

The time was not accounted for. So Jim seemed perplexed and somewhat confused. He glanced upwards and peered painstakingly at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to countdown but he sensed something else. Something oddly stealing his glance towards the right side suddenly brought on an awareness. He had awoken with some nagging ache in his consciousness and he missed the first train. He anxiously squeezed into the morning throng. Some untidier gentleman stared blankly at a telephone. He had 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. His 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 a 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 train car's to and fro at times caused many 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 refer 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 over the din. Notices of breakdowns and other assorted mishaps annoyed the daily clientele.