

Jim seemed perplexed and somewhat confused. He glanced upwards and peered painstakingly at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to departure but he sensed something else. Something oddly stealing his glance toward the right side suddenly brought on a sort of fog. He had awoken with some nagging headache. He had missed the first train. He anxiously squeezed into the morning throng and immediately noticed some untidier gentleman staring blankly at a telephone. He held it barely two inches from his face. Another surveyed the sprawling mass from above. Some tired-looking women leaned into his embarrassingly jilted frame. His coat now rumpled had begun to play tricks on Jim and he imagined some ancient cluster of Roman brides offering themselves in wanton delight to a somewhat lurid but nonetheless abiding Caesar. Morning ladies tapping on their keyboards did not always reveal a finer intellect. Some played games and some read from tales cherished. Most simply moved a tepid gaze over the words and barely gave thought to the actual message in what was on the page. The train car's to and fro caused many to at times search frantically for something to grasp on to. Others utilized it to rouse their half-hearted spirits. Early morning travel never wholly appealed to Jim. The Head of Studies had posted him to early morning classes at the Royal Guard. He had never asked for the assignment nor would he. The throng – *la manada* is how they referred to it in the Spanish language – jolted backwards every time the train stopped. Some kaleidoscope suddenly in arrest and in odd unison. Stopping. Stopping. Stopped. This would have been at stations under normal circumstances. Unsuspecting riders were commonly taken advantage of at this time of the day and poor stewardship of the train often resulted in an inordinate number of delays. Voices could be heard over the din. Notices of breakdowns and other assorted mishaps annoyed the daily clientele. Sounds would occasionally make their way into Jim's care. Some of these were simply adjunct to the environment around him. Others recalled those more highly tempered noises brought back to him from his youth. He had come to bemoan some overabundance of musical formation in his days as a student at the City College of New York. He did realize that years in passing were not always true to one's own original intent. But language learning also seemed to require some more humanistic skill. The City College was long known for its churning out scientists and engineers, doctors and theoreticians and the musical arts had rather been an added appendage to the somewhat staid curriculum. It seemed to acquire much the same non-humanistic flavor nevertheless. Riding the Lexington Avenue northbound and past one's destination to almost Amsterdam would come round full circle to the place of his own endowment. He often sat for hours listening to the dearest voices. It was a time gone by but still being. Flutes and rapturous voice rising slowly would endure until the arm reached the end of that infinite spiral. Jim would return the stylus needle to its outermost edge. But minutes turned into hours and he would usually arrive late for his next class. He would sit staring at the clock on the library wall just above the librarian's mantel. Stark and unforgiving as its second hand ticked off the spending moments of his youth. Such was the one to take hold of, to listen to the maestros and make them his, strings and voices beneath a thunderous ovation of quiet desperation. The jaded class would become his to change or fashion as he saw fit. A right bequeathed him by they who had crossed on while looking back at the darkness, following some perfect pitch across the divide between what we should be now and what we were then. His grandparents had made that journey long ago. They emigrated from the cities and villages of the Sicani and places too far removed from his present predicament even to be contemplated now. It would take years and then more years and time to bring to fruition all that he had inherited. Jim's

teachers had been amongst the finest. It seemed to Jim that he might have indeed found some proper path. Wary cliffs looking off from the Palisades might be telling of Jim's own dilemma as he approached the completion of his insipid daily pilgrimage. Stepping off onto the subway platform would provide him one last chance for redemption. Climbing upwards on 136th St. and past some cheap urban hotel reminded of the opportunities which needed to be gotten hold of. Some scarcity of people and ideas, creativity disappearing and taunting Jim did tease one into the confines of what would become some lifelong embrace. Universities trying to find refuge within some past ideal would liken Jim to the very earthen stone from which Amsterdam had been built. Endless sun-filled cover over some hard-pressed curriculum would comfort Jim more than some young woman who might complement the warm spring day into which he had placed all hope and desire. Unable to convince Jim that his was some wayward turn, laying a gentle hand upon him would render him oblivious to all that the real world would eventually refuse to reconcile. She eventually moved on. And sounds and tones inspiringly of some other lost age but now long forgotten could overly extend this purely academic exercise. The harmonies which Jim had intoned would soon vanish down the cauldrons of some silent abyss. Still he would remain faithful to the proper calling, sound formation providing comfort to the weary historical shift that he would be destined to endure.

Jim had sat for some minutes at the coffee stall before heading to his usual departure point. Thoughts of a conversation he had had in yesterday's class continued to distract him. Some *Capitán de Fregata* had told a tale about his great-great-grandfather, which had as its backdrop the Spanish-American War and had celebrated the threading of a sinuous path through the American Naval defenses down from the mid-Atlantic and then northward from the southern seas toward some singularly historical challenge. Jim suspected that this could provide him with a lesson for that morning. It had been some years since he last would set about preparing lessons on his own. Some lacking in motivation forbade him from doing so. And yet he never held back at the moment of having to comply with his duties. Idle classroom banter had always come to be his best recourse and this was no exception. Entering the passenger lounge had increasingly been becoming some unbearable daily chore. Poorly-polished wooden benches lined the perimeter. Steel knee-high waste bins were strewn intermittently throughout. He usually managed to navigate the tenuous path amongst legs, packages and briefcases. Some finely-dressed young woman only added to his task on this day.

"Do you know what time the number 161 departs?" she asked.

"Just in 10 minutes" replied Jim.

He replied with an assuredness which would have been unheard of some months earlier. Schedules and routines had never been a welcome commodity for Jim. The woman seemed to be satisfied with Jim's assistance. She sat at the corner of a rather large and mahogany table awkwardly placed in a far corner of the lounge. Jim took a place at the opposite side but not far enough from the woman so that he could not observe her somewhat nervous demeanor. Ten minutes passed. Jim sat and wondered whether the woman across the table had even bothered to glean that her bus was about to leave the platform without her. His first inclination was to divert some non-threatening remark her way but ultimately decided that it would be too forward to do so

and refrained. He once again buried his face in the novel he had been reading. The bus left as scheduled but the woman remained. She seemed to be unconcerned until Jim suddenly looked up and caught her glance unexpectedly. She then reared her head back as if to rearrange some lock of hair which had fallen over her forehead. There was no reasonable concern nor any reason to feel perturbed by her continued presence. Yet Jim couldn't help but notice how she fumbled with her purse and shifted in her seat nervously. Some huge clock on the wall began to chime rather tentatively. Each recurring sound seemed to perpetuate itself sheepishly across the room. Loud and bellowing yet muted and bent downwards towards some labored solfege as the student in him recalled those very moments in the music library when he could not hardly imagine the predicament within which he would one day awake. Some labored exercise which he would have been obliged to deliver in front of ten or perhaps fifteen other students who certainly outdid Jim in all that was either studied or performed.

“Bravo”.

“Bravo, yes, bravo.”

Meaningless chores and tasks would eventually turn such accolades – modest though they were – into his only means for continuing down that useless path. Distant memories of those better times which faded so quickly into traps and conundrums. How else could someone with such determination in wanting to throw off the pains and insults he had been obliged to endure, growing up in some sort of familial cesspool and eventually having to engage in the most menial of pursuits? Jim rested on the notion that an incomplete turn of phrase could not be tolerated any longer. Language teaching had come to represent some pathetic last hope, some nervous fidgeting this way and about just as those restless gestures which he had been observing in the pretty lady sitting across the worn mahogany table. His first job came upon him a bit unexpectedly. He accepted it with some trepidation but ultimately decided that holding on to some sanity would inevitably mean numbing himself with the barbarities that life seemed to continually offer. Some opiate-like substance resting on the edge and just enough within reach so as to deny even the slightest tendency towards capitulation. Jim had never been initially too keen on entering the office building in the Barrio de la Concepcion. Its facade was stark and forbidding, some black marble set against square meters of concrete and gratuitous vegetation. Once inside the revolving doors, one was immediately desensitized by yet more marble, rising in great columns on either side and framing great panes of glass which seemed to inspire envy in the substantial piece of corporate humanity that happened to face it every day. But places and situations did not always demand as much sacrifice as Jim might have originally expected, and he would often enjoy the short lift to the eighth floor. He normally arrived just upon most re-entering after lunch hour, so the elevators were usually crowded and Jim would be taken upon to eavesdrop on the moral tales which presented themselves. At times he would be thrown into some temporary state of translucent stupor, as if transformed into that poet who spent some considerable time transfixedly upon his own grey sock and under the influence of some strange narcotic taken daily in staunch dose. Scent of stale tobacco and iridescent shades of the scantily perfumed yawned at him encouragingly, animating him on to the next second, and the next until his upward journey was complete. Waning moments with brow furrowed by his lack of command, challenged without respite by those teasing

him with other than his own mother tongue. Jim would press back against the back of the lift while laying canvass to some tender mass into which each syllable seemed to penetrate, one by one slowly in a rush of foreign grammar. Words and gentle pressure of sounds and smells all joined into the sensation that seemed to escape him always. And how could they not? After all, his experience was not theirs, nor might he wish it to be. Pure tones ringing out in unselfconscious disregard, climaxing on the swells which seemed to ignore the very audience for whom they were intended. Steadfast bell dissipating under much wider sky whose blue Jim could almost touch under the moistened fabric of some late afternoon's gentle shower. Incipient chatter about this or that, leading to nothing except Jim's personal vindication of what was left behind and where he should be going. Then at once caught up in some disorienting vacuum of fading conversation, some space suddenly gained through the withdrawal of those well come up to. Jim would find new breadth in his role as disinterested observer, and feel having had been completely served by some lukewarm stream of petty revelation which had accompanied him to the eighth floor. Once there, he daily confronted some unrelenting routine of malaise and malevolence set amid some faceless grid of pre-fabricated offices and welded cubicles. A construction and demeanor so opposed to the stone tradition of Castilla that Jim would be taken upon to once again immerse his forward thinking into the olive flesh of foreign syntax. Only then could he once again come to terms with the situation in which he found himself, light years away from a time and place the little boy had prepared for him, that which he had foregone so ungratefully. Ending up here at the Madrid branch of Nelson Marketing Inc., specializing in the study of habitual processes – soap powder, appliances, silk stockings– all bound together by some public thirst for consumer rendition. Enterprise sent over from some foreign land, trade indirectly linked to that of the Netherland though routinely examined through one's own finer scope and appreciated for what it was. Acceptable so long as it were not to upset some finer tilt toward the undisputed maintenance of one's own superior character, superficial nuance designed to profit but never render easily.

His only student would be Dolores. She took great pride in being department chief and, aside from whether one had anything to do with the other, never let him in too quickly. There were usually a number of items to be addressed before class could begin, and which would be fine with Jim since he was paid strictly by the hour. Waiting outside her office door was nevertheless instructive. Puzzled glances and non-considered, idle office space whom no one might ever think too much of having to be wary of. He would often lose himself momentarily in the eighth-floor essence of his present predicament, looking down against some full-length window pane, playlike structures on a busy street dedicated to some most rapid transport within the circulatory confines. These were the daily attempts at transcontinental competition moving swiftly north and then back down again. Pale imitation as far as Jim was concerned, reflections of another place trying to apologize for some inescapable thrust into modernity. Awe-inspiring monuments towering out over Rector Street and Wall, showering their worthy inhabitants with some timeless reward cried out for one's just recognition. All the while calming the smoking ruins whose sometime pitying reminder of meaningless squander, nonetheless testament to the noblest ongoing endeavor, choked us to thoughts and tears harking back to that of the hungry masses entering a harbor full of light and sound adamantly. Al-Andalus as civilization committed once and always to some reasoned consideration of life and love for all who would care to have it, and staring in consternation at some carnage brought about in its name, destructors of tarnished vision and dubious character

probably reveling through the holy place onto which Jim would be staring down at that very moment. Perfectly peaked arches and gently swaying rhythms, kneeling modestly toward Mecca, naked humility converted into blasphemy by those naysayers who would use the corporate misdeed not as signpost, but as some means for bludgeoning the innocent. Jim had probably seen that structure dozens of times, but only in seeing it from above could he appreciate the vivid contrast it forged against some jet black asphalt, and marking off neatly from its surroundings. The irony of its being next to the city morgue was inescapable as far as Jim could see, tyranny of the old wallowing in some splendid homogeneity while writing off all that refused to conform. Some storefront gateway of Moslem engender lining the walkways of Bushwick Avenue had always belied an easy, if not sometimes turbulent, reside. Welcome your tired masses and poor in spirit while with the steeple and the bell calling out to anyone wishing to carve out some place of their own, advancing to beyond the meeting point from which Jim had been unable to proceed. He would then turn in frustration to face the consumer study group within which he found himself. This particular enterprise had been in Madrid for just nine years and had already risen to large market dimension, picking apart the whys and wherefores, habits and peculiarities of some consumer class. Endless pages of thought engaging questionnaires were churned out day in and day out from the very room in which Jim would be standing. Researching everything from where a particular item had been purchased, why it had been so, how it had been so and inquiringly of whether such action might be repeated. Results were tabulated to the minutest nuance. Reeling off and grinding out a lathe of hurling figures which could only make the average citizen cower in unblended insignificance. Jim would on occasion overhear some casual remark, as if having been foretold by his lift to the eighth floor. In this way, he would be able to appreciate the more sordid details of his most worrisome student's outward regard. Considered a veritable bitch by her entire staff, Dolores would often keep notes on each and every one of them tucked neatly inside her bustier. It was the only place she was sure no one would ever find them –not that she would ever give a damn if anyone had– and thereby be able to well document some smallest detail when one came up for corporate review. This they all resented and more. At Christmas time, for example, the company directors would give her department some special bonus if they had performed well during the year. It was intended to be distributed squarely and promptly at the beginning of the month. Dolores would always wait until someone either very brave or very cash poor might decide to claim their rightful reward. In that way, she could always get away with passing on just a bit less than what had originally been intended, and with not even the slightest furtive glance from one who obviously had nothing to lose from such bland assertion, but so much otherwise from being too inquisitive. Being too discreet was never one of Dolores's vices and she would use the extra guarded cash, though not directly toward her personal benefit, to organize small dinner parties – un petit diner as she liked to call them– for her most lucrative clients. *Voudriez-vous une autre truffe?* She could often be heard showing off her command of other idioms in and around the office and neither was this a source of kinship among her staff. Most of them actually handled themselves much better than she in this regard – which is hardly a compliment under broad review – but had to usually settle for group classes and often third-rate at that. Sanchez herself had been known to attend more than one of her midnight soirees, and Dolores quickly became one of Sanchez's prized patrons. Jim's time soon became divided amongst her, some military groups and a couple of classes over at a telephone company switching station in the city center. When finally

it would be Jim's place to enter her office, he did so always belying some certain reticence, as if never quite sure about which of several demeanors he should expect. After all, with her staff she was quite the supervisor but with clients quite the sympathetic soul in whom they could most eagerly confide. With Jim, she could be any of these depending on what she required of him on that particular day. He might sometimes be called upon to advise regarding the best turn of phrase within the course of one of her irrefutable international lectures. Teacher as advisor inextricably linked in sound formative argument was, if not pleasing to Jim, then tolerable. On other occasions she would be in need of some surrogate staffer to whom she could bemoan the lack of this or that, having unattended to the last detail she had prescribed. At these times, Jim would feel it necessary to gather his most steely armor, fend off the unpleasantness and state of impatience, for while Dolores's ranting was certainly unbecoming of her role as his student, he nonetheless needed the classes. And so he would sit calmly. Eyes usually transfixed on one dangling ornament or piece of plated gold sporting tastefully, odd sullen features needing of improvement for the benefit of client and non-client alike. More than a bit overripe in stature, she might gesture toward the large glass panes feeding some corporate abyss high above, and back down slowly onto her lap in heated expectation of the next. Never missing some opportunity to scold, she did so without regard to whom Jim was or where he had come from. Indelible foreigner brought back from where he should have been, already weary of the scolding he had had to endure for having done so. Just castration, Jim would often reason. Bold and just retort to the notion that he might have been able to reverse the tangential objective of his forefathers. Why should he not have become grinding stone to the likes of Dolores Berzosa?

Still at other times, she would treat him as a trusted and worthy confidant. This and a potentially tender experience reviled Jim the most. For in her heart of hearts she knew how the staff would speak of her, and amid whisperings the same was probably true of her clients and even those whom she had always considered to be her best friends. Jim as consoler and healer, unrequited confessional high above ground floor rebuke toward those who might stand and stare at the great black marble structure, and question why this particular building and this particular enterprise had one day appeared amidst their own living space. Impinging on the very neighborhood ease with which they had always carried on with their lives. And here was Jim, as unlikely testament to it all. Repentant of the sins committed against staff and consumer public alike, violation of private trust preoccupied Jim. And yet there were those who persevered in blaming all those who had had the courage to take up the dare, millions of forward-looking spirits in total ignorance and tacit disapproval of the excesses that would inexorably pass in their name, industrial turning under of those who were at the foundation of its majesty. But should an entire generation and dozens more to follow be disqualified on the basis of what mistakes are made in seeking to reconstruct a life form out of some dark rubble? Consideration of weak result as other than some signpost suggested to Jim an easy link with the destructors. Rector Street and Wall as guardian and enharmonic vision to that which had fallen so near. It certainly did preoccupy Jim just as much as if he had not been supposed to be there *quod docere*. But for better or for worse he was, and it would bring him to bear upon the unseemly task which was his. Dolores had always been motivated as far as the finer points of grammar were concerned. Hashing and rehashing the same regular structures were of little difficulty provided she had some proper source of self-betterment at her side. Speaking in the past in such a way as to avoid any self-reasoned

misunderstanding was of the utmost concern, and as well it should have been. Past endeavor continuing to present form demanded a more general feel, some present perfect oration seasoned with a bit of qualifier perhaps, but nevertheless perfect in its need for open-endedness. And not just in any continuous sense, which would in fact become another matter entirely. Open unknowingly of when one action occurred or had occurred required some secular vision, one free from the dogmatic view toward time as being absolute and unforgiving. Time and place resolved as in complete suspension of mind and thought, relaxing air of psychic drift relieving all pretension of temporal exactitude. Jim might then pause in consideration of the proper way to correct her, taking fully into account some apparent need for accuracy in citing times and places whose past was clearly identifiable. She rarely doubted his expertise, but even in not doing so belied her own belief that he was doing all this out of sheer necessity and unwanting of any didactic or pedagogic remuneration. Thus, any correction he might venture would be accepted as expounding less on some true meaning regarding any general sense of time, and more on the superficial life requirements which one might possess at any given moment. Or for reasons of unintended confluence of past events which blur along the course of one's lifetime, but then redefine themselves at some particularly lucid moment in depicting the evolution of what we have become.

Dolores would have tired of working the grammar by well before halfway through the class, and Jim was never one to miss a cue. After all, as Sanchez had once professed so self-righteously, administering privately was unlike the protocol to be maintained during a group class. You mustn't permit them to chew on it for too long! You'll need to consider using a little psychology. She would always squint just a bit on the last word, enunciating sharply the second syllable which, aside from presenting an occasion for some particularly concussive sound, became the precursor to every subsequent properly articulated vocal tone that she might tend to speak. Dolores would always be in outright anticipation of some free form which Jim was about to introduce. Willingly laying her pen on the table meant that she was no longer disposed to taking any more notes, anxious to rely instead on her improvisatory skills. Thorough satisfaction with having had arrived past the point of playing nemesis to her entire staff, she would now desire to feel Jim upon her in total confrontation. Preparedly for the most grueling sparring match, war of words for which Jim had to summon his most professional state of being. He always tried to identify the most pertinent professional topics, which were always preceded by some text recounted verbally and in loud voice. Supermarket shelves were taking up a fair amount of Dolores's time during Jim's stance at the company, and he would often recall her passionate tirades in support of vertical product subjugation, arms and fingers gesticulating wildly while searching for just the right piece of vocabulary to cushion her obvious discontent with some inferior explanation. Jim might then shift mightily in his chair and project that not-so-quite-sure air certain to keep her talking. For her time was his, old world filling the new with tedious justifications of why it had taken so long to take up the chorus, and when finally having done so how it could possibly be of any use now. Computer driven elegy improved through the illusion that some grander space had become small, useful selections borrowed with all the while ridiculing those who might tear down the pedestal upon which Dolores and the rest were so time honorably situated. Modern reach in search of that perfect supermarket setting, packaging impeccably designed for the most effective clash among cultures would continually motivate Nelson Marketing, Inc. to enlarge its scope. And yet, would forcing some such corporate ridden

practicality really matter in the long run? Could Dolores and her kind truly find it reasonable that they should be brought into the realm of Rector Street and Wall? For they who power some forward-moving engine know all too well how to distance themselves from its hierarchal tradition. Upheld throughout centuries in reverence of some social deprecation and unequally sharing in its proud harvest. Dolores might be interrupted by another urgent matter, now having had gone far too long without the input office thrust which had always seemed to enrich her day. Jim could then rest assuredly upon some little remaining time that they would have left together. If it had been a telephone call, Dolores would tend to shoo Jim away as easily as some swatted insect. If a personal intrusion, on the other hand, he would be shamed into raising his eyes just enough to avoid some seemingly voyeuristic intent. Jim would sheepishly begin to gather his notes and quietly take leave while suggestive of an approving nod toward his somewhat tousled student. How quickly it all dissolves back to the place of its departure! Years would suddenly fill his head with thoughts of living and dying, space and time misused in frantic search for some rightful inheritance. Apparently lost amid some gray carpet leadingly onto a trail toward his next language class, his ears would once again give host to sounds of those calling into an unrequited wind. Jim might experience one last passing essence of softest turn of voice and quickly find himself having descended to street level. The lengthiest and most meticulously spun-out novel ends with nay the quickest turn of a page. There to find himself once more amongst the living spaces of the jaded class, and obliged to look onwards.

Jim's bus had finally arrived. He got up and moved casually toward the platform. He seemed perplexed and somewhat confused. He glanced upwards and peered painstakingly at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to departure but he sensed something else. Something oddly stealing his glance toward the right side suddenly suggested to Jim that he may have been mistaken or had misheard the young woman's question. The young woman also approached the platform.

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

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

"Oh yes, thank you" she replied.

She was obviously desperate to avoid any further exchange with Jim and simply found and slipped into a space in the queue. Jim began to consider why she had reconsidered but this quickly gave way to wondering as to how today's class would begin and how it could be enticed toward some semblance of better tuition. Some *Capitán de Fregata* had told a tale about his great-great-grandfather, which had as its backdrop the Spanish-American War. He had celebrated the threading of a sinuous path through the American Naval defenses down from the mid-Atlantic and then northward. But Jim had already surrendered to this notion and he boarded the bus and took his usual seat near the rear. He often found it to be less invasive to his early morning stupor and permitted him to study his notebook. Or review the morning's news on his mobile phone. He had forgotten about the young woman entirely when suddenly she rose from a seat she had taken near the rear door and opposite some gentleman who had lifted some contraption onto the bus in



apparent hope of making some eventual use of the vast swathe of empty space that enclosed the confines of the Royal Guard Headquarters. She staggered her way toward the front of the bus and timidly approached the driver. He for his part now struggling between listening and attending to his daily journey but Jim could not make out what the woman was attempting to say to the driver nor could he once again consider why she may have so abruptly modified her travel plans at the bus station. She nodded her head in understanding at what the driver was saying and gradually made her way back to her seat. The man with the contraption was having great difficulty keeping it from falling over with every gaping turn that the bus took and hoping that some mother or father with their child in a stroller or baby carriage would not get on the bus, for he would then have to abandon his convenient refuge in acknowledging that the space he had commandeered was not properly assigned to him nor to his machine. The bus made its way along the wooded route over which he had commuted whenever the Head of Studies decided that he was required to fill in for the regular teacher on leave. Now coming into the Pardo – a well-enough-to-do village at the foot of the Guadarrama – reminded him to rise and move toward the exit. The young woman also moved toward the bus's exit but she hesitated noticeably so that Jim could exit first. As the bus came to a stop he could feel a slight throbbing in his right temple as though some ongoing medical condition had once again surfaced to perhaps remind him of the uncertainty and ultimate futility of it all. Jim stepped off the bus and immediately felt a bit cold. Not in any emotional way nor telling of any interaction or engagement with any particular student or person with whom he might have had to attend to during the day. Rather the mornings were always noticeably chillier and damp as compared to the approaching cauldron which would usually engulf the city center in mid-summer. A slight respite from the masses of traffic and humankind becoming one might have been the only benefit of escaping to this hamlet – the Pardo – from time to time. No sooner had he begun to reach into his bag for his security pass than his phone rang. Jim stopped and pulled the mobile from his jacket pocket and managed to catch a glimpse of the pretty woman passing him by as he did so. He again wondered – wholly against his wishes he thought -- where she might be going and why she had decided against taking the bus she had initially inquired about. But the sudden sound of the Head of Studies diverted his attention and he was duly notified that his first class had been cancelled. Nothing to be surprised at, Jim thought. But having to fill empty spaces of time had always been a challenge. He considered going to the breakfast place down the street but it would be filled with all those English boys. Eager teachers, young and bright searching for some newer adventure in language learning, finer arts of learning and more youthful techniques reminded Jim of some bitter irony. He too was once at the starting gate. And how quickly it had all disappeared. He ended up at the breakfast place after all. Not wishing to have to confront any of those boys, he slipped unnoticed into one of the side booths. The usual ambient thick with obnoxious intent made him feel even queasier than usual. Swirling toasted sensations mixed with the uncertainty that had again befallen him, Jim managed to spy a moment when any of the three tending bar could prepare him a café solo. He had never ceased to be amazed at the fluidity with which some endless number of single servings could pop themselves onto the time-worn altar each day. Rejuvenating constantly among delusional cries of wait for this or that. Jim recalled how his father's father had matinally set down the single serving – one, two or more. No doubt then from sheer habit spawned by a lifetime of wanton self-examination, all the while with waiting for this or that chance to make pristine sense of it all, never sure of its global outcome, confidently

suggesting that it was as it had to be and why it must continue. Jim struggled to remember that many years earlier, with his hand joined to that of his paternal mentor, entering into a harbor fraught with real or dubious notions of guarded success, he had looked back at the dark character, but then in repugnance quickly turned back again. Looking eagerly toward the next morning's ritual of distant but certain plenitude. This Jim considered as he suddenly saw fit to pity those engaging in delusional thought on that particular morning, for here there was nowhere to go. Even distant success would seem to be impossible, so long as he continued getting about with the English boys. Jim had indeed been warned of the superfluousness of their intent. After all, none of them had ever had to deal with the obstacles which were naturally set in his way as a non-citizen.