

Churchsteeple text

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for Jack Lessard

friend, teacher, composer

Sometimes when I look at that church I can sense another time, another place. It might be many things other than what it actually is. There is one like it on Amsterdam and 96th. And perhaps another on 3rd and 126th, but that is not more important than there having been one just like it at some other point in time. Or that it itself might have been right there at some other moment. Oh, that it could fold me into its pillared spires and let me observe what it has for so long! All the more so if it might be and have been at that place and that time. For I could then try and find him, who has escaped my imagination for so many years. He who set me on that journey toward Amsterdam. What did he do at eight in the morning? Where did he look for his daily lot and why did he not despair upon never finding it? Bread, sugar, cigarettes. The next game of chance to be had for so little and with the promise of so much gain. Listening to the sounds that shaped his sensibility at any given time, any given place and trying to make sense of it all so courageously. Sense of sound and syllable made even more difficult by the lack of sound and reasonable formation in a place from which he had arrived many years earlier. That time and that place. Foreign sounds and foreign ideals driven into his living daily as one of the chosen many, those who once looked at the church residing beneath the steeple in peaceful anticipation and never peaceful resolve. Awaiting the soft but steady rise into the steeple which looked far off into the sky resolutely. Peering learnedly up to the meeting point and in awe of the linear and tangential possibilities which it inspired. Leading necessarily to the defining system of another space and time, it would mock those who dared doubt the mission to which it pretended, while at the same time casting a nod toward the inevitable futility that lay as its foundation. At that place and time, he might have strolled down by the Hamilton Avenue bridge and perhaps bring his mind to bear upon that morning when he had first arrived into the bay, a child grasping onto the hand of his mentor, paternal intuition sending him on his lifelong journey. A treadmill of opportunity he would soon learn it was, if not imperfect then free from the deprecatory glances of the darker class. Secular endeavour unyielding to the church and steeple whose irony he was at a loss to comprehend. But only after many years when he was to father a child and again his child, who would sit and stare upwards at the steeple that caught his eye as he one day awaited routinely on his own, now of fourth generation. Pointed resolve dissolving into pointed guilt for his having abandoned the promised land. And finding himself once again among the stifling pillars of archaic reason. Cold and barren as the stone drearily, looking upwards again towards the painted dome and trying to spy through some stained glass the steeple which appears so seductively from without. And when his own child peers upwards innocently, never hoping to understand the labors which they had put forth unselfishly, he breaks down the languid demeanor which is his own and sobs pathetically. Trying to imagine that place and that time. Bread, sugar, cigarettes. What might have been his daily lot?

Or back further still, across the great chasm between who we should be now and what we were then. Did the little boy ever look up at that steeple and wonder why the sky seemed to appear so? Why the mist gathered anxiously into great clouds of colors and shapes, at times obscuring the churning blue while at other times not? At times revealing some softest yearning of the jaded class and at other times not? Sometimes questioning, other times peering into some wayward band of light within which one might be carried off to some distant star and look back toward oneself in pity? Or why it sometimes seemed to move with the greatest of urgency toward some

chosen destination while at others be presiding patiently over those who would choose not to pick themselves up off the pavement residing willingly and unrepentantly? Feeling nothing but sorrow for their aging souls and regret for opportunities lost, their eyes cast downward toward the least of all possibilities and never looking up in sudden awareness of just how easy is the escape into one's own shining light. The guardian of their own destiny reaches out to some most distant cloud and continues on toward the essence of her beauty. Chastened by that single moment of inspiration one could be made to rise above their own soiled existence. Church...Steeple...Sky... These the little boy might never have considered in his rush to toss the next stone, and when upon spying its insatiable need to return from above sit thoughtfully. Again looking upwards at the steeple and feeling sure that he too might one day reach so high. Far, far off into another place decorated with candy canes and baseball caps and bursting with the promise of a new order, some sound moral fiber reckoned solely by man's own being man. He was years away from understanding why that stone returned so wantingly. Would he too return indefinitely? Or was it some easy metaphor for that governing principle which defines cyclically the events throughout which history unfolds? A uniquely defining principle not defining at all, but merely some individual weakness, lack of character and constitution? There would always be inexplicable attractions to reckon with. Those between places and people, and feelings drawing one to or away from certain situations and commitments. Where need one look to acquire those tools for peering into the future and knowing the proper path? Teaching to touch upon one's own sense of foresight had become the child's destiny. Oh, but how poorly I have learned! The steeple is clear and decided in its chosen way, a fact even the little boy could perceive with his innocent gaze, yet seeming to know all the while that in its brazen determination would be found some means toward the redemption of many generations to come.

Jim sat looking at the pavement. He would like to have gone to spend some time at that breakfast place on Serrano but could not bear the thought of having to let on that he, too, had been caught up in the language school scam. *Vergonzoso* is what the newspapers said. Learning should be a worthy exercise, one to be shielded from those who would have it yield so easily to whim. Jim could not help but recall that even the tritest of ventures had been required to bear the seal. Those in the East Village displaying that nod of approval proudly for which they had toiled so long and hard. Years of poring over the tools and disciplines which might send one off either happily or scurrying hurriedly past the eatery windows toward some nearest refuge within which to redefine oneself. All the while bemoaning some lack of sound formation which had caught them unwittingly. For a much needed requirement it was. And if upon riding the Lexington Avenue northbound and past one's destination to almost Amsterdam, one might hail a crosstown and come round full circle to the place of their endowment. His own endowment. Sitting for hours and listening to the dearest voices. A time gone by and still being, flutes and rapturous voice rising slowly into one's own consciousness. Jim would sit staring at the clock on the library wall just above the librarian's mantel. Stark and unforgiving as its second hand ticked off the spending moments of his youth. Such was the one to take hold of, to listen to the *maestros* and make them his, strings and voices beneath a thunderous ovation of quiet desperation. The jaded class would become his to change or fashion as he saw fit. A right bequeathed him by they who had crossed on while looking back at the darkness, following some perfect pitch across the divide between what we should be now and what we were then.

It would take years and then more years and time to bring to fruition all that he had inherited, placing and square upon his own laden shoulders. Jim's teachers had been amongst the finest. He might nonetheless occasionally wonder as to the legitimacy of one's time being spent, still unknowing of some fairly future erosion of one's own youthful desire to enlighten. How quickly it would all come to pass! And so it seemed to Jim that he might have indeed found some proper path, until then seeking out one fair slightly figure, sure to ill-provide and this he might have liked to believe. Scholarship again coming back and holding on in desperation would tend to wantonly dissolve some white platinum hair length offering, scent of fresh flower sweetly carried over from some other place. Wary cliffs looking off from the Palisades might be telling of Jim's own dilemma as he approached the completion of his insipid daily pilgrimage, for it was from there that she had been long initiating some desperate calling out to Jim. Stepping off onto the subway platform would provide him one last chance for reconsideration. Climbing upwards on 136th St. and past some cheap urban hotel settlingly reminded of the opportunities which needed to be gotten hold of. Some scarcity of people and ideas, creativity disappearing and taunting Jim did tease one into the confines of what would become some lifelong embrace. Universities trying to find refuge within some past ideal would liken Jim to the very earthen stone from which Amsterdam had been built. Endless sun-filled cover over some hard-pressed curriculum would comfort Jim more than she who might complement the warm spring day into which he had placed all hope and desire. Unable to convince Jim that his was some wayward turn, laying a gentle hand upon some tired music remunerations hopefully endured and oblivious to all that the real world would eventually refuse to reconcile. Sounds and tones inspiringly of some other lost age, but now long forgotten and could overly extend this purely academic exercise. The harmonies which Jim had intoned would soon vanish down the cauldrons of some silent abyss. Still he would remain faithful to the proper calling, sound formation providing comfort to the weary historical shift that he would be destined to endure.

Jim chose instead to go over to the head office in hope of recovering some of the back pay he was due. Stevenson had said that she would just as soon sell her wares *ad hoc* rather than have to put up with those misers up north. They were all just shit according to her and tried to persuade Jim not to stay on any longer after they appointed dragon lady to head the district. But time breeds complacency and such breeds laziness, whereby Jim could not see any point in trying to revive what had died some time ago. A spirit spent through years of personal neglect and unintendedly at that. Going forward everyday into what would eventually become some flaccid exercise of body and frame come about, tender findings sometimes alighting beneath some still softer grammar of verbs and phrases mingled hurriedly. Jim would not know what was to be on his headway plate until ascending those dank stairs to street level at which cars and human form become joined in some dreary and time worn challenge. Did anyone ever manage to get ahead of themselves, wringing hands longingly at first but then lamentingly and not wanting more? Usually emerging at a difficult place, Jim would usually have to struggle to negotiate some proper line. And barely achieved, hurrying at first but then walkingly while venturing some daring glance at the international. Suites undoubtedly occupied by such whose careers had taken a different turn, sellers of dubious reputation, soldiers of fortune caught up in some whirlpool of continental competition. He would walk straight on or first off to the side and around the potted plants adornedly, false reassurance to the staff within, watching and listening for that hour of being on one's own. *Hasta mañana*. Then years of having had put himself up to matinal review, being passed on like some long overdue piece of furniture whose delivery date had been

pending. There upon reaching the second floor, Jim would sit patiently, thinking through the steps which would lead him to some eventual release and temporary life blood. Awaiting all the while that moment of subtle poetry, gentle redemption which oversaw some rising swell of intolerable confusion. Some lone cello singing out to the little ones, calling and prodding inexhaustibly amid missed opportunity, syntax frustrated by some overall yearning for just intercourse. Sitting across from those who might have been his most beloved audience, Jim had delivered his inane exaltation day in and day out. And although eventually bringing itself to bear in another place, he had been certain that one day it would all come crashing down in some sea of corporate satisfaction.

Ladrones y sinvergüenzas. Jim had arrived to the opposing shore with the idea of pressing on with his teaching career. While he had been of a modest value back home, he was made to feel somewhat of a nuisance over here and quickly became the object of many an unscrupulous character's search for inexpensive employ. Jim signed on to his first of many at 800 pesetas an hour. Catching the Number 7 train crosstown would deliver him to the Barrio de la Concepción, a quite faceless conundrum of medium-sized apartment buildings and office blocks. Señorita washing her sidewalk of unwanted debris as the little ones trot on home for lunch. *Comida mediterranea.* Jim himself would often get a bite before having to begin. Some unpleasant odor of rancid oil had not yet begun to dissuade him from the occasional repast. While always asking for the same, he inevitably imagined much more. Two pieces of bread between which some delicate completeness had always to be revealed. Whether it had been at John's diner or that less flamboyant place on Grand Ave., Jim would always come away with some latent satisfaction and expectantly of the next. Delicate completeness. Some hint of the sublime together with just the right dash of mayonnaise and *dijón*, over which the gardenest fresh leaf of lettuce were carefully set. He would delight in the variety which he had been afforded, one which presented itself freely, wholeheartedly and unexpectedly in some constant whirlwind of feast and flavor. Jim learned to go without such matter-of-factness at the *cervecería* but could never get used to the actual *bocadillo*, as if it were some understatement of our own lack of resourcefulness or ineptitude of spirit. Still, one was usually treated with the quiet dignity often alluded to, though empty and fraught with some false promise of psychic remuneration. Oh, yes. And some music from another time and place but mostly another place eeking out of some scratchy speaker placed slightly above the top shelf of an entire generation's morning delight. Just a drop in some gilded cup of coffee, or often taken *aparte* in stoic accompaniment to the dawn's first light. Some different tongue charring the minds of many but usually just covering the walls with unsensational strips of bland three-by-five. Upon which to display some everyday chatter, it all dissolved inevitably into one giant cacophony of sound and syllable squandered uncaringly. Going off far into another mind, Jim might momentarily forget about the lunch in front of him and consider if the boy, too, had felt his speech suffering undeservedly under the yoke, compromised so by overreach and insinuation. A latin verse calling to his imagination, he who had looked up at the steeple and, even then, continued looking far beyond the meeting point in order to subdue some last vestige of from where he would have come. For upon arriving into the bay on that morning, he would have had surely found his dialect to be one in small regard. Some once and still eloquent echo of beauty pushed aside in disregard unwittingly but nonetheless, as if listening to his father issue some last few utterances in that increasingly distant tongue. But what is one's own manner of speaking if not merely a means for moving toward some useful goal, some way of finding out who and where we are and what we should or could be doing? The little boy

would soon reject his present murmurings. To emerge anew amid reason and practicality, better prepared to confront the details which often dictate our own waking hours. Bread, sugar, cigarettes. In a new street, on some different corner to that on which his father would have bought him toys and sweets. *Gelato per il ragazzo, signore*. But only in the hope that such trapping, like the idiom itself, would merely serve as some bridge to what he could become. Church...Steeple...Sky... The meeting point between who we were then and what we should be now. Between a race bound by sound and syllable and one unfettered, that is to say, only by the demands that our fellow man places upon fellow man.

Jim had never been initially too keen on entering the office building in the Barrio de la Concepción. Its facade was stark and forbidding, some black marble set against square meters of concrete and gratuitous vegetation. Once inside the revolving doors, one was immediately desensitized by yet more marble, rising in great columns on either side and framing great panes of glass which seemed to inspire envy in the substantial piece of corporate humanity that happened to face it everyday. But places and situations did not always demand as much sacrifice as Jim might have originally expected, and he would often enjoy the short lift to the eighth floor. He normally arrived just upon most re-entering after lunch hour, so the elevators were usually crowded and Jim would be taken upon to eavesdrop on the moral tales which presented themselves. At times he would be thrown into some temporary state of translucent stupor, as if transformed into that poet who spent some considerable time transfixedly upon his own grey sock and under the influence of some strange narcotic taken daily in staunch dose. Scent of stale tobacco and iridescent shades of the scantily perfumed yawned at him encouragingly, animating him on to the next second, and the next until his upward journey was complete. Waning moments with brow furrowed by his lack of command, challenged without respite by those teasing him with other than his own mother tongue. Jim would press back against the back of the lift while laying canvass to some tender mass into which each syllable seemed to penetrate, one by one slowly in a rush of foreign grammar. Words and gentle pressure of sounds and smells all joined into the sensation that seemed to escape him always. And how could they not? After all, his experience was not theirs, nor might he wish it to be. Pure tones ringing out in unselfconscious disregard, climaxing on the swells which seemed to ignore the very audience for whom they were intended. Steadfast bell dissipating under much wider sky whose blue Jim could almost touch under the moistened fabric of some late afternoon's gentle shower. Incipient chatter about this or that, leading to nothing except Jim's personal vindication of what was left behind and where he should be going. Then at once caught up in some disorienting vacuum of fading conversation, some space suddenly gained through the withdrawal of those well come up to. Jim would find new breadth in his role as disinterested observer, and feel having had been completely served by some lukewarm stream of petty revelation which had accompanied him to the eighth floor. Once there, he daily confronted some unrelenting routine of malaise and malevolence set amid some faceless grid of pre-fabricated offices and welded cubicles. A construction and demeanor so opposed to the stone tradition of Castilla that Jim would be taken upon to once again immerse his forward thinking into the olive flesh of foreign syntax. Only then could he once again come to terms with the situation in which he found himself, light years away from a time and place the little boy had prepared for him, that which he had foregone so ungratefully. Ending up here at the Madrid branch of Nelson Marketing Inc., specializing in the study of habitual processes – soap powder, appliances, silk stockings– all bound together by some public thirst for consumer rendition. Enterprise sent over from some foreign land, trade indirectly linked to that of

the Netherland though routinely examined through one's own finer scope and appreciated for what it was. Acceptable so long as it were not to upset some finer tilt toward the undisputed maintenance of one's own superior character, superficial nuance designed to profit but never render easily.

His only student would be Dolores. She took great pride in being department chief and, aside from whether one had anything to do with the other, never let him in too quickly. There were usually a number of items to be addressed before class could begin, and which would be fine with Jim since he was paid strictly by the hour. Waiting outside her office door was nevertheless instructive. Puzzled glances and non-considered, idle office space whom no one might ever think too much of having to be wary of. He would often lose himself momentarily in the eighth-floor essence of his present predicament, looking down against some full-length window pane, playlike structures on a busy street dedicated to some most rapid transport within the circulatory confines. These were the daily attempts at transcontinental competition moving swiftly north and then back down again. Pale imitation as far as Jim was concerned, reflections of another place trying to apologise for some inescapable thrust into modernity. Awe-inspiring monuments towering out over Rector Street and Wall, showering their worthy inhabitants with some timeless reward cried out for one's just recognition. All the while calming the smoking ruins whose sometime pitying reminder of meaningless squander, nonetheless testament to the noblest ongoing endeavor, choked us to thoughts and tears harking back to that of the hungry masses entering a harbor full of light and sound adamantly. Al-Andalus as civilization committed once and always to some reasoned consideration of life and love for all who would care to have it, and staring in consternation at some carnage brought about in its name, destructors of tarnished vision and dubious character probably revelling through the holy place onto which Jim would be staring down at that very moment.. Perfectly peaked arches and gently swaying rhythms, kneeling modestly toward Mecca, naked humility converted into blasphemy by those naysayers who would use the corporate misdeed not as signpost, but as some means for bludgeoning the innocent. Jim had probably seen that structure dozens of times, but only in seeing it from above could he appreciate the vivid contrast it forged against some jet black asphalt, and marking off neatly from its surroundings. The irony of its being next to the city morgue was inescapable as far as Jim could see, tyranny of the old wallowing in some splendid homogeneity while writing off all that refused to conform. Some storefront gateway of Moslem engender lining the walkways of Bushwick Avenue had always belied an easy, if not sometimes turbulent, reside. Welcome your tired masses and poor in spirit while with the steeple and the bell calling out to anyone wishing to carve out some place of their own, advancing to beyond the meeting point from which Jim had been unable to proceed.

He would then turn in frustration to face the consumer study group within which he found himself. This particular enterprise had been in Madrid for just nine years and had already risen to large market dimension, picking apart the whys and wherefores, habits and peculiarities of some consumer class. Endless pages of thought engaging questionnaires were churned out day in and day out from the very room in which Jim would be standing. Researching everything from where a particular item had been purchased, why it had been so, how it had been so and inquiringly of whether such action might be repeated. Results were tabulated to the minutest nuance. Reeling off and grinding out a lathe of hurling figures which could only make the average citizen cower in unblended insignificance. Jim would on occasion overhear some casual remark, as if having been foretold by his lift to the eighth floor. In this way, he would be able to appreciate the more sordid details of his most worrisome student's outward regard.

Considered a veritable bitch by her entire staff, Dolores would often keep notes on each and every one of them tucked neatly inside her *bustier*. It was the only place she was sure no one would ever find them –not that she would ever give a damn if anyone had– and thereby be able to well document some smallest detail when one came up for corporate review. This they all resented and more. At Christmas time, for example, the company directors would give her department some special bonus if they had performed well during the year. It was intended to be distributed squarely and promptly at the beginning of the month. Dolores would always wait until someone either very brave or very cash poor might decide to claim their rightful reward. In that way, she could always get away with passing on just a bit less than what had originally been intended, and with not even the slightest furtive glance from one who obviously had nothing to lose from such bland assertion, but so much otherwise from being too inquisitive. Being too discreet was never one of Dolores’s vices and she would use the extra guarded cash, though not directly toward her personal benefit, to organize small dinner parties – *un petit dîner* as she liked to call them– for her most lucrative clients. *¿Voudriez-vous une autre truffe?* She could often be heard showing off her command of other idioms in and around the office and neither was this a source of kinship among her staff. Most of them actually handled themselves much better than she in this regard – which is hardly a compliment under broad review – but had to usually settle for group classes and often third-rate at that. Sanchez herself had been known to attend more than one of her midnight soirees, and Dolores quickly became one of Sanchez’s prized patrons. Jim’s time soon became divided amongst her, some military groups and a couple of classes over at a telephone company switching station in the city center.

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

Still at other times, she would treat him as a trusted and worthy confidant. This and a potentially tender experience reviled Jim the most. For in her heart of hearts she knew how the staff would speak of her, and amid whisperings the same was

probably true of her clients and even those whom she had always considered to be her best friends. Jim as consoler and healer, unrequited confessional high above ground floor rebuke toward those who might stand and stare at the great black marble structure, and question why this particular building and this particular enterprise had one day appeared amidst their own living space. Impingingly on the very neighborhood ease with which they had always carried on with their lives. And here was Jim, as unlikely testament to it all. Repentant of the sins committed against staff and consumer public alike, violation of private trust preoccupied Jim. And yet there were those who persevered in blaming all those who had had the courage to take up the dare, millions of forward-looking spirits in total ignorance and tacit disapproval of the excesses that would inexorably pass in their name, industrial turning under of those who were at the foundation of its majesty. But should an entire generation and dozens more to follow be disqualified on the basis of what mistakes are made in seeking to reconstruct a life form out of some dark rubble? Consideration of weak result as other than some signpost suggested to Jim an easy link with the destructors. Rector Street and Wall as guardian and enharmonic vision to that which had fallen so near. It certainly did preoccupy Jim just as much as if he had not been supposed to be there *quod docere*. But for better or for worse he was, and it would bring him to bear upon the unseemly task which was his. Dolores had always been motivated as far as the finer points of grammar were concerned. Hashing and rehashing the same regular structures were of little difficulty provided she had some proper source of self-betterment at her side. Speaking in the past in such a way as to avoid any self-reasoned misunderstanding was of the utmost concern, and as well it should have been. Past endeavor continuing to present form demanded a more general feel, some present perfect oration seasoned with a bit of qualifier perhaps, but nevertheless perfect in its need for open-endedness. And not just in any continuous sense, which would in fact become another matter entirely. Open unknowingly of when one action occurred or had occurred required some secular vision, one free from the dogmatic view toward time as being absolute and unforgiving. Time and place resolved as in complete suspension of mind and thought, relaxing air of psychic drift relieving all pretension of temporal exactitude. Jim might then pause in consideration of the proper way to correct her, taking fully into account some apparent need for accuracy in citing times and places whose past was clearly identifiable. She rarely doubted his expertise, but even in not doing so belied her own belief that he was doing all this out of sheer necessity and unwanting of any didactic or pedagogic remuneration. Thus, any correction he might venture would be accepted as expounding less on some true meaning regarding any general sense of time, and more on the superficial life requirements which one might possess at any given moment. Or for reasons of unintended confluence of past events which blur along the course of one's lifetime, but then redefine themselves at some particularly lucid moment in depicting the evolution of what we have become.

Dolores would have tired of working the grammar by well before halfway through the class, and Jim was never one to miss a cue. After all, as Sanchez had once professed so self-righteously, administering privately was unlike the protocol to be maintained during a group class. *You mustn't permit them to chew on it for too long! You'll need to consider using a little psychology.* She would always squint just a bit on the last word, enunciating sharply the second syllable which, aside from presenting an occasion for some particularly concussive sound, became the precursor to every subsequent britishly articulated vocal tone that she might tend to speak. Dolores would always be in outright anticipation of some free form which Jim was about to introduce. Willingly laying her pen on the table meant that she was no longer disposed to taking

any more notes, anxious to rely instead on her improvisatory skills. Thorough satisfaction with having had arrived past the point of playing nemesis to her entire staff, she would now desire to feel Jim upon her in total confrontation. Preparedly for the most gruelling sparring match, war of words for which Jim had to summon his most professional state of being. He always tried to identify the most pertinent professional topics, which were always preceded by some text recounted verbally and in loud voice. Supermarket shelves were taking up a fair amount of Dolores's time during Jim's stance at the company, and he would often recall her passionate tirades in support of vertical product subjugation, arms and fingers gesticulating wildly while searching for just the right piece of vocabulary to cushion her obvious discontent with some inferior explanation. Jim might then shift mightily in his chair and project that not-so-quite-sure air certain to keep her talking. For her time was his, old world filling the new with tedious justifications of why it had taken so long to take up the chorus, and when finally having done so how it could possibly be of any use now. Computer driven elegy improved through the illusion that some grander space had become small, useful selections borrowed with all the while ridiculing those who might tear down the pedestal upon which Dolores and the rest were time honoredly situated. Modern reach in search of that perfect supermarket setting, packaging impeccably designed for the most effective clash among cultures would continually motivate Nelson Marketing, Inc. to enlarge its scope. And yet, would forcing some such corporate ridden practicality really matter in the long run? Could Dolores and her kind truly find it reasonable that they should be brought into the realm of Rector Street and Wall? For they who power some forward-moving engine know all too well how to distance themselves from its hierarchal tradition. Upheld throughout centuries in reverence of some social deprecation and unequally sharing in its proud harvest.

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

Jim's decision to pass through the head office had been prefaced by some uneasy determination to make things right. He had harbored no prior inclination to justify some recently occurring tendency toward one's sadder misgivings. And so he continued in the assuredness that all of this could one day be risen above. Coming down along some final block length, he fell well within the shadow of some white granite cathedral spire, markingly of the spot at which he had been able to find his way easily toward some pleasanter repose. The head office had been carefully removed from the academy itself, and this proved to be no accident. Its students had generally been

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

—Is that you, Jim?

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

—It happened.

—What?

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

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

—Can anything be done about it now?

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

—Come again?

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

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

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

—We'll see, said Jim.

Walking back toward Serrano, Jim was able to nearly taste the smoke and petrol that seemed to provide him a bank along which to organize his thoughts. He looked for a bridge over the thick aromatic track that arose, black haze in the closest geographic element, cars and trucks moving toward some soiled destination. Once across, Jim's next mind drifted back to the ordinary job. Knowing that which one has to do unencumberedly. Steadily finding one's way and without tending toward any pretext of having to do more. The child holding on to the hand of his mentor, paternal intuition looking out over a sea of thick black, going forward unafraid. And then his child who would soon have to abandon all rightful formation in material support of his faithful bestowers. Land of plenty and opportunity to take but at the hardest cost. Jim's father was the first to be born in the new land. Many professions would be flouted around him, he unable to benefit from any of them and never imagining the day when he would be measuring up Jim. Schools and universities done over with some slightly dangerous academic overtone, temptation to look back at the dark character and bestow upon it a glimmer of soft approval. Jim quickly learned that earning the seal was not more important than understanding why they had arrived in the first place. Sound formation placing one within reach of some egalitarian ideal first and foremost, a gesture they had cherished if hardly understood. Jim's father had worked for forty years on the piers, loading and unloading, an honoured routine made regal by its having answered faithfully to the call of foreign lands. Distant ports still heralding the need for constant uplift, port of call and stevedore acting as one to push this tired race towards moral completion. How envious Jim had become! Forty steadfast years of rhyme and rigor, seasoned brow made more so by the prevailing breeze cutting through the Battery on its enlightened path toward the Netherland. Park players passing time, gazing over at the ships trudging forth to the Netherland historically. From which was built the foundation of this thriving trade, towing and lifting, a job ordinary and vital to who we are and what we will become. But Serrano continued to cut to the root of just what it was Jim had still to do. Like it or not, he could not imagine his father caught up in any such kind of laboral irrelevance. Student squalor reaping the banal reward of sounds and syllables trimmed to the turnings of their own sordid ascendancy barely gratified. Churches robbed of even the most necessary accoutrements, saddened by the path onto which its afterbearers had been diverted. And one might see a steeple rising above some traffic jam in Red Hook and wonder if it might in fact be one and the same. But no. Jim could not fool himself any longer, for the *entorno* of his father's was not his. This saddened him dearly. Visions of his father sitting in cool respite amongst the vines of a well-deserved jubilation, cigar brandished evening flashed into his sensibility with every doorway he passed. Thinking and dreaming back beneath some ripened wine fruit. High haze skyline beach smilingly over some girdered expanse stretching back and over toward Jim's daily nurture. Wondering what must have become of some unorthodox

tendency. Years omitted had served no true purpose, and paternal unknowing would become his own least painful endure, some none-too-mutual feeling which derided and tormented Jim. The well-groomed kaleidoscope sounding out a whirling vision in his head. Church. Steeple. Church. Reality still slipping back into a whitewashed concrete magnificence wall, throne of angels and landscape resolutely gave in to a finer relaxing moment. Late day, freshly turned garden render intoxicated with its youthful play watering down upon some generational photograph shift. Three across, and then some wry smile eeking its way out from his father's face, sincere and robust with all the spark which Jim had only been able to dream of. Would he someday be able to reclaim such humble frame? Or had heartache become too cast for the ever-burgeoning sense of remorse into which he mired? Neighbors darting out seemed threatening to Jim, his executioners carrying out this worn and disappointed paternal sentence. Military contracts, he thought. Jim recalled the last time he had done military work. It was poorer pay than most but still there was a bit of satisfaction in being somewhat useful in the grander scale of things. Jim would arrive to the barracks everyday at exactly 4:15. Any earlier would have meant having to park in the visitor's lot beyond the sub-official's working quarters. This was greatly unpleasant as it was usually knee deep in mud from the water which continually ran down from some broken sewer pipe draining off from the latrines. The smell was overwhelming, and besides Jim could never walk the five minutes back to his classroom without running into that insatiable staff sergeant who never tired of demonstrating his verbal prowess. When upon the various officers' beginning to abandon their posts for some evening free from the usual military rigor, Jim could unobtrusively set himself into their places. By the time anyone could realize his impertinence, class was out and he was gone inextricably committed to the next day's lesson.

Jim ended up in the breakfast place after all. Not wishing to have to confront any of those English boys, he slipped unnoticed into one of the side booths. The usual ambient thick with obnoxious intent made him feel even queasier than usual. Swirling toasted sensations mixed with the uncertainty that had again befallen him, Jim managed to spy a moment when any of the three tending bar could prepare him a *café solo*. He had never ceased to be amazed at the fluidity with which some endless number of single servings could pop themselves onto the time worn altar each day. Rejuvenating constantly among delusional cries of wait for this or that. Jim recalled how his father's father had matinally set down the single serving – one, two or more. No doubt then from sheer habit spawned by a lifetime of wanton self-examination, all the while with waiting for this or that chance to make pristine sense of it all, never sure of its global outcome, confidently suggesting that it was as it had to be and why it must continue. Jim struggled to remember that many years earlier, with his hand joined to that of his paternal mentor, entering into a bay fraught with real or dubious notions of guarded success, he had looked back at the dark character, but then in repugnance quickly turned back again. Looking eagerly toward the next morning's ritual of distant but certain plenitude. This Jim considered as he suddenly saw fit to pity those engaging in delusional thought on that particular morning, for here there was nowhere to go. Even distant success would seem to be impossible, so long as he continued getting about with the English boys. Stevenson had warned Jim of the superfluousness of their intent. After all, none of them ever had precedents who had crossed over into the bay. And why should they? Pompous yearnings and subservient to some blackened class of corporate irregularity.

Jim gazed long and hard into the coffee sitting in front of him. If he decided to return to doing military work, he would again be obliged to put up with the rantings

of Sanchez. Jim had always guessed that pinning down all those lieutenant colonels might have meant providing favors to them and their subordinates. Sanchez herself was known to have had more than one illicit tryst which, although repugnant to the rest, undoubtedly impressed those who saw great merit in the acquisition of new prospects. But Jim saw no reason to concern himself with the inner dealings of her obviously thriving enterprise, and began to warm to the thought that it just might be the only way to go, at least for now. Some coffee cup dwindling slowly down to whitened alabaster would inevitably ring in the hour of language study. Post-*comida* even in military circles demanded some frame of mind and spirit clear and for the ready, free from the hungering moments of late morning. After Jim's car was in place, he would arrive to his classroom at just around 4:20. The room always reeked of lately spent chalk dust and, as it mixed with some well-directed rays of a late afternoon sun, it cast an air at once suffocating and melancholic over the hard wooden floor. Well-aligned table tops mapped out several oases of temporary scholarship, and Jim would always wait patiently for the last person to file in before beginning. Sitting at his desk pretending to be fussing over something or other would have inevitably relieved him of some pre-class calling on. This he came to rather late, and had previously been made to endure many moments of difficult conversation. One corporal he could recall as having had been particularly challenging, and with telling joyously of some high Alicante sun, afternoon reminder of the lifelong insignificance to which one might easily succumb. It would continue to bear down on Jim. Recountingly of youthful escapades gone wrong and discovering some military undertaking as Jim listened in feigned contemplation. While all approached the task headlong and with the same dutiful stepping out with which they had been trained, these were indeed more mindful of the pledge. Straining to overcome some sorely inadequate grammatical refrain, the corporal would attempt to lay out the smallest detail for Jim, and having struggled to free herself from the smothering comfort of some well-intentioned womb early on. She would eventually become engaged in some starker logistical analysis, heinous warfare plans far removed from that more commonplace line so dreaded by the rest of her regiment and of this she felt proud. Some certain nuclear or biological delight straining the face of this once completely misspent Spanish girl. That the world might eventually become consumed within some foretold armageddon would never concern her, and nor should it. Laboratory techniques misunderstood might go dancing upon her somewhat more egalitarian vision of military life, and with female arguments drowning out some none-too-pervasive adolescent warmth. Olive drab masking the yearnings sought after within some just recent past would momentarily depress Jim, but then urge him on to some higher working ordeal, and consideringly of this just fortitude which seemed to engage her frail slightly frame. Past experiences melting into Jim might begin to forge some momentary bond between the two, she continuing to entice some complimentary remark with which to soothe over one's overall desire for tenderest rapport. He more than willing to go along with this wholly unsolicited non-committal exercise of verbal interplay. Jim had been used to starting each class with some written exercise, and when at times his intrusion upon the corporal could no longer be adequately sustained, he might invite her to begin on that day's assignment and until the rest of the class arrived. His adrenaline would have peaked by then, and some softest transition towards a more multiple choice obligation would have charmed even the likes of Sanchez. Jim might take comfort in knowing that his was indeed some civilian prize undertaking. Four or five more years could have easily presented itself if not having been for an oncoming appreciation of the more somber need for some incessant non-satisfaction. Toward unhappiness would always prevail, and sensing some ever stronger sensation for a

reconciliation within these many years to follow. As distant banter grew louder, Jim would be obliged to return to his involuntary retreat. The boys had by now become heavily engaged in some dubious pedagogical exchange and, if it were not for Jim's having had taken some more cynical turn, he might have considered joining in. Jim rather began to feel somewhat consumed by it all. Unseemly conversation at this or any other time of the day, and he would be inclined to have no part of it.

By the time Jim left the breakfast place, it was well into Spanish lunch hour. The sun was quite high now and the air seemed to have warmed without regard for most, cool and comfortable reminders of the hours just past. Heavier-than-usual attire became a midday reality, some exercise for prying into one's own sense of self. Dark glances thrown the way of those whose dress had been adequate to fend off the morning chill were vindictively directed by the more traditional, toward those who dared invest in the practicality of adapting to sudden change. And how odd it seemed to Jim, for nowhere had the dividing line been drawn so markedly than in this city on high plain, atmospheric layers absent denying all soft transition and disregard for some temperance of climate in which one could always confide. South Ferry mid-afternoon mist relaxing one's worn down resistance with times and distances equally distributed jogged his memory. Tales of sea and salt against some finer notion carried readily across a great bay and in just finished study of one tarnished melody. Counterpoint mixed with historical fare would be intoxicating as it blended on a warm spring day. Studies en route to the place of one's own bosom life and recent remembering of what needed to be on the next day's plate, when once again he would pilgrimage toward the masters sitting in wait atop the bell scholarly cliffs of Amsterdam. It must have been the reason and rationale which held him captive to the bay during all those years. Just that which they had experienced upon first entering is what truly enticed, tales of sea and salt upon some finer inward search. A punishing light rang down on Jim, at times mixing sadistically with the sky and the bell throwing off its maddening vibration near and above. Harking to some warmer temperatures, it continued to ignore its beguiled audience arrogantly in its guise as keeper of the faithful. While such a sound would have been well appreciated on Amsterdam – bosom of the beautiful tones which had always required some more proper guardian – here it was in excess. Some hapless relic of another time whose was still and without betterment. Jim thought that if he were indeed serious, today it would have to be. Sanchez's office had been on Fuencarral the first time around, some pleasant enough street full of later-era cathedrals. Jim had barely had his fill of it when he decided to leave upon finding some better laboral situation. *You shall not receive any money for the month!* Sanchez always spoke scoldingly, some perfect complement to her peculiarly castrating appearance. She and the rest certainly had the upper hand in all of this, but a bit of courtesy would have been none too overreaching. Since the boom, she had been working out of some larger office space on Castellana, more upscale setting for the type of high stakes fare in which she pretended to engage and making it all the more difficult to perceive them for the bunch of fakers that they were. Sanchez could pull the wool over the eyes of the most seasoned entrepreneur, easily convinced of some necessity for sound and smart language command. Jim might have walked some short distance to the main avenue and then caught a northbound bus. He would then have arrived rather quickly to his destination. And too quickly for any impression that he would have liked to offer, for nor did he wish to present himself as having been burdened by some blatant necessity for returning to Sanchez's employ. Besides, Jim would be playing too fast and loose with some later lunch hour uncertainty, surely to cause him nothing but unending confusion and delay. *Sobremesa*. He decided to go on foot. It was a pretty fair distance, but the time would be

well spent. Newspaper stands hawking the latest fashion magazines an easy effort, lingerie boutiques calling in those who might have otherwise forgotten how to make the most of their good fortune, plying and peeling away one hope after another in generous demur. Jim continued moving within some well-directed lethargy. Some quicker glance off and to his right would bring about meagerly, some double-digit visual reminder of just how far he had still to walk. Some sun drenched early afternoon respite continued to elude, and it was evident that winter went fast receding, some colder infatuation growing fonder along the rutted *desagues* lining the streets of Madrid. When at last Jim began to arrive, thoughts of endless years spinning out into some blackened abyss again terrified, and he was made to acknowledge the towering insignificance of that which we all strive to confound. Some self-inflicted web of daily misfortune to which we invariably cling so dearly. Gilded imaginings of success spurring on some sporadic bands of envy tauntedly, and notions of seldom gracious acts of prostitution being realized everyday in the welcoming heights high above the gray track of Castellana.

Jim must have sat for another hour or more on some soiled bench opposite the entrance to number 219. Periodically glancing down at his watch only seemed to have produced some inner prolong, tempting pleasantly upon some neighborhood vested relief. Glancing downward and again had only frustrated Jim until realization taking hold, time increasingly remarked and stopped. Time had slowly stopped, and obliged Jim to once again curse his stillborn fortune. Time costingly and at the mercy of some gadgetry purchased offhand. Jim tapped on the watch in hope that something sluggish or misplaced might be revived, but it was no use. It had indeed stopped. And Jim began to feel the wage of his indecision threatening him once again in some puerile way, headlong fantasy winking back at Jim and retiringly in quiet dissolution. Behind and in front buzzed the constant whoosh of cars and motorbikes oppositely addressed, one urging him forward and the other backward. One up toward some saving station promising speedy westward tilt and out beyond the meeting point, the other down to some blithe continuation of his continental journey. Jim strained to hear the bell tolling out over Plaza de Castilla, shades along some gray track transforming each vibration into a death knell, kaleidoscopic images challenging his deepening gaze into the lobby of number 219. One, two, three and more it sounded until Jim was confident that he had indeed waited for some proper time. He would be able to leave it off at a jeweller's on his way back, served politely and proper *en el acto* until feeling sure that some recognition of time had indeed been restored. Jim now felt the push of circumstance acting in disrespect to all that used to be his, urging him on to some mindless sequence with noise and youth distracting. Those of a distant motivation which used to be his, denying him any looking back and mockingly of some more pressing task. Castellana seemed to be full of these as he at last charted a course through the fast track, two lanes but then not and in clear defiance of some inner highway piercing the heart of his daily confine. Cars and utility vehicles piled randomly in some horizontal relief congestingly, then not knowing which path to take confused Jim. Number 219. But why the porter disappeared smartly, only to appear again he would wonder. Damp asphalt giving way to puddles of lately fallen rain water challenged as he gazed downwards, and then the utility vehicle protrudingly well beyond forced Jim to return momentarily. Puddles of lately fallen water framing some tire stained with mud and excrement from one late hour advance. Warm voices again softly distracted Jim, gently gliding over some spent existence whose only recuperation lay in this hapless course towards number 219 and with the porter and the bell. Why might it be sounding again? Warmer voices still and the bell masked the porter and Jim became newly confused. Parallel motion getting him nowhere displaced at number 217, he sighed and felt further from his destination. He

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