

- El Patio Moro -

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Jim seemed somewhat puzzled. He glanced upwards and peered painstakingly at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to departure but he sensed something else. Something oddly stealing his glance toward the right side suddenly confused -- as if it were his intention all along to prolong this most unforgiving of daily exercises. He had awoken with some nagging headache. He missed the first train and had sat staring at the platform for some length of time. All the while holding some tattered paperback in his right hand. A worn brown leather bag leaning precariously against his leg. Notebooks, devices, assorted cables and what not. The underground tracks seemed to converge. Their parallel play in fact seemed to rest on the notion that all would be okay. But it would still be some fifteen minutes before his train made its way into the station and he raised the paperback to almost eye level. Then having been surprised by some rather large suitcase being led along the platform. It passed just in front and with barely a notice of some human being guiding its path. Some useless exercise brought on by the perceived need to visit old friends or perhaps the promise of some new acquaintance. Only to be disillusioned in the end, never knowing where or how to continue on with this nagging fantasy of misplaced affection. Damned devotion. The train then approaching in the opposite direction seemed to rattle the growing number of commuters to his right and to his left suddenly having manifested themselves to Jim. Startled and hopeless wishing for any prompt arrival and most simply going about their early morning business. Staring ahead to some now slowing motion of the retrograde carriages or checking on telephones for messages or photos missed or ignored. Jim expected his own train to pull into the station at any moment. He glanced at his wristwatch but was quickly distracted by some faraway sound seeming to reverberate from opposite and across and had brought to mind some earliest days of his adolescence. Some towering ecclesiastical figure bellowing out rules and formulas regarding times and spaces, velocities misconceived or unpredicted until pen and paper could allow one to abide them properly. Witnesses to some yet lingering notion of the saving Christ, eventual apostates to the Holy Order. Jim attempted to mark the time it took for the echo produced by cold steel on steel to reach him but the exercise seemed futile. And so his train did indeed arrive and Jim squeezed into the morning throng. He immediately noticed some untidier gentleman staring blankly -- and somewhat mindlessly he thought -- at a telephone. He held it barely two inches from his face. Another surveyed the sprawling mass from above. Some tired-looking women leaned into his embarrassingly jilted frame. The man's coat now rumpled had begun to play tricks on Jim and he imagined some ancient cluster of Roman brides offering themselves in wanton delight to a somewhat lurid but nonetheless abiding Caesar. Morning ladies tapping on their keyboards did not always reveal some finer intellect. Some played games and some read from tales cherished. Most simply moved a tepid gaze over the words and barely gave thought to the actual message in what was on the page. The subway car's to and fro caused many at times to search frantically for something to grasp on to. Others utilized it to rouse their half-hearted spirits. Early morning travel never wholly appealed to Jim. The Head of Studies had posted him to early morning classes at the Royal Guard. He had never asked for the assignment nor would he. The throng -- *la manada* is how they referred to it in the Spanish language -- jolted backwards every time the train stopped. Some kaleidoscope suddenly in arrest and in odd unison. Stopping. Stopping. Stopped. This would

have been at stations under normal circumstances. Unsuspecting riders were commonly taken advantage of at this time of the day and poor stewardship of the train often resulted in an inordinate number of delays. Voices could be heard above the din. Notices of breakdowns and other assorted mishaps annoyed the daily clientele. Special sounds would occasionally make their way into Jim's *entorno*. Some of these were simply adjunct to the environment around him. Others recalled those more highly tempered noises brought back to him from his youth. He had come to bemoan some overabundance of musical formation in his days as a student at the City College of New York. He did realize that years in passing were not always true to one's own original intent. But language learning also seemed to require some more humanistic skill. The City College was long known for its churning out scientists and engineers, doctors and theoreticians and the musical arts had rather been an added appendage to the somewhat staid curriculum. It seemed to acquire much the same non-humanistic flavor nevertheless. Then riding the Lexington Avenue northbound and past one's destination to almost Amsterdam would come round full circle to the place of his own endowment. He often sat for hours listening to the dearest voices. It was a time gone by but still being. Flutes and rapturous voice rising slowly would endure until the stylus reached the end of that infinite spiral. Jim would return it to its outermost edge and minutes turned into hours and he would usually arrive late for his next class. He would sit staring at the clock on the library wall just above the librarian's mantel. Stark and unforgiving as its second hand ticked off the spending moments of his youth. Such was the one to take hold of, to listen to the maestros and make them his, strings and voices beneath a thunderous ovation of quiet desperation. It would take years and then more years and time to bring to fruition all that he had inherited. Jim's teachers had been amongst the finest. It seemed to Jim that he may have indeed found some proper path. Wary cliffs looking off from the Palisades might be telling of Jim's own dilemma as he approached the completion of this insipid daily pilgrimage. Stepping off onto the subway platform would provide him one last chance for redemption. Climbing upwards on 136th St. and past some cheap urban hotel remindingly of the opportunities which needed to be gotten hold of. Some scarcity of people and ideas, creativity disappearing and taunting Jim did tease one into the confines of what would become some lifelong embrace. Universities trying to find refuge within some past ideal would liken Jim to the very earthen stone from which Amsterdam had been built. Endless sun-filled cover over some hard-pressed curriculum would comfort Jim more than some young lady who might complement the warm spring day into which he had placed all hope. Unable to convince Jim that his was some wayward turn, laying a gentle hand upon his would render him oblivious to all that the real world would eventually refuse to reconcile. She did eventually move on. And sounds and tones inspiringly of some other lost age but now long forgotten could overly extend this purely academic exercise. Jim stepped out and onto the platform. He had been so consumed by thoughts of years surrendered in his mind that he almost missed his stop. It was only due to some sudden tide of fellow travelers pointing his way toward the train car exit that he was able to avoid another inexcusable inconvenience of having to double back at the next station. The escalator seemed to grow narrower and narrower with each passing day. Those on the left moving upwards in more rapid motion never made much sense to Jim. Some rat race never ending and brought to mind how his present position at the academy might very well come crashing down as the others. He had in fact been unceremoniously dismissed from his previous post shortly after learning surreptitiously that it was less of a learning venture than some sordid money laundering scheme. He recalled how

he debated as to whether to pass through the head office in hope of salvaging some of his unpaid monthly wages or simply call it all for a loss. He would often wallow in self-pity and decry the day when he refused to take the advice of a worthy colleague. Stevenson had said that she would just as soon sell her wares *ad hoc* rather than have to put up with those misers up north. They were all just shit according to her and tried to persuade Jim not to stay on any longer after they appointed dragon lady to head the district. But time breeds complacency and such breeds laziness, whereby Jim could not see any point in trying to revive what had died some time ago. A spirit spent through years of personal neglect and unintendedly at that. Going forward every day into what would eventually become some flaccid exercise of body and frame come about, tender findings sometimes alighting beneath some still softer grammar of verbs and phrases mingled hurriedly. Jim would not know what was to be on his headway plate until ascending those dank stairs to street level at which cars and human form became joined in some dreary and time-worn challenge. Did anyone ever manage to get ahead of themselves, wringing hands longingly at first but then lamentingly and not wanting more? Emerging at a difficult place, Jim would usually need to struggle to negotiate some proper line. And barely achieved, hurrying at first but then walkingly while venturing some daring glance at the international. Suites undoubtedly occupied by such whose careers had taken a different turn, sellers of dubious reputation, soldiers of fortune caught up in some whirlpool of continental competition. He would walk straight on or first off to the side and around the potted plants adornedly, false reassurance to the staff within, watching and listening for that hour of being on one's own. *Hasta mañana*. Then years of having had put himself up to matinal review, being passed on like some long overdue piece of furniture whose delivery date had been pending. There upon reaching the second floor, Jim would sit patiently, thinking through the steps which would lead him to some eventual release and temporary life blood. Awaiting all the while that moment of subtle poetry, gentle redemption which oversaw some rising swell of intolerable confusion. Some lone cello singing out to the little ones, calling and prodding inexhaustibly amid missed opportunity, syntax frustrated by some overall yearning for just intercourse. Sitting across from those who might have been his most beloved audience, Jim had delivered his inane exaltation day in and day out. And although eventually bringing itself to bear in another place, he had been certain that one day it would all come tumbling down in some sea of corporate satisfaction. But Jim's decision to pass through the head office had been prefaced by some uneasy determination to make things right. He had harbored no prior inclination to justify some recently occurring tendency toward one's sadder misgivings. And so he continued in the assuredness that all of this could one day be risen above. Then coming down along some final block length, he fell well within the shadow of some white granite cathedral spire, some steeple marking of the spot at which he had often been able to find his way towards some pleasanter repose. Stopped and languishing on some wooden bench placed precipitously along the Calle Goya. Listening keenly as the church bell intoned its midday lament upon those who had once been faithful to its call. The head office had been carefully removed from the academy itself and this proved to be no accident. Its students had generally been supportive of its finer goals. Some eager exchange between student and teacher would provide both with some sense of latent gratification. If not for some oddly pristine dissatisfaction at times and which might prompt some more untimely administration, insipid though it may have been but riling none-the-less. Jim entered carefully. The morning porter was in the habit of washing the floors early, before the

awakening faithful could realize that there was not a single morsel to be had for breakfast. One moving hurriedly towards the nearest *panaderia* was not an uncommon sight in Madrid, and often until well into what could be early afternoon in another place. These were the kindest and most generous at Christmas and such, so that the floors got washed in the best of their regard. This, of course, meant that squatters like Jim and those others in the head office were not to be spared any inconvenience. Why should Jim have needed to tread so delicately, seeking just the right balance between himself and he who others thought he should be, when he too could have easily resorted to earning a wage in some such ordinary fashion? He might still have his chance, and this he considered carefully as he rang the doorbell. *Bajo 2*. He had always found it unduly long that he should have to wait so for someone to let him in. One would soon be amazed by some bolder contrast, empty hallway turned chaotically and more so. As if having fallen suddenly into some strangely foreign land, Oz unpreparedly through some hitherto untrumpeted dining room door. Jim was especially unprepared for what he was about to be told.

“Is that you, Jim?”

“Yeah. Any word on that meeting down at the union hall?”

“It happened.”

“What?”

“Paco said that we were all a bunch of assholes. Should’ve started turning the screws on those guys back in January.

“Can anything be done about it now?”

“Not much. Five months’ pay is probably gone for good. But that’s not the worst of it.”

“Say again?”

“Company’s closing. They found Gonzalez in bed with the director’s wife. Got her to spill the beans about where all that money had disappeared to. They’re onto it all, but they’ll never get those bastards ... probably in Buenos Aires by now.”

It had taken Jim an eternity to find steady work. He had spent years shuffling around the city from one burnt out class to another. At the academy, he had at least found some place at which to reside, some easy repose for himself and free from beating the path he now most readily despised.

“Sanchez’s got some new military contracts coming up and needs teachers to give the basics. Nothing fancy, just conversation”.

“We’ll see, said Jim.”

Then walking back towards Serrano, Jim would recall how he was able to nearly taste the smoke and petrol that seemed to provide him a bank along which to organize his thoughts. He looked for a bridge over the thick aromatic track that arose, blackened haze in the closest geographic element, cars and trucks moving towards some soiled destination. Military contracts, he thought. Jim recalled the last time he had done military work. It was poorer pay than most but still there was a bit of satisfaction in being somewhat useful in the grander scale of things. Jim would arrive to the barracks every day at exactly 4:15. Any earlier would have meant having to park in the visitor’s lot beyond the working quarters of the *suboficiales*. This was truly unpleasant. It was usually knee deep in mud from the water which continually ran down from some broken sewer pipe draining off from the latrines. The smell was overwhelming, and Jim could never walk the five minutes back to his classroom without running into that insatiable staff sergeant who never tired of demonstrating his verbal prowess. When upon the various officers’ beginning to abandon their posts for some evening free from the usual military rigor, Jim could unobtrusively set himself into their places. *Pos-comida* even in military circles demanded some frame of mind and spirit clear and for the ready, free from the hungering moments of late morning. Jim would arrive to his classroom after having trudged his way amongst the various pieces of military junk strewn along his path. The room always reeked of lately spent chalk dust. It mixed with some well-directed rays of a late afternoon sun. It cast an air at once suffocating and melancholic over the hard-wooden floor. Well-aligned table tops mapped out several oases of temporary scholarship, and Jim would always wait patiently for the last person to file in before beginning. Sitting at his desk pretending to be fussing over something or other would have inevitably relieved him of some preliminary need for mindless discourse. This he came to rather late, and had previously been made to endure many moments of difficult conversation. One corporal he could recall as having had been particularly challenging, and with telling joyously of some high Alicante sun, afternoon reminder of the lifelong insignificance to which one might easily succumb. While all approached the task headlong and with the same dutiful stepping out with which they had been trained, she was indeed more mindful of the pledge. Straining to overcome some sorely inadequate grammatical refrain, the corporal would attempt to lay out the smallest detail for Jim. She would eventually become engaged in some starker logistical analysis, heinous warfare plans far removed from that more commonplace line of her colleagues. Some certain nuclear or biological warfare delight straining the face of this once completely misspent Spanish girl. That the world might eventually become consumed within some foretold armageddon would never concern her, and nor should it. Olive drab masking some prurient yearning would momentarily depress Jim, but then urge him on to some higher working ordeal cleverly tailored to engage her frail slightly frame. Past experiences melting into Jim might begin to forge some momentary bond between the two as she continued to entice with some complimentary remark. Some means to soothe over one’s overall desire for tenderest rapport. He was more than willing to go along with this wholly unsolicited exercise of verbal interplay. He had been used to starting each class with some written exercise, and when at

times his intrusion upon the corporal could no longer be adequately sustained, he might invite her to begin on that day's assignment and until the rest of the class arrived. His adrenaline would have peaked by then but some inevitable disappointment would always prevail. Her classmates would appear at once and then oblige Jim to diffuse his pleasantries until an hour had passed. He struggled in his promise to see them again in a number of days. By the time anyone could realize his impertinence, class was out and he was gone inextricably committed to the next day's lesson. He stepped off the escalator and now well within his usual path from the subway platform to the bus station. Frantic commuters darting from the right and left, head on and then some challenged his train of thought continually. He sat for some minutes at a coffee stall before heading to his usual departure point. Thoughts of a conversation he had had in yesterday's class continued to distract as he sipped some innocuous brew. Neither flavor nor effect as to what had come to be passed off as some morning concoction but he had little choice and so he persevered in his deliberation. Some Capitán de Fregata had told the tale of his great-great-grandfather, which had as its backdrop the Spanish-American War and had henceforth celebrated the threading of a sinuous path through the American Naval defenses down from the mid-Atlantic and then northward from the southern seas toward some singularly historical challenge. Jim suspected that this could provide him with a lesson for that morning. It had been some years since he last would set about preparing lessons on his own. Some lacking in motivation forbade him from doing so. And yet he never held back at the moment of having to comply with his duties. Idle classroom banter had always come to be his truest recourse and this was no exception. Then entering the passenger lounge had increasingly been becoming some unbearable daily chore. Poorly polished wooden benches lined the perimeter. Steel knee-high waste bins were strewn intermittently throughout. He usually managed to navigate the tenuous path amongst legs, packages and briefcases. Some finely dressed young woman today only hardened his task.

“Pardon me, would you know what time the number 161 bus departs?” she asked.

“Just in 10 minutes” replied Jim.

He replied with an assuredness which would have been unheard of some months earlier. Schedules and routines had never been a welcome commodity for Jim. The woman seemed to be satisfied with Jim's help. She sat at the corner of a rather large and mahogany table awkwardly placed in a far corner of the lounge. Jim took a place at the end of the opposite side but not far enough from the woman so that he could not observe her somewhat nervous demeanor. Ten minutes transpired. Jim sat and wondered whether the woman across the table had even bothered to glean that her bus was about to leave the platform without her. His first inclination was to divert some non-threatening remark her way but ultimately decided that it would be too forward to do so and refrained. He once again buried his face in the novel he had been reading. The bus left as scheduled but the woman remained. She seemed to be unconcerned until Jim suddenly looked up and caught her glance unexpectedly. She then reared her head back as if to rearrange some errant lock of hair which had crept over her forehead. There was no reasonable concern nor any reason to feel perturbed by her continued presence. Yet Jim couldn't help but notice how she fumbled with her purse and shifted in her seat nervously. Some large and imposing clock began to chime

rather tentatively. Each recurring sound seemed to perpetuate itself sheepishly across the room. Loud and bellowing yet muted and turning downwards towards some more labored solfège as the student he once was recalled those very moments in the music library when he could not hardly imagine the predicament within which he would one day awake. Some labored exercise which he would have been obliged to deliver in front of ten or perhaps fifteen other students who certainly outdid Jim in all that was either studied or performed.

“Bravo”.

“Bravo, yes, bravo.”

Meaningless chores and tasks would eventually turn such accolades – modest though they were – into his only means for continuing down that useless path. *Ladrones y sinvergüenzas*. Jim had arrived to these opposite shores from a fairly comfortable position with the New York City Board of Education and with the idea of pressing on with his teaching career. While he had been of a modest value back home, he was made to feel somewhat of a nuisance here and quickly became the object of many an unscrupulous character’s search for inexpensive employ. Struggling to recall some distant memories of those better times which faded so quickly into traps and conundrums. How else could someone with such determination in wanting to throw off the pains and insults he had been obliged to endure, growing up in some sort of familial cesspool and eventually having to engage in the most menial of pursuits? Jim rested on the notion that an incomplete turn of phrase could not be tolerated any longer. Language teaching had come to represent some pathetic last hope, some nervous fidgeting this way and about just as those restless gestures which he had been observing in the pretty woman sitting across the worn mahogany table. The post at A.C. Nelson had come upon a bit unexpectedly. He accepted it with some trepidation but ultimately decided that holding on to some sanity would inevitably mean numbing himself with the barbarities that life continually seemed to offer. Some opiate-like substance resting on the edge and just enough within reach so as to deny even the slightest tendency towards capitulation. He signed on at 800 *pesetas* an hour. Catching the Number 7 train crosstown would deliver him to the Barrio de la Concepcion, a quite faceless conundrum of medium-sized apartment buildings and office blocks. *Senorita* washing her sidewalk of unwanted debris as the little ones trot on home for lunch. *Comida mediterranea*. Jim himself would often get a bite before having to begin. Some unpleasant odor of rancid oil had not yet begun to dissuade him from the occasional repast. While always asking for the same, he inevitably imagined much more. Two pieces of bread between which some delicate completeness had always to be revealed. Whether it had been at John’s Diner or that less flamboyant place on Grand Ave., Jim would always come away with some latent satisfaction and expectantly of the next. Delicate completeness. Some hint of the sublime together with just the right dash of mayonnaise and *dijon*, over which the gardenest fresh leaf of lettuce were carefully set. He would delight in the variety which he had been afforded, one which presented itself freely, wholeheartedly and unexpectedly in some constant whirlwind of feast and flavor. Jim learned to go without such matter-of-factness at the *cerveceria* but could never get used to the actual *bocadillo*, as if it were some understatement of our own lack of resourcefulness or ineptitude of spirit. Still, one was usually treated with the quiet dignity often alluded to, though



empty and fraught with some false promise of psychic remuneration. Oh, yes. And some music from another time and place but mostly another place eeking out of some scratchy speaker placed slightly above the top shelf right next to the bottle of *Anis del Mono*. Just a drop in some gilded cup of coffee, or often taken *aparte* in stoic accompaniment to the dawn's first light. Some different tongue charring the minds of many but usually just covering the walls with unsensational strips of bland three- by- five. Upon which to display some everyday chatter, it all dissolved inevitably into one giant cacophony of sound and syllable squandered uncaringly and more so at this hour of the day. Jim had never been initially too keen on entering the office building in the *Barrio de la Concepcion*. Its facade was stark and forbidding, some black marble set against square meters of concrete and gratuitous vegetation. Once inside the revolving doors, one was immediately desensitized by yet more marble, rising in great columns on either side and framing great panes of glass which seemed to inspire envy in the substantial piece of corporate humanity that happened to face it every day. But places and situations did not always demand as much sacrifice as Jim might have expected, and he would often enjoy the short lift to the eighth floor. He normally arrived just upon most re-entering after lunch hour, so the elevators were usually crowded and Jim would be taken upon to eavesdrop on the moral tales which presented themselves. At times he would be thrown into some temporary state of translucent stupor, as if transformed into that poet who spent some considerable time transfixedly upon his own grey sock and under the influence of some strange narcotic taken daily in staunch dose. Scent of stale tobacco and iridescent shades of the scantily perfumed yawned at him encouragingly, animating him on to the next second, and the next until his upward journey was complete. Waning moments with brow furrowed by his lack of command, challenged without respite by those teasing him with other than his own mother tongue. Jim would press back against the back of the lift while laying canvass to some tender mass into which each syllable seemed to penetrate, one by one slowly in a rush of foreign grammar. Words and gentle pressure of sounds and smells all joined into the sensation that seemed to escape him always. And how could they not? After all, his experience was not theirs, nor might he wish it to be. Pure tones ringing out in unselfconscious disregard, climaxing on swells which seemed to ignore the very audience for whom they were intended. Steadfast bell dissipating under much wider sky whose blue Jim could almost touch under the moistened fabric of some late afternoon's gentle shower. Incipient chatter about this or that, leading to nothing except Jim's personal vindication of what was left behind and where he should be going. Then at once caught up in some disorienting vacuum of fading conversation, some space suddenly gained through the withdrawal of those well come up to. Jim would find new breadth in his role as disinterested observer, and feel having had been completely served by some lukewarm stream of petty revelation which had accompanied him to the eighth floor. Once there, he daily confronted some unrelenting routine of malaise and malevolence set amid some faceless grid of pre-fabricated offices and welded cubicles. A construction and demeanor so opposed to the stone tradition of Castilla that Jim would be taken upon to once again immerse his forward thinking into the olive flesh of foreign syntax. Only then could he once again come to terms with the situation in which he found himself, light years away from a time and place the little boy had prepared for him, that which he had foregone so ungratefully. Ending up here at the Madrid branch of Nelson Marketing Inc., specializing in the study of habitual processes – soap powder, appliances, silk stockings – all bound together by some public thirst for consumer rendition. Enterprise sent over from some foreign land, trade indirectly

linked to that of the Netherland though routinely examined through one's own finer scope and appreciated for what it was. Acceptable so long as it were not to upset some finer tilt toward the undisputed maintenance of one's own superior character, superficial nuance designed to profit but never render easily. His only student would be Dolores. She took great pride in being department chief and, aside from whether one had anything to do with the other, never let him in too quickly. There were usually a number of items to be addressed before the class could begin, and which would be fine with Jim since he was paid strictly by the hour. Waiting outside her office door was nevertheless instructive. Puzzled glances and non-considered, idle office space whom no one might ever think too much of having to be wary of. He would often lose himself momentarily in the eighth-floor essence of his present predicament, looking down against some full-length window pane, play-like structures on a busy street dedicated to some most rapid transport within the circulatory confines. These were the daily attempts at transcontinental competition moving swiftly north and then back down again. Pale imitation as far as Jim was concerned, reflections of another place trying to apologize for some inescapable thrust into modernity. Awe-inspiring monuments towering out over Rector Street and Wall showering their worthy inhabitants with some timeless reward cried out for one's just recognition. All the while calming the smoking ruins whose sometime pitying reminder of meaningless squander, nonetheless testament to the noblest ongoing endeavor, choked us to thoughts and tears harking back to that of the hungry masses entering a harbor full of light and sound adamantly. Al-Andalus as civilization committed once and always to some reasoned consideration of life and love for all who would care to have it, and staring in consternation at some carnage brought about in its name, destructors of tarnished vision and dubious character probably reveling through the holy place onto which Jim would be staring down at that very moment. Perfectly peaked arches and gently swaying rhythms, kneeling modestly toward Mecca, naked humility converted into blasphemy by those naysayers who would use the corporate misdeed not as signpost, but as some means for bludgeoning the innocent. Jim had probably seen that structure dozens of times, but only in seeing it from above could he appreciate the vivid contrast it forged against some jet-black asphalt, and marking off neatly from its surroundings. The irony of its being next to the city morgue was inescapable as far as Jim could see, tyranny of the old wallowing in some splendid homogeneity while writing off all that refused to conform. Some storefront gateway of Moslem engender lining the walkways of Bushwick Avenue had always belied an easy, if not sometimes turbulent, reside. Welcome your tired masses and poor in spirit while with the steeple and the bell calling out to anyone wishing to carve out some place of their own, advancing to beyond the meeting point from which Jim had been unable to proceed. He would then turn in frustration to face the consumer study group within which he found himself. This particular enterprise had been in Madrid for just nine years and had already risen to large market dimension, picking apart the whys and wherefores, habits and peculiarities of some consumer class. Endless pages of thought engaging questionnaires were churned out day in and day out from the very room in which Jim would be standing. Researching everything from where a particular item had been purchased, why it had been so, how it had been so and inquiringly of whether such acquisition might be repeated. Results were tabulated to the minutest nuance. Reeling off and grinding out some lathe of hurling figures which could only make the average citizen cower in unblended insignificance. Jim would on occasion overhear some casual remark, as if having been foretold by his lift to the eighth floor. In this way, he would be able to appreciate

the more sordid details of his most worrisome student's outward regard. Considered a veritable bitch by her entire staff, Dolores would often keep notes on each and every one of them tucked neatly inside her bustier. It was the only place she was sure no one would ever find them – not that she would ever surrender to concern if anyone had – and thereby be able to well document some smallest detail when one came up for corporate review. This they all resented and more. At Christmas time, for example, the company directors would give her department some special bonus if they had performed well during the year. It was intended to be distributed squarely and promptly at the beginning of the month. Dolores would always wait until someone either very brave or very cash poor might decide to claim their rightful reward. In that way, she could always get away with passing on just a bit less than what had originally been intended, and with not even the slightest furtive glance from one who obviously had nothing to lose from such bland assertion, but so much otherwise from being too inquisitive. Being too discreet was never one of Dolores's vices and she would use the extra guarded cash, though not directly toward her personal benefit, to organize a small dinner party – *un petit diner* as she liked to call them – for her most lucrative clients. *Voudriez-vous une autre truffe?* She could often be heard showing off her command of other idioms in and around the office and neither was this a source of kinship among her staff. Most of them actually defended themselves much better than she in this regard – which is hardly a compliment under broad review – but had to usually settle for group classes and often third-rate at that. Sanchez herself had been known to attend more than one of her midnight soirees, and Dolores quickly became one of Sanchez's prized patrons. Jim's time soon became divided amongst her, some military groups and a couple of classes over at the telephone company switching station in the city center. When finally it would be Jim's place to enter her office, he did so always belying some certain reticence, as if never quite sure about which of several demeanors he should expect. After all, with her staff she was quite the supervisor but with clients quite the sympathetic soul in whom they could most eagerly confide. With Jim, she could be any of these depending on what she required of him on that particular day. He might sometimes be called upon to advise regarding the best turn of phrase within the course of one of her irrefutable international lectures. Teacher as advisor inextricably linked in sound formative argument was -- if not pleasing to Jim -- then tolerable. On other occasions she would be in need of some surrogate staffer to whom she could bemoan the lack of this or that, having unattended to the last detail she had prescribed. At these times, Jim would feel it necessary to gather his most steely armor, fend off the unpleasantness and state of impatience, for while Dolores's ranting was certainly unbecoming of her role as his student, he nonetheless needed the classes. And so he would sit calmly. Eyes usually transfixed on one dangling ornament or piece of plated gold sporting tastefully, odd sullen features needing of improvement for the benefit of client and non-client alike. More than a bit overripe in stature, she might gesture toward the large glass panes feeding some corporate abyss high above, and back down slowly onto her lap in heated expectation of the next. Never missing some opportunity to scold, she did so without regard to whom Jim was or where he had come from. Indelible foreigner brought back from where he should have been, already weary of the scolding he had had to endure for having done so. Just castration, Jim would often reason. Bold and just retort to the notion that he might have been able to reverse the tangential objective of his forefathers. Why should he not have become grinding stone to the likes of Dolores Berzosa? Still at other times she would treat him as a trusted and worthy confidant. This and a potentially tender experience reviled Jim the

most. For in her heart of hearts she knew how the staff would speak of her, and amid whisperings the same was probably true of her clients and even those whom she had always considered to be her best friends. Jim as consoler and healer, unrequited confessional high above ground floor rebuke toward those who might stand and stare at the great black marble structure, and question why this particular building and this particular enterprise had one day appeared amidst their own living space. Impinging on the very neighborhood ease with which they had always carried on with their lives. And here was Jim, as unlikely testament to it all. Repentant of the sins committed against staff and consumer public alike, violation of private trust preoccupied Jim. And yet there were those who persevered in blaming all those who had had the courage to take up the dare, millions of forward-looking spirits in total ignorance and tacit disapproval of the excesses that would inexorably pass in their name, industrial turning under of those who were at the foundation of its majesty. But should an entire generation and dozens more to follow be disqualified on the basis of what mistakes are made in seeking to reconstruct a life form out of some dark rubble? Consideration of weak result as other than some signpost suggested to Jim an easy link with the destructors. Rector Street and Wall as guardian and enharmonic vision to that which had fallen so near. It certainly did preoccupy Jim just as much as if he had not been supposed to be there quod docere. But for better or for worse he was, and it would bring him to bear upon the unseemly task which was his. Dolores had always been motivated as far as the finer points of grammar were concerned. Hashing and rehashing the same regular structures were of little difficulty provided she had some proper source of self-betterment at her side. Speaking in the past in such a way as to avoid any self-reasoned misunderstanding was of the utmost concern, and as well it should have been so. Past endeavor continuing to present form demanded a more general feel, some present perfect oration seasoned with a bit of qualifier perhaps, but nevertheless perfect in its need for open-endedness. And not just in any continuous sense, which would in fact become another matter entirely. Open unknowingly of when one action occurred or had occurred required some secular vision, one free from the dogmatic view toward time as being absolute and unforgiving. Time and place resolved as in complete suspension of mind and thought, relaxing air of psychic drift relieving all pretension of temporal exactitude. Jim might then pause in consideration of the proper way to correct her, taking fully into account some apparent need for accuracy in citing times and places whose past was clearly identifiable. She rarely doubted his expertise, but even in not doing so belied her own belief that he was doing all this out of sheer necessity and unwanting of any didactic or pedagogic remuneration. Thus, any correction he might venture would be accepted as expounding less on some true meaning regarding any general sense of time, and more on the superficial life requirements which one might possess at any given moment. Or for reasons of unintended confluence of past events which blur along the course of one's lifetime, but then redefine themselves at some particularly lucid moment in depicting the evolution of what we have become. Dolores would have tired of working the grammar by well before halfway through the class, and Jim was never one to miss a cue. After all, as Sanchez had once professed so self-righteously, administering privately was unlike the protocol to be maintained during a group class. You mustn't permit them to chew on it for too long! You'll need to consider using a little psychology. She would always squint just a bit on the last word, enunciating sharply the second syllable which, aside from presenting an occasion for some particularly concussive sound, became the precursor to every subsequent properly articulated vocal tone that she might tend to speak.

Dolores would always be in outright anticipation of some free form which Jim was about to introduce. Willingly laying her pen on the table meant that she was no longer disposed to taking any more notes, anxious to rely instead on her improvisatory skills. Thorough satisfaction with having had arrived past the point of playing nemesis to her entire staff, she would now desire to feel Jim upon her in total confrontation. Preparedly for the most grueling sparring match, war of words for which Jim had to summon his most professional state of being. He always tried to identify the most pertinent professional topics, which were always preceded by some text recounted verbally and in loud voice. Supermarket shelves were taking up a fair amount of Dolores's time during Jim's stance at the company, and he would often recall her passionate tirades in support of vertical product subjugation, arms and fingers gesticulating wildly while searching for just the right piece of vocabulary to cushion her obvious discontent with some inferior explanation. Jim might then shift mightily in his chair and project that not-so-quite-sure air certain to keep her talking. For her time was his, old world filling the new with tedious justifications of why it had taken so long to take up the chorus, and when finally having done so how it could possibly be of any use now. Computer driven elegy improved through the illusion that some grander space had become small, useful selections borrowed with all the while ridiculing those who might tear down the pedestal upon which Dolores and the rest were so time honorably situated. Modern reach in search of that perfect supermarket setting, packaging impeccably designed for the most effective clash amongst cultures would continually motivate Nelson Marketing, Inc. to enlarge its scope. And yet, would forcing some such corporate-ridden practicality really matter in the long run? Could Dolores and her kind truly find it reasonable that they should be brought into the realm of Rector Street and Wall? For they who power some forward-moving engine know all too well how to distance themselves from its hierarchal tradition. Upheld throughout centuries in reverence of some social deprecation and unequally sharing in its proud harvest. Dolores might be interrupted by another urgent matter, now having had gone far too long without the input office thrust which had always seemed to enrich her day. Jim could then rest assuredly upon some little remaining time that they would have left together. If it had been a telephone call, Dolores would tend to shoo Jim away as easily as some swatted insect. If a personal intrusion, on the other hand, he would be shamed into raising his eyes just enough to avoid some seemingly voyeuristic intent. Jim would sheepishly begin to gather his notes and quietly take leave while suggestive of an approving nod toward his somewhat tousled student. How quickly it all dissolves back to the place of its departure! Years would suddenly fill his head with thoughts of living and dying, space and time misused in frantic search for some rightful inheritance. Apparently lost amid some gray carpet leadingly onto a trail toward his next language class, his ears would once again give host to sounds of those calling into an unrequited wind. Jim might experience one last passing essence of softest turn of voice and quickly find himself having descended to street level. The lengthiest and most meticulously spun-out novel ends with nay the quickest turn of a page. There to find himself once more amongst the living spaces of the jaded class, and obliged to look onwards. The passenger lounge had started to empty by now. Jim seemed perplexed and somewhat puzzled. He glanced upwards and peered painstakingly at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to departure but he sensed something else. Something oddly stealing his glance toward the right side suddenly confused. Not due to anything that he had done or imagined but rather on account of someone or something which had momentarily crossed his path.

He rose from the poorly polished bench and started to move easily toward the bus platform. The choking aroma of thick soot made it clear that he was indeed nearing the last leg of his morning journey. He glanced upwards. It seemed to show dimmer than on most days and Jim needed to wince a few times before feeling confident enough to carry on. It is then when Jim considered that he may have been mistaken or had misheard the young woman's question. The young woman also approached the platform.

“Excuse me, ma'am. The 161 bus has already left. This isn't the 161 bus.”

Jim's remark came quite suprisingly. The young woman appeared to be a bit startled and seemed to wonder why Jim had even bothered to put himself out as such.

“Oh yes, thank you” she replied.

She was obviously anxious to avoid any further exchange with Jim and simply found and slipped into a space in the queue. Jim began to consider why she had reconsidered but this quickly gave way to again wondering as to how today's class would begin and how it could be enticed toward some semblance of better tuition. Some Capitán de Fregata had recounted a story of his great-great-grandfather which had as its backdrop the Spanish-American War and had celebrated the threading of a path through the American Naval defenses. But Jim had already surrendered to this notion and he saw little need in continuing to dwell upon it. He boarded the bus and took his usual seat near the rear. He often found it to be less invasive to his early morning stupor and permitted him to study his notebook. Or review the morning's news on his mobile phone. He had forgotten about the young woman entirely when suddenly she rose from a seat she had taken near the rear door and opposite some gentleman who had lifted some contraption onto the bus in apparent hope of making some eventual use of the vast swathe of empty space that enclosed the confines of the Royal Guard Headquarters. She staggered her way toward the front of the bus and timidly approached the driver. He for his part now struggling between listening and attending to his daily journey but Jim could not make out what the woman was attempting to say to the driver nor could he once again consider why she may have so abruptly modified her travel plans at the bus station. She nodded her head in understanding at what the driver was saying and gradually made her way back to her seat. The man with the contraption was having great difficulty in keeping it from falling over with every gaping turn that the bus took and hoping that some mother or father with their child in a stroller or baby carriage would not get on the bus, for he would then have to abandon his convenient refuge in acknowledging that the space he had commandeered was not properly assigned to him nor to his machine. The bus made its way along the wooded route over which he had commuted whenever the Head of Studies decided that he was required to fill in for the regular teacher on leave. Now coming into the Pardo – some well-enough-to-do village at the foot of the *Guadarrama* – reminded him to rise and move toward the exit. The young woman also moved toward the bus's exit but she hesitated noticeably so that Jim would be able to exit first. As the bus came to a stop, he could sense a slight reticence on her part, measuring her steps carefully and not wishing to marshal any unnecessary attention. Jim stepped off the bus and immediately felt a bit cold. Not in any emotional way nor telling of any interaction or engagement with any

particular student or person with whom he might have had to attend to during the day. Rather the mornings were always noticeably chillier and damp as compared to the approaching cauldron which would usually engulf the city center in mid-summer. A slight respite from the masses of traffic and humankind becoming one might have been the only benefit of escaping to this hamlet – *el Pardo* – from time to time. No sooner had he begun to reach into his bag for his security pass than his phone rang. Jim stopped and pulled the mobile telephone from his jacket pocket and managed to catch a glimpse of the pretty woman passing him by as he did so. He again wondered – though in a more labored way -- where she might be going and why she had decided against taking the bus she had initially inquired about. But the sudden sound of the Head of Studies diverted his attention and he was quickly told that his first class had been cancelled. Nothing to be at all surprised at, Jim thought. Having to fill empty spaces of time had always been one of the most tiresome chores. He considered going to the breakfast place down the street but it would likely be filled with all of those English boys. Many of these had too been caught up in the language school scam. And occasionally meeting one or more of them on the city streets had proven to be an unbearable reminiscence for Jim. *Vergonzoso* is what the newspapers said at the time. Learning should be a worthy exercise, one to be shielded from those who would have it yield so easily to whim. Jim could not help but recall that even the tritest of ventures had been required to bear the seal. Those in the East Village displaying that nod of approval proudly for which they had toiled so long and hard. Years of poring over the tools and disciplines which might send one off either happily or scurrying hurriedly past the eatery windows towards some nearest refuge within which to redefine oneself. Eager teachers, young and bright searching for some newer adventure in language learning, finer arts of learning and more youthful techniques reminded Jim of some bitterer irony. He too was once at the start of a career and how quickly it had all disappeared. Jim stared at the pavement for a few seconds before reluctantly heading down a path which led to the small wooded enclave. The smell of burnt *tostadas* and week-old cooking oil was as unappetizing as usual. He noticed upon entering that the boys had obviously been bantering for some time and were gathered like a school of sea lions within two booths just to the right of the line along which he was obliged to tread. He initially thought to slip unnoticed into another of the side booths but there was no room to be had and he walked swiftly towards the end of the bar instead. There was the usual ambient thick with morning smoke and obnoxious intent. A certain queasiness began to take hold as swirling toasted sensations mixed with the uncertainty that had again befallen him. Jim managed to spy a moment when any of the three tending bar could prepare him a *café solo*. He quickly caught the eye of a staid gentleman who had attended to him regularly during his sojourn in El Pardo. Some taller man – roughly one meter ninety -- towering over the morning clientele and permitting him an advantage in distinguishing between they who might have required immediate attention and those who had entered merely on the whim of a companion or colleague. This was truly a challenging melee – military personnel disillusioned with the Base amenities, workmen priming for the daily lot with some anis cocktail and the odd language teacher awaiting their morning call. The taller gentleman attended to his as a vocation. Jim had never ceased to be amazed at the fluidity with which some endless number of single servings could pop themselves onto the time-worn altar each day. Rejuvenating constantly among delusional cries of wait for this or that. Jim recalled how his father's father had matinally set down the single serving – one, two or more. No doubt then from sheer habit spawned by a lifetime of wanton self-examination, all the

while with waiting for this or that chance to make pristine sense of it all, never sure of its global outcome, confidently suggesting that it was as it had to be and why it must continue. Jim struggled to remember how in all of those years earlier his father had expected him to continue on with their modest undertaking. Setting down the single serving – one, two or more until the day's chore was done. Looking eagerly toward the next morning's ritual of distant but certain plenitude. This Jim considered as he suddenly saw fit to pity those engaging in delusional thought on that particular morning, for here there was nowhere to go. Even distant success would seem to be impossible, so long as he continued getting about with the English boys. Jim had indeed been warned of the superfluousness of their intent. After all, none of them had ever had precedents who had dared venture over into a New World. And why should they? Pompous yearnings and subservient to some blackened class of corporate irregularity. Jim gazed long and hard into the coffee sitting in front of him. If he had decided to return to doing military work, he would have again been obliged to put up with the rantings of Sanchez. Jim had always guessed that pinning down all those lieutenant colonels may have meant providing favors to them and their subordinates. Sanchez herself was known to have had more than one illicit tryst which, although repugnant to the rest, undoubtedly impressed those who saw great merit in the acquisition of new prospects. But Jim saw no reason to concern himself with the inner dealings of her obviously thriving enterprise, and began to warm to the thought that it just might have been the only way to go, at least for a short time. Some coffee cup dwindling slowly down to whitened alabaster would inevitably ring in the hour of language study. Jim was quickly awoken by a distant banter growing louder as the English boys had now become heavily engaged in some dubious pedagogical exchange. He might have considered joining in if it were not for Jim's having had taken some more cynical turn over the years. Still he began to feel somewhat repulsed by it all. Unseemly conversation at this or any other time of the day, and he would be inclined to have no part of it. Bad enough that the Director had been particularly seductive at the moment of persuading Jim to accept the military post. Past experience had proven him to be quite useful in her mind for dealing with military personnel and procedures. Not that she would have considered Jim's skills beyond some cosmetic attempt at offering some more pleasing public relations facade. He oddly enough appreciated her welcoming demeanor – as spurious as it may have been -- and was ultimately grateful for some long-lost pretension of fulfilling some need. So much so that he would gradually build up some subtle affection for the woman and she for him. Some lengthier summer evening would often bring her and Jim into closer proximity under the pretext of reviewing administrative business or some other non-didactic issue. Gentler whirls of breeze carrying the Director's perfume Jim's way was never unintentional in his mind. He always hoped that it might lead to something more productive but romantic ventures were seemingly secondary to her sense of practicality vis-a-vis some more promising venture. Maria de la Paz Sanchez – or Paz, as she was commonly referred to. A slighter touch on Jim's forearm was all that would have been required for him to continue acting in a facile way and he gradually warmed to her entreaties. He wondered if she would be just as amenable this time around. He could recall sitting for some time on a worn bench opposite the entrance to Number 219, trying to summon the courage to face her again after so many months. Periodically glancing down at his watch only seemed to have produced some inner prolong, tempting pleasantly upon some neighborhood relief. Glancing downward and again had only frustrated Jim until realization taking hold, time increasingly remarked and stopped. Time had slowly stopped, and



obliged Jim to once again curse his stillborn fortune. Time costingly and at the mercy of some gadgetry purchased offhand. Jim tapped on the watch in hope that something sluggish or misplaced might be revived, but it was no use. It had indeed stopped. And Jim began to feel the wage of his indecision threatening him once again in some puerile way, headlong fantasy winking back at Jim and retiringly in quiet dissolution. Behind and in front buzzed the constant whoosh of cars and motorbikes oppositely addressed, one urging him forward and the other backward. One up towards some saving station promising speedy westward tilt and out beyond the meeting point, the other down to some blithe continuation of his continental journey. Jim strained to hear the bell tolling out over Plaza de Castilla, shades along some gray track transforming each vibration into a death knell, kaleidoscopic images challenging his deepening gaze into the lobby of number 219. One, two, three and more it sounded until Jim was confident that he had indeed waited for some proper time. He would be able to leave it off at a jeweler's on his way back, served politely and proper en el acto until feeling sure that some recognition of time had indeed been restored. Jim now felt the push of circumstance acting in disrespect to all that used to be his, urging him on to some mindless sequence with noise and youth distracting. Those of a distant motivation which used to be his, denying him any looking back and mockingly of some more pressing task. Castellana seemed to be full of these as he at last charted a course through the fast track, two lanes but then not and in clear defiance of some inner highway piercing the heart of his daily confine. Cars and utility vehicles piled randomly in some horizontal relief congestedly, then not knowing which path to take confused Jim. Number 219. But why the porter disappeared smartly, only to appear again he would wonder. Damp asphalt giving way to puddles of lately fallen rain water challenged as he gazed downwards, and then the utility vehicle protrudingly well beyond forced Jim to return momentarily. Puddles of lately fallen water framing some tire stained with mud and excrement from one late hour advance. Warm voices again softly distracted Jim, gently gliding over some spent existence whose only recuperation lay in this hapless course towards Number 219 and with the porter and the bell. Why might it be sounding again? Warmer voices still and the bell masked the porter and Jim became newly confused. Parallel motion getting him nowhere displaced at Number 217, he sighed and felt further from his destination. He considered what might have become of the little boy and paternal mentor should their own destination had not been so desired. Would they have been left to rot as Jim had? Would they have not looked up at the structure with its sacred objective but arguably sacred foundation casting out from a crippled faith, far past the meeting point and rendered themselves in disgust? Self-flagellation and warm voice became smaller and smaller, disappearingly into the moistened loins of asphalt and laughing up at Jim with every step. The morning porter had always had some added responsibility of caring for the greater abundance— doble fila — space full with vehicles of varying means. Catching Jim's eye suddenly and giving new wind to one's endeavor, angry incarceration now becoming past consoled momentarily. Why should he have had to be the one, after all? Seeds of return in heinous rebuke of his forefathers again confused and sent Jim into one more momentary haze of warmest voice and softly calling subconscious. He would never know for sure. Fair yellow mane offering on either side and still warmer voices passing on the sidewalks along the gray track of Castellana comforted Jim. When all was said and done, these would be the only reminiscences which would matter. Some slight smile mischievously disappeared from his face as he unexpectedly crossed paths with the porter, whose angular deviation seemed oddly upsetting to Jim, but convincingly of

its correctness and immediately assuming it confidently. The porter carrying himself quickly and with dignity inspired Jim to complete his ill-begotten course, resisting any further temptation of giving in to some further idle ideas of delay. Softest delay turning into determination had been Jim's rule, then back again until all those things that Jim had ever wanted or cared about looked small and inconsequential. Becoming tides of quiet langor, hardened malaise or gentle tepid pools of passage looking neither forward nor backward. As if finding himself – alone – on some soiled red carpet directed inward, standing high off the humid pavement. Some island of personal initiative at once empty and humiliating. Glass doors reflecting noise and image off the gray track of Castellana hustled Jim uninspiredly towards some unlikely return. He was, after all, inside the lobby. A sudden dimness panicked as he stared blankly at the portería. Vacant mailboxes dared him to imagine the lives of those they represented in mild repose, or in wait of some slightest most singular remark encouragingly from some distant beyond. Jim's wait had been eternal, but nothing had fulfilled the promise of bringing him back full circle to that place of his endowment, flutes and rapturous voice all having had permanently escaped Jim on that faraway afternoon. Scent of freshly cut grass had ascended sweetly over some unlikely oasis presenting itself pleasantly. Needle faltering harmlessly over some vinyl singing out a magic vibration of sound, mysteriously moving through some stainless piece of servitude towards some amplitude upon which he could rest his spirit. Which still on the rise, as must have been that of the child and his father as they began to closely perceive what would all appear in front of them, newly and inviting. Devoid of some darkly patronizing tone of those who were enviously left behind, one-dimensional melodrama being played out pathetically at every turn by the self-congratulatory director. Waning moments quickly becoming prelude to some fugue of voice and activity which was to dominate their waking hours during the remainder of their time together and beyond. Jim had indeed often recalled staring at the clock and wondering if he might ever have the opportunity of visiting the old country, home to those of whom Jim would sit and ponder habitually and as regular regime. The maestros and time itself would surely have been kind to him then, moments of introduction and tardy recapitulation in support of some larger gestalt, some lifetime of expectant successes lightly incrementing themselves and providing a joyous relief to the deafening brass that sounded downwards. But he also knew that finding the proper course would not be easy, and he sensed inclusively that the reins of practicality might one day force his hand in much the same manner as it had that of his forbearers. For in that sweet and beautiful oasis restingly on the mighty plains of ash and soot, hovering regally upon the shoulders of Amsterdam, Jim became one with the scholarship and insight which would find in themselves some means for overcoming all except the earthly squalor, petty bargaining of director and public alike, seemingly to dominate ever more so his present and just present continental undertaking. The porter's sudden bark, crisp and sharp startled Jim from his fleeting stupor. He could now feel that the palms of his hands had moistened considerably.

“¿*Qué quería usted*” inquired the porter.

“I'd like to visit the language consulting on the tenth floor. *Me gustaría subir al centro de idiomas.*”

Jim had never learned to speak the language very well, though enough for some occasional regular purpose. Buying at the fruit stand required no extraordinary effort and he seldom had much difficulty, except for the childish grins his obviously foreign accent might draw. *Extranjero*. Jim would then try to imagine how his ancestors had dealt with some non-native demeanor, calm and unnerving but leaving in its wake some inexplicable feeling of wanton ambition.

“¿Le espera la señora?” asked the porter.

“She’s expecting me ... yes. *Me espera a las cinco.*”

Sanchez was not and would never have been expecting to see him again. But Jim guessed that he could never fully understand the porter’s role, that stately yet none-too-deliberate undertaking enjoyed but so often taken for granted. Rarely had anyone ever bothered to inquire as to his goings about and never had they apparently thought to check up on what Jim had momentarily struggled to concoct. He had not bothered to call ahead, fearing that Sanchez would attempt to use the telephone in a particularly searing manner. Some deliberate attempt to shame Jim into sudden self-awareness, lack of total control understood might have served to convince him to trust Sanchez as his last living hope. Jim would be determined not to allow that to happen. He would turn up at her doorstep in much the same way as he had the first time. Besides, he had always held out some hope that any slightest perturbation could upset at any given instant, promisingly of some newest professional turn. As he edged closer to the lift, dimness persisted with dark gray shades in broad relief. Showing him the way until some tiny fluorescence teasingly reminded him of the many prior occasions on which he had been subjected to such, silhouetted challenge to enter or be left behind. Heavily sprung metal doors shutting from within engulfed Jim in a world at once upwards and unmoving, harking back to his first job on 14th St. Teaching at an off-site under the auspices of the New York City Board of Education and in full confrontation with those holding special needs, Jim would often wonder as to some proper path for his own intellectual life salvation. He had been given the opportunity of assisting generously within the social welfare. He had been responsible for those of a lesser intellectual fortune, and at his own tender age. Most of the others on the work floor would be going about their business under some watchful eye – chairs and tables in some time period upholstery overlay – as Jim engaged in his own rudimentary somersault nearby. Over and again would only frustrate his still frail teaching capabilities, though giving forth affectionately, and within some unrequited sense of genuine concern. Riding the freight elevator on its slow ascent to the second floor would have shocked Jim into some matinal classroom feeling. Freshly refined sawdust strewn over some freight elevator floor would continue its finite discourse onto the workspace – drills, electric saws – prelude to Jim’s final plaster board resting place. Jim might begin with some easy maths, or perhaps a brief word problem. For concrete learning would necessarily be the rule of the day, concrete learning stages peeling away Jim’s already exhausted resources. Hardly anyone would finish the exercises he had laid out. Still, he would find it oddly appropriate that they should at all look forward to his daily lessons. None would ever successfully complete the official course of study, and this Jim knew to be true. Instead preferring to perpetually remain on the work floor, beneficiaries of some closed-space protectorate eternal, some easier

meaning to their stunted lives. Reminiscing fancy brought him to an ever more occurring realization that it was to be his most cherished. Attempting to draw some parallel between those more lucrative years and that in which he presently found himself would offer little consolation. Nor did he do it often, for fear of cornering oneself within some all too well-known predicament from which he could hardly break free. He had often wondered what might have become of the slender Jamaican girl with a smile of gold. Beats droppingly off a Brooklyn pavement would be her not wholly unwelcome life legacy, hip-hop movement dying away and out through the upper reaches of some hardened village. Delancey Street sound dripping beats and playing loud, and louder still while making it harder to find fit oneself into this cosmopolitan jungle. They had looked for and found a place for Jim then. Here, on the other hand, his backward journey had never been able to afford the same, and in this regard he was no less fortunate than the rest. The lift began its slow motion upwards to the tenth floor. It struck Jim odd that no one should be getting on at any of the intervening floors at this time of the afternoon. But for what reason might anyone have wished to do business within their own sphere, and at such an early hour? Stepping out of the lift at last gave Jim some wry satisfaction and for no apparent reason. Facing a large plate glass, he could appreciate the vast visual feast which presented itself, telling of the presumption and self-grandeur to which Sanchez had always pretended. Antennas jutting out against some quickly moving sky, colors flashing reminded Jim of his predicament. Signals reaching out to some distant despair while the earth spins its completely regular course of inanimate decision beseeches us all to some higher thinking. Impossible problems resolvingly here but perhaps not in another tempts to leave quickly and unobtrusively. Secret images harboring could have lasted Jim a lifetime but for the ill-timed intrusion of things over which he could summon no control. Details and information in an instant transcurring through some low-frequency haze of camouflaged noise and evil intent, made good by the knowing of some deeper structure. Placing his finger over the doorbell of Beta Language Consultants S.G., he felt more and more confident that this should have been its just response, and in doing so rested a bit more happily than when he had come in. Some faded plastic pressure bored Jim and he went on with his gaze. Again in repose, he continued looking out at the sky and sensed a bit of rain. The blue from another place encroachingly set his mind on the unlikely coexistence he had once imagined for himself, planned and framed between those worlds which he would attempt to reconcile. Briskly moving sky easterly and out from that against which every bone in his body shattered in remembrance or sweet embrace. Jim suddenly found himself confronted by a young woman in her late twenties, pretty enough and with some tightly cropped short length of hair. She could have been any of those below, fashion news devotees made up with the newest line of facial creme, running forth into some blue water quartet of want and desire, quickly upon herself in small escape of one's present task.

*“Buenas tardes,”* she said.

*“Buenas tardes. Would it be possible to speak with the director?”*

He often enjoyed a puzzled look, surrenderingly and upon being led on in some teasing way. As if receiving at a language school should necessarily presume some more-than-slight command of the idiom.

“Is she expecting you?”

She impressed Jim as having a particularly kind accent and wondered if Sanchez had not again been recruiting abroad through one of those illicitly run agencies. Rumors would continue to abound regarding other endeavors which she might have been attending to.

“Actually, she isn’t. I used to teach here and’ve just found myself in need of some classes. I didn’t think she’d mind a visit.”

“What was your name, then? she asked.”

“Jim...Jim Cantrell.”

His explanation had not seemed to bother or predispose her in one way or another. His meandering insignificance might have offered her some jealous reprisal for losses past. Undeservedly so and long gone, but enduring beneath the cold of some heightened sense of aging insecurity. She seated him in one of those generic pieces of furniture usually found and telling of some less high-minded aesthetic. Cold metal and connected to thoughts sprung from well-emptied pools of wait longer transfixed, and more so as the receptionist returned. Then back across the room arrivingly in full portrait, bathed in late afternoon light downwardly directed. Forty-five against a face of rose-colored sensation into which one’s very own existence seemed to melt. Placing one over the other in uncaring resignation and with tints and shades of varying beige upon each gentle gesture. Jim shifted slightly to one side in order to better appreciate a bleached relief, heartened and then back to a time of lying in some early evening light eagerly but then disappearing. Days on end of tired frustration, unable to conquer some pale complexion, some sound mockingly at his own doorstep and coarse reminder of all the ungiven psychology, misbegotten ideas which had evidently been denied him. Swimming lengths through fluid resistance, holding back in decidedly forward direction towards some purest reward. Some swift ruffle momentarily enticed him into forgetting why it was that he had arrived, fragrant mistrust of some softer inclination enhanced into this pristine canvass which he continued to endure. Muse of fine black and still finer along some silkened figure, reminiscently of many and casting into insignificance all that Jim was unwillingly bent on achieving. Some inexorable escape into one’s own existential womb looking outwards, through some fragrant rose petal feature and daringly of some more determined insinuation. Some silk-screen image in transparent relief unrequitingly beautiful.

“Miss Sanchez is on the telephone,” she said.

“Oh, I’m in no hurry.”

She spoke as if not having been able to recall whether Jim had been informed as to the conditions of his brief wait. Neither could he, and this only reinforced in his mind some unintended

miscalculation in the manner with which he had been silently attending to her. It was to be all too brief, however, as Sanchez at once appeared.

“Hello, Jim. How have you been?”

“He became confused by the spontaneity with which it had occurred, presenting itself in some almost vulgar way and relative to all that had been taking place. “

“Lately, not that well. I don’t suppose you’ve heard about this Opening School mess.”

“Oh, sure. It has rather been news. Don’t tell me you were amongst the affected...”

“...didactic personnel. That’s right.”

The newspapers had always dismissed it in some journalistic way, insultingly and within a jargon telling of some particularly crueler piling on. As for his dealings with Sanchez, he had come to prefer anticipating such remarks rather than suffer them outright. She made some attempt to conceal her gloating and enjoyingly at that. Some preliminary picture of Jim against an upscale office space only reinforced the darker character in his mind, with once again calling forth notions of a child moving forth. Some bay of welcome and receipt discouragingly of all such kinds of false bravado. Flashes of bell sounds once again dazed Jim into overcoming and question exactly why he had agreed to any of this. Half-past-five ringing in some wayward regime high above Plaza de Castilla. Tardy souls barely intoxicated on the food and drink of their harrowing routine and returning necessarily. For Jim could at least rescue some tiniest piece of unsettled satisfaction, knowingly within some doubtless opportunity of not having had to be amongst the regular shift.

“It seems to have been run by the *mafiosos*, said Jim. It started out as a pretty good deal, though, steady pay and decent working conditions.”

Sanchez was unfazed.

“Well, that’s what I heard.”

She had begun to garner the feigned omniscience for which she was well known.

“I was told you had some new military contracts and needed teachers,” he said.

“Would you be interested, Jim?”

“Sure, why not.”

“Wonderful! Because, you know, I really am in a bind. They want me to send someone over tomorrow morning. Could you do that?”

“Tomorrow...I suppose so.”

“Come into my office and we can discuss the details.”

She would continue to surprise with that peculiar habit of turning nouns into verbs willingly, shifting emphasis set awry and without any regard for some better nature left behind. Jim entered her office, if not suspiciously then at least remembering all those previous months in her employ.

“Sit here and I’ll just give you the usual paperwork to be completed for social security and the like. You know. Just return them to my receptionist tomorrow or the next day when they’re filled in.”

She seemed eager to begin.

“I see you’ve found a new one,” said Jim.

“What was that?”

“Receptionist.”

“Oh, yes. Carolina. She’s not a quick study but very correct in her manner. Sanchez had never been accused of being too kind to any of those in her employ”.

“Now, there are some things for this assignment that you’ll be needing. It would rather require some special materials.”

Sanchez truly delighted in her profession. No one had ever doubted her penchant for pedagogic rigor. It was rather some occasional dubious moral fiber which offended even the most steadfast acquaintance.

“I heard it was just conversation,” said Jim.

Language teachers in Madrid would be quite varied and with differing ideas as to how to get on with it. A great many knew absolutely nothing about language teaching. Indeed, many had never come into contact with any student, whether idiom-related or not. These were usually the younger set, cool tourist attraction peddling off of one’s natural abilities. Hours at any price might suffice for the weak stomached, all-night drinking parties at some bar in the city center. Then up at nine for some first class with one of the locals, calling on one finer news dedication for some easier pulling over. Some rain on the plain exempted squarely, some fixed-price formulations extracted wantonly from the coffers of some such second-rate enterprise. Although this might not have necessarily been the case with more serious-minded academies, these were few and far

between. Conversation was, therefore, the call of the day. Finding a feather in the lot might send one off to the whiteboard, inventing of some sterner notion and seeking out one diviner explanation as if from another time or space. Trying to recall those lesser regarded lessons from one's youth and upon some ad lib delivered timidly. Wayward resolve being called back to one's own panic-stricken sensibility and wondering, until some softest configuration might distract from the principal drill so callingly. Some gentle breeze visionary pressing upon one's own delicately chosen object. A kind word, or perhaps some tender implore teasingly within the confines of this once fruitful exercise. Some coming under and imaginably of one's early morning resuscitation might lead one to covet the very half to whom she had given herself over in proper abandon. It would not be difficult to imagine the receptionist in such terms, slowly generated rhythmic routines duly appreciated might result in some longer relationship overly perceived.

“Conversation, yes, but also a working knowledge of some basic concepts vital for a correct functioning in what they are called upon to achieve in their mission. You can see that, can't you Jim?”

She spoke scoldingly and offering little patience for Jim's seeming impertinence. A long silence ensued as she fumbled through some pile of folders and manuals atop her desk.

“I can't imagine where they could be. They were sent over yesterday. By courier, you know.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Let's just go over and have a look in the shelves. It won't take a minute.”

Sanchez rose and disappeared behind a wall of books and folios. Tattered and yellow offering out over some square meter space, stepping around and back again gave Jim the impression that she really had never had any special materials at all. But seemingly in order to better justify his accepting the classes, he the lone responsible facilitator and making amends for the way in which she had treated him. Of course, she had not offered to pay him what was still owed from upon his last departure, and nor did he ever expect that she would. But her being in somewhat of a difficulty – *I really am in a bind* – would usually have her going off into some time-consuming search of special materials. And so she once again disappeared, not giving mind to the extra plate well-exhibited as she bent down and over for yet another go of it. *It would rather require some special materials!* Jim started feeling strangely relaxed by it all. Crossing one leg over the other in gentle recline he glanced uncaringly at the ceiling. He dabbled in some delicate play of tic-tac-toe, and then again upon some slighter imperfection in the ceiling above. Month-old stains daring some quick dart from his playful eye, stretchingly and affording him a much-needed win within which he could temporarily thrive. At once he again caught sight of the receptionist, and gracefully in study of the documents over which she had been given charge. *She is not a quick study!* Her profile seemed to cry out for some just conclusion to whatever it was that Jim was doing there. Sleek and daring of anyone whom she might have occasion to greet. Nightly routine of



regular time and place amongst friends in search of satisfying some slightly tainted appetite. *Otro cubata, por favor*. Festively and in full pleasure until having to enter at half-past-eight each morning, passing the porter in cheery ascent and expectant of even the smallest demand which Sanchez would quickly lay before her. Not a quick study, perhaps, but Jim had rarely seen one glide so sweetly over stage work floor unpretendingly of even the slightest show of discontentment readily directed towards her. Requiring employ from head to toe, much like Jim himself. Lack of anxious enthusiasm about anything that might ease some constant gnawing discomfort within her, and for which she obviously had little need.

“Here they are, said Sanchez, as well as some other things which just might supplement wonderfully!”

Having again been made to rouse, Jim leaned forward onto the desk in front of him. Sanchez made her way around and back to the other side. Then raising his forehead, eyes widened in false anticipation brought Jim back into some proper consultation and trying to put it all into some clearer light.

“Here we’ve got some tests of level which you should consider using. Some have been studying and speaking for quite a while. They’ve attained pretty good levels and can speak fluently and appropriately in their chosen turns of phrase.”

“Okay.”

“We’ll nevertheless need to stratify them a bit, as I’ve been made to understand that those capable would be sent off quite soon to stations abroad, while the others could be made to languish on a bit longer.”

Jim was not quite sure what she meant by the last remark.

“What’s more, I should tell you that the tests of level do not necessarily reflect their speaking abilities. No, they’re rather unreliable in that respect. Any tendency towards proper use of syntax, or no, becomes clear certifiably upon consideration of some slightly skewed scale of performance, but that is all. You do realize, Jim, that we here at Beta Consultants have always strived first and foremost to satisfy our clients’ most urgent needs. And in this regard, we are prepared to forgo the usual rigor-more-all for some sounder reflection of their capabilities. The validity of such tests is questionable at best, and we certainly do not seek to become heavy types – *pesados* as we say here in Spain – and therefore quite logical in questioning the integrity of such routine formalities.”

“Why do we bother at all giving these level tests?” asked Jim.

“Oh, come on ...for the higher-ups! We can’t be seen as being too lax in our regular regime. These are military people, after all. You’ve got to play the game!”

Sanchez had always been somewhat of an enigma. Scholarship achieved would present itself in some superficial way, walls covered with certificates and diplomas at first impressingly but then in disrespect of one's better judgement. Shaking hands with the president of the Texas Association for the Betterment of Small Business International Alliance, she would present some stark cynicism against the discourse wall, smilingly and in fullest awareness of one well-thought-out scheme. She might have taken the microphone, cheaper acoustics fed back through some regular course of turkey dinner and bland conversation, put together for the benefit of some long buried social ideal whose time would never come. Then sitting at the presenter's table in anxious thought returningly to some motherland plain. Her tiniest seed of civilization moved onwards and attemptingly to plant and sow amidst some brush cover of ancient principle, doomingly to wither away in prompt overwhelm. And yet, at times Jim could sense some faintest glimmer of generosity towards her subject matter. Genuine joy in opening up to the latent formation to which she had been called. Licensing sincere in English philology working forthright. Alas, Sanchez had become a caricature of all she had ever intended to be. Drawing into her every wayward soul, seeking some bit of easy gain pretendingly of sound service and intention. Proud of having helped to bridge the gap across to the Texas Association but never thinkingly of some higher contradiction. Years and generations ago attemptingly in search of some escape from the darker character. Just as free as if flying in direct wing from atop that steeple overlooking solemn square, bell calling as if from high above the plaza, ringing down remorse and pity upon those whom his forefathers had once renounced. Remarking staidly with nothing but kind words and good intentions. Church...Steeple...Sky... High above, some sacristan calling to an aging flock, aging formation within which knowledge becomes but some cruel device to be taken advantage of, and for nothing except pure personal reward, ego-satisfaction drawn upon by some still lingering doubt and insecurity. Secular misplay given reverent by the wrongdoers on both continents, but held sacred only on one. And for what other reason could it be if not for some time-honored regard of caste, real or virtual but vile nonetheless. This Jim could never live down if it were he in her place.

“The tests of level once completed would have you presenting them with some detailed description of the course...”

“Just one more thing, he interrupted.”

“Of course.”

“I really thought that this was to be a more loosely put-together project. Some grammar, but more directed towards a conversational feel and not so...”

“...structured? Yes, but we must not sacrifice rigor for convenience. Can't you see that, Jim?”

It cost Jim to speak in such a didactic jargon. After all, he had spent the better part of his youth in direct opposition to such vulgarity, earthly drawl and with whiling away of time on end

in listening to the finest voices. He had come to all of this rather late -- taken up as somewhat of a last resort. Arts and sciences had always been more to his own sense of responsibility. Gazing back at some diminishing set of contours, one's Amsterdam retreat could never forgive us all. Uneven distribution and readying the battlefield would all fall upon Jim and those who shared in his academic misfortune. Notes torn away in harrowed frustration would be his all-too-burdensome life legacy, and with the purest of souls all the while wishing him on to something better. The teaching of language had eluded him altogether, and in this respect he too found himself mired within some incidental excursion for which he had always chided those whom he had commonly referred to as the travelling teachers. Some finer formation was always to be appreciated, although Sanchez and her kind would forever be satisfied with whatever happened to stumble their way.

"You've got a course syllabus, then?" asked Jim.

"Yes, I have. I developed it myself -- in conjunction with Beta Consultants, that is."

She never missed an opportunity to cover her tracks just in case things got out of hand. Feeling confidently in his mind, she produced some not-too-brief manual, well-bound inexpensively and placed it squarely in front of Jim.

"That looks like the one I used to use for the intermediate group at the barracks."

"It is basically, but with some very important additions tailored to their specific lines of duty. You'll notice, for example, that third conditional structures have been especially sought upon in this version. As has deductive language, past and present, so important for the rather sort of secretive communication with which they'll be called upon to deal."

Jim hardly heard the last bit, as it had often been his habit to block out reflexively what Sanchez had been saying. In that way, she could always be approached in some fresher manner, pretending that Sanchez had not spoken at all but still piqued by what might follow.

"Say that again, Jim?"

Jim was not aware that he had said anything at all. Only in recalling some faint *sensación buccal* in his lower jaw which gave him the impression that something in Sanchez's words must have been quite calling to his attention. Not feeling sure of exactly what it was, he apologized and invited her to continue.

"Oh, no. That's all I have to say about the manual. You can keep this copy for yourself."

He slipped both the bound pages and test of level into his bag.

"How will you be arriving there, Jim?"

“Depends on where it is.”

“Haven’t I told you? Quite the out-of-the-way location, I’m afraid.”

“Is there a bus line?”

“Yes, but it’s not very regular. Not much cause to head up that way, I guess.”

Not having asked about the location beforehand only reiterated Jim’s lifelong lack of foresight. Sanchez seemed to have always delighted in sending teachers off to the furthest reaches of the city. Some far-off redistricting, only to be newly disappointed upon some gut feeling of aimlessness, anonymity and regret returning. He would almost come to question the very steps which had placed him in his present dilemma.

“Would you like a bus schedule, Jim?”

“No thanks. I’ll probably drive. Is there a gas stipend?”

“Beta Consultants will reimburse you for half of your petrol receipts. That’s the best we can do, I’m afraid.”

“Has the wage gone up, at all?”

“Since you last taught for us, it’s been raised 100 pesetas an hour.”

That was over two years ago, thought Jim. An hour echoed and inside Jim’s head over and over he could hear it taunting him and echoing even further into some time passage and crying out within a bell rush of vibration. Hours and days, days and months to years arching out some longer and longer pantomime of tired assaults, spaces of hours and days being spent in lonesome concert with one’s own lifeline, some screenplay founded upon moments turned to hours and then hours more. Jim began to feel an odd dizziness coming over. How often he had experienced just that! At times overwhelming, while at others simply some mild inconvenience begging for recognition and reeling off an endless stream of mind-numbing information. Feeling grateful for the latter, he insinuated some gracious acceptance, rose from his chair and extended a hand in gratitude.

“Well, then.”

“Here’s a map you can use to find your way, Jim. The exact address is on back and they’ll be expecting you at eight o’clock.”

He politely refused her offer to show him out, thinking that he might steal some last glimpse of the receptionist which, alongside Sanchez, would have been surely to disappoint.

“Oh, and just one more thing, Jim.”

“Sure.”

“They would rather prefer no conversation at all regarding either present assignments or the installations themselves. Could you keep that in mind?”

“Of course.”

As Jim began crossing over to the door, he quickly realized that the receptionist was no longer to be found. He made no venture as to where she may have gone, but smilingly and with renewed intent he reached for the door. ...

Having now stepped back out into the corridor, the lift seemed to be further away than ever. Some gentler reverie which had accompanied him up to the tenth floor had become moot, and this would always be amongst the most worrisome of results. Time casting about at Jim's expense would continually set him upon thoughts not inconsistent with one's own inadvertent life retreat. Moving down and towards some erstwhile new beginning would nevertheless continue pretending to be Jim's sole saving grace, some downstairs light pulling him back out onto the track and better path along which he had come. But Jim's second employ with Maria de la Paz Sanchez would also be short-lived. He was never quite sure why he had come to be so distrusted at that Headquarters to which he had been sent. Perhaps it was a general dissatisfaction with the manner in which he related to his students. Or it may simply have been some vaguer notion that he was not who he had pretended to be. Suspicious glances darting his way, unceasing innuendo seeming to make light of his role there as language teacher. In any case, he would now think back to it all with cool disregard, just one more absurdity within a series of many and certainly not worth any toll it may have taken on his own feeling of self-worth. The fact that they had requested a change could only have been some commentary on their own worth as language learners, and this would be confirmed some years later upon meeting one of his former students – a lovely young woman to be sure – who confided that it had only been due to some ubiquitous tactic by the administration for gradually eliminating any need for language classes at all. He had risen early on the day of his return. Shaving barely and not bothering to achieve much of anything, he sat down to his usual instant breakfast coffee and tepidly supporting himself on a white formica. Eyes slowly staring through a plate glass and then another out to some darkened forest of dream sleep covering. Mornings had always been the hardest time. Trapped between the sleeping subconscious and unimaginable climb. Hours ahead of going forth slowly in some life-threatening desperation. Some wake-up call come too late for having known better and thinking about all those poor souls vanquished. One by one, they disappeared in startling anguish, pale faces and becoming lost in some moving reverie wrought with uncertain conclusions. Emerging packages of urgency kept unawares and useless except for she who spent her last dying breath distractedly into a sea of white paper fancy. Dreamingly and yearning for all that had gone away in careless disregard. Gentler breeze continuing on towards the Netherland would lift one, loftingly and in direct rebuke to some

backward civilization downturn. Retentive thoughts. Stifled dreams. Dreams and interrupted sleep eternal begging some earlier morning greater casting forth. Restingly and at peace with some higher pursuit, recently inaugurated protectors of this ne'er flourishing race. Insignificance conspired against Jim and he picked up his bag in response. Turning one key over the other, hidden tumblers forging some coldly defined re-examination consecutively took Jim into some faraway time. Easy pursuit into a St. George terminal would continue indefinitely and with all the while dreaming of some early morning sense. The general early hour had cloaked him, and would continue to do so throughout his lifetime. Little remaining and yet everything. Seas and algae splashing up upon some metal shore of dreams and hopes germinating out and away from past places. Newer location and in virtual defiance of some strictly defined moral and social order unknowingly descending into what might have become theirs and his own. It was pitch black as Jim walked to his car. The sun would not appear for another hour, and this Jim knew to be true despite some uneasy longing for quick judgement, uneasy feeling for the things and places which never seemed to be rid from his moistened routine. Parched nurturing of dampened psychologies and anxiously to begin the mindless chores so necessary in being able to temporarily soothe over some quickly diminishing earth-worn presence. Driving down and then up around towards the north side seemed to cost Jim his life's journey increasingly incensed. Thoughts and more thinking back within some unending revision would cause him to wander along a road so little travelled, and this particular morning would be no exception. Needing to arrive at some given time and place often cost Jim until finally rendering to some sullen hand helpfully along a gilded way. *Hasta la rotunda*. But where would Jim go then? For the circle at which he would arrive speaks softly and too softly to be heard in offering him some surer way forth, more likely tricking and laughing at Jim for the way in which he had set himself up for slaughter. Not knowing that which might be awaiting him at the end of a winding road was precisely what had been enticing since early on. Jim had ventured onto a well-presumed path and right at the traffic circle as he had been told. He nonetheless seemed to be going nowhere. The map Sanchez had given him turned out to be totally inadequate. Light haze intermittent against some black canvass strained Jim's eyes as he rode past one by one, each saluting some consecutive drive and hopefully onto some less equivocal proposition. Jim soon reached a dead end. Due to the darkness, he struggled to notice a limestone structure to his right, coming up and terminating at some corner unforeseen geometrically. Lone sentinel amidst the morning dew cautioned Jim to turn away, and this he did with some sharp deviation to the left and up to his briefest search for a place at which he could resume this most recent misadventure. He refrained from some quick glance down at his watch. Habit had long gotten the best of Jim, and he had put it on despite some uneasy awareness, recent recollection and tending towards some inherent contradiction. Still, he was confident that it would have confirmed his having had arrived well ahead of time. Not wishing to enter so early was tantamount, polite refusal of some poorly thought-out life lesson and barely coping at that. Jim took a moment to rest his head back, glancing up and to his left bringing on some sharp beauty sensation. Pinpoint of dazzling ray lighting up the corneal screen of some well-worded poem delightedly in active recline. Venus picture frame of some perfectly developed photograph beaming out and towards one at quick light speed. Some early morning night cover had shed its black all-encompassing upon Jim. How long and far might that beam have been able to transport him? When and where could he have arrived within its protective embrace? It might have delivered him back to the meeting point

high above some tired sanctuary. Or foretold of some abandonment reckoning, old for new and wondering aloud in self-righteous regard as to how one could live and endure in such a time-worn state. Where upon some loftier gaze descending, some darkened shadows capped two, then three more passing just under eye-line sight with horses driving on sounds of clip-clop startled Jim. The beauty was unimaginable, some concurrence of every last piece of lost joy ever read about or studied! Some youthful flower too sublime to endure and wondering if there could really be any way back, or onwards forever towards some white mist pastel color. Valhalla resting peacefully at the end of that beam, yet pretendingly of one's own point and restless nature. Sharply marking out the slow exit of one's own being and reclining forward onto some stifled calling out. This is how it had often occurred to Jim. Emerging from his car in awareness of some silently-not-so air sensation chilled around his ears and forehead, and only to better appreciate some gaining approach of one more patterned night compression, equestrian learning of some finer character. Going it alone downward towards a limestone wall certainly, and gave Jim the impression of one well-guarded presence. Steel and barbed wire playing peacefully off a dark morning sky seemed to encourage some brighter moment, and he could savor the promise of some orange beginning alighting behind the taller structures which clearly defined the central city. Off at a distance and *Casa de Campo* laying down before some pathetic imitation nevertheless impressed Jim. Some welcoming mid-orange glow, and yet not. Drawing closer along a not-so-steep incline demanded some larger fortitude and wider appreciation across any dead-end street. Sanchez had said nothing about horses, and this led Jim to momentarily consider that he, too, had been coaxed onto a different path, wrong for now but then invitingly in the longer sense and perhaps even welcome. The limestone began to overwhelm as it grew nearer and nearer, some distant planet fading away blindingly into this next-day texture and assured Jim that it was to indeed take place. Just as Sanchez had intended. In this place where a life might find easy turn and begin some slow steady crawl back to where it had been born. The heavy metal gate structure which Jim had confronted now seemed to be fully exerting as it again pushed him persuadingly away from some left-turn direction. He instantly situated it well to his back. Knowing the gatekeeper was continuing to observe and resisted the temptation to reverse his gaze, as though Jim had had anything to hide or be wary about. He recalled the plodding inconvenience that such official formality could bring and was prone to no baited intention or towards any such delay on this particular morning. Where upon having exhausted the left-wall structure, he entered into some open relief and sharply contrasting the impasse from which he had just been discouraged. Some dead-end gate used selectively and would lead Jim to consider that it might have made for one fairly discreet entrance. Several well-dressed gentlemen strode quickly past Jim, and back out towards the sidewalk from which he had just arrived. Nor was their general demeanor much what Jim might have expected. It only added to his initial impression that this was unlike the last military site at which he had taught. He entered hesitatingly.

*“Buenos dias. Soy un profesor de ingles de Beta Consultants. Me esperan unos alumnos a las ocho.”*

Jim stammered a bit as he spoke, though for no apparent reason. The foyer had not been particularly threatening, though a bit smaller than expected and gave the impression of being secure and correct in its glass metal decor. It seemed to have been built from some specific design, menace unforeseen and close enough to be taken seriously. Whether or not something easier might have sufficed he could not say. Perhaps he had still not been convinced, failing to thoroughly digest some afforded response of the exterior guard, or maybe in recalling the security camera above with its quiet insistence on some forlorn practicality. Nothing had so far given him any clue as to where he was. In any case, Jim had done the best he could to explain his sudden appearance.

*“¿Por favor, me deja el documento?”*

Jim was initially unsure of what he was being asked to do, even though he had been requested to present his identity card just about every day for the past ten years, and at one place or another. Not for any specific language difficulty, but rather some plate glass turning back sound at its own and forcing Jim to lean his forehead up and against in search of some proper path of communication. Oral exercise as prelude had always been the rule, and here it seemed to take on some even greater urgency, some taxing of one's better ability to put forth clearly and concisely. The officer was now framed and oddly reflected back at Jim as he slipped his card through a narrow slot in the glass. It was inspected more rigorously than usual, and this might have given Jim cause for concern in any other circumstance. But attributing to some more rigidly defined life obligation gave it no further thought. Years of military discipline had obviously taken its toll and Jim would not want to offend the man. Still, it took a rather unexpected turn with Jim's being asked to put off his duly-scheduled first class.

*“Hace el favor de esperar en la sala de atras. Ya te avisaremos cuando puedas subir”.*

The desk officer spoke at once authoritatively and with that not-wholly unfeigned politeness that Jim had had to endure for so many years. He had not realized that there was indeed a waiting room and just off to the right of the principal entrance. Sala de Espera. Waiting, it seemed to Jim, had always here been a well-deserved exercise. With barely so much as a nod to the officer, Jim turned and again measured steps across a black speckled linoleum deliveringly onto some closed-door space. Once inside, Jim was complacent enough though still a bit disappointed in the delay. Had there been some problem with his identity card? Why had the officer not returned it? And Jim continued to be curious about why not one of the few people he had seen since arriving was in uniform, lacking in some just visual reminder of the mission to which one had been called and declared willingly to accept and achieve. A sound military code demanded it. Yet he sat in the second of three black chairs confidently and with patience, lining perpendicular to the place of entrance and mockingly of some stark windowless ambient. Without anything specific to consider and in light of some pre-being mindset, he reached into his bag and produced the test of level



which Sanchez had given him. Neatly laid out and with some distinctly professional appearance, it certainly presented the case for a critical learning reliability. It occurred to Jim that the usual photocopies would have to be arranged for, and when in consideration of some present time equation rendered an impression that he might not be able to get through everything that he had intended to do. Lesson plans pushing back against unforeseen events had never ceased to amaze Jim. His gaze became suddenly fastened onto some singular portrait, at just above eye length and adorningly. Some singular portrait as such was procedural, chief commander in regal attire looking on in paternal oversight. Morale constraint left unretained until one could further their own solely through some more mindful inner sanction. Inner strength opening up and deliveringly onto a shield-ended plate of national will. Some service directed outwardly and towards the betterment of one's own sense of social obligation. The room was surprisingly quiet, and testament to the heavy metal door which insulated it from the foyer. It only reinforced some nagging sense of misbelonging, as some regal authority continued to promulgate its unrelenting stare upon Jim. He wondered if he should set himself a limit, one on which he could rely without seeming to be too overbearing. Happenstance overcoming some tired reality that he was there not for any pleasure seeking nor encouragingly of his own. It was arguably a favor to Sanchez, or so he would have liked to believe. Empty wall space gray above and more above looking upwards brought Jim back to some adolescent end trance. Associated with some perpendicular wall strength white and unknowingly left Jim with little more than some passing notion of dedicated scholarship. Vocation pressed onward through the chimes and efforts of a well-intentioned clergy, secular defeat looking back and out through some sacred stained-glass dome and all-knowing of the meeting point to which Jim had arrived and forsaken. It occurred to him that the room was impeccably kept, as was the little else that he had been able to see up to that point. A stark and welcome contrast to the barracks at which he had given classes some years earlier. Green worn uniform walking and splashing through mudden pools strewn this way and that. Artillery equipment proved to be no match for some weathered resolve turned depressingly in Jim's world, and would often urge him to reconsider his somewhat already torn mission. Why had he agreed to return? A question so engrained in his mind and insatiable in its desire to torment and humiliate Jim. Regular classroom shifts had afforded him some new breadth for too short a time, then vanishing and reminded him once again of the abyss into which he had been hurled. And what would Stevenson say if she knew that he had lingered on until the very end, lying prone beggily in such shameful respite? The door opened suddenly and a tall gray-haired gentleman stepped in. His general appearance struck Jim as implying more years than he might have actually had. Without so much as acknowledging Jim, he sat down in an adjacent seat. The man had looked familiar. Although by now, Jim was wondering if he should temporarily ease his growing suspicion of having been either neglected or forgotten, and since the gentleman had gotten an equally good look at Jim saw no reason to insist upon some mutual recognition. Both persisted in a forward directed gaze, eyes shifting neither one way nor the other. Indecision began to get the best of Jim, and this he had endured upon years and years of feeling his way through interminable self-justification and unendingly so. Moving on and then back had always made for some easy excuse if not incalculable wait. The tall gentleman let

go with a slight throat sounding inwardly, muffled reverberation sensed politely and reserved. The door to Jim's front left seemed to negate the cold right-angle plane which he had taken for granted, spilling over its matinal yearnings with a call towards Jim's better judgement. He had always felt awkward and uncomfortable in situations like these without really knowing why. Lack of staid planification imposing its unforgiving course and unable to fit into any role situation momentarily called for. Some sudden mind vacuum at once took hold of Jim, and cold empty war maneuvers began to fill his head with historical reference patterns and newspapers decrying of one life turn after another. He might have assumed that there appeared something in the room to set off such an unlikely rumination. The portrait, perhaps, with its incessant challenge to Jim's permeating disregard. Policies designed to ensure some greater sanity played off the military involvement with which he had once again become acquainted. Military whys and wherefores leading some pleasingly everyday existence above a green cut lawn, walking resolute within one's duty-filled obligation but all the while enjoyingly of some finer diversion. Language learning to be sure, but other things as well and always in an even-handed way, never once chastened by some other type of superfluousness. The greater political gestures above would always be a mystery to Jim. Debates told one upon the other and then again within some shameless discourse going on. Jim caught sight of some well-used bulletin board at the far end of the room, diagonally and without any effort towards the tall gentleman seated immediately to his right. Senseless manifestations of one existence or another calling up from beneath some tired population. Jazz music psychologies, writings of some stark totalitarian lifestyle sprung from cold connections edging out between one side and the other. Bust went the stage theater rendering of some child spoken dramatic strife! Nonsense syllables strung along in shame and insinuating of some striking casualty among the enlightened few. Waiting and more so until tactical errors confused Jim within this slightly sullen pedagogical world. Jim had never considered himself to be a standard bearer for the profession. Nor would he ever. Some awaiting within uncommon strides, forays into those less probable situations should have provided him some certain cause for continuance. Alas, it had not. And why that should have been he could not say. Unprepared to play the role and unwilling to accept the consequences of giving in to sheer practicality, undeservedly inferior notes were irrevocably doled out and stubbornly held onto until Jim could no longer tolerate some sharp breaking down. He might have considered picking up a newspaper, here laid flat in plenty and beneath some rigid royal portrait. He would soon tire of such ramblings, false antidotes wanting in some information intention. Seeking to confuse and at once entertain accomplished little of either, providingly of some more sinister draft yet to come. Going off and more sounding out about events conspiring worldly out of control, spheres of broken diehard fiddling about with some very nature on which we all depend. Still commentary beholding of some cooler past, lunchtime reading moments dotted with newspaper configurations mixing through some smaller potpourri of jargon confused most, mockingly of some steady carrying forward within one's new world feeling. This blank wall stare became increasingly difficult and with military colors glaring outward and unwelcomingly besieging Jim. Duty called and he had answered. Begrudgingly had he accomplished that which some faded youth prize could have but momentarily considered. Some watchful commander and

guardian of the shield-ended plate onto which readied engagement is acquired solemnly would never intimidate Jim. Some dubious purpose and muddled machinery slogging about bore no ill will, but neither did it satisfy. The room in which he had been sitting began to grow warmer, some well-sealed institution and would demand no less. Some temperate inability had always played upon Jim in a certain conspiratorial manner. Attemptingly of forcing him away from this less-than-welcoming continental misdeed and which might eventually have its way. Jim's thoughts vacillated in some wildest non-vague manner, between that which he had attempted and those ideals for which his ancestors had ventured out. Gone over in tacit disgust of one's own non-consideration, meeting point man-against-fellow-man and all the while attemptingly disguised in some most proper human form. Jim perhaps had not been able to see things so clearly as the others, and his life birth may have arrived too late and at too high a cost. Still, in refusing to acknowledge that which warranted no acknowledgement afforded him some patent satisfaction. Who dare be so bold as to suggest that anyone had refrained from doing their very best? He might have assumed the gentleman seated to his right to be in some inconspicuous line, telling of a rather tenuous relationship between government and the general well-being. Jim rose from his chair and while trying hard to avoid any errant glance. Lest the gentleman think Jim to be unduly parochial in his manner, self-conscious demeanor left no room for a smooth stepping out. And Jim flung open the door with some newly acquired self-assuredness and wanting to get on with the business at hand.

“Will I be waiting much longer?” asked Jim, and again pressing his forehead to the plate glass.

“... *¿Habr  que esperar mucho m s?*”

“*El sargento bajar  a por ti dentro de diez minutos.*”

Ten minutes would be an eternity to Jim. He was inclined not to re-enter the room from which he had just emerged. And stepping outside once again might have meant being besieged by some wanton disdain for this course so unapologetically decided upon. Hence, Jim began to alight upon things once more removed from his present consciousness. Clip-clop horse recollections momentarily re-emerged, entertaining Jim and temptation ran past some desire to re-live the experience. Garnered track turned round might have spoken for a pleasanter circuit of light equestrian exercise, delightingly in some faster comeback and screaming through a more delicate form. Early morning rehearsal for some larger space routine, bringing on and turning up some mudden feats of form and wonder. Light fantastic sounds glowing over some wretched pane finely founded had called to mind one sunny afternoon residingly on Yonkers fare. Knowing how and when to strike on to a solid finish, photographic telling of a winning beast championed beneath some gilded saddle. Jim recalled how his own father might partake of one finer afternoon, clip-clop alighting on some slightly mischievous intent. Hard work habits would at times be left to languish on a faithful dock. Resentingly of some supplementary responsibility and in such manner

which tended to savor one's own life reward. So it would have been with Jim but for some arduous weight over which he could exert so little control. Looking back had cost him dearly. Time consuming accoutrements filling up time past with their incessant call for a fairer start. Out of a gate and sprinkled youth upon some lust love of wealthy burden gone forward, into a soul reckoning search of ripened awakening. Jim recanted his none-too-precipitous attitude, cunning in its anonymity yet stepping out through the glass door once again. Feeling some now ripening matinal broth against his face only reinforced the notion that his world was firmly at odds with some more even-tempered anesthetic mindset running about. The usual morning condensate had disappeared five or so minutes earlier and Jim stared down at its frost intent. Wet pavement black and staring up watchfully made him bring into full realization the need for complete disclosure, some inherent need for prompt recapitulation and trying to make sense of one's youthful need for the creative. Jim himself had once considered some literary undertaking. Weeks of churning out some tiredly veiled expressions, some poor substitute for senseless guitar melodies ill-perceived, misplaced windows peering back into one's own soul search disappointed inevitably. Thinking back and mingled in between reins of laughter saw one coming home in strange satisfaction. Thinking back and putting all that was seemingly digested into one or another closed capsule of crème-colored moment satisfied. Jim had enjoyed playing music as a boy, its fleetingness being all too eager to disappoint. Garage music sounding out through some old accordion instrument pleased throughout years of passing yarn, woven along in some chaotic fabric ne'er perceived until lateness gave speak to one's own dying breath. Spoken over and over, slowly at first but then gaining in some somewhat formidable show of overwhelming advance delightedly. Jim would have reveled anew in his unexpected treasure. Playing three-by-four around some dissonance tone space opened up one's future art possibility. Relaxingly in closed sleep nesting, comfort endured and with grudging wind-blown bass, tones alighting beneath some scratchy melody, custodian to one's inherent inability foremost but warning of some larger stop. Organ instrument leaping out of Jim's recollection momentarily but then surrenderedly beneath strains of hang on. Standing near some chartreuse perfumed veil of soulful endeavor caught Jim and then returningly in joyous flashback of some musted recreation space in easy recline. Backbeat foot-pedaled in some numbered return unintended, some cold jazz future might await and hurried Jim's present mind back to one's sweetest recovery. Continuing to tempt and finally, young girls dancing beneath some middle class amazed and urgently onto some erstwhile music formation. Pleasanter intentions would not cease amid some darker result, but neither could they flourish. Wet pavement continued as some later morning motion impressed and pressed on. Non-uniformed servants quickly directed and urgency determining some new daily course became ridden upon one's steadily rising sun awareness. What had become of Jim's early morning trial? Again gazing upwards brought down some granite facade view, white whisper brushstrokes higher above and expectingly of this final wait prelude. Higher looking and imagining some distant covering, Jim's soul filtering into the vast ether and becomingly of one's own fading mortality. Some high blue sky and Jim thinking still about a fate which might yet exercise its graying grasp upon one's already wayward identity. Some resonant voice was heard to summon him in, and Jim rebounded.

The sergeant had indeed appeared, and Jim again took refuge within events determined, sacrificial mind inhalation and peace-of-mind temporarily redeemed. He followed him closely, loathe to disrupt any implicit relationship freshly-attended-to and trying to withstand any errant cold profession stare which might be encountered along the way. Jim continued to alight among friendly fare unpursued, stepping softly upon newly waxed fusiform readiness and anticipating of some certain compelling free-form vision. Impeccably kept and needing some cheerful task implied greetings out-of-hand. Professional layman appearances still lay canvass to Jim's imagination and having all but given up on any sterner army endeavor reconciliation. The sergeant returned Jim's identity card, gestured him into a room at the end of the hallway and abruptly disappeared. A fine classroom it was. Some carpeted rectangular gray contrasted sharply with the crude barracks to which he had last been assigned. Were these students to be like all the others? He had expected a number of them, yet there appeared just one. Some mustached gentleman in his fifties, not wholly unpretentious and with a gaze at once demanding of some authority-driven need to comply and generously given toward those in his command. Surely he had been well-skilled in the quiet elocution necessary for bringing forth from a silent faithful. But it was all in the background for now as Jim's recurring retreat took on its newest turn, ill-timed events again negating one's own life ambition. He, too, had once expected much of some well-earned devotion. They who had long ago entered into some bright new world would have expected of him, too. He had been awaiting the arrival of some class-filled candidature, those wishing for some sudden idiom enlighten. Old-world patterns and predictions forsaken in much the same way as could be explained by Jim's own common lack of events foreseen. Events as chaotic eruptions one upon another continued to present Jim the pretext for bathing himself within endless hours of self-examination. Justification lost for all that had occurred and certain destiny notions dwindling away amid the twists and tangles of everyday life. Jim sat alone. As some well-fulfilled gentleman completed the compass to which he had aspired. Then standing eye to eye, words still restrained beneath some mutual need for quiet self-congratulatory achievement, and extending a hand toward Jim.

“Hello. I am Virgilio!

“How do you do, said Jim.

He was startled by the man's enthusiasm. It was not as though he had never seen anything like it before. It just rather seemed grander than most and more demanding of some even more extraordinary response, non-prejudicial nor did it strive to confuse.

“You are Jim?” he asked.

His voice seemed to at once rise and fall.

“Yes. Are there any other students?”

“No. This is a particular class.”

Jim began wondering aloud as to Sanchez’s instructions.

“I was told that there were to be other ...”

“...yes. They mentioned that you would be expecting a larger group.  
Miss Sanchez is confused sometimes.”

Jim could only concur on this point, albeit reluctantly so long as he needed to be in her employ.

“Vir..., said Jim.”

“*Vir-HIL-io* ... You know *El Infierno*?” he asked.

Jim thought for a moment before feeling sure. He continued with a wry smile.

“Virgil. Yes, of course.”

Jim had never read the book in its entirety, although he was reasonably sure that his new student had.

“Is this a military installation?” asked Jim.

“Oh, yes.”

“And” to whom am I speaking in that regard?

But Jim was obliged to rephrase his question.

“May I ask if you are military or civilian?”

“I am a military Colonel.”

Jim was impressed. Not only by the completeness of Virgilio’s response, but also in

having had only come to teach as high as *comandante* in his previous military classes. The colonel invited Jim to sit, and they both did so. It was clear from the outset that he would be disposed to however Jim wished to proceed. Unlike Dolores, who would be too preoccupied with some furtherest delusion of self-grandeur, the colonel seemed to be a rather humble man.

“I’ve been waiting downstairs for some time, and I really don’t know how much time we have left this morning,” said Jim.

He figured that Sanchez’s level test would now seem ludicrous and decided to forgo the whole thing. Jim had already gotten a pretty fair idea regarding the colonel’s capabilities. Besides, one quickly learned that such formality, despite Sanchez’s bent to the contrary, meant little and still less when dealing with private classes.

“I am sorry for the wait. The security here is very hard, and with many more papers... *papeleo* as we say.”

Jim thought he might just as well try for some more information and completely in disregard of Sanchez’s instructions.

“What exactly is this place, Colonel?”

“These are the intelligence services. And where are you from, Jim?”

“New York City.”

“New York! Good!” exclaimed Virgilio.

Sanchez seemed to have been on when she told Jim that any discussion regarding the installation would tend to be discouraged, for Virgilio had quickly changed the subject.

“Have you ever visited, Colonel?”

“No, never. But I would like.”

“...to.”

“Yes,” said Virgilio.

“No ...would like *to*.”

He saw no reason not to try and utilize the time they had remaining. Virgilio's blank stare only encouraged Jim back to some whiteboard explanation. Wire-rimmed glasses peering into one's own puzzled novel protagonist took Jim back to some literary adolescent Tuesday. One which could only be appreciated over these many years henceforth. Higher responsibilities sought after and for some more proper interpretation of the bard, nobler past reverence duly-rendered would provide Jim some earliest lifelong appreciation of that which could only comfort through some more secular vision, religious undoing and gaining in some more adequate interpretation of bell and steeple. Walking through some sunlit high school camp, afternoon match athletic against some rhythmic drumbeat would alleviate the need for one's temporary learning gratification. Listening to some cold wind echo and searching out one truly pristine form brought over from another place. Seasons undisturbed, warmer green amidst some softest adolescent attraction might pull one along properly, some more gently perfumed blue sky dwelling offering a bridge across one's most stubborn forlorn existence. Emptiness sought-after and prized for the remuneration it had presented unfailingly — scholarship as definitive death knell. One Saturday morning drive askew had nearly provided Jim some pre-emptive escape never ending. He began poring over the usual invitation pattern: *to, it, one, some*. Indefinite article demanded one in appropriate response dumbfounded at times, some offering and uncountable putting forth quantities innumerable. To it assignedly in definite resignation would inevitably bring Jim back to some action evolving, softest dream gazing out through one plate glass commutation and hurriedly toward one's own life examination. Some stopped motion request would never be granted. And just how he might someday encounter that object of eternal adolescent invitation would continue bringing Jim back to that particle, longed after but left forever, untreated and eternally smitten. Some universe coveted and unrequitingly so.

“O.K. ... Yes... I would like *to*.”

The colonel seemed satisfied.

“Last year, we go to Virginia,” he continued.

“Past tense, sir?”

The colonel's expression became noticeably tense.

“...*went* ... We *went* to Virginia.”

Jim could not have imagined a more unlikely visit. In any case, he now began to ponder some usual reconsideration regarding excessive correction. *They do so easily discourage!* Sanchez's advice had seldom been in vain and, as much as Jim disliked having to admit it, some new improved *tête-a-tête* was usually encouraged.

“On holiday, Colonel?”



“No, no. It was a conference ... F.B.I. ... Federal Bureau of Instigation.”

“... *investigation.*”

Jim recalled some lone sentinel amidst morning dew, security camera faintly foretelling and dissolvingly into some civilian frame reference. Purposeful military lapses had indeed implied some newer pedagogical forum. All the same as it was to Jim, yet slightly more moving in its occasional glint and pretext for some mid-level imagination intrigue. Sinking ever deeper into some pathos implied increasingly more searching out of opportunities slighted, sequences lost. And lost and still lost amid some incorrect continental drift, misconstrued setting forced upon one's own academic ideal. Jim could barely recall an inscription etched squarely in the limestone face, clearly sited acronym upon which he had relied as reference to his early morning arrival. Only later would Sanchez come to give passing mention as to its meaning. And under no circumstance was Jim to discuss with anyone as to why or how he had had even the slightest cause to frequent such a location.

“I don't suppose there's much time for fun at anything like that,” said Jim.

“Working all the time. But at night ...drinks!”

Drinks, thought Jim. Sitting around some suburban lounge, cheap inn attraction and attempting to call in and over some time travel recede, tired longing for some elusive boredom as tender interlude. Freshly cut Virginia lawn essence marking off the passing moments of one's own home displaced sensibility.

“Well, colonel, I would suggest we do a real working of the interrogatives in upcoming classes. They are so important for good communication.”

“Of course. You are the teacher!”

As was common in these types of situations, Jim had no real intention of beginning anything of substance during their first encounter and was merely biding his time.

“Were you able to function well in Virginia?”

“...function?”

“Yes ... speak and understand...communicate.”

The colonel gestured delicately with a slight-left forehead turn and frenzied brow. The pause struck Jim as being far too long for any response he could possibly wish to make.

“So, so.”

“How do you mean, sir?”

“The written texts are usually given at these conferences. This was not a very big problem for me. But later ...speaking outside ...much more difficult.”

“During drinks, for example?”

“No, no. We drank whiskey. American whiskey ...No problem!”

Virgilio let loose with some cannon of a laugh. So much so that Jim began to panic at not being able to remember his next question. Although not to worry, for the colonel quickly picked up where he had left off.

“The accents were sometimes difficult to listen.”

Jim was now determined to forgo any pedagogical interruption. Besides, the colonel was beginning to betray some slightly pained expression, as if trying to gain sympathy from Jim.

“I spoke with many Americans in Virginia, but I can understand you better.”

“Well, that’s surprising.”

“I like listening different ways of speaking, he said. I can remember jumping with *compañeros* from many different places.”

“Jumping?”

“Yes, *padachute*.”

Some persistent *r* becoming *d*, and within some insistent Spanish phonetic had always been an insurmountably difficult task for Jim. He had never pretended to be an imparter of English pronunciation, nor would he. Phonetic charts and the like would always be better left for those

stronger minded travelling types, implying of some territorial advantage better marked by those more properly skilled in the art of deception. He would marvel at those English boys gathered at the breakfast place on Serrano, conferring about some odd diphthong properly intoned, yet dismissive and filled with abundant disregard of all that they had come to misrepresent *vis-à-vis* some lighthearted willingness to mislead.

“That sounds exciting, Colonel.”

“Oh, yes!”

“When did you do that?”

“I used to command the 4<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. But before that, I was with an international peacekeeping force in North Africa for four years. Exercises and more exercises. Very hard. The heat was very strong, but I learned to speak some English.”

“Was it difficult jumping out of airplanes, Colonel?”

“No, no. Anyone could do it. Even you, Jim!”

But Virgilio seemed to be considering something else.

“At night, it was a bit more difficult.”

“How could you see where you were falling?”

“You could not, Jim! Impossible!”

“That must’ve been dangerous, Colonel.”

“Sorry....”

“At night ... the darkness ... dangerous ...”

“Well, it was really very funny.”

“Funny?”

“You could not see any of your partners as you hit the ground. Only hearing  
*aargh...uurgh....aargh...*”

Virgilio grimaced in feigned discomfort several times in rapid succession, and suggesting of what Jim imagined it would have been like to be in that situation.

“Well, that doesn’t sound all that funny, Colonel.”

But Virgilio just continued gazing as if still enjoying some long-gone memory, youth having faded forever into that dark night.

“Do you still jump, Colonel?”

“Yes, but not so much.”

His tone belied a certain sadness.

“How much English did you learn?”

“Little, but it was the only way to communicate. It was okay most of the time.”

“Were there any problems?”

“Sometimes with the air traffic.”

“Oh?”

“The pilots were all from different places too, and we had to use the best speaker of English to direct the planes in and out of the airfield.”

A huge smile appeared over Virgilio’s face.

“Getting into the sky was more dangerous than jumping down!”

Virgilio again let loose with one of those laughs befitting of his rank and demeanor. The situation must have bordered on the comical, and some North African international undertaking been his forever thought-out path back to where we might have all liked to remain.

“Well, I think our time is up for today, Colonel.”

Having had spied the Colonel's watch, Jim decided it was time to conclude.

“And I should say — very, very good speaking!”

He gave Viriglio not one, but two enthusiastic thumbs up. The Colonel beamed in delight and they both rose from their chairs.

“Very nice meeting you, Jim. I see you again on Friday?”

“Oh, yes. See you on Friday, sir.”

“I can show you out,” said Viriglio as he extended his hand in warm farewell.

“Thank you, sir, don't bother.

The Colonel smiled and permitted Jim to take leave and back out into the corridor. Jim was almost certain that Viriglio would have disappeared through an exit at the far end of the classroom, leadingly onto some quarter space reserved for official business. He began by making his way back along the linoleum floor hall. That he would like to have a drink of something before leaving the building occurred to him, thinking slowly and then in consideration of some later morning blind. No desire to go beyond some first task had always been secondary to that of one's initial morning sense, expectedly so in laying waste to some precious dream sleep. Still, some later lack of fluid morning resolve, fluid imagination recedingly along some deep chasm matinal relief frightened. Panic wrought upon one lonely figure cowering and looking upwards against some hardened gaze, artificial halo pressing downwards onto one's own metaphysical sense of dread and despair. What would Jim do next? Halo off some sleek new track, newly polished luster trying to urge Jim onto some more positive outlook and again reminding of just how carefully kept this place seemed to be. Jim would soon tire of such antiseptic settings, viewing them ever more so as mere assaults upon his increasingly chaotic life. Viriglio, too, might have fallen prey. Some suburban physical light orchestra could have been just what the colonel had needed at that moment in his deserved career. Out-of-tune wind instrument calling forward, trying to breathe some life into one tired bunch of souls accompanyingly, notes shrilled against some cheap construction material, fire hazard legionnaire matter unthought of until it would be far too late. Life coincidences taken for what they were and offering some trivialized meaning would soon prove too much for the colonel, as they had for Jim. Until all consciousness of having forsaken the bell and steeple rising high above some parochial rendition confirmed that Jim's sense of dread had indeed returned. At some point between his final explanation and taking leave of the Colonel, it had again blossomed into some unexpected inescapable

palpitation. Jim came to via some mechanical sound which he could only interpret as being that of some overworked piece of equipment, copies churning forward at rapid pace. It occurred to him that he had some materials of his own which could be prepared for Virgilio's next class. Beats in slashing succession had once led Jim down some strewn life pavement. Some feat and fury of nerves pounding incessantly might give occasion to some regular rhythm stress, perspiration teasingly beneath some midtown humid laying over. Out and beyond one's own looking upward, leisure lunch hour remain would sometimes point Jim down 6th Ave. and toward some upper West Village. Some sensation lacking only in its inability to thwart one's inevitable return. One more hour would have had Jim in fullest regale, workspace mid-afternoon resolve clinging desperately to some chance for softest fancy. Amid shouts for withered belongings, early workday release, and hoping to engage some far-off exotic entail might momentarily calm Jim's then youthful mind aspiration. He would have moved accompanyingly along some 14th St. existential paradise, touching on that which only he might know. Sellers of cheap merchandise would have left him unawares. Leadingly onto some work-floor space would usually bring him in for a quick glimpse, softest image translucent finale. Would he once again be made to wait for the next day's sojourn? Or could he at once please some wanting affectation? No one could ever say for sure that some such confluence of noise and ideas had never been able to firmly secure a sounder future passage for one lone and tired civilization. Jim was certain that it had done so. As had one small garrison of kindred souls whose shared birth-lowered capabilities would reflect some equally skewed desire to excel at that which some better fortune might have afforded. And here was Jim. Amidst it all and soon willing to forfeit the lot to some uncertain roll of the dice. Sunlight shining down brightly through some early twentieth-century pane and putting forth majestically within Jim's new world inheritance. Foreign birth leaned over heavily into this wayward song, and in it Jim felt sure that his was to be a destiny of tireless assimilation properly taught. Out and into a sea of windswept youth would last forever, and leaving behind the shores of their forbearers, dark character fading into one boldly and ambitiously. It certainly did seem as though he had come across the copy machine, and he wondered if some benefit might be sought through its use. He fancied helping himself as he had done so often in the past, former military administration exempted. Clearly put and stated plainly had required no further order, command from some higher authority forbidding such use, pedagogically or not. Without anything pressing for the remainder of the morning, and consideringly of some ever-present pre-class concern — inexplicable though it was — Jim decided to investigate such a possibility. Drawing nearer to some contrite red panel glow, he peered into the open room. Having grown silent upon someone's end succession implied no mystery. Neither did it intrigue Jim that no one was observed to leave through the actual copy room door at that moment, for as had been the case when taking leave of the colonel some time earlier, occupants might tend to spend and disappearingly so within exits and entrances at opposite room ends, implyingly of some other furtherings and as to some proper building space utilized efficiently. Jim thought he might just as well see how much he could complete before being found out. He had not been given any specific instructions since arriving, and the

personnel had seemed cordial enough. He pulled from his well-worn bag two neatly placed and well-presented sheets of exercises. Interrogative comings and then so would be some welcome instance for a student like Virgilio, well-motivated and not akin to causing any inquietude from which Jim could never recover. Edging toward the copy machine suggestively held his imagination at bay, twirling daisies upon red and white carnations daring some adolescent angst to reassert itself festively. Some cheaply prepared invitation done over in black-and-white misrepresentations had always disillusioned Jim. He would have imagined much more. And he had lately come to regret some youthful oversight, dance floor penchant for some softer saturation lacking. Some ne'er knowing nor being precisely sure of what there might have been undiscovered within one's own singular personality undeveloped. Some musical learning ease had not provided for a still softer voice, and some end class incalculable post-game ambition would leave Jim with the query of whether one's own life turn would ever appear. Gently lifting some broader plastic palette presumed some more determined effort, copies produced effectively and in well-numbered succession. One, two but then it seemed as though someone had been let onto Jim. No sooner had the first set been completed that a short, portly gentleman approached quickly from the open doorway.

*“Perdón, señor. Se prohíbe hacer fotocópias por cuenta propia.”*

The man spoke with some sense of urgency, and he only confirmed what Jim had guessed regarding the possibility that he would be permitted to use the machine. Such was indeed prohibited, as it had been at the barracks.

*“How can I get these done? ... ¿Cómo se puede hacerlas?”*

He explained very carefully to Jim that any materials for copying should be left with the floor officer, fully upon one day's notice and being accompanied by clear explanations as to number and format of copies requested. But as the man spoke, Jim could only consider that, like a comet spent along some futile path through an aging universe, he could feel nothing but cold. Frozen sensation putting forth page after page of mind-numbing information reflectingly bespeaking of one's very own time frame insignificance. One, two and then more of the same could be cause for concern at some other level of consciousness. But within Jim's self-inflicted misplace had become tantamount to some lack of ideal, principled fault of the thinking reactionary which he undoubtedly was. So long ago had cast him into some transatlantic sense of time immovable. So long ago and how much longer would he be obliged to make mirror of some youthful reflection tolerantly. Contrasted against one present picture framed in paler shades. Eight-by-eleven rebuke to one's own daily sense of struggle, and resultingly in some bemused expression displayed helplessly. Rhythmic time fault going on some same tired original led Jim onto the conclusion that this was indeed the predicament which had befallen him after so much generational

tilt. What was once so agile at interrupting some such patterned recourse had been turned back by Jim. He listened to his interlocutor with neither mind nor contempt. The rules and regulations had been carefully laid out and Jim could only stave off some shrinking self-satisfaction via one's own steady stream of ill-recognized naiveté. Compliance rendered across some thinly stretched sense of dignity would continue being the call of the day.

*“¿Dónde se puede encontrar a esa persona?”*

Jim was told that the floor officer could be found upon entering the next-to-last door before reaching the lift and then back toward from where Jim had just been. Mind sound signal beckoning him out and moved translucently still, yet in some slow motion progressing steadily toward the lift. And more forward still until striking fast to some hardened image face set in stone. As if petrified within some years of unyielding servile still-life and moving in adjacent to Jim. The tall gray-haired gentleman and remindingly of the room in which Jim had been waiting for the sergeant. Through some cordial offering would make room enough to replace the greeting which Jim had earlier been denied. Still, he might have attempted some sort of gesture at that moment. Some clearer picture might have persuaded Jim that this was, indeed, someone he had once taught at the telephone switching station on Orense. Jim seemed to recall some ubiquitous involvement with some computer analyst, never hurriedly nor impatient and with a particularly calm demeanor. Sleeping barely through hour-long sessions, one-on-one didactic reinterpretation of some preliminary lesson completed would have put Jim to amongst his most difficult of tasks. Staring blankly and with ne'er the slightest smile, betrayingly of some somber routine daily practiced. He would have temporarily coaxed Jim out of some incidental excitation, worn churchsteeple goings-on or softest still which could have languished on from within some semi-hidden free fleshen silk of his previous lesson. Changing ambient warm to not-quite-so would have served to provide Jim some temporary mind relaxation as he commenced. Now straining to ascertain some connection between this gentleman and the intelligence headquarters at which they presently found themselves might be folly, or matter little. For while Jim had long been prone to entertaining himself through the unlikeliest of diversions, some widening *divertissement* rarely underestimated and would never commit to having clouded one's already taxed sensibility with such unwanted debris. He continued toward the office door with neither a confirmation nor salutation. Once having arrived, it became clear that creativity was again becoming lost. Paper machine amidst one's own stagnant decay mentality would again transform Jim back to some ghost materialized upon distant shores. One's own lack of spontaneity disheartened, some anti-climax formulation and reducing it all to pure process. This and more paper would run off one's own secondary professorship routine, volume and quantitative of manifest plurality overwhelming even the most steadfast of teachers, and Jim would be no exception. Running headlong into one's own immediate lack of ingenuity would prove to be too depressing for Jim. While circumstance had clearly been to blame for such inspirational downturn, woe be to he who is incapable of benefiting from its eventual retreat. Pressed back



along many years and toward some elusive scene enlivened, youth looking to some finer learning curve and with little regard for one's own life result. Jim's sense of invention had been reduced to some fair play of material duplication. Sadly he gazed down at the task he had still to accomplish. Hearing the floor officer rattle off some procedural shift courteously, repetitive of that which he had just been and gave him food for thought. The interrogative exercises which he had managed to begin copying might have been supplemented, as well as completed. Some next day three-page length made for little handling, while one further single-student comprehensive ease might have prodded Jim to hastily consider some additional materials. Action objectingly could play out some finely tuned keyboard fantasy. Action as subjectedly considered might resemble some foreign language conundrum dazzling us all, and then knowingly of some deeper hidden secret. Suffix remindingly and placed accordingly would amaze the colonel, as it had so many others. As if upon some participle unbending, *-ing* in some unordinary present mode would be starkly revealing of a purer function, given over from some long-lost sea of souls struggling to make sense of foreign tongues misbegotten. For the idioms which they had inherited were losing in some plain sight, foreign ideals embraced for what they were and without so much as a hint of nationalistic intent. Verb coalition *-ing* signature providing some humble banner onto which would be forged generations of heterogeneous intercourse. That the colonel was not quite up to the rest did not bother Jim. Some such study would not be dissuaded by one's circumstantial lack of facility. Nor would it discourage Jim from pursuing some more ambitious turns of phrase. Thus, he hurriedly marked off the pages of interest and placed the workbook on the floor officer's desk. He was duly assured of some prompt return and came about satisfiedly, resolute and looking forward to one's own later morning resolve. It might not easily materialize, and in lieu of some other distraction softly endured which might quickly play host to Jim's imagination. Some bristled first-floor enchantment could again await, and become some sweetest interlude to which Jim might easily succumb. As Jim once again crossed out into the corridor, pale hard haze again poundingly of some hurtful artificial light, overhead projecting downwards and encouraged Jim onto some quickest exit. He faintly recalled there having been a water cooler just opposite the lift. And adjacent to the general stairwell might offer him some alternative to pressing on with this unduly long experiment, some further detailed mediocrity and willfully within the career of this once promising pair nocturnal foe. He had momentarily considered passing through Sanchez's office on his return. Some sleeker notion enticing him on and further onward toward that which might have begun to ease some crossing return, some strange pedagogical defeat and pending self- recrimination. *She* would be well within her morning routine by now, and Jim might well present some tertiary guise, third-party justification and pretense of actually wishing to speak with Sanchez. Indeed, softest grammar captured had forever been Jim's sole reward. Listening to some kinder voice for a change had lent some time-to- time rendition not completely looking up to. Subtlety falling and gently resting upon some apathetic version of one's own semi-silent demeanor would offer its own gentle demur. The receptionist had continued to dance pirouettes within Jim's wanting imagination, and some easy access down and around might have set forth one's daily dose of

advantage taken. Poor substitute, and lost but for that which could readily afford itself within the loins of some foreign land and made for one's own sense of forlorn consolation. Writing delicate, blond awakening singing out upon some white board endeavor assisted and rang out from within one's own finer enchant. Some yearnings sought after beneath goals set upon, some back road placed well up and within one's own Amsterdam undertaking. Scholarship had long since become moot, lying down ashamedly before some meeting point looking higher. Some bell reminder had grown weary of rescuing Jim. And Jim had continually grown more frustrated at the prospect of spending the rest of one's own garnered year in constant denial. Oh, how it pained Jim to be walking down this corridor and at this particular moment! Just when the smile upon Virgilio's face might have given larger to some more prized objective! Unseasoned generational shift having been insulted and irreconcilably disturbed, beyond the point of ever being able to find some path back to that faint glistening which one calls home. Jim came across the water cooler as he had expected. A quick stop and then across to the lift would bring him back to the ground floor. Resting his bag down while bending his knees so that his left forearm was at some equidistance to the spigot, he removed one small plastic cup. Feeling some slight pressure under his left thumb and with sounds stirring his ever-present time remaining. For the corridor had once again enshrouded Jim within a virtual silence, and some quiet intermezzo from above began to serenade, sounding down and scornful of his time accumulated. Some not-so-slightly depreciative manner became hardly overlooked, and Jim could make light of some situation which would have been considered ridiculous in any other circumstance. Indeed, as it had been to Jim himself. Some strange serenade from above, one which he certainly had not encouraged, some melody from another era seemed to catch up with Jim. He waited impatiently for someone to enter the corridor, so that some scolding insinuation might be diluted or, better still, prevented. But it was no use, for he again found himself alone. And alone continuing on unabated into the better part of this earthly decline. Listening passively and in some anxious middle harmony to one's own quickly spending adolescent refrain. Jim certainly recognized the song. It was not as if some cheapened arrangement, overdone reminder of Jim's own slide into this jaded fancy turning backwards had ever been cause for confusion. Yesterday and gone today, reflections on love lost belatedly and then regrettingly of some misspoken gesture turned inconsiderate. Going off about some faraway trouble and being here to stay would foresee the enigma to which Jim had fallen prey. Some temptation grew within Jim to hum along. Out of some chastened respect for that which bore his signature reflection, tidily upon some mid-life angst which he would have had to confront now or later. He remained in the corridor and sipping water from some small plastic cup. Jim remained and listening all the while as the second verse wore on. He listened and not really wanting to, longingly and solemnly he succumbed to some yesterday, faraway chorus and nowhere was there to be found. Other than he and near some oddly placed water cooler. Softened ballad respite offering and at times reminiscent of some cool water quartet given over from the tenderest class high above Castellana. The receptionist cannot have been very pleased in Jim's mind, and Sanchez would have only deepened her growing sense of patent disregard. She too would be well on her way toward travelling that much

untouted road as Jim had, and whether or not she chose to remain within Sanchez's circle. Love might have been an easier game, some hourly-laden exercise driven mostly by some tacit misunderstanding. Stale comings over, yesterday's child and daily bread upon one's tongue in delicate dose requiringly of not any further reconciliation. The music ended as quickly as it began, and Jim picked up his bag. Having discarded the cup from which he had been drinking and decidedly upon some newly chosen endeavor. Jim crossed over to the stairwell and began his ever-increasing descent to the ground floor. The desk officer might not be there now, having had been replaced by some untenured figure. Some meager ration calling forth at this hour of the morning would be paramount. Sweet sitting back and wondering ahead toward some later day diversion respectfully of one's own stricter professional overlay. Animal charging forth from beneath some crowded grandstand, bugle signaling the start of one time-honored exercise urged some stronger emotion. Jim emerged at the bottom of the stairwell and looking at the doors which led back into the foyer. The sergeant crossed quickly in front of him, and faintly acknowledging Jim as perhaps being amongst that last of species, thankless warrior through some time given over from one trusted learning tradition unachieved. Some patronized learning foreplay to one's own commonplace existence. Jim might have found himself suddenly feeling sorry for the gray-haired gentleman if not having been for some recurrent sense of time miswoven, and rejectingly of even the sincerest learning effort. Having been sent off to work at another place and under some assumed identity would have necessarily presumed some abstract equality between who we are and what we are made to be. Could Jim's irrational displacement over great oceans have been to the gentleman's professional deception? Equal in their cunning brutality yet at polar ends and deserving of some completely different fate? He suddenly realized clearly as to Sanchez's cold insistence on conditional structures. Secretive communication. Words uttered as Jim was again considering whether he might have been tricked into giving in to all of this. Military contracts, indeed. Jim crossed briefly through the foyer toward the principal door, nodding slightly toward the desk and making his way down and out onto the sunlit pavement. By the time he had returned to that gaping relief through which to begin some brief ascent back to his car, Jim was feeling decidedly disappointed. Later morning bathed had not proven to be late enough. Some persistence, finely acuted sunlight might be implying of one's own lengthier scheme. Jim's day would be far too long, and it left no alternative but to continue searching throughout those agencies and academies for which he had grown to harbor nothing but ill will. He noticed that the morning sentinel had also been replaced, though whether temporarily he could not say. Considerably less fortunate than his predecessor, he would be left to deal with some later matinal rush, personnel and incoming deliverability calling on the sentinel to provide one's own pre-paid knowledge skill. Careful scrutiny and then some quick check would lead us all into the inner reaches of some darker intelligence. Jim would be content to remain on the outside, pointedly headed back and up toward the curb. Turning sharply, present left-handed disregard for this iron gate which marked the sentinel's self-inflicted terrain and stretched reassuringly across some loosened time release for which Jim should have shown nothing but gratitude. Some high sun spreading out over one greenly dotted plain might have

swept Jim well across and through to some central mountain rising up from within the *Guadarrama*. Jim had often delighted in one's own seeming willful ability to coax back some previously well-received situation, again some and time awaitingly of the sergeant which had afforded him his most recent opportunity. Emptiness would again be the general rule of the day. Except for one pleaded cry, some fierce generation intoned through a warming wind caught Jim's ear, and remindingly of one earlier morning rush, clip-clop sensation having been thought about. Lingering and still hovering over Jim in pleasant repose, sound and whooshing beat had once more approached and this time in concert with some livelier palette. Broader bass grounded against a more subtle counterpoint gave one the impression that some daily morning exercise was drawing to a close. One final kicking on would bring some worthy profession to a rousing finish, and well onto the next open afternoon event. Taking bets stoically, one on the track and then two churning up reassured Jim that this final length would suffice within the last drop of one's own final day's labor. Only upon sensing some time losing itself quickly did Jim fully ascertain the nature of the horseman's greeting. Then some quicker glance could catch a lifting pose high over a well-worn saddle. *¡Hola, vecino!* Cooler face sensations had given way to some slightly more moderate fare, later temperatures urging this slothened day forward. As sounds he had held dear began to grow faint, Jim got back into his car. But he could not figure out what to do next. Still lying off at distance, Casa de Campo laying down before what had now seemed to be still less impressive, within some steadily declining downtown silhouette and rising sun belittling. He sat and stared at the sentinel attending to some luminous arising brightly off some blackened image. Closed glass retreat and informingly of some Tuscany visit, international dispatch made at some quickened haste and put together officially. Jim struggled to discern some faint delineation, official vehicle check and through some hard-white haze piercing his windshield, eyes strainingly and for no good reason. Cross border cooperation would intend to fend off any evil intent, until time rung in for some culinary obligation setting. *¿Vino, señores?* And never minding of some more pressing arrangement, then hung over within some forlorn misadventure and blatant disregard. Jim would make light of it all. Hardened special processes would intend to shield us all. One tired civilization showing off some penchant for an inevitable self-destruction, and at the expense of all it was that Jim had ever had. He came to upon noticing that the driver had been passed through without much expense, and with nothing further to consider moved down and away back toward the highway.

The morning had already begun warming by the time Jim left the breakfast place. Sunlight finding its way through sprawling branches. Then heading back toward the main gate left Jim once more confounded by what may have happened to the woman who followed him off the bus. She seemed to have vanished into this *entorno* – the Pardo – as if taken captive by some centuries-old nonesuch and elevating oneself within his slowly deteriorating imagination. Jim needed to stop at the guardhouse. It had been more than a year since he last taught at the Royal Guard and the security pass that he managed to squeeze out of his bag had since become useless. He climbed the metal stairs upward towards the guardhouse door. The stairs were unduly steep, Jim thought. He remembered how he had on occasion nearly slipped on a rainy day. Slippery steel and some ever-present uncertainty, some leaning forwards, hoping against hope that one day he

would be able to ascend that stairway and feel at peace with what would await. The duty guard sat unperturbed. Unperturbed by the morning routine. Unperturbed by the uncharacteristic disorder adorning her desk. Unperturbed by the queue of displaced military personnel and civilian laborers inching forwards. Jim began to regret his time at the breakfast place and anxiously glanced at his watch. He had never been comfortable with the prospect of arriving late and this was never borne of some inborn commitment. Rather some insecurity seemingly blossomed into complete mistrust in oneself but at times debilitating and often humiliating. The duty guard must have spotted Jim, for she instantly called him to the front of the queue – to the surprise of those who had been waiting for some moments -- and requested the security pass. She glanced at the number somewhat peeling off the blackened plastic and entered something into her computer. Jim received the pass without barely a nod from the woman and he left the guardhouse as unexpectedly as he had come in. Now passing through the turnstile reminded of the uselessness of all that he had been called upon to do. Untold hours of preparation in his youth had led unmercifully to this nagging sense of emptiness with which he had to contend each and every day. He vaguely remembered where the classroom was but wondered if he would still be able to navigate the myriad tapestry of patios which comprised the quarters. Various groups of soldiers passed to his right and to his left, seemingly to move outward regardless of from where he was positioned and at any given time. This left a disconcerting sensation in Jim's mind and he began to find it difficult to negotiate some true path. His knees appeared to give way just a bit and he remembered how he would run miles as a young man and pathetically reminding of how his physical frame was now beginning to fail him. Then suspecting that a left turn may have been in order he entered a darkened passage within which still more soldiers had been alighting. Some with cigarettes in hand or others in mid-espousal of false grievance about this or that. Only to emerge to the right across some decidedly delapidated tiled square. Some exquisitely embellished – excessively so for the fading splendor of its immediate environs – circular fountain elegantly perched upon graceful pedestal as one's eye would always fall upon the lonely stream giving forth in its center. One upward motion nay four fingers high turning gently on itself at its peak. Then downwards in some slighted arc as if daring its jaded onlooker to spend an eternity waiting for it to desist. Jim had often been directed to this place – *el patio moro* – as it had come to be known and inexplicably prized. Some injustice having been perpetuated over time. Some historical abomination having rooted itself in false prophets and wanton demagogues. Some vast maniacal effort extending over the North African continent in the name of extinguishing those who would have nothing to do with the falsities and superstitions which would continue to cloud Jim's existence and for how long to come. Marching across some vast expanse towards one's own certain mortality. Now stepping gingerly around misplaced pebbles and littered shards and resting assured that his final destination would greet him at the far corner of the patio. A bell started tolling just as he was midway along and he could not help but think that its timbre rang somewhat unbecoming of this royal unit. Some historic relic from a past century or perhaps merely holding some historical significance for the most ardent student of military lore. Some bell tolling as in a novel by that meandering American novelist who would often give Jim some much needed solace as he threaded his youthful journey up through the morning stations of Amsterdam. It sounded every day at this very midday with its dulled response, severely handicapped propagation struggling to pierce a morning mist and daring its listeners to continue on with their daily chores. Muffled and vaguely reminiscent of the bell perched atop the

neo-Medieval architecture that would welcome him each morning to his early course of studies at the City College of New York. Some steeple rising starkly and high above the bewildered going about their seemingly endless string of chores and responsibilities. Some faraway bell – but perhaps not so – calling to those who would have otherwise forgotten to submit to the trappings of church and country, far removed from the structure above, oblivious of sky and complete reign of personal fulfillment. Some bell aching in its tired position of perpetuating the myth that its calling is one of history's great enterprises. Some mighty instrument made waste by the very song that it intones. Jim decided that the morning was too pleasant to be detained within some barren second-floor classroom. He spotted some paint-peeled wooden bench in the corner of the patio. Appearing to be molting as some waterfowl after a springtime of finer admittance and now anticipating of the warm summer months to come. Yes, those English boys had always been true to form upon affirming that the sun in Spain was certainly reason enough to endure. Besides, the corporal would notify him of any student expecting of Jim on that day in any case and he would have by now dismissed any lingering notion that the woman who had followed him onto the bus might be of any significance whatsoever. Likelier one more figment of Jim's tired imagination after years of trying to make sense of some continental drift which had befallen him soon after leaving university. The cornet sounds. The staff sergeant bellows one final entreaty in the morning order. Some still-life upon the white gray canvass of time moving slowly onward. Little patience for the undecided few and the bell awaiting, in silent anticipation of the next.

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