

## Into a pinyin sunrise

– III –

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He and his parents had settled across the river in Sunset Park some years earlier. His father, specializing in the marinade of fine poultry since Nick's youngest days in the Fujian Province, was intent on continuing this culinary tradition here in the New World. It was indeed to their good fortune that the locale over which they now resided had gone for the asking and yes it did turn out to have become a popular spot amongst the locals.

The wholesale dumpling house to which Nick had been directed could have seemed unattainable if not for the crumpled piece of paper to which he clung so desperately.

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

Some crumpled piece of paper had been intended to direct Nick towards the wholesale venue to which his father had alluded but how much longer, he wondered, would it be before they could afford to buy their own dumpling press so that they might relinquish the need for this weekly trek? Nick would often tell his father that there was no need to offer such Chinese delicacies on the menu but his father emphatically objected. Yuppies like dumplings he would tell Nick -- *yǎpíshì xǐhuān chī jiaozi*.

Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway, larger-than-life and staring down onto tangles of traffic and human flesh being subdued into some mesh of rising subway steam and tried grease which passing vehicles had been spewing upon these Manhattan streets eventually lit his way toward Canal Street in the heart of what had affectionately come to be known as Chinatown.

Upon entry, he felt 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 funneled through to one of the Hudson River tunnels and beyond. Some sun only promising as he made his way down Broadway now bathed him completely and he tended to savor the orange glow which warmed his adolescent features.

Finally arriving to the entrance of 21 Mott left him a bit bewildered -- one staircase up, one staircase down and how was he to know anyhow which one led to the wholesale house to which he had been directed?

The downward staircase led to a walkdown eatery and, judging from the queue of

hungry diners waiting to enter, quite a popular one. Then spying some succulent-looking fowl behind a steamed glass persuaded Nick to begin his descent, for the bird which presented, glazed honey and stiffened at the neck in gentle swirl convinced him that this was undoubtedly superior to the roasted chicken which his father had for so long been trying to teach Nick to prepare for their own neighborhood clientele.

But the marinade to which his father long dedicated his early mornings had begun to take its own toll on Nick. Some day-to-day monotony of rising at dawn and trying to follow instructions being bellowed out regarding ingredients and measures and spices signaled to Nick a lifetime of wasted initiative and he bristled at the thought that this should be his lot. Some life passing through at a snail's pace, some malaise akin to that which ultimately persuaded those of the heartiest to look beyond the tea plantations of Fujian Province in an attempt to flee the drudgery, the ultimate untruth of a classless society with little remuneration for the hardworking.

Nick would often try to speed up the process in defiance of his father's wishes. He would then be admonished for his impatience in allowing the cooking fat to be rendered prematurely. So many chickens, anyway, and what he mean I work too slow! *Gōngzuò tài màn* -- so many chickens, anyway.

And so Nick's now eyeing this honey glaze delight easily persuaded him to continue his climb down into the eatery, for the dumplings could wait for one more hour, after all. As he descended, some sudden scarcity of traffic and pedestrians to his back only seemed to lend some truer meaning to his journey. Some sudden scarcity of traffic and pedestrians now being replaced with customers happily moving in and out of the swinging glass doors which gave way to a cramped vestibule filled with waiting diners.

There were no tables to be had at first glance and he wondered if such a rush would frustrate his lunch plans. Having a studied gaze through a second set of glass doors, he noticed a smaller table just off to one side of a rather portly waiter putting the finishing touches on various utensils.

Nick inched his way past three or four persons engaged in animated conversation and managed to open the second set of glass doors just enough to squeeze through and into the restaurant proper. The noise level increased to a deafening pitch. Waiters darting back and forth, some piping hot tray of *black bean aubergine* barely beneath his chin and almost colliding with a rather opulent tray of *egg foo yong* as Nick approached the waiter and asked if it would be possible to sit at the table that he had spotted through the glass.

The man smiled sheepishly and replied with a slow lilting drawl reminiscent of some of those less educated who tended to reside in some of the more remote regions back along the Shijing River. *No-one sit here* was his reply. Nick grew annoyed and was told that this table was for waiters use only -- *Jīn xiàn fúwùyuán* - only for waiters.

*Why only for waiters?* he thought. *No-one using this one. Maybe big dummy don't understand English. Miss McGrath say my English good now. Leave bilingual next year and go into regular classes. Maybe I say to this big dummy in ... .*

But much to his surprise, the man began clearing the table, sweeping aside the vials of soy sauce and the like and Nick was invited to sit.

He was unsure of why the man changed his mind and wondered if the man had not been so impressed with his command of a new idiom which was being thrust upon, after all. All speak English now, his father would say -- *Dōu shuō yīngyǔ*. All speak English.

His first day at the Public School on 49th Street was quite harrowing for Nick as the bit of English he had acquired at the secondary school in Fujian Province was all but inadequate for navigating the required curriculum at present. Some playing sport in the schoolyard or bantering with his friend Renhan Lin or even with those Vietnamese girls required no special command but Ms. McGrath would demand much more and he had made some noteworthy improvement over the past year it was observed.

He readily accepted the waiter's offer as some honey-glaze aroma was still managing to find its way through the conundrum of other scents continuing to inundate the room. Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway still went beholding those jagged levels of ne'er weathered brownstone structure which did so adorn these environs and Nick at last looked forward to savoring it's fast-approaching feast.

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The man stopped Nick from advancing towards the table, smiled sheepishly and spoke in a slow lilting drawl reminiscent of those less educated who tended to reside in those more remote regions back along the Shijing River. Struggling with the language he managed only a curt reply -- no-one sit here -- waiters only.

Why only for waiters? thought Nick. No-one using this. Maybe big dummy don't understand English. Miss McGrath say my English good now. Leave bilingual program next year and go into regular classes. Maybe I say to this big dummy in ... .

But much to his surprise, the man began clearing the table, sweeping aside vials of soy sauce and Jing Tao Pepper, and Nick was invited to be seated.

He initially wondered why the man changed his mind but any such intention seemed now to be moot, as he readily accepted the waiter's offer, for some honey-glazed aroma was still managing to find its way through the conundrum of other scents continuing to inundate the room.

Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway still went beholding those jagged levels of ne'er weathered brownstone and Nick --- at last ---- looked forward to savoring it's long-belated feast.

## **CHURCHSTEEPLE text REVISED EXTRACTS**

Jim sat, staring at the pavement. He'd have liked to go to that breakfast place on Serrano but was loathe to have to let on to those English boys that he, too, had been caught up in the language school scam. Vergonzoso is what the newspapers said -- shameful!

He chose instead to go over to the head office in hope of recovering some of the back pay he was due. Upon arriving, he could notice a small angry mob gazing at a rather intimidating chain solidly fastened across the glass doors.

He reluctantly searched for the address of his former employer in a tattered leather bag. He inched a small piece of paper up from within the bag and on which was scrawled an address -- 219 Paseo de la Castellana, 10th floor.

He'd left some months ago under rather unpleasant circumstances --- you'll receive no salary for the month, he was told. And all for the dubious claim of not having fulfilled one of the companies' pettier regulations.

He considered calling first but feared that Sanchez would attempt to use the telephone in a particularly searing way, teasing some remorse over having to once again contact the woman and coaxing one more reminder that Jim were to again be in her total control. Strings of dependency might be more easily managed within some more face-to-face encounter and so he set off on his way.

Walking along the main boulevard, Jim was able to nearly taste the smoke and petrol that provided him a bank along which to organize his thoughts, some thick aromatic track of blackened haze spewed by the stream of vehicles speeding north and south along this corporate

thoroughfare—the Paseo de la Castellana -- home to the gilded imaginings of success spurring on some sporadic bands of cowards and thieves, with notions of seldom gracious acts of prostitution being realized every day in those welcoming heights high above.

Jim must have sat for another hour or more on some soiled bench opposite the entrance to Number 219. Peering down at his watch for the umpteenth time only seemed to have produced some recurring angst.

Glancing downward, and once again, had only frustrated Jim until realization taking hold, time increasingly moribund. Time in arrest and slowly stopped. Some gadgetry purchased offhand seemed to have failed him. Jim tapped on the watch in hope that something sluggish or misplaced might be revived, but it was useless.

Jim strained to hear the bell tolling out over the Plaza de Castilla, shadows cast by the towering blocks of concrete and metal transforming each vibration into a death knell, kaleidoscopic images challenging his deepening gaze into the lobby of Number 219. One, two, three and more it sounded until Jim was confident that he'd indeed waited for some proper time.

He rose from the bench and navigated his way across the street. Having avoided a number of moving vehicles only presented him another obstacle as he neared the curb. Cars and utility vehicles piled randomly in some chaotic conglomeration. Dampened asphalt giving way to puddles of lately fallen rainwater challenged as he gazed downwards. Puddles of lately fallen water framing some tire stained with mud and excrement momentarily setting him on a different course. Then having to double back towards his destination and finally finding himself face to face with someone who appeared to be the building porter.

As both moved into the foyer, he inquired as to what Jim wanted. Jim replied that he'd like to visit the Language Consulting on the 10th floor.

-- ¿Le espera la señora? asked the porter.

– She's expecting me, yes, at five -- a las cinco.

He started to move away from the porter's station, slowly enough so as not to betray some mischievous intent yet with the conviction that the porter himself would be no more inclined than any of the others to question the comings and goings of such early evening visitors.

Dimness seemed to persist. Dark gray shades along the floor seemed to diminish in relief as he neared the lift. The aroma of month-old humidity emanated from the paint-peeled walls as some tiny fluoresce showed the way and invited him into the shutting of some heavily sprung metal and engulfed Jim in a world at once upwards and unmoving.

Then stepping out of the lift on the tenth floor and facing a large plate glass, he could appreciate the vast visual feast which presented itself from high above the Castellana. Antennas jutting out against some quickly moving sky. Signals reaching out to some distant star while the earth spins its completely regular course of inanimate decision and mockingly of the earnestness with which the traffic below seemed to rush from north to south and back again.

At last placing his finger over the doorbell of Beta Language Consultants S.L., Gently laying his finger upon the yellowing plastic, then gazing at the wood-finished door until finally it opened and finding himself confronted by a young woman in her late twenties, pretty enough and with some tightly cropped short length of hair. She could have been any of those below, fashion-news devotees made up with the newest line of facial crème.

–Buenas tardes, she said.

–Buenas tardes. Would it be possible to speak with the director?

–Is she expecting you? she replied in a surprisingly fluent English.

Jim told her that he hadn't called ahead but used to teach there and had just found himself in need of some classes.

-- I didn't think she'd mind a visit, he added

–What was your name, then? she asked.

–Jim...Jim Cantrell.

His explanation hadn't seemed to bother or predispose her at all. She seated him in one of those generic pieces of furniture usually found and telling of some less high-minded aesthetic.

Jim started feeling strangely relaxed. Crossing one leg over the other in gentle recline he glanced uncaringly at the ceiling. He dabbled in some delicate play of tic-tac-toe upon some of its slightlier imperfections. Then the young lady back across the room arriving in full portrait, bathed in late afternoon light downwardly directed against a face of rose-colored sensation. Leaning for some documents at arms-length and Jim shifting slightly to better appreciate the display being presented. Some silk-screen muse it seemed to Jim and he dared one more inquiry.

–Do you know if she'll be very long?

The young woman replied that Ms Sanchez was on the telephone.

– Oh, I'm in no hurry. I'll wait, said Jim.

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Now even more discouraged, he reluctantly searched for the address of his former employer in a tattered leather bag. It gave him no pleasure to consider returning to either military teaching or corporate classes but circumstances demanded otherwise. He inched a small piece of paper up from within the bag and on which was scrawled an address -- *219 Paseo de la Castellana, 10th floor.*

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Glancing downward and once again had only frustrated Jim until realization taking hold, time increasingly moribund. Time in arrest and slowly stopped. Time costing and at the mercy of some gadgetry purchased offhand. Jim tapped on the watch in hope that something sluggish or misplaced might be revived, but it was useless. It had indeed stopped. And Jim began to feel the wage of his indecision threatening him once again in some puerile way, some headlong fantasy which might have been cherished in the past now winking back playfully at Jim in veiled disparagement.

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—*Buenas tardes*, she said.

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

—Is she expecting you? she replied in a surprisingly fluent English.

She impressed Jim as having a particularly kind disposition and he wondered if Sanchez hadn't again been recruiting abroad through one of those illicitly run agencies.

Jim told her that he hadn't called ahead but used to teach there and had just found himself in need of some classes.

-- I didn't think she'd mind a visit, he added

—What was your name, then? she asked.

—Jim...Jim Cantrell.

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—Do you know if she'll be very long?

-- The young woman replied that Ms Sanchez was on the telephone and might be some minutes more.

— Oh, I'm in no hurry. I'll wait, said Jim.

5:20

It was some ten minutes before Sanchez did finally appear, agitated or excited, likely due to some leverage which she'd just managed to garner over some unsuspecting client. She invited Jim into her office, or at least what was meant to be an office, for it was nothing more than an extension of the same space set off by some inexpensive wooden dividers and rather unimaginably at tha. She showed not the slightest surprise at his presence.

He sat down without waiting for an invitation to do so. He inquired as to the state of her enterprise and she told him of some impressive military contracts which had just

come her way, as well as one potentially lucrative offer from the multinational firm of A.C. Nielsen Marketing Inc.

-- And how have you been, Jim?

Not all that well he remarked and began to recount the details of the school closure. She interrupted him almost immediately, surprising Jim with a recounting of her own and commenting that it had, after all, been in all the papers of late.

She showed no empathy toward Jim's plight, but nor did she seem to delight in Jim's misfortune, which in itself was unexpected, for Sanchez had always been a bit of an enigma.

Scholarship achieved would present itself in some superficial way, walls covered with certificates and diplomas at first impressingly but then in outright disrespect of one's better judgement. Cheaply framed photos of her shaking hands with the President of the Texas Association for the Betterment of Small Business International Alliance, she would present some stark cynicism against the discourse wall, smilingly and in fullest awareness of one well-thought-out scheme. Taking the microphone, some cheaper acoustics fed back through some regular course of turkey dinner and bland conversation, put together for the benefit of some long-buried social ideal whose time would never come.

And yet, at times Jim could sense some faintest glimmer of generosity toward her subject matter. Genuine joy in opening up to the seemingly latent formation to which she'd been called, licensing sincere in English philology, after all.

But alas, Sanchez had become a caricature of all she'd ever intended to represent. Clawing into every wayward soul she might come upon, seeking some bit of easy gain pretendingly of sound service and intention. Proud of having helped to bridge the gap across to the Texas Association but never consideringly of some higher goal, some higher aim to achieve for achievement's sake.

—The closure can't've been much of a surprise, she continued, it seems to have been run by the *mafiosos*.

Sanchez's sudden commentary seemed to have jarred him out of his momentary stupor. He could volunteer only a tepid response.

■ Yes, it certainly seemed so – the *mafiosos*.

Jim's glance had once again been veering toward the reception area in hope of once again spying the young lady who'd greeted him at the entrance but she was nowhere to be found and so he managed to steer the conversation back to the issue at hand.

Sanchez seemed surprisingly receptive to the idea of Jim's return and commented that she certainly was in a bind and that -- if he were up to it -- he could

actually take on both employment opportunities which she'd mentioned at the outset. *I am in a bind*, she repeated.

He certainly wasn't pleased about having to return to either military barracks or company work, but under the circumstances he saw no real alternative.

She told Jim that the military classes would start at the end of the month but the marketing firm was expecting a teacher – for the Director, no less – on the very next day in the early evening. Jim readily accepted and was told to wait a few more minutes while Sanchez looked for some materials that might be of interest. She went on to make one of those determined dashes across the room so in keeping with her guise of didactic fervor and toward a rather large bookcase at the far end of the room.

■ Don't forget to see my receptionist about completing the usual paperwork before you leave, she half-shouted as she leafed through various notes and papers.

■ I see you've found a new one, he replied.

■ A new one, Jim?

■ Receptionist.

■ Oh yes, Carolina. Not a quick study, I'm afraid, but quite motivated.

Not a quick study, perhaps, but Jim had rarely seen one glide so sweetly over stage work floor unpretendingly of even the slightest show of malcontent which Sanchez might readily direct her way. Her profile seemed to conjure up thoughts of what it was that Jim had once imagined life to be like over here. The grace with which she went about her mundane office chores might have been recognized as downright inspiring given the proper circumstance. Sleek and daring of anyone whom she might have occasion to greet. Nightly routine of regular time and place amongst friends in search of some slightly tainted adventure. *¿Otro cubata, por favor?* Festively and in full pleasure until having to enter at half-past-eight each morning, passing the porter in cheery ascent and expectant of even the smallest demand which Sanchez would quickly lay before her. Requiring employ from head to toe, much like Jim himself, they can't have been much different in their reluctant surrender to Sanchez and Jim thought that there might come a day when he might approach the young lady in some show of camaraderie or concern.

Sanchez returned with some materials. Jim placed them into his bag and with hardly a thought that they'd ever be used at all. He rose quickly. As he began crossing over to the door, he realized that the receptionist was still no longer to be found and Sanchez, spotting his perplexity, immediately chimed in.

-- Give no mind to the paperwork, Jim. It can be done tomorrow if you'd drop by in the morning.

Nodding in some non-committal way, smilingly and with renewed intent he reached for the door. Having now stepped back out into the corridor, the lift seemed to be further away than ever. Some gentle reverie which had accompanied him up to the tenth floor had now become moot, and this would always be amongst the most worrisome of circumstances. Time simply casting about at Jim's expense. Time as nimble warrior unceasingly, and once again luring him into that trancelike state which he so despised. Moving downwards and toward some supposed new beginning would nevertheless continue pretending to be Jim's sole saving grace, some downstairs light pulling him back out onto that path along which he'd come and without so much as a gesture toward the porter as he did so.

Jim got up early the following day, went to Sanchez's office to do the paperwork as she'd mentioned, did some morning chores and finally caught the Number 7 train crosstown at around mid-lunch hour, thereby delivering him to the Barrio de la Concepción, a quite faceless conundrum of medium-sized apartment buildings and office blocks.

Señorita washing her sidewalk of unwanted debris as the little ones trot on home for lunch.

#### *Comida mediterranea.*

Jim himself hoped to get a bite before having to begin. Strutting into one of those plentiful bars lining the pavement, impervious to some unpleasant smell of rancid oil which had luckily or unluckily not yet begun to dissuade him from the occasional repast. While always asking for the same, he inevitably imagined much more -- two pieces of bread between which some delicate completeness had always to be recalled from his earlier days in another place and time. Whether it had been at John's Diner, a busy eatery offering a flagrant view of the Metropolitan Opera House or that less flamboyant one on Grand Ave., Jim would always come away with some latent satisfaction and expectantly of the next. Delicate completeness.

Some hint of the sublime together with just the right dash of mayonnaise and *dijón*, over which the gardenest fresh leaf of lettuce were carefully set. He would delight not only in the variety which had been afforded, but also at the reverence with which the cook would set the top slice of day-fresh pumpernickel over the regal offering, not daring to apply excess pressure to the tender slab for fear of destroying its elegant appeal.

Jim had to quickly learn to go without such matter-of-factness at the *cervecería* but could never get used to the so-called *bocadillo*, as if it were some understatement of our own lack of resourcefulness or ineptitude of spirit.

Jim finished his meager lunch at any rate and made the brief walk to the National headquarters of A,C, Nielezen Marketing Inc.

Jim had never been initially too keen on entering the office building in the Barrio de la Concepción. 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. 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 would daily confront 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 he once imagined. 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

*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 apologise 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 revelling 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 dîner 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, and unattendingly to the last detail she had remanded. At these times, Jim would feel it necessary to gather his most steely armor, fend off the undeservedness with pleasant and patient state, for while Dolores's ranting was certainly unbecoming of his place, 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 attemptingly 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 confessionally 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. Impingingly 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 offward-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 pastin 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 britishly 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 gruelling 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 time honoredly 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 decision to pass through the head office had been prefaced by some uneasy determination to make things right. He had harbored no prior inclination to justify some recently occurring tendency toward one's sadder misgivings. And so he continued in the assuredness that all of this could one day be risen above. Coming down along some final block length, he fell well within the shadow of some white granite cathedral spire, markingly of the spot at which he had been able to find his way easily toward some pleasanter repose. The head office had been carefully removed from the academy itself, and this proved to be no accident. Its students had generally been

supportive of its finer goals, and did not much seem to bother over some occasional inconvenience. Some eager exchange across one's own lap mindingly would provide both with some sense of latent grammatical inexpectation. If not for some oddly pristine dissatisfaction, and might prompt some untimely administration which, insipid though it may have been, riled none-the-less. One transcendent spire peaking aloft and upon some verbal communication gloss would provide for an easier commodity, more telling venue for the misspoken few. Jim entered carefully. The morning porter was in the habit of washing the floors early, before the awakening faithful could realize that there was not a single morsel to be had for breakfast. One moving hurriedly toward the nearest panadería was not an uncommon sight in Madrid, and often until well into what could be early afternoon in another place. These were the kindest and most generous at Christmas and such, so that the floors got washed in the best of their regard. This, of course, meant that squatters like Jim and those others in the head office were not to be spared any inconvenience. Why should Jim have needed to tread so delicately, seeking just the right balance between himself and he who others thought he should be, when he too could have easily resorted to earning a wage in some such ordinary fashion? He might still have his chance, and this he considered carefully as he rang the doorbell. Bajo 2. He had always found it unduly long that he should have to wait so for someone to let him in. Might everyone have had become too comfortable with their present undertaking whereby to ignore any outside intrusion? In any case, one would immediately be amazed by some bolder contrast, empty hallway turned chaotically and more so. As if having fallen suddenly into some strangely foreign land, Oz unpreparedly through some hitherto untrumpeted dining room door. Jim was especially unprepared for what he was about to be told.

—Is that you, Jim?

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

—It happened.

—What?

—Paco suggested that we were all a bunch of assholes. Should have started turning the screws on those guys back in January.

Jim could suddenly feel the icy deliberation of his ancestors weighing even more heavily upon him. Having not only squandered his birthright, he had also failed to see the wisdom in Stevenson's advice.

—Can anything be done about it now?

—Not much. Five months pay is probably gone for good. But that's not the worst of it.

—Come again?

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

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

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

*—We’ll see, said Jim.*

*Walking back toward Serrano, Jim was able to nearly taste the smoke and petrol that seemed to provide him a bank along which to organize his thoughts. He looked for a bridge over the thick aromatic track that arose, black haze in the closest geographic element, cars and trucks moving toward some soiled destination. Once across, Jim’s next mind drifted back to the ordinary job. Knowing that which one has to do unencumberedly. Steadily finding one’s way and without tending toward any pretext of having to do more. The child holding on to the hand of his mentor, paternal intuition looking out over a sea of thick black, going forward unafraid. And then his child who would soon have to abandon all rightful formation in material support of his faithful bestowers. Land of plenty and opportunity to take but at the hardest cost. Jim’s father was the first to be born in the new land. Many professions would be flouted ar*

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-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 a blatant contrast amongst those dwarfed miniatures poking barely above his family’s restaurant and tellingly of some lesser-than-satisfactory remunerative path which his family had been obliged to pursue.

*Only fresh dumpling he say.*

The wholesale house to which he had been directed could have seemed unattainable to Nick if not for some crumpled piece of paper to which he clung so desperately – not for any pre-determined trepidation considering of his journey but rather as indication of the excitement which was his upon finally finding the means to venture into what had in fact represented some promised land inexplicably mirrored within the lakes and riverbeds of Fujian Province.

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 other possibility of abandoning respectably those banks of the Xi Jiang.

Now some crumpled piece of paper had been intended to coddle Nick towards the 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 the need for this weekly trek?

Only out of concern for his ailing uncle had his father agreed to permit Nick to cross over on this occasion, and the ridicule which Nick heaped upon himself when emerging from the Houston Street station erroneously would have referred at least obtusely to the 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 tangles 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 the sight of some slightlier young bird preening gracefully within the corner space. Some kindlier face reminding him of Xiaoling and with features seeing well into the capability which he knew he possessed for winning her over some day. Some stealing Xiaoling away from her textbooks and tests and afterschool study sessions with the Cambodian girls and crossing over with her too on one finer day.

What could she really have understood regarding the motives which her 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 plight did seem a more fitting remedy for the indignities which they had been obliged to endure. Neither textbooks nor those kindlier entreaties so often espoused by the likes of Miss McGrath could change any of that. Miss McGrath say Nick speak good English now -- *shuō jiā Yīng wén*.

He considered heading back down on a southbound train -- but no. Something newer on his plate, with now some higher sunlight etching out shadowed

angles in close relief and deliveringly of one more block-upon-block. Some step-upon-step and one more block upon another 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 sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway went beholding of 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, a 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 back down toward Canal Street.

*¿Ér hòu shén me? Then what? No directions to dumpling house from there.*

Some larger crosstown thoroughfare had already begun coming into view and he glanced at the piece of paper once more in hope of concocting some clue or semblance of the whereabouts of his final destination.

Nick's eventual entry into Canal Street felt 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 funneled through to one of the Hudson River tunnels and beyond. Some sun only promising as he made his way down Broadway now bathed him completely and he tended to savor the orange glow which warmed his adolescent features.

*—¿Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?*

But he asked no-one in particular. Nick was in fact taken in entirely by the experience which presented, some oriental feast all about. Women pushing carts full of lychees nearly knocked him to the ground. The smell of Sichuan pepper salt tantalized his nostrils as Nick started moving eastward but only for some still greater concentration of people and food stalls. Some greater concentration of people and fishmongers pulling him onwards. Sounds and smells of fresh fish bedecking the sidewalk and attempting to avoid the now rancid puddles left by the flailing carps languishing in unsold bins. Bouquets of mandarin orange within some more elegant pose did hum their gentler melody toward anyone who might bother to listen and Jim tried once more to make good on the crumpled piece of paper which he continued to cradle in his palm.

*¿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.

He caught sight of some grandiose pagoda, upon closer view seeming to be nothing more than a cheap façade decorating some lesser-than-noble lending institution. Some towering structure 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 or confuse Nick so that he hardly became aware

of having finally arrived to the unassuming byway known as Mott Street. He instinctively set himself upon some newer course, now newly confident, some turning gaily and dodging some resigned old man hawking kaleidoscopes on a lower stoop as Nick set his sights squarely on some smaller cluster of children chasing dragons along the side. He was almost completely certain he had found the street but inquired in any case.

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

— *Mott? Mott?*

The boy nodded -- but rather equivocally -- and Nick continued to wonder whether some idiom had indeed been vanquished to the pinyin muck which his father had warned him about on so many occasions – *all speak English now* his father would say. *All speak English.*

Finally arriving to entrance of 21 Mott left him a bit bewildered -- one staircase up, one staircase down. *How I know where to get dumpling, anyway?*

The lower storey seemed to be an eatery and, judging from the queue of hungry diners waiting to enter, quite a popular one at that. Then spying some succulent-looking fowl behind a steamed glass persuaded Nick to begin his descent, for the bird which presented, glazed honey and stiffened at the neck in gentle swirl convinced him that this was undoubtedly superior to the roasted chicken which his father had for so long been trying to teach Nick to prepare for their own neighborhood clientele.

Some Chinese marinated chicken properly roasted had always been his own family specialty, yes seemingly quite inferior to the roasted duck he'd now been observing. Some roasted chicken delicacy had been theirs to rely upon since arriving here some years ago, and it was to their good fortune that the locale in which they presently presided had gone for the asking and at such a reasonable offer. *Shì xīng cān guǎn* and yes it did turn out to have been a familiar spot amongst the locals.

But the marinade to which his father long dedicated his early mornings had begun to take its own toll on Nick. Some day-to-day monotony of rising at dawn and trying to follow instructions being bellowed out regarding ingredients and measures and spices signaled to Nick a lifetime of wasted initiative and he bristled at the thought that this should be his lot. Some life passing through at a snail's pace and Nick would often try to speed up the process in defiance of his father's wishes.

-- *Yóu tài lěng! Oil too cold!* admonished his father.

*Who cares oil cold?* Nick would think. *So many chickens, anyway.*

-- ¿*Zěn me yùn zhuǎn rèn xú xú zhè tiān? Too slow!*

*What he means work slow today?* thought Nick. *He think I'm a machine or somethin'?*

But he would at times summon the courage to verbalize his own disapproval.

– *¡Tiáo wèi zhī tài duō nián nián! Marinade too sticky. Keep my fingers together. ¡Nián, nián!*

– *Tóng yī rú tong měi tiān. Same as every day, insisted his father.*

*Not same as everyday, thought Nick.*

– *¡Nián nián! he would shout. ¡Nián nián! ¡ Nián nián!*

And so it went on every day, day in and day out and Nick's now spying this honey glaze delight easily persuaded him to continue his climb down into the eatery, for years of exasperation had surely given merit to such reward and it had been nearly seven hours since the sesame cake he had heartily devoured at the Meng Ling Bakery on 49<sup>th</sup> street and the dumplings could wait for one more hour after all, he thought.

As he descended, some sudden scarcity of traffic and pedestrians to his back only seemed to reinforce the elegance of his journey. Some sudden scarcity of traffic and pedestrians now being replaced with customers happily moving in and out of the swinging glass doors which gave way to a cramped vestibule filled with hungry diners awaiting an opportunity to enter.

There were no tables to be had and he wondered if such an early evening's rush would frustrate his dinner plans. Having a studied gaze through a second set of glass doors, he noticed a smaller table just off to one side of a rather portly man putting the finishing touches on various utensils, burnishing each methodically – almost religiously -- with a woven white cloth and which seemed to Nick an exercise meant more to appease the customers than any real attempt at added cleanliness. The table in any case was cluttered with assorted accessories – salt and pepper shakers, vials of soy sauce and the like, and which now seemed to Nick a not-so-well-thought-out waste of space for paying customers such as he, unaccompanied and more-than-willing to endure any inconvenience which such a small space might predispose.

Nick inched his way past three or four persons engaged in animated conversation and managed to open the second set of glass doors just enough to squeeze through and into the main room. The noise level seemed to increase to a deafening pitch. Waiters darted back and forth, some piping hot tray of black bean aubergine barely beneath his chin and Nick quickly approached the rather portly man.

– Can I sit here? he asked.

The man smiled sheepishly and replied with a slow lilted drawl reminiscent of some of those less educated who tended to reside in some of the more remote regions back along the Xi Jiang.

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

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



-- *Zhǐ shìyìngshēng.*

*Why just for waiters? he thought. And more empty tables over there. No-one using this one. Maybe big dummy don't understand English. Miss McGrath say my English good now. Maybe I say to this big dummy in ... .*

But much to his surprise, the man began clearing the table of the condiments and Nick was invited to sit, albeit in a somewhat precarious-looking wooden chair unlike any other in the place.

– *Xing. Yòng bǐ yǐ,* said the man in a more welcoming tone.

Nick was unsure of why the man changed his mind but readily accepted the offer. Perhaps it was due to Nick's unexpected impertinence. Or Nick's speaking in a still-poorly-understood foreign tongue which continued to intimidate when encountered in a native son. In any case, he indeed readily accepted and prepared for what was pretending to become some urban feast in his mind. Some honey-glaze aroma managing to still find its way even through the conundrum of other scents and flavors inundating the room.

– I'll have ....

– *No take order,* replied the man tersely.

– *Why no take order?* Nick 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 all day...shining spoons?* Nick asked the portly man.

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

*All day change?* considered Nick.

– *So what I supposed to do? Starve?.*

*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?*

With that the man directed a comment to the second waiter.

– *Bǐ lù zhèr.*

This man did not take the comment with grace and it was only after a brief exchange – rather terse it seemed to Nick – did he finally and rather reluctantly address

Nick.

– ¿*Nǐ xū cài dān?* asked the waiter.

– *Don't need no menu!* exclaimed Nick.

– ¿*Shén nǐ cān?* asked the waiter.

*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 hanging in window and...*

– *SHUō zhōng wén mǎi zhǔ zhōng guó,* insisted the waiter.  
*Chinese with Chinese customer!*

Nick could suddenly sense the man tending towards another table just to his left – a younger couple eager to place their order and without any consideration for interrupting Nick's increasingly unintelligible banter. Some leaning motion away and further away from Nick and he sensed once more that this evening repast might also be drifting out of his reach so he conceded quickly to the man's request.

– ĭǎn yuàn yì yǎn qián! shouted Nick.  
Okay ... kě'n fù... happy now? Chinese with Chinese  
customer!

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

– ĭShén nǐ cān? asked the waiter.

– Don't want nothing else ... I mean ... xū yào wú fēi.

*These people ALL dummies -- make me speak like a foreigner, thought Nick.*

## Work in Progress revised extracts

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Jim seemed puzzled. He'd glanced upwards and peered at the digital screen. It read seven minutes to arrival but then someone oddly stealing his glance toward the right side. Some character now faintly recognizable to Jim.

The woman wore a lengthy dark shawl which tapered as it reached the back of her knee. Jim thought she'd been an acquaintance of his. Or maybe just one more ghost from his somewhat uneven past. She looked straight ahead and it seemed to Jim that she was deliberately trying to avoid making eye contact.

He'd awoken with some nagging headache. He'd missed the first train and sat staring at the platform for some length of time. All the while holding on to some tattered paperback in his right hand. Some worn brown leather bag leaning precariously against his leg. Notebooks, devices, assorted cables. '

It would still be five minutes before his train appeared. He raised the paperback to just eye level. His field of vision could capture some rather large suitcase being led along the platform by a rather stout gentleman. No doubt some useless exercise brought on by the perceived need to visit old friends or perhaps the promise of some new acquaintance.

A train approached in the opposite direction and seemed to rattle the growing number of commuters to his right and to his left. Some while checking on

telephones for messages or photos missed or ignored. Others staring ahead to some slowing motion of the retrograde carriages. The woman now seemed to have disappeared into the crowd but continued to prompt Jim into recollecting some alarming encounter he once had to endure, unspoken words but threatening nevertheless he recalled.

He glanced at his wristwatch. He became distracted by some faraway sound in rapid approach. Some waves propagating at second per second and creeping ruminations of his earliest days of adolescence. Some towering ecclesiastical figure draped upon some dusty chalkboard bellowing out rules and formulas regarding times and spaces, velocities misconceived or unpredicted until pen and paper could allow one to abide them properly. Witness to some yet lingering notion of the saving Christ, eventual apostates to the Holy Order.

Jim attempted to mark the time it took for the echo produced by cold steel on steel to reach him but the exercise began to seem moot. His train began to move into the station and Jim squeezed into the nearest car.

The stout gentleman managed to find some refuge in the corner of the car. Then noticing some untidier fellow staring blankly at a telephone. Held barely two inches from his face and a taller young man surveying this sprawling mass from above. Some tired-looking women leaning into this man's embarrassingly jilted frame. The young man's coat now rumpled had begun to play tricks on Jim and he imagined some ancient cluster of Roman brides offering themselves in wanton delight to a somewhat lurid but nonetheless abiding Caesar.

The throng – *la manada* is how they sometimes referred to it – wretched 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 some inordinate number of delays.

Voices and other special sounds could be heard over the din. Some recalled those more highly tempered noises brought back to him from his time as a student of Music at the City College. He'd eventually come to bemoan some overabundance of musical formation in his days there, but did realize that years in passing were not always true to one's original intent. And language learning also seemed to require some more humanistic skill, which tended to lend some consolation after all.

Jim stepped off the train at his usual stop. He negotiated a path from the underground station to the bus platform. Frantic commuters darting at him from all directions, head on and then some challenging his train of thought continually.

He took some refuge at a coffee stall before heading to his departure point. Then entering the passenger lounge had increasingly been becoming some more

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. He often felt like some marionette being dangled across the art stage, some hollowed-out being terminally content to have and be had.

“Pardon me, would you know what time the 161 bus leaves?” he was asked in a moment.

“Just in 10 minutes” he replied.

It was only after some seconds did he realize that it was indeed the woman in the black shawl inquiring about the number 161 bus. The shawl itself was now a bit tousled about her shoulders and seemed to give her a somewhat more approachable appearance. He spoke with an assuredness which would have been unheard of some months earlier. Schedules and routines had never been a welcome commodity for Jim. She seemed to be satisfied with Jim’s assistance in any case and proceeded to sit at the corner of a rather large mahogany table awkwardly placed in a far corner of the lounge. Jim took a seat at the end of the opposite side but not far enough from the woman to be unable to observe her somewhat nervous demeanor.

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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. His first inclination was to divert some non-threatening remark her way. He ultimately decided that it would be too forward to do so and again buried his face in the novel that he’d 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 reared her head back as if to rearrange some errant lock of hair which had crept over her forehead. Surely there was no need for concern nor any reason to feel perturbed by her continued presence. Yet Jim could not help but notice how she fumbled with her purse and shifted in her seat nervously.

Some large and imposing clock began to chime. Each recurring sound seemed to perpetuate itself sheepishly across the room. Loud and bellowing yet muted and turning downwards towards some more labored solfege. Some labored exercise not unlike those which he would have been called upon to deliver in his student days. Ten or perhaps fifteen other performers who certainly outdid Jim in all that was either studied or improvised then appraising his every note.

“Bravo”

“Bravo, yes, bravo”

The seemingly endless train of meaningless chores which Jim would now have to deal with on a daily basis would eventually turn the memory of such accolades – modest though they were – into his only means for tolerating such a merciless path, for while he had been of even modest value back home, he was made to feel somewhat of a nuisance here and quickly fell prey to many an unscrupulous character’s search for inexpensive employ.