

Enzo Scavone

Fu Dinxiang

Fu Dinxiang stands on the Brooklyn-bound platform of the N, Q, R-train at the Canal Street station. A slender boy with buzzed, black hair and a pallid face. His dark eyes begin a nonchalant expression which his forehead, mouth and cheeks have trouble completing. A breeze rising out of the tunnel flattens his wide, worn out t-shirt to his skinny upper body. It blows into the sides of his open sweater jacket. His baggy jeans are stained, barely hanging on to his slim waist. His sneakers cry for replacement, but Fu doesn't hear. The train is coming. As the doors open he gets in and sits down on the hard, blue plastic bench. The air in the car is cold and he zips his sweater jacket. The train's engine is completely quiet for a brief moment. Then, a loud buzzing sound, the door signal, and the doors close. Fu looks forward to the train passing over the bridge and being able to see the tall skyscrapers through the windows. Soon after that, however, the train will pull into Atlantic-Barclays. He tries to stay ahead of this thought.

The conceptual laziness of the Atlantic Barclays subway station. Easy-to-clean tiles and dirt and ever-moving throngs of people. Fu remembers when he used to come here with his grandfather; every weekend and often on weekday nights, too. On a laundry cart his grandfather would carry an electric keyboard that he

had bought in a second hand store in Chinatown. They would go to the lower level, the platform where the D, N, and R-train stop and his grandfather would set it up. Fu would watch him and the strangers passing by. If Fu carried any toys, he would now stick them in his pockets or his backpack to have his hands free. After his grandfather had set down a cardboard box in front of the keyboard and put a couple of bills and coins in it, Fu would sit down at the keyboard and play. His grandfather would stand a little apart with his hands clasped behind his back and try to gauge the faces of the passers by at the sight of his six-year-old grandson playing the keyboard like one of those classical European masters.

Since he had been a small child, Fu had been trained to play pieces on the keyboard. His grandfather would set it up in the living room, next to the blaring TV, and switch it on. He would press a couple of buttons and then little red dots would light up on the keys in a flickering and confusing pattern. His grandfather would tell Fu to try to catch the dots with his fingers. Fu would see the blinking dots on the keys and try to catch them. When he pushed a key, a sound would come out. The first time this happened, Fu startled a little in surprise. He would push another key and a different sound would come out. First he wasn't so good at catching the red dots, but as he got better he realized that by catching the dots with the right finger, in the right order, and at the right speed he would play a melody. Just like the ones his grandfather would play for him on cassettes. His grandparents made him sit at the keyboard for the most part of a day telling him that if he improved, they could go out together to play in the streets and people would give them money.

Fu remembers the many endless afternoons in their apartment on Henry Street. While he practiced, his grandfather would watch TV next to him getting worked up about something on the screen. Hours

would pass until Fu could stop playing. When he was done he felt very exhausted and relieved. After practice he liked to look out the window onto the life outside--like he's looking out the train now. But through this window he only sees the darkness of the tunnel. Opaque and impenetrable. He's getting a headache and perspiration is accumulating under his sweater. He feels a little sick and terribly tense. He doesn't want to look out the window anymore. Nothing is happening and he gets angry at the thought that it's taking him forever to get to Brighton Beach. He checks the display showing the stops and before realizing how many stops there still are, he turns his gaze back to the window, quiet and serious. He feels contempt for the conductors of the train and holds them responsible for its slow movement. He feels trapped in a loop, like having to repeat something over and over again many, many times.

The years passed and Fu went out into the stations with his grandfather, until one day his grandfather didn't take him anymore. Fu didn't ask why. He was happy about not having to do it anymore. He had been fifteen then. Soon afterwards, Fu took a job in a warehouse in Chinatown and stayed mostly to himself--even when he didn't work. As he grew, he found out that most things in life can be done the same way he had when he had pushed the keys on the keyboard. You simply go through the motions. You repeat and repeat until your hands do the task by themselves and your head doesn't bother with it anymore. When your head stops thinking and your hands are on their own, you feel the rest of your body more. When his hands went off like that Fu felt like he was really hungry, really had to go to the bathroom, and really wanted to kiss a girl--all at the same time. Something deep within his body complained. And with every repetition of the task his hands were performing it complained more.

Fu met Yevgeniy at work. Yevgeniy (Zhenya for short) is a delivery guy. He lives in Brighton Beach and delivers goods to the warehouse where Fu works. After Zhenya's truck was unloaded, he and Fu would sit outside on the sidewalk on crates or whatever they could find and smoke a cigarette--talk about this and that. Zhenya quickly picked up that Fu felt strange most of the time and wanted to help Fu, he said. One Friday, Fu went to his place in Brighton Beach. After some beers Zhenya convinced him to snort dope with him. Fu had sniffed tobacco before. He had enjoyed that quite a bit. At first it seemed weird to sniff the floury white powder, but why not? Fu quickly realized that dope was nothing like tobacco. After he had snorted it and the tingling in his sinuses had vanished, he could feel the complaints of his body vanishing along with it. He felt like his arms were finally calm and belonged to him. His body was quiet; all parts at once. Fu felt like he could finally look out onto the life outside. It was wonderful. He stayed at Zhenya's that weekend snorting dope in regular intervals. He returned to work on Monday. There he put his hands back to work once more, but all his head could think of was the coming Friday when he would go over to Zhenya's again. Every Friday he went. And every Friday his body would stop complaining. Just like it will soon today.