



The Strangers: Nine Stories by Nine Immigrant Writers Brought Together by One Concept

Anna Wang Yuan, Editor

Purple Pegasus (Feb 23, 2016)

Softcover \$9.75 (192pp)

978-0-9966405-1-0

Anna Wang Yuan's collection is a beautiful tribute to the Chinese immigrant experience in North America.

In *The Strangers*, Chinese-Canadian immigrant and writer Anna Wang Yuan draws together short stories from nine other Chinese writers, resulting in a fascinating and frequently lovely tapestry of experiences that speaks to the challenges of a global society.

In Christina Yao's *Vacances á Paris*, an accomplished but lonely married woman meets a young man at a conference who inspires both lust and hope in her; in Rui Wang's *A Hero of our Times*, a young man grows up through Mao's revolution, nursing love for a woman from his village even as the world changes around them.

A family man finds that American dreams aren't as glittering as the hype in *The Golden Venture*, while a woman late to love finds that she misses her lost freedoms in *Counting Down the Minutes*. *The Bug* uses an imported piece of foreign wood to comment upon the boundaries observed in individual lives, while *The House in Avenel* and *The Stranger* both use the stories of others to comment upon the way intimacies are forged or avoided between neighbors.

While tones vary from author to author and piece to piece—from the straightforward and autobiographical tones of *A Golden Venture* to the eerie perspective shifts in Ma Lan's *Flowers Bloom, Flowers Fall*—great skill is an omnipresent factor in these stories, and transitions between pieces are swift and pleasant.

Most stories are set in Wang Yuan's adopted Canada, though American settings, and China itself, also play in, but Chinese identity is a consistent thread. The collection is a cultural gem, addressing character experiences straightforwardly but settling on no one correct articulation of Chinese life, even within single tales.

Stories approach Mao's government and the aftermath with sensitivity, speaking to past oppression with quiet skill. Each story is a microcosm of the immigrant experience as well, for first generations and beyond. Isolation, culture shock, struggles to maintain one's identity, and the urge to assimilate are all present, and all are approached with nuance and feeling.

Whether individual stories were penned first in Chinese or in English, were translated by their authors or by strangers, language is evocative and scenes are well-set throughout. Wang Yuan includes brief interviews with the authors after each, asking about their other projects, experiences with shifts in language and locale, and inspiration; though these insights provide glimpses into author psyches not often available through short story collections, they also prove to be somewhat mechanical in comparison to the prose they accompany. Section transitions have a similar air of superfluosity. Despite these minor distractions, the collection maintains interest throughout, and the stories in it are certain to spark interest in its writers beyond the pages of *The Strangers*.

Anna Wang Yuan's collection is a beautiful tribute to the Chinese immigrant experience in North America, encompassing a vast array of responses to new and changing cultures, and its elegant stories stand to charm its audiences.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January 3, 2017)

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