

Into a Pinyin Sunrise
(in progress)

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

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

– *ǝWǒ bì děi bēn!*

Xiaoling replied angrily to her mother's request to wait for her younger brother.

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

– *¡Biǎo hé chǔ nǐ kāi chē!*

Xiaoling howled her wrath at the driver who had rushed behind her. Too close, she thought – *tài jiē jìn* – too close. There had been far too many like that since the *taxistas* had begun surfacing along fifth avenue. Some *te llevo baratito* would always prove to be too omnipotent when set against the welfare of the likes of Xiaoling and she quickly learned that the best she could do was forget it and keep on in that vane from which all of this had originally been borne. Some sitting and waiting patiently as the throng would be about to depart and wondering as to whether any good would be about to descend upon this imminent emancipation from strife and inopportunity. Some day school which she could recall barely projecting its sharpest rebuke inside her head and still counting in back turned integers – earliest survival for the homeland but still they had been encouraged to look towards afar and relishing some horizon calling, some hastened entreaty to the vast fields of virgin volition which were to become theirs. Then some elderly gentleman searching for the key which were to open some portal beneath

one cloudier day, some greener pastures sheltering those hidden lives against the temptation to remain and forswear the open sea in remuneration for so little. Someone's calling forth toward some *taxistas* edging nearer to the precipice which might ever define some more curious determination – *te llevo allí* or *te llevo* what could be the difference it was all just some other manner of speaking some other idiom pricking at us all *te llevo baratito* some language from another part of some other place and it was all so close some incessant chatter with *te llevo* and *te llevo allí* or *aquí* with here or there and they drive like they speak like they oh why should they not enjoy the same opportunities as the rest of us? Some going all about from one place to the next in search of those who might require those who might need oh they drive and dance like they speak *te llevo* or *te llevo allí*. Some bringing from here to there and having arrived to this newer place of business ne'er gone awry, some business soaring and moving faster and faster until one could only recall and wonder as to the utility of counting upon this 8th avenue looking over some sunrise in this borough by the sea but are they not all by the sea? Some having journeyed from afar and so far in search of all this which might still show some promise. Some promise overlooking this newer frontier, some newer sunrise day and did sufficiently place Xiaoling squarely within the throes of those who might be lumbering toward success. Then some insect would go buzzing up to the light fixture and back down unsettlingly close, some quicker glance off to a side might bring into clearer relief the profile of Kanh Boi who would have seemed to be eagerly engaged and the heat slowly filtering up from some freshly asphalted 48th street. Mr. Hernandez would have been somewhat adamant as to the amount of space required within one aisle to the next, some space-upon-space and seemingly too distant from Kanh Boi now to appreciate some truer manner of contemplation which would have been hers to exude. Some sweeter contemplation defining of some more oriental flavor and blatantly at odds with the increasingly chaotic academic exercise which Xiaoling would come again to peruse in some almost begrudging way. Why should she have had to atone for the lack of initiative which her parents had nurtured back in Fujian? Then some sheathe for protecting herself from the barbs which might follow, some sheathe with which to mask her just tendered loins from that generational outburst which had forever been underlying some slightest hint or remark and could have been offered completely out-of-hand. *Chóng fǎn Fujian* her parents were to hear from those who had come over years before from across the strait and being completely at odds with all that Xiaoling had ever come to expect from such a place so otherwise accommodating. That some cycle of generational rejection could have spawned this great community might only further her determination to see through toward some final conquest, some coming upon equally or even surpassing those *mexicanos* for whom 48th street had provided some easier means for reward. Some geometry which Xiaoling had been considering now began to taunt and she quickly advanced to the following line. Some tightly clustered set of numbers belying one hidden set of values universally telling and thus began to ruminate accordingly, and why any such particular value should have shone so was neither for her nor anyone else to say. Xiaoling would sit staring at the problem which had become hers.

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

– *Wú zhī xī,* replied Xiaoling.

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

- Get killed, stupid girl!
- Shut up. I have *important* test today.
- Not worth it. Life *too* short.

Xiaoling had listened passively to such a remark before.

- *Xīn xīng fà* ...everyday new hair! noted Xiaoling.
- Not everyday. What *you* mean?
- Almost every...*oh*...

(silence)

- Can I touch?
- *Zhōng zhǐ!* Don't touch *nothing* ...work all morning to fix it this way! scolded Nick.
- Why so early for *that*? mocked Xiaoling.
- *Early* bird catches *worm*.
- What's that? she laughed.
- Miss McGrath *tell* me that. Don't you know? She *say* my English good now. Don't you know?

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

(silence)

- *Huh?*

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

- Oh, I'll be late ... *have* to go.
- No wait, urged Nick.

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

- Why? ... *have* important test, she replied.
- Why *you* come this way every morning? Why you cross street here and not over there?

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

- ¿*Shén nǐ yuē?* I *have* test, she insisted.
- *Test, test, test* is all you think about! What's that?
- *Maths* test ... and you too.
- Not me. Miss McGrath's test tomorrow. I *do* good tomorrow.
- And how about *test* today?
- That *too* hard.
- Not too hard. You *just* lazy... like your stupid friends.
- *Fú měng*. Not stupid!

– *Oh...*, but she did not really know what to say next.

(silence)

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

– For what? puzzled Nick.

– Do Maths and learn so you can ...

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

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

– What then?

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

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

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

– *You* know I stay here every morning. So...why you cross in front of *me* all the time? Huh?

– *¡Yú mò!* I do not! ...sometimes cross over there, she finished shyly.

– ...*never* over there!

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

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

Nick watched as Xiaoling walked hurriedly up 49th street toward the junior high school. Some standing and waiting patiently for the arrival of his mates could have only taken on some more sinister appearance, as at times it had. Some assuming the worse had resulted in Nick and his cadres too often being taken to the precinct house as

truants. Only to be at last reclaimed by the attendance dean in charge of such day-to-day intrusions into his own personal pleasure, some dozing off in the back room or more sordid enjoyment of some closet activity whose interruption could have only annoyed as he pretended to collect his monthly pay and attribute to some more civil duty finely tendered. Some worthless but amenable man having earned the post of dean quite dishonorably. Nick thought forward to the prospect of having to spend still another morning in feeble explanation of why he had been languishing at that time of the morning and on that particular day. Some overworked testimonial which had never been to the attendance dean's satisfaction, in any case. Some cowering inescapably beneath one's own bitterer stare, some glaring over narrowed spectacles attempting to shame Nick for the indiscretions which would have commonly arisen. But then his friends were never on time and so he watched Xiaoling move even further, some form swaying barely as leaving some blackened tar pavement background propping up the girl, some pushing upwards into one flattening silhouette now certainly too far to actually perceive. Still Nick had always wondered what might have actually become of her if she had never been brought over. Or *he* for that matter. Might he have found her quite by chance pedaling along the banks of the Xi Jiang in some desperate urge to arrive on time? Some thrusting more furiously against the cast iron metal which would have been providing of her only engagement with some long lost own eternal suffering? One which her parents had forsworn for the young girl, for all times and by any means possible would have hurried them along on that morning as they verged upon the fading grey embankment, some façade which were to eventually emerge as one more relic engrained within a memory too tired to bespeak even that slightest of tones and in an idiom now too distant to be appreciated for what it once was? Some prouder discourse now smothered within the pinyin muck? Somewhere along this tiring length of timeless monotony had lain some ne'er receding need for merciless intercourse. Some more oddly sounding verbal intention and would seem to tease into the notion that they were indeed inoculated within some grander sense of words themselves. Some words jarring about without any such eloquence forthcoming, only pointing and imploringly of the need for paying homage to the pinyin. Some calling out and pointed toward the pinyin sunrise which were to bring those who might bathe in its incandescence one gentler notion of who we might be destined to become. Yet some sense for bathing in a pinyin sunrise had seemed oddly eternal – *mēng qī zi* has no meaning in and of itself. Some pinyin sunrise having turned to muck and unwittingly being exploited in this modest piece of writing. Some walking along the banks of some tepid pool and trying to make sense of one more utterance. Some wallowing within the pinyin muck which were to become. Some smothering not once but then and above. Some idiom receding and giving in to that pinyin muck which were to become theirs and sadly, and sadder so they must have said but Nick could find only reward in the notion that one distant idiom had become so bastardized. Some now almost useless tool being left out along the side of the road for the collectors of waste which were to become and providing of some further assurance that some other idiom larger in scope and possibility could bring together all those courageous enough to have had sought out this pending chance at a better life. Some long-awaited idiom melting down into the pinyin muck which were to become, some pinyin words looked down upon by the lords but inevitable. Some standing deeper in the pinyin muck which were to become all of theirs too. Some creeping backwards towards some more fitting appreciation of who they were and what they were doing here now. Now some succeeding within one larger discourse as Nick stared fixedly at her disappearing into what might very well have been his own best refuge. *Nick* to be sure, some larger expanse of water did shower him or was it just water he

beamed forth at Miss McGrath and her smile went placingly upon him as some halo in delight. Some warmer encouragement which all his teachers seemed to render yet nevertheless ne'er kind enough, for Nick would continue loitering at the corner of his errant befalling until graduation day and probably beyond. Even Dong Er would stride quickly down 48th street on that day, some slightest reflection upon those filtered rays which had descended steadily upon the province of Fujian. Some final merit to having been set so ungraciously into the cauldron which were to become hers and the rest. Some confused explanation hurriedly as to why they were to arrive had not been well received, and the notion that it were to all make sense in the long run only added to some primal deformation in her mind. Nick too could have been answering high above the call, some cleverer nature never having seemed to acquiesce and would continue to draw heavily upon Xiaoling in attempting to bring forth that inspiration which did unceasingly pervade his own daily meanderings. It was indeed all he could do to continue steadfastly in the eatery which his father had been attempting to carry over from the old country, let alone pretend to occupy some ranking similar to that of those more intelligent pupils. Some earlier morning convocation would have probably had its origin in his obligations toward seeing to it that the family business kept on with some day-to-day regularity. Nick would always defrost the chickens in the evening in preparation for some next day's sojourn although this had never been his habit before beginning at the high school. His had always been some morning too hectic for the formalities which were to have imposed. Some chinese roasted chicken had always been his family specialty and such would enable his father to begin the arduous labor to which he had become indebted at some more decent hour than that which would have presented otherwise. Some roasted fowl delicacy had been theirs to rely upon since arriving here some years ago, and it was to their good fortune that the locale over which they presently presided had gone for the asking. *Shí xīng cān guǎn* and yes it did turn out to have been a popular spot amongst the neighbors. Some roasted delicacy enabling those who would beseech it some otherwise befitting substitute for the sloth which might have overtaken even that kindest of entrepreneur. Some later afternoon hour had always been the busiest time and for reasons which could have hardly ever been properly understood. Some earlier supping had always been the rule amongst those most newly brought over, and some moderner sunset park environs must have pushed it along even more so. Some likelier boredom gazing across from some tiresome café and why should some heartier repast ne'er be in the offing? Some sun laying down and over, some sixty-degree coming from out of a shadow definingly of some roof-top structure across and shading one's eyes accordingly. Some egg *foo yong* staring upwards and was it not *y-o-ng*? Some mexicano-mixed pronunciation – *y-u-ng* – as in some irrepressible throwback toward tendered youth singing. There had arrived far too many of those who might never have left the homeland if not for some family member or friend to whom they would have been permanently mortgaged in one way or another. Some life passing through at a snail's pace and always ne'er reading in some ghostlier fashion. Some ne'er ending penchant for agreeing without bounds with she who would have provoked some gnawing ache deep within the depths of one's bowels. At times, customers would enter without some means for remunerating properly their occasional feast – *bì xū chū qián cǐ kè!* – but Nick's angry rebuke towards timely payment would almost always become consumed within some gentler gesture which his father might render. They had come after all to seek the fortune which had gone so fleetingly in Fujian, or most of them in any case. Some going fleetingly, some fortune written on paper tenuously and under some threat of becoming moot as per the consequence of certain actions taken (or not) by those bent on an existence wrought with self-congratulatory adulation. Some

temporal endurance marked by cowardice and stupidity did call to mind those more intellectually challenged cretins who but for the ficklest of fortunes confounded did materialize at all. Some occasional preference toward undermining that of others in becoming more fleetingly still. Some fortune being commandeered by the lowest order of filth which would handily refuse to ease the suffering of just one more of their very own (or so one would have thought). *Yīn dào!* Consider the wrath of fortune which they must have lusted after and lost. Some roasted chickens guiding the way up and out of their mostly hopeless state must have rested fervently upon the thoughts of those who had first studied the culinary merits of chinese roasting. Some roasted chicken enabling Nick to cling to those few norms having survived and languishing from their harrowing journey, and in doing so savor the possibility of bestowing some greater good upon himself and his family. Now some setting them in line for preparation with the final marinade would have him reflecting back to some previous week's class. Some straight line being shorn up into odd numbered divisions and odder still when in consideration of the fact that it could be accomplished longingly. Or could it? Some numbered line going off into number lines with afternoon light setting upon. Some numbered line set down within some more passive structure then numbed or numbered along some line with afternoon light and coming down onto some vaguer recollection did appeal to Nick. The fowl would have been marinated accordingly and he could have never imagined that here too he might be well within his own. Some better attempt at escape from this tattered existence. Some upward motion through the ranks of those newly arrived and into this societal array placed forth so invitingly. Whereupon being obligated to render some quickest decision regarding one's final destination did put all in Fujian to the test, some giving his own grandparents certain cause for concern and determined that Nick and all their progeny should taste the fervent fruit of some newer world. Now setting down one, two, three more and applying that final essence, some *voix dernière* which had never failed to draw forward even that most disinterested of gastronomical devotee, some more succulent trying into the sweeter bastion which did ever presently shield us from some most unwanted progeneration. Some sweeter coming into the numbered cleavage which would have only parted but for some sheerest of desperation, some bending more lowly into what had surely been the love of Dong Er and now unsure of why or how this parade were ever to continue. Some numbered inclination would have earlier confounded Nick with imaginary concepts putting forward, some circular function surely befitting of one's own better understanding.

– *¿Tā tuǒ dàng dàn?*

– *Shàng wèi.*

– *¿Gǎn máng, huǒ hē!*

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

– *¿Jī! ¿Jī!*

Still his father was adamant as to the manner in which Nick sometimes went about his business. It is not that he felt the boy to be unhelpful. Quite the contrary, he knew Nick to be diligent in matters of the home and could only add to his chagrin

regarding the way in which he conducted his affairs of study. Some hanging about with the likes of those schoolyard boys on 8th avenue had caused him to lose some most basic acquisition of self-discipline which had been tryingly instilled in his earliest years at the day school. Some growing up leaning heavily upon epistles dating back some five or six generations in the land of his ancestors had hardly affected the boy and this his father knew to be true despite the fact that he himself had little time to spend with the child here in their new home.

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

What *he* means work slow today? Nick would think.

– *Tiáo wèi zhī tài duō nián nián!* he would respond.
Marinade *too* sticky today, *keep* my fingers together.
¡Nián nián!

– *Tóng yī rú tong měi tiān,* would sound distantly through a painted peeled wall.

Not same as everyday, he would think.

– *¡Nián nián!* he would reply.

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

– *¡Nián nián! ¡ Nián nián!* he would reiterate to himself.

But the marinade might not give in to the rants of those who refused to accept happily their daily lot and Nick would continue to draw upon his thoughts of Xiaoling and some passage into which both had begun to delve during the morning. Some scene which might have ensued with the attendance dean could not have been properly foresworn, and as such some more lasting rumination perhaps being touched upon. Some imaginings of she and he in subtler repose which might one day endear and bear fruit, some ne'er extinguishing romance could properly comprehend and stoop lowly upon the lace which would more warm-heartedly placate those whose lives had become irretrievably consumed Thereupon some cheek inclined or some softest telling – *oh*. Some inability to bespeak and she relinquishing those misjudgments against which had been previously guarded as her own.

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

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

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

– Looking at girls *all* you do!

– *Bù zàn yī cí*, replied Renhan.

– *Nǐ jiāng huì bù jí gé gāo zhōng!*

– *Uhgry* bitch!

– *¡Zhōng zhǐ!*

– Bitchbitchbitchbitch...ha ha ...

Xiaoling was always trying to care for those who seemed to be too incapable. Then looking aloft at some earlier twentieth-century structure just as the sun was beginning to offer some more obtuse reflection across the darkened brick façade did seem wholly at odds with the taunts of Renhan Lin though tolerantly. Some inner resolve to ignore all those barbs thus directed at Xiaoling from this and so many others with whom she had always thought she shared some more intimate camaraderie. Then moving up one more step toward some staid metal doors newly painted, some gray inquiringly of whether or not one's suddenly acquired entrance had been more of an exit and hoping it were not to be so. Some setting further upon one graying embankment peering deftly away from the village of her grandparents and trying to remember whether anyone could have really fathomed the anxiety her mother had had to brave for so long. *Mǒu wù jiào hǎo*. Something better she had always said. Some scurrying down more quickly toward the mooring which had ne'er gone too unnoticed by the authorities and still unbeknownst of the trial which they were about to endure. Xiaoling had become petrified at the sight of the captain awash, straddling and crying furiously as he clung more tightly to the boom. Then some further magnification in sound cutting through those slates of torment which had been raining down on the decrepit vessel since they had turned eastward toward the bluff – *bēng xiàn* – man overboard and some final glimpse she had caught of the stricken sailor was to remain with Xiaoling for the rest of her life.

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

– *¿Nǎ er shì nǐ?* replied Khanh Boi in mock impatience and Xiaoling was at a

loss to explain how she could have entered through the 48th street gate knowing it was delivery day.

- Oh, I *forget* it's Monday. How long did you wait there? asked Xiaoling.
- I *have been* waiting for ten minutes...*have been* ..*have been*...
- *Měi hǎo, měi hǎo*. You *have been* waiting ...
- You must learn to speak correctly or Miss McGrath will come to your house, amused Kanh Boi.
- No, she won't! laughed Xiaoling.
- Come on or we'll be late.
- ...and Phuong?
- Upstairs already, replied Kanh Boi.

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

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

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

- Well go ahead, but try to remember girls. It's *every* Monday.
- *So* sorry, Miss Pacheco.

The two girls hurried up the stairs and intending upon pre-empting any second thought which the dean might have entertained. In such case, the notion that some earlier- than-expected arrival through this hitherto non-permitted entrance could have only caused some seething, some uncalled-for attempt at a vindictiveness at times experienced by the entire student body. Still, Miss Pacheco had always been one of those more dispassionate deans in the school and no such event was seriously considered.

Miss Pacheco would make the long walk to the fifth floor just as gracefully as when she first started out at this upper school on 48th street. Some dancing out loud and sound turning back on its own would have continued to foster within her, now thinking back to some lonelier evening within someone's tidier embrace or standing for hours outside some lesser-than-enlivening nightspot hoping against hope that she too might be chosen. And why should she not? Some preening near and far had always met with some certain reward, none-so-much revered as on that day when she once more went united with some meandering artiste on station's front. One by one they entered and left some straddled platform as stage for she and he who might forever lay claim to her innermost thought and desire. Some receding passion longing for one more pressing onwards and why should it not? Some sleeker alighting across one more bent gently and in search of some more fleeting glimpse of carnal embrace would have to sustain her forth toward yet one more of life's disappointments and asking if he loved her – do you love me? then gently mingling within some mass of misappropriation which would have defined inevitably this very element within which she had habitually taken upon, for the day had come and gone when she might be called upon to command her very own. Some more soothing refrain set down by the artiste who now seemed to lean more heavily against her faltering breast and languishing from behind in hope of reaping his ill-beset harvest. Some be mine be thou art fairer had been studied and re-studied but unknowingly of how any such rendition could be delivered within our own present circumstance and would forever lead her onto some more lingering cadence, some greeting those most gilded of voices to which would have become some post-universal

exercise gone awry. Some intending to guide her along and she unresponsive as the next train succumbed meekly to this next darkened pathway. Some wading along the tracks and hoping and thinking do you love me at all well one would think. Some mingling and darkness again pushing through this one darkened tunnel and the artiste in less-than-hastening invigoration and standing more closely on station's front did lead onto some more musing over one's fairer headed fragrance rising swiftly, some such perfumed and so peculiarly to one's own keener awareness now closer and closer and languishing still from behind then nearer and nearer until thinking do you love me? Now entering her fifth floor office and unlamenting of the fact that no-one could really pretend to deny her the spoils for which she had so long toiled, some reaching over for one more dose of beauty encased. Some circular portal through which she might continue to penetrate and partake of that mirrored magic which did forever place emphasis upon her supplest of features. Some silkened forty-five degree light lifting a wanton grace from the dank grey wall structure which deftly defined her windowless office. Some *pat* went one more last stroke intended to redeem upon and she would be done with it but that last one felt just right and *pat pat* why not it would be five more minutes before they made it up here. Some temporary preening most always interrupted by those Mexican girls why she might have even held Miss McGrath responsible for *pat pat* and why did my office need to be up here next to hers anyway? She is such a nice lady such a darling when her husband was ill all she could think about was her children her *niñas* and such but all those other students if you could call them that all day long moving by hello Miss Pacheco and why do they think *pat* that I am their friend anyway their *amiga* now just keep going to your next class girls *pat patting* then some try to speak correctly girls or Miss McGrath will come to your house (it was always a joke with her but she is one of those more intelligent oriental students so beautiful too with that long straight silkened hair). Some Spanish girls calling out to each other in the hall *hola chica* or Mexican or whatever what difference does it make they are all just ours and those Mexican girls *pat* deserve something prettier hoping to settle upon did often occur to her as she began to perceive some sound now beginning to grow out of the din and Miss Pacheco tucking the small rounded metal case into her drawer. Some rushing out toward the door of her office and meant to engage frontally those pupils arriving well into her own domain. Some glimpse of Chinese or Vietnamese or whatever it what was the difference they were all just ours. Some domain which having had forced itself upon her in a real way and relaxingly of some inner frustration which she had had to endure at some other place. Some tapping reluctantly upon keys all day and some cannot show this page or that for one reason or another with some reaching down for some temporal play, some unobtrusive tampering with before one other attempt at connecting to the place or whatever it was called. Some attempt at filling her coffers with this but never materializing to her own satisfaction, then pushing on and over again toward this present didactic situation if it could be called that she would usually intimate. Some previous professional foray resulting in just reaching down for it all day long and never really serving anyone's purpose or reason without proper remuneration. Some cannot show this page or that or reaching down for one more or some waste of one's time completely or some being unable to know exactly what to do just waiting and hoping to be chosen and not left to waste away or fade on into some middle-age looking back and wondering what might have been. Some why should I not be chosen this time around I look better than anyone and working harder toward some perfection some slimmer or shimmering lace falling more softly and some chillier evening ambient frosted suspiration teasingly tingling the next boy and he would have been a little too young in any case. That some artiste should have been so constant in my thoughts and

pushing forward into this mass of hoping against hope some hoping against hope to be the one and when will it end why do I still feel some need for feeling some need to feel on some chillier evening frosted suspiration. Some continuing to please now he is glancing back over and maybe we could both be chosen over and then back again for one more day of didactic if you could call it that. Some hesitating nearer to the door leadingly onto some fifth floor hallway for some do you love me and the artiste just there not really doing much of anything and why are they always making so much noise just trying to savor some do you love me? And why should he not? Some standing and waiting on station's front and ne'er knowing whether some more suffering artiste might ever. Some ne'er reacting to or ne'er knowing if some suffering artiste and coming seemingly from behind some languishing or whatever he called it could ever readily suffice for one more, some mass misappropriated and standing more closely still until unknowing of when some next train were to approach and become newly absorbed. Some coming back and still coming back around until all those things which at some time seemed so important would have become moot. Now some more meaningful involvement with those children in her charge, some more quickly paced and eager to attend to those who would seem to be determined to arrive to their classroom at some proper hour. Some *no time to go back* had always been some proudest refrain of Xiaoling and the entire Huan family, now some marking off succinctly to the steps upon which her soles had been treading. Some approaching the third floor landing and exhausted students leaning heavily against some freshly painted wall, grainier finish daring those who would once more scrawl their adolescent exuberance to refrain – *a refrain ... oh the refrain* (some changing parts of speech) now seeming to Xiaoling and bringing on some thought that last went swimmingly in her head. Some language examination would challenge tomorrow but still they climbed well accompanied up to this morning's task and at last stepping onto the landing.

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

– Why so tired? chided Xiaoling.

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

– Nothing comes out of that face!

– What? exclaimed Kanh Boi.

– It's *empty* face laugh!

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

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

Some stark metal cage structure now being left behind as they turned toward the next set of stairs had always been irking to both. Neither in Fujian nor in Ho Chi Minh had either witnessed some flagrant rebuke to their dignity as trustworthy students. Might such a non-reliance on common thinking though youthfully be more telling of the

academic non-insistence which forever seemed to frustrate some more proper intellectual nature and adherence to this newer place? They had always seemed daily determined to change all of that, and continued their climb to the next landing. Some noise began to filter in through the approaching doors, some nagging reminder that it was indeed delivery day and indicative of some one-hundred-and -eighty degree error in their own approach to the fifth floor.

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

– Probably confused like us, sighed Xiaoling.

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

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

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

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

– These stairs *too* high, exclaimed Xiaoling.

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

Kanh Boi reflected momentarily though too obliquely at some construction found typically back home. Both had by this time begun to sound a bit like the girl they encountered on the third floor landing, although any such remark to the matter which might be directed from without could have only drawn the ire of Kanh Boi. Some finer young girls in sleeker regard, some glossier *revista* appearance had always been so prized and more to the liking of those Mexican girls – *las chicas* – some certainly not ever having been that to which either Xiaoling or Kanh Boi could aspire. Still, Dong Er was of another sort entirely and always having been open to those more lurid sensations which might have been intimated.

- Almost there. ¿*Zhōng yú!*
- Yeah. Good exercise for us skinny girls.
- *You* skinny, conceded Xiaoling.

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

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

The girls filed into the classroom amidst those who had entered from the proper entrance. Some mass of converging into had almost torn the two apart and Xiaoling was intent on following through behind Kanh Boi, not out of any sense of digression nor would it, but rather for some sense of security which some nearer presence of Kanh Boi might afford. She settled into an adjacent desk and wondering just fleetingly if perhaps her best friend were to think poorly of the gesture. Some need for one's own sense of comfort or well-being and beginning to take herself onto the exercise to which they both would be about to commit. Some *oh here* as she watched Kanh Boi too descend into her task. Then some placing measuredly those tools upon which would be prelude to the notes and ideas increasingly gone meandering in her own mind. Some last minute turning over concepts and lemmas joined intimately within the products of those lifelong events which had defined her most wayward journey. Some journey from the fields and streams of Fujian to this now well-substantiated means toward achieving that individual glory which would be so close at hand. Some *oh this oh here where? oh there* and seeming to begin slipping into some slower submission.

She had been long admiring of Kanh Boi's calmer sense and now glancing over to her friend who went barely moving and alighting patiently over some time-weathered slab of wood which had supported some more devout tuition and would now be put to the test. Some altar of finer hope placed silently beneath the vision of one so tranquil and she again bringing to mind that rarely had she ever looked upon the features of one so sublime. Some finer veil of hair dropping gently over Kanh Boi's left cheek did seem to absorb Xiaoling for the longest moment until coming to some realization that it had only been through the sheerest of life's fortuities that they had at all become so mutually aware. Some lingering uneasiness concerning the fleetingness of life itself and ruminations hardly befitting the thoughts and ideas of one so new her mother would say. Some trying not to consider such notions and now intending to bring into mind those concepts and lemmas which had begun to provide the comfort she had been seeking since gazing and puzzling over some dearer man clinging desperately in some last frantic attempt at salvation as they rounded some final marker and out eastward over a churning sea toward the bluff which were to provide some final vista of China.

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

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

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

The instructions came across as not being delivered dedicatedly. They seemed to lack that insistence which Xiaoling had come to expect of some more or less authoritarian gesture meant to motivate.

– III –

Some sun reflecting off the billboards on lower Broadway went beholding those jagged levels of ne'er weathered brownstone structure which does so adorn these environs, those which Nick's casual glance seemed to at once consume and ridicule. Some earlier twentieth-century art-deco pastel having placed itself squarely and re-thinking as to whether any of this could have been some other city, some other place

thought of improperly. He had rarely ever ventured out from the confines of his Brooklyn neighborhood let alone toward that which might have been considered some portlier piece of urban center. Some sun reflecting off the billboards which were to re-define some blatanter contrast amongst those dwarfed miniatures poking barely above the restaurant and telling of some lesser-than-satisfactory economic situation into which his family had been obligated to continue peering. Just *get dumplings* his father had urged — *only fresh dumpling he say*. The wholesale house to which he had been directed could have seemed to Nick unattainable if not for some crumpled piece of paper to which he clung so desperately — not for any pre-determined trepidation consideringly of his journey but rather some indication as to the excitement which was his upon finally finding the means to venture into what had in fact represented actually some promised land mirrored within the lakes and riverbeds of Fujian. No-one could have possibly ended up here, within these rising edifices of some bustling island enterprise. And yet some had apparently had, some more tightly condensed refrain of immigrant anxiety from another era and perhaps prior to any possibility of abandoning respectably those banks of the Xi Jiang. Now some more crumpled piece of paper had been intended to coddle Nick towards some wholesale venue to which his father had alluded. How much longer would it be before they could afford to buy their own dumpling press so that they might relinquish some need for this weekly trek? Only out of some concern for his ailing uncle had his father agreed to permit Nick to cross over on this occasion, and the ridicule which Nick urged upon emerging from the Houston Street station would have referred at least obtusely to some outpouring of disappointment which he and his family had initially professed toward their new found lot. *Only fresh dumpling he say*. Some larger-than-life billboard looming, some staring down onto some tangle of traffic and human flesh being subdued gently into some mesh of rising subway steam and tried grease which some passing vehicle had been spewing inadvertently. Nick should have gotten off at Canal Street, and he would have too if not for some thought which had lifted slowly as he stared across at some slightlier young woman presiding gracefully upon the corner space which he had been inordinately denied upon entering the subway car. Some kindlier face reminding him of Xiaoling and some features seeing well into the capability which he knew he possessed for winning her over. Some stealing her away from textbooks and tests and crossing over with her too on some finer day. What could she really have understood regarding the motives which his own father had harbored? Some purely remunerative twist of fate cannot have been the only reason for such a harried exodus and this Xiaoling would never be able to determine as clearly as had Nick. Some billboard looming and pressing some newer life into one's own paling sensibilities did seem a more fitting explanation for the indignities which they had been obliged to suffer. Neither textbooks nor those kinder entreaties so often overheard within the spaces of wisdom currently espoused by those like Miss McGrath could change all of that. Some inability to detract from the aching desire which embodies that truer design for which we all yearn. Nick had considered crossing over and back down on a southbound train but rather decided to accept readily some happenstance with which he had been so heartily presented. Something newer on his plate and now some sun etching out shadowed angles in close relief and deliveringly of one more block upon another. Some step-upon-step and Nick still fondling the crumpled piece of paper which continued taking pains to appear then re-appear in his increasingly moistened palm:

Hop Kee Wholesale Dumplings 21 Mott Street

Some step-upon-step and earlier twentieth century art-deco pastel endearing Nick as he glanced upward at the ornate structures adorning the overhangs of the flattened rooftops along this lower length of Broadway. Some vaguely perceived baroque, some sunbeam catching his eye barely and dangling upon his forehead as it pointed its way downtown and weaving a path along some steadfast umbra edging earnestly toward Canal Street. *¿Èr hòu shén me?* Then what? he wondered. *No directions to dumpling house*, then upon recalling that his father had told him to inquire on his own volition when he at last arrived in the vicinity and he continued on without further worry. Some larger crosstown thoroughfare had already begun coming into view and he once more glanced down at the crumpled piece of paper in preparation for what he would inevitably be called upon to do. *È rén men – all good people* his father had said. Nick's entry into Canal Street felt at once as if he had been royally received, some expanse of terrain stretching up to the Manhattan Bridge and back down toward the snarl of traffic which defined some mandatory funneling through to one of the Hudson River tunnels and beyond. Some sun which had been but a promise as he made his way down along Broadway, some insistent tease only intermittently through the granite rooftop awnings which went passing overhead now bathed him completely and he tended to savor the orange glow which warmed his adolescent features. *¿Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?* he asked some passerby entirely characterless but evidently to no-one in particular. Nick was in fact taken in entirely by the experience which presented, some oriental feast bringing down and about and much more so than that of his own Brooklyn environs. Some vaster enclave pledging more and lending him some ever increasing notion that such was about he and all those others like him and Xiaoling who had been so delivered. Some newer generation set off onto some newer place, some newer idea open to the masses and defining of one's own birthright for years to come. Were not both he and Xiaoling meant to be so chosen? Nick started moving eastward but only for some greater concentration of people and places. Some greater concentration of people and shops constituting some richer pallet of light and color. Some sounds and smells of fresh fish bedecking the sidewalk and bouquets of mandarin orange within some more elegant pose did hum their gentler melody toward anyone who might bother to listen. *¿Nǎ yī ge tú Mott?* he repeated but some elderly woman took no notice and he began to doubt as to whether their language was indeed his own. Some push and pull of people and places seemingly of determining his path along did starkly contrast the scarcity which he often experienced along his own venue. He at once caught sight of some more grandiose pagoda, one of those more effectual lending institutions which donned the façade of some temple whose childhood memory had faded fondly and his grandfather warning him and his friends to desist from playing within for fear of infuriating the spirits for whom it served. The sight seemed to endear Nick even more so and he hardly became aware of having finally arrived to the unassuming byway within which he now found himself. He instinctively set himself upon some newer course, some turning gaily and dodging some resigned old man hawking kaleidoscopes on a lower stoop as he set his sights squarely on some smaller cluster of children chasing dragons along the side. Nick was almost completely certain he had found the street but asked anyway. *¿Cǐ Mott?* and a small boy looked puzzled until Nick grew somewhat more adamant. *¿Mott? ¿Mott?* The boy nodded and Nick continued to wonder whether some idiom had been vanquished to the pinyin muck which his father had warned him about on so

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

– Can I sit here? asked Nick.

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

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

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

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

– *Xing. Yòng bǐ yǐ.*

(silence)

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

– I'll have

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

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

– *Why no take order?* he asked impatiently.

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

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

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

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

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

- So what I *supposed* to do? Starve? complained Nick.

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

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

Some renewed sense of regret refused to go persisting in Nick and why should it not? Some penchant for ranting whenever circumstances would give in. Some insistent sense of anger and impatience had seemed to run its course on so many occasions and when the attendance dean could barely tolerate some ill-timed intrusion into some illicit activity in the back. Some intending to shout down at Nick but never within some patronizing frame of thought nor would Nick ever tolerate such behavior.

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

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

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

- *¿Shén nǐ cān?* asked the waiter.

(silence)

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

- You don't speak English, man?
- Chinese with Chinese customer, replied the waiter.
- I'll *have* bird in window...hanging up.
- *Shuō zhōng wén mǎi zhǔ zhōng guó.* ...Chinese with Chinese customer, repeated the waiter.

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

- Miss McGrath *say* I speak English! I'll have...

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

- Chinese with Chinese customer, reiterated the waiter.

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

entourage edging carefully along toward the table which the thinnish waiter had signalled to in the adjoining dining room. Some hunger-driven aborigine in search of one more harried celebration or otherwise and was all Nick could do to set himself apart from such an ordinary lot. Now beginning to sense some sympathetic overture toward the waiter's desire for linguistic cross cultural exclusion and hoping to gain some favor, he once more tried calling to the thinnish man who had by now vanished momentarily behind the temporary façade which marked off this dining room from the next.

– *Ān yuàn yì yǎn qián!* shouted Nick.

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

– Okay ... *kěn fù*... happy now? Chinese with Chinese customer!

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

– *¿Shén nǐ cān?* asked the waiter.

But Nick was still unsure as to whether he should reply. Some further consideration of the nature of some non-capitulation to the whims of those who would pretend to provide for his own dispensation did once again tend to present. Then suddenly in some otherwise more overpowering manner, for if not for some certain discomfort which he was beginning to feel and would have surely seen the waiter once again defer apathetically toward some other far off corner of the dining room.

– *Ān xū yāng!* said Nick.

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

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

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

(silence)

Sounds and far off visions of fading embankments, some feel of newly mourned mist caressing Nick's skin enticing this untimely recollection did seem to absolve him of any prejudice. That was then. Some choice taken precipitously it surely had not been, and of this he was assured as he became old enough to ponder fully the banalities of such a vulgar existence. Some time marked by this earthly promise and

ne'er hoping to move beyond to some adjoining portal, some opening up to some other plane of intuition and knowing. Some curdling into the safety of considering that it certainly had not been his own choice to make, nor could it. Some choice taken surely and without bothering to delve into his own tenderer frame, searchingly and wondering if some time-worn vessel might have ever been able to penetrate the façade which seemed to encircle protectively this domain into which he had so unwittingly been brought, some tried earthly experience extending far off into and back towards the initial reaches of time itself. Some choice exerted and which did now present itself revealingly in some other guise, some revealing of the trials which were to become and Nick was obliged to react more quickly than the waiter could have intended.

– *Měi hǎo. Ān hòu*, replied Nick.

Some disappointment regarding Nick's initial decision to cede to the waiter's request had now been rendered somewhat dull by his succumbing to the furtherer prospect of having to wait twenty minutes before being able to partake of this incidental repast. Some more succulent delight continuing to tempt Nick upon first glance and then darting away remorsefully, or so he would have liked them to presume. Some slightly tanned morsels of shaded glaze, some honeyed romantic setting and upon once more did lift the spirits of such a stifled lot. Such a lot soured by the rigors of having to put forth so on such a daily basis lest the spoils of this newer world should become so elusive. Then thinking twice, some one on either side pressing forwards in some vainer attempt at one's own carnal self-understanding. Some tastier dish wonderingly and asking coquettishly about whether she might have come sooner or not at all. Some tidier time to pass and Nick could only admire the scholarship with which the thinnish waiter seemed to attend to his now impoverished ritual. Some inability to desist from the nagging tendency he might suffer toward likening these glistening pieces of tendered flesh to the rounded silhouette he might have once beheld as she were exiting too hastily from some earlier morning bath. Upon passing her house each day and pausing in hope of spying some more casual gesture, some glancing up toward the second floor bedroom where she had been alighting since their arrival from Fujian. Nick stared at the ceiling and wonderingly, as if someone else might have been occupying the very table at which he presently sat. Then too wonderingly and began to become fixed upon one or two more imperfections in the level structure which tended to limit the majesty which seemed to distinguish this place from the others he had passed along the way. Some higher structure becoming joined at some geometric union of the three, then three more plus one and might hark back to the task which had gone so belatedly in Mr. Hernandez's class. Some recollection of the maths examination which she must have been fancying on this day and at this very hour or so Nick must have been mistaken, some greater time expanse having had transpired since his earlier morning departure into the 9th Avenue subway having taken its toll. Some poring over lemmas and definitions too unmoving to become anything other than what they might have represented truly and some pastime in teasing her along the way with who might she be with and what might she be doing? Some gender reversal and now some complicity within one's own frame of mind and pondering herself once more, some better lemma expressed and beginning to question the validity of all that she would now be doing. Some where is Nick and then why is oh he is just lazy like his stupid friends she must be thinking really going and setting off onto some newer things and pondering ponderingly of herself as Nick sat patiently and considering just how quickly he had been made to feel alone in this place. Some vegetable egg drop dropping languidly

down and away from the waiter's thinnish frame and placingly on the table in front of them. Some vegetable egg drop being languidly placed and provoking Nick to at once reconsider the honeyed delight he had once been assured.

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

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

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

– *Nǐ yuàn wàng chá?* asked the waiter.

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

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

– *Nǐ yuàn wàng miàn tiáo?*

– Don't want no noodles! *Just bird hanging up in window! O.K.?*

barked Nick.

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

– *Nǐ yuàn wàng...*

– *Don't want nothing!* exclaimed Nick.

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

– *Fēi cháng duō gèng shí jiān?* asked Nick.

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

– Want duck... *have* to wait! the waiter shot back.

...into her and thinking by now *what happened to Chinese with Chinese customer*, some slight redemption at the waiter's momentary language regression he most cherished and noticing some light rain beginning to settle onto the steamy glass facing outwards toward the street and he thinking that it might be difficult to manage with two larger bags of dumplings all on his own and with no respite from some possible inconvenience, some more finely tuned stepping around pools of cooler water mixing into sidewalk debris then creeping in upon Nick's ankles as he might think menacingly of his father waiting at some sodden doorway glancing up one way then another and the little daylight that would be left over to hover upon we poor mortals just standing around and waiting for one more glimpse of it, just one more inhalation of some aroma which could put our spines out of place recallingly of some song he might have fancied one morning while waiting for her on the corner and how could she know anyway of some of those that might be entrapped in his own thoughts as he reclined at night. Some hoping for one more glimpse as she passed in front of her dimly lit window cast as nearly some shadow and then so much easier at the corner in the morning mist, some *never over there* he reminded her and trying to turn her thoughts away from those ghosts still unburied from a distant past then

– ... never mind, it's ok ...

...then *who this other big dummy in suit anyway* when Nick became accidentally nudged from behind, someone more official-looking probably from the courts of justice on Centre Street and noticingly of some sudden push which one more official-looking type having entered and besieging the thinnish waiter all over again with tables beginning to become scarcer as the evening meal grew closer and closer upon thoughts of her and his father looking up first this way then that and wondering

where he could be where she could be now that the examination should have been well finished and sitting deftly upon the edge of her bed wondering what might have become of him of the music which she had once intoned into his own ear as he bowed slowly beneath some gentler wisp of air which her breath had

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

Five more minutes? Yeah, he think I got nothing else to do! What he think? Dumplings can't wait. Have to be back by six. What he think? The official-looking type now seatedly just across and marking out one rather scalene figure with the younger couple whose more feminine side he had been coming to glimpse and more so. Nick then being made to feel as some victim of some situation and did equally consider whether such would have been some sort of just compensation for the trials which his forbearers might recall, some equally but frightfully unjustifiable treatment regarding the pains which they must have wrought and seethingly, some more clearly held longing and feeling like some victim over and over, some gnawing victimization ne'er sought after but succumbed to nevertheless. Some looking forward to the niceties which could have materialized but didn't, some second-guessing and then some, might have pushed Nick unceremoniously to the brink but hadn't, some yet becoming more prone to considering whether such a repast could have been worth the pains and tribulations of all but one of those gestures made so deeply from within. Some being made to fall victim to the trials and rituals of those for whom Nick might have meant so much, or so little dependingly of how one more seemingly insignificant event could have played out and then returning to this original claim of fairer than fairest-art-thou, goingly and knowing only too well that here in this tinier place where one might find some peace and comfort rendered and so unforgivingly, Nick might simply get up and leave. Some wanting to rebound from the sickness which were to intend upon then some picking up and warding off that ever encroaching subserviency which he himself had long come to recognize. Some wanting and wanting more had never been of his own, some eternal rising of the pinyin which loomed continually and then locking itself into place, some rising early morning sunrise pinyin sunrise as some chastened idiom did go hardly and without some easier surrender to that which Nick now called his own. *Miss McGrath say I speak good English!* Now back to the brink and to the brink once more as the official-looking typed gone and seeming to delight in what it is he had been served. Something seethingly tasty it appeared to Nick and then occurring that never had he seen such a delight being offered in this or any other version or culinary venue. Some rethinking of a progressive time situation now and in light of the fact that never had he ever intended to imply that he had ever seen such a spectacle in this or any other type of venue, culinary or not. Some running about and glidingly smooth under and about itself, then some tenderer scallions embellishing some richer *sauté* which had evidently gone towards somewhat more than mere accompaniment. Some winding upwards and around down to some pristine dish which seemed to have bestowed upon it some more chastened relief, some chastened treat and shearing proudly beneath some other mucous membrane which might have masked its outer beauty but didn't. Instead glistening and encouraging he who would partake to admire some tinier structure which might have been used to vanquish its prey or rather adorn innocuously some more finely lit piece of flesh from whence it might have arisen. Then being lifted slowly as the *sauté* might have made its way dripping easily, some heartier breathing outwardly onto the steaming sensation which were about to become, and all according to some more sumptuous aroma rising stealthily through the seasoned ether that did go enveloping the billowed

aliment which seemed to stare upwards at its ne'er endearing official. Then being reluctantly consumed or seemingly so, some slipping slowly through the official's puckered lips and leaving some sharpened tentacle dangling against the nape of his chin as he reached downward for one more glass of warmed oriental beer, some slightest chance at carnal reconciliation and whoever might have thought that such an official type could have necessarily been too starved or too depraved to consider just about anything else, some going off and going off again throughout entire moments while again knowing all too well that she might have been the one who might have been able to give him and then standing plaintively on some subway platform with her looking behind at some older more noteworthy gentleman, sitting cock-kneed against the back of some steely bench upright and ne'er giving any thought to the feast which might have been coming his way. Some returning to the spectacle which would continue to grace his dish, now some more completed gesture of relief as the warmed oriental beer trickled down the back of his throat and he glancing downward as Nick went noticingly of some subtler bed of rice which would have encouraged even that most squeamish of incidental connoisseur. Some once more, some continued piercing of the greyish mucous which did seem to persist all the while and this time without some slimier mass sliding upwards along a chosen track, some looking forwards to one other quicker digestion and knowing all too well that such cuisine could have only benefited from the locale in which it had been served. The waiting became unbearable, beginning to seem as if some endless time had run away. Some tending now toward deception as the only way out and noticing that the fan above Nick's head had begun to rotate at some more deafening pitch. Some rapture looked into and deceivingly as the only honest way to survive, some calling up to the pains and unjust rewards which had always passed so closely past Nick's own. Some deception as to the better manner in which to survive all the pains and debilities which Nick was made to suffer at the obvious comparison with Xiaoling and that friend of hers who not unlike those other *wài guó rén* had so quickly sought refuge beneath one of so much more honored oriental descent. Indeed, he would neither be surprised if the two had been setting about within some more-than-platonic tryst, some awakening newly to practices previously scorned. Some deception would seem to become the only recourse in which Nick could confide and the waiting had begun to grow immeasurably intolerable. The official had by now placed his utensil delicately beneath one more succulent mass and thrusting upwards toward some more ravenous consumption, some accompanying grain of rice barely teetering along the edge as it were, and disappearing uneasily into the mouth of he who might have tended to such daily tasks of incrimination justly served. And why should he not? For when all was said and done, he too could have very well become caught up in such ne'er enlivening fare, some being devoured whole by the whimmish devaluation of civil society and reluctantly waving to Xiaoling (and that friend of hers) as he would be drawn away towards some more unseemly incarceration. Nick kept a keen eye on the thinnish waiter as he once more approached this judicious guest, now with some apportioned silvered platter upon which sat some blackened mass, some otherwise *escargot* and still painfully unknowing of just how much longer this incessant interlude were to continue. Nick shifted uncomfortably within his own as he watched the man devour some jellied slime one after another, some delicate foreplay tickling at each of the tinier shells which passed on through his steadier hand crawling further upwards, some afterlife reaching barely upon the tips of his fingers or just prior to some somewhat completer submission. And yet such fare could have never been prepared upon the banks of the Xi Jiang, nor could it have ever made its more slightly acrid ascent into the thoughts of whomever would have been imposed upon in those final

moments before turning westward around the bluff. Alight now, for any moments turn could alter and think carefully about why one is sitting in this place.

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

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

– *Gèng chá*, requested Nick.

The thinnish waiter at first hesitated in replying. Chinese with Chinese customer and some unavoidable dilemma of entering at all hours with some bring me this or that no matter how one might have been feeling or even slovenly. Some just wanting to retrieve one's tiniest bit of dignity, not slovenly or wanting to be. Some hoping for one last ephemeral notion as to why this had to come about, some never-ending odyssey away from the wellspring of his youth and drawn into some laggard servility as if *Chinese with Chinese customer* could even begin to requite. The waiter walked back to the kitchen slowly and emerging some moments later with the tea Nick had fancied. Some wondering sympathetically as to why Nick had so carelessly nurtured the *entrée* away from this unwillingness to imbibe, some proceeding imprudently and without measure. Some unmeasured taking in of this cherished repast

did at some turn seem at once too unexpected and too predictable. The younger couple by now had finished their own, some rising jocularity and still inseparable as they hurried through the throng of expectant throng and up toward the pavement. Nick would linger some moments more in appreciation of this seasoning at long last. Some further sustenance and savoring of the carnesceous morsels which continued to embrace his own bespoken tongue. Or was it meant to be so sorely misused? Some staggering months and time of inconsequential fare, one's own lack of piquancy unwillingly and these most exquisite of dishes unbeknownst eternally by those with whom he had always fantasized. Some libidinous appetite, some overly succulent aroma lasting through the darkest of times did never seem to deter the impressionable flavour which had so inculcated on this day. The younger couple would have been just as keen on discovering that neither had Nick been capable of confiding in anyone regarding those things most dear, or that any single person could have at last been able to afford him the time and rationale for perceiving anything other than those provincial dishes which had come to confine him and his entire family. Some sudden wondering now as to whether *she* had finished the task to which she had committed. Some more high flung ideas regarding what could be won through the procurement of knowledge and skills put upon by teachers and benefactors who had been shown to be nothing but the cruellest and most heartless of scoundrels. Some harder labour governed by the earning from one's own will and need to weather is what she would ultimately learn, as Nick had from his own mentors who were now on the verge of harvesting the benefits which this newer world had promised to extend. Nick placed his chopsticks insistently to the side of his plate now cluttered with various bits and pieces. Some now glancing above at some twelve o'clock ort then around slower toward three and noticingly of some further bit of rice seemingly strewn aside for no other reason. Could Nick's own time here have been so wrought with uselessness? Or might he have better sought some manner of reassuring those possessing of a keener view of his plight? Nick was quickly becoming convinced of his own need for some kinder self-destruction and at once considered reposing within some eternal dream sleepiness. Still he recognized the obligation to abide by those conventions which tended to endure and demurely gestured as if willing enough to be scrutinized for some lack of grander largesse by the thinnish waiter.

– *Zhàng dān, qí.*

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

– Have to pay at *door*, directed the waiter.

Nick reached deftly into the side pocket of his trousers while continuing to wallow in the pandemonium of some culinary clutter, some platter still and stiller appearing to mock him from beneath and more imagining of the day he might come

with her to this very place, some sitting within hair's breadth as had the younger couple and pressingly of the warmth which could have only been evoked in the company of another. Nick left two seamy dollar bills in midst of some disarray now taken for granted as he rose and not looking back but decidedly, some diminishing sense of remorse having been beginning to become overtaken with some other source of self-confidence and barely hoping to replace some nagging recrimination dredged forwards from within each time one recalled some farther away moment, some farther away moving even farther and farther as he inquisitively asked the cashier (some unconcerned spectacled type ne'er bothering to glance at whom would be considering such a chore) as to the whereabouts of Nick's destination having been so hitherto displaced.

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

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

– *Páo de tuán shàng dì?*

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

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

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

Nick was unsure of why he had even felt the need to inquire. Perhaps some impending fascination with wanting to see the man put into some less-than-enviable predicament, some more frightening means for banal recollection of things which should have gone ne'er forgotten (*only fresh dumpling he say*) but always in constant need of some further mental percipience, or seemingly. Some television then blaringly from a higher place and Nick glancing upwards at some black-and-white screen

sounding out news from some other venue. Some taller more eloquently decked gentleman of subtler race taking on the masses as if beseeched to doing so with four score and seven years and no-one wishing to take notice or even acknowledging the gravity of that which had been occurring, some of knowing (*only fresh dumpling he say*) some of wasting time or some having just stopped in for some ripened repast long overdue with some hour for awakening some hour for collective conscience and give us your tired masses your huddled or whatever it was all just some promise unmet as far as Nick was concerned and more hopefully toward some more fruitful existence, or seemingly. Some more hurried taking back of the notes which had been furnished to the cashier as he headed perhaps too stealthily (*only fresh dumpling he say*) toward the door and back up towards the street, for Nick had become in a quandary here and having to consecrate some holier journey for returning the produce with which he had been entrusted by his father on the previous morning. Some *only fresh dumpling* as if such a locale could have ever had anything other than and Nick finding himself now confronted once more with some edifice at last, some not so being the same at which he had been divining previously or even consciously so, some fiftier minutes and then some fiftier more. Some fiftier moments which having had gone by on the basement floor, some fiftier and then fiftier and more so as the thinnish waiter had gone refusing his kindlier petitions and would have led on to some fiftier or fortier or whatever more if he had not at once made claim to one's own better resolve over which his father had bothered so staidly. Some now bothering and (*only fresh dumpling he say*) botheringly *bok choy* if that had been what had been so specified *bok choy* he thought and pork dumpling now impressing upon Nick as he spied a second entrance off to the left and unpromising of anything at all really. Some refusing to conceive or bother to recognize to, some admittance to the stupidity which could not have possibly prevailed but had indeed and now without means for *bok choy* this or *bok choy* that some lifelong sentence on these unpracticed shores with some time for getting better getting ahead she said (but where could she be now) and walking somewhat more quickly as the dusk went advancing upon the sooty metal poles lining the block. Some ten feet just to the other entrance leading upwards and asking of some *bok choy* dumpling (*only fresh dumpling he say*).

Nick entered the other doorway now more quickly than he had intended. Some more overblown reflection of the things which had or hadn't come about never materialized, and the thoughts which had sustained him throughout his unexpected repast seemed now to guide him up some narrower staircase. Some tattered felt carpeting insisting and dustily would mesmerize Nick as he rummaged upon just what his father would remark as he arrived home some five hours later than expected. One two stairs at a time then three four and Nick would be quick to arrive at the top of the landing. Some piercing lower Manhattan nightmare had begun to intrude into and could only foretell the worst for his journey back to Sunset Park. Some providence lost on poorer souls strewn along within some no uncertain stench and some more discreet passage overwhelmingly as he made his way back and over across to the Canal Street Station. Some more feinted idea of returning to Houston Street succumbed quickly beneath the burden of having to forgo the luxury of the same type of meandering which did so pleasure Nick on his way downtown. Some lower-toned rustle of plastic bags and muted machinery urged Nick to enter the food produce venue which had been his targeted intention all along, and he strained to recall the exact quantity of dumplings which his father had requested. He was alone. Except for some busier type filling plastic bags with the delicate morsels, and another more surrendering figure seemingly

categorizing the finished packages into some enormous walk-in freezer which lie just to the left and immediately greeting of his recent entry.

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

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

– Five *bag*, Nick blurted out.

He could only offer some assessment based on how often the restaurant seemed to be in need.

– *Three* pork, *two* bok choy.

But Nick was again relying on his judgement of just how quickly each type of dumpling had gone lacking in the short run. Some taking orders two or three at a time had never so readily been perceived, some arithmetical sequence better understood and instantaneously calling back to some exercise to which *she* had been devoting on this day.

– *Tè zhì xī bok choy. Tè zhì xī!* Special order! replied the man.

Nick stood momentarily dumbfounded. *Why special order?* he thought. *Why special order* and then why would some bok choy dumpling be so special with ...

some pork dumpling more so...

and why would some ...

(standing in silence)...

(standing) ...

...

(standing) ...

...

Nick had sensed none-too-inexplicably some lowest fathom pushing upward against his tired soles, some trough at its deepest and no longer taking one's time for caring at all or ne'er considering, some wondering upon this or that solitary existence within which each passing day he could only hope to wither, as he saw it. Nothing had seemed to reap any benefit for Nick and, while some ritualized repast might have otherwise stood to convey to others, to him it simply bore out some futility with which he had lately been seeming to endure, one's more overwhelming sense of dread vindicated by some vision of his family toiling in the cauldron of self-doubt and despair. Some more whimsical turn in the ever more interminable line of human affliction, some boring down and emaciatedly into the pinyin muck which thus seemed to ease more rapturously with each passing day. Then some sound filtering down from

upwards would catch Nick's attention, some vaguely familiar call to sport and listening over to some — second base, first base and *why* some *special order* and more silence and more. Some sound dripping lazily from some tinier source just above and behind the busier man and trying to decide. Some second base, first base and rememberingly of one sunnier day when his uncle had taken the whole family to the Grand Concourse for some spectator sport affair, some gathering and watching in vain as some orbicular notion would go pursued through one wider expanse of greener field. Some never knowing or understanding but trying to encase themselves more self-delusionally, as he saw it, into some newer world manner of being and Nick could only remember how his father felt when he told him oh yes he thought. Some first base, then second and coming around for one more as the speaker box seemed to be playing a bit louder now. And prompting Nick to interrupt in such a way as to startle the busier man into prompter redress.

– Why special order? *What* so special about ...?

– *Fú zú gòu lǐ yóu*, replied the man brusquely.

Nick at once decided to persist in his present staying and indefinitely, if necessary. Some two more, or one more eliminatory note tick tocking over the tinier yet tinier loudspeaker still teetering above the busier man like some fog, some clouding over one's own better wont of reasoned expression. Some going over and again of trying to convince, some bok choy dumpling had never been so much in demand and wantingly of any need unnecessarily. Some needing for more, some restrictive regime with regards to ordering and who orderingly of what and why would anyone even bother to ply the bok choy dumpling to some other sunset park clientele bent on conforming to exemplars less exotically? Some second base, first base and rememberingly of one sunnier day when his uncle had taken the whole family to — but how could Nick have re-entered some such oft rendered account of lives past, ambitions abused and some overall rebuke knowingly of the roots and more principled dictates which had been abandoned along the banks of the Xi Jiang? Then with some other sportsman calling from behind and being within some more proper eliminatory note, some you're out you're out on strike one strike two and was just some wholly unnecessary backdrop to the conversation, some spoken conversation between Nick and the busier man who might never have been thought to tender some finer interest in the sports which would so while away the day for so many. Nick considered leaving deprived of the prized package which his father had ordained but