brushed his lips on hers, and she felt the impulse to touch his chest.

“Time to get rid of this,” he said, and he helped her slip off the caftan over her head.

They instinctively both got up and walked to his bed. They lay quietly, side by side, for a few minutes, his arms around her shoulder. She felt like wrapping her legs around his and opening herself to him, but she waited for him to make the next move. He still seemed to be in a talking mood.

“You’re a real revelation,” Bruce said, pressing his hand on her shoulder and pulling her closer to him. “It’s as if I’m discovering a new person from the one I see at school. What other surprises do you have in store?”

“What surprises you most about me?” she asked.

“Well, I had never pictured you wanting to write, for example. You’re always so quiet. Why don’t you talk more about the things that matter to you?”

“I can’t seem to string the right words together to do justice to the things I want to say. What comes out of my mouth never sounds anything like the images I carry in my head. The two never match.”

“I told you about the tons of muck that is unearthed for a few ounces of gold. It’s hard work. It’s fucking hard work for everybody. But if you have the images, at least you

have something worth digging for. Sooner or later they'll find their way to the surface, don't worry."

"Do you write?" she asked.

"No... Wrote some poetry in college, but I dried out after a few tries. Words are not enough, you know. The terrain I come from is pretty barren."

"I thought it was full of gold."

"Ah, maybe I'm jaded and weary, or just fucking lazy. Writing is just... too... fucking... hard."

Cathy wanted to keep the conversation going. "Maybe you're too much of a perfectionist, afraid to take risks. What I'm afraid of is that the longer stories will remain lodged deep inside. It's harder to get them out."

"Yeah, they become malignant growths, which you know are there even if you cannot feel or see them."

"I know what you mean," she said. "It's like carrying a burden—until they are told. Things brought out in the open look a lot less menacing than when they're buried in the dark."

"But that's the crunch. Knowing when it's time to let go. Good stories need the dark for incubation, but in the process, they can fester and suck the life out of you."

"And make you feel... barren?" she asked.

"Lifeless... soulless," he said with his eyes closed, pulling her closer to him.

Cathy raised her head to look at the alarm clock next to his bed. It was close to three o'clock. It was November first already. All Saint's Day. If only she had thought of

calling the house earlier, to check that Carmy had been picked up at school as planned, then she might have relaxed in Bruce's arms.

"You're so restless, but it has been a long day." After a few minutes he added, half-slurring, as if he were talking in his sleep. "I have to give it to you. You've got a lot of guts wanting to be a writer."

"Oh, I wouldn't consider myself a writer. All I want to do..."

"Whatever your aim," he interrupted. "I hope you realize what you're getting yourself into. You've begun another journey."

"But I feel as if I haven't reached any destination yet."

"Writers are the eternal nomads. They are exiles from another planet. You may be destined to be a traveler all your life."

He turned to kiss her, but she raised her head off the pillow. "Bruce I can't stay here the night. I need to go home. I'm sorry... I have too much on my mind... Maybe some other time."

"I was kind of afraid you'd say that," he said, getting out of bed.

Cathy got up, collected her purse and caftan, and then they both walked quietly out into the dark.

Looking for Carmy

As Bruce turned the corner onto Cartier Street, Cathy instantly feared that something was wrong. Her brother's car was in the driveway and all the lights inside the apartment were on.

“What’s my brother doing here?” she asked. “It’s almost three thirty in the morning.”

“Do you want me to come in?” Bruce asked.

“No, no; please go,” she said, adjusting her clothes.

“I’ll wait at the corner for a while. Wave if there’s something wrong,” he said.

“OK,” she said. “Thanks... good night.”

The apartment door opened before Cathy had a chance to put her key in the lock. There was her mother, her face tense with worry.

“Where have you been?” she asked.

“I went to the country for a party. I had told Sean I’d go. What’s wrong?” Cathy felt quite annoyed at the questions.

“You didn’t want to go with your husband, but were out all night at another party?” Teresa said, in an accusatory tone. But before Cathy could answer, Teresa asked, “Was Carmelina with you?”

“No, why would she be with me?”

“So where did she go? Do you know? She’s not home either. Alfonso and Comare Rosaria have been calling every fifteen minutes.” Teresa’s voice was shrill.

“How am I supposed to know? I left Carmy at school. Alfonso was supposed to pick her up. Can someone please tell me what’s going on?”

Luigi got up from the sofa, where he had been dozing, and Sean came out of the bedroom.

“Good morning,” Sean said. “Nice of you to call.”

“You knew where I was. I had told you I was thinking of going up north to Susan’s,” Cathy yelled.

“Oh, I’m not the one who got alarmed,” he answered. “I came back home at two to find them here.” He pointed to Teresa and Luigi.

They had let themselves into the apartment with their spare key. Luigi explained that they had been worried that something was wrong after they received a call from Alfonso, saying he had gone to the apartment to pick up Carmy as usual, and that no one was there. At first, Alfonso figured that Sean and Cathy might have gone to the hotel early, to help with the party preparations, so he called his mother for Teresa’s number. He called Teresa to ask if, by chance, she knew where Cathy was. They had all found it very unusual that neither Cathy nor Carmy had called Alfonso to advise him of a change in plans. Alfonso then went home to get ready for the ball.

At the ball, Alfonso asked Sean about Cathy and Sean told him she had not been feeling well and would probably be spending the evening at her mother’s. He also said not to worry about Carmy, since he thought she might have been delayed by the school party. Alfonso kept calling Teresa every now and then, to see if she had heard from Cathy.

Teresa got especially worried when she heard that Cathy had not been feeling well. She called a friend of Cathy’s from school, who told her that Cathy’s car was still in the garage when she left school after the student dance. When, by eleven o’clock, there was still no answer at Cathy’s apartment, Teresa called the teacher friend back. She begged her to call the night janitor at school to confirm that the car was still there.

Teresa then insisted that Luigi drive her to Cathy's, to check on the apartment, and they stayed there until Sean got in around two. Alfonso arrived not long after. While his wife waited in the car, he made a few phone calls, and then finally called the police to report that his niece was missing.

Sean had managed to get the phone number for Susan's cottage from the operator, but Susan's phone was not in service. "I tried to tell them not to worry," Sean said, pointing to Teresa. "I figured you had both gone to the country."

"No, I didn't see Carmy at all," Cathy said. "Her uncle was supposed to pick her up at school. She called her aunt to tell her. Maybe he didn't get the message from his wife."

"Maybe she played a trick on you," Sean said.

"What are you saying?" Teresa asked, and Cathy repeated in Italian what she had just told Sean.

"Then why didn't Carmy call their house when Alfonso didn't pick her up at school?" Teresa asked.

"I don't know," Cathy answered. "Maybe it suited her to be left alone."

"Why did you have to get mixed up in this?" Teresa asked. "How are you going to explain this to her uncle?"

Sean added, "You should have been more alert. I'm surprised you didn't follow up on her telephone call."

"Call Alfonso to tell him you're home," Teresa said. "He should have arrived at his place by now."

“You call him. I can’t believe this. I have to tell everyone where I’ve been?”

Cathy threw her stuff on the floor.

“If it wasn't for the other one, I wouldn't worry,” Teresa said, as she dialed. Cathy heard her mother tell Alfonso that Cathy had arrived, then handed Cathy the phone. “He wants to speak to you.”

Cathy repeated to Alfonso what she had just told her mother—that maybe his wife had not given him the right message from Carmy about picking her at school. But Alfonso insisted that no one had called the house the evening before.

“Have you tried calling the Club à Go-Go?” Cathy asked hesitantly. “She may have gone there with her friends.”

“Of course!” Alfonso said. “It’s the first place I called. But they never saw her there. I even called the police.”

“I’ll try calling some of her friends. I’m sure they know where she is.” After she had hung up, Cathy exclaimed, “Oh my God! Why is everyone overreacting? It’s Halloween and there are a lot of parties going on. Has he called the goon squad too? We go out one night and they have the police after us.”

“I don’t know why you’re so angry,” Luigi said. “He called the police for his niece, not you. Do you think he cares where you go at night?”

“And what did the police say?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Luigi replied. “What could they do? They won’t do anything unless a teen is missing for twenty-four hours.”

“She’s not missing. She’s with her friends at some party. All he would have had to do was speak to her friends, if he'd known who they were.”

Cathy searched for Linda's and Gina's phone numbers in her school papers, but not finding them, looked in the phone directory. She dialed and spoke to someone at Linda's house, who sounded very irritated, and who said that Linda was out, and wouldn't be home for the night. Then she called Gina's house, introduced herself, and this time apologized profusely for the late call. She was told that Gina was sleeping over at Linda's house. Cathy didn't want to alarm Gina's family and didn't tell them that their daughter had lied to them.

"Well, everyone is useless. I'll go and look for her myself," Cathy said, looking for her coat in the hallway wardrobe.

"Are you crazy? Where do you even start looking for someone at this time of night?" Teresa screamed out at her.

"I know where she wanted to go. She may still be there. If she's not, I'm sure one of her friends is, and she'll tell me where I can find her."

"Why don't you just phone the place and ask?" Luigi said.

"They won't tell me the truth on the phone. Those girls are very sneaky. They're a bunch of little sluts," she said angrily. "You two go home and stop worrying."

"Don't worry? How can we not worry?" her mother replied. "With all that has happened lately? With all that has been said? Who knows how many enemies Pasquale has made. Why would he run away like that? They can't take it out on him, so they take it out on his daughter." She raised her two hands and yelled, in a panic. "*Madonna mia*, why did we have to get mixed up with these people? I had told you to stay away."

"Is there a full moon tonight?" Cathy yelled back. "You're all going out of your minds. Everyone is taking Pasquale as a joke, except you."

“Then why did Antonio write about him? If he doesn’t watch it, he may be taught a lesson too. There are some people you just don’t fool around with,” Teresa said.

“The girl wanted to go to a party tonight, and she tricked all of us. I’ll find her in no time at all.” Then Cathy remembered she didn’t have her car. “Could you give me a lift to school on your way home?” she asked Luigi. “My car is still there.”

“You’re not going to a club all by yourself?” Teresa said.

“We’ll go with her,” Luigi said. “And then we’ll go to the school to pick up the car.” Then he added, “The night janitor had asked someone to go pick it up earlier. He said you’re not allowed to leave it there overnight, that he’s not responsible if something happens.”

“What could happen to a car in an empty closed garage? Is everyone paranoid tonight because it’s Halloween?” Cathy asked, lifting her hands in exasperation.

In the car, Teresa calmed down. She said, “Still, you could have called to tell your husband or us you’d be out all night.”

“How could I, if there was no telephone in the place?” Cathy replied impatiently. “I didn’t drive there with my car, so I had no choice but to wait for someone to drive me back. I couldn’t walk home from Saint-Sauveur, could I?”

“It’s OK, it’s OK. Don’t get all upset,” Teresa said. “As long as you’re well. If only we could find the other one now.”

“Don’t worry. Don’t worry. I’ll find her in the place we’re going to.”

Luigi parked just outside the *Club à Go-Go*. The *Danseuses nues* sign was well lit, but from the outside, the club showed no sign of life. The windows were covered up with blown-up pictures of half-clad dancers in suggestive poses.

“Nice place,” Luigi said sarcastically. “But it looks closed.”

“It’s too early to be closed. They had announced a special Halloween party,” Cathy said. “Wait for me here.”

“I’ll come in with you,” Luigi said.

Teresa also got out of the car.

“Wait for us in the car,” Cathy said crossly to her mother.

“I’m not going to stay in the car all alone at this time of night, around this place,” her mother said. “I’ll come in with you.”

“They won’t let you in,” Cathy said.

“Why not?” Teresa asked. Cathy didn’t have an answer for her, and just shrugged.

“You’re not of age, Ma,” Luigi said, laughing.

“This is crazy,” Cathy said, realizing how ridiculous the whole situation had become. But the thought of her mother going into a strip club seemed surreal.

Luigi tried opening the door, but it was locked.

“Ring the bell,” Cathy suggested. She pushed the button on the wall beside the door.

In a few moments, a doorman opened the door and looked suspiciously at the three of them.

“Is the club closed?” Luigi asked.

The doorman looked perplexed and didn’t answer. He looked them over.

“I want to talk to two of your dancers—Linda and Gina,” Cathy said. “They told me they’d be here.”

“We don’t have any dancers with those names. Linda and Gina who?” he asked in a gruff voice.

“They may not be full dancers. Linda Albino and Gina Di Manno. They take dancing lessons here.” Cathy could hear loud music and hooting coming from inside. “All we want to do is come in and ask them a few questions.”

“What kind of questions?” He didn’t seem ready to let them in.

“Can I speak to Charlie Matteo?” Cathy asked.

“You know Charlie?” he asked.

“Yes, I do,” she said. He closed the door again.

Luigi looked at her. “I know Charlie. I went to school with him. He was involved in funny business even then.”

“I know. I’ve heard about him from the girls,” Cathy said.

“*Madonna mia!* Who are we dealing with?” Teresa asked.

“Who did you expect to find here, the parish priest?” Cathy asked. “I told you to stay in the car.”

The door opened and Charlie showed up, the surly doorman behind him.

“It’s almost four o’clock in the morning,” Charlie said. “Sorry, but the club is only open to regular members, so we can’t let you in.” As he spoke, he kept his eyes on Cathy, as if trying to place her. “Do I know you?” he asked.

“Maybe. Years ago, you went to school with my brother here... This is my brother Luigi and my mother Teresa... I’m Cathy. I’m Linda and Gina’s teacher.”

“Oh yes, they’ve spoken about you,” he said.

“We’re looking for Carmy Tonnelli, one of my students. She usually hangs around with Linda and Gina. Do you know her?”

“Yeah, she’s been here a few times to take dancing lessons,” Charlie said. “Alfonso Abiusi, her uncle, has already called, but we haven’t seen her at all this evening.”

“I’d like to speak to one of her friends. Maybe they know where we can look for her.”

“Well, I think Linda left already, but Gina is still here. She’s in the dressing room,” he added hesitantly. “She wasn’t feeling well. I think she had one drink too many. You know how it is when they’re not used to drinking. I’ll call her, and tell her to come out.”

“I would rather go inside and speak to her there,” Cathy insisted. She wanted to make sure Carmy wasn’t inside the club.

“Sure, sure. Come in. But you need to pass through the bar and the stage to get to the dressing room.” Charlie looked at Teresa with an amused grin. “It’s a strip club, you know.”

“It’s OK,” Cathy said. “She’s come this far. She might as well see once and for all what a nightclub looks like.”

Charlie smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and nodded at the doorman to let them through. Then he turned to Luigi. “Now I remember you from Pius. You used to play the horn.”

“I still do,” Luigi said.

“Come in and have a drink,” Charlie said. He walked with them through a narrow corridor with photos of dancers posing with well-known personalities. Cathy looked at her mother, and pointed to the photo of a popular local singer surrounded by dancers, but Teresa just looked puzzled and didn’t seem to recognize him.

The music got louder and louder as the corridor opened onto a darkened, smoke-filled room. A bar ran along the length of the room on one side. Charlie asked them if they wanted to drink something. Cathy and her mother declined. Charlie went behind the bar and poured Luigi a brandy. The blaring music made it impossible to carry on a conversation, but the eyes of all those present were fixed on the cavorting dancers at various stages of undress. Then Charlie led Cathy and her mother to the dressing room, while Luigi stayed at the bar.

Cathy looked around. The club patrons were mostly men, but there were a few women in costumes and masks sitting around the tables next to the stage and the runway. Cathy tried to focus on the people in the audience, looking for a sign of Carmy. Some men sat on stools in front of the mirrored bar, hooting and whistling at the stage on the opposite side; others stared intently but vacantly at the reflections of gyrating bodies in the mirror behind the shelves of liquor bottles. Amidst dry-ice-induced smoke and dizzying strobe lights, a strident announcer spotlighted a parade of nude girls who shook their tinsel breasts, spread their legs, bent forward and backward to offer the audience a full view of their most intimate body parts, leaving nothing to the imagination. Some completely nude dancers with lacy garter belts stood on individual tables, shaking their bodies right above the faces and upraised hands of the overheated patrons, who slipped money into the girls’ garter belts for the sole thrill of touching their exposed flesh.

Cathy turned back to look at her mother, but she just followed impassively.

Inside the back room, which served as a changing room for the dancers, a half-dozen women chatted as they sat in front of mirrors, adjusting their make-up, their corsets, hats and capes. The ones in full regalia waited behind the closed door for a cue to go onstage. Other girls rushed in, carrying their shed clothing in their hands, put on robes and sat down to rest on a cot in the corner.

“Where’s Gina?” Charlie yelled. “Gina, someone’s here to see you.”

Gina’s eyes looked glazed over and she didn’t seem particularly surprised to see Cathy. She still wore the priest’s costume and seemed distant and spaced out as she got up from the cot to greet them.

“Hi, Gina,” Cathy said. “I’m wondering if you know where Carmy is. I came to give her a lift home.”

“She never came here, Miss. Her uncle called here already and I told him that.”

“I know. Gina, you must know where I can find Carmy. I have to drive her home.”

“I swear to you, Miss. She wanted to come to the party here with Eddie, but then she never showed up. Everything got screwed up today. I should have stayed in school. Instead, I listened to Linda, and she never even waited for me. Nothing has gone the way it was supposed to.”

A tall woman in a mask and cape, and holding a whip, looked at Teresa, and said, “*Bonjour maman... C’est ta maman, Gina?*” But she walked out of the room before Gina had a chance to respond.

“*Bonjour, Madama,*” Teresa said to the woman, and then just stood there looking around the room. But there was no sign of Carmy in the room, unless she had managed to hide in some other corner of the club.

Cathy told her mother to wait for her while she went to check the bathroom.

“Do you know where it is?” she asked.

“I’ll find it,” Cathy answered. She found it at the other end of the bar, but Carmy was not there. She returned to find her mother, and told her they might as well leave. Carmy was not at the club anymore. Then she looked at Gina, who was staring blankly at her. “Gina are you OK? How are you going to get home? How come you didn’t go home with Linda? Do you need a lift?”

“I have to take a cab. That bitch left without me, and I bet she went to school to see George.”

“Let’s go,” Cathy said, and the three women left the dressing room. They walked past the bar, nodded at Charlie, and exited the club with Luigi.

“I don’t know how they can stand working in all that smoke,” Luigi said. “So she wasn’t here after all. Now what?”

“*Oh Dio mio.* Where could she be at this time?” Teresa asked plaintively.

“I don’t know. I don’t know,” Cathy said, then turned to Luigi added in a low voice. “If you drive me to school, I’ll pick up my car and take this girl home. She doesn’t seem to be in any shape to go home by herself.”

Luigi shook his head in disbelief and spoke in dialect. “What is a fifteen-year-old girl doing in a place like this?” Then he turned to his mother, “So now you can say you’ve been in a club. What do you think?”

“They can keep them, for all I care. All that smoke, just to look at a woman’s ass?

In my time, a man had to get married to see it.”

“Now all they have to do is pay \$6.00 for a drink,” Luigi said.

“He charged you for the drink?” Cathy asked.

“No, but that's what it would have cost. I checked the price list.”

Cathy asked Gina, “Won’t your parents worry about you being out all night?”

“I told them I was sleeping at Linda’s tonight,” she said.

“And I presume that Linda told her parents she was sleeping at your place?”

Cathy asked.

“How did you know, Miss?” Gina asked.

“Linda is not home yet. Do you know where she went?” Cathy asked.

“I didn’t even see her leave. She spent the evening with a guy I’ve never seen, and I got stuck in the dressing room all night, helping the girls.”

“I wish I knew where Carmy is sleeping tonight,” Cathy said. “Do you know Eddie—Carmy’s friend? Where can I find him?”

“He hangs around the school a lot. Maybe he’s still there.”

“But where would he be at this time of night? It’s four in the morning.”

“Try the office. He hangs around George a lot these days.”

“Who’s George?”

“The night janitor. The two work together at the office.”

“The office? What office?” Cathy asked.

“If you go by the school, I’ll take you there. Maybe we’ll find Carmy and Linda there with Eddie,” Gina said.

Luigi looked at Cathy and made a face as if asking if Gina was all right. Cathy just shrugged her shoulders.

“So, what are you going to do now?” Teresa asked.

“I can’t do anything else. Just drive us to school,” Cathy said. “I’ll get my car, drive Gina home, and then go to sleep.”

“She’ll probably wake up drunk in some other club, and go home in the morning,” Teresa said. “What have we come to?”

Cathy was too tired and too disappointed to answer, and they drove in silence to the school.

Luigi let Cathy and Gina out in front of WHHS, but he waited until George, the short-order cook and night janitor, had opened the door.

“Hi George,” Gina said.

“We’re here to get my car,” Cathy said, and she motioned her brother to go ahead.

“Did Linda come to see you?” Gina asked.

“No, I haven’t seen anyone,” George answered and seemed in a foul mood.

“Do you know Eddie?” Cathy asked.

“Eddie who?” he asked.

“You know Eddie... Eddie Marshall,” Gina said.

“I told you, I haven’t seen anyone all night long,” George said. He glared at Cathy. “Next time you keep your car overnight, you need to ask permission, or I’ll have it towed.” He walked away, in the direction of the auditorium.

“He’s not very friendly. Do you know him well?” Cathy asked Gina.

“He used to work at Miss Park Ex,” Gina said.

“I know. But is he always this unfriendly?”

They walked past the cafeteria. All the posters and decorations had already been removed, and the place didn't look as though a party had been held there only a few hours before. Another janitor, whose face Cathy didn't recognize, walked by and looked them over suspiciously. Cathy knew all the day janitors, who were always friendly with her. Some came to get a haircut, and joked with her and her students. These night men had the school to themselves and seemed resentful of their intrusion.

Walking through the empty corridors, Cathy thought of how quickly the school had resumed its calm after the previous day's chaos. A thorough cleanup and floor-washing had cleared away all signs of the partying students, and of the mess they had created. But empty, a school building—especially one as large as WHHS—revealed how walls, rooms, corridors devoid of people are only that, walls, rooms, and corridors. The only tell-tell sign of student life was the graffiti on the walls, which Mrs. Champagne tried so hard to wipe out. Maybe, instead of erasing the scribbles, Cathy thought, someone should find a way of preserving them, of somehow removing the panels of plaster at the end of each year and replacing them with new ones. Students could be free to write their names, their love notes, their four-letter curses, and they could be reclaimed from storage anytime.

They walked past the hairdressing classroom without stopping, past the loading dock and the receiving area. Instead of taking the stairs up to the garage, Gina walked straight into the empty space used for the storage of used furniture, where the swimming pool was to have been. “I'll go check George's office,” Gina said. “See if Eddie is there.” She spoke as if she were sleepwalking.

Cathy followed her. They passed the piles of old desks, the portable blackboards, the boxes and boxes of old books, and, even, the car parts that had spilled over from the nearby automotive classes. In all of her years teaching at WHHS, Cathy had never bothered to cross the dark, empty space.

Gina walked to the far corner and, sure enough, there was a cubicle with glass windows, similar to the cubicles located next to the labs on the upper floors. This “office” must have been intended to serve instructors who would have a view of the whole area while doing paperwork. The windows were covered with colored construction paper. The door was opened, but there was no one there.

A second door led into another room that contained a table, chairs and a futon, and that had posters of metal-rock bands all over the walls. Used Styrofoam cups, plates and cardboard pizza boxes from Miss Park Ex littered the table and chairs, as though a party had recently been held there.

“We missed them,” Gina said. “Everyone’s gone already,”

“Who comes here?” Cathy asked.

“Lots of kids do, and they bring their friends. It’s George’s office.”

“What goes on here?” Cathy asked. She had never heard of this hang-out before.

“Oh, you can buy stuff here. I even heard that some girls do tricks here for ten dollars a pop.”

“Are you serious, Gina? Are you making all this up?” Cathy asked in disbelief.

“I’ve just heard about it from Eddie. Eddie and George are like this,” she crossed the middle fingers of both hands.

“But when do they come here?” Cathy asked, as they walked back toward the stairs. There was nothing unusual about a night janitor having an office down here. But, if Gina’s stories were true, these activities were taking place in an open area of the school, an area crossed by teachers every morning and afternoon. Cathy could not believe she had never heard of it before. Were there more secluded nooks and crannies in the building? The latest rumors had been about illicit activities around the school, not inside its belly.

“George works only at night, but Eddie is around during the day and he has a key to the office. At night, people come through the door next to the delivery garage. Only the janitors have the key for that door. But I heard that, even during the day, Eddie lets some girls bring guys into the office. They lock the two doors and no one can see what’s going on.”

Cathy thought of the hours of supervision assigned to keep outsiders out of the school, and the school was wide open to anyone at night. Costa from Miss Park Ex had once told her that he knew everything that was going on at school. Now she knew why. He had an inside track.

“Let’s go home,” Cathy said wearily.

They walked to the car and drove out of the empty garage. “Why did you think Carmy might be here with Eddie?” Cathy asked Gina, while driving.

“Carmy likes this Eddie guy, and he sometimes stays here overnight with George, so I thought she might have followed him here. Some of the sec-5 kids said they were going to try to keep partying at the office after everyone else left.”

Gina lived only two blocks east of the school. After driving her home, Cathy decided not to go home yet. It was past five o'clock in the morning, and she needed a coffee badly, but it was still too early for most restaurants to be open. She stopped the car on a side street to collect her thoughts. She believed that Gina had told her the truth. The booze or whatever she was on had loosened her tongue. She remembered how her students had talked about white slavery and she shuddered. What could possibly have started such rumors?

Beside the club and the school, Cathy didn't know where else to look for Carmy. The girl had wanted to go to Charlie's party so badly, Cathy had been sure she'd find her there. What could have made Carmy change her mind? The clue had to be Eddie. He might have sidetracked her from going to the club, just as Bruce had talked Cathy into leaving Susan's party. She put her head back, closed her eyes, and tried to rest. She still had a couple of stops to make.

After an hour, she drove back to Jean-Talon Street, and parked outside Miss Park Ex, which was open for breakfast.

"Eh, what brings you here so early?" Costa asked surprised.

"I've been up all night. I need a coffee badly."

"An all-nighter, Miss? Celebrating Halloween?"

"Kind of. Did you have a lot of action here last night?"

"We were swamped with orders, Miss. First, early on in the evening, before the kiddies went out trick-or-treating, and then again later, for the parties going on everywhere. Halloween is a big deal, and this year it fell on a Friday night. But I'm not complaining. Business is good."

“Did you deliver pizzas to Hingston late at night?” she asked.

“Not that I know of,” he said. “Why do you ask?”

“I saw some empty pizza boxes there, in George’s office,” she said.

“They could have been pick-ups. Lots of students came by last night.”

Cathy ordered toast and coffee, and then said, “I was just curious. Actually, I’m looking for someone who may have stopped by here last night. Carmy Tonelli. Does her name ring a bell?”

“Miss, I’m no good with names. I might know her to see her. Do you know how many students come by here every day?”

“She would have been dressed in a black leather jacket. She had spiked short hair.”

“That describes half the Hingston students, these days,” Costa replied as he buttered the toast.

“She hangs around Eddie. You know Eddie, right? He’s a friend of hers.”

“Eddie Pinto, the Portuguese?”

“I don’t know his family name, but I think this guy is English, not Portuguese.” Then she remembered Gina’s exchange with George, and corrected herself. “Actually I think his name is Marshall.”

“Oh, the other Eddie. I know him, but he doesn’t hang around here.”

“I thought he was a friend of George’s—your cook,” she said.

“I kicked George out a couple of weeks ago. My father didn’t like him—didn’t like the crowd he hung around with.”

Costa handed Cathy a cup of coffee and a plate of toast. She sat facing Costa at a table next to the window. The restaurant was empty and she hoped that he would reveal more.

"So, I didn't know George worked at Hingston as a night janitor," she said. "Did he get the job after you kicked him out?"

"He had that job before. He only worked here part-time—when he felt like it. Not very dependable, that guy. Stayed up all night. You can't be a night person and keep a day job too. And there were people looking for him, even when he wasn't here. My father didn't like it. And I didn't want to be his messenger boy—like that Eddie guy. Miss, I'd be careful about this girl if she hangs around Eddie. But I mind my own business."

"All this is news to me," she said. "What kind of business is Eddie into?"

"This is just from what I hear, Miss. Everyone in Park Ex knows he's a scalper. And he is... But he's more than just that. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. But I heard that if you want a joint, a quickie from a girl, or even a copy of a provincial exam, Eddie can get it. For a little guy, he's a real con artist. I heard he can forge signatures and handwriting. He's into everything. I don't know how he does it so openly, but one of these days, he'll get burned. George will learn his lesson, believe me. He doesn't know yet how good he had it here."

"I need to find this guy," Cathy said. "Only because this girl may be with him. I need to find the girl."

"I'm afraid I can't help you there. I haven't seen either Eddie or George."

"So you don't know who picked up pizza last night for a party at Hingston?"

“It wouldn’t have been either of them. My father works here at night and he doesn’t want to see them here. He’s worked too hard in this place to turn it into a joint. I have nothing to do with those two guys. So I only know what I hear from others, Miss.”

“I’ll have to make some calls,” Cathy said, and she went to use the public phone at the entrance. She called the house, and woke up Sean. He said he hadn’t heard from anyone since they had left the apartment.

Then Cathy called Bruce, to tell him about Carmy being missing.

“So this is what had you so worried. You had a premonition,” he said. “Could her running away have anything to do with the composition?”

“No, how could it?” she asked, feeling very tired.

“The hawk. Could it be someone she is still seeing?”

“Of course not. I think he’s a make-believe character.”

“Cathy, I still have a responsibility to mention it to the police. We can’t take any chances.”

“But there’s no real names mentioned in the composition. What would they have to go by?”

“The description. The police work from descriptions all the time. Maybe they’ll recognize the club, or the scar on the lip, or the pockmarked face.”

“Give me a few more hours to look for her before mentioning anything to the police. We may have a lot more to tell. You wouldn’t believe the stories I’ve been hearing about the school and about this guy Eddie. I hear he’s a real con artist—forges signatures, handwriting, even sells exams. Can you believe it? Who knows? Maybe he did steal the composition from someone.”

“What else have you heard?”

“Well, for one thing, I’ve discovered that all of our supervision has been futile, a total waste of time. Steve was right to object to them.”

“Supervision? What are you talking about Cathy?”

“I know it doesn’t make sense, but I’ll tell you more some other time. I wonder if you still have Eddie’s number. He used to be your student, right? I’m afraid she might be with him. She’s attracted to his type.”

“Are you OK, Cathy? You’ve been up all night.”

“I’m OK. Just call Eddie, and check to see if he’s home. I’ll call you back in a few minutes.”

“OK, Cathy. I’ll look for his number and I’ll call him. If I don’t get him, we might try looking for him at the market. Where are you now? Wait for me. I’ll go with you and we’ll look together.”

“No, Bruce. This is something I have to do. She’s my responsibility. I’ll call you back in a few minutes.”

She ate her toast and listened to Costa’s chatter, but couldn’t get him to say anything more revealing. Other people were beginning to come into the place and ordering breakfast. Costa worked alone and was kept busy.

Cathy waited ten minutes and then called Bruce again.

“I spoke to Eddie’s mom. She told me he’s working at the market this morning. He got home at around three o’clock this morning, alone. So Carmy is not with him. Everything sounds normal with Eddie, Cathy. Go to the market if you want, but then go

home to bed, rest for a couple of hours, and then call me. She'll probably show up on her own. ”

“I'll go talk to Eddie at the market, and then I have one more stop to make before giving up.”

“Cathy, go home to bed.”

“Thanks, Bruce.”

When she hung up, she realized she didn't know what Eddie looked like. How would she find him?

“I heard that Eddie works at the market," she said to Costa. "Do you know where exactly?”

“He used to work at the vegetable store next to the Shamrock Fish Market. But the market won't be open for another hour or so.”

Cathy had an hour to kill. The coffee had perked her up, so she took a notebook from her tote bag. She jotted down some notes about everything she had observed and felt throughout the night, for she was afraid she had been dreaming it all.

At eight o'clock, Cathy paid her bill and drove slowly toward the Jean-Talon Market. Only a few outside stalls were open at this time of year, displaying pumpkins and bushels of pickling vegetables. The tomato-canning season was over, but wine making had just began, so boxes and boxes of plump green grapes and tiny black ones were being unloaded from trucks onto the sidewalk of the vegetable store next to the Shamrock Fish Market. She asked for Eddie.

A thin and nervous, but smiling, teen, who looked no older than fifteen or sixteen, came up to her. He wore a black leather jacket and rubbed his hands together as though to keep warm.

“What can I do for you?” he said, smiling and moving nervously on the spot.

“I’m a friend of Carmy Tonnelli,” she said.

“Yeah, you’re the teacher she lives with. I recognize you. Did you come to get her jacket?” he asked, beginning to take off the jacket.

Cathy recognized the jacket as the one Carmy had been wearing the day before.

“No, no. I’m looking for her... How come you have her jacket?”

“We switched at school yesterday. She wanted my Jason costume. You looked good in that long gown... like some kind of princess. I saw you at the park.”

“Do you know where Carmy went after school yesterday? She hasn’t come home.”

“You’re kidding me! I last saw her trick-or-treating in TMR.”

“At what time?” Cathy asked. “Can you tell me exactly where you saw her?”

“First I saw her at Jarry Park in the afternoon. That’s when we exchanged jackets. Then she went to the dance. Didn’t you see her there in the Jason mask?”

“What does a Jason mask look like?”

“It’s from the horror movie, “Friday the Thirteenth”. You know, Miss... white mask.”

Cathy tried to think of all the masks she had noticed at the dance, and then she remembered someone in a white plastic mask staring at her by the train tracks. Had that been Carmy?

Eddie kept talking. “Then we separated, and I didn’t see her all afternoon, so I thought she might have gone with Gina and Linda. But then I went trick-or-treating in TMR.”

“Why did you go trick-or-treating in TMR?” Cathy asked.

“I used to do that as kid—they have the best treats there—and I still go with a bunch of friends, for the fun of it. You know, sometimes they close the gates to keep us out. So I go and scare those rich bitches, and have fun walking all over their rock gardens. I saw Carmy wearing her mask and walking with a bunch of kids on the other side of the street. It glows in the dark, you know, the mask. That’s how I saw her. I waved but she didn’t see me. I even called her, but there were so many kids out, she didn’t hear me. I figured I’d catch up to her after doing my side of the street, but by then, she seemed to have disappeared into thin air.”

“What time was that?” Cathy asked.

“It was after dark, but not too late, since I was back at school at eight to help George clean up after the party.”

“You work at the school?”

“Not officially, Miss. But George is a lazy motherfucker, and he gives me a few dollars to do his dirty work. He’s trying to get me in as night janitor. Good hours, job security, you know? Better than this shit job at the market.”

“Eddie, do you have any idea where I might find Carmy?”

“No clue, Miss, but when you see her, tell her I want my mask back. Don’t worry. She’ll be back when it suits her... Do you make wine? We have the best prices on Zinfandel grapes—fourteen dollar a case, Miss. You can’t beat that anywhere.”

“Listen, Eddie, if you come across anyone who saw Carmy last night, please give me a call.” She jotted down her phone number on a piece of paper, and handed it to him.

From the market, Cathy drove directly to the *Agence de Voyage Le Méditerranéen*. Antonio was at his usual place behind his desk. “I have some bad news,” he said as soon as he saw Cathy.

“Did you hear something about Carmy?” she asked, alarmed.

“No, what’s the matter with Carmy?” he asked.

“She disappeared and I can’t find her,” she said, her voice shaking with emotion.

“Just disappeared—like that?” He snapped his fingers. “How can that be?”

“She hasn’t been home all night,” she said.

“That doesn’t mean she’s disappeared—only that she’s not home. Well, let me tell you the latest development ...”

Cathy cut him short, piqued at how easily he dismissed the seriousness of her announcement. “You’re not even concerned about her. I can’t believe it.”

He was taken aback by Cathy’s reaction. “Of course I’m concerned... But I have some important news from the other side. I just received a call from my uncle in Mulirena. It seems that Pasquale—Carmy’s father—died early this morning... A terrible, terrible death.” He said all of this with a half grin that irritated Cathy. She stood there, unable to react to the news.

Antonio went on. “I don’t have all the details yet, but it seems that they found his body hanging from a tree in his hometown. He had gone there with Micu to visit his mother’s grave. But before leaving, he stopped at my uncle’s with a letter addressed to me. He asked him to mail it for him—I’ll tell you about the letter later. Pasquale and

Micu were supposed to meet at the piazza for lunch, but Pasquale never showed up. When Micu went looking for him, he found him hanging from a tree... like a Judas.” Antonio put his hands around his neck.

Cathy broke down. Once she had started, she couldn't stop sobbing.

Antonio put his arms around her. “I'm sorry,” he said. “I didn't think Pasquale's death would touch you so much. You hardly knew him, and he wasn't the nicest of characters... In fact, some people will be happy he's gone.”

“I'm crying for Carmy, not Pasquale,” she said, sniffing. “He's still her father. He's dead and she's not even here to mourn him... and it's all my fault.”

“She's a strange kid, you have to admit. I found her morose and secretive. Hard to guess how she'd react, but why blame yourself for her actions?”

“I gave my word I'd look after her, but I got too involved with my own problems to help her with hers. I worried about how I looked, about the party, about Bruce... and I completely ignored her!”

“Now you've lost me. You're bringing in people and situations that I'm not aware of. Who's Bruce?”

“He's a guy from school—a very nice all-Canadian guy—but he's a whole other story. He sidetracked me yesterday, and I paid no attention to Carmy, and she tricked me, and went trick-or-treating in TMR instead of coming home, and she's still out there...or I don't know where.” Cathy looked through her purse for a tissue, didn't find one, and gave up.

“I still don’t follow you, but I understand that you got distracted. She caught you off-guard and tricked you. She’s smarter than we think. She won’t get lost, believe me, and... in TMR? ”

“She even watched me ignore her. She was right there in front of my nose and I didn’t see her.... And now this—her father kills himself—and she’s not even here to cry for him, or maybe laugh. Who knows? I don’t know what I’m saying, but nothing makes sense.” Cathy sat down, wiped her nose on her sleeve, and crossed her arms.

Antonio handed her a tissue from a box on his desk. “You came to see me. I wish I could help.”

“I came to see if maybe you had heard from her. I know she came to see you once.” She got up and began pacing.

“Yes, in fact she told me that she doubted her father was the only guilty party in her mother’s beating. Apparently Lucia had some very heated words with her brother about the land in Mulirena and about the farmhouse. She accused him of not taking care of it for her. You know, it almost makes sense, now.”

“What does?” she asked.

“I had my uncle read the letter Pasquale intended to send me. It is full of accusations against Alfonso. Some going back a long time. Maybe Pasquale went back to Italy not only to run away but also to check on his own home and on that of his wife, after the arguments between Lucia and Alfonso. But we won’t know for sure unless Lucia comes out of her coma. No one else is really credible. I should have taken Carmy’s story more seriously. I sure hope her disappearance has nothing to do with Alfonso wanting to hide something.”

“What are you saying?” Cathy asked, more alarmed than ever.

He shook his head. “No. I shouldn’t be speculating like this and worrying you unnecessarily. Carmy is out there having a good time with her friends. She has done this before. But I wish I had taken her more seriously.”

“Sure, you probably just... brushed her off. Like you brushed off her mother, like you brushed me off many times.” Cathy stopped and looked straight at Antonio. “I wish you had done more for her, Antonio.”

He stood up at his desk, and said indignantly. “I take offence at your tone. What could I have done?”

“Just think. She could have been your daughter...”

“But she isn’t. She has her own father...”

“Who killed himself. Just think of all the years during which Carmy and her mother were totally ignored and neglected—especially by you.” Cathy shook her finger at him.

He faced her, speaking in a grave voice. “Caterina, I don’t know where you’ve been all night, or what you’ve been up to, but now you’re clearly hallucinating. You’re blaming me for Carmy’s disappearance?”

She answered firmly. “Carmy ran away because of situations you helped create. She probably couldn’t make sense of her life—or of her mother’s life. Think of how easily you dismissed her mother.”

He raised his voice. “You have no right to blame me for whatever happened between Lucia and me. You know there were circumstances I couldn’t control—of a political, ethical nature...”

“You let those circumstances control you a little too easily, I thought. I remember wondering about that when I was little, when I traveled with her on the boat and read about the other Lucia. Renzo never gave up on her. You gave up too quickly, Antonio.” Cathy sat down on her chair. “No one dares to strive for ideals anymore. Everything comes apart, and we just let it happen. We all give up too easily now.”

Antonio walked around the desk and took hold of Cathy's shoulders. He shook her. “Caterina, please. You're an intelligent girl. Get Manzoni out of your head once and for all! Even if we agree that he was a great writer, he lived in a different time. This is 1980! Let's not pretend we can do the impossible—fix things that we ourselves have shattered beyond any hope of repair.”

“Still, don't you have any feelings for Carmy and her mother? Their fate could be that of your daughter, your sister, or even your mother. And even if I find Carmy, what do we have to offer her? A dead father, a comatose mother. Her school is rotten to the core. She can hardly read or write. And she's in love with a petty criminal. What chances does she have of rising above all that?” Cathy lowered her head into her hands.

“Maybe you had aimed too high for her,” he said gravely. “It wasn't realistic.”

“But to fall so low...it's really depressing.” Cathy started sobbing all over again. “I've been going around in circles searching for her: in a strip club, in a school basement hidey-hole, in a greasy spoon, at the market. For heaven's sake! Did you think this is where we'd end up, twenty-five years ago?” Her crying became uncontrollable.

Antonio waited for her to wipe her nose and eyes before responding. He spoke pensively. “Well, it has been twenty-five years, you're right—a quarter century. I guess it's time to take stock... Yes, I too had greater expectations for myself, for Lucia—and

even for you, I confess. But let's also admit that we neither left a paradise, nor came to one. We created for ourselves whatever world was possible with the means we had. If we're disappointed by the results, it's because we may have been misled by our own dreams of grandeur. All our small victories look insignificant by comparison. It's an Italian trait, you know. Let's admit it to ourselves."

"Carmy is an Italian trait too, I'm sorry to say – a real cop-out. We created her and then we failed her. It's too humiliating. I especially blame myself. I let her slip through my fingers."

"You're too hard on yourself. The situation may not be as desperate as all that. She'll show up soon enough. You'll see." Antonio squeezed Cathy's shoulder.

"I don't know where else to look, Antonio. And I hate giving up and going home."

"Then come with me to the hospital. I usually go there on Saturday afternoons when no one else comes by. I sit next to Lucia, look into her eyes and whisper to her."

This surprised Cathy. "I didn't know you still cared for Lucia."

"How could I not care for her? She's part of my being, my history. I look into her eyes and I see my past, my youth, my first love...my own yet-unfulfilled dreams."

She smiled. "That's the way you used to make love to one another in Mulirena—with your eyes—I remember."

"You know us well, Caterina. That's why I trust you." Antonio tapped Cathy lightly on the cheek.

"But aren't you tired of dreaming—of not living a real life?" she asked.

“No. It’s a different life—this life of the mind. But no less real. One never tires of it, for it renews itself continuously. It’s what keeps the wheels in our heads going round and round,” he said, making circular movements next to his temple with his index finger.

From: Cathy Anastasia <cathya@hotmail.com>
 Sent: June 25, 2004, 12:00:05
 To: : aatirreno@sympatico.ca
 Cc: aurorapublishing@net.com

Subject: Thank you – submission

Attachment: Ending or Epilogue.com

Antonio,

Here's the epilogue I had promised you which has turned out to be my ending.

Thank you for explaining, in depth, why Franco Pastore is not interested in publishing the novel. But I'm puzzled by some of the reasons you gave. I had figured that his Aurora Publishing House would be the most logical one to try first, considering the subject of the novel. But I understand that times change, and that he needs to update his image and explore new themes, etc. Is it possible that my work sounds too Italian for an ethnic press?

You say he feels my story is late by at least twenty years, but unfortunately, as you know, this is the way my life has unfolded, and as much as I'd like to, I cannot go back and recoup lost time. Someone once told me that it would take at least five years to write a novel. I'd say it has taken me fifty-plus.

You wondered what took me so long to finish the novel, after our last discussion about writing in the fall of 1980, and what triggered me to finally email Pastore last March. Well, my most plausible excuse is that life does get in the way of artistic pursuits—marriage, children, a house, a career, an aging mother—layer upon layer of life to sort out and comprehend. But ultimately, I must admit that it has mainly been my stubborn nature, my need to finish what I set out to do, at whatever cost, that kept me from bringing this story to a close. Above all, I was determined to find a fitting ending that would justify the arduous journeys of these characters. But time and time again, as I managed to patch up one fractured circle, another snapped open beyond repair. "*Lavori e pazzi*," my mother always said, so finally, with her death, followed by other deaths, I had to concede that what we lose, we lose for good. The only act of defiance left is to plug the void with written words.

I emailed Pastore directly and impulsively after seeing his name in the *Writer's Market*, not wanting to impose on your friendship. I had hoped that my sample writing would have been enough to convince him. When he contacted you, I just went along with the course of action you two suggested.

You pointed out what you both consider to be some major problems with the writing so far, especially the negative stereotyping, repetition of common themes, etc. But I wouldn't know how to write about an Italian immigrant living in Montreal in the 1980s, and skip over some of those subjects. Maybe if we had immigrated into outer

space, into an absolute cultural void, we might have produced different stories. Or maybe not.

Regarding the many exchanges you've had, and your irreconcilable views on politics and even on writing, I find it somewhat insulting that you never included me in the discussions. You've both treated me like a child or like a curious anthropological subject to dissemble and analyze. My life, my heart and my soul have been invested in these pages, and I would have expected more sensitivity from both of you.

You hope I will not be devastated by this first rejection and discouraged from further writing. If the two of you had read my writing more attentively, you'd have little doubt about what it is that pushes me forward. I've slowly discovered the joy of transferring images onto paper through simple words, of expressing my innermost thoughts and ideas—something that is not possible to me verbally. It's a freedom I've longed for most of my life, and I will not allow one rejection letter to keep me from pursuing it further.

Antonio, thank Franco for taking the time to read the novel. And I want to thank you for all of your interventions. I never questioned your editing and your decision to change the narration from the first person to the third person, but I'll ask you to leave this last part as is. I hope you won't be offended, but I've decided to complete this novel on my own. The process we've been through has been an interesting trip, and I've learned a lot from it, but you understand that I need to find my own way out of this and my own ending.

Ciao,

Cathy

Saturday, November 1, 1980

Girotondo 2

It was early Saturday evening when I returned home from the hospital. Lucia was still lost in her own impenetrable world and Carmy was nowhere to be found. I had gone through the night and day without any sleep and with little food. Sean was snoozing in front of the TV with a book on his lap. I didn't bother waking him up. In all of my wanderings through the night and day, I had never once thought of calling him to ask his opinion or to tell him what was on my mind. *We're not even good roommates anymore*, I thought.

In the bedroom, the boxes of new furniture were still unopened. Some were serving as night tables next to the mattress on the floor. Others held Sean's clothes and books. All I wanted to do was crash on a bed and sleep, but I couldn't bring myself to do it in the bedroom, and Sean was in the living room.

We'd have a marriage built out of cardboard boxes, I thought as I went to the kitchen and turned on the faucet to get a drink of water. I retired to the den, closed the door and opened up the sofa bed. The sheets smelled of Carmy, but I was too tired to change them. I threw myself on the bed and fell asleep almost instantly. I woke up a few times during the night, each time awakened by a dream, but in my exhausted state, I couldn't distinguish between dreaming and waking.

I found myself walking through a maze of cardboard boxes—small ones and big huge ones towering over me. Some were gift-wrapped and I was anxious to see what was in them, but I had nothing to open them with. I tore at the largest one with all of my strength until it opened, and hundreds of pieces of wood, bolts and screws rained down all over me. I was buried in mismatched furniture pieces. I dug inside the box, trying to get out.

I tossed and turned but couldn't find a comfortable position to sleep. It was unbearably hot, and the smell was nauseating. My throat felt parched and I got up to get a drink of water and to turn the TV off. It was blaring the opening tune of the "Johnny Carson Show." Sean had moved to the mattress in the bedroom, but had left the TV on.

In my head, I kept counting the hundreds of furniture pieces that needed assembly, and I tried to put them together. But they were too irregularly shaped, and wouldn't fit together. *Would the effort be worth it?* I wondered. If my home was built on a cardboard foundation, I had been just as foolish and just as guilty as Sean. Even more so: I should have known better! A sickening feeling overtook me. How could I face the world after failing so miserably with Carmy? Would I find her in time for her father's funeral? Would there be a funeral, and who would show up for it? *Poor man*, I cried. *Imagine to die so unloved and unmissed!*

I found her playing ring-around-the-rosy on a street that was all done up in Halloween decorations. A profusion of chrysanthemums covered the rock gardens of each mansion. Then I watched as Totu made love to her on a grassy field. I recognized him only after he had taken off his Ronald McDonald wig. "Your insides are as soft as silk," he said to me, in a voice that was as smooth as liquid gold.

When I turned my head to look at the view, I saw arms and legs sprouting from the leaf-covered grass. I got up to read the inscriptions on the tombstones and to look for names I recognized. Along the way, he picked a bouquet from the plastic flowers scattered around the tombstones, and gave it to me, but I hid it in my purse. The manicured lawns of the mansions had been turned into cemeteries for children to play in. White ghosts fluttered from trees; skeletons rattled in the wind, a large gray parrot with bright red tail feathers screeched in a cage swinging from a portico. I watched Carmy turn round and round with the kids at a dizzying pace. All I could see of her was her made-up face, without eyes, nose or mouth—a fluorescent, lifeless mask. Her face was turned toward the sky.

“Giro Giro Tondo, Com’e’ bello il mondo,” the children sang, over and over.

This is my song, I thought, and was happy to have finally found her. I joined the kids and turned round and round with them, looking up at the stars. I stopped abruptly when I looked into the cage and saw it empty. I walked up to it and spotted the remains of a tiny bird skull at the floor of the cage, gray feathers scattered around a large hole – large enough for a raccoon to slither in and out, I thought. Three crimson tail feathers lay neatly by the doorstep. I collected them for safekeeping, put them in my purse, then resumed the dance. I raised my eyes to the sky again and I caught sight of my father sitting on a balcony.

“Why did you all leave me?” I yelled at him. He smiled and put his hands to one ear, as if to say he couldn’t hear. I screamed louder. “Why did you have to die before I could sing in the play?” He threw his arm down at me, as if giving up.

“It was only a play. It’s kid’s stuff. Leave me alone...” he said.

The balcony dissolved into the sky before I had a chance to reply. Everyone else had also left, and I was alone in the night, in front of a strange house all lit up with orange lights.

I woke up. The room I woke up in looked unfamiliar. I wondered where I was, and wished I could get up and go home. I remembered feeling like this before.

Going Home

It was the year I was four or five, during Mulirena's carnival period, when families took turns slaughtering their pigs and helping each other with the messy job of cutting the meat and making provisions for the year. Mother, Luigi and I had spent the evening at grandmother Caterina's house, making sausages. The women sat around the table with a metal sausage maker clamped to its edge. One woman fed the cut-up meat into the machine's top opening, turning the handle that pushed the meat into the pig's intestines. I watched as the long slimy tubes, plumped up with red meat and speckled with white fat, slithered and curved onto the table like snakes. Another woman pricked the sausages with a safety pin to let out the air, while another tied them tightly into links.

All evening, I had wanted to help. *Nanna, let me do some pricking.* But she insisted that I'd slow them down. They also wouldn't let me turn the handle. When they finished, late at night, *nanna* gave me some scrap meat and some intestine for me to play with—just when Mother was ready to go home.

“Let her stay; she can sleep here,” *nanna* Caterina said.

Mother wasn't convinced, but I wanted to stay. While *Nanna* cleaned up and got ready for bed, I played at turning the handle and stuffing and tying the tube, as I had seen the others do, though I was disappointed that my sausage turned out skinny and soft.

After *Nanna* had finished washing the pans and cleaning the table, she undressed and asked me if I needed to go to the bathroom. The cold, smelly cubicle was in a dark corner of the house, so I said I didn't need to go. I went to bed with my clothes on, between her and *nannu* Luigi, since it was quite cold.

I had often slept with my other *nanna*, but never here. After the lights had been turned off, the room looked completely different, and I was terrified by the shadows on the white-washed walls, made by the moonlight shining through the slits in the closed window. I couldn't fall asleep. *Nanna* Stella used to sing me a lullaby about wolves eating a sheep and now the shadows all looked like wolf faces.

I regretted having stayed over just to make a flabby sausage. Sandwiched between my grandfather, who snored and made all kinds of strange noises, and *nanna*, I was afraid to move, and I felt uncomfortable sleeping with my clothes on. I started to cry, softly at first, and then, more loudly. *Nanna* heard the sobbing and asked me if I wanted some water, or maybe I needed to go to the washroom? Crying so much, I gasped for air, I said I wanted to go to my own home to sleep.

“At this hour? It's past midnight,” *Nanna* said.

“Take her home, *ppe la Madonna*,” *Nannu* yelled. “Or no one is getting any sleep here tonight.”

The old woman got out of bed, dressed me up in my coat, and then put on her own outer winter clothes, with a heavy, black *mancale* over her head. We went out into the cold February night. The dark, deserted streets were lit by a sky full of sharp, bright stars and a smiling crescent moon, and I felt happy again—except for *Nanna* grumbling all the way up the hill. She said she could hardly feel her hands and legs anymore. She had been up since dawn, chopping the grisly meat for *capicolli* and sausages, salting the *prosciutti*, pickling the hog's head for *ialatina*, boiling and stirring its blood for blood pudding. She couldn't count how many times she had rinsed out the greasy pots and pans with frigid

water. And now, to complete her day, she really needed this *passeggiata* at this ungodly hour, with the *signorina* from Piano Don Carlo!

When we got home and Mother answered the knock on the door, wearing her long white shirt and holding a lantern in her hand. She looked fearful that something had happened. *Nanna* Caterina just pushed me inside the house, happy to be rid of me. She said crossly, “Here, here, you can have her.”

Mother sounded very angry with me in front of her mother-in-law. She exclaimed, “*Oi!* Something told me this would happen. What could we expect? Go to bed with children, wake up with fleas.”

At this point, I started crying again, imagining I would get a good spanking from my mother. Instead, when *Nanna* had gone, Mother tucked me into the warm bed next to her, kissed me, and whispered gently. “Stop crying now. It’s nothing serious, as long as nothing’s happened to you, and you’re safe at home.”

Sunday, November 2, 1980

The Yellow Pinto

The den, its blinds opened, was awash with sunlight. I woke up very early on Sunday morning. I felt rested. I got up, made a pot of coffee for myself, sat back on the sofa bed and planned my day.

Sean would be sound asleep until noon, and there would be no need to wake him. On Monday, I'd call the Danish House to return the furniture and get my money back. The prints, lamps, accessories, dishes, and small appliances that we had bought together, I would leave behind. They didn't mean anything to me anymore. Sean could take whatever he wanted, or he could sell them to whoever rented the apartment. The rest of the furniture would remain behind for some other gypsy-minded couple to call their own. The sheets and bedspreads I had received as presents from my relatives over the years were still at my mother's, in the old trunk that we brought with us from Mulirena, along with the embroidered linens from Mother's trousseau. I only had to pack a few clothes, my personal toiletries, my notebooks, and walk away.

Then I stared at the wall-to-wall shelves of books in the den, and I realized I could not leave them behind. My uncle had wanted me to have them. In case Sean got the notion that part of the library was his, I decided to pack the books into my car before he got up. Before even washing up and changing, I started sorting books into the order I would take them. First, I chose all the literature books. It felt good handling the old, worn-out tomes—*From Shakespeare to Shaw, Blake's Poems and Prophecies, Tom*

Jones, The Stories Of Anton Tchekov—with hand-written notes in the margins. Some day, I'd take the time to read and study the poetry, the classic novels and short stories contained in them. I had no empty boxes in which to pack the books, so I used a plastic laundry basket to carry them to my car. I piled the books onto the floor of the back seat.

Next I chose and carried the writings of Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Socrates, Hegel, Sartre, Thoreau, de Beauvoir, Marx, and Churchill, and stacked them on the seats. The basket felt heavier and heavier with each trip down the stairs to the car, but I was determined to pack the car with as many of the books as possible. One day I might regret not having them. The books on music and art, I'd give to my brother, though he'd probably never take the time to read them.

After the back seat of the car was stuffed to capacity, I packed the trunk. Except for a few books on geography and science, and Sean's own books, the shelves were left bare. I must have made over twenty trips up and down the stairs, still wearing my housecoat.

Finally, I took down my copy of *I Promessi Sposi* to place carefully into my tote bag along with my notebooks, containing the stories I had written all along. Before packing the book, I opened it to the last page and read:

Man, as long as he is in this world, is like an invalid lying on a more-or-less-uncomfortable bed, who sees other beds around him which look outwardly smooth, level, and better made, and imagines he would be very happy on them. But if he succeeds in changing, scarcely is he lying on the new bed than he begins, as his weight sinks in, to feel a piece of flax pricking into him here and a lump pressing into him there; so that, in fact, he is more or less back where he started.

I'd have to reread that book again, to look at it with new eyes. My stories too needed rewriting.

On the final trip, I quietly moved the standing mirror from the bathroom. It was lighter than I thought. I positioned it in the car to block the stack of books on the back seat from tipping over while I was driving. The mirror would be a trusty reminder of who I was from day to day—someone different from who I had been the day before, or who I would become the day after.

My hands were dirty and felt grimy from handling the old, dusty books. I showered, washed and dried my hair, made up my face, and put the cosmetics and toiletries into the tote bag. In a garbage bag, I stuffed some underwear and a few of my favorite clothes for the upcoming days. The rest I left behind.

I looked at my watch; it was almost one o'clock and Sean was still sleeping. My mother, brother and sister-in-law would be just starting to eat lunch. If I left the house now, I'd be in time for coffee—though Mother would insist that I eat a plate of leftover pasta.

I would leave the apartment for good now, and call Sean later on in the evening to explain. I didn't know where I would spend the night, but it would not be at my mother's, and it would not be here. I'd have to find a place of my own, and keep looking for Carmy. What I wanted most of all was to find her, and to bring her to her mother. Maybe together, we could get Lucia to come out of her coma. What would she have to say for herself after such a long, deep dream?

The yearly autumn show of brilliant colors was at its peak, and the tree-lined street was more luminous than ever. I drove away in my yellow Pinto, weighted with unread books, in silent unrest on a sunny Sunday afternoon.