

# **Into a Pinyin Sunrise**

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Xiaoling would sit staring at the problem which had become hers. Some special congruence could not have assumed such overwhelming challenge if not for the misconception which had presented just as she passed hurriedly through the front garden adorningly of her family home. Some giving way onto the canvass which had forever become her own 48th Street. Some thinking occasionally back to those days of transcontinental retreat and vessels reeking with day-old waste bringing about some more ancestral satisfaction and more so of a time when this very block had first been procured. As some special congruence would be befitting of one more figure upon the next, then upsettingly so, as corner upon corner could not possibly coincide and why should she not begin to draw upon those concepts which had been so afforded in the first place? Some still reflecting back upon events past and striving to unearth those postulates which did lend some finer meaning to the tales which her mother and grandmother had recounted over and over when she was a mere child.. Some confidence built up over many lifetimes of achievement and who might have also ventured forward to this newer existence should they have had the opportunity. Wonderingly so, some consideration given to those discoveries which had so formulated the basis of to which all Xiaoling might ever hope to aspire. Some lemmas proceeding concurrently, some contemplating the now seemlier result looking over and once more upon Xiaoling. Some oh yes within this momentary contemplation did characterize some present figure which now went strugglingly and still poorly understood—but why? Some givens and lesser-known hypotheses had done little to reinforce some tenacity which she and her family had always maintained for never giving in. Some thinking incessantly as to whether she could ever go back and ne'er pretending that it would ever prove to be so impossible. Her father had returned at an advanced age, some tenderer mind rendition sustaining him through the harder times which had led up to their emigration from Fujian. Some ne'er taking nothing for granted had provided the motivation for such rigor, lemmas accordingly expressed and then some cleverer replacement. Some affording of one's more proper manner for deciding upon this or that comprehensibly. Some more complementary nature should not have had to protagonize here, and she bristled gently at the thought that this was all she could conjure. Nor rear itself upon the thoughts of Xiaoling and she hastily disregarded some remainder which had so unknowingly appeared. Some ninety-degree revelation which having had caused some more empowering sensation deeply within those younger students could only serve as some distraction to her here. Some variable protagonism in the textbooks she had been given to cherish like no other, some stiller unknown and how could that possibly be of any use to her now – but why? Some givens and lesser-known hypotheses running throughout and testing intricately some more finely-woven fabric beneath which she had always been able to find some easier repose.

– *jDěng dài dì!* cried her mother from a second story window.

– *jWǒ bì děi bēn!*

Xiaoling replied angrily to her mother's request to wait for her younger brother. She needed to get to class as quickly as possible today, some already overextended time at the breakfast table having prolonged too much as it were. Today she would sit for the examination which had been so long in the offing. Mr. Hernandez had been adamant as to the time when all examinees were to arrive and she knew it would have been well warranted, it being he who assumed. Some more important matter had always been to the liking of Xiaoling and the sort who would make themselves sought after by those older boys had

never been held too highly in esteem by either her or the Huan family. Some glancing down quickly into one darkened alley did place sufficiently she who had formerly been her closest friend into doubt – ¿*Dong Er shén nǐ bàn?* Then some crumpled figure bending lowly into what would have been the love of Dong Er had only perplexed Xiaoling and wonderingly as to whether any lasting satisfaction could be gained from such carnal insignificance. Some moving more swiftly could only now reinforce the notion of what was to be gained and she hurried past the vegetable market which had always marked some virtual beginning of her matinal journey. Come now, come lowly and humbly be thy crown to wit Xiaoling had always admired those sweetest refrains in a language which had seemed so foreign on those first of days. Some thirst for seeking out that which might eventually become her greatest salvation but more so. Some intellectual yearning calming her once churning breast as she waited patiently within the rest of hers and Fujian province, some fading graying embankment recessing slowly and providing all the encouragement she would ever need. Some insatiable thirst for going off and wondering had always been the source of some familiar contention as if not knowing had been peculiar to her alone. Her mother had certainly been blessed with some finer notion about when and how one's own opportunity should be approached but never seemed too keen on inoculating Xiaoling with those principles which had always been thought of as being tendered upon some more inferior notion of self preservation. Now crossing the intersection along some more diagonal path did call to mind her mother's advice about being too injudicious which in measured dose might even gratify. Some more physically telling circumstance had always required some more measured frame of thought and this she knew from the outset of her deed. Some scarcity of motion along this still slumbered avenue and would have startled even that most vigilant of pedestrian. Some urgency for arriving on time had provoked her into filtering her mother's heeding along some more sheltered agenda, some vehicle moving more swiftly than she might have originally perceived.

– ¿*Biǎo hé chǔ nǐ kāi chē!*

Xiaoling howled her wrath at the driver who had rushed behind her. Too close, she thought – *tài jīè jìn* – too close. There had been far too many like that since the *taxistas* had begun surfacing along Fifth Avenue. Some *te llevo baratito* would always prove to be too omnipotent when set against the welfare of the likes of Xiaoling and she quickly learned that the best she could do was forget it and keep on in that vane from which all of this had originally been borne. Some sitting and waiting patiently as the throng would be about to depart and wondering as to whether any good would be about to descend upon this imminent emancipation from strife and inopportunity. Some day school which she could recall barely projecting its sharpest rebuke inside her head and still counting in back-turned integers – earliest survival for the homeland but still they had been encouraged to look towards afar and relishing some horizon calling, some hastened entreaty to the vast fields of virgin volition which were to become theirs. Then some elderly gentleman searching for the key which were to open some portal beneath one cloudier day, some greener pastures sheltering those hidden lives against the temptation to remain and forswear the open sea in remuneration for so little. Someone's calling forth toward some *taxistas* edging nearer to the precipice which might ever define some more curious determination – *te llevo allí* or *te llevo* what could be the difference it was all just some other manner of speaking some other idiom pricking at us all *te llevo baratito* some language from another part of some other place and it was all so close some incessant chatter with *te llevo* and *te llevo allí* or *aquí* with here or there and they drive like they speak like they oh why should they not enjoy the same opportunities as the rest of us? Some going all about from one place to the next in search of

those who might require those who might need oh they drive and dance like they speak *te llevo* or *te llevo allí* . Some bringing from here to there and having arrived to this newer place of business ne'er gone awry, some business soaring and moving faster and faster until one could only recall and wonder as to the utility of counting upon this 8th Ave. looking over some sunrise in this borough by the sea but are they not all by the sea? Some having journeyed from afar and so far in search of all this which might still show some promise. Some promise overlooking this newer frontier, some newer sunrise day and did sufficiently place Xiaoling squarely within the throes of those who might be lumbering toward success. Why should she have had to atone for the lack of initiative which her parents had nurtured back in Fujian? Then some sheathe for protecting herself from the barbs which might follow, some sheathe with which to mask her just tendered loins from that generational outburst which had forever been underlying some slightest hint or remark and could have been offered completely out- of-hand. *Chóng fǎn Fujian* her parents were to hear from those who had come over years before from across the strait and being completely at odds with all that Xiaoling had ever come to expect from such a place so otherwise accommodating. That some cycle of generational rejection could have spawned this great community might only further her determination to see through toward some final conquest, some coming upon equally or even surpassing those *mexicanos* for whom 48th St. had provided some easier means for reward.

– *¡Nǐ jiāng huì lù nǐ zì jǐ!* shouted someone from across the street.

– *Wú zhī xī,* replied Xiaoling.

Nick was always waiting on the corner of 8th Ave. and 48th St. at this time of the morning. Now seeing how close Xiaoling had come to getting struck by some speeding taxi caused him to express some consternation at both but particularly at her. Some concern for those in his own locale would have never been his alone, as if procrastination did ever present him some other reward. It did not. *Hóng Fán Wāng* had come to detest his given name – *Hóng* for big or eastern bean goose, *Fán* for cage and *Wāng* for expanse of water. What's that? he would beam at Miss McGrath upon being told of the meaning of his name within some cultural pride foray. What the hell is that, man? Big bean goose in cage – and no water for me. *Bú kě yǒng.* Can't swim, man! The Chinese teachers would always find some cleverer way to avoid having to address him by his newly acquired vulgar denomination. Nick. It appeared to them as some affront to the mission to which they had been dedicated since arriving to these shores. Pleasingly and with sufficient relief had they welcomed the notion that *Hóng Fán* was to be transferred out of their charge as bilinguals, for it was commonly felt that the boy could begin to flourish in his own right. Nick had certainly been more to his own liking and he brandished it with delight, even though many in his circle would at times casually refer to him only obliquely as Nick and coupled with some carefully chosen profanity either in jest or otherwise. The name would along with his demeanor usually invite certain liberties among his friends and some kinder encounter would always be welcoming.

– Get killed, stupid girl!

– Shut up. I have important test today.

– Not worth it -- life too short.

Xiaoling had listened passively to such a remark before.

– *Xīn xīng fà* ...everyday new hair! noted Xiaoling.

– Not everyday. What *you* mean?

– Almost every...oh... (silence)

– Can I touch ....?

– *¡Zhōng zhǐ!* Don't touch *nothing* ...work all morning to fix it this way! scolded Nick.

– Why so early for that? mocked Xiaoling.

– *Early bird catches worm!*

– What's that? she laughed.

– Miss McGrath tell me that. Don't you know? She say my English good now. Don't you know?

– She tells everyone that... *she* nice lady.

– Does not. She say I ain't gonna be in no bilingual class next term. English too good for all ...Science, Maths ...all subjects. What *you* think 'bout that? Huh?

(silence)

– Huh? she finally replied.

Nick was by now counting on some later commentary by Xiaoling and seemed bitterly disappointed by the meager remark she had had to offer. His eyes beamed sharply into the face of Xiaoling and what was she determined to be some delicately raised forehead, she still glancing down the avenue as if searching for some *taxista* which had caused her to react so anxiously. Some newer coiffure would frame Nick's face quite menacingly although expressing of some more likely caricature of himself or pattern of comic relief and Xiaoling almost suggesting what she thought to be some final invocation.

– Oh, I'll be late ...have to go.

– No wait, urged Nick.

Some customary softest coda to her breathy exuberance went severely shattered by Nick's sudden remark. Still, she rebounded swiftly.

– Why? ...have important test, she replied.

– Why *you come* this way every morning? Why *you cross* street here and not over there?

She glanced quickly as Nick's forehead darted sharply toward the 49th St. corner.

– ¿*Shén nǐ yuē?* I have test, she insisted.

– Test, test, test is all you think about! What's that?

– Maths test ... and *you* too.

– Not me. Miss McGrath's test tomorrow. I do *good* tomorrow.

– And how about test today?

– Too hard.

– Not too hard. You just lazy...like stupid friends.

– *Fú měng.* Not stupid!

– Oh...

(thinking)

– Oh..., some day you get in big trouble. You'll see.

(silence)

– Doesn't your father tell you about Fujian? ...*left* for that, she went on meekly.

– For what? Nick asked pointedly.

– Do Maths and learn so you can ...

– ...what? ...have restaurant? ...marinate whole life?

– Don't need Maths to have restaurant, she insisted.

– What then?

– I don't know ...be engineer, like Mr. Hernandez say.

– What he know? ...just *tell* me to shut up in class and I don't do *Nothing*. What *he* think?

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

– You *know* I stay here every morning. So...why *you* cross in front of

me all the time? Huh?

– ;Yú mò! I don't! ...sometimes cross over there, she finished shyly.

– ...never over there!

Nick would be continually hard-pressed to convey some more congenial manner which he almost always found to be an elusive commodity. His teachers had always thought it odd that he should have at all found those with whom to alight, for his abrasive nature was completely foreign to any such show of camaraderie. Still, he felt pleased that he had finally confronted Xiaoling and forced her to assume some sudden realization toward this transition so heartfelt regarding himself, and as if feeling lost and unwelcome should have had to be his alone.

– I'll be late ...have to go, she insisted.

Nick watched as Xiaoling walked hurriedly up 49th Street towards the high school. Some standing and waiting patiently for the arrival of his mates could have only taken on some more sinister appearance, as at times it had. Some assuming the worst had too often resulted in Nick and his cadres being taken to the precinct house as truants. Only to be at last reclaimed by the attendance dean in charge of such day-to-day intrusions into his own personal pleasure. Some dozing off in the back room or more sordid entertainment, some closet activity whose interruption could have only annoyed as he pretended to collect his monthly pay while attending to some more civil duty finely tendered. Some worthless but amenable man having earned the post of dean quite dishonorably. Nick thought forward to the prospect of having to spend still another morning in feeble explanation of why he had been languishing at that time of the morning and on that particular day. Some overworked testimonial which had never been to the attendance dean's satisfaction, in any case. Some cowering inescapably beneath one's own bitterer stare, some glaring over narrowed spectacles attempting to shame Nick for the indiscretions which would have commonly arisen. But then his friends were never on time and so he watched Xiaoling move even further, some form swaying barely as leaving some blackened tar pavement background propping up the girl, some pushing upwards into one flattening silhouette now certainly too far to actually be perceived. Still Nick had always wondered what might have become of her if she had never been brought over. Or he for that matter. Might he have found her quite by chance pedaling along the banks of the Xi Jiang in some desperate urge to arrive on time? Some thrusting more furiously against the cast iron which would have been providing of her only engagement with some long lost own eternal suffering? One which her parents had forsworn for the young girl, for all times and by any means possible would have hurried them along on that morning as they converged upon the fading grey embankment, some façade which were to eventually emerge as one more relic engrained within a memory too tired to bespeak even that slightest of tones and in an language now too distant to be appreciated for what it once was? Some prouder discourse now smothered within the pinyin muck? Somewhere along this tiring length of timeless monotony had given birth to this ne'er receding need for merciless intercourse. Some more oddly sounding verbal intention and would seem to tease into the notion that they were indeed inoculated within some grander sense of alliteration. Some words jarring about without any such eloquence forthcoming, only pointing and imploringly of the need for paying homage to the pinyin. Some calling out and beckoning to the pinyin sunrise which were to bring those who might bathe in its incandescence one gentler notion of who we might be destined to become. Some dialect

receding and giving in to that pinyin romance which were to become theirs and sadly. Nick for his part could find only reward in the notion that one distant idiom had become so bastardized. Some now almost useless tool being left out along the side of the road for the waste collectors which were to become and providing of some further assurance that some other means of communication larger in scope and possibility could bring together all those courageous enough to have had sought out this pending chance at a better life. Some long-awaited tone melting down into the pinyin muck which were to become, some foreign-looking characters looked down upon by the lords but inevitably. Some wading more deeply into the pinyin muck which were to become all of theirs as well. Some creeping backwards toward one more fitting appreciation of who they were and what they might be accomplishing here. Some succeeding within one larger discourse as Nick stared fixedly at Xiaoling's disappearing form, wandering further away into what might very well have been his own best refuge. Nick to be sure, some larger expanse of water showering him or was it just that which he beamed forth at Miss McGrath and her smile went placingly upon him in some halo-filled delight? Some warmer encouragement which all his teachers seemed to render yet nevertheless ne'er kind enough, for Nick would continue loitering at the corner of his errant befalling until graduation and probably beyond. Even Dong Er would stride quickly down 48<sup>th</sup> Street on that day, some slightest reflection upon those filtered rays which had descended so steadily upon the province of Fujian. Some final merit to having been set so ungraciously into the cauldron which were to become hers and the rest. Some confused explanation hurriedly as to why they were to arrive had not been well received, and the notion that it were to all make sense in the long run only added to some primal deformation in her mind. Nick too could have been answering high above the call, some cleverer nature never having seemed to acquiesce and would continue to draw heavily upon Xiaoling in attempting to bring forth that inspiration which did unceasingly pervade his own daily meanderings. It was indeed all he could do to continue steadfastly in the eatery which his father had been attempting to carry over from the old country, let alone pretend to occupy some ranking similar to that of those more intelligent pupils. Some earlier morning convocation would have probably had its origin in his obligations toward seeing to it that the family business kept on with some day-to-day regularity. Nick would always defrost the chickens in the evening in preparation for some next day's sojourn although this had never been his habit before beginning at the high school. His had always been some morning too hectic for the formalities which were to have imposed. Some Chinese roasted chicken had always been his family specialty and such would enable his father to begin the arduous labor to which he had become indebted at some more decent hour. Some roasted fowl delicacy had been theirs to rely upon since arriving here some years ago, and it was to their good fortune that the locale over which they presently presided had gone for the asking. *Shí xīng cān guǎn* and yes it did turn out to have been a popular spot amongst the neighbors. Some roasted delicacy enabling those who would beseech it some otherwise befitting substitute for the sloth which might have overtaken even that kindest of entrepreneur. Some later afternoon hour had always been the busiest time and for reasons which could have hardly ever been properly understood. Some earlier supping had always been the rule amongst those most newly brought over, and some modern Sunset Park environs must have pushed it along even more so. Some likelier boredom gazing across from some tiresome café and why should some heartier repast ne'er be in the offing? Some sun laying down and over, some sixty-degree coming from out of a shadow definingly of roof-top structures across and shading one's eyes accordingly. Some *egg foo yong* staring upwards and was it not *y-o-ng*? Some mexicano-mixed pronunciation – *y-u-ng* – as in some irrepressible throwback toward tendered youth singingly. There had arrived far too many of those who might never have left the homeland if not for some family member or friend to

whom they would have been permanently mortgaged in one way or another. Some life passing through at a snail's pace and always ne'er reading in some ghostlier fashion. Some ne'er ending penchant for agreeing without bounds with she who would have provoked some gna some means for remunerating properly their occasional feast – *jì bì xū chū qián cǐ kè!* – but Nick's angry rebuke towards timely payment would almost always become consumed within some gentler gesture accorded by his father. They had come after all to seek the fortune which had gone so fleetingly in Fujian, or most of them in any case. Some going fleetingly, some fortune written on paper tenuously and under some threat of becoming moot as per the consequence of certain actions taken (or not) by those bent on an existence wrought with self-congratulatory adulation. Some temporal endurance marked by cowardice and stupidity did call to mind those more intellectually challenged cretins who but for the ficklest of fortunes confounded did materialize at all. Some occasional preference toward undermining that of others in becoming more fleetingly still. Some fortune being commandeered by the lowest order of filth which would handily refuse to ease the suffering of just one more of their very own (or so one would have thought). *Yīn dào!* Consider the wrath of fortune which they must have lusted after and lost. Some roasted chickens guiding the way up and out of their mostly hopeless state must have rested fervently upon the thoughts of those who had first studied the culinary merits of Chinese roasting. Some roasted fowl enabling Nick to cling to those few norms having survived and languishing from their harrowing journey, and in doing so savor the possibility of bestowing some greater good upon himself and his family. Now some setting them in line for preparation with the final marinade would have him reflecting back to some previous week's class. Some straight line being shorn up into odd numbered divisions and odder still when in consideration of the fact that it could be accomplished longingly. Or could it? Some numbered line going off into number lines with afternoon light setting upon. Some numbered line set down within some more passive structure then numbed or numbered along some line with afternoon light and coming down onto some vaguer recollection did appeal to Nick. The fowl would have been marinated accordingly and he could have never imagined that here too he might be well within his own. Some better attempt at escape from this tattered existence. Some upward motion through the ranks of those newly arrived and into this societal array placed forth so invitingly. Whereupon being obligated to render some quickest decision regarding one's final destination did put all in Fujian to the test, some giving his own grandparents certain cause for concern and determined that Nick and all their progeny should taste the fervent fruit of some newer world. Now setting down one, two, three more and applying that final essence, some *voix dernière* which had never failed to draw forward even that most disinterested of gastronomical devotee, some more succulent trying into the sweeter bastion which did ever presently shield us from some most unwanted progeneration. Some sweeter coming into the numbered cleavage which would have only parted but for some sheerest of desperation, some bending more lowly into what had surely been the love of Dong Er and now unsure of why or how this parade were ever to continue. Some numbered inclination would have earlier confounded Nick with imaginary concepts putting forward, some circular function surely befitting of one's own better understanding.

– *jì Tā tuǒ dànɡ dàn?*

– *Shàng wèi.*

– *jì Gǎn máng, huǒ hē!*

Who cares fire hot? he would think. So many chickens, anyway. He would have been working to prepare the meat as quickly as possible and could not resist the temptation to answer within his own persuasion.

– *jJī! jJī!*

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

– *¿Zěn me yùn zhuǎn rèn xú xú zhè tiān?*

(What he means work slow today? )

– *jTiáo wèi zhī tài duō nián nián!* Nick replied.

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

– *jNián, nián!*

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

– *Tóng yī rú tong měi tiān.*

Not same as everyday, he thought

– *jNián nián!* he would reply.

Now trying to set the chickens in some other sense would only bring about some pleasanter rumination about doing harder work in the back of the class, some seeing to it that both Dong Er and her cousin were properly attended to. Some rectangular exercise uncompleted, some now-too-easy thoughts, lengths and widths befitting of this current bird feast and no need for some spatial calculation within one's larger space, some space now pleasingly to Nick as he might slide the birds from the tray and into some more proper recipient. This too would prove to be futile as the viscous dressing once more would begin to test Nick.

– *jNián nián! j Nián nián!*

But the marinade might not give in to the rants of those who refused to accept happily their daily lot and Nick would continue to draw upon his thoughts of Xiaoling and some passage into which both had begun to delve during that morning. Some scene which might have ensued with the attendance dean could not have been properly foresworn, and as

such some more lasting rumination perhaps being touched upon. Some imaginings of she and he in subtler repose which might one day endear and bear fruit, some ne'er extinguishing romance could properly comprehend and stoop lowly upon the lace which would more warm-heartedly placate those whose lives had become so irretrievably consumed Thereupon some more affectionate cheek inclined or some softest telling – oh! Some inability to bespeak and she relinquishing those misjudgments to those who had been previously guarded as her own. Never over there! Some never over there but Nick knew all too well that her morning went motionless until he appeared, some ever-so-soothing advance through such delicate morning fare. Some painted fancy and one more making over of some prettier deed rarely looked upon. For he had long gathered Xiaoling's desire for him and ne'er once sought to dispel the notion of her perfuming herself in simmering anticipation, some searing restlessness within and seeping downwards into her still innocuous womb. Some thirst for the warmed relaxation which her mother had always told her about, and would continue to plunge her forward into some perpetual incarnation of the fruit she would be called upon to bear.

## -II-

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

– Have you seen Khanh Boi or Phuong? she asked.

No one answered her question and then finally occurring to her that she had not asked anyone in particular. Some younger boys leaning against the chain link fence and Renhan Lin eyeing a circle of ninth-grade girls across the yard did cause Xiaoling to angrily direct herself.

– Looking at girls all you do!

– *Bù zàn yī cí*, replied Renhan Lin.

– *¡Nǐ jiāng huì bù jí gé gāo zhōng!*

– *Uhgary bitch!*

– *¡Zhōng zhǐ!*

– Bitchbitchbitchbitch...ha ha ...

Xiaoling was always trying to care for those who seemed to be too incapable. Then looking aloft at some earlier twentieth-century structure just as the sun was beginning to offer some more obtuse reflection across the darkened brick façade did seem wholly at odds with the taunts of Renhan Lin though tolerantly. Renhan Lin had always listened to some more distant chatter of those who were to become his mates and too often with little fortune, some daily transformation into a caricature of himself for others to ogre or despise. Now

some drifting towards the main entrance somewhat saw Renhan Lin and his friends becoming unduly protagonistic, some golden zone shifting in kaleidoscopic fashion as Xiaoling held fast and preferring to remain alone for the briefest of moments. Locked within herself as some sleeker satin entwined and begging some tenderer escape, some wanting to exhibit but usually holding back for the shame of appearing too denuded for the tastes of her family and closest acquaintances. Some longstanding familiarity with those propensities of Renhan Lin as he and his mates would go spiraling into one vaster entrance, then some overly imposing portal from one century past, some historical narrative of a Brooklyn once mistook for the outpost it was inevitably meant to become. Some settling and descendants of some faraway inconvenience, across to some shores and then more. Some persecutorial mistelling in a land begot with rivers and canals winding through and some bitterer taste of this uncyclopedic misnomer, some ale or other religion gone repressed. He wondered in some other language as to the way he could justify his presence here, on that first day and some being fearful of newer faces and customs which he might never know or fully understand. The first day of registration had always been marked by some more peculiar mix of peoples and language, some newer wave of immigrant mothers mostly seeking to at once comply but also fulfill. Some unsustainable mix of Spanish and Chinese drowning out, some drowning out within mixes of words ne'er told for the love of Renhan Lin, for some arriving unconsorted was Renhan Lin and little did he know then of some asymmetric camaraderie which were to become his very own so soon thereafter. Some others standing and almost expecting Renhan Lin to appear and he then accepted kindly into their own. Some newer mix of languages now seeming almost unbearable, some 19th century portal looming over these foreign gestures lurching forward and crying, let us into your land of milk and honey and bestow upon your tired masses. Some looking up now and over the multitude mobbing a front patio with familiar sounds, some thirst for learning, some hunger ne'er satisfied from lands afar. Some crying out to the wind — *jfēng bào!* — and then some sea salt pounding down upon and Renhan Lin looking about through some more determined torrent sheet of rain until feeling alone and without. Some withering through the very heart of Renhan Lin as his mother fading through the gray confused more and more, some younger adolescent remorse just beginning to hold onto and torment. Some innocence lost — forever. Some heartbreak which would only begin, some grief which were to endure throughout the better part of three generations (or more) and only to arrive at some finality bespeaking of some longer running failure to rise above. Some more devastating journey across oceans, and the mother of Renhan Lin vanished within one moment's surge swell — *jfēng bào!* — and then some sea salt pounding down upon. Some southwesterly current carrying one's tattered soul to its eternal resting peace. Some burning need for ne'er leaving behind one's own blemished carcass, some used-up piece of pathetic waste which could merely repulse after all. Only many years afterwards would Renhan Lin have come to realize, some genuflecting before the memory of his own mother's demise and wishing to abide as closely as he could. Renhan Lin had long been nurtured more by his mother's mother than his own, still notwithstanding and his own keeping some closer eye on him through his years as a young boy and little more. Some sadness had overcome the mother of Renhan Lin and some scrutiny which were to test the patience of all those who would have chosen to pass over into this more admired currency. Some years and decades seeping through as some honeyed afterthought made bitter by one incestuous resolve to self-recriminate. Some self-indulgence made even more unconquerable by this perpetuating myth, some lingering notion that this entire span were to fall within their own eminent domain as some inalienable right. Some God-given concession to the virility of all those who might think themselves so foolish as to seek some possession which should forever go so unsought. Only had an uncle of Renhan Lin once dared to look toward the wisdom of seeking some more eternal dream sleep so unencumbered, some

drifting out beyond the reef and into some more expressive compounded state of fluid passage. Some shunning the notion of this mortal flesh being so tardy to arrive, some more embarrassment defiling of one's very moment for which they had planned so long. Then one more swimming stroke upon stroke, some gliding past the first buoy within this cold frightenedly and one more practiced daily over the course of some sorely misspent youth. Some being ne'er admired nor appreciated, some ridicule heaped finely upon throughout all those years in Fujian province and as a younger boy — *tóng xìng* — in not wishing to bring dishonor to the name of this or any other family so besieged by the more frightening prospect of a life without end. Then some furthestest gale would plunge the helpless sea vessel around and out incapably into some more heaving westward oblivion. Some tempest which were to slowly eclipse the mother of Renhan Lin from her cherished offspring — *jfēng bào!* — and some ne'er turning back which were to doom the actions of Renhan Lin and most of the others for generations to come. He would arrive finally to these shores but too tired, too confused and all unknowing of the task which his life were to press down upon him. Unrecognizable as some briny feast for the wretched creature from the deep which had become his alone. Some washing up of remains to which he could never again replenish with his own, some shell now exchanging niceties within this newer world absurdity. Hiding away upon some sunset park reminder and some pinyin muck seeping through, some acrid remnant into which they had themselves become transformed — Renhan Lin had made his presence known, some unconsorted entrance into some less-than-unforgiving land. Some inner resolve to ignore such barbs thus directed would impel Xiaoling to shrink from these and so many others with whom she had always thought she shared some more intimate camaraderie. She would choose the rear entrance as she so often had. Then moving up one more step toward some staid metal doors newly painted, some gray inquiringly of whether or not one's suddenly acquired entrance had been more of an exit and hoping it were not to be so. Some setting further upon one graying embankment peering deftly away from the village of her grandparents and trying to remember whether anyone could have really fathomed the anxiety her mother had had to brave for so long. *Mǒu wù jiào hǎo.* Something better she had always said. Some scurrying down more quickly toward the mooring which had ne'er gone too unnoticed by the authorities and still unbeknownst of the trial onto which they were about to endure. Xiaoling had become petrified at the sight of the captain awash, straddling and crying furiously as he clung more tightly to the boom. Then some further magnification in sound cutting through those slates of torment which had been raining down on the decrepit vessel since they had turned eastward toward the bluff — *bēng xiàn* — man overboard and some final glimpse she had caught of the stricken sailor were to remain with Xiaoling as some averse reminiscence throughout.

— Kanh Boi! Kanh Boi! she cried but then oh, over there she murmured to herself in relief, her voice trailing off to ne'er a whisper.

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

— Oh, I forget it's Monday. How long did you wait there? asked Xiaoling.

— I have been waiting for ten minutes...have been ..have been...

— *Měi hǎo, měi hǎo.* You have been waiting ...

- You must learn to speak correctly or Miss McGrath will come to your house, joked Kanh Boi.
- No, she won't! laughed Xiaoling.
- Come on or we'll be late.
- ...and Phuong?
- Upstairs already, replied Kanh Boi.

Kanh Boi and her cousin had arrived in Brooklyn not two years earlier, some strife having seemed to pass quietly throughout two generations in their native land and had now been supplanted squarely within the reins of such youthful eternal. Kanh Boi Ha was always fond of telling those who exerted pretensions of being her mentors that she missed the musings and finer humilities of that city not far from the delta. Some thinking upon furtherest resources in a time of post-war upheaval and did anyone really call it Ho Chi Minh? Some character placed peculiarly would have surely imposed and quite uncharacteristically – Minh – as in her own. Some indecipherable thread brought over to this newer world and wonderingly of a time when fruit went ripened and breezes languished more milkily upon the thoughts and schemes of but a few higher-minded individuals. Some pretension wrought toward social equality and incorruptible mores did lead on to this newer world which had ne'er seemed to afford its own lack of higher-minded sorcery. There abiding some ruffled figure sitting stodgily in face of some more geopolitical design overlooking some city not far from the delta and would have cried out to Kanh Boi in anguished refrain. That she had been able to communicate at all with her friends of Chinese descent would have continued to baffle, if not for some ancestral miscue on the part of her great grandparents. For while she in fact came into this world through that portal toward which the city of Saigon would have eventually succumbed, her grandfather was born in the province of Yunan, some momentary meandering northward toward one more economic opportunity having had defined the course of her great grandparent's later years. Whereupon some eventual return southward would have left permanently engraved that tongue to which Kanh Boi's grandfather had continued to see fit and endure throughout future generations. Some common banter between the two girls went off to distant reaches at times, but always at the amazement of those other Vietnamese girls who were hard pressed to comprehend such an unexpected interchange. Then some larger hand trucks carting dried goods and cartons of milk seemed to impose upon, some eerily metallic structure gliding on as it were and attesting barely to the presence of one outstretched cry from just beyond the stairwell. Some figure half-ensconced in grayish veil peering ahead and wondering as to what might have been the cause for this utterly unexpected intrusion.

- Why 're you girls entering through this door?
- Oh we sorry, Miss Perry, but no time to go back. Exam starts at nine.
- It's only half-past-eight.
- ...but Mr. Hernandez said to be upstairs now.

Xiaoling's voice again tended to trail off to just under that which could have been properly understood even in the best of circumstances. Some larger-than-life sound again imposing upon and further upsetting that which had already become some ill-intentioned proposition in her mind, some steely reminder to all who would listen regarding the haste which might inevitably have its way with each and every one of them.

– Well go ahead, but try to remember girls. It's every Monday.

– So sorry, Miss Perry.

The two girls hurried up the stairs and intending upon pre-empting any second thought which the dean might have entertained. In such case, the notion that some earlier-than-expected arrival through this hitherto non-permitted entrance could have only caused some seething, some uncalled-for attempt at a vindictiveness at times experienced by the entire student body. Still, Miss Perry had always been one of those more dispassionate deans in the school and no such event was seriously considered. Miss Perry would make the long walk to the fifth floor just as gracefully as when she first started at this upper school on 48th Street. Some dancing out loud and sound turning back on its own would have continued to foster within her, now thinking back to some lonelier evening within someone's tidier embrace or standing for hours outside some lesser-than-enlivening nightclub hoping against hope that she too might be chosen. And why should she not? Some preening near and far had always met with some certain reward, none-so-much revered as on that day when she once more went united with some meandering artiste on station's front. One by one they entered and left some straddled platform as stage for she and he who might forever lay claim to her innermost thought and desire. Some receding passion longing for one more pressing onwards and why should it not? Some sleeker alighting across one more bent gently and in search of some more fleeting glimpse of carnal embrace would have to sustain her forth toward yet one more of life's disappointments and asking if he loved her – do you love me? then gently mingling within some mass of misappropriation which would have defined inevitably this very element within which she had habitually taken upon, for the day had come and gone when she might be called upon to command her very own. Some more soothing refrain set down by the artiste who now seemed to lean more heavily against her faltering breast and languishing from behind in hope of reaping his ill-beset harvest. Some be mine be thou art fairer had been studied and re-studied but unknowingly of how any such rendition could be delivered within our own present circumstance and would forever lead her onto some more lingering cadence, some greeting those most gilded of voices to which would have become some post-universal exercise gone awry. Some intending to guide her along and she unresponsive as the next train succumbed meekly to this next darkened pathway. Some wading along the tracks and hoping and thinking do you love me at all well one would think. Some mingling and darkness again pushing through this one darkened tunnel and the artiste in less-than-hastening invigoration and standing more closely on station's front did lead onto some more musing over one's fairer headed fragrance rising swiftly, some such perfumed and so peculiarly to one's own keener awareness now closer and closer and languishing still from behind then nearer and nearer until thinking do you love me? Now entering her fifth floor office and unlamenting of the fact that no-one could really pretend to deny her the spoils for which she had so long toiled, some reaching over for one more dose of beauty encased. Some circular portal through which she might continue to penetrate and partake of that mirrored magic which did forever place emphasis upon her supplest of features. Some silkened forty-five degree light lifting a wanton grace

from the dank grey wall structure which deftly defined her windowless office. Some pat went one more last stroke intended to redeem upon and she would be done with it but that last one felt just right and pat pat why not it would be five more minutes before they made it up here. Some temporary preening most always interrupted by those Mexican girls why she might have even held Miss McGrath responsible for pat pat and why did my office need to be up here next to hers anyway? She is such a nice lady such a darling when her husband was ill all she could think about was her children her niñas and such but all those other students if you could call them that all day long moving by hello Miss Perry and why do they think pat that I am their friend anyway their amiga now just keep going to your next class girls pat patting then some try to speak correctly girls or Miss McGrath will come to your house (it was always a joke with her but she is one of those more intelligent oriental students so beautiful too with that long straight silkened hair). Some Spanish girls calling out to each other in the hall hola chica or Mexican or whatever what difference does it make they are all just ours and those Mexican girls pat deserve something prettier hoping to settle upon did often occur to her as she began to perceive some sound now beginning to grow out of the din and Miss Perry tucking the small rounded metal case into her drawer. Some rushing out toward the door of her office and meant to engage frontally those pupils arriving well into her own domain. Some glimpse of Chinese or Vietnamese or whatever it what was the difference they were all just ours. Some domain which having had forced itself upon her in a real way and relaxingly of some inner frustration which she had had to endure at some other place. Some tapping reluctantly upon keys all day and some cannot show this page or that for one reason or another with some reaching down for some temporal play, some unobtrusive tampering with before one other attempt at connecting to the place or whatever it was called. Some attempt at filling her coffers with this but never materializing to her own satisfaction, then pushing on and over again toward this present didactic situation if it could be called that she would usually intimate. Some previous professional foray resulting in just reaching down for it all day long and never really serving anyone's purpose or reason without proper remuneration. Some cannot show this page or that or reaching down for one more or some waste of one's time completely or some being unable to know exactly what to do just waiting and hoping to be chosen and not left to waste away or fade on into some middle-age looking back and wondering what might have been. Some why should I not be chosen this time around I look better than anyone and working harder toward some perfection some slimmer or shimmering lace falling more softly and some chillier evening ambient frosted suspiration teasingly tingling the next boy and he would have been a little too young in any case. That some artiste should have been so constant in my thoughts and pushing forward into this mass of hoping against hope some hoping against hope to be the one and when will it end why do I still feel some need for feeling some need to feel on some chillier evening frosted suspiration. Some continuing to please now he is glancing back over and maybe we could both be chosen over and then back again for one more day of didactic if you could call it that. Some hesitating nearer to the door leadingly onto some fifth floor hallway for some do you love me and the artiste just there not really doing much of anything and why are they always making so much noise just trying to savor some do you love me? And why should he not? Some standing and waiting on station's front and ne'er knowing whether some more suffering artiste might ever. Some ne'er reacting to or ne'er knowing if some suffering artiste and coming seemingly from behind some languishing or whatever he called it could ever readily suffice for one more, some mass misappropriated and standing more closely still until unknowing of when some next train were to approach and become newly absorbed. Some coming back and still coming back around until all those things which at some time seemed so important would have become moot. Now some more meaningful involvement with those children in her charge, some more quickly paced and

eager to attend to those who would seem to be determined to arrive to their classroom at some proper hour. Some no time to go back had always been some proudest refrain of Xiaoling and the entire Huan family, now some marking off succinctly to the steps upon which her soles had been treading. Some approaching the third floor landing and exhausted students leaning heavily against some freshly painted wall, grainier finish daring those who would once more scrawl their adolescent exuberance to refrain – a refrain ... oh the refrain (some changing parts of speech) now seeming to Xiaoling and bringing on some thought that last went swimmingly in her head. Some language examination would challenge tomorrow but still they climbed well accompanied up to this morning's task and at last stepping onto the landing.

– *Wǒ jīng pí lì jìn*, sighed one girl now occupying some intermittent space on the landing.

– Why so tired? chided Xiaoling.

– Too fat too fat too... as Kanh Boi's remark became consumed in some half-silenced visual laugh. Some face far too beautiful to be offset by the ringing outpour of comic grace which did presently shake Kanh Boi to the bone.

– Nothing comes out of that face!

– What? exclaimed Kanh Boi.

– It's empty face laugh!

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

– *Yě fēi pán* ... too fat! insisted Kanh Boi.

Some stark metal cage structure now being left behind as they turned toward the next set of stairs had always been irking to both. Neither in Fujian nor in Ho Chi Minh had either witnessed some flagrant rebuke to their dignity as trustworthy students. Might such a non-reliance on common thinking though youthfully be more telling of the academic non-insistence which forever seemed to frustrate some more proper intellectual nature and adherence to this newer place? They had always seemed daily determined to change all of that, and continued their climb to the next landing. Some noise began to filter in through the approaching doors, some nagging reminder that it was indeed delivery day and indicative of some one-hundred-and-eighty degree error in their own approach to the fifth floor.

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

– Probably confused like us, sighed Xiaoling.

– I think the dean saw her and was too afraid to say anything ...so fat.

– That's not nice, replied Xiaoling. Why you say that?

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

Kanh Boi's last comment seemed not to be logical, although Xiaoling accepted it as yet some other gift or attempt at making light of what could have very well become some very difficult morning for both. Some cruelty certainly unbecoming of Kanh Boi but one which no person had ever taken too seriously. Nor did Xiaoling, and some cumulative examination would properly test their ability to cope with some sequence of mathematics upon which both were hoping, some achievement for which their parents had come so far and sacrificed so much. Such gifts were commonplace from Kanh Boi, tomboyish darling of the least lot and unwanting of the sort that some lesser students like Dong Er and Renhan Lin might better concur with. Some tomboyish darling seeking out one's own place amidst so many more oriental students and struggling to speak some language which had so long ago challenged as presently. I have been learning was learning are then so many years before in Ho Chi Minh – have no choice wú nài have no way out wú kě nài hé but obviously no certain significance to be gained from such temporal have auxiliaries, some past meaning in general time not merely lost but moot in pinyin. Some setting off into a pinyin sunrise had quite remarkably come to be for her great-grandparents and eventually for herself. That each should have occurred at different places and times and on different continents might have only attested to the absurdity which life itself had always had to offer, and to be obliged to deal with as best we could. Some setting upon for an explanation of that which none existed. Kanh Boi too had shuttered in disgust upon being told by Xiaoling of some tryst mistakingly set upon – ¿*Dong Er shén nǐ bàn ...?* Some stooping lowly into what should have been the love of Dong Er. Some having no way out she would consider or having no choice but then turning once more toward some wú kě nài hé or wú nài, some time to absorb one's newer language or some newer world opportunity. Some fabric woven out of so many different patches of sensibilities could have only strengthened and marked off the cadence for which all succeeding generations were to be so grateful. I have been we have been climbing wú nài have no choice like those other students Dong Er and Renhan Lin. Some are climbing have been climbing these stairs in temporal have auxiliary but that is tomorrow thought Xiaoling and Kanh Boi replying yes as if through some extra sensory mind coexistence with Xiaoling.

- These stairs too high, exclaimed Xiaoling.
- ¿*Shén me?* ...are too high. ...are...
- Oh, no-one listening now!
- But what will you do tomorrow on the language exam...?
- Who cares! It's tomorrow. Why these...are these too high? asked Xiaoling feigning concern over errant predicates.
- I don't know. All buildings were just two in Ho Chi Minh.

Kanh Boi reflected momentarily though too obliquely at some construction found typically back home. Both had by this time begun to sound a bit like the girl they encountered on the third floor landing, although any such remark to the matter which might be directed from without could have only drawn the ire of Kanh Boi. Some finer young girls in sleeker regard, some glossier revista appearance had always been so prized and more to

the liking of those Mexican girls – *las chicas* – some certainly not ever having been that to which either Xiaoling or Kanh Boi could aspire. Still, Dong Er was of another sort entirely and always having been open to those more lurid sensations which might have been intimated.

– Almost there. *¡Zhōng yú!*

– Yeah. Good exercise for us skinny girls.

– *You* skinny, conceded Xiaoling.

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

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

The girls filed into the classroom amidst those who had entered from the proper entrance. Some mass of converging into had almost torn the two apart and Xiaoling was intent on following through behind Kanh Boi, not out of any sense of digression nor would it, but rather for some sense of security which some nearer presence of Kanh Boi might afford. She settled into an adjacent desk and wondering just fleetingly if perhaps her best friend were to think poorly of the gesture. Some need for one's own sense of comfort or well-being and beginning to take herself onto the exercise to which they both would be about to commit. Some oh here as she watched Kanh Boi too descend into her task. Then some placing measuredly those tools upon which would be prelude to the notes and ideas increasingly gone meandering in her own mind. Some last minute turning over concepts and lemmas joined intimately within the products of those lifelong events which had defined her most wayward journey. Some journey from the fields and streams of Fujian to this now well-substantiated means toward achieving that individual glory which would be so close at hand. Some oh this oh here where? oh there and seeming to begin slipping into some slower submission. She had been long admiring of Kanh Boi's calmer sense and now glancing over to her friend who went barely moving, and alighting patiently over some time-weathered slab of wood which had supported some more devout tuition and would now be put to the test. Some altar of finer hope placed silently beneath the vision of one so tranquil and she again bringing to mind that rarely had she ever looked upon the features of one so sublime. Some finer veil of hair draping gently over Kanh Boi's left cheek did seem to absorb Xiaoling for the longest moment until coming to some realization that it had only been through the sheerest of life's fortuities that they had at all become so mutually aware. Some lingering uneasiness concerning the fleetingness of life itself and ruminations hardly befitting the thoughts and ideas of one so new, or so her mother would say. Some trying not to consider such notions and now intending to bring into mind those concepts and lemmas which had begun to provide the comfort she had been seeking since gazing and puzzling over some dearer man clinging desperately. Within some last frantic attempt at salvation as they rounded some final marker and out eastward over a churning sea toward the bluff which were to provide some final vista of the homeland.

– All right then. Please take everything off your desks except pencils and pens. Protractors and rulers will be provided, as will paper for rough work.

Some voice suddenly from the front of the room had startled Xiaoling and she looked up whilst beginning to become aware of the other students around her. Some none-too-distant recollection of Nick began calling to mind and it seemed to Xiaoling reluctantly that he was indeed nowhere to be found. Some reluctantly for it was always toward her own sense of regret that he should continue to be so unserious in those matters which were to affect him most, and Xiaoling did venture one quicker glance behind. Some one-hundred-and-eighty-degree and still no sign of Nick. Some suddener thinking as to where he might be and how he might have come to arrive did bear upon this kindlier evolution in her own thoughts, for while she had never been taken to admitting any feelings for the boy she would have been drawn naturally toward his insistence or eagerness or out of some sense of commoner repose upon the ordeal through which both had been. Some commoner administration of fortitude unknowingly and did characterize some involuntary transformation which both had had to endure.

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

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

– Alright, please begin. You'll have ninety minutes to do this exam. Good luck.

Kanh Boi might have been thinking back to one's immediate entrance into this promise of life and laughter, some reasoning upon so seductive an ambition and certainly would have done the same if called upon to do so. Some times and tatter seeing to it that not one more hour should be spent in such circumstantial disarray, and it were to be at moments like these when she could summon her very best. Then scrutinizing with divining eye some first task would be paramount, calling on those lemmas and postulates which tended to satisfy and only those. For well-disciplined she was, and whereas Xiaoling's parents had been inexorable regarding the road she would be obliged to take, Kanh Boi would be content to find within herself possessing of some commitment for bettering her own life and that of those nearest to her. She could be seen scanning down along some frivole border, some quicker deciding upon just which she might accomplish first and seeing to it that the time she had to spend would satisfy her properly and securely. Some defining logarithms to herself and muttering lowly, she would often be the first to discover some unforeseen complication which set the others awry. Some geometry which Xiaoling had been considering, and would begin to taunt as she quickly advanced to the following line.

Some tightly clustered set of numbers belying one hidden set of values universally telling and thus began to ruminate accordingly, and why any such particular value should have shone so was neither for her nor anyone else to say. Kanh Boi and Xiaoling alike were to persevere in their quest for a better life, some thought of Nick languishing in his father's employ casting both into some easier revulsion, and with only the latter permitting such to upset some more rewarding sense of objectivity. Some searching and glancing off to the side could only fulfill Xiaoling's profound penchant for furtherest notions of the subject to which she presently devoted, so often mistaken for some less-than-honorable gesture but always unyielding and taken to those better strides uninhibitedly.

– III –

Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway went beholding those jagged levels of ne'er weathered brownstone structure which does so adorn these environs, those which Nick's casual glance seemed to at once consume and ridicule. Some earlier twentieth-century art-deco pastel having placed itself squarely and re-thinking as to whether any of this could have been some other city, some other place thought of improperly. He had rarely ever ventured out from the confines of his Brooklyn neighborhood let alone toward that which might have been considered some portlier piece of urban center. Some sun reflecting off the billboards which were to re-define some blatanter contrast amongst those dwarfed miniatures poking barely above the restaurant and tellingly of some lesser-than-satisfactory economic situation into which his family had been obligated to continue peering. Just get dumplings his father had urged — *only fresh dumpling* he say. The wholesale house to which he had been directed could have seemed to Nick unattainable if not for some crumpled piece of paper to which he clung so desperately — not for any pre-determined trepidation consideringly of his journey but rather some indication as to the excitement which was his upon finally finding the means to venture into what had in fact represented actually some promised land mirrored within the lakes and riverbeds of Fujian. No-one could have possibly ended up here, within these rising edifices of some bustling island enterprise. And yet some had apparently had, some more tightly condensed refrain of immigrant anxiety from another era and perhaps prior to any possibility of abandoning respectably those banks of the Xi Jiang. Now some more crumpled piece of paper had been intended to coddle Nick towards some wholesale venue to which his father had alluded. How much longer would it be before they could afford to buy their own dumpling press so that they might relinquish some need for this weekly trek? Only out of some concern for his ailing uncle had his father agreed to permit Nick to cross over on this occasion, and the ridicule which Nick urged upon emerging from the Houston Street station would have referred at least obtusely to some outpouring of disappointment which he and his family had initially professed toward their new found lot. *Only fresh dumpling* he say. Some larger-than-life billboard looming, some staring down onto some tangle of traffic and human flesh being subdued gently into some mesh of rising subway steam and tried grease which some passing vehicle had been spewing inadvertently. Nick should have gotten off at Canal Street, and he would have too if not for some thought which had lifted slowly as he stared across at some slightlier young woman presiding gracefully upon the corner space which he had been inordinately denied upon entering the subway car. Some kindlier face reminding him of Xiaoling and some features seeing well into the capability which he knew he possessed for winning her over. Some stealing her away from textbooks and tests and crossing over with her too on some finer day. What could she really have understood regarding the motives which his own father had harbored? Some purely

remunerative twist of fate cannot have been the only reason for such a harried exodus and this Xiaoling would never be able to determine as clearly as had Nick. Some billboard looming and pressing some newer life into one's own paling sensibilities did seem a more fitting explanation for the indignities which they had been obliged to suffer. Neither textbooks nor those kinder entreaties so often overheard within the spaces of wisdom currently espoused by those like Miss McGrath could change all of that. Some inability to detract from the aching desire which embodies that truer design for which we all yearn. Nick had considered crossing over and back down on a southbound train but rather decided to accept readily some happenstance with which he had been so heartily presented. Something newer on his plate and now some sun etching out shadowed angles in close relief and deliveringly of one more block upon another. Some step-upon-step and Nick still fondling the crumpled piece of paper which continued taking pains to appear then re-appear in his increasingly moistened palm:

### **Hop Kee Wholesale Dumplings 21 Mott Street**

Some step-upon-step and earlier twentieth century art-deco pastel endearing Nick as he glanced upward at the ornate structures adorning the overhangs of the flattened rooftops along this lower length of Broadway. Some vaguely perceived baroque, some sunbeam catching his eye barely and dangling upon his forehead as it pointed its way downtown and weaving a path along some steadfast umbra edging earnestly toward Canal Street. *¿Èr hòu shén me?* Then what? he wondered. No directions to dumpling house, then upon recalling that his father had told him to inquire on his own volition when he at last arrived in the vicinity and he continued on without further worry. Some larger crosstown thoroughfare had already begun coming into view and he once more glanced down at the crumpled piece of paper in preparation for what he would inevitably be called upon to do. *È rén men* – all good people his father had said. Nick's entry into Canal Street felt at once as if he had been royally received, some expanse of terrain stretching up to the Manhattan Bridge and back down toward the snarl of traffic which defined some mandatory funneling through to one of the Hudson River tunnels and beyond. Some sun which had been but a promise as he made his way down along Broadway, some insistent tease only intermittently through the granite rooftop awnings which went passing overhead now bathed him completely and he tended to savor the orange glow which warmed his adolescent features. *¿Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?* he asked some passerby entirely characterless but evidently to no-one in particular. Nick was in fact taken in entirely by the experience which presented, some oriental feast bringing down and about and much more so than that of his own Brooklyn environs. Some vaster enclave pledging more and lending him some ever increasing notion that such was about he and all those others like him and Xiaoling who had been so delivered. Some newer generation set off onto some newer place, some newer idea open to the masses and defining of one's own birthright for years to come. Were not both he and Xiaoling meant to be so chosen? Nick started moving eastward but only for some greater concentration of people and places. Some greater concentration of people and shops constituting some richer pallet of light and color. Some sounds and smells of fresh fish bedecking the sidewalk and bouquets of mandarin orange within some more elegant pose did hum their gentler melody toward anyone who might bother to listen.

¿*Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?* he repeated but some elderly woman took no notice and he began to doubt as to whether their language was indeed his own.

Some push and pull of people and places seemingly of determining his path along did starkly contrast the scarcity which he often experienced along his own venue. He at once caught sight of some more grandiose pagoda, one of those more effectual lending institutions which donned the façade of some temple whose childhood memory had faded fondly and his grandfather warning him and his friends to desist from playing within for fear of infuriating the spirits for whom it served. The sight seemed to endear Nick even more so and he hardly became aware of having finally arrived to the unassuming byway within which he now found himself. He instinctively set himself upon some newer course, some turning gaily and dodging some resigned old man hawking kaleidoscopes on a lower stoop as he set his sights squarely on some smaller cluster of children chasing dragons along the side. Nick was almost completely certain he had found the street but asked anyway. ¿*Cǐ Mott?* and a small boy looked puzzled until Nick grew somewhat more adamant.

— *Mott? Mott?*

The boy nodded and Nick continued to wonder whether some idiom had been vanquished to the pinyin muck which his father had warned him about on so many occasions – all speak *Engh-a-rish* now his father would say. He actually reached the establishment at just about half-past four and concurringly with some hour appropriate for having had embarked on such a prolonged nexus. He had hardly expected to be confronted with one more complication upon arriving, some additional two-story intrusion into his own and he stared blankly for some seconds at the spectacle which seemed to have presented itself wholly out of spite. Not for any impending confusion did it confound nor could it. Some briefest inspection at once provided the clue toward ascending to the dumpling house but Nick's appetite had gone wanting since the sesame cake he had had for breakfast at the Meng Ling bakery on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue earlier in the day. Some sudden realization that he should be able to engage in some lunch hour fare had at once delighted and he ignored stoically some temptation to proceed to the iron clad staircase straight way. Some deciding to descend to the basement door off to the side of which hung framed behind some window- greased mist some most tantalizing of glazed poultry. Some less conventional fare honeyed just for the delight of it and Nick wondering if perhaps he might brave some comparison between it and his own family specialty. As he descended, some sudden scarcity of traffic and pedestrians to his back only seemed to renew the elegance which his journey had unknowingly acquired. Now set off within some less frequented quarter and wonderingly of whether he had actually abandoned some confines to which his enthusiasm had been so pointedly directed, Nick could only confide in the expectation that this were to become something more profound than the menial task with which he had at first been charged. Some thereupon passing through a pair of perpendicular glass doors, some generic reminder intermittently written on some blank sheet upon the first and in stipulation of the type of payment expected. Once inside, Nick looked upon some elegance not overbearing in its outward décor, yet rather tasteful in its insistence on presenting Nick with some culinary experience closely in keeping with one's own culture drawn across years and distances too great to be comprehended clearly by those for whom they had provided so staid a cornerstone of daily determination. There were no tables to be had at first glance and it looked as though Nick should have to forgo his wishes purely out of some sense of expediency. Much to his surprise, there sat empty one smaller square stationed discreetly within a corner not far from the kitchen doors and just off to the side of some enlivened

gentleman putting what appeared to be some finishing touches on utensils one by one. Some finishing touches on utensils one by one and what seemed to be some just cleansed means for engaging in the sort of gastronomical retreat which Nick had had in mind. Still he was unsure of the table's availability. It might have been providing of some meaningless backdrop for the labors of those who would have protagonized or serving reflexively of some mere receptacle for things or ideas which might have gone momentarily in excess. There was no chair to accompany, and this prompted Nick to question the gentlemen whose chore he was sure not to upset in any case.

– Can I sit here? asked Nick.

The man smiled sheepishly and offering of some kinder notion about why some seemingly achievable act might at times be wholly unachievable on its own, some glistening font of information receding inexplicably and transforming into some afterthought and completely unawares, some use and re-use throughout until insisted upon and abandoned inevitably within some final breath.

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

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

His adamant reply surely took the man by surprise. What business of the boy might it have been to presume as to how the amenities in their own workplace should be utilized? He had encountered such customers before but Nick had been the first to convey successfully some notion that they might in fact have been mistaken in thinking that such a space could not be afforded properly to the clientele in times of need. Some smile which continued to go sheepishly would not be defeated and Nick's initial consideration regarding the stamina with which the gentleman approached his task proved to be reasonable. Nick waited patiently for the man's response and unmovingly as some waiter were to hustle piping hot trays of black bean barely beneath his chin. One more utensil were to go guarded and Nick would grow increasingly impatient. Why just for waiters? he thought. More empty tables over there. No-one using this one. Maybe he don't understand English. Miss McGrath say my English good now. Maybe I say it to this big dummy in ...

– *Xing. Yòng bǐ yǐ.*

(silence)

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

– I'll have ....

– No take order, replied the man tersely.

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

– Why no take order? he asked impatiently.

– No take order now, the man insisted. He take order.

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

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

– Change jobs. Sometime fork, sometime spoon or knife. Sometime take order. always change job. All day change.

The man's explanation had not been too satisfying to Nick. Some easier comparison with that of Nick's own could only point up some eerie similarity, some looking into the mirror of one's own discontent and wanting to investigate further as to just how and why this newer place might hold out some hope which had so often gone assuringly. Nick for his part had never been asked to look after the utensils as such. It was assumed to be taken upon by the kitchen help, some continuing attempt at finding that most proper of marinades always having had proved to be worth some highest priority for taking advantage of the little time which Nick had to spend at the restaurant. Might such an ambitious ritual have been telling of some finer classification in this borough across the river from his own? Some more acute sensibility for things refined or at least less confidingly? Some suspicion of things not right and the need to present some appearance of trying to make them so?

– So what I supposed to do? Starve? complained Nick.

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

– *Bǐ lù zhèr*, the thinnish man was told.

Some renewed sense of regret refused to go peresistent in Nick, and why should it not? Some penchant for ranting whenever circumstances would give in. Some insistent

sense of anger and impatience had seemed to run its course on so many occasions and when the attendance dean could barely tolerate some ill-timed intrusion into some illicit activity in the back. Some intending to shout down at Nick but never within some patronizing frame of thought nor would Nick ever tolerate such behavior.

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

– Don't need no menu! exclaimed Nick.

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

– ¿*Shén nǐ cān?* asked the waiter.

(silence)

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

– You don't speak English, man?

– Chinese with Chinese customer, replied the waiter.

– I'll have bird in window...hanging up.

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

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

– Miss McGrath say I speak English! I'll have...

Nick could suddenly sense some leaning motion of the waiter and tending toward some more implicit refusal of giving in to his stubborn diatribe. Some motion away from the tediousness which had befallen so cruelly upon his better intentions, some serving something up for this one or that had always gone so easily save for those moments which concurrently presented themselves.

– Chinese with Chinese customer, reiterated the waiter.

Before Nick could react accordingly, the thinnish man had followed through on his leaning motion and started toward a table near the door. There sat a young couple and not too much older than Nick himself. It seemed as if they were about to make their order and with no forthcoming opposition from the waiter, some more decidedly caucasian clientele having obviously been all too common in such a popular venue as this and Nick was quick to realize just how sheltered the confines of his familiar existence in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn really was. Rarely did many such *tǔ zhù* visit his father's restaurant, aside from some occasional teacher from the junior high school, while here they would seem to account for well more than half of the daily receipts. Some subsequent attempt at comprehending the waiter's point of view did then dawn upon Nick but quickly began to doubt once more as the couple went shaking their heads from side to side in what appeared to Nick as some deliberately confusing gesture. Why he not listen to me? I don't give any trouble. Just want bird in window. The waiter hesitated before seeming to consider leaving the younger pair to ponder over the menu a few minutes longer. Some foregone consideration for wanting to present Nick one more opportunity at acquiring this long-desired repast might have arisen if not for some unlikelier cry from across the room and inquiringly of some larger party just having cleared the heavy glass doors which separated the foyer and bottom step leadingly upwards to the street. Some larger gentleman in eager pursuit of some oriental feast and leadingly of what have might been some lesser-than-enthusiastic entourage edging carefully along toward the table which the thinnish waiter had signalled to in the adjoining dining room. Some hunger-driven aborigine in search of one more harried celebration or otherwise and was all Nick could do to set himself apart from such an ordinary lot. Now beginning to sense some sympathetic overture toward the waiter's desire for linguistic cross cultural exclusion and hoping to gain some favor, he once more tried calling to the thinnish man who had by now vanished momentarily behind the temporary façade which marked off this dining room from the next.

– *¡ǎn yuàn yì yǎn qián!* shouted Nick.

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

– Okay ... *kě'n fū*... happy now? Chinese with Chinese customer!

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

– *¿Shén nǐ cān?* asked the waiter.

But Nick was still unsure as to whether he should reply. Some further consideration of the nature of some non-capitulation to the whims of those who would pretend to provide

for his own dispensation did once again tend to present. Then suddenly in some otherwise more overpowering manner, for if not for some certain discomfort which he was beginning to feel and would have surely seen the waiter once again defer apathetically toward some other far off corner of the dining room.

– *Ān xū yāng!* said Nick.

– *Ēr shí fēn zhōng*, replied the waiter.

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

– *ǐ Nǐ hòu ěr shí fēn zhōng?* asked the waiter.

(silence)

Sounds and far off visions of fading embankments, some feel of newly mourned mist caressing Nick's skin enticing this untimely recollection did seem to absolve him of any prejudice. That was then. Some choice taken precipitously it surely had not been, and of this he was assured as he became old enough to ponder fully the banalities of such a vulgar existence. Some time marked by this earthly promise and ne'er hoping to move beyond to some adjoining portal, some opening up to some other plane of intuition and knowing. Some curdling into the safety of considering that it certainly had not been his own choice to make, nor could it. Some choice taken surely and without bothering to delve into his own tenderer frame, searchingly and wondering if some time-worn vessel might have ever been able to penetrate the façade which seemed to encircle protectively this domain into which he had so unwittingly been brought, some tried earthly experience extending far off into and back towards the initial reaches of time itself. Some choice exerted and which did now present itself revealingly in some other guise, some revealing of the trials which were to become and Nick was obliged to react more quickly than the waiter could have intended.

– *Měi hǎo. Ān hòu*, replied Nick.

Some disappointment regarding Nick's initial decision to cede to the waiter's request had now been rendered somewhat dull by his succumbing to the furtherer prospect of having to wait twenty minutes before being able to partake of this incidental repast. Some more succulent delight continuing to tempt Nick upon first glance and then darting away remorsefully, or so he would have liked them to presume. Some slightly tanned morsels of shaded glaze, some honeyed romantic setting and upon once more did lift the spirits of such a stifled lot. Such a lot soured by the rigors of having to put forth so on such a daily basis lest the spoils of this newer world should become so elusive. Then thinking twice, some one on either side pressing forwards in some vainer attempt at one's own carnal self-understanding. Some tastier dish wonderingly and asking coquettishly about whether she might have come sooner or not at all. Some tidier time to pass and Nick could only admire the scholarship with which the thinnish waiter seemed to attend to his now impoverished ritual. Some inability to desist from the nagging tendency he might suffer toward likening these glisteningpieces of tendered flesh to the rounded silhouette he might have once beheld as she were exiting too hastily from some earlier morning bath. Upon passing her house each day and pausing in hope of spying some more casual gesture, some

glancing up toward the second floor bedroom where she had been alighting since their arrival from Fujian. Nick stared at the ceiling and wonderingly, as if someone else might have been occupying the very table at which he presently sat. Then too wonderingly and began to become fixed upon one or two more imperfections in the level structure which tended to limit the majesty which seemed to distinguish this place from the others he had passed along the way. Some higher structure becoming joined at some geometric union of the three, then three more plus one and might hark back to the task which had gone so belatedly in Mr. Hernandez's class. Some recollection of the maths examination which she must have been fancying on this day and at this very hour or so Nick must have been mistaken, some greater time expanse having had transpired since his earlier morning departure into the 9th Avenue subway having taken its toll. Some poring over lemmas and definitions too unmoving to become anything other than what they might have represented truly and some pastime in teasing her along the way with who might she be with and what might she be doing? Some gender reversal and now some complicity within one's own frame of mind and pondering herself once more, some better lemma expressed and beginning to question the validity of all that she would now be doing. Some where is Nick and then why is oh he is just lazy like his stupid friends she must be thinking really going and setting off onto some newer things and pondering ponderingly of herself as Nick sat patiently and considering just how quickly he had been made to feel alone in this place. Some vegetable egg drop dropping languidly down and away from the waiter's thinnish frame and placingly on the table in front of them. Some vegetable egg drop being languidly placed and provoking Nick to at once reconsider the honeyed delight he had once been assured.

— *¿ Zěn yàng měi ge rén lǐng qǔ shí wù?* asked Nick angrily.

— *Nà jiǎn yì. Yā gèng shí jiān,* replied the waiter.

Nick's sudden outburst of impatience went upon noticing that the younger couple had already been receiving their vegetable egg drop and would have seemed to typify some demeanor which had always gone so blatantly in the boy's disfavor. He might still have had the opportunity to find her alone one day and cross over into this other place, some other impatience for having been resigned for too long and for too much. Some thinking that he could have just as easily turned away, some complete disregard for the entanglement which might have ensued and gone on to live some life of yearning, some endless incarceration bearing down on him and those in his own *huán jìng*. Some shadow of a human being having to rely on the likes of Renhan Lin for the rest of his tirelessly diminishing days and never wishing to elucidate much further than some occasional mishap partaken wholly out-of-turn, some latent responsibility missed or put off or simply having arrived too late. Some three-o'clock-return which he had promised his father ...

— *¿ Nǐ yuàn wàng chá?* asked the waiter.

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

... which he had promised his father might now very well seem to be fading into the shadow of some less-than-expected event occurring wholly out-of-turn. Some less-than-expected event occurring ...

— *¿ Nǐ yuàn wàng miàn tiáo?* Don't want no noodle! Just bird in window! O.K.?

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

— *Nǐ yuàn wàng...*

— Don't want nothing! exclaimed Nick.

The waiter seemed to begin feeling a bit squeamish to Nick who had become entrapped by one more fleeting reverie and regarding some inability to satisfy, some innate sensation for the servitude which had long become his and at the hands of so many generations perished. Nick, too, should have arrived at some solitary union with his past by now, and grievously looking forward were not to become his idea of achieving some barest of whatever font of pleasure his life might have to offer. Some serving those who would have surely been setting strides across greater distances and too ill-determined to address just about anything except some wanton fascination with his relationship to Xiaoling and the mirror which she would inevitably present to Nick. Some larger gentleman now quickening his pace along the steely utensils behind him and one last peek across to the younger couple ...

— *¿Fēi cháng duō gèng shí jiān?* asked Nick.

...to some younger couple who had apparently been having their own go of it and quite at the expense or it must have just seemed that way to Nick who had by now completely forgotten as to the exact moment when his initial request had been tendered, some mind now better drifting away toward thoughts of what it is she would have been making of all of this or even if she might be attending properly to the task which would have inescapably found its way within her by now ...

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

...within her and thinking by now what happened to Chinese with Chinese customer, some slight redemption at the waiter's momentary language regression he most cherished and noticing some light rain beginning to settle onto the steamy glass facing outwards toward the street and he thinking that it might be difficult to manage with two larger bags of dumplings all on his own and with no respite from some possible inconvenience, some more finely tuned stepping around pools of cooler water mixing into sidewalk debris then creeping in upon Nick's ankles as he might think menacingly of his father waiting at some sodden doorway glancing up one way then another and the little daylight that would be left over to hover upon we poor

mortals just standing around and waiting for one more glimpse of it, just one more inhalation of some aroma which could put our spines out of place recalling of some song he might have fancied one morning while waiting for her on the corner and how could she know anyway of some of those that might be entrapped in his own thoughts as he reclined at night. Some hoping for one more glimpse as she passed in front of her dimly lit window cast as nearly some shadow and then so much easier at the corner in the morning mist, some never over there he reminded her and trying to turn her thoughts away from those ghosts still unburied from a distant past then ....

– ... never mind, it's ok ...

...then who this other big dummy in suit anyway when Nick became accidentally nudged from behind, someone more official-looking probably from the courts of justice on Centre Street and noticing of some sudden push which one more official-looking type having entered and besieging the thinnish waiter all over again with tables beginning to become scarcer as the evening meal grew closer and closer upon thoughts of her and his father looking up first this way then that and wondering where he could be where she could be now that the examination should have been well finished and sitting deftly upon the edge of her bed wondering what might have become of him of the music which she had once intoned into his own ear as he bowed slowly beneath some gentler wisp of air which her breath had ....

– *Wǔ fēn zhōng*, remarked the thinnish waiter.

Five more minutes? Yeah, he think I got nothing else to do! What he think? Dumplings can't wait. Have to be back by six. What he think? The official- looking type now seatedly just across and marking out one rather scalene figure with the younger couple whose more feminine side he had been coming to glimpse and more so. Nick then being made to feel as some victim of some situation and did equally consider whether such would have been some sort of just compensation for the trials which his forbearers might recall, some equally but frightfully unjustifiable treatment regarding the pains which they must have wrought and seethingly, some more clearly held longing and feeling like some victim over and over, some gnawing victimization ne'er sought after but succumbed to nevertheless. Some looking forward to the niceties which could have materialized but didn't, some second-guessing and then some, might have pushed Nick unceremoniously to the brink but hadn't, some yet becoming more prone to considering whether such a repast could have been worth the pains and tribulations of all but one of those gestures made so deeply from within. Some being made to fall victim to the trials and rituals of those for whom Nick might have meant so much, or so little dependingly of how one more seemingly insignificant event could have played out and then returning to this original claim of fairer than fairest-art-thou, goingly and knowing only too well that here in this tinier place where one might find some peace and comfort rendered and so unforgivingly, Nick might simply get up and leave. Some wanting to rebound from the sickness which were to intend upon then some picking up and warding off that ever encroaching subserviency which he himself had long come to recognize. Some wanting and wanting more had never been of his own, some eternal rising of the pinyin which loomed continually and then locking itself into place, some rising early morning sunrise pinyin sunrise as some chastened idiom did go hardly and without

some easier surrender to that which Nick now called his own. Miss McGrath say I speak good English! Now back to the brink and to the brink once more as the official-looking typed gone and seeming to delight in what it is he had been served. Something seethingly tasty it appeared to Nick and then occurring that never had he seen such a delight being offered in this or any other version or culinary venue. Some rethinking of a progressive time situation now and in light of the fact that never had he ever intended to imply that he had ever seen such a spectacle in this or any other type of venue, culinary or not. Some running about and glidingly smooth under and about itself, then some tenderer scallions embellishing some richer sauté which had evidently gone towards somewhat more than mere accompaniment. Some winding upwards and around down to some pristine dish which seemed to have bestowed upon it some more chastened relief, some chastened treat and shearing proudly beneath some other mucous membrane which might have masked its outer beauty but didn't. Instead glistening and encouraging he who might partake to admire some tinier structure which might have been used to vanquish its prey or rather adorn innocuously some more finely lit piece of flesh from whence it might have arisen. Then being lifted slowly as the sauté might have made its way dripping easily, some heartier breathing outwardly onto the steaming sensation which were about to become, and all according to some more sumptuous aroma rising stealthily through the seasoned ether that did go enveloping the billowed aliment which seemed to stare upwards at its ne'er endearing official. Then being reluctantly consumed or seemingly so, some slipping slowly through the official's puckered lips and leaving some sharpened tentacle dangling against the nape of his chin as he reached downward for one more glass of warmed oriental beer, some slightest chance at carnal reconciliation and whoever might have thought that such an official type could have necessarily been too starved or too depraved to consider just about anything else, some going off and going off again throughout entire moments while again knowing all too well that she might have been the one who might have been able to give him and then standing plaintively on some subway platform with her looking behind at some older more noteworthy gentleman, sitting cock-kneed against the back of some steely bench upright and ne'er giving any thought to the feast which might have been coming his way. Some returning to the spectacle which would continue to grace his dish, now some more completed gesture of relief as the warmed oriental beer trickled down the back of his throat and he glancing downward as Nick went noticingly of some subtler bed of rice which would have encouraged even that most squeamish of incidental connoisseur. Some once more, some continued piercing of the greyish mucous which did seem to persist all the while and this time without some slimier mass sliding upwards along a chosen track, some looking forwards to one other quicker digestion and knowing all too well that such cuisine could have only benefited from the locale in which it had been served. The waiting became unbearable, beginning to seem as if some endless time had run away. Some tending now toward deception as the only way out and noticing that the fan above Nick's head had begun to rotate at some more deafening pitch. Some rapture looked into and deceivingly as the only honest way to survive, some calling up to the pains and unjust rewards which had always passed so closely past Nick's own. Some deception as to the better manner in which to survive all the pains and debilities which Nick was made to suffer at the obvious comparison with Xiaoling and that friend of hers who not unlike those other wài guó rén had so quickly sought refuge beneath one of so much more honored oriental descent. Indeed, he would neither be surprised if the two had been setting about within some more-than-platonic tryst, some awakening newly to practices previously scorned. Some deception would seem to become the

only recourse in which Nick could confide and the waiting had begun to grow immeasurably intolerable. The official had by now placed his utensil delicately beneath one more succulent mass and thrusting upwards toward some more ravenous consumption, some accompanying grain of rice barely teetering along the edge as it were, and disappearing uneasily into the mouth of he who might have tended to such daily tasks of incrimination justly served. And why should he not? For when all was said and done, he too could have very well become caught up in such ne'er enlivening fare, some being devoured whole by the whimish devaluation of civil society and reluctantly waving to Xiaoling (and that friend of hers) as he would be drawn away towards some more unseemly incarceration. Nick kept a keen eye on the thinnish waiter as he once more approached this judicious guest, now with some apportioned silvered platter upon which sat some blackened mass, some otherwise escargot and still painfully unknowing of just how much longer this incessant interlude were to continue. Nick shifted uncomfortably within his own as he watched the man devour some jellied slime one after another, some delicate foreplay tickling at each of the tinier shells which passed on through his steadier hand crawling further upwards, some afterlife reaching barely upon the tips of his fingers or just prior to some somewhat completer submission. And yet such fare could have never been prepared upon the banks of the Xi Jiang, nor could it have ever made its more slightly acrid ascent into the thoughts of whomever would have been imposed upon in those final moments before turning westward around the bluff. Alight now, for any moments turn could alter and think carefully about why one is sitting in this place.

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

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

what little respect and lifelong retrieval he could muster. Some flesh savoured appeared to lack the humility he had expected, and he at once turned toward the waiter in some more inquisitional way, some calling out to anyone who might possibly be able to enhance this most deafening of experiences which was tending to devour him day by day.

– *Gèng chá*, requested Nick.

The thinnish waiter at first hesitated in replying. Chinese with Chinese customer and some unavoidable dilemma of entering at all hours with some bring me this or that no matter how one might have been feeling or even slovenly. Some just wanting to retrieve one's tiniest bit of dignity, not slovenly or wanting to be. Some hoping for one last ephemeral notion as to why this had to come about, some never-ending odyssey away from the wellspring of his youth and drawn into some laggard servility as if Chinese with Chinese customer could even begin to requite. The waiter walked back to the kitchen slowly and emerging some moments later with the tea Nick had fancied. Some wondering sympathetically as to why Nick had so carelessly nurtured the entrée away from this unwillingness to imbibe, some proceeding imprudently and without measure. Some unmeasured taking in of this cherished repast did at some turn seem at once too unexpected and too predictable. The younger couple by now had finished their own, some rising jocularly and still inseparable as they hurried through the throng of expectant throng and up toward the pavement. Nick would linger some moments more in appreciation of this seasoning at long last. Some further sustenance and savoring of the carnesceous morsels which continued to embrace his own bespoken tongue. Or was it meant to be so sorely misused? Some staggering months and time of inconsequential fare, one's own lack of piquancy unwillingly and these most exquisite of dishes unbeknownst eternally by those with whom he had always fantasized. Some libidinous appetite, some overly succulent aroma lasting through the darkest of times did never seem to deter the impressionable flavour which had so inculcated on this day. The younger couple would have been just as keen on discovering that neither had Nick been capable of confiding in anyone regarding those things most dear, or that any single person could have at last been able to afford him the time and rationale for perceiving anything other than those provincial dishes which had come to confine him and his entire family. Some sudden wondering now as to whether she had finished the task to which she had committed. Some more high flung ideas regarding what could be won through the procurement of knowledge and skills put upon by teachers and benefactors who had been shown to be nothing but the cruellest and most heartless of scoundrels. Some harder labour governed by the earning from one's own will and need to weather is what she would ultimately learn, as Nick had from his own mentors who were now on the verge of harvesting the benefits which this newer world had promised to extend. Nick placed his chopsticks insistently to the side of his plate now cluttered with various bits and pieces. Some now glancing above at some twelve o'clock or then around slower toward three and noticing of some further bit of rice seemingly strewn aside for no other reason. Could Nick's own time here have been so wrought with uselessness? Or might he have better sought some manner of reassuring those possessing of a keener view of his plight? Nick was quickly becoming convinced of his own need for some kinder self-destruction and at once considered reposing within some eternal dream sleepiness. Still he recognized the obligation to abide by those conventions which tended to endure and demurely gestured as if willing enough to be scrutinized for some lack of grander largesse by the thinnish waiter.

– *Zhàng dān, qí.*

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

– Have to pay at door, directed the waiter.

Now having caught sight of some more non-descript type lunching off in some corner alone. Alone as would be some victim wallowing in the self-abuse that they had brought upon themselves but seemingly in wait of three more, some readying the dishes and utensils that would betray the person's impending companions. Some thinnish waiter leaving the plastic bowl of dampened aperitif which seemed to have adorned at first the tables of all those of other ethnicity, some central repast which would be meant to whet the appetite of those who might request more and patronizingly thus of some higher quantity of remuneration. Some dampened stack of rice noodle it seemed to Nick, before bill and why no aperitif for him he thinks. Chinese with Chinese customer. No noodle aperitif for Chinese customer and Nick watching as the victim take whole plate and start to enjoy unthinkingly of the accompaniment which would be soon to arrive. Now nearly complete and the others would be soon to arrive but Nick refused to be drawn into some spectacle which was not his own and decided to continue on and up to the dumpling house in any case.

Nick reached deftly into the side pocket of his trousers while continuing to wallow in the pandemonium of some culinary clutter, some platter still and stiller appearing to mock him from beneath and more imagining of the day he might come with her to this very place, some sitting within hair's breadth as had the younger couple and pressingly of the warmth which could have only been evoked in the company of another. Nick left two seamy dollar bills in midst of some disarray now taken for granted as he rose and not looking back but decidedly, some diminishing sense of remorse having been beginning to become overtaken with some other source of self-confidence and barely hoping to replace some nagging recrimination dredged forwards from within each time one recalled some farther away moment, some farther away moving even farther and farther as he inquisitively asked the cashier (some unconcerned spectacled type ne'er bothering to glance at whom would be considering such a chore) as to the whereabouts of Nick's destination having been so hitherto displaced. As he passed the man who now seemed to be taken aback by his own gluttonous remorse, some noticing the shrinking bowl of rice noodle and reached down onto the floor. Then picking up some business card which had seemingly fallen from the victim as he rampaged through his illicit rice noodle aperitif and returned it to the man, now embarrassedly accepting the fallen card and uttering some slightly unsettling remark, but Nick too intent on completing his chore continued on towards the exit.

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

The cashier said nothing (*only fresh dumpling* he say) and neither indicative of whether he had heard or listened to anything that Nick had been insisting upon. Some more careful scrutiny of the note did seem to suffice, some going about one's own less pleasanter routine daily and seeming to be wholly incognizant of Nick's desire for total momentary peace of mind. Some giving in unconditionally to the needs of those about him and unselfishly withdrawing into one's own more eternal slumber.

– ¿*Páo de tuán shàng dì?*

Some repetition of his request (*only fresh dumpling*, he say) simply reinforced his commitment to remaining true to his family's dedication to excellence. Some nobler desire of best catering to one's own patronage, for while most other local establishments had been passing off two-week-old fare, such foul play would never warrant any tidier consideration with the Wāng family. Some time spent enjoying his lunch had gone past Nick (*only fresh dumpling* he say) and some earlier evening deadline which his father had laid out would surely go unkept. Still, as there had been no inclination toward any hint or reply by the cashier Nick would presume that the man were either deaf or illiterate in either language, some curiousness considering the weightier task with which the man had been entrusted.

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

– *Shàng dì, shàng dì*, replied the man.

Nick was unsure of why he had even felt the need to inquire. Perhaps some impending fascination with wanting to see the man put into some less-than-enviable predicament, some more frightening means for banal recollection of things which should have gone ne'er forgotten (*only fresh dumpling* he say) but always in constant need of some further mental percipience, or seemingly. Some television then blaringly from a higher place and Nick glancing upwards at some black-and-white screen sounding out news from some other venue. Some taller more eloquently decked gentleman of subtler race taking on the masses as if beseeched to doing so with four score and seven years and no-one wishing to take notice or even acknowledging the gravity of that which had been occurring, some of knowing (*only fresh dumpling* he say) some of wasting time or some having just stopped in for some ripened repast long overdue with some hour for awakening some hour for collective conscience and give us your tired masses your huddled or whatever it was all just some promise unmet as far as Nick was concerned and more hopefully toward some more fruitful existence, or seemingly. Some more hurried taking back of the notes which had been furnished to the cashier as he headed perhaps too stealthily (*only fresh dumpling* he say) toward the door and back up towards the street, for Nick had become in a quandary here and having to consecrate some holier journey for returning the produce with which he had been encharged by his father on the previous morning. Some *only fresh dumpling* as if such a locale could have ever had anything other than and Nick finding himself now confronted once more with some edifice at last, some not so being the same at which he had been divining previously or even consciously so, some fiftier minutes and then some fiftier more.

Some fiftier moments which having had gone by on the basement floor, some fiftier and then fiftier and more so as the thinnish waiter had gone refusing his kindlier petitions and would have led on to some fiftier or fortier or whatever more if he had not at once made claim to one's own better resolve over which his father had bothered so staidly. Some now bothering and (*only fresh dumpling* he say) botheringly *bok choy* if that had been what had been so specified *bok choy* he thought and pork dumpling now impressing upon Nick as he spied a second entrance off to the left and unpromising of anything at all really. Some refusing to conceive or bother to recognize to, some admittance to the stupidity which could not have possibly prevailed but had indeed and now without means for bok choy this or bok choy that some lifelong sentence on these unpracticed shores with some time for getting better getting ahead she said (but where could she be now) and walking somewhat more quickly as the dusk went advancing upon the sooty metal poles lining the block. Some ten feet just to the other entrance leading upwards and asking of some *bok choy* dumpling (*only fresh dumpling* he say). Nick entered the other doorway now more quickly than he had intended. Some more overblown reflection of the things which had or hadn't come about never materialized, and the thoughts which had sustained him throughout his unexpected repast seemed now to guide him up some narrower staircase. Some tattered felt carpeting insisting and dustily would mesmerize Nick as he rummaged upon just what his father would remark as he arrived home some five hours later than expected. One two stairs at a time then three four and Nick would be quick to arrive at the top of the landing. Some piercing lower Manhattan nightmare had begun to intrude into and could only foretell the worst for his journey back to Sunset Park. Some providence lost on poorer souls strewn along within some no uncertain stench and some more discreet passage overwhelmingly as he made his way back and over across to the Canal Street Station. Some more feinted idea of returning to Houston Street succumbed quickly beneath the burden of having to forgo the luxury of the same type of meandering which did so pleasure Nick on his way downtown. Some lower-toned rustle of plastic bags and muted machinery urged Nick to enter the food produce venue which had been his targeted intention all along, and he strained to recall the exact quantity of dumplings which his father had requested. He was alone. Except for some busier type filling plastic bags with the delicate morsels, and another more surrendering figure seemingly categorizing the finished packages into some enormous walk-in freezer which lie just to the left and immediately greeting of his recent entry.

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

Nick had difficulty understanding why he was continuing to feel so alone, especially in light of some newly-found figure having intruded into. Some ephemeral glimpse of space and time also puzzling, as had been his total disregard of some enormous freezer which would have been so sure to convey some sense of satisfaction regarding his father's willingness to seek goods and services beyond the usual bounds of what might be considered some more hallowed territory, some sunset park in the borough of ...

– Five bag, Nick blurted out.

His father could only offer some assessment based on how often the restaurant seemed to be in need. To Nick it was hardly worth the effort of knowing or not knowing anything about his father's clientele and he held out steadily towards the notion that all was starting to prove too futile to ultimately ignore. Some lying next to Xiaoling had never ceased to invade his every waking moment for the past two years or so ...never over there! ...and some mutual need for one's closer presence offered, with some nagging ache from beneath remindingly of the pain which would endure should he not at least make some attempt toward mutual delight. Or perhaps to assert some long-overdue sense of independence which had gone missing since bidding adieu to the shores of Fujian. Nick began to indulge freely into some Kubrick-esque intrigue which were sure to awaken him from this slumber within which his existence seemed to have been languishing and without end. Some garnered enchantment which had sadly gone for naught suddenly cast itself as some beautiful woman whose seduction was complete yet withered rather quickly beneath the burdensome imposition of some lesser task. Some lesser task borne of some still lesser one and suddenly startled by the realization that all had been lost and why should anything be nurtured or taken to task or become the object of beauty itself? Or sought? Once presented with the bags of dumplings which he at last found himself to be on the verge of acquiring Nick might consider reformulating to his own agenda for the rest of the afternoon into evening. Some heading uptown. Some going off and wandering, at last, would become his once-ridiculed sense of mission. Now some depression was beginning to set upon Nick and he attempted to speed his journey – *¿wèn tí?* The man behind the counter assured of there being no problem, and that Nick should have his order in just another two or three minutes. Some more modest transistor radio from above and bleeding mono sounded into the factory as one's timeless item, some island held on to and cherished before it could banish one forever into life's abysmal cycle of error and regret. He just might walk up and over to the Grand Street station, catch a D train uptown and seek out some newer prospects along the sidewalks of Harlem. Sanchez had often told him of a bodega his cousin ran on Cathedral Parkway (why that called parkway, anyway?), and Nick might be quick to enter upon some more sordid business negotiation which would have been too pedestrian to but consider in some other borough. Some sunset park sunrise would always transpire in the shadow of this Manhattan maze, some cavernous milky flow of ambition mocking all there would be resting on either side, some northly then back again retreat putting off the daily commute which would have been his daily chore, some worthy undertaking should he decide to press on with his studies as Xiaoling had suggested. The fifth bag was now prepared (*only fresh dumpling* he say) and Nick was quick to reach into his pocket for the money his father had sent him off with.

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

Nick could barely produce twenty-five dollars. Some lack of foresight had typically been his since being brought over, and the time he had spent downstairs only reinforced some glaring recognition that one more roasted feast went draining of the quantity he was to spend on his father's requested foodstuffs.

– *Bù guò èr shí wǔ*, remarked Nick.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

– *¡Zhì zuò tè dìng!* the man repeated.

Nick's gaze began to go somewhat receding as the man's voice seemed to trail off into some faintest oblivion and he spied some metal lamp off to the side and just out of reach. Its light shone wantonly through some blackened soot which coated the light bulb, some shadow it cast upon the man and his wholesale produce now threateningly to Nick as his own field of vision went more tapered still. Some sudden wondering as to why he should even bother to give this man the money he had been owed, some conquering notion run through his mind concerning how it could be better spent and without abandoning unnecessarily the mission to which he had committed on this day. Some *only fresh dumpling* would still find its truest path and his glance once more directed to the metal lamp structure now daring Nick to act at once. Some thinking about and thinking moreso had been a temptation to Nick since arriving, even sooner as making one's way around the bluff – *¡fēng bào!* – and out westward towards the promised land might have caused one to lose some hard-earned sense of identity. Some self-esteem now crumbling and falling through the scum-riddled cracks of this very existence which would have proved to be too unsavory in any case. Some stupid man filling bags for the very scoundrels and representing the oppressors of purity and personality which were meant to flower from the moment of one's own virgin birth. Now would have been the only time for acting, some action predicated upon the savage within. Some primordial need for self-assertion and turning back some despreciation and ridicule which had been dumped upon us by the ignorant, unknowing cretans whose only hope it could have been to vegetate as father and son. Nick reached for the metal lamp and raised it high above his head. The lamp cord seemed to shoot from the wall socket in an instant, and he startled the man less with his unwavering demeanor than by some

clipped sound instigated from somewhere beneath the man's feet. Then lunging downward sent the cold steel piercing through Nick's right arm and the prospect of buckled flesh and bone went wholly unheeded, some self-satisfying need to thrill and be thrilled by the taking of a life which had gone so mockingly of his and for far too long. The blight of Nick's rage had all but blinded him to the fact that the diligent man had apparently finished his chore and had left the room. Or had he? Nick searched in back of the counter and off to the left as some steady stream of blood ebbed politely from the sunken wellspring which now lay motionless against the decaying wooden floor. Some more discordant shades of gray and blue as it did appear to Nick, then turning away in disgust as he had done on that more fetid journey from the shores of Fujian and beyond. Nick succumbed to the thought that the second man had indeed left the building. Some receding shadow having been revealed, some bit of orange tint smeared across a triangular piece of ceiling just above the frosted window opened upward and Nick discounted the notion that this could have been his undoing in quick retreat. He snatched the bag from the counter, along with one of the ten-dollar notes he had offered as some initial remuneration. Could he have at that instant altered the course of events which were to dictate the time he had left? Or should he? Now inching his way slowly through the doorway and down some dusty stairway along which he had come some minutes ago only confirmed to Nick some latent need for placing one out of harm's way, some more powerful recrimination of that which had forever kept him at arm's length to a beauty so ardently sought. Some mucleant breeze then carressing his boyish face and seducing him as she could never have, tireless and rapturously where the precipice loomed, some enthralling and hurdling oneself out around the bluff and outward toward the open sea.

Some sudden sense of disbelief surrounded Nick as he made his way along Mott Street and back towards Canal. Some unforgiving tide of people and belongings frustrating his urgent need to get ahead, some thinking back to his father's entreaty and what had become of it, or not. Now the second man would once again come to mind and he wondered if perhaps he hadn't been noticed after all, some spying a reddened drop on his sleeve and still others on the bags he had snatched away in those waning moments. Nick had never thought himself capable of perpetuating such a barbaric deed, some wondering out loud as to what could have brought on such a tirade as his feet began to carry him even more quickly toward his destination. But where could that be now? And why? The prospect of being able to somehow lengthen what had begun as some more precious time away was fast degenerating into something unwhole, some unreasoned escapade for which he could only feel some gnawing sense of panic churning from within some burning sensation in his upper chest. *What he mean 'made special'?* For Nick had so often resented some declaration offered entirely without base, some sole intention to injure and debase notwithstanding and devoid of even some slightest attempt at gentler intuition. Some quickest check of that workspace just off to the left of the cold chamber had not betrayed even some slightest hint that some second man were anywhere to be found. Still Nick hadn't even bothered to consider that they might have gone lingering in some otherwise non-designated workspace, some midday recreation or merely enjoying a fag out back. The noise (while not unduly calling) would have been enough for some sudden looking on, and as Nick had been temporarily incapacitated for fear of being discovered, he could have conceivably overlooked some tell-tale notice with which to be found out. Nick briefly considered returning but found himself at odds with the notion that any such digression could be of any use. Any second man could be long gone by now, well on his way to letting everything on to the police and Nick became unduly anxious at the thought that he were to become the first at undoing all that had

been accomplished by his predecessors and those others who had been struggling under the yoke since arriving from the shores of Fujian. Some lesser-than-fantastic look at reality as it was meant to be, although some pitifully looking over suddenly seemed to Nick as a ghost whose never-ending lack of mercy would torture until some final hurrah. *¡Nian nian!* Marinade too sticky. Some final resting place nestled between someone's rotted corpse and his own attempt at final jubilation, some better-than-unknown insignificance littering alleys already strewn with urine and broken glass and not unfit to reign as some final perverse altar to Nick's own twisted sense of just advancement. *¡Nian nian!* Then making his way back onto Canal – but why should he be so determined to turn left when some newly honed idea would have him channeling his few remaining hours onto some other venue? Some orientation better chosen and more to his liking? Some staring up at the sky into some space and time, Nick's sudden dizziness began to overcome him, unproductively whereas some sweet perfume overwhelming from behind had seemed to suddenly leave his emotions at bay, some futile longing futility seeming to blunt his senses with every other essence that went filtering through his nose and mouth. Just one more instance of carnal dispute would remand Nick and those around him to some eternal remorse and puzzlement as he sensed some softest piece of flesh pushing up against his back and...oh...*sorry, why she do that anyway?* Some softest reminder of the idea he had once prized as his own and never-ending thoughts recurring of Xiaoling and then some scent growing stronger as she moved away...*why she do that anyway... stupid bitch?...bitchbitchbitchbitch...*and Renhan Lin could have only realized the senselessness. Something almost reaching down as a reflex while the traffic lights went changing and the crowd seeming to sweep Nick onto some brighter path. Some brighter path trying to offer itself and without this ongoing, unforgiving paranoia of why and when his most recent act of cruelty had probably crippled him for good, some memory imprisoned in the haphazard awakening of his own twisted sense of moral justice, some upbringing wholly lacking and punishing for no reason other than to humiliate in disguise of one's own certain absence of intelligence or *cojones* as the mexicanos liked to refer to them just languishing there and with some softest awaiting perhaps no-one had seen him at all perhaps all would become keener as some uptown excursion began telling of its own more proper course, perhaps going perhaps coming closer now with some better compulsion driving him forwards, some better obsession to consider as Nick's feet seemed to become more and more reluctant to carry him along. Then seemingly more and more senseless while looking back at the beauty which had always been his (in his mind) and almost slowing to some deadening pace what with the prospect of his being found out and becoming encaged so unceremoniously within this existential disarray. Some nihilistic nightmare pursuing and still willing to pursue within some futuristic abyss, some thinking obsessively and *why she do that anyway?* Nick turning to see if he might find her again but something less puerile had come to assert itself as the multitude refused to part, he struggling to maintain some finer course as Hester St. would go completely unnoticed by Nick. Some walking north along edges in definition of one more curious sense of vanity and borderline sanity on the other side. Some uncertainty plaguing Nick as consideringly of justice misconceived, some justice meted out as *quid pro quo* seeing Nick open up more enlightened furlows between himself and the bridge of steel and gurter which had marked the beginning of his journey since leaving the dumpling house. Some slivering pool of blood red threatening to stain the sole of Nick's shoe had enabled him to remain calm and lucid even as he wondered who might be watching him deliver that fatal blow and insisitng on getting on with it in any case as getting away cleanly could be the only

result one should tolerate and blindly, some instantaneous lack of vision would momentarily mask Nick and imprison within the confines of some more animalistic urge, some primordial necessity to feel one's own rising swell reaching high above his head as the act was being committed. Some descending onto non-encrypted flesh and bone and quite unabashed for anyone who might care to witness or adore, some rapture intertwining passion let loose and Nick could only delight in the evening which had at long last become his, some later afternoon quickly descending into this blackened vacuum of piss and vomit which were sure to make up the better part of the little time he might have to enjoy. Forever. Night. Some eternal dream sleep comforting even those least comforted and ne'er acknowledging some superstition meant to soothe the muted populace which Nick had always held in such low regard. Some blackening sky now appeared to descend upon as he veered off towards the Bowery, some darkening vacuum pulling Nick forwards, some seeming rendering away from the Netherlands and towards all that he and Xiaoling and Rehan Lin and Kanh Boi would ever need in their final quest and here in these final moments. Some stench would lead Nick up along the decrepit boulevard and ending at last beneath the smothering promise of Delancey, for it was here that the intellegensia seemed to gather and spit upon the perversion which had been promised them by a society too quick to condemn, too unwilling to offer some gratitude rightly earned and just and thankless disregard overwhelmed by those properly taught. Nick kicked and dragged his feet suddenly, as if his limbs had begun to desert him in this time of want. Some time and lack of physical stamina which had usually been to the dislike of Xiaoling (or so he thought), now calling upon all he could so that those finer arches of mid-city sky would soon crumble down upon him without mercy, some merciless raking over for the fool he had become, some pitiful shade of what once was, refrains of Amsterdam which he had all but listened to in some post-pubescent dream as it were. Some passing of broken bus stop facades now appeared to Nick as some altars set apart one after the other, some shrines onto which he could only look back with remorse for the lack of foresight which had been his from the start — *what he mean 'made special'*? Nothing had ever been so special for Nick since arriving to this so-called newer world, some finer notion of what his existence might have been like, some alighting beneath the branches of the tallow and reclining in calmest delight within some gentler breeze cooling the furrowed banks of the Xi Jiang. Faces and expression became threatening to Nick. Some passing by at arms length sent feelings of panic through his increasingly bitter soul, some suddenly overcast sky turning over and over and sprawling nimbostratum beginning to unravel to the east, some unfurling to the west and would go unnoticed by Nick so long as he remained preoccupied with the notion that all were to result in some crashing end. Sweeter reminiscences of some savier Jew reclining and working the pulley, then glancing over his shoulder as just five more ounces would spin out some further unintended torque. Nick would be sure to feel amiss at no longer being able to admire the low grey ceiling which seemed to protect some jagged skyline as he looked off from the 49th Street pier, and never imagining that one day (his last?) would have him partaking of this moveable feast so readily, for even if he hadn't gone wholly unnoticed what good could come of his repenting now? What could possibly come of his mentioning some long-hidden desperation, some crying out for relief now that he had become aware of the drudgery which would have had to be endured? Some following some sweetest form through the streets of Chelsea, hungering and deafening for some warmth all brought on in spite of themselves reaching down and wondering if it ever should become so. Some delirious, some child whirling and dancing in front of Nick spoke to the desire which he had lately been acquiring, pressing

hard into the waste bin which some demented tart had left undone, some opening and free to Nick for that which he had always promised himself from the start. Nick started wandering again as Houston came into view, some moving more quickly towards and towards more and further but where to now? And why? Nick understood that he could never go back. Some eternal condemnation into some meaningless purgatorial brigade, some marching back to and fro within some timeless conundrum. On and on he would continue day after day, year upon year and without vision into some hypothetical middle-age and beyond. Just then an old man passed at arms length speaking rudely at two young children who seemed to be mocking him in some other dialect, some more foreign expressing of what one would enjoy to be saying but were otherwise too obedient to react. Some incessant submission to the rules and regulations of those who pretend to some higher skill, some thinking on from an earlier age within stipulated inaccuracies, some damaging incites offered by fools who would dare be regarded as the guardians of those in need. Some more foolish and moronic fare masquerading as parental advantage, only to be uncovered in one's later years when all were too late for adequate reexamination. Some darker sky seemingly and raining down on, some skating through opened puddles having invited him to this once festering feast of light and culture. Some sudden rush of sirens at once maddened Nick and he felt some tension gnawing from deep inside. Some sharper deafening commotion as one's sudden call to judgement in defense of order and societal submission came in pursuance as he hid inexplicably within some fraying grey portal present with the smell of rotting food and vermin, all to the surprise of his once optimistic sense of calm and relief. Some reminding of those certain salubrious callings from Dong Er to fulfill some aching want from deep within, girlish and newly tallowed fruit offered unashamedly and Nick sinking lowly into the love of Dong Er, some sounder sustenance through the most difficult of moments and never being able to understand the mistreatment she would have had to endure at the whims of those other girls. Some lowly and lowlier until the nape of his neck could hardly withstand the lightly perfumed fold within which he attempted to repose. Some slighted nectar fit to act as glorified potion and sipping from the fleshened chalice which she had chosen to bequeath him. Some siren rush grew louder and he sank more deeply into the moistened portal as some surging paranoia could only play itself out in a more grotesque way. Images of headless creatures in fornicate rapture shuffling their feet against the bones of some ageless muse defecating passionately and some tidal rush of earnest expression beginning to cast palls over the spectacle within which Nick had become consumed. Some keener population advancing with the sort of pointed resolve which he had secured well before leaving the dumpling house in such a frightening pace. Some coming up upon Astor, now Astor looming larger and thinking forwardly to some refreshingly keener turn onto the crosstown and up to Chelsea. Some approach and keener escape out of the dust and pity onto Astor and Nick became completely unsure of the geography he had since set out to conquer, some shiveringly pathetic oversight imbibing his mind with thoughts of microform paranoia, some blood-spattered reminiscence torturing his quickening gait.

— Hey, watch *where going*, man!

The bundle had fallen precipitously to the pavement, then some reconsidering of what could have been the reason for plummeting into this lingering nightmare. Some younger man

rushing about had almost brought Nick to his senses, some unintended physical exchange during one expansive moment frozen in time and then some. Multiple bodies colliding and consequent motion revealing some universal lemma, some knowledge taken upon and thoughts of Xiaoling struggling to achieve the peace of mind which had been promised and reinforced as some course out west and beyond the bluff would leave their beloved homeland far off in the distance. Some distance without measure. Some distance without time or space, only those tears shed for some quickly fading bond formed over the span of years and lifetimes (or so it seemed to Nick). He left the bundle where it had fallen but momentarily, some more perverse awareness having overtaken him and he picked it up, only to discard it at the next waste bin. *Only fresh dumpling* he say. What now? Only time to think about some more frightening pursuit, some more acuminous blade forever hovering above his head and charting his every move from here on in. At no time could Nick desist in his fear that the act he had committed not thirty minutes ago would set him upon some potentially self-consuming course from which he could never abscond. He crossed over to the north side of the street and eagerly peered ahead in hope of finding some sign, some modicum of encouragement from the distance he had still to traverse. Soon he would again be on Broadway, and the haunting notion of turning back drove him to curse his fortune aloud, some startling those passers-by who would have entered his path, some delirium beginning to awaken Nick from the darkening slumber which must have overcome him. Once again he would become lost within some sobering prospect of sleep eternal, and he couldn't resist some furtherer temptation to curse his fate. Everyone had forever been treating Nick's confusion as some purely academic exercise. Some turning on lemmas and theorems for their own sake, and never considering that the contempt he harbored for himself within this newer world existence could eventually culminate in some act of barbarism for which he felt not even the slightest bit of remorse. Some act committed wholly out of circumstance. Some circumstance wholly out of his control and not warranting of any further initiative other than to continue on with his futile journey, some underlying sense of non-humanity for a start. Climbing measuredly up some steeper earthened path towards some ultimate futility and culminating in the atrocity which had become as if some rapturous rush of unspoken desire had rendered him completely powerless. Some uncalculated academic exercise with Nick moving on, and moving more quickly if he might ever indeed return at his appointed hour. Some hair salon shops sleeker cosmopolitan *chic* grasping the corner of his eye as his approach to lower Broadway loomed larger with each step and wondering as to which path he would choose upon his arrival. Nick sensed the urgency of unawareness at his back and was disinclined to consider any ongoing lack of foresight which had highlighted his very existence since entering the high school. He quickly shed any thought of turning back down towards the Canal St. Station and instead took as his objective some candy shop on the corner of Astor and Broadway, as if some such place were indeed to exist on his lonered idea of what was meant to be and what was not. Some littler ones jumping for joy over bits of sugared treats smearing their devilish faces, sounds as if some shriller orgasm from birth leaning over to tidy their widened smiles of delight. Some going on and onner and wanting to place Xiaoling within his reach as he proceeded without caution. Dong Er had been his only retreat (he had thought at one point) and somehow managed to kiss her determinedly on some newly camphored pair of lips one morning within some dream of yet one more opportunity lost. Some newer world offering begging Nick to prepare for himself some bed of fortune onto which some future could be secured, some prospect bettered and indigence permanently staved off regardless of how poorly his father's restaurant were to be deemed. Nick would be forever to feel

the crashing of his own family's lament, some remorseless ridicule heaped upon Nick by their never-ending torment, some Nick the sissyboy for choosing to engage in the less-than-palatable manners and wayfare, habits and far-removed traditions of Fujian still seeking to suck the lifeblood from their tired souls. Now doomed to spend the rest of his young life (and beyond?) scraping the scum off this filtered façade and seeking solace in the anonymous sexual favors which he himself had been put onto by the likes of Renhan Lin and those other one-trick ponies who would congregate at the main gate to the high school courtyard each morning. *Only fresh dumpling* he say. Some paranoia again beginning to overcome Nick as dampened pavement appeared to leap up at him in some reddened splatter. *What he mean 'made special'?* Some sirens again taunting Nick with their melancholic melody, some attesting to the fact that the second man had not indeed left the floor but continued to cower in some darkened corner as Nick's confusion blinded and proceeded along its self-destructive course. What could he have been thinking at that very moment? What demons might those horrifying noises have conjured in his still peasantly state of mind, wincing in fear with every self-gratifying gesture which Nick had brought to bear upon. Some widening plague spreading stench over the plains of Fujian and beyond, friends and relatives succumbing to some final throes and leaving one to persevere in deference to some death mask which stared in determination and despair. Some of what could possibly be lost now that Xiaoling had spurned his advances and left any hope he would have remaining to the prospect of enticing Dong Er into his very own sphere of sick seduction. Some falling down into the love of Dong Er and whimpering within some velvet silence as the aroma of freshly fallen seed would go radiating into the passages of his now tiring sense of smell and touch. Some longer and larger vacillation over saddened and wet, some meaning for shielding Dong Er from some sinuous reach of the momentary master, groping for some thunderous ovation as it were and unawares of just how poorly the girl must have felt upon learning of her family's intentions. Nick took some decided turn uptown and began to cherish the newfound freedom which was sure to lead him to his final resting place. His footsteps had become laden one after the other, some thinking back to the nightmare into which he had hurled himself some years ago. Some inescapable conundrum of self-abuse and want of endless portraits daily taunting him with youth and inexpressible beauty never becoming his. Some sleeker line tempting him beneath airs of uselessness, now with shop windows counting off one after the other and one after the other walking on quickly toward some final curtain but not downtown nor Brooklyn from that where he had come just uptown perhaps where was that 56<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>, some hallowed halls of storied performances, storied audiences sustaining some finest art and teasing Nick with some certain future before it all had been squandered on a whim. Some more misinformed insinuation having pryed them away from their truest universal calling, widened river and silkened fields giving sway to the rice paddies which had entertained him even on those most uneventful of evenings. Some still obsession over earthly remedies, dying past, dying more quickly as he ran throughout. Some obsessing over things for their own sake dying past, dying past as the remorselessness which he felt (or not?) the jaded *chink* having fallen just with some unsought hem and haw to the floor boards. Some obsessing over menial transactions meant to pave the way through this tired journey and *why no speak English anyway only Chinese with Chinese customer*. Some still obsession went relaxingly as the latter portion of his subconscious seemed to achieve some state of trance into which he bathed and re-examining each laden drop as a light rain began to settle upon him and all that were soon to become Nick's own resting place, some ideas and thoughts which had been tormenting Nick becoming more and more relentless and chafing at Nick in the most insidious way. It might have

come as some relief that the past which he had so long endeavored to forget should get caught up in this incessant madness, or might it have been merely the notion that he should succumb to the nagging realization that the second man had indeed been present and knowingly of the sacrificial slaughter which he had perpetuated on the workshop attendant. Some alarm sounding maddeningly in his head rushing forth to the Flatiron structure which had now just come into view, bustling multitudes probably easing away from some lifelong profession meant to soothe and benefit no-one but the very ponderance of a life too slowly to achieve, some forthcoming sense of security overlooking some sprawling plain of monotony and boredom stretching into middle age and beyond. Some stretching into middle age and beyond and having arrived to some not-so cornered 5<sup>th</sup> and Broadway bedeviling Nick into believing that he had gone astray. Then sitting in some doorway as if guided by some other time — one lone musician sitting crossed-legged, speaking without making noise only thinly veiled untempered threads of some far off eastern refrain — two lone musicians sitting cross-legged in some parallel play conversing in untempered threads of some far off eastern refrain to which Nick could only pause and reflect, some inability to continue on intentionally until Nick could only consider pausing and reflecting upon what had been his singular task having gone askew, some thinly pondered overreaction to which even he might ascertain to have been some mere subconscious recollection. Some threads of far off eastern sound calling forth his sensuality and imminent demise at once. Nick moving on into some more hurried motion while forgetting the past and spying some more imminent demise at once, some sensuality now seeming to have ebbed away slowly as the avenue came into view and Nick could only affix his imagination remittently upon the transcendency of his ultimate destination, that place whereby he would have once felt some overwhelming calm, some long ago sense that all might be right again. Some reincarnation of this youthful agnosticism which may have converted into some jaded author pounding keys as some digital diatribe, all the while crying in somber tones of regret and missed passage. Some Sixth Avenue would come into view and he would turn northerly and begin to warm himself with musings of the peace which was to await, some delicate life ether running off into the sodden estuaries which had come to play host to centuries and millenniums of some intellectual waste. Tired and sodden souls marrying within some besieged state, excitedly and turgid feelingly of some softer enthusiast, feelingly of some softer and more constricted state of want within some higher flying ménage, envious of some fairer blonde vision drawing nearer and nearer till ne'er some milder remuneration could not convince one of its lesser minded intentions, touching beneath and unknowing of the pleasure which were to consume. Some fondling lonelier pillars of wrath and remorse did bring Nick's back to notions of her and her alone. Now passing by some reeking enclaves where those most reviled would hold their nightly rituals, some peeing along lying half-corpses who had once become aware of all there was to be and not, some family rooted slipping through the begotten grains of time and whose despair at realizing such would make all but the most inefficient of vices seem remote. Silence succumbed as the Priest tried to appreciate the piece of fruit perched so squarely atop his wife's head— *bang* — then the Priest retained his purest of motives and went on to complete some tenderest farewell of the woman who had robbed him of his now-mangled seed. Some long ago and having to suffer the verbal barb from generations past, now faced with the ubiquitous fortune of needing to deal with the same from beneath, some aching arrogance weaning the life blood. Some weaning of a spirit which had been lost long ago. Nick marched on. He marched on as if wondering how he could ever overcome the not-so-latent guilt he had felt upon wrenching downwards onto the unknowing soul who was after all only performing his daily

contrition, some earning of one's own daily bread. Then turning upwards and beyond any thought of sudden redemption, some softest flower teasing one's most vaporous rapture pushing one along. Some passing shops and kiosks along and wondering if it were finally time to put an end to this most senseless of missions, some guiding forth and looking for some way of disappearing completely and yet apporthing some trace of having been, some scent of effort gone awry but wantonly. Some learning satisfaction having been accomplished and achieved while awaiting one's ultimate salvation. Thus Nick relished carefully the thought of entering some darkened alley at the corner of 40<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, some invitation too encompassing to ignore. Still Nick marched on. As if wondering how this now overextended tale of generational woe would reach its end – finally – and devoid of any prefabricated sense of regret or pent-up remorse. Without some do-this-or-do-that for appearance's sake. He would readily reach his destination, some strains of the staccato and silencios ringing out this constant barrage of dissonant overture to the crowd. Some playing to one more crop of overly decorated female coquetry hoping for one more lasting sense of engagement with their fellow man. Some more rhythmic sense of playing all one could beneath tiring loins and misshapen phallus. He would reach his destination eventually, some strains of the staccato and silencios ringing out, some ringing out of this constant barrage of dissonant overture to the crowd -- some playing to one more crop of overly decorated female coquetry.

The silence suddenly subsided as Nick made for one last dash toward the shore, rising swiftly out of some confused yearnings of his imagination and now seeming to go off into the sunset unamused. Some going off into another realm into another eternity and barely capable of lifting his feet some pair of centimeters above the pavement. It had been some two hours since he lurched downwards and he began to feel the weight of his inexcusable deed confronting and taunting him, in some mocking tone as if wondering whether his time had come at last. Indeed it had, and he moved more swiftly toward the underground, confident and willing to succumb to the very fate which he had been pondering for so long. Renhan Lin was right – *bitchbitchbitchbitchbitch* – run down now onto some steely surface. Feel some cold severing and shearing as had he at the dumpling house. Just vengeance. For Nick the only consolation would be eternal peace as he disappeared once and for after down the darkened stairway.

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