

taking time to be ready for her if she asks. He came to a newspaper stand less than a block from the station. He surveyed the papers for sale, bought a copy of the *Daily News* and opened it a few yards away. The first story he saw was "Mayor in New Bind". Above the title was a photo of the city mayor, his face, tired and frustrated, as he pressed a fist into his cheek. Nathan tried to read the story but could not. The words did not stay put and he gave up trying for them. He turned the page with a jerk of his hand and discovered the headline, "Demonstrators Ask for New Policy". The photo with the story showed several people carrying signs as they listened to a man speak outside city hall. A woman in the crowd had been yelling by the camera when the photo was taken and her angry face seemed set on Nathan as he read. Beyond the newspaper, he heard the steps of the people passing in the street. As he slowly read the story, he felt the sharp cold bite at his hands and sink down the sleeve of his shirt into his arms. No, he thought, I can't keep this up. I won't make myself freeze. He folded the newspaper and stuffed it in his blazer pocket. He turned and walked up the street toward the subway station. The entry and the first concrete steps down showed dim and dingy before him. He descended. On the platform, he put his newspaper in the recycling bin and edged toward the track to await his train.

When it arrived, Nathan stepped inside with a small group and sat in one of the hard plastic seats by the wall. The car doors closed and the train started uptown. Nathan leaned forward hoping to sit comfortably. Above, he saw the reflections of the other passengers on the windows as the train advanced underground. The images appeared

and disappeared as lights were passed along the route. He saw a woman with a shopping bag sulking a few seats to his right. A man in a white shirt and khakis appeared to him close by studying the car floor. Who were these people and why were they here?, he asked himself. The train raced whining along the track and its bottom clacked hard as it passed between sections of rail. The noise sung in his ears. He considered he was moving fast toward the next station, his destination. His back tensed. The train slowed and pulled to a stop at his station. The standing passengers moved toward the door and those seated stood. Here I am, he thought, his heart beating hard. When the car doors opened, the passengers stepped onto the platform. He rose, drawing breath, and went toward the doors then out them. The passengers that had exited the train walked toward the turnstile and the stairs leading to the street. Nathan followed, keeping behind them. He passed through the turnstile and ascended the grey concrete stairs. The sky and a lamppost showed past the stair top and he breathed harder. The people on reaching the street dispersed. Suddenly alone, Nathan cut a sharp right and crossed the street.

He reached a small park and spotted the courthouse immediately beyond. The courthouse was a long, granite building of three stories set on a small rise of land. A pediment, like a long, stately ledge, topped its front, and rows of framed windows extended along its sides. The large compact granite blocks that made up the building presented a near seamless face. The place had a formal, solid appearance. Nathan drew to a stop well before it. In the park around him was a grove of bare maple trees by the

courthouse street. The grass beside the trees was still a bit green despite the winter and a few young children, who had come with their parents, called and ran along the paths. An equestrian statue in the park center had several pigeons strutting around its base. One bluer pigeon flew onto the marble figure and roosted. Nathan stood admiring it. He wondered for a moment what it would be like to be the bird. I would go where I will if I was, he thought. I'd fly anywhere without asking anyone if I should. I would feel free. I never feel I can now. He watched the bird hop and descend from the statue, then fly away. Nathan dropped his eyes and walked for the courthouse across the street.

In the building, Nathan took the stairs to the second floor and walked straight down the hall for Room 251, the courtroom where he was to have the divorce finalized. His wife Jan sat on a bench beside the room door at the hallway's end. Jan was a large woman with wide, blue eyes and curly, blonde hair bunched high on her head. Her heavysset face was soft at the cheeks beside her pressed, dark pink lips; her chin, a thick slope of flesh, melded to the middle of her neck. Beneath her tan blazer Nathan spotted the end of her dragon green dress and black shoes. She doesn't give me any good feeling, he thought, drawing near her.

When he first met Jan years ago at a social luncheon, Nathan had liked her. He had never been a skilled talker but, as they chatted that day by the sandwich table, she made him feel that he simply could listen to her without being a bore. He found she liked sharing her opinions with him. On her career, theatre, politics: she ranged the gamut. This made it easy for a quiet man like him to have a relationship. As they dated,