

- A Pinyin Story-

Anthony DeMarco (2020)

Xiaoling would sit staring at the problem which had become hers. Some special congruence continued to confuse. Her mother prodded her to finish her breakfast. *Bù hǎo*. No good cold she would say. She had often scolded Xiaoling for bringing her books to the morning table. No time for study here, she would say. Here for breakfast. *Zǎo fàn*. No time for study. Xiaoling flipped through the pages of her notebook nervously. Seeming to be looking for nothing in particular but continually bothered by the geometry which teased her at every turn. Lemmas and theorems jumping up into her own space and keeping her from attending to her morning meal.

“Shān shān lái chí” said her mother.

She agreed belatedly and finally left the kitchen through the back door.

“Rèn kě. Rèn kě.”

Then around and towards the front yard. She nearly tripped over some flaw in the pavement, some vestige of the terrain that her father had acquired after all. He had never been able to repair it properly. Barely having had the means for purchasing the lot to begin with and beaming with pride when recounting the tale of how he had managed to escape the hopelessness of Fujian. She passed hurriedly through the front garden and adorning of her family home. Some giving way onto the canvass which had forever become her own 48th Street.

“ǐ Děng dài dì!” cried her mother from a second story window.

“ǐ Wǒ bì děi bēn!”

Xiaoling replied angrily to her mother’s request to wait for her younger brother. She needed to get to class as quickly as possible. Today she would sit for the examination which had been so long in the offing. Mr. Hernandez had been adamant as to the time when all examinees were to arrive and Xiaoling did not wish to be late. She hesitated as she passed in front of the alleyway just before arriving to the bakery. Some high-pitched cry – though almost mournful -- caused her to peer down into the dim light. Xiaoling could glimpse the shadow of Dong Er but quickly turned away upon realizing that there were two forms seemingly locked in violent embrace. *ǐ Dong Er shén nǐ bàn?* Then some crumpled figure bending lowly into what would have become the love of Dong Er had only perplexed Xiaoling and she wondered as to whether any lasting satisfaction could be gained from such carnal insignificance. She hurried past the vegetable market which had always marked some virtual beginning of her mourning journey, though she was never quite certain as to why this was so. Some minutes would have already transpired by the time she arrived to that point. Perhaps it was the smell of freshly picked *bok choy*, or perhaps simply a sight of the old woman sweeping away some unwanted remnants from the previous day’s workspace.

Some metaphor for the not-so-sudden turn of events which had beset her and her family. Some newly found opportunity that she had been given upon realizing that the hubris which she and others in her predicament shouldered had finally been swept behind. Now crossing the intersection along some more diagonal path would call to mind her mother's advice about being too careless in the way she moved throughout the neighborhood. She often considered the angst of her mother and perhaps the reason why she tended to shy away from any lasting affection in a committal sense. Some urgency for arriving on time had always caused her to filter her mother's heeding, something she might eventually come to regret.

“*ǐ Biǎo hé chǔ nǐ kāi chē!*”

Xiaoling howled her wrath at the driver who had rushed behind her. Too close, she thought – *tài jiē jìn* – too close. There had been far too many like those since the *taxistas* had begun surfacing along Fifth Avenue. Some *te llevo baratito* would always prove to be too omnipotent when set against the welfare of the likes of Xiaoling.

“*ǐ Nǐ jiāng huì lù nǐ zì jǐ!*” shouted someone from across the street.

“*Wú zhī xī,*” replied Xiaoling.

Nick was always waiting on the corner of 8th Ave. and 48th St. at this time of the morning. Now seeing how close Xiaoling had come to getting struck by some speeding taxi caused him to express some consternation at both but more so at Xiaoling. Some concern for those in his own locale would have never been his alone, but almost always the most appreciated. Perhaps due to those circumstances within which he came to reside here. Or perhaps due to some feigned bravado and braggadocio which all of his peers had come to somewhat admire in Nick. Hóng Fán Wāng had come to detest his given name. *Hóng* for eastern bean goose. *Fán* for cage. *Wāng* for expanse of water. What's that? he thought. (Though he would beam at Miss McGrath upon being told of some curiosity which the meaning of his name might provoke in conversation.) What the hell is that, man? Big bean goose in cage – and no water for me! *Bú kě yǒng*. Can't swim, Jack! The Chinese teachers would always find some cleverer way to avoid having to address him by his newly acquired name. They welcomed the notion that Hóng Fán was to be transferred out of their charge as bilinguals, for it was commonly felt that the boy could begin to flourish in his own right. *Nick* had certainly been more to his own liking and he brandished it with delight, even though many in his circle would at times refer to him only rather unconvincingly as Nick, obliquely and with a sense that it would have simply been some greeting rooted in mere obligation.

“Get killed, stupid girl!”

“Shut up. I have important test today.”

“Not worth it -- life too short.”

(silence)

“*Xīn xīng fà* ...everyday new hair!” noted Xiaoling.

“Not everyday. what you mean?”

“Almost every...oh... can I touch?”

“*Zhōng zhì!* Don’t touch *nothing* ...work all morning to fix it this way!” scolded Nick.

“Why so early for that?” mocked Xiaoling.

“Early bird catches worm!”

“What’s that?” she laughed.

“Miss McGrath tell me that. Don’t you know? She say my English good now. Don’t you know?”

“She tells everyone that... she nice lady,” replied Xiaoling.

“Does not. She say I ain’t gonna be in no bilingual class next term. English too good for all ...Science, Maths ...all subject. What you think ‘bout that? Huh?”

Nick waited for some supportive remark by Xiaoling, or at least some nodding approval. She continued to glance down the Avenue as if searching for the taxista which had caused her to react so anxiously.

“Oh, I’ll be late ...have to go.”

“No wait, urged Nick.”

“Why? ...have important test,” she replied.

“Why you come this way every morning? Why you cross street here and not over there?”

“*Shén nǐ yuē?* I have test,” she insisted.

“Test, test, test is all you think about! What’s that?”

“Maths test ... and you too.”

“Not me. Miss McGrath’s test tomorrow. I do good tomorrow.”

“And how about test today?”

“Too hard.”

“Not too hard. You just lazy...like stupid friends.”

“*Fú měng*. Not stupid!”

“Oh...Oh..., some day you get in big trouble. You’ll see,” said Xiaoling.

“Doesn’t your father tell you about Fujian? ...left for that.”

“For what?” Nick asked pointedly.

“Do Maths and learn so you can ...”

“ ...what? ...have restaurant? ...marinade whole life?”

“ Don’t need Maths to have restaurant,” she insisted.

“What then?”

“I don’t know ...be engineer,” like Mr. Hernandez say.

“What he know! scolded Nick ...just tell me to shut up in class and I don’t do nothing. What he think?”

“You just lazy like stupid friends. ...wait here on corner every morning for them. Why?...just to get in trouble.”

“You know I stay here every morning. So...why you cross in front of me all the time? Huh?”

“*¡Yú mò!* I don’t! ...sometimes cross over there,” she protested.

“ ...never over there!” argued Nick.

(silence)

“Oh I’ll be late ...have to go,” she insisted.

Nick watched as Xiaoling walked hurriedly up 49th Street towards the High School. Nick for his part lingered as always at the corner to wait for his friends. He would have been sure to arrive late to Mr. Hernandez's exam, and so decried the thought of having to spend yet another morning in feeble explanation of where he had been and what he had been doing. *Miss McGrath's test tomorrow. I do good tomorrow.* His friends were rarely on time and he watched Xiaoling move even further, some form almost floating upon some blackened pavement. Further and further until all he could discern was one flattened silhouette. Still Nick had always wondered what might have become of her if she had never been brought over from the Fujian capital. Or he for that matter. Might he have one day found her quite by chance pedaling along the banks of the Xi Jiang in some desperate attempt to arrive on time? And to where? Some thrusting more furiously against a cast iron which would have been nothing but some senseless rush to her – and his -- inevitable lifelong disappointment. His father managed to set up the family business not long after settling here. It tended to keep on with some day-to-day regularity and he had expected Nick to contribute as soon as he was capable. Nick divided his time between work and study from an early age. He would always defrost the chickens in the evening in preparation for some next day's sojourn, although this had never been his habit before having to begin at the High School. His had quickly become some morning too hectic for all which would have been otherwise required. Some Chinese roasted chicken had always been his family specialty. Some roasted fowl delicacy had been theirs to rely upon since arriving here some years ago, and it was to their good fortune that the locale over which they presently presided had gone for the asking. *Shí xīng cān guǎn* and yes it did turn out to have been a popular place amongst the neighbors. Some roasted delicacy rendered diners from as far away as 3rd Avenue and beyond. Some later afternoon hour had always been the busiest time and neither Nick nor his father could reason why. Some earlier supping had always been the rule amongst those most newly brought over, and some modern Sunset Park environs must have pushed it along even more so. Some likelier boredom gazing out across from their tiresome café and why should some heartier repast ne'er be in the offing? Some sun laying down and over, some sixty-degree coming from out of a shadow defining of roof-top structures across and shading one's eyes. Some *egg foo yong* staring upwards and was it not *y-o-ng*? Some Mexicano-mixed pronunciation – *y-u-ng* – somewhat and only belatedly accepted by those older than Nick. There had arrived far too many of those – they who might have never left the homeland if not for some family member or friend to whom they would have been permanently mortgaged in one way or another. Some life passing through at a snail's pace and always living in some ghostlier fashion. Now some ne'er ending penchant for agreeing without bounds with she who would have produced some means for remunerating properly their occasional feast – *bì xū chū qián cǐ kè!* – but Nick's angry rebuke towards timely payment would almost always become consumed within some gentler gesture accorded by his father. They had come after all to seek the fortune which had gone so fleetingly in Fujian, or most in any case. But they had not all been able to prosper to the same degree and Nick's family would always be prone to helping those who may have fallen by the wayside. Who could have thought that some Chinese roasted chicken would guide their way up and out of their sorriest state? Some roasted fowl enabling Nick to cling to those few norms having survived and languishing from their harrowing journey, and in doing so savor the possibility of bestowing some greater good upon himself and his family. Now some setting in line for preparation with some final

marinade and reflecting back to some previous week's class at the High School. Some straight line being shorn up into odd numbered divisions and odder still when in consideration of the fact that it could be accomplished at all. Or could it? Some numbered line going off into number lines with afternoon light setting upon. Some numbered line set down within some more passive structure then numbed or numbered along some line with afternoon light and coming down onto some vaguer recollection and appealing to Nick. The fowl would have been marinated accordingly and he could have never imagined that here too he might be well within his own. Laid out in rows three by four. Some better attempt at escape from this tattered existence. Some upward motion through the ranks of those newly arrived and into this societal array. Whereupon being obligated to render some quickest decision regarding one's final destination did put all in Fujian to the test, some giving his own grandparents certain cause for concern and determined that Nick and all their progeny should taste the fervent fruit of some newer world.

“*¿Tā tuǒ dàng dàn?*” his father would ask.

“*Shàng wèi.*”

“*¿Gǎn máng, huǒ hè!*” his father would reply impatiently.

Why fire too hot? Who care fire hot? So many chickens, anyway. He would have been working to prepare the meat as quickly as possible so that he could finish and go out with his mates.

“*¡Jī! ¡Jī!*”

Still his father was adamant as to the manner in which Nick sometimes went about his chores. It is not that he felt the boy to be unhelpful. Quite the contrary, he knew Nick to be diligent in matters of the home and could only add to his chagrin regarding the way in which he conducted his affairs of study. Some hanging about with the likes of those schoolyard boys on 8th Avenue had caused him to lose some most basic acquisition of self-discipline which had been tryingly instilled in his earliest years at the day school in Fujian. Some growing up with leaning heavily upon epistles dating back some five or six centuries. It had hardly affected the boy and this his father knew to be true despite that he himself had had little time to spend with the child here in their new home.

“*¿Zěn me yùn zhuǎn rèn xú xú zhè tiān?*”

(What he means work slow today?)

“*¡Tiáo wèi zhī tài duō nián nián!*” Nick replied.

(Marinade too sticky today, keep my fingers together.)

“*¡Nián, nián!*” he replied impatiently.

Then sounding distantly through the paint-peeled walls two or three deep.

“*Tóng yī rú tong měi tiān.*”

(Not same as everyday.)

“*¡Nián nián!*” he would insist.

Now trying to set the chickens in another sense might be made easier if only for some momentary distraction. His morning conversations with Xiaoling. Some imaginings of she and he in subtler repose which might one day endear and bear fruit, some ne'er extinguishing romance which could properly ensue. Then stooping lowly upon some lace which would all but soothe Nick's longing for her acceptance. Thereupon some more affectionate cheek inclined or some softest telling – oh! Or some more prurient rumination upon some seeing to it that both Dong Er and her cousin would always be properly attended to. In any case, some rectangular exercise uncompleted, some lengths and widths now transforming themselves into the metal pan on which Nick needed to place the viscous poultry.

“*¡Nián nián! ¡ Nián nián!*”

-II-

When Xiaoling finally arrived to the schoolyard she gave quick notice to that usual cadre of handball devotees who had not yet begun their morning match. Nor did she see the Vietnamese girls, and which gave her some certain cause for concern.

“Have you seen Khanh Boi or Phuong?” she asked.

No one replied and she came to realize that her question had not been directed to anyone in particular. Some younger boys leaning against a chain link fence and Renhan Lin eyeing some circle of ninth-grade girls across the yard provoked Xiaoling into an angry rebuke as if she had not been bothered at all by the absence of her friends.

“Looking at girls all you do!”

“*Bù zàn yī cí,* replied Renhan Lin.”

“*¡Nǐ jiāng huì bù jí gé gāo zhōng!*”

“*Uhgary* bitch!”

“*¡Zhōng zhǐ!*”

“ *Bitchbitchbitchbitch...ha ha ...*”

Xiaoling had nonetheless always held a certain affection for Renhan Lin. Unexpectedly and without merit considering the amusement that he and his friends would occasionally enjoy at her expense. After all, he had had perhaps the most difficult of times. His mother died of tuberculosis at an early age. His father had abandoned them both soon after the Cultural Revolution came to an end. Some said it was on account of a newly found freedom. Others claimed it was strictly due to an ability to father the child in proper manner. Some yearning for throwing off the shackles by which he and society had been bound so long. Renhan’s grandmother cared for him for many years until he too arrived at the opportunity to leave. None except Renhan took any pleasure in recounting the difficult journey which they had all needed to endure.

“ Kanh Boi! Kanh Boi!” she cried out but then ... oh, over there she murmured to herself in relief, her voice trailing off to a whisper.

“ *¿Nǎ er shì nǐ?*” replied Kanh Boi in mock impatience and Xiaoling was at a loss to explain how she could have entered through the 48th Street entrance knowing it was delivery day.

“ Oh, I forget it’s Monday. How long did you wait there?” asked Xiaoling.

“ *I have been waiting for ten minutes...have been ..have been...*”

“*Měi hǎo, měi hǎo.* You have been waiting Learn to speak correctly or Miss McGrath will come to your house,” joked Kanh Boi.

“ No, she won’t!” laughed Xiaoling.

“ Come on or we’ll be late.”

“ ...and Phuong?”

“Upstairs already,” replied Kanh Boi.

The three girls had barely stepped onto the playground’s steaming tarred pavement when they heard the voice of the morning dean above the din.

“ Why are you girls entering through this gate? It’s Monday. The deliveries need to come in this way. You know that.”

“ Oh we sorry, Miss Perry, but no time to go around. Exam starts at nine.”

“ It’s only half-past-eight.”

“...but Mr. Hernandez said to be upstairs now.”

Xiaoling ‘s voice again trailed off to a whisper.

“Well go ahead, but try to remember girls. It’s every Monday.”

“So sorry, Miss Perry.”

The two girls hurried across the playground. They pulled open the heavy iron door and proceeded up the stairs.

Miss Perry had always been one of those more dispassionate deans. She would make the long climb to the fifth floor every morning at 8:15 just as gracefully as when she first started at this High School on 48th Street. Some waist-length blonde hair swaying to and fro as she persisted in her climb. Some dancing out loud on Saturday evenings would have continued to sustain her though a long school year. Now thinking back to some lonelier evening within someone’s tidier embrace or standing for hours outside some lesser-than-enlivening nightspot and hoping against hope that she too might be chosen. And why not? Her preening had always met with some certain reward. None-so-much revered as on that day when she once more went united with some meandering artiste on station’s front. Some sleeker alighting and bent gently in search of some more fleeting glimpse of carnal embrace. Do you love me? then gently mingling within some mass of societal misappropriation. Some more soothing refrain set down by the artiste who now seemed to lean more heavily against her faltering torso and languishing from behind in hope of reaping his ill-beset harvest. Some be mine be thou art fairer had been studied and re-studied but unknowingly of how any such rendition could be delivered within one’s own present circumstance and would forever lead her onto some more lingering cadence, some greeting those most gilded of voices to which would have become some exercise gone awry. Languishing still from behind. Then nearer and nearer until thinking -- do you love me? Later entering her fifth-floor office and unlamenting of the fact that no-one could really pretend to deny her the spoils for which she had so long toiled, some reaching over for one more dose of beauty encased. First patting her forehead with the golden powder. Some silkened forty-five degree light lifting a wanton grace from the dank grey wall structure which defined her windowless office. Pat pat. Then some pat went one more last stroke intended to redeem and she would be done with it but that last one felt just right and pat pat why not it would be five more minutes before they made it up here anyway. Some temporary preening most always interrupted by those Mexican girls -- why she might have even held Miss McGrath responsible for pat pat and why did my office need to be up here next to hers anyway?

“*Wō jīng pí lì jìn,*” sighed one girl now occupying some intermittent space on the landing.

“Why so tired?” chided Xiaoling.

“Too fat too fat, ” interrupted Kanh Boi.

Her remark became consumed in some half-silenced visual laugh. Some face far too beautiful to be offset by the ringing outpour of comic grace which often seemed to shake Kanh Boi to the bone.

“Nothing comes out of that face!” exclaimed Xiaoling.

“What?” cried Kanh Boi.

“It’s empty face laugh!”

Having said that, Xiaoling broke into one of her own.

“*Yě fēi pán* ... too fat!” insisted Kanh Boi.

Some stark metal cage structure now being left behind as they turned toward the next set of stairs. Neither in Fujian nor in Ho Chi Minh City had either witnessed some more flagrant rebuke to their dignity as trustworthy students. Like a prison Kanh Boi would often be heard to say. And that she and Phoung had been able to communicate at all with their friends of Chinese descent was somewhat remarkable. Some comfort for all, as the loneliness which they surely would have had to endure in that newfound Brooklyn neighborhood seemed to occasionally present itself even after they managed to secure some much needed bond. Now upwards further and to the next landing. Some noise began to filter in through the approaching doors, some nagging reminder that it was indeed delivery day and indicative of some error in their own approach to the fifth floor.

“*¿Wèi shén me shì fǒu tā zhèr?*” wondered Kanh Boi.

“Probably confused like us,” sighed Xiaoling.

“I think the dean saw her and too afraid to say anything ...so fat.”

“That’s not nice”, replied Xiaoling, “why you say that?”

“Fat girl coming in wrong door... *¿shéi cǎi?*” laughed Kanh Boi.

“These stairs too high,” exclaimed Xiaoling.

“*¿Shén me?* ...are too high. ...are...”

“Oh, no-one listening now!”

“But what will you do tomorrow on Miss McGrath’s test?”

“Who cares! It’s tomorrow. Why these...are these too high?” asked Xiaoling feigning concern over inelegant speech.

“I don’t know. All buildings were just two in Ho Chi Minh. Not high,”

Both had by this time begun to feel the strain and sound a bit like the girl they encountered on the third-floor landing, although any such remark to the matter could have only drawn the ire of Kanh Boi. Especially now in the ever-growing presence of some finer young girls in sleeker regard, some glossier *revista* appearance had always been so prized and more to the liking of those Mexican girls – *las chicas* – some certainly not ever having been that to which either Xiaoling or Kanh Boi could aspire. Still, Dong Er was of another sort entirely and always having been open to those more lurid sensations which might always be intimated in her mind.

“Almost there. *¡Zhōng yú!*”

“Yeah. Good exercise for skinny girls.”

“*You* skinny,” conceded Xiaoling.

Then taking on some air of survivor having risen high above, some testament to one’s better determination and hearing some voice from just off to the right and coming on quickly.

“Go into the classroom and sit quietly, boys and girls. Mr. Hernandez will be up here just as soon as he collects the examinations from the main office,” instructed Miss Perry.

The girls filed into the classroom amidst those who had entered from the proper entrance. They settled into adjacent desks. Some need for one’s own sense of comfort or well-being and beginning to take themselves onto the exercise to which they both would be about to perform. Some *oh here* as she watched Kanh Boi descend into her task. Then some placing those tools upon which would be prelude to the notes and ideas increasingly gone but reappearing. Pencils. Rulers. Protractors. Some last minute turning over concepts and lemmas. She had been long admiring of Kanh Boi’s calmer sense and now glancing over to her friend who went barely moving, and alighting patiently over some time-weathered slab of wood which had supported some more devout tuition and would now again be put to the test. Some altar of finer hope placed silently beneath the vision of one so tranquil and she again bringing to mind that rarely had she ever looked upon the features of one so sublime. Some finer veil of hair draping gently over Kanh Boi’s left cheek did seem to absorb Xiaoling for the longest moment until coming to some realization that it had only been through the sheerest of life’s fortunes that they had at all become so mutually aware. Some lingering uneasiness concerning the fleetingness of life itself would leave Xiaoling unable to cope at times if not for the constant urging of her mother. Now intending to bring into mind those theorems and lemmas which had begun to provide the comfort she had been seeking all along. Some last frantic attempt at salvation as they had rounded some final marker and out eastward over a churning sea toward the bluff which was to provide some final vista of a homeland growing smaller and more distant.

“All right then. Please take everything off your desks except pencils and pens. Protractors and rulers will be provided for anyone without, as will paper for rough work.”

Some voice suddenly from the front of the room had startled Xiaoling and she looked up whilst beginning to become aware of the other students around her. Some none-too-distant recollection of Nick began calling to mind and it seemed to Xiaoling reluctantly that he was nowhere to be found, for it was always toward her own sense of regret that he should continue to be so negligent in those matters which were bound to affect him most. Xiaoling did venture one quicker glance behind and still no sign of Nick. She had never been taken to admitting any feelings for the boy, though she would have been drawn naturally toward his insistence or eagerness or out of some sense of commoner repose upon the ordeal through which both had been obliged to endure.

“Please keep all examinations face down on your desk until you are told to begin.”

The instructions came across as not being delivered so dedicatedly. They seemed to lack that insistence which Xiaoling had come to expect. Then some insect would go buzzing up to the light fixture and back down unsettlingly close, some quicker glance off to the side might bring into clearer relief the profile of Kanh Boi who would soon seem to be eagerly engaged and with heat slowly filtering up five storeys from some freshly asphalted 48th Street. Mr. Hernandez would have been rather adamant about the amount of space required within one aisle or the next, and seemingly too distant from Kanh Boi to now fully appreciate some truer manner of contemplation. Some sweeter reflection defining of some more far Eastern essence and blatantly at odds with the increasingly chaotic academic exercise which Xiaoling would come again to peruse in some almost begrudging way. And as some most beautiful of watercolors did Kanh Boi seem to her now.

“Alright, please begin. You’ll have ninety minutes to do this exam. Good luck.”

Kanh Boi scrutinizing with divining eye some first task. For well-disciplined she was, and whereas Xiaoling’s parents had been overly inexorable regarding the road she that would be obliged to take, Kanh Boi would be content to find within herself some commitment for bettering her own life and that of those nearest to her. Now scanning down along the edge of the page, some quicker deciding what she might accomplish first and seeing to it that the time she had to spend would satisfy her properly and securely. Some geometry which Xiaoling had been considering, and would begin to taunt as she advanced quickly. Or perhaps too quickly for a life which continues unabashedly and without pity for those who meander. Some tightly clustered set of numbers belying one hidden set of values, and some thought of Nick languishing in his father’s employ casting both into some easier revulsion.

Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway caught Nick's casual glance. Some twentieth-century art-deco pastel having placed itself squarely and re-thinking as to whether any of this could have been any other place. He had rarely ever ventured out from the confines of his Brooklyn neighborhood let alone toward that which might have been considered some urban center. Some sun reflecting off the billboards which were to re-define some more blatant contrast amongst those dwarfed miniatures poking barely above his father's restaurant. Just get dumplings he had urged — *only fresh dumpling*. Some larger-than-life billboard looming, some staring down onto some tangle of traffic and human flesh being subdued gently into some mesh of rising subway steam and grease which each passing vehicle had been spewing inadvertently. Nick should have gotten off at Canal Street, and he would have if not for some distraction as he stared across at some slightlier young woman fawning gracefully within some corner space. Some kindlier face reminding him of Xiaoling and some features seeing well into the capability which he knew he possessed for winning her over. Some stealing her away from textbooks and tests and crossing over with her too on some finer day. Some step-upon-step and Nick now fondling some crumpled piece of paper which continued taking pains to appear then re-appear in his increasingly moistened palm.

**Hop Kee Wholesale Dumplings
21 Mott Street**

Some step-upon-step and earlier twentieth century art-deco pastel endearing Nick as he glanced upward at the ornate structures adorning the overhangs of the flattened rooftops. Some sunbeam catching his eye barely and dangling upon his forehead as it pointed its way downtown and weaving a path along some steadfast umbra edging earnestly toward Canal Street. But no directions to the dumpling house.

“¿*Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?*” he implored some elderly woman.

She took no notice and he began to doubt as to whether their language was indeed his own.

“¿*Cǐ Mott?*” and a small boy looked puzzled until Nick grew somewhat more adamant.

“*Mott! Mott!*”

The boy nodded but more in astonishment than any real understanding and Nick continued to wonder whether some dialect had been vanquished to the pinyin muck which his father had warned him about on so many occasions. He eventually reached the establishment at just about half-past four. Some realization that he should be able to engage

in some lunch hour fare at once delighted and he proceeded to the iron clad staircase straight way. Now some deciding to descend to the basement door while off to the side hanging the most tantalizing of glazed poultry. Some less conventional fare and honeyed just for the delight of it and Nick wondering if perhaps he might brave some comparison between it and his own family specialty. Some sudden scarcity of traffic as he descended and pedestrians to his back only seemed to renew the intrigue which his journey had unknowingly acquired. Once inside there were no tables to be had at first glance. There sat empty one smaller square space much to his surprise. Some twelve-by-twelve-inch formica perched precariously upon a barely sustaining metallic pedestal and Nick wondering if it could ever succeed in fulfilling any basic function whatsoever. Stationed discreetly within a corner not far from the kitchen doors and just off to the side of some enlivened gentleman putting what appeared to be some finishing touches on utensils one by one. Still he was unsure of the table's availability.

"Can I sit here?" asked Nick.

"*Nà jī shì zhě zhi,*" the man replied apologetically.

"No-one sit here? Why no!" asked Nick angrily.

His forceful reply surely took the waiter by surprise. He had encountered such customers before but Nick had been the first to convey successfully some notion that they might in fact have been mistaken in thinking that such a space could not be afforded properly to the clientele in times of need. Nick waited patiently for the waiter's response and unmoving as others went hustling piping hot trays of black bean barely beneath his chin. Why just for waiters? he thought. More empty tables over there. No-one using this one. Maybe he don't understand English. Miss McGrath say my English good now. Maybe I say it to this big dummy ...

"*Xing. Yòng bǐ yǐ.*"

(silence)

Nick's thought had been interrupted by the waiter's unexpected offer. Some other customer might have been feeling some certain remorse over the unjust implication which Nick had heaped upon the gentleman who had simply been doing his job. Nick had already earned some irrefutable reputation for urging upon inordinately, some ne'er disputed characteristic newly born in him and some others of his generation in an attempt to extinguish some slightest bit of resistance, some warding off the havoc which such might reek in gaining those advantages which had been duly promised them by their newly found situation. Nick readily accepted the man's offer and placing some chair obliquely against the wall alongside which he could find some easier repose.

"I'll have ..."

"No take order," replied the man tersely."

Nick was so genuinely startled by the man's use of another dialect that his indignation regarding some unwillingness to listen to his order almost went completely concealed to both. Some why no take order could have only served as some cascade spilling wildly within his head and unchanging of nothing in the larger sense.

“Why no take order?” he asked impatiently.

“No take order now,” the man insisted. “He take order.”

The man nodded to one of the other waiters, some thinnish looking man quite at odds with the portlier appearance of his colleague.

“What you do there all day...shining spoons?” Nick asked the big man.

“Change jobs. Sometime fork, sometime spoon or knife. Sometime take order.
Always change job. All day change.”

“So what I supposed to do? Starve?” complained Nick.

(Big dummy think I got nothing else to do. What he think? Dumplings can't wait.
Have to be back by six. What he think?)

“*Bǐ lù zhèr,*” the thinnish man was told.

Some ranting whenever circumstances would not give in. Some insistent sense of anger and impatience had seemed to run its course on so many occasions and when the attendance dean could barely tolerate some ill-timed intrusion into some illicit activity to which Nick and his friends would be committed to almost daily. Some intending to shout down at Nick but never within some patronizing frame of thought nor would Nick ever tolerate such behavior.

“*¿Nǐ xū cài dān?*” asked the thinnish waiter.

“Don't need no menu!” exclaimed Nick.

Nick watched and waited as the thinnish man clutched some more reliable tool of his trade, some sharpened pencil pointedly reminding of the need he had once harbored surely for being proper in the fulfilment of his obligations. Some preparation in setting out upon his own daily chore, some more servile attitude being feigned in order to get ahead with one more remuneration and providing of the dream which he and his forbearers had imposed. Some feigned glance for Nick and his present tendency toward this culinary satisfaction and self-delight.

“*¿Shén nǐ cān?*” asked the waiter

(silence)

Why he talking like I some foreigner or something? thought Nick.

“You don’t speak English, man?”

“Chinese with Chinese customer,” replied the waiter.

“I’ll have bird in window...hanging up.”

“*Shuō zhōng wén mǎi zhǔ zhōng guó.* ... Chinese with Chinese customer,” repeated the waiter.

Nick could perceive some paler reflection or long lost triumph darting off some façade which the waiter had been trying to sustain for so many years. Some long ago lost expectation which had been wasted away, some other lost source of hope ebbing slowly out of reach and sinking hardly along the banks of the Xi Jiang. Some hoping to surface again and wondering if it ever would. Some eternal longing for one’s own return to some more motherly tongue, some more motherly tongue and desisting from the pinyin muck which were to go imposingly. Some pinyin muck ascending slowly from beneath the veneer and threatening to extinguish some sunrise which had warmed the faces of those who stood within its promise.

“Miss McGrath say I speak English! I’ll have...”

Nick could suddenly sense some leaning motion of the waiter and tending toward some more implicit refusal of giving in to his stubborn diatribe. Some motion away from the tediousness which had befallen him so cruelly upon his better intentions.

“Chinese with Chinese customer,” reiterated the waiter.

The thinnish man had followed through on his leaning motion before Nick could react and started toward a table near the door. There sat a young couple and not too much older than Nick himself. It seemed as if they were about to place their order and with no forthcoming opposition from the waiter, some more decidedly Caucasian clientele having obviously been all too common in such a popular venue as this and Nick was quick to realize just how sheltered the confines of his familiar existence in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn really was. Rarely did many such *tǔ zhù* visit his father’s restaurant, aside from some occasional teacher from the High School, while here they would seem to account for well more than half of the daily receipts. Some subsequent attempt at comprehending the waiter’s point of view did then dawn upon Nick but quickly began to doubt once more as the couple went shaking their heads from side to side in what appeared to Nick as some deliberately confusing gesture. Why he not listen to me? I don’t give any trouble. Just want bird in window. The waiter hesitated before seeming to consider leaving the younger pair to

ponder over the menu a few minutes longer. Some foregone consideration for wanting to present Nick one more opportunity at acquiring this long-desired repast might have arisen if not for some unlikelier cry from across the room and inquiringly of some larger party just having cleared the heavy glass doors which separated the foyer and bottom step leadingly downwards from the street. Some larger gentleman in eager pursuit of some Oriental feast and some lesser-than-enthusiastic entourage edging carefully along toward the table which the thinnish waiter had signaled to in the adjoining dining room. Some hunger-driven aborigine in search of one more harried celebration or otherwise and was all Nick could do to set himself apart from such an ordinary lot. Now beginning to sense some sympathetic overture toward the waiter's desire for linguistic cross-cultural exclusion and hoping to gain some favor, he once more tried calling to the thinnish man who had by now vanished momentarily behind the temporary façade which marked off this dining room from the next.

“*ǎn yuàn yì yǎn qián!*” shouted Nick.

Some seconds had seemed to pass reluctantly when the waiter reappeared and Nick was none too quick to reiterate his entreaty, especially in light of how quickly the place had been filling up since he arrived. Some anxiety began to take hold regarding the dumplings his father would be expecting and the time it would take to return to Brooklyn, then going over why this language or that might not be of some utmost importance and choosing to conform to the waiter's criteria. Some lateness being all too impenetrable for the feast which might never become and so Nick had needed to act decisively and so he did.

“Okay ... *kěn fù*... happy now? Chinese with Chinese customer!”

These people all dummies. Make me speak like a foreigner or something, just to get some bird hanging up in window. Miss McGrath say I speak good English now. She say ...

“*¿Shén nǐ cān?*” asked the waiter.

But Nick was still unsure as to whether he should continue to appease the waiter. Some further consideration of the nature of some capitulation to the whims of those who would pretend to provide for their own sense of survival by refusing any dissonance brought upon by all that they might consider to be even the slightest bit exotic. Some continuing to speak in some foreign tongue, as if providing some shield against the savagery which all but their land of birth could have afforded.

“*Kǎo yāg ... kǎo yā ...*” said Nick.

“*Ēr shí fēn zhōng,*” replied the waiter.

(silence)

Twenty minute for what? Bird just hanging up in window! This dummy think I got nothing else to...

“¿Nǐ hòu ěr shí fēn zhōng?” asked the waiter.

(silence)

Some disappointment regarding Nick's initial decision to cede to the waiter's request had now been rendered somewhat moot by his succumbing to the further prospect of having to wait twenty minutes for his order. He reluctantly nodded in agreement. Some more succulent delight continuing to tempt Nick upon first glance after all. Some slightly tanned morsel of shaded glaze, some honeyed romantic setting would lift the spirits of any such a stifled lot. Soured by the rigors of having to put forth so on such a daily basis lest the spoils of this newer world should become so elusive. Some tastier dish wonderingly and asking coquettishly about whether he might have come sooner or not at all. Some tidier time to pass and Nick could only admire the scholarship with which the thinnish waiter seemed to attend to his now impoverished ritual. Daily tasks calling upon, some maddening repetition and leading one to weigh the pros and cons of following one's own path along the tired banks. Upon passing her house each day and pausing in hope of spying some more casual gesture, some glancing upward towards the second-floor window where she had been alighting since their arrival from Fujian. Nick stared at the ceiling and wonderingly, as if someone else might have been occupying the very table at which he presently sat. He then began to become transfixed upon one or two more imperfections in the level structure which tended to limit the majesty which seemed to distinguish this place from the others he had passed along the way. Crossing one leg over the next, some gentle sway of his well-worked coiffure and then arching his young torso ever more in reverse. Some higher structure seemingly joined at the geometric union of three, then three more plus one and might hark back to the task which had gone so belatedly in Mr. Hernandez's class if he were to dedicate to Xiaoling's liking. Some recollection of the Maths examination which she must have been fancying at this very hour. Some greater time expanse having had transpired since his earlier morning departure into the 9th Avenue subway having taken its toll. Some poring over lemmas and definitions too unmoving to become anything other than what they might have represented truly and some pastime in teasing her along the way with who might she be with and what might she be doing? Some gender reversal and now some complicity within one's own frame of mind and pondering herself once more, some better lemma expressed and beginning to question the validity of all that she would now be doing. Some where is Nick and why is -- oh -- he is just lazy like his stupid friends she must be thinking really going and setting off onto some newer things and ponderingly of herself as Nick sat patiently and considering just how quickly he had been made to feel alone in this place. Some vegetable egg drop spilling languidly down and away from the waiter's thinnish frame and placingly on the table in front of them. Some vegetable egg drop being languidly placed and provoking Nick to at once reconsider the honeyed delight he had once been assured.

“¿ Zěn yàng měi ge rén lǐng qǔ shí wù?” asked Nick angrily.

“Nà jiǎn yì. Yā gèng shí jiān,” replied the waiter.

Nick's sudden outburst of impatience went upon noticing that the younger couple had already been receiving their vegetable egg drop. Some thinking that he could have just as easily turned away, some complete disregard for the entanglement which might have ensued and gone on to live some life of yearning, some endless incarceration bearing down on him and those in his own *huán jìng*. He still might have refused to abide by the waiter's tenets. Then turning into some shadow of a human being and having to rely on the likes of Renhan Lin for the rest of his tirelessly diminishing days. Some three-o'clock-return which he had promised his father ...

“¿Nǐ yuàn wàng chá?” asked the waiter.

“Don't want no tea!” Nick shot back. “Want food!”

... which he had promised his father might now seem to be wholly out of the question. Some less-than-expected event occurring ...

“¿Nǐ yuàn wàng miàn tiáo?”

“Don't want no noodle! Just bird in window! O.K.?”

... occurring wholly out-of-turn and wandering off into some endless impersonation of time itself. After all, some decision had been taken without haste. Setting off from the banks of the Xi Jiang and seek some finer remuneration for the effort which had been so valiantly placed. Some accordingly going off, and wonderingly of the intrusion which might not have occurred if not for some innermost need to succeed and flourish in their own right. Some occurring wholly out-of-turn into a pinyin sunrise which would have been awaiting them and taking advantage of one of life's more desperate challenges, seekingly and wantonly absorbing some unintended *force majeure* which had dared to exert upon.

“Nǐ yuàn wàng...”

“Don't want nothing!” exclaimed Nick.

“Want duck?... have to wait!” the waiter shot back.

What happened to Chinese with Chinese customer? Some slight redemption at the waiter's momentary slip of the tongue. Or was it? He noticed some light rain beginning to settle onto the steamy glass facing outwards toward the street and began thinking that it might be difficult to manage with two larger bags of dumplings all on his own and with no respite from some possible inconvenience. Some more finely tuned stepping around cooling pools of water mixing into sidewalk debris then creeping in upon Nick's ankles as he might think menacingly of his father waiting in some sodden doorway glancing up one way then another and the little daylight that would be left over to hover upon. Poor mortals just standing around and waiting for one more glimpse of it, just one more inhalation of some aroma which could

put our spines out of place and recalling of some song he might have fancied one morning while waiting for her on the corner and how could she know anyway of some of those that might be entrapped in his own thoughts as he drifted off to sleep at night. Some hoping for one more glimpse as he passed in front of her dimly lit window cast as nearly some shadow and then so much easier at the corner in the morning mist, some never over there he reminded her and trying to turn her thoughts away from those ghosts still unburied from a distant past then. Who this other big dummy in suit anyway? Coming in here and Nick accidentally nudged from behind, someone more official-looking probably from the courts of justice on Centre Street and noticing of some sudden push which one more official-looking type having entered and besieging the thinnish waiter all over again with tables beginning to become scarcer as the evening meal grew closer and closer upon thoughts of her and his father looking up first this way then that. Some wondering where he could be and where she could be now that the examination should have been well finished and sitting deftly upon the edge of her bed wondering what might have become of the music which she had once intoned into his own ear as he bowed slowly beneath some gentler wisp of air directed towards his boyish cheek.

“Wǔ fēn zhōng,” remarked the thinnish waiter.

Five more minutes? Yeah, he think I got nothing else to do! What he think? Dumplings can't wait. Have to be back by six. What he think? The official-looking type now seatedly just across and marking out one rather scalene figure with the younger couple whose more feminine side he had been coming to spy with an ever-growing curiosity. Then Nick struggling to avoid being cast as some victim. Some situation spiralling and having taken some wrong turn. As if spinning out yarns and tales of superstitions, elders resting along the banks of the Xi Jiang in eery prognostication of what the future may hold. Places and events in turmoil. Shattered expectations. This and more now bearing down on Nick and some urgency becoming wholly unbearable. Some being made to fall victim to the trials and rituals of those for whom Nick might have meant so much, or so little dependingly of how one more seemingly insignificant event could have played out and then returning to this original claim of fairer than fairest-art-thou. Miss McGrath say I speak good English! Now back to the brink and to the brink once more as the official-looking type seeming to delight in what it is he had been served. Something seethingly tasty it appeared to Nick and then occurring that never had he seen such a delight being offered in this or any other version or culinary venue. Some running about and glidingly smooth, some tenderer scallions embellishing over some richer sauté which had evidently gone towards somewhat more than mere accompaniment. Some winding upwards and around down to some pristine dish which seemed to have bestowed upon it a more chastened relief, some more succulent treat and shearing proudly beneath some other mucous membrane which might have masked its outer beauty – but not. Instead glistening and encouraging he who might partake to admire some tinier structure which might have been used to vanquish its prey or rather adorn innocuously some more finely lit piece of flesh from whence it might have arisen. Then being lifted slowly as the sauté might have made its way dripping easily, some heartier breathing outwardly onto the steaming sensation which were about to become, and all according to some more sumptuous aroma rising stealthily through the seasoned ether that did go enveloping the billowed aliment which seemed to stare upwards at its ne'er endearing official. Then being reluctantly consumed or

seemingly so, some slipping slowly through the official's puckered lips and leaving some sharpened tentacle dangling against the nape of his chin as he reached downward for one more glass of warmed oriental beer, some slightest chance at carnal reconciliation and whoever might have thought that such an official type could have necessarily been too starved or too depraved to consider just about anything else, some going off and going off again throughout entire moments while again knowing all too well that she might have been the one who might have been able to give him and then standing plaintively on some subway platform with her looking behind at some older more noteworthy gentleman, sitting cock-kneed against the back of some steely bench upright and ne'er giving any thought to the feast which might have been coming his way. Some returning to the spectacle which would continue to grace his dish, now some more completed gesture of relief as the warmed oriental beer trickled down the back of his throat and he glancing downward as Nick went noticing of some subtler bed of rice which would have encouraged even that most squeamish of incidental connoisseur. Some once more, some continued piercing of the greyish mucous which did seem to persist all the while. Some slimier mass sliding upwards along a chosen track, some looking forward to another's quicker digestion and knowing all too well that such cuisine could have only benefited from the locale in which it had been served. The waiting had indeed become unbearable. Some tending now toward deception as the only way out and noticing that the fan above Nick's head had begun to rotate at some more deafening pitch. Some deception as to the better manner in which to survive all the pains and debilities which Nick was made to suffer at the obvious comparison with Xiaoling and that friend of hers who -- not unlike those other *wài guó rén* -- had so quickly sought refuge beneath one of so much more honored oriental descent. Indeed, he would neither be surprised if the two had been setting about within some more-than-platonic tryst, some awakening newly to practices previously scorned. Some deception would seem to become the only recourse in which Nick could confide and the waiting had begun to grow immeasurably intolerable. The official had by now placed his utensil delicately beneath one more succulent mass and thrusting upwards toward some more ravenous consumption, some accompanying grain of rice barely teetering along the edge as it were, and disappearing uneasily into the mouth of he who might have tended to such daily tasks of incrimination justly served. And why should he not? For when all was said and done, he too could have very well become caught up in such ne'er enlivening fare, some being devoured whole by the whimmish devaluation of civil society and reluctantly waving to Xiaoling -- and that friend of hers-- as he would be drawn away towards some more unseemly incarceration. Nick kept a keen eye on the thinnish waiter as he once more approached this judicious guest, now with some apportioned silvered platter upon which sat some blackened mass, some otherwise escargot and still painfully unknowing of just how much longer this incessant interlude were to continue. Nick shifted uncomfortably within his own as he watched the man devour some jellied slime one after another, some delicate foreplay tickling at each of the tinier shells which passed on through his steadier hand crawling further upwards, some afterlife reaching barely upon the tips of his fingers or just prior to some somewhat completer submission. And yet such fare could have never been prepared upon the banks of the Xi Jiang, nor could it have ever made its more slightly acrid ascent into the thoughts of whomever would have been imposed upon in those final moments before turning westward around the bluff. Alight now, for any moments turn could alter and think carefully about why one is sitting in this place.

“ Why he get so many things? I here first! *Wèi hé* ... “

Before Nick could manage one more utterance the thinnish waiter appeared from nowhere and placing some piping hot tray gingerly upon the table in front of him. Then looking over his shoulder for some more reassuring gesture from the younger couple -- who could not have become so much more intimately involved -- and endeavouring at last to appraise that pleasure into which he had ne'er before thought to pry. Some more antiquesounding box beginning to herald somewhat more loudly from a recess just outside the kitchen to which Nick's big dummy had retreated for yet one more greying fibreglass cask of utensils and some one more looking back over at the younger couple before wondering as to the manner in which he could indulge himself into this sprawling morsel which now lay before him. Or within some other manner which would have been hitherto unappreciated even by he, or Xiaoling as in some circumstance long gone by. Some chance forsaken and determined not to let it happen again. As if seeking permission from the younger couple in closer embrace he hesitated before picking up his chopsticks for some go of it. Some lingering over this rising aroma sweetly but not too much so, some glistening brownly tinted glaze did treat ones eyes to its most innocuous feast, as yet some other long lost remuneration for this broken life and upon which his father would be all too keen on surrendering. It raised fairly enough, up towards some boyish lips and did it keep from falling back onto the plate from which it was stolen. Some slower than usual penetration into that carnivorous cavern which did teem with some over abiding sensibility now duly awarded and Nick began to more easily remind himself of those slightlier chores toward which he had still to alight. Some more mundane assumption that he might be doing this for the rest of his life, some generational abyss caught up within and ne'er knowing just how to call out and earn himself what little respect and lifelong retrieval he could muster. Some flesh savoured appeared to lack the humility he had expected, and he at once turned toward the waiter in some more inquisitional way, some calling out to anyone who might possibly be able to enhance this most deafening of experiences which was tending to devour him day by day.

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“*Gèng chá,*” requested Nick.

The thinnish waiter at first hesitated in replying. Chinese with Chinese customer and some unavoidable dilemma of entering at all hours with some bring me this or that no matter how one might have been feeling or even slovenly. Some just wanting to retrieve one's tiniest bit of dignity, not slovenly or wanting to be. Some hoping for one last ephemeral notion as to why this had to come about, some never-ending odyssey away from the wellspring of his youth and drawn into some laggard servility as if Chinese with Chinese customer could even begin to requite. The waiter walked back to the kitchen slowly and emerging some moments later with the tea Nick had fancied. Some wondering sympathetically as to why Nick had so carelessly nurtured the entrée away from this unwillingness to imbibe, some proceeding imprudently and without measure. Some unmeasured taking in of this cherished repast did at some turn seem at once too unexpected and too predictable. The younger couple by now had finished their own, some rising jocularly and still inseparable as they hurried through the throng of expectant throng and up toward the pavement. Nick would linger some

moments more in appreciation of this seasoning at long last. Some further sustenance and savoring of the curvaceous morsels which continued to embrace his own tongue. Or was it meant to be so sorely misused? Some staggering months and time of inconsequential fare, one's own lack of piquancy unwillingly and these most exquisite of dishes unbeknownst eternally by those with whom he had always fantasized. Some libidinous appetite, some overly succulent aroma lasting through the darkest of times did never seem to deter the impressionable flavor which had so inculcated on this day. The younger couple would have been just as keen on discovering that neither had Nick been capable of confiding in anyone regarding those things most dear, or that any single person could have at last been able to afford him the time and rationale for perceiving anything other than those provincial dishes which had come to confine him and his entire family. Some sudden wondering now as to whether she had finished the task to which she had committed. Some more high flung ideas regarding what could be won through the procurement of knowledge and skills put upon by teachers and benefactors who had been shown to be nothing but the cruelest and most heartless of scoundrels. Some harder labour governed by the earning from one's own will and need to weather is what she would ultimately learn, as Nick had from his own mentors who were now on the verge of harvesting the benefits which this newer world had promised to extend. Nick placed his chopsticks insistently to the side of his plate now cluttered with various bits and pieces. Some now glancing above at some twelve o'clock then around slower toward three and noticing of some further bit of rice seemingly strewn aside for no other reason. Could Nick's own time here have been so wrought with uselessness? Or might he have better sought some manner of reassuring those possessing of a keener view of his plight? Nick was quickly becoming convinced of his own need for some kinder self-destruction and at once considered reposing within some eternal dream sleepiness. Still he recognized the obligation to abide by those conventions which tended to endure and demurely gestured as if willing enough to be scrutinized for some lack of grander largesse by the thinnish waiter.

“Zhàng dān, qí.”

The waiter was a bit startled at Nick's modesty but nonetheless replied within his own reflection, some having studied and nurtured that tendency to which the more conventional diner had always subscribed. Some unwillingness to admit to any slightest dissatisfaction at that moment of wanting to assess the bill and reflect upon the joylessness which had been unavoidable throughout. Some quicker less carefully planned remark scribbled in haste and not entirely without some veiled insinuation as to the accuracy or not of the note itself. The thinnish waiter handed Nick the bill.

“Have to pay at door,” directed the waiter.

Nick passed gingerly between the thinnish waiter leaving a plastic bowl of dampened aperitif and one more customer who had just entered with a small boy in hand. Some dampened stack of rice noodle aperitifs would adorn most of the tables upon being occupied. Some day-old stack of noodles which Nick had not been presented after all and maybe because of Chinese with Chinese customer. Why no noodle for Chinese customer? thought Nick but decided not to dwell on such a meaningless slight at this point and approached some

antiquated – in his mind – cash register set upon some plate-glass rectangular counter and filled hapahazardly with Lucky Strike and bits of yellowed newspaper. Nick’s glance was initially drawn to a cockroach which seemed to be lost amidst the carton-upon-carton of cigarettes and faded news print. It struggled to claw its way upwards and having evidently spied a path through which to enter the wider confines of the restaurant floor. Some seeking out one’s better survival. Some trying to overreach towards that which might never come to fruition and yet tirelessly so and with added motivation. He reached deftly into the side pocket of his trousers after glancing once more at the bill and while continuing to wallow in the pandemonium of some culinary clutter, some platter still and stiller appearing to mock him from beneath and more imagining of the day he might come with her to this very place, some sitting within hair’s breadth as had the younger couple and pressingly of the warmth which could have only been evoked in the company of another. Nick had left two rather delapidated dollar bills in the midst of some disarray as he rose and not looking back but momentarily reconsidering whether the service had been more to his liking but then decidedly, some diminishing sense of remorse having been beginning to be overrun by some other source of self-satisfaction and he felt confident once more. He inquisitively asked the cashier -- some generic type spectacled and ne’er bothering to glance at whom would be considering such a chore -- as to the whereabouts of his supposed destination.

“Dumpling house upstairs? asked Nick as he handed over a twenty-dollar note.

In an instant the portlier waiter brushed behind him and some ongoing ballet between the two threatened to once again interrupt the narrative that he had set out to interpret on this of all days. Then picking up some utensil which had fallen to the checkered floor with some steely sound, returning it to the waiter and feeling embarrassed unexpectedly. Some glint of fading satisfaction in the waiter’s eye. Some years and more so of service to this noble undertaking. Some enterprise placed within this neighborhood and within this street of bustling endeavor which had been birthered by some lingering need to flee. The cashier said nothing and neither indicative of whether he had heard or listened to anything that Nick had been insisting upon. Some more careful scrutiny of the note did seem to suffice, some going about one’s own less pleasant routine daily and seeming to be wholly incognizant of Nick’s desire for total momentary peace of mind.

“¿Páo de tuán shàng dì?”

Some repetition of his request for information – Chinese with Chinese customer -- simply reinforced his commitment to remaining true to his family’s dedication to excellence. Some nobler commitment to best catering. Some time spent enjoying his lunch had thankfully distracted Nick and some earlier evening deadline which his father had laid out would surely go unmet. There had been no inclination toward any hint or reply by the cashier. Nick would presume that the man were either deaf or illiterate in either language, some curiousness considering the weightier task with which the man had been entrusted.

“¿PÁO DE TUÁN SHÀNG DÌ?... Hey, man! No speak Chinese or what?”

“Shàng dì, shàng dì,” replied the man.

Nick was by now unsure of why he had even felt the need to inquire. Perhaps some impending fascination with wanting to see the man put into some less-than-enviable predicament. Some television then blaring from a higher place and Nick glancing upwards at some black-and-white screen, some taller more eloquently bedecked gentleman sounding out news and information and no-one wishing to take notice or even acknowledge the gravity of anything being heard. Some more dominating figure and drawing some starker contrast to the ever-fading presence of the cashier. Then some more hurried change from the twenty-dollar note which Nick had furnished the cashier as he began to head stealthily toward the door and back up towards the street. Some contrast which the late afternoon light presented against the artificial umbra of the restaurant below momentarily confused and his glance skirted unexpectedly upwards towards a bell alighting motionless in the church tower adjacent to building in which he were to enter. Some eager population now passing swiftly to his right and to his left tended to dissuade him from his perceived path. His gait went somewhat tortured as he approached his mark, some rusted iron door seemingly to dissuade any of the general public from entering. Forbidding and starkly reminiscent of a film he had once watched in horror, some deranged figure masked and bearing down upon his innocent victim only to be snatched into the breach and never to be seen again. Nick entered the doorway rather quickly. Some more overblown reflection of the things which had or would come to pass never materialized, and thoughts which had sustained him throughout his unexpected repast seemed now to guide him up along some narrower staircase. Some tattered textile carpeting insisted and the dust seemed to choke Nick as he climbed to the second floor. One then two stairs at a time and Nick would be quick to arrive to the top of the landing. His thoughts went quickly to the worst of what could come to pass on his journey back to Sunset Park. Some more feinted idea of returning to Houston Street succumbed quickly beneath the burden of having to forgo the luxury of the same type of meandering which so pleased Nick on his way downtown. Some lower-toned rustle of plastic bags and muted machinery urged Nick on through some peeling wooden door, an empty space where the door handle had once fit winked as its light shone like a lantern into the dank surroundings of the staircase. He struggled to recall the exact quantity of dumplings which his father had requested as he passed into what may have become his ultimate destination. He was alone. Except for some busier type filling plastic bags with the delicate morsels, and another more surrendering figure seemingly categorizing the finished packages into some enormous walk-in freezer which lie just to the left and immediately welcoming of his recent entry.

“*¿Duō shao?*” asked the diligent man barely glancing at Nick.

Nick had difficulty understanding why he was continuing to feel so alone. Some ephemeral glimpse of space and time also puzzling. Some coldness bearing down and seeming to mirror the enormous freezer which would have been so sure to provide some sense of satisfaction regarding his father’s willingness to seek goods and services beyond the usual bounds of his Sunset Park environs.

“Five bag,” Nick blurted out.

His father could only offer some assessment based on how often the restaurant seemed to be in need. To Nick it was hardly worth the effort of knowing or not knowing anything about his father's clientele and he held out steadily towards the notion that all was starting to prove too futile to ultimately ignore. Some lying next to Xiaoling had never ceased to invade his every waking moment -- never over there! -- and some mutual need for one's closer presence, some nagging ache from beneath remindingly of the pain which would endure should he not at least make some worthy attempt. Or perhaps to assert some long-overdue sense of independence which had gone missing since bidding adieu to the shores of Fujian. Now Nick began to indulge freely into some Kubrick-esque intrigue which were sure to awaken him from this slumber within which his existence seemed to have been languishing. Some garnered enchantment which had sadly gone for naught suddenly cast itself as some beautiful woman whose seduction was complete yet had withered rather quickly beneath the burdensome imposition of some lesser task. Some lesser task borne of some still lesser one and suddenly startled by the realization that all had been lost and why should anything be nurtured or taken to task or become the object of beauty itself? Or sought? Once presented with the bags of dumplings which he at last found himself to be on the verge of acquiring Nick might consider reformulating to his own agenda for the rest of the afternoon into evening. Some heading uptown. Some going off and wandering, at last, would become his once-ridiculed sense of mission. Then some depression was beginning to set upon Nick and he attempted to speed his journey.

“ ¿Wèn tí?”

The man behind the counter assured of there being no problem, and that Nick should have his order in just another two or three minutes. Some more modest transistor radio from above and bleeding some monoaural creed into the factory, some island held on to and cherished before it could banish one forever into life's abysmal cycle of error and regret. He might just walk up and over to the Grand Street station, catch a D train uptown and seek out some newer prospects along the sidewalks of Harlem. One of his friends had often told him of a bodega his cousin ran on Cathedral Parkway and Nick might be quick to enter upon some more sordid business negotiation which would have been too pedestrian to but consider in some other borough. Some Sunset Park sunrise would always transpire in the shadow of this Manhattan maze, some cavernous milky flow of ambition mocking all there would be resting on either side, some northward then back again retreat putting off the daily commute which would have been his daily chore, some worthy undertaking should he decide to press on with his studies as Xiaoling had suggested. The fifth bag was now prepared and Nick was quick to reach into his pocket for the money his father had sent him off with.

“Five bag... thirty dollar twenty-five cent,” remarked the man as he placed Nick's request on the counter.

Nick could barely produce thirty dollars. Some lack of foresight had typically been his since being brought over, and the time he had spent downstairs only reinforced some glaring recognition that one more roasted feast should have never taken place.

“*Bù guò èr shí wǔ,*” remarked Nick.

“*Sān shí èr shí wǔ* ...thirty dollar twenty-five cent, “insisted the man.

Big dummy can't see I aint got thirty dollar twenty-five cent. What he want me to do, anyway? Only take four bag.

“*Bù guò cǎi mǎi sì.* Only take four bag, then.”

“*¡Zhì zuò tè dìng!*” the man snapped back.

What he mean 'made special'? What so special about pork dumpling, anyway?

“*Bù guò cǎi mǎi sì.* Just four bag,” insisted Nick.

Some barking seemed oddly foreign even to Nick, and notwithstanding that it was in his native tongue. Some psychological misfire must have been brewing since the first mono blast having pierced the finer regions of his brain with thoughts regressing to the roasted bird he had just disposed of, some sweetest couple going on even further in mutual consumption before his very eyes as his own cock pressed longingly and lapping the tangy juice which made its way slowly down the side of one's cheek and now seeming to

“*¡Zhì zuò tè dìng!*” the man repeated.

Nick's gaze began to go somewhat receding as the man's voice seemed to trail off into some faintest oblivion and he spied some metal lamp off to the side and just out of reach. Its light shone wantonly through some blackened soot which coated the light bulb, some shadow it cast upon the man and his wholesale produce now threatening to Nick as his own field of vision went more tapered still. Some sudden wondering as to why he should even bother to give this man the money he had been owed, some conquering notion run through his mind concerning how it could be better spent and without abandoning unnecessarily the mission to which he had committed on this day. Some *only fresh dumpling* would still find its path forward and his glance once more directed to the metal lamp structure now daring Nick to act at once. Some self-esteem now crumbling before him and falling through the scum-riddled cracks of this very existence which would have proved to be too unsavory in any case. Some stupid man filling bags for the very scoundrels and representing the oppressors of purity and personality which were meant to flower from the moment of one's own virgin birth. Now would have been the only time for acting, some action predicated upon the savage within. Some primordial need for self-assertion and turning back some depreciation and ridicule which had been dumped upon us by the ignorant, unknowing Cretans whose only hope it could have been to vegetate as father and son. Nick reached for the metal lamp and raised it high above his head. The lamp cord seemed to shoot from the wall socket in an instant, and he startled the man less with his unwavering demeanor than by some clipping sound emanating from somewhere beneath the man's feet. Then thrusting downward sent the cold steel piercing through Nick's right arm and the prospect of buckled flesh and bone went

wholly unheeded. Some self-satisfying need to thrill and be thrilled by the taking of a life which had gone so mockingly of his own and for far too long. The blight of Nick's rage had all but blinded him to the fact that the diligent man had apparently finished his chore and had left the room. Or had he? Nick searched in back of the counter and off to the left as some steady stream of crimson ebbed politely from the sunken wellspring which now lay motionless against the decaying wooden floor. Some more discordant shades of gray and blue as it did appear to Nick, then turning away in disgust as he had done on that more fetid journey from the shores of Fujian and beyond. Nick succumbed to the thought that the second man had indeed left the building. Some receding shadow having been revealed, some bit of orange tint smeared across a triangular piece of ceiling just above the frosted window opened upward and Nick discounted the notion that this could have been his undoing in quick retreat. He snatched the bag from the counter, along with one of the ten-dollar notes he had offered as some initial remuneration. Could he have at that instant altered the course of events which were to dictate the time he had left? Or should he? Nick inched his way slowly through the doorway and down the dusty staircase along which he had come some minutes ago.

Some sudden sense of disbelief surrounded Nick as he made his way along Mott Street and back towards Canal. Some unforgiving tide of people and belongings frustrating his urgent need to get ahead, some thinking back to his father's entreaty and what had become of it, or not. Now the second man would once again come to mind and he wondered if perhaps he hadn't been noticed after all, some spying a reddened drop on his sleeve and still others on the bags he had snatched away in those waning moments. Nick had never thought himself capable of perpetuating such a barbaric deed, some wondering out loud as to what could have brought on such a tirade as his feet began to carry him even more quickly toward his destination. But where could that be now? And why? The prospect of being able to somehow lengthen what had begun as some more precious time away was fast degenerating into something unwhole, some unreasoned escapade for which he could only feel some gnawing sense of panic churning from within some burning sensation in his upper chest. *What he mean 'made special'?* For Nick had so often resented some declaration offered entirely without base, some sole intention to injure and debase notwithstanding and devoid of even some slightest attempt at gentler intuition. Some quickest check of that workspace just off to the left of the cold chamber had not betrayed even some slightest hint that some second man were anywhere to be found. Still Nick hadn't even bothered to consider that they might have gone lingering in some otherwise non-designated workspace, some midday recreation or merely enjoying a fag out back. The noise -- while not unduly calling -- would have been enough for some sudden looking on, and as Nick had been temporarily incapacitated for fear of being discovered he could have conceivably overlooked some tell-tale notice with which to be found out. Nick briefly considered returning but found himself at odds with the notion that any such digression could be of any use. Any second man could be long gone by now, well on his way to letting everything on to the authorities and Nick became unduly anxious at the thought that he were to become the first at undoing all that had been accomplished by his predecessors and those others who had been struggling under the yoke since arriving from the shores of Fujian. Some lesser-than-fantastic look at reality as it were meant to be, although some pitifully looking over suddenly seemed to Nick as a ghost whose never-ending lack of mercy would torture until some final hurrah. *¡Nian nian!* Marinade too sticky. Some final resting place nestled between someone's rotted corpse and his own attempt at final jubilation, some better-than-unknown insignificance littering alleys already strewn with urine and

broken glass and not unfit to reign as some final perverse altar to Nick's own twisted sense of just advancement. *¡Nian nian!* Then making his way back onto Canal – but why should he be so determined to turn left when some newly honed idea would have him channeling his few remaining hours onto some other venue? Some orientation better chosen and more to his liking? Some staring up at the sky into some space and time, Nick's sudden dizziness began to overcome him, unproductively whereas some sweet perfume overwhelming from behind had seemed to suddenly leave his emotions at bay, some longing futility seeming to blunt his senses with every other essence that went filtering through his nose and mouth. Just one more instance of carnal dispute would remand Nick and those around him to some eternal remorse and puzzlement as he sensed some softest piece of flesh pushing up against his back and... oh... some softest reminder of the idea which he had once prized as his own and never-ending thoughts recurring of Xiaoling and then some scent growing stronger as she moved away... *bitchbitchbitchbitch...* and Renhan Lin could have only realized the senselessness of it all. Something almost reaching down as a reflex while the traffic lights went changing and the crowd seeming to sweep Nick onto some brighter path. Some brighter path struggling to offer itself and without this ongoing, unforgiving paranoia of why and when his most recent act of cruelty had probably crippled him for good, some memory imprisoned in the haphazard awakening of his own twisted sense of moral justice, some upbringing wholly lacking and punishing for no reason other than to humiliate in disguise of one's own certain absence of intelligence or *cojones* as the Mexicanos liked to say. Some languishing here and there and with some softest awaiting perhaps no-one had seen him at all perhaps all would become keener as some uptown excursion began telling of its own more proper course, perhaps going perhaps coming closer now with some better compulsion driving him forwards, some better obsession to consider as Nick's feet seemed to become more and more reluctant to carry him along. Then seemingly more and more senseless while looking back at the beauty which had always been his – in his mind -- and almost slowing to some deadening pace what with the prospect of his being found out and becoming encaged so unceremoniously within this existential disarray. Some nihilistic nightmare pursuing and still willing to pursue within some futuristic abyss, some thinking obsessively. *Never over there!* Nick turning to see if he might find her again but something less puerile had come to assert itself as the multitude refused to part. He struggled to maintain some finer course as Hester St. would go completely unnoticed by Nick. Some walking north along edges in definition of one more curious sense of vanity and borderline sanity on the other side. Some slivering pool of blood red had threatened to stain the sole of Nick's shoe but had enabled him to remain calm and lucid even as he wondered who might be watching him deliver that fatal blow and insisitng on getting on with it in any case as getting away cleanly could be the only result one should tolerate. Some instantaneous lack of vision would momentarily mask Nick and imprison within the confines of some more animalistic urge, some primordial necessity to feel one's own rising swell reaching high above his head as the act was being committed. Some descending onto non-encrypted flesh and bone and quite unabashed for anyone who might care to witness or adore, some rapture intertwining passion let loose and Nick could only delight in the evening which had at long last become his, some later afternoon quickly descending into this blackened vacuum of piss and vomit which were sure to make up the better part of the little time he might have to enjoy. Forever. Night. Some eternal dream sleep comforting even those least comforted and ne'er acknowledging some superstition meant to soothe the muted populace which Nick had always held in such low regard. Some blackening sky now appeared

to descend upon as he veered off towards the Bowery, some darkening vacuum pulling Nick forwards, some seeming rendering away from the Netherlands and towards all that he and Xiaoling and Rehan Lin and Kanh Boi would ever need in their final quest and here in these final moments. Some stench would lead Nick up along the decrepit boulevard and ending at last beneath the smothering promise of Delancey, for it was here that the intellegensia seemed to gather and spit upon the perversion which had been promised them by a society too quick to condemn, too unwilling to offer some gratitude rightly earned and just and thankless disregard overwhelmed by those properly taught. Nick kicked and dragged his feet suddenly, as if his limbs had begun to desert him in this time of want. Some time and lack of physical stamina which had usually been to the dislike of Xiaoling -- or so he thought -- now calling upon all he could so that those finer arches of mid-city sky would soon crumble down upon him without mercy, some merciless raking over for the fool he had become, some pitiful shade of what once was, refrains of Amsterdam which he had all but listened to in some post-pubescent dream as it were. Some passing of broken bus stop facades now appeared to Nick as some altars set apart one after the other, some shrines onto which he could only look back with remorse for the lack of foresight which had been his from the start — *what he mean 'made special'*? Nothing had ever been so special for Nick since arriving to this so-called newer world, some finer notion of what his existence might have been like, some alighting beneath the branches of the tallow and reclining in calmest delight within some gentler breeze cooling the furrowed banks of the Xi Jiang. Faces and expression became threatening to Nick. Some passing by at arms length sent feelings of panic through his increasingly bitter soul, some suddenly overcast sky turning over and over and sprawling nimbostratum beginning to unravel to the east, some unfurling to the west and would go unnoticed by Nick so long as he remained preoccupied with the notion that all were to result in some crashing end. Sweeter reminiscences of some saviier Jew reclining and working the pulley, then glancing over his shoulder as just five more ounces would spin out some further unintended torque. Nick would be sure to feel amiss at no longer being able to admire the low grey ceiling which seemed to protect some jagged skyline as he looked off from the 49th Street pier, and never imagining that one day – albeit his last -- would have him partaking of this moveable feast so readily, for even if he hadn't gone wholly unnoticed what good could come of his repenting now? What could possibly come of his mentioning some long-hidden desperation, some crying out for relief now that he had become aware of the drudgery which would have had to be endured? Some following some sweetest form through the streets of Chelsea, hungering and deafening for some warmth all brought on in spite of themselves reaching down and wondering if it ever should become so. Some delirium, some child whirling and dancing in front of Nick spoke to the desire which he had lately been acquiring, pressing hard into the waste bin which some demented tart had left undone, some opening and free to Nick for that which he had always promised himself from the start. Nick started wandering again as Houston came into view, some moving more quickly towards and further but where to now? And why? Nick understood that he could never return. Some eternal condemnation into some meaningless purgatorial brigade, some marching back to and fro within some timeless conundrum. On and on he would continue day after day, year upon year and without vision into some hypothetical middle-age and beyond. Then some old man passing at arms length speaking rudely at two young children who seemed to be mocking him in another dialect, some more foreign expression of what one would enjoy to be saying but were otherwise too obedient to react. Some more foolish and moronic fare masquerading as parental advantage, only to be

uncovered in one's later years when all were too late for adequate reexamination. Some darker sky seemingly and raining down on, some skating through opened puddles having invited him to this once festering feast of light and culture. Some sudden rush of sirens at once maddened Nick and he felt some tension gnawing from deep inside. Some sharper deafening commotion as one's sudden call to judgement in defense of order and societal submission came in pursuance as he hid inexplicably within some fraying grey portal present with the smell of rotting food and vermin, all to the surprise of his once optimistic sense of calm and relief. Some reminding of those certain salubrious callings from Dong Er to fulfill some aching want from deep within, girlish and newly tallowed fruit offered unashamedly and Nick sinking lowly into the love of Dong Er, some sounder sustenance through the most difficult of moments and never being able to understand the mistreatment she would have had to endure at the whims of those other girls. Some lowly and lowlier until the nape of his neck could hardly withstand the lightly perfumed fold within which he attempted to repose. Some slighted nectar fit to act as glorified potion and sipping from the fleshened chalice which she had chosen to bequeath him. Some siren rush grew louder and he sank more deeply into the moistened portal as some surging paranoia could only play itself out in a more grotesque way. Images of headless creatures in fornicate rapture shuffling their feet against the bones of some ageless muse defecating passionately and some tidal rush of earnest expression beginning to cast palls over the spectacle within which Nick had become consumed. Now Astor looming larger and thinking forwardly to some refreshingly keener turn onto the crosstown and up to Chelsea. Some approach and keener escape out of the dust and pity onto Astor and Nick became completely unsure of the geography he had since set out to conquer, some shiveringly pathetic oversight imbibing his mind with thoughts of microform paranoia, some blood-spattered reminiscence torturing his quickening gait.

“Hey, watch where goin’, man!”

The bundle had fallen precipitously to the pavement, then some reconsidering of what could have been the reason for plummeting into this lingering nightmare. He left the bundle where it had fallen but momentarily, some more perverse awareness having overtaken him and he picked it up, only to discard it at the next waste bin. *Only fresh dumpling* he say. What now? Only time to think about some more frightening pursuit, some more acuminous blade forever hovering above his head and charting his every move from here on in. At no time could Nick desist in his fear that the act he had committed not thirty minutes ago would set him upon some potentially self-consuming course from which he could never abscond. He crossed over to the north side of the street and eagerly peered ahead in hope of finding some sign, some modicum of encouragement from the distance he had still to traverse. Soon he would again be on Broadway, and the haunting notion of turning back drove him to curse his fortune aloud, some startling those passers-by who would have entered his path, some delirium beginning to awaken Nick from the darkening slumber which must have overcome him. Once again he would become lost within some sobering prospect of sleep eternal, and he could not resist some furtherer temptation to curse his fate. Everyone had forever been treating Nick's confusion as some purely academic exercise. Some turning on lemmas and theorems for their own sake, and never considering that the contempt he harbored for himself within this newer world existence could eventually culminate in some act of barbarism for which he felt not even the slightest bit of remorse. Some act committed wholly out of circumstance. Some

circumstance wholly out of his control and not warranting of any further initiative other than to continue on with this futile journey, some underlying sense of non-humanity for a start. Climbing measuredly up some steeper earthened path towards some ultimate futility and culminating in the atrocity which had become as if some rapturous rush of unspoken desire had rendered him completely powerless. Some uncalculated academic exercise with Nick moving on, and moving more quickly as if he might ever indeed return at his appointed hour. Some hair salon shops sleeker cosmopolitan chic grasping the corner of his eye as his approach to Lower Broadway loomed larger with each step and wondering as to which path he would choose upon his arrival. Nick sensed the urgency of unawareness at his back and was disinclined to consider any ongoing lack of foresight which had highlighted his very existence since entering the High School. He quickly shed any thought of turning back down towards the Canal St. Station and instead took as his objective some candy shop on the corner of Astor and Broadway, as if some such place were indeed to exist in his lonered idea of what was meant to be and what was not. Some littler ones jumping for joy over bits of sugared treats smearing their devilish faces, sounds registered as if some shriller orgasm from birth leaning over to tidy their widened smiles of delight. Some going on and further and wanting to place Xiaoling within his reach as he proceeded without caution. Dong Er had been his only retreat -- he had thought at one point -- and somehow managed to kiss her determinedly on some newly camphored pair of lips one morning within some dream of yet one more opportunity lost. Some newer world offering begging Nick to prepare for himself some bed of fortune onto which some future could be secured, some prospect bettered and indigence permanently staved off regardless of how poorly his father's restaurant were to be deemed. Nick would be forever to feel the crashing of his own family's lament, some remorseless ridicule heaped upon Nick by their neverending torment, some Nick the sissyboy for choosing to engage in the less-than-palatable manners and wayfore, habits and far-removed traditions of Fujian still seeking to suck the lifeblood from their tired souls. Now doomed to spend the rest of his young life -- and beyond? -- scraping the scum off this filtered façade and seeking solace in the anonymous sexual favors which he himself had been put onto by the likes of Renhan Lin and those other ponies who would congregate at the main gate to the High School courtyard each morning. *Only fresh dumpling* he say. Some paranoia again beginning to overcome Nick as dampened pavement appeared to leap up at him in some reddened splatter. *What he mean 'made special'?* Some sirens again taunting Nick with their melancholic melody, some attesting to the fact that the second man had not indeed left the floor but continued to cower in some darkened corner as Nick's confusion blinded and proceeded along its self-destructive course. What could he have been thinking at that very moment? What demons might those horrifying noises have conjured in his still peasantly state of mind, wincing in fear with every self-gratifying gesture which Nick had brought to bear upon. Some widening plague spreading stench over the plains of Fujian and beyond, friends and relatives succumbing to some final throes and leaving one to persevere in deference to some death mask which stared in determination and despair. Some of what could possibly be lost now that Xiaoling had spurned his advances and left any hope he would have remaining to the prospect of enticing Dong Er into his very own sphere of sick seduction. Some falling down into the love of Dong Er and whimpering within some velvet silence as the aroma of freshly fallen seed would go radiating into the passages of his now tiring sense of smell and touch. Some longer and larger vacillation over saddened and wet, some meaning for shielding Dong Er from some sinuous reach of the momentary master, groping for some thunderous ovation as it were and unawares of just how poorly the girl must

have felt upon learning of her family's intentions. Nick took some decided turn uptown and began to cherish the newfound freedom which was sure to lead him to his final resting place. His footsteps had become laden one after the other, some thinking back to the nightmare into which he had hurled himself some years ago. Some inescapable conundrum of self-abuse and want of endless portraits daily taunting him with youth and inexpressible beauty never becoming his. Some sleeker line tempting him beneath airs of uselessness, now with shop windows counting off one after the other and one after the other walking on quickly toward some final curtain. Some obsessing over menial transactions meant to pave the way through this tired journey and *why no speak English anyway. Only Chinese with Chinese customer.* Some still obsession went relaxingly as the latter portion of his subconscious seemed to achieve some state of trance into which he bathed and re-examining each laden drop as a light rain began to settle upon him and all that were soon to become Nick's own resting place, some ideas and thoughts which had been tormenting Nick becoming more and more relentless and chafing at Nick in the most insidious way. It might have come as some relief that the past which he had so long endeavored to forget should get caught up in this incessant madness, or might it have been merely the notion that he should succumb to the nagging realization that the second man had indeed been present and knowingly of the sacrificial slaughter which he had perpetuated on the workshop attendant. Some alarm sounding maddeningly in his head rushing forth to the Flatiron structure which had now just come into view, bustling multitudes probably easing away from some lifelong profession meant to soothe and benefit no-one but the very ponderance of a life too slowly to achieve, some forthcoming sense of security overlooking some sprawling plain of monotony and boredom stretching into middle age and beyond. Nick spotted two street musicians sitting in some doorway and as if guided by some other time — one lone musician sitting crossed-legged, speaking without making noise only thinly veiled untempered threads of some far off eastern refrain — two lone musicians sitting cross-legged in some parallel play conversing in untempered threads of some far off eastern refrain to which Nick could only pause and reflect, some inability to continue on intentionally until Nick could only consider pausing and reflecting upon what had been his singular task having gone askew.

“Want money or what?” asked Nick.

The young men simply continued playing with little or no attention paid to Nick. At a moment they seemed to look right through him, as if his soul had already begun its slow transformation into oblivion. Some threads of far-off Eastern sound calling forth his sensuality and imminent demise at once. Nick moving on into some more hurried motion while trying to forget the past, some sensuality now seeming to have ebbed away slowly as the avenue came into view and Nick could only affix his imagination remittently upon the transcendency of his ultimate destination, that place whereby he would have once felt some overwhelming calm, some long ago sense that all might be right again. Some reincarnation of this youthful agnosticism which may have converted into some jaded author pounding keys as some digital diatribe, all the while crying in somber tones of regret and missed passage. Some Sixth Avenue would come into view and he would turn north and begin to warm himself with musings of the peace which was to await, some delicate life ether running off into the sodden estuaries which had come to play host to centuries and millenniums of some intellectual waste. Tired and sodden souls marrying within some besieged state, excitedly and

turgid feelingly of some softer enthusiast, feelingly of some softer and more constricted state of want within some higher flying ménage, envious of some fairer blonde vision drawing nearer and nearer till ne'er some milder remuneration could convince one of its lesser minded intentions, touching beneath and unknowing of the pleasure which were to consume. Some fondling lonelier pillars of wrath and remorse did bring Nick's back to notions of her and her alone. Now passing by some reeking enclaves where those most reviled would hold their nightly rituals, some peeing along lying half-corpses who had once become aware of all there was to be and not, some family rooted slipping through the begotten grains of time and whose despair at realizing such would make all but the most inefficient of vices seem remote. Silence succumbed as the Priest tried to appreciate the piece of fruit perched so squarely atop his wife's head— *bang* — then the Priest retained his purest of motives and went on to complete some tenderest farewell of the woman who had robbed him of his now-mangled seed. Some long ago and having to suffer the verbal barb from generations past, now faced with the ubiquitous fortune of needing to deal with the same from beneath, some aching arrogance weaning the life blood. Some weaning of a spirit which had been lost long ago. Nick marched on. He marched on as if wondering how he could ever overcome the not-so-latent guilt he had felt upon wrenching downwards onto the unknowing soul who was only performing his daily contrition after all.

Then silence suddenly suffocating Nick made for one last dash toward the shore which continued to cloud his waking memory. Rising swiftly out of some confused yearnings of his imagination and now seeming to go off into the sunset unamused. Some going off into another realm yet into another eternity and barely capable of lifting his feet further, some pair of centimeters above the pavement seeming to Nick as the chore which he would never be capable of completeing. It had been some two hours now and he began to feel the weight of his inexcusable deed confronting and taunting him, in some mocking tone as if wondering whether his time had come at last. Indeed it had, and he moved more swiftly toward the subway entrance which shone like a much needed portal, confident and willing to succumb to the very fate which he had been pondering for so long. Renhan Lin was right — *bitchbitchbitchbitchbitch* — run down now onto some steely surface. Feel some cold severing and shearing as he had at the dumpling house. Just vengeance. For Nick the only consolation would be eternal peace as he disappeared once and for all down the darkened stairway.
