

29 July - 1 August 99

1 Seville

Almu's brother works for RENFE, the Spanish rail monopoly, and got us onto the AVE, the high speed rail to Seville. We met him at the train station, and he nodded to the ticket collector, and we passed on in to the cafeteria car, where the supervisor told us to wait until everything was settled. There were about eight people in the cafeteria car when the train started going, and I wonder if they were all guests of somebody's. The conductor led us to our seats, which is a feeling of regal luxury, even better than paying lots of bucks for an upper class seat, which anybody can do. The in-trip movie was Wag the Dog.

When we got to Seville, it occurred to Almu that her sister, who works for Iberia Airlines, was here in town today. So we walked over to her hotel, which was nearby, just down la Avenida Kansas City. The building was kind of ugly, but it was indeed a four-star hotel. You could tell by the incredibly cold air conditioning, the mirrors absolutely everywhere, and the little boxes or bottles of every imaginable type of hygiene product. When Almu and I arrived, the full crew of four or five planes was at the check-in, all in full uniform. After a few hellos to the crew, we went up to Begoña's room. The room was nice, with two beds joined up, comfy chair, lots of drawers, more mirrors everywhere, a safe in the closet, and a TV which we couldn't quite figure out how to work (Bego the pro got it to play the radio). Having played with everything there was to play with and eaten the welcome fruit basket, we went out to search for a café.

2 On Quaintness

I will take the opportunity of the walk through Seville to expound briefly on the concept of 'quaintness'. My impression is that this is the one most common adjective which people from the USA use to describe Europe in general. ¿Where does it come from, this quaintness, and why can't we in the US find the quaintness formula, bottle it, and sell it? Only a small part of the Big Q comes from history. Within almost every city in Europe there's the original city, which involves small, narrow streets that have no order about them, and the modern city, which looks like any city in the US. London lacks the old city center because it burned down and was replaced by the set of Blade Runner. Paris lacks the old part because everything's been torn down and designed for cars.

This is the second fundamental aspect of quaintness: a lack of cars, which are the anathema of quaintness, (unless they're old and function badly). The aforementioned narrow streets, the quiet atmosphere, the people in the street conversing without yelling, the fresh air, all

derive from the lack of cars. Some readers may comment that this shows a great amount of civic consciousness on the part of those citizens who choose not to drive, but it really comes down to something else, which is the real issue.

Quaintness comes from poverty. The lack of cars, the fact that all the buildings haven't been torn down to build something that better handles air conditioning, everything about Europe that's different from the States, derives from a fundamental lack of cash to do better. The cobblestoned streets are like that because proper tarmac is expensive. The people are lounging on the outside terrace because the bar can't afford air conditioning. Everybody drives a scooter (especially in Andalucia) because even a full motorcycle is too expensive. Folks buy fresh fruit and veg because frozen and canned are value-added—read 'more expensive'—products; and they buy them from three corner stores instead of the more convenient big supermarket because not enough people could scrounge together the massive amount of capital necessary to maintain a full-service supermarket.

I think the one thing that Europeans do that involves more money is that the sidewalks are typically a grid of small squares, instead of the giant concrete blocks that you get in the States. They're less likely to crack, and when they do works on a pipe or a cable under the sidewalk, they can just replace a few squares instead of pouring new concrete, which is ugly and rough enough that you trip over it. Nobody notices a good sidewalk, but a bad one really ruins your day.

3 Seville (again)

That said, the walk to the café was uneventful. The hotel was in the modern part of Seville, and we wound up going into the old and quaint part. The city walls are still in place here and there, and where they're not, the main road in Seville rings around to mark the distinction. We passed by two ruins of Roman aqueducts right in the middle of the street, but upon further inspection we found the little plaque that points out that these are replicas. The reader is left to decide whether they count as quaint or not.

Past that is the city center, where the streets suddenly turn narrower and narrower. Anything wider than a car length has cars going down it, which means you have to stand in a doorway or something and let them pass. But most of the streets aren't that wide, and were sometimes not even wide enough for the three of us to walk together. Most of the buildings are about four stories tall, and, the way buildings loom in when you're close, sometimes seem to meet up at the top. We were lost, and got to soak in the ambiance thoroughly. We asked some kids running down the street, and their vague advice actually did direct us to a triangular square with a bunch of cafés. I had been here twice before with guests, and its aura of peace and summer air had been tainted by paying 800 pesetas (\$too.much) for two bottles of orange juice from concentrate. Putting that out of mind, Almu and Bego and I had a

pleasant dinner, then made our way to the Giralda.

The Giralda was probably at one point the tallest structure around. [The pamphlet for the tourists describes it as the ‘largest gothic cathedral in the world.’] From Begoña’s 9th storey hotel room we were at about eye level with it, which is not a trivial feat for midaevil Spaniards. From past visits, I can tell you the view is pretty darn impressive, and it’s fun to be in the bell tower when the bells go off. The walk up is onerous, and they try to help by numbering every landing, but since nobody knows how many landings there are, it’s no use.

But this time, we couldn’t pass inside, into the orange grove or the varied cathedral chambers, because the massive wood-but-looks-like-iron doors were shut. The giant-sized doors deserve a mention, by the way, because they were in the arabic onion-topped style, which speaks volumes of history. The orange grove is also taken from old mosque design (¿The tower as well?). But admiring the cathedral from the outside wasn’t much: wow, that’s really big. Look at all those cherubs. This thing could sure use a cleaning.

From there we were left with the task of going home. Things are less quaint when you’re lost and tired, but we made it back. A brief shower in the overmirrored bathroom (four-star hotel customers must be really vain), a brief dry with the wall-mounted hair dryer, and a long sleep in the bed. Almu went down to claim Bego’s free breakfast (Bego eats on the plane), and we made our way to look for train food. We found a snack shop, but the proprietor was two doors down in the beauty salon, head covered in shampoo. “¡I’ll be right over!” she burred. We made do without. [Technical note: I’m uncomfortable pretending that everybody in the world speaks English, so I’ve decided upon the following standard: ‘Hello.’ is somebody saying hello to me, while “Hello” is somebody actually saying ‘Hola’. Though, many conversations were spanglish and I don’t necessarily remember what language I was speaking at every instant.]

4 Puerto de Santa María

You all remember Puerto de Santa María from your grade school classes as sending one of the first ships to Cuba, along with the Niña and the Pinta. When we arrived, our primary goal was to get to the tourist info office. We asked the train station’s security guard where the tourist info was, and he pointed us in the right direction. Andalusians have an accent, by the way, which sounds like the stereotypical American effeminate (but in Spanish): “Ith over that way, though ith a pretty long walk.”

The streets are less narrow and quaint than the center of Seville, and it seems that everything had been built in the last few decades. We passed by a vendor on the side of the road, selling things out of buckets, and I got a gut-wrenching ‘tales from the dark side’ feeling when I looked in the buckets and saw that they were tiny live crabs, crawling all over each other

trying to get out. I think he also had bait. Across the street was the playground, which was new and had a lot of high tech devices that I really can't describe to you (I leave it to you and your therapist. 'So, what would the high-tech playground of your dreams look like?'). It only lacked kids, though they showed up in the evening. We went back across the street to the city.

It's hard to gague which buildings are up-to-date and which are hovels, since the newer buildings are generally built to look like the older ones; it seems the only way to tell is by whether the white paint is peeling or not. A lot of the paint in Puerto de Santa María was peeling. We found the tourist info, and a chubby, smiling girl pointed out where the beach was ("though it's a long walk") and gave us a giant stack of flyers (the Spanish for 'flyer' is 'propaganda'). While she was telling us about everything there is to know about the town, another tourist came in with 'una problema' that there used to be a phone in the park a few years ago but now it's gone and he needs a payphone and where can he find one. I couldn't concentrate on what our perky hostess was telling us because I was listening to this guy try to communicate. I wonder what it would be like to work there.

Walking down the street, you notice the incredible number of motor scooters, fifty percent of which are mounted by women, nobody wearing a helmet. I guess they pollute the air much less than cars, but they sure do make a lot of noise. The small ones, two-strokes, are illegal in the US because they're so obnoxious. There was also a preponderance of old people sitting in the sidewalk watching you as you go by. If you say hello to them, about half respond. Finally we reached the shore, and Almu and I argued about which beach we should stop at. They were either all covered in algae, which bothered Almu, or all covered in people, which bothered me. After about four, "OK, we'll go to the next one"s, we stopped at one. In passing, Puerto de Santa María seems to only have a fisher's port now, which is beautifully constructed with lots of curved walls that don't seem to do anything.

5 The Atlantic

At the beach, I started swimming immediately. I don't think I've ever swum in the Atlantic before (Oh yeah, about ten minutes on the coast of MD during an extensive high school field trip). The waves are large, the algae is varied, including coral-looking stuff, jelly ball looking stuff, and tiny bush looking stuff. No animals appeared (¿maybe the jelly ball stuff?). The salt is extreme, and if you don't time it right with the waves and go under when you should have gone over, you get the feeling of scrubbing the internal workings of your face with a salty rag. The salt also means that it's easy to float. We worked over to a more people, less algae part, and body surfed with a crowd of kids. They seemed very intent on getting it right, with one calling "¡Now swim!" every time a big one came by. I just floated and played with the currents. When I was a kid, old people would always lecture me about how I have to be careful about the 'undertow,' but I didn't understand what that was, because

the lakes of Illinois just don't have one. But here, when a big wave comes in, the water goes out as forcefully as the next wave comes in, so that your legs are being pushed out while your head is being pushed in. With a bit of care, you could use the currents to send yourself in a big circle, which I found so amusing and amazing that I just spent a paragraph on it.

We spent a lot of time sitting on the beach. The Spanish yuppies were there, with their cell phones, discussing whether to go to the bull fight tonight. [Going to the bull fights is looked down upon among the youths of Spain. It's about two steps away from yelling, "¡I'm a fascist!" But that's another very long essay]. One really big wave came by, getting the yuppies and half of our stuff wet. The fact that there was only one wave big enough to do that in the hours we were there shows how hysterically the ocean behaves. [See, if we described waves using a bell curve, the curve would have large hysteresis]. Almu tried to tan, but refused to take her top off even though there was one topless girl behind her, who was obviously here every day because she was so dark she could apply for minority scholarships. I read a few pages of my wet book. We'd bought lots of food from the giant supermarket by the bull ring, but what we hadn't eaten was now all sandy and wet, which are not desirable characteristics from your bread. After a few hours of such nothing-doing ('Ben, ¡stop looking at the topless girl!'), another dip in the waves, and a brief game of catch with the algae, we made our way back downtown.

We passed by a dozen pairs of people playing paddle ball, then up past the summer apartments, which have perfect grass and big parking lots. We made a futile attempt at hitching a ride: "Hey Mr. Driver, ¿where ya going?" "¿Where you going?" "Downtown. ¿Can we—" "Straight on. Though it's a long walk. ¡Bye!" The people at the bus stop were more helpful, and one woman not only told us which bus to get on, but offered a full itinerary of things to see for the next several days. The bus was really crowded, and was one of those routes that toured the whole town, through lots of big apartments and lots of big signs (from two and only two companies) declaring that there would be more big apartments at this site. Everyone on the bus was a girl about 14-16 years old, and Almu and I just couldn't figure out where the boys were. We ate the kikos (corn nuts) which were the only thing sealed in plastic, and as I finished the last handful, I noticed the boy across from us staring hungrily through his thick glasses. As more 14 year old girls got on the bus they commented, "smells like kikos."

Downtown, we bought more bread and a big bag of chips, and randomly picked a place to eat at. It was between two which faced each other, a restaurant/café, and a café/restaurant. The café/restaurant was right at the cusp between the big-city conglomeration of people who came out to have coffee outside and the small-town row of old guys who brought a chair out to watch people pass by and make fun of them. So we went for the restaurant/café, which was a bad idea. We asked for a knife and the waiter said he had to talk to the boss first and then came back and told us, with a face as if somebody had died, that he couldn't give us one. Almu swore that she would never return to this stuck-up town. Also, the streets here are too narrow for cars but scooters pass by easily—the stairs here and there even have

ramps for them. This makes for unpleasant eating, and we left quickly.

6 Jerez

Almu found a hostel in Jerez which would be \$20 cheaper than anything in Puerto de Santa María, so we caught the commuter rail up there. Puerto de Santa María and Jerez are directly across a little bay from Cádiz, within commuter rail distance. All the commuter rails are run by RENFE, so that all the graphics are the same, all the tickets are the same, the orchestral rendering of the Lambada plays on every train, and every toilet in every rail station in all of Spain costs 25 pesetas to use. The Cádiz-Jerez commuter rail line is labelled C-1, even though there's no C-2 and probably never will be.

Jerez 'reeks of money,' according to my tour guide, and it does indeed have lots of cars, wide streets, and lacks quaintness to the point that it looks like suburban Maryland—lots of lifeless apartment buildings and streets that don't do anything but get you from point A to point B. Sherry originated here, and the booze business still brings a lot of money into the town. Almu made some phone calls, and the station security guard told us where Plaza de España was, where we'd catch the bus, "Though it's a long walk." We arrived in five minutes, and I sat as Almu made another phone call. The plaza was well lit, and there were people all over the benches. Around the periphery were palm trees, and in the center, a statue of an eagle, which really looked like a pigeon, with live pigeons standing on top of it. There was a big bunch of kids on the other end of the square with big tubes, maybe two meters long, trying to hit a bat (the flying kind). One swung with too much force and broke his tube on the ground, and had to trade his broken tube for a little kid's before he could continue swinging at the bat. Almu came back and we went to the bus stop and waited with some other folks, who told us where the hostel was, and said that it was far, but we're young and could probably walk it. The busses aren't frequent, but there's a little sign that gives you time and temperature and pleasant messages to keep you occupied. As the bus left, the kid had joined a few tubes and was now trying to reach an electrical wire.

We got to the hostel, which was very far away, and there was no one at the desk, so we went up and wandered around for a while. I just started showering, and Almu went down to check herself (and not me) in to a single room. The reader is left to debate the morality of this; I guess I paid for it by being bitten about five times by a mosquito which got in while we were sleeping. The next morning, Almu and I agreed that she would check out and I would follow exactly seven minutes later, in time for the bus. I was slow, and got there around twelve minutes later, and—get ready for this—the bus driver waited for me. Further, I only had a 1000 peseta bill with me and so couldn't pay. When we got to the appropriate point, the driver got out of the bus, went with me to a café where I got change and paid him, and he leisurely pointed out the way for us. The walk was through the quaint part of town.

7 A brief geography lesson; Cádiz

What follows are a lot of ferries, trains, and automobiles, so a review of Mediterranean geography may help.

‘The Pillars of Hercules,’ Gibraltair and Ceuta, mark the end of the Mediterranean. Gibraltair is about the southernmost point in Spain, and is owned by the British. Ceuta, directly to the South, is as much a part of Spain as Madrid. The pillars appear on the seal of Spain, with the latin phrase ‘plus ultra’ on them, which I’m sure is valiant in Latin, but in English it just sounds like a toilet paper brand. An unreliable source tells me that from this the two lines on the dollar sign (once the peso sign) are derived.

On the ferry I found that you can actually see one city from the other, and I don’t think we as modern people could imagine how mind-blowing it must have been for the Greek explorers when they sailed past this point, and found that the two sides of the sea never connected up like all logic says they should.

Cádiz is ‘possibly the oldest city in Europe’ [A lot of the historical facts are from my Lonely Planet guide book]. Phoenicians settled the port around 1100 BCE, and it’s still a working port. Note that Cádiz is a little West of Gibraltair, facing the Atlantic, and is therefore beyond what the Greeks called the edge of the world. Orthodox capitalists may use this to point out how even in early times, capitalists managed to see beyond what ‘the cultured’ saw. Cádiz is something of a peninsula, and was about the only place that held out against Napoleon when he took over Spain in 1812. Cadiz’s Plaza de España therefore has a monument to the brave men who didn’t give in to the evil Frenchmen. Lacking the poetic beauty of a statue of a pigeon upon which pigeons could rest, the monument included a statue of a woman, labelled ‘constitucion,’ upon which was standing another little thirty centimeter tall woman. There was also a massive bird’s nest on top of the whole monument.

Almu had gone her way to Madrid so she could work; I had nothing to do but wait for the bus. Cádiz seems to be a nice place to live. I was wandering through the trendy part of town—lots of women trying really hard to be fashionable, shop names in English—so I may have a slanted image. However, despite being surrounded on all sides by water, I am amazed to say that it did not stink of fish, which only speaks well for the town. The streets of most Spanish cities have posts every two meters to keep cars from parking or driving on the sidewalk—the only way to keep drivers from doing these things is to make it physically impossible. The streets in this part of Cádiz just had a yellow stripe on the road—not even a curb—to demarcate the pedestrian part from the car part. How civilized.

The bus station was dirty and miserable, the way all bus stations are, and the tiny ticket was conveniently pre-crumpled when the cashier handed it to me (*¿a returned return?*). I don’t remember much of the bus ride, because I slept through it. The bus driver honked the horn a lot, complained about the traffic cops, and yelled at the passengers. “If you don’t

have correct change, I can't give you a ticket. Get change from the kiosk over there. ¡I give you exactly a minute!" At some point I woke up long enough to see a long row of (modern electricity-producing) windmills, which everybody on the bus was admiring. They made the hills they were on, with a bit of fuzzy grass and a look of being cool, so desirable; and the heat of the bus and the mild odor all around and the dream state I was trapped in made me want to tell the driver to stop right there and let me off. I wonder what those windmills sound like.

8 Ceuta

The ferries are nice, with two rooms: a big one for sitting, which looks much like a wide airplane, and a smaller one in front for sitting and getting drunk. I sat in the front room, though I didn't buy anything, and looked out the window. All I could think about was what doing this trip would have been centuries ago, without global positioning, a bar, and the Fresh Prince of Bel Aire to help you along. There was a giant Arab family surrounding me. Grandma was in a black dress which covered her pretty entirely, mom was in something less depressing involving pants, and the oldest daughter was in the standard Spanish girl's summer dress. Grandma's dress has a slit on the side, to reach the pockets or so she could scratch herself or something, and that revealed cotton with a floral print—standard issue granny underwear. Deep down, we're all the same. Another Arabic woman wore the standard head dress (I forgot the name), but in purple, with buttons up the front. How nice.

I should give a few notes about what I was expecting before I arrive. My main goal was to go swimming. Simple enough. A few nights before leaving, I had a long conversation with a friend who had gone to Morocco, and here's some of his advice: Chauwen is where the nice pot is. He asked me to buy him a big block. You can get a collective cab there for about 30 dirán (1 dirán=1 dime, or 15 pesetas). People will want to be your guide, but just ignore them; they're only gonna cheat you. Ashila had a nice beach where he went swimming and had a good time. Booze is outlawed, so whiskey is dear. Buy something cheap that says "Scottish" in big letters and you can trade it for a carpet.

Arriving in Ceuta, the first thing you see is a gigantic Spanish flag, just to remind you. The first thing you see when you disembark onto the continent of Africa is the pathetic sales counter and waiting room, which takes about two seconds to cross and get outside. I was looking for the bathroom when somebody asked me where I was going.

Abdul, bearded, Arabic, took me to his Volvo, asking me where I was from and where I wanted to go and so on. In his car, the glove compartment was filled with glossy tour guides. I asked him his price, and he said, "7000 pesetas," and I said, "Well, I was thinking more like 500 pesetas." and he said, "I can take you to the border for 3000 pesetas, and then you can get a collective cab from there," and I said, "If I pay you, I can't eat. I'm going to have

to look somewhere else,” and he said, “Hold on, let me take you to a friend who will drive you there in a van.”

His friend, whose name began with an A, was in a full tunic and wore an Arabic yamulke, a white knit thing which tightly covers the whole top half of your head, and makes a lot more sense than the diminutive Jewish yamulke which is always falling off. He said we needed five more people, so we’d have to go looking. He already had two. The first, I don’t remember the name he gave, was big and dressed in French colors, and the second, Miguel, was shorter, moustached, and dressed like a businessman on casual day. We went to wait for a while and talk about nothing. As soon as we sat down, they introduced themselves again. ‘I’m Kareem.’ ‘I’m Abdul.’ ‘¿Abdul? ¿Weren’t you Miguel a minute ago?’ ‘Just forget that.’ Nothing builds trust like not giving your real name.

Trust was a big problem. It takes less than a second to look at me and realize that I’m not from around here and that I have money. In a country where unemployment is absurdly high and employment isn’t much better, cheating tourists is one of the main businesses. But Miguel Abdul and Kareem seemed reasonable. We moved to the bar so I could get some potatoes, and learned that Kareem had been to the States, as he showed off every slang term he knew. He was an agricultural engineer, and spoke sufficiently about it to demonstrate that he wasn’t making it up; Abdul was a chicken farmer. We all know that the difference between rich and poor is huge in a country like Morocco; and it was quickly evident (if only because they were just getting off a ferry from Spain) that these were the upper class and thus didn’t have quite the same driving need to cheat the tourists so they could buy bread tonight. After hanging out in the bar for a long time (Kareem seemed to know the staff well), we gave up on the van. Kareem whispered to me that he was waiting for his girlfriend, and didn’t want family around when she arrived, and then offered to Abdul and me that we catch a cab.

Abdul didn’t say much as we walked to the taxi, which seemed way the heck out there. He mentioned something in Spanish about contraband trade, and I said, *faux pas español*, “Where do you sell the goods when you get them here,” and he said, ‘Not me, other people. You don’t speak Spanish very well, ¿do you?’ and then proceeded to talk to me in really bad English for the duration of my time with him. Arabic doesn’t have a being verb, for example, and Abdul correspondingly never put one into his English sentences: ‘I your friend. I take you. The cab cheap.’ Most of the time I spoke Spanish, hoping, and he answered in English. The cab, a normal one, took us to The Border—there’s only one way out of Ceuta by land. The route was along the coast, with calm Mediterranean on the left, tall hills on the right, and took about five minutes. 200 pesetas each, for a total savings for me of 2,800 pesetas.

The border was simple. There was a covered area to signify that something was happening here, and a bunch of cars either parked or going very slowly. The cab stopped just before all that and we walked to the windows on the right to fill out the little paper entry form.

Everybody seemed to have fifty copies of that form, including Abdul the first back in the Volvo. Miguel Abdul saw somebody in a tunic and aviator sunglasses, with a little nametag that had a photo of him in a suit, and greeted him as if he was his long-lost brother. Words in Arabic. The official took my passport and filled out the entry form for me, then carried it to a window while Abdul explained. ‘He my friend, going to get us across the border quickly. You see that line there, there only one window where all the tourists have to go to get their passport stamped. They have to wait two hours in the sun. Two hours. But my friend going to get us through quickly.’ Indeed, we got through in two minutes. One of the people in the tourist line passed by with his British passport trying to see what we were doing, but the guy inside wasn’t moving the big board from the window for him. It was nice, though somehow not quite as regal as riding AVE for free.

9 Tetuan, upper-class guide

‘¡Welcome to Africa!’ Abdul exclaimed. At our left was a long line of people, streaming across the border (the cliché fits), who looked Arabic enough that they didn’t need a passport stamp. There were a couple of shabby stores on the hills at the right, the Mediterranean on the left, and lots of people everywhere. We’re only ten feet across the border; ¿where did they all come from? Further up was the taxi stand, which looked like the starting line for a demolition derby. Abdul greeted another long-lost brother, who asked me if I wanted to go individually or collective, but before I could respond, Abdul was with another cab driver, and we got in the car.

A Moroccan taxi differs from a New York taxi in a few respects, besides the fact that you don’t have the right to a noise-free ride or an English-speaking driver. They’re all old Mercedes-Benzes. Besides the driver, there are six people in the car; in this case, two women in full dress, one sleeping; two guys who looked French in the front seat; and me and Abdul. This one didn’t, but most cabs have a little fire extinguisher by the driver’s head with a picture of a flaming car, which is unsettling. The distance to Tetuan is maybe half an hour, so you can enjoy having fresh, cool, Mediterranean air being forced up your nostrils at 60 kph. It was hard to keep my face from twitching when we got out. The final, huge difference, appeared along the way to Tetuan, somewhere after Club Med but before Club M’diq: the road took a bend, and the Mercedes in front of us didn’t. Four cars pulled over to help. Within seconds of the accident, there were four times seven people standing around, trying to see the damage, trying to help however they could. The driver was holding his bloody hands in front of him, while his wife in the passenger seat was holding her head—she had shattered the windshield. The police arrived within two minutes, and Abdul commented to me that she’ll be fine and everything was OK. We kept driving; past a beach with a huge grid of tents which we’ll get back to; past the absurd Magic Lantern restaurant, with the giant lantern and Aladdin statues out front; past the camel farm; and finally into town.

The town was spacious, with big streets, big houses, and lots of space doing nothing in between. A lot of the houses were new, right next to other houses still in construction, and then others had the peeling paint that implied that they were a mess indoors. The thing is that in a country where it never really gets all that cold, the idea of a building is sort of different. You want a space that's your own, where you can put your stuff, with a bathroom and a kitchen, that provides you with shade, and that's all. Everything is from the same stucco material; you don't have any appliances besides a lamp and maybe the TV to plug in; the architects aren't all that creative and don't do anything incredible. So every building looked the same.

We got off at what I was guessing to be downtown. It looks pretty normal, but that all the buildings are white stucco. There seemed to be a lot of parked cars and few driven cars. Abdul made a bee-line to the orange juice cart at the side of the street. I was expecting that the guy would squeeze out a few of the oranges that are laying all over the cart, but he just opened the little refrigerator door and pulled out a pre-squeezed jug. He poured it into two tall glasses (yes, glass), and we drank it down in about three seconds. 'You need a place to sleep. ¿You want a cheap hostel?'

We went two blocks this way and one that way to an unmarked house. There was a mother and her kid at the foot of the stairs inside, whom we passed up to the first floor. The hostel attendant spoke French with Abdul; I think there wasn't a room available at first, but Abdul got the key to #16 out of him. The room was mostly taken up by the big bed, which had those overstarched and overbleached hotel sheets on it. The entryway to the rooms was really big, with lots of glass tiles, and I think I would have preferred to sleep there. 'You like?' We went back down and gave the key back to the attendant, telling him we'd be back.

From there, we passed the big fountain, down the main street, which was a bit more crowded and a bit more inland, the signs were in Arabic, but otherwise just like the streets of Puerto de Santa María. At the end was a giant square, with a big tile circle where the fountain should be. This was the palace of Mohamed the Sixth, the king of Morocco since King Hassan the Second's death last Friday. The palace from here just looked like a big stucco wall, a little brighter white than the others, much taller. The flag of Morocco, bright red with a green five-pointed star, had a corner sort of tucked in to the roof. We went to the left, passing what I can only presume was the employee entrance, and then through a big swinging door.

10 The market; the rug shop

Passing through the door by the palace was one of those moments from the Wizard of Oz where you're suddenly in a place more colorful. We were in the heart of the market. Abdul walked quickly and said virtually nothing, and I was lost at the first turn. The streets are

maybe two or three meters wide, and in every alcove, there's somebody selling something: single copies of old kitsch Spanish magazines, cuisinart blades (no cuisinart), full stainless steel sinks, shoes (in pairs, at least), tools of all kinds. Nobody approached me but kids saying 'Hola' and staring. But the most prominent difference between these narrow and quaint streets and those of the city centers of Spain is that the buildings here were all built straight over the street. "Nobody's using this space here over the street, so ¿why don't I build myself something nice in it?" So except for several pauses for air and light, the entire market is basically underground, or understucco. I was wondering what all these buildings were, residences or what, when Abdul asks me, '¿You want some tea?'

We entered one of the buildings, a rug shop. Every room had five meter wood-beamed ceilings and a big lazy fan up at the top. The floors were all glossy tile, though they could use a bit of sweeping, and you can't see the walls—at all—for the rugs everywhere. There were about four people lying around, all in tunics. Two of them got up quickly and led us up the stairs, as Abdul made some comments in Arabic. The first room, with a couch at one end and three small tables (trays on stands), was too hot, so we switched to another room with the same layout. The salesman immediately started. [I'm not making fun of him, by the way. He really talked like this, in a very calm tone.]

Salesman: You are surely thirsty, please. [Arabic.] We will get some water and tea for you, please. Where are you from?

Ben: Chicago.

Salesman: Very good. Then you would like to pay in dollars, please. Let me show you the catalog, please. These are all made by an art school consisting of 450 families, please. Take a look at this first rug, it is 40,000 knots per meter, please. Come and take your shoes off and feel this rug, please.

Ben: It's nice.

Salesman: We have some others as well. You like, please. [Assistant unrolls another and another and another; pitch continues.] You like this one? I will give it to you for one thousand, three hundred dollars, please.

Ben: I can't possibly pay that. I don't want a rug.

Salesman: But this is a wonderful price, please. You can take this rug to the United States and easily sell it for twice that, please.

Ben: I know it's a good deal. If you offered me a Mercedes for \$1,300, it would be a good deal, but I can't afford it. I'd like to just drink my tea, thank you.

Salesman: Write for me here your best offer, please. [Draws circle on paper.] Let me tell you that we Berbers have a custom, it is called an 'installment plan,' please. You don't have

to pay anything for 12 months, please.

Ben: I can't give you a price.

Salesman: Let me show you this one. It is made from pure silk, and has a million knots per square meter, please.

Ben: A million?

Salesman: Yes, it is machine made [on a loom], please, but come here and feel how soft it is, please. Feel its quality; tell me what you can pay for this, please.

Abdul: I have a rug like this at my house. I paid \$350.

Ben: If I give you a price, you'd be offended.

Salesman: Please.

Ben: \$100. [Salesman thinks, then gets up and leaves the room, offended.] I don't want to buy a rug like this.

Salesman: I have some rugs you can buy for that price, please. [He pulls a rug from the crap rug pile. The all-grey rug looks like a kid learning to use a loom had made it.]

Abdul: Please, put those away.

Salesman: But I can not sell him a rug like these for that kind of money, please.

Abdul: [Arabic]

Salesman: [Arabic]

Abdul: [Arabic]

Salesman: [Arabic]

Abdul: It's true. I'm your friend. I'll help you out. I'll tell him you're a student, and he'll give it to you for \$200. I'll help you.

To make a long story a touch shorter, I wound up buying the rug, which gave me an immense feeling of nausea. I couldn't find my wallet, and had this feeling that I'd been robbed, until I got up and found it in my back pocket. My head was spinning, and the thought crossed my mind that the tea had been drugged. I had mentioned to Abdul that I wanted to buy a rug for my dear mother, but not on this scale. It was obvious that Abdul wanted me to buy the rug, either because he was getting a percentage or (more likely, but with the same effect) he was scoring a lot of goodwill from the vendor and his next rug from this guy would be half price. I knew I had no control over the situation (I don't buy silk, ever), and didn't

know that I was buying a rug when Abdul offered that we enter for some tea. However, it's true—\$200 is cheap for a rug like this. I was being pushed and swindled into a good buy. This is what the economists call the 'Edgeworth box,' and what the rest of the world calls 'a lot of negotiating room': if he'd sell the carpet for \$100, and the carpet is worth over \$200 to me, ¿have I been swindled if I pay \$200? Besides, it's not a real gift if it doesn't cost too much.

I had a million forms to fill out, mostly postal forms in mailing the carpet to my mother, since the government pays postage as a subsidy to the tourist-swindling industry. It gave me a chance to think how this had happened. The guy decided that I was going to buy a carpet from the start, and ignored everything I said to the contrary. He switched carpets midway, from the handmade to the machine-made, meaning that I had in memory that \$1,300 starting point which he had continuously been going down from, while he would have started much lower with the rug I actually bought. 'We have a berber custom, please, that the customer tips the salesman, please. No, the bank won't take coins.' [Of course, the smallest Spanish bill is 1000 ptas=\$7] 'You should also tip my assistant.' [whereupon the coin problem disappeared]

11 The herbalist

I left shaking, but we kept walking rapidly through the maze. I think we passed back to where we came from, because I passed by the same kids who said 'hola' to me. We passed by yet another mosque, but since its doors were open I could look in as we passed. The structure of the building is simple: a tower and a large square floor space, open but for lots of pillars in a grid along the whole room. I'm sure that most of the pillars are purely decorative, and if you lean against them too hard they'll break. Besides the pillars, I didn't really see any furniture, just a guy placing mats on the floor.

Next stop was the pharmacy. This was indoors as well, with another high ceiling, and another assistant laying in the corner. But the big difference was the smell, which I can only describe with an unqualified 'good'. It didn't remind me of anything or have distinct but subtle undertones. It was just good. The walls were filled with big plastic jugs filled with everything. The herb shops in Spain or Chicago have similar shelves filled with jugs, but they're typically heavy glass or porcelain things which try to look old world. Our dear herbalist, however, felt uncompelled to prove that he was from around here. He was another berber, made obvious by his name, 'Berber'. He wore the yamulka and tunic, and was unoustached, with a mole where Cindy Crawford has hers, only bigger. He spoke calm Spanish, and offered me lots of things. "Ginseng, it's good for the brain, and keeps your motor running, if you know what I mean." But when I said, "My motor runs fine, thank you," he didn't push any harder, which was a relief. It was pleasant speaking Spanish with him because, being a non-native, he was clear and used simple words. The only error I caught

myself on was that, instead of saying, ‘Mi madre tiene su regalo’ (My mother has her gift), I said, ‘Mi madre tiene su regla’ (My mother is having her period). I don’t know if he caught it. Abdul, for his part, asked for the bathroom (in Arabic) and disappeared, reminding me that I had never found the bathroom back in Ceuta. When I asked for a bottle of wheat germ oil, the assistant went upstairs for it. When I asked for brewer’s yeast, Mr. Berber called up to this little room hanging over the door (thinking about it now, the room would be over the street), where I presume the family was hanging out: an unspecified adult in the back, and a few kids, one of whom fluttered a plastic bag down to us. As I was filling out the credit card form, I somehow mentioned to Mr. Berber that I had family way back when from Cordoba, and he said that he too had family from Andalucia, how incredible finding a long-lost brother like this. He asked my address so he could write me, and he asked me to read it to him so he could make sure he got it right. I guess I’ll be getting his price list by mail sometime this month. Mr. Berber went back out to the street to talk Arabic with his buddies, I went back in to smell for a while and wait for Abdul.

12 The house of the Moroccan Elite

The way back to Abdul’s house went by a few places so Abdul could pick up some stuff. First was the pastry shop. I sat outside and watched the ice cream girl, who was maybe 17 and had a level of vanity sufficient that it showed through her uniform, which was the typical shapeless dress but in 31-flavors pink. There was a boy at a bench, talking to his friend and attempting to flirt with the ice cream girl, in that manner in which people flirt before they learn subtlety. Abdul led me down the streets (now outside the quaint part), passing through a few more stores, which were really just maybe two meters wide by three deep, big enough for a few shelves, a counter, and a place to stand. The owners sit in a chair on the sidewalk until a customer comes by. The outdoor café was occupied by dozens of parcheesi players (all men), playing on really nice boards.

We turned down another street, which was, as my brother would describe it, ‘still recovering from the bombings.’ I think they were tearing down buildings, because there were lots of piles of stuff around. I’m sure some of them were being built as well, but you can never tell. The street was unpaved and had big mounds of dirt here and there, and you had to step tall to get up to the sidewalk. I remember somewhere amidst all this another circle of girls, dressed like spañards, chatting. The street had been like this for a few years now, and in fact had no name. Abdul had a post office box, 1322, for receiving mail. The buildings which were actually constructed finally showed some sign of being upper-class: they all had a satellite dish.

Up a normal-looking flights of stairs, and we reached Abdul’s apartment. Let me describe the house in full, before I enter. When you enter, the hallway that goes down the whole apartment is on the right. Right by the door on the right is the kitchen, which I didn’t pay

much attention to and wish I did. On the left is a wood cabinet with the good china. Past that on the right is the TV room, which is just a space with TV, table, two seats. On the left is the living room or salon or what have you. It's the beautiful room, with the expensive carpet from our friendly carpet dealer on the floor, and the nice furniture, and a modest array of knick-knacks, some of which were Hindi. It was obvious that nobody ever really used this room. Taken as a whole, it surely cost—as the Spaniards say—an eye from the face. Further down the hall is another less-adorned sitting room on the left, with more seats all around the room, which is probably good for big parties, and another TV. Across from that is the bathroom, which I'll get to when I have to. At the end of the hall are the bedrooms.

All that said, the first thing you notice when you pass through the door are his two sons, Hassan and Hussein, who are incredibly energetic. They're twins, six years and two months, and didn't really stop trying to get my attention the entire time I was there. They were in my face and pressed against me every second that they weren't doing flips. When we entered, Abdul took me over to the expensive sitting room, but then said, 'Would you like to watch TV?' and we went to sit on one of the sofas. The sofas, by the way, mostly don't have backs, but are just sort of high beds with lots of pillows. My mother did something like this in one of my childhood apartments; I don't know if she was trying to be middle-eastern or just trying to use something she found out back. Abdul had chosen a channel from pretty much every European country, mostly music video channels. Though the kids loved it, and laughed at every country name in turn. Germany, jajaja, Holland, jaja. I later learned that Morocco has two TV channels of its own, but only channel one is broadcast to the north half of the country. Northerners instead watch three or four Spanish channels which come through clearly. Abdul asked me if I wanted tea or coffee, and I said it didn't matter, as one of the twins attempted to act out the meaning of 'olgar'. 'No, please, this is your home. ¿Would you like tea or coffee?' 'No, it really doesn't matter.' [Abdul firmly grabs one of the kids and sits him down, lecturing him in Arabic.] 'You see, they can only leave the house on Sundays, so they have a lot of energy.' 'Only on Sunday?' 'It's dangerous outside. They're better off in here.' I refrained from the logical response—'You're an asshole'—and nodded in agreement. 'So, do you want tea or coffee?' 'Tea. I'll have tea. Thank you.' Abdul brought out another carpet, the one he had bought for \$350. It was nice.

The kids continued to perform 'olgar' for me. It seems that the only words they know in a European language are: Ouai (French for Yeah), Hello (English for Hola), and mañana (Spanish for Olgar). I got up to look over at the expensive room again, and as I passed across, I caught a glimpse of a woman at the end of the hall, dressed head to toe in white. Two or three minutes later Abdul came and brought me over to the less-adorned sitting room. His wife (chubby, wearing a typical shirt and slacks ensemble) brought out the coffee and bread. The bread was flat and fried and layered, and you'll just have to go to a Moroccan or Ethiopian restaurant and try some for yourself. There was another kind that looked like a pancake cut in half, which I didn't eat much of because to me it tasted like one of the ingredients had gone bad. She also brought out chicken somosas (Oh, yeah. He's a chicken farmer.), but gave a look of understanding when I told her I was a vegetarian.

Abdul and I began to eat quietly, alone, and she came out to sit. She laughed at my jokes when Abdul translated them. Her sister stuck her head in from the edge of the door, and entered a few minutes later. Naima, her name was. She had a painted face, even lip liner, but was wearing just an old oversized t-shirt. She sat right next to me and tried really hard to communicate. By now the kids had found us, and were here continuing their dance interpretation of ‘tomorrow,’ as I attempted to probe out whether Naima had heard of John Coltrane or not. Abdul forcefully removed them.

The king was on TV. With fingers streaming down her face, Naima told me that she had been crying all last week over the death of Hussein the second. “Really, crying?” ‘Oui.’ The king had just announced that, in celebration of his ascending the throne, he had reduced the prison sentences of everyone in Morocco’s jails, and that those with less than three years of prison time were now free. Picture of bunches of people walking through a big gate. Naima told me that this was a common way to celebrate festivals. Over the course of this, another relation, whose name I’ve forgotten, came by. She spoke very good French, meaning that I couldn’t understand her. She had brought her daughter Muna (to play with the twins, I do hope), but she didn’t say anything except in whispers to her mother. I wonder what it’s like for a four year old kid who only speaks Arabic to be confronted by some idiot speaking Spanish at her. The eight of us laughed a lot in the place of coherent communication. Naima had to go somewhere and disappeared, passing by in a jacket, cyan cotton tights, high-heeled sandals—the pushing thirty and unmarried look.

I excused myself to go to the bathroom, which confused me. The bathroom is the usual: sink, shower, toilet. The sink is just a sink; the shower is just a shower, no bathtub. The toilet is a squat toilet, i.e., a hole in the ground. It’s a little more elaborate than that: it’s porcelain, all indented about three centimeters from floor level except for two rectangles for your feet. In front of the toilet is a faucet and a small bucket. Next to Abdul’s toilet was a tiny little handle, I have no idea what it does, and turning it did nothing. I went back to check with Abdul before doing anything horribly embarrassing. ‘Um, Abdul, I have a question.’ ‘You want to pee or shit?’ ‘Ummm,’ ‘Oh, you want to shit. Well, you just squat down here and when you’re done, use the bucket.’ ‘What does this handle thing do?’ ‘Nothing. don’t touch it.’ Abdul went out, I hear laughter in the other room, and I go about trying things out. The system is actually pretty well designed. You take your dump, clean yourself and rinse your hand with the stream of water, then pour the water between your legs. Since the whole thing is indented, you don’t even have to try too hard to avoid making a mess. The one flaw in the system is that Abdul had no soap at the sink, and I had to get my own.

13 The beach camp

When Abdul said he had a brother, a first division football player, who was camping out on the beach, I had the image we all have of a guy out in the woods in a stupid little tent. He suggested that I go out and sleep there, which was his third offer of where I'd be sleeping tonight, after the hostel we never went back to and his own house. I left the spices at his house, thinking I'd be back later. I offered to go by myself, because I'd be swimming and he wouldn't, and he gave me a look of sincere offense.

The cab ride was long, almost back to the border. This must be really boring for a resident. I was amused to see the boats on brick pillars, monuments to something, which appeared frequently. The dozen Moroccan flags in front of the Hilton were all at half staff. Here and there were pottery salesmen, who looked just like Mexican pottery salesman, with the field of pots, the giant pile of roofing, and a few rugs for color.

We got to the beach camp, which was, as I had described earlier, a grid of tents about half a kilometer long. As we approached along the east side, there appeared a sound of a thousand people relaxing on the beach, playing Arabic music, running around, which never went away. Abdul didn't know which tent to go to, so we passed through a couple until finding that of his brother. The tent was actually a small complex of tents, with two large tents on either side, and in between a spacious shack made from walls of bamboo mats. There was a space for sleeping/laying around, and a kitchen area, and a hallway joining the two tents. The laying around area and the hallway had blue and white mats, all of the same style. Out front were a few non-folding chairs and a parasol stuck in the sand. All in all, it must have been pretty expensive and taken a really long time to build, but then that's always the case when you own instead of rent.

I couldn't stand being there much longer without swimming. Abdul was talking to this guy Mohamed, whom we'll meet briefly, and I popped into one of the tents to change and made my way into the water. It was dusk, so there weren't many people swimming. There were a lot of people fishing, and I get the feeling I made lots of enemies as I swam the length of the beach and scared the fish. I never saw anybody catch one, and never ran into one, but if these people are doing it they must be getting something. Depending on which direction you were facing, you could either hear nothing, the chattering sound, or the sound of your heart beating underwater. I could still see the bottom of the water in the dim light, and the little dunes that form in the sand. There were also big black patches of something which I didn't want to touch, which at first were occasional but soon covered the whole ground. When I got out of the water, at the other end of the camp, my ears were filled with salt water and I had that dizzy disorientation walking back, trying to avoid the children.

Abdul had to go, because he had to work on the chicken farm tomorrow; he told me the business wasn't going too well because the chickens keep dying after a few days, because the conditions are too crowded. I again refrained from calling him an asshole. After a brief

introduction, he exited stage right. Mohamed is thin, with the standard bushy moustache, one or the other eye distinctly crossed, in a Reebok windbreaker, I'm guessing late 20s. We sat on the chairs outside of the tents, under the parasol, for what it's worth after nightfall. He normally lived at a camp further up in the mountains, but was here for a week, to get away from his tentmates for a little while. A lot of people are living here for three months, just to pass the summer, including people from further south in Morocco who came for the better Mediterranean beaches.

14 A conversation with Mohamed

He was unemployed, and just went around looking for things to do, like carrying parcels for people. I told him that he'd do well at the border, because his Spanish is pretty good, but he said that the only thing he could do would be to work as some sort of guide, and he's got a lot of contempt for people like that, who make their money cheating people. He didn't cry when Hassan II died, because he didn't do anything for the North. He concentrated entirely on the South, where any and all new industry is located, and just concerned himself with preventing revolt in the North. Somebody came by with a marijuana pipe, a two-part, hollowed out stick, maybe 40 centimeters long, with what looks like an upside-down faucet at the end. Mohamed explained to me that if you're in the South and caught smoking, it's a year in prison, or until the next festival. But in the North it's even encouraged, because as long as you're high, you don't care that you don't have any money and that the king is living off of your efforts. But it doesn't matter, because when you die, it doesn't matter how much money you have, and he'll be right on the same level as the king. He pointed this fact out several times.

I excused myself to go to the tent and get my shirt. Amena was in the north tent, where my bag was. Amena is a pneumatic girl, with her hair done up and makeup pancaked on. At the back of the tent is a whole row of stuff, which I'm guessing was mostly hers: handbags, a pair of silver high-heeled shoes. She gave a strong impression of boredom, and asked me to come in and talk (though her Spanish is about zero); I told her to come outside where we were.

Mohamed didn't like the idea of having to rush around trying to earn money. He was fine poor, because it allows him to enjoy life. He spent his days mostly hanging out on the beach, playing football or swimming a bit. He said he was a better player than Abdul's brother the first division player, but he didn't like the business and the showy aspect of the game. He just liked to play. By the way, you ask what kind of music a slacker like this listens to, living on the beach and smoking pot all day? Bob Marley, of course. Reggae of all types.

Cat Stevens as well, who had converted and was now a Moslem. Abdul had told me the same anecdote. I think Cat converted just so he could sell to a new market. Mohamed later

told me that Neil Armstrong converted after his jaunt to the Moon. I always thought it was really tacky when people tell you about famous people who agree with their ideology. If it's stupid to buy Converse because Dennis Rodman wears Converse, it's as stupid to convert to vegetarianism because Albert Einstein was vegetarian.

Speaking of music, here came Amena. She had a Casio keyboard, a nice one with a second row of keys for the melody, and a lot of demos. It lacked a battery door, however. Mohamed continued talking while Amena tried to put the batteries in and turn the thing over. First it just didn't work, but then the batteries started to actually fall out every time. She went to get a piece of cardboard, which she ripped up and shoved in, and then finally, she was jamming, which consisted of her pecking out the melody while the demo played. She seemed happy.

Mohamed offered that we move into the house, over to the lounge (we'll call it), leaving Amena outside to continue her one-finger symphony. I still had wet sand all over my feet, so I laid over at the edge as Mohamed continued. He's strict about his religion, but it's increasingly difficult. Conversion would be impossible nowadays, because there are too many temptations: too many women walking around in skirts up to there, too many women willing to have sex with you without papers. He never drank, and I wondered what he would think if/when he saw that I had a bottle of whiskey in my bag. By the way, he had sufficient command of the language to translate to the Spanish, 'El Dios'. I mention this because it's different from the Arabs in the James Bond movies who speak perfect English but make constant reference to 'Allah.' He also spoke Basque thanks to another friend, he said, which would be impressive indeed. He said his handwriting was good, and was eager to show me on the pages of his faux leather 1998 agenda, which he kept hidden behind a blanket.

I told him I bought a rug, just that, and he said, "It's actually good that you got cheated (engañado) because that means that some of your sins have been transferred to those who cheated you, and you're that much better off in the final judgement." I asked him what he thought about Abdul in general, and he said, "I can't speak badly of him, because he's my friend's brother. He thinks he's smart (listo), but El Dios will figure him out in the end." "Those people who take you to the stores, they all earn a commission," he pointed out again. At this point my feet were de-sanded and I had unfolded one of the blankets from the hallway and was fully bundled.

Pretty soon, Abdul's brother arrived. He spoke English the way Kareem from the port did, with lots of Americanisms, and wore clothing like an American. He had his shopping with him, and after putting it all in the kitchen, he started kissing on his girlfriend Amena. He told me that 'we have to fuck before midnight.' Something about maintaining his energy. They hid under a blanket to Mohamed's right while we continued talking. He said that it added a bit of tension, having to live with somebody like this, but he tolerated it. Life is short, after all, and then you have to face up to your judgement. A few other folks came by—there were people passing through the tent all the time—and we played cards for a

while. The cards were thin and uncoated, and all of them had a nice vertical bend down the middle, so they didn't sit flat. The cards had the tarot suits, clubs being actual clubs (the one looked like a heart with veins sticking out), cups, swords, (gold) coins. Mohammed told me that the rules were really hard, but it was just another variation on the highest-takes-the-trick game, like bridge, but they never let me play out a hand. During the game I was babbling to Mohamed about my life as a broker and how bored I was, and he was uninterested.

I decided I'd best just go to bed. I was overwhelmed with the need to go to sleep, not because I needed sleep, but because I needed to be alone for a while. I had been accompanied and watched over every moment of every waking hour. The only time I had alone was spent squatting, and even then Mohamed was waiting for me outside. Mohamed tried hard to find me a nice place to sleep, brought me my bag, "take care of this," and took the animal skin out of the south tent so I could sleep. We agreed that we'd go to town at 9:30 tomorrow morning. I could hear voices for a long time out front, and though I was missing unique and wonderful experiences I didn't care, the way that nothing matters when sleep is so near.

15 Morning at the beach

I was the first to get up, at about 9:30. Everyone else was fast asleep, so I just went out to the chair under the parasol and wrote up a few notes (you think I did all this from memory?). You could hear a few people out there, but not many. Amena got up shortly thereafter. She crawled out of the tent in a fluorescent green bikini, then put on a vest and one of those skirts that you have to wear a swimsuit under because it's way too short to count as clothing by itself. It was a white skirt, so the green showed through. She came out and laid out for a while in the shade behind me, saying a few words, then drifted on to another tent. Later, I could hear the sound of the Casio demo drifting along on the wind. I figured I shouldn't go swimming if we were going out soon, though the guys on the inflatable mattress in the lounge didn't seem to have much life in them. I decided I'd go for a walk through the camp.

Passing by the tent where Amena was laying on the floor with her feet on some guy's stomach, I saw the biggest tent on the block. There was a grey-haired White guy just sitting down at the table, with his newspaper and bread. I approached, thinking that he's probably Spanish. I complimented him on his tent, which seemed to have a full-sized bedroom, and a big kitchen in back. In my memory, the kitchen has tiles and a full-scale refrigerator, the place was so huge. "How many people live in this castle?" "I dunno. It's like a hotel, with so many people coming in and out." "Where are you from?" "France. But I'm working here now." "What do you do?" "I'm a professor." "Really! What subject?" "Gym." After another minute of this, I came to the realization that I had nothing to say to this guy, and walked on. But I so appreciate the fact that I could walk into any old tent and start a conversation.

I got to the end of the camp, not seeing anything all that different, and made my way back. I got lost briefly, and even ran into a dead end. Back at the camp, Mohamed and the other guy (who was introduced to me as “the king of the beach”) had woken up. Mohamed was looking for his sandals, which were borrowed by somebody else, we concluded after looking under the inflatable mattress three times. This was apparently common. He was now in a five or ten year old Ricky Martin t-shirt. The sound of camp was growing louder, but Mohamed told me that it’d be a while before the city’s really awake, and we should wait for his sandals, since he didn’t have his football shoes here, so maybe I should just go for a swim for a while. I readily obliged.

I went straight out this time, as straight as I could, because the current had dragged me halfway across the camp, Atlanticward. From there, maybe 300 meters out, all I could hear was water, which is how swimming should be, if ya ask me. I could see the whole of the camp, then just beyond the dividing wall, the summer homes made from non-canvass materials, and still further on, Club Med’s tower. Coming back was slow. When I got back, Abdul was here, in a swimsuit, playing with Amena’s exposed belly. Amena, for her part, was trying to put on her foundation and install blue contact lenses to cover her black eyes. She had the cutest little mirror attached to her finger with a little cuff. Through all this, Abdul was bickering forcefully with her, evidently about how she doesn’t need to wear makeup. Then he laughed loudly and, in English, said, ‘We’re just playing. But we’re friends. She says she looks like a human being now.’ Mohamed explained it to me, though: Abdul has another girlfriend (I don’t know how literally we should take that) and Amena doesn’t want Abdul to bring her to the beach. Breakfast was now being served, which consisted of omlettes and bread, just like dinner the night before. I just ate my bread. The bread is a round, flat loaf, shaped like pita but actually bread, and we have about three rounds for the five of us. As other people pulled off pieces and passed it around, all I could think about was how the toilets didn’t have soap. The olive oil for dipping the bread was good, as was the tea, which is mint tea with branches of mint (herbabuena) floating in it like an aquarium.

Abdul said that Mohammed had told him we’d be going to the Jewish quarter, and that he was eager to go downtown with me again. I could buy more things and make a killing reselling them over in the states, like with the carpet. “I don’t feel very good that I bought the carpet,” I said. He stopped talking for a while.

Abdul introduced me to another neighbor, who was from England and stayed here every summer. He has a restaurant, and two cute little daughters with cute little accents. ‘Can I have a hug, daddy?’ ‘I’m all the way over here. I’ll hug the hat. Mmmm. Here, now you hug it.’ ‘Mmmmm.’ Everybody else in the tent only spoke Arabic, French, and ‘Hola.’ Oh, they understood the word ‘Chicago,’ because they gave the correct response: ‘¡Chicago Buyls!’

By now Mohamed had found his sandals, and we were ready to head out. Abdul declined to come with us. Mohamed and I held up two fingers and caught a cab. The ride downtown was painfully uneventful, just another twenty minutes watching now-familiar scenery while

pressed against somebody I don't know.

16 The Jewish Quarter

Mohamed lives with his parents in the Jewish quarter. However, there are now only two Jewish families there, so it's not really all that Jewish anymore. There's a tiny little doorway to enter the area, and Mohamed points to a hole in the top of the doorway. "There used to be a stick hanging down here, so you couldn't walk burros through the streets." He continues for another minute or two about how clean it used to be here, and how it's dirtier now that they've all moved out. 'Very hygienic' was always one of my favorite stereotypes of Jews; I wonder why Moslems don't follow the same mitzvot. I was looking for signs of Jewdom, in the street signs, in the faces of the children, and finding none. We passed by the Jewish school, which was open, with two women in tunics at the door, and lots of kids in tunics running around. Right next to that was the synagogue, which was only identifiable as such by the slanted wound in the door frame where the mezuzah used to be until it was pried off, evidently with much force. All the Jews had moved to Spain or to Casablanca (the largest city in Morocco), until there were only the two Jewish families left here, which Mohamed knew by name. He paid rent to one of them. His house was right around the corner; I would like to have seen it, but he asked me to wait.

Standing on the corner, two meters from the older guy also standing on the corner, I could see all the way down the street, which was pretty crowded all the way along. The cross-street on which Mohamed lived was totally deserted. I don't know how people decide that they should all establish their shops in this street instead of that. It's interesting to think of the idea of a residential or a commercial street when there are no cars, not even burros.

Mohamed now had his football shoes, and we went walking. There were fewer stuff vendors here, and more food, herb, pastry, thread, book vendors. We stopped at the book stand and I looked at a Spanish math textbook dated 1957, while Mohamed checked something else out. He bought a Spanish football daily. We continued walking, through an underground shopping mall, which looks a lot like the ones outside, but with a more American look with backlit signs telling you what stores are upstairs and metal grates which were now closing because it was time to pray. I asked Mohamed if the guy who calls to prayer uses a loudspeaker, because it sure sounds like it, but he never answered. When we came back up we were outside of the city center, in the paved and carred part.

We passed into a café. Almu had told me that I could get myself a tall glass of avocado juice, but Mohamed had never heard of it, and I didn't see a big pile of avocados next to the big pile of oranges behind the counter. The place was kind of dirty, with a big group in the back playing parcheesi, and a lot of men just sitting around. Way in the back was a doorway that seemed to lead to a courtyard, but I didn't go and see. Instead we just sat and

watched TV. First was football, which we mostly talked over, because I have no interest. The announcer was English, so Mohamed couldn't understand it anyways. A few minutes later, the show was interrupted by an announcer reminding the viewer that it's time to pray. The reader may not think much of this point, but anything that interrupts football has to be really, really important. A big electronic Koran opened to reveal gold letters on a sky background, which were read in Arabic and in English (not French). It was something about how knowing your neighbor's wife opens the path to knowing other neighbors' wives.

Shortly thereafter the game ended, and some violent program from the 70's began. The evil businessman does evil things for a while, but is then stopped by the eccentric action-loving hero. Lots of people are killed, lots of guns are sold by some guy with a too-thick Australian accent. I can relate all this because it was in English as well, with Arabic subtitles. Guns are illegal in Morocco as another means to prevent revolt, Mohamed told me. Possession is six years in prison. [Doing some reading in the Bank of Spain the other day, I saw that the king had some reason to be concerned, having suffered a series of attempted military coups in the 80's. As of the book's writing in 87, military men needed police escort to leave the barracks.] Mohamed failed to mention the other main method of keeping the people down: prayer five times a day. Some of you will argue that passivity such as 'I'm not going to work hard or be pissed off that I'm being exploited by my government because one day I'll die and then it won't matter' as innate, but I'd say that much of it is learned from Marx's famous "opiate of the masses."

17 The casbah

I got some cash from an automatic teller, and commented to Mohamed about how cool modern technology was. He grunted. Having thus prepared, we caught a cab uphill. From almost anywhere in the city, you can see the hills, and the houses that cover it. This is where the poor folks live. Traffic was slow in the flat city center, and Mohamed kept apologizing, maybe three or four times, that it's not far once we get past the traffic. We finally got to the foot of the hills and traffic cleared.

tHE STReets were lousy, just like in Abdul's upper-crust neighborhood, and the taxi driver didn't have an easy time about getting up. Mohamed was getting the cash from me, 400 diráns, which was more than I had expected. "Everybody says the best hash is in Chauwen, but now it's too overcrowded and the quality is going down. This stuff is better." Looking out the window, there were fewer people, walking uphill and making the taxi driver's life still harder, or going up long flights of concrete stairs hidden between the buildings. The buildings themselves seemed pretty uniform, all with the same peeling paint and the same steel doors with a place to put the padlock and one big diamond on each door for decoration, with nothing particularly special to accomodate for the steep slope. We got to some intersection, and Mohamed went off in some direction.

I waited in the cab, as per Mohamed's instructions, with the door wide open, but soon got tired of that and went to sit on the curb. The intersection itself was twisted, with none of the streets meeting at a right angle, and none on the same plane. At the curb was a convenience store, again with no space for anything but shelves. There was a boy loosening what I presume were bags of salt by hammering on them with a bottle. Three bangs and then the next bag. There were some boys running around, maybe 10 years old, in white tunics and yamulkes, having a good time. Oh, and as proof that the neighborhood wasn't as run-down as I'd thought, there was a burro carrying a huge load of brand-new bricks up the hill.

Mohamed came running down the street, and we jumped in the cab for our getaway. He had the "egg" in hand, a blob about three by three by two, which smelled very herby. I opened my bag to look for a place to hide it, and pointed to the bottle of whiskey. I didn't show it to him before because I feared that he might be offended, since he doesn't drink. But he was practical about it, and told me matter-of-factly that I could have gotten a 100 dirán discount with it, and we sat silently for a few seconds in that 'shoulda done' manner.

18 Tetuan, lower-class guide

Back in the city, we passed by the fountain that Abdul had first taken me to yesterday. It was the first landmark all day that I had recognized, and shrunk down my impression of the size of Tetuan. Next to that was a music shop, and I asked Mohamed what was good. He pointed to some old guy, whom he classed as a classic on the guitar; something about Neil Armstrong converting when he heard him play. Most of the shop was tapes, with a window of CDs near the door. I offered to buy Mohamed one as well, and he finally picked one out for himself—he didn't need to be asked four times. When we asked for a tape, the guy at the counter opened the shrink wrap and played a few minutes for us on a little stereo with nice speakers. He wrapped each of them in paper and put the title in indecipherable characters on the cover. I'd tell you the name of the guy I got, but there isn't a single word in latin letters anywhere on the tape. But it sounds pretty good.

With everything I bought for him, Mohamed never said thank you, which seems to make sense to me. One thing that was very eye-opening about Mohamed's manner which I'll point out explicitly is that he really didn't care that my standard of living, measured by annual consumption or such, is a hundred times higher than his. People often assume that people poorer than them want to live their lives, which is sometimes but not always true. The poor in the cities in which we live see wealthier people every day of the week, which inspires jealousy and hatred. But Mohamed, I can safely say, has no idea of what life in Madrid is like, and therefore feels absolutely no need to attempt to attain it, no bitterness over the fact that he is where he is. If we put him in a four-star hotel in Sevilla with the chlorinated swimming pool, gave him a computer and a washing machine/dryer, he wouldn't necessarily

be happier than he is on a tent in the beach with an old agenda and his bic stic. Or so I think. This may be because of the vast distance between the two lifestyles or because of the anti-revolt measures discussed earlier: hash and religion.

We returned to the city center, passing by the cafés with the parcheesi players, back to Mohamed's neighborhood, which was now familiar. I stood around as he tried to get his friends to buy my whiskey. Watching Mohamed trying to sell the stuff, I realized my flaw: even though he was certainly too honest to cheat me, he was so honest that everybody else cheated him. I probably got a lousy price on the hash and was now getting nothing fair for my whiskey because I had a bad negotiator. In the end, I just gave the bottle to Mohamed to do what he wished with it, which was to give to his friends.

His friends were sitting around on a stoop, mostly silent the while I was there. Overall, I got the impression that people don't feel nearly as bad about pauses in the conversation as Spaniards or Estadounidenses do. His friends tried to talk to me, but with little success. One was in a Chicago White Sox style jersey with Chicago written across the front. I pointed it out, and he misidentified it as a Bulls shirt. A girl passed by in moderately tight clothing, modest and unattractive on the Spanish scale, and every head followed her, then she passed by again coming back, and a third time, with subtle glances every time. It made me laugh. Later I managed a brief conversation with one of the guys who spoke some Spanish. I asked him about the women and the booze, and he said that he just wasn't interested in women at all, preferred football; and that Mohamed had a problem in that he did like the ladies, but had to restrict himself to just looking. From there he immediately digressed: "¿You wanna go swimming? The beach is ten minutes away." I declined politely, since I had to go soon, and we made our way.

We evidently passed through the food part of the town. First were the fish vendors; then the animal part vendors, one of whom had a cage of chickens clucking around and a big wood table, most of whom just had lots of slabs of things on ice; then the pasta and grain vendors; then the fruit vendors; and here and there a cleaning supply vendor. I was amused that people had managed to segregate in such a manner. I guess it wasn't regulated that way because here and there there was a fruit vendor in the meat section, but it seems to make more sense to me that they could form small coalitions, so that every block has one of every vendor. The one big advantage to the current setup that I saw was that only one block smelled of fish. I guess that's why I'm not running my own fruit stand.

I bought lots of stuff: cumin (I didn't want cumin; Mohamed misidentified it), whole pepper, oranges with the little leaves still attached. I was also looking for gifts, maybe an espresso maker, but they didn't seem all that much better here than in Spain. I felt silly buying so much, with Mohamed patiently arranging every trade. It gave me a distinct feel of outsidersdom. Oh, I should point out that we never entered any shops like I did with Abdul, which I think explains the system: upper class inside, lower class outside.

Leaving the center, we passed through one of the seven gates of the original city. Way back

when, they closed the gates at nightfall. It made me think about a poem, Little Boy and Lost Shoe (Robert Penn Warren), wherein the boy loses his shoe on the way home and mother makes him go back and find it. ‘Hurry, for time is money and the sun is low.’ All of his poems were set in the rural south, but ¿what if the little boy lived here?, in Tetuan, where the four meter tall doors are shut by the last light of day, and aren’t opened under any circumstance. ¿What would it be like, searching for that lost shoe, knowing that coming home before dark isn’t just desirable, but is strictly, strictly enforced? After the doors are closed, nobody will talk to you; you’re just left to read the inscription over the door over and over.

The pharmacy signs in Paris and Spain, by the way, have always been my favorite. They’re plus signs made with a lot of neon tubes. They all dance, all in a different manner, some getting bigger and smaller, some rotating, some doing everything at once. I could watch them for hours—I have. Being in the Arabic world, however, the signs are crescent moons, not crosses, in exactly the same shade of green, which offers fewer possibilities for dancing neon.

I bought some chocolate at the expensive pastry shop, which was still cheap for me. It was expensive because it was indoors and air conditioned and the chocolate came in a box tied with a ribbon; there seemed to be many of the type. We took another long, long ride back to the beach. The driver paused briefly so that the guy next to me could greet a friend whom he saw on the side of the road. He’d just got out of prison the day before, and they hadn’t seen each other for years. The guy spoke Spanish, so as we continued driving I was able to ask him about it all. He was nondescript, to the point that I can’t describe anything he said. He was going to Malaga, a Spanish city with a large Arab population and a distinctly racist mayor, and seemed sincere when he said he hoped to see me on the ferry. He declined when I offered him my chocolate.

19 Leaving Morocco, going home

At the beach, Abdul and company were laying out under the parasol, now moved closer to the shore. I went for a swim again, this time just brief and deep, searching for that point where you don’t float or sink or hear or see. Then I dripped back to Abdul and Mohamed and gave my farewells. I asked Abdul to have the herbalist send me the herbs I’d bought, and he grunted. Mohamed asked for a pen to give me his address. ‘And you, Abdul, post office box 1322?’ ‘Yeah, but just write Mohamed if you have anything to say to me.’ On that note, and with a nod to the other residents of the tent, Mohamed and I went to get a cab. Abdul was calling out to me as I walked further and further away, ‘Tip him well. Tip! Him! Well!’ This made me feel really slimy when I gave Mohamed the 100 diráns I was intending to give him anyways. “This is because you didn’t try to sell me a carpet.” Mohamed continued about how there are so many dishonest people around here until the

cab came. The ride was short, and I'm sure that the guy next to me wasn't very happy that I'd just gone swimming.

At the border, I stopped into a store to buy a round of bread for the trip home. I also asked where I could change my diráns, and the guy immediately pulled out a wad of pesetas. He said it was 14.2 pesetas per dirán, but then he gave me about 10 per, which pissed me off. He spent another three or four minutes trying to convince me that it wasn't better elsewhere, at which point I was comfortable just walking away. I bought my boat ticket in diráns instead, which gave me a better price than pesetas, and continued on to the border. There was one window where the guy was stamping a friend's passport, as mine had been stamped. He gave a look of 'Oh no' when I caught him with his window open, but then just directed me to window 4. Fortunately, window 4 had no line. I handed the passport over to a Spaniard, who inspected my passport, then the computer screen, then the passport, then the screen, for about two minutes, then handed it back to me.

The border had me nervous. ¿What if they search my bags? Regarding the rock from the casbah, ¿what if the sheriffs don't like it? But I took comfort in knowing that they're really only looking for dealers, and a block this small, 'for personal use', will at worst lead to a fine that I'll never pay and confiscation. None of that happened: the guy just looked at my passport and handed it back. I instead stopped him, asking where I can change my money. He pointed to a big sign that said, "Change," which was a big tent with lots of tables and the logo of some bank (hands shaking) and no people. Further on I found a place to make the change. I was so overjoyed that I wasn't shafted that I forgot my passport there. I caught a shared cab with some folks, realized that I had left my passport, and wound up having to pay the entire price for one and a half trips.

Anyways. I got to the ferry station, sat around and waited ten or fifteen minutes at the wrong gate, and was lucky enough to be the last person on the boat I had a ticket for. As I was running to the boat, security stopped me to ask for my passport. I replied that I was from the US, with a nice American accent, and was waved on. This is the same method used at the Tijuana border: proof of citizenship by accent. I slept catatonically on the ferry. Getting off, I was surprised to see the luggage inspectors were on this side of the water. I guess being surprised was good, because I didn't have to get nervous beforehand. The woman doing the inspections was incredibly flippant. About half the people walked past, but she pointed to me, and I put my bags on the table. She just glanced into the bag of spices and oranges, talking to a friend all the while, then opened my other bag and, grabbing the shirt that had my lump of hash, pushed some stuff around and waved me on.

This left me to find the train station, which wasn't hard. The only interesting thing about the port of Algeciras was a certain building that completely lacked any sort of glass (they painted a nice building onto the facade), and next to that a building almost entirely built out of glass tiles. If we could learn to share, we'd all be better off. I bought my ticket, and then had an hour to kill. There were two British girls with gigantic backpacks looking for a

café, and I tagged along. We sat and tried to talk over the vespas, as they explained their trip to me. It was a big loop from England to southern Italy and back again, with lots and lots of stops in between. The joys of Interrail. Some guys were asking donations for an AIDS charity, and I was actually asked about four times, on the way to the station and then here at the café.

On the train, there was a cute couple from Cordoba, with a thron Andaluthian acthent, who went to Ceuta so boyfriend could participate in a bike race. He came in 11th out of 70+. The bike was in the corridor, and people were so preoccupied with avoiding it as they passed that they wouldn't notice the glass door. The repeated thuds gave us endless enjoyment. At my side was an older man, who only talked to complain about how the train was late. On my other side was a Greek guy who spoke only English, and I got to play translator between the Cordobans and him.

After sleeping for a while, I found that there was a big agglomeration of people in the cafeteria car. Many were laying out in sleeping bags. Some were sitting around at a table, including the Greek guy, two Scottish girls, and a French guy. They were speaking the lingua franca—English—so I had no problems. They were talking about hash. The Scots spent eight days in Chauwen. People sit around in the cafés all day long, sitting, staring. The girls wanted to stay for two days, but ended up staying eight, just because they didn't really have the energy to leave. Now they were on their way to Amsterdam. The Greek guy pulled out his souvenier from the fields of Chauwen: a full marijuana leaf, which was admired all around. Somebody told him he'd get years and years in prison if he was caught with a chunk of hash, so he threw what he'd bought in the ocean before crossing to Ceuta, and was now complaining, as they all were, about how they didn't have anything to smoke. I gave them a tiny bit, partly to be social, and mostly to shut them up. The girls gave me 300 pesetas for theirs, which I guess makes me irredeemably a dealer. When the conductor came by, everybody got quiet, and he gave them all a stern look before saying, 'It's OK. But no smoking when the cafeteria opens in the morning.'

I slept more, and woke up at Madrid-Chamartin. As I was walking down the platform, a guy stopped me—'¡Policia!'—flashing his badge in my face. The first thing I thought was about that conductor. ¡He turned me in! ¡He knew! But it was of course more banal than that. I had tanned, and now looked close enough to Arabic that the police would stop me. This time I actually had to show my passport for the "routine check." He didn't look for an entry stamp, just that the picture matched my face. From there, I was on the last leg of this journey home: cab to cab to ferry to train to Metro. After the twenty minute ride on the Metro, trying to sleep, writing notes, stinking, I was back home and in bed.