

Not My Morocco 89,238 words
by Vago Chris Damitio

This book is for my daughter, because ultimately, it's the story of your origin, Aya Sophia. This is how you came to exist.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Fuck the American Dream.....	4
Coming to Morocco.....	7
My Moroccan “Wife”.....	11
Back to Europe and North America.....	17
Going Back to Morocco.....	19
Casbah Life.....	21
Born Again Virgin.....	25
Tales of the Jews in Old Sefrou.....	29
Reading Morocco.....	32
Dar el Djinn.....	34
Sidi Blogs.....	36
The Problem is Me.....	40
The Journey is about the People.....	42
Sick of and Sick in Morocco.....	46
Winter Comes.....	54
It's Not Only Me.....	56
The Cobbler of Sefrou and other Stories.....	58
The Evil Eye Strikes.....	63
Driving Ms. Fatima.....	68
I am the Curse.....	71
Aasura.....	81
Cold Morocco.....	87
The Moroccan Teachers Conference.....	90
Onward to the Future.....	92
A Vagobond Valentines.....	94
Meknes – Built on the Backs of Imperial Slavery.....	97
Bruce Lee in Morocco.....	99
American English School Films.....	100
The Ugliest Rug in Morocco.....	102
Marriage Papers in Morocco.....	103
I Hate Moroccan Weddings.....	107
Wedding More Moroccan than a Moroccan Wedding.....	112
Leaving the American English School.....	118
Leaving Morocco.....	120
Postscript.....	122

Introduction

I've written books, but I don't know if I can write this book. I don't even really know what this book is about. I'm sitting here in a small apartment I've rented in the heart of one of Morocco's oldest medinas. I don't really even have a clue what I am doing here. I don't know why I'm here. I don't know what I want. As the Gnawa music beats its rhythm from the CD merchant's cart that sits on the bridge of the Oued Aggai which rushes by outside my window, I hear the children of the family that lives above me playing in the stairwell. My Derrija isn't good enough to know what they are saying, but they are kids, so I have a fairly good idea.

Part of what made me rent this apartment was the white noise of the river and the other part was that it was the first place I found that I could call my own in this country that is most certainly in no way mine. Equal parts. Luckily, the first place I found offers a lot of what I wanted in a home. It's in a car free area. Fruit and vegetable merchants are an easy walk away. I have one neighbor who speaks English, an English woman named Jessica who has integrated herself into the casbah quite nicely and thus has paved the way for me to live here without too much attention.

If you come into the Medina through Bab al-Maquam and walk across the bridge past the Great Mosque of Sefrou you will see a narrow alleyway on the right side. Turn down that alleyway and follow its narrow winding path and eventually you will reach a communal water source, I suppose you could call it a fountain, but it's more like a community tap. Most of the people living here don't have their own faucets and so they get water from the fountain, gather there, gossip there, and get to know each other there. You will pass a small hanut, or store. It's more like a closet than a store and the store keeper sits inside this closet with a half door separating him from the world. The shelves of his closet store are lined with candies, sugar, Tide detergent, yogurt, and other essentials for household life. He has a TV or talfiza inside that usually has Bollywood films or football matches on it. Young men without jobs hang out around the hanut and women and kids hang out around the tap. There is a definite division of the sexes here in Morocco. Sometimes there is crossover, sometimes there is not.

The women wear the standard housewife uniform of colorful pajamas and an apron. Some of them wear hijabs, some don't. This after all is the casbah, which I have been told again and again is the seediest and most dangerous part of the medina. My friend Yassine asked me if he could leave his money here so he could walk home safely through my neighborhood. I said yes and then I started to feel nervous about where I've chosen to live.

The men and teen boys wear jeans and dark jackets. Their hair is cut short and lots of the younger guys like to sport what I call a mini-mohawk with about one inch of hair combed to the top in a sort of cock's comb. They talk in dark doorways, play cards on the stoops, and look at me curiously as I walk by. If they look hard enough, I will give them a "Salaam a leykum", Peace upon you, to which I usually get a "Wa leykum Salaam" in return, and upon you be peace. If they don't return my greeting, my nerves kick up a notch.

I'm told by my English speaking Moroccan friends that this is the quarter where prostitutes are and that it is dangerous here beyond anywhere else, but I feel no more threatened by anyone here than anywhere else and I get no more come hither looks than I get everywhere else. I get lots of those looks. I am the dream of every suffering Moroccan woman. A ticket out of the country to a different life that they've seen on TV and are certain I hold the keys to. Ha ha, if only they really knew.

The truth is, I never managed to figure out exactly what lock those keys are supposed to go to. I'm a self-imposed exile from my country of origin who found that he was unable or unwilling to achieve the American dream. I've never figured out exactly which. I tried my hand at dozens of jobs in a half dozen states and never found what I was looking for. Finally, after achieving a degree I paid for with loans I will probably never pay back, I decided it was time to leave. I simply hadn't found what I was looking

for.

I don't know if I wanted to find a mate, a career, or a home but none of them turned up and so I am left wondering what my life would be like if one or all of them had. A part of me claims that the real reason I am here is because I don't want to work, I don't want to commit, I don't want to put in the effort to have those things. Maybe that part of me is right, but I'm not sure. Just as I'm not sure about anything except the fact that I am here, in Morocco, a country that I knew nothing about when I first visited it. I'd never even heard of Paul Bowles and had no idea that William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac came here and were influenced by this place. I had heard of Tangier and Marrakesh, but I really didn't know what country they were in. I thought Tangier was in Mexico and Marrakech was in India. Neither one seemed like they would be in Africa. I had watched Kate Winslet in *Hideous Kinky* but had no idea it was set in a country just 30 minutes by ferry from Spain. I'd eaten couscous and watched Casablanca but really couldn't have told you that couscous was the national dish or even have pointed to Casablanca on a map. I probably would have pointed to somewhere in the middle east or maybe to Algeria. I arrived here without even having a guidebook or having done any sort of research about the place.

And yet, now, it is home. If you find that strange, I can't even begin to express how much more strange I find it. Somehow I have a fiance and with her I have a whole extended family of shepherds, hanut keepers, pajama wearing women, and mini-mohawk wearing boys. Entirely too easily I was able to land a job at a prestigious English school in Fez, the cultural capital of this strange country, and while I'm not sure that it will work out, everyone is very impressed that I am working there.

I've also started to make money through blogging workshops for other ex-pats living here and now it looks like I will be able to do some consulting as well. My initial prices are entirely too low, I undervalued myself, but perhaps this will lead to some demand and then I can begin to raise my prices. Like everything else, this has just sort of happened. I can explain the process to you, but I can't really make sense of it.

And this is why I'm not sure I can write this book at all. I'm not really sure what I am writing it about in the first place, or why, or how I am here or what I intend to do here. Hopefully you can see my dilemma and it will give you some patience as you read this, if I should happen to drift from one place to another without rhyme nor reason.

~ written in the Casbah of Sefrou, December 2009

Fuck the American Dream

I've never really liked or believed in the American Dream. From the time I was old enough to have thoughts, my thoughts tended to drift towards questions that were philosophical rather than practical.

This is one of those points when I am forced off point as Gnawa musicians from Fez have parked themselves outside my door and are beating their drums like mad men in the hope that Jessica, my English neighbor is home and will come outside and invite them in for tea. Or maybe they have heard I am here and are hoping for me to come out and invite them in. It's a fascinating idea, but not likely to happen since I have put myself in for the night. Jess isn't home and her dogs are barking like mad as the Gnawa guys beat their drums. If I were Burroughs or Kerouac, I would go out, invite them in, smoke some hash with them, and make some sort of strong connection that would color my entire Moroccan life in a different light. That's not me though. Not now anyway.

After a year of living out of a suitcase, I finally have a place I can lock the door and I'm not willing to open it to anyone just yet. I've learned in this life that one thing that disappears faster than money is privacy. If you open the door, you can never close it. This is especially true in Morocco where people like the Gnawa guys will show up unannounced and simply make music outside your flat and if you are home, they will certainly come in and make themselves at home. Moroccan hospitality is vast and an unfortunate consequence of that is that it is often expected. When you go to someone's house here, you don't go up to the door, you stand a stone's throw away and you shout the name of the person you are looking for. Or you stand in the street beating your drums until someone comes out and lets you in. I don't want anyone in right now. Not even the girl I'm supposed to marry. Although I will admit that if she were outside I would let her in and that letting the Gnawas in and smoking dope sounds more fun.

Perhaps my main hesitation here right now is language. I can read body language but without being able to express opinions, have conversations, or delve into philosophical issues, it's next to impossible for me to enjoy the company of other people. This might be the major source of my doubts with my fiance. Her English is superb but she is a talker and not really a listener and that makes conversation a one way street. I can force her to listen, but she doesn't really digest and then recontribute towards an actual conversation where both of us learn and grow. Instead she just wants to snuggle, kiss, and rest. That's far from horrible, to have a cute little Arab girl who wants to cuddle all the time, but my mind needs stimulation too. And from her, it's not getting it. In fact, even as a translator she fails to keep me involved...

So, back to the American Dream. The thing is that I've always known I am destined to die and so it has never made much sense to me to work hard for a bunch of things that can't go with me anyway. That's what the dream is, right? You work hard and spend your time on this planet doing things that you don't necessarily want to be doing and then you get to have things that you want. Right? Sacrifice your time, a limited quantity, for things, which the universe has in abundance. The things aren't really going anywhere, but you certainly are, you just don't know when or where. You will die and then your body will become just one more thing that will decompose and become other things like all the rest of the things.

So, to me, the bigger question has always revolved around whether we are more than just that thing we call a body and if we are, then what exactly are we? Somehow, I've never been able to believe that when our bodies die, we die with them. In other words, I am unable to disbelieve in what can best be described as souls. For those paying attention, note the intentional use of the double negative. Your high school English teacher might tell you that what I just wrote translates as "I believe in souls" but that's a pile of horse crap. I neither believe nor disbelieve in souls. Instead, I am simply saying that despite there being no thing-ish evidence for souls, I am not convinced they don't exist.

I am convinced though that dead people don't need a bunch of stuff from this world. So, to me,

whether there is continued life after physical death or not, it seems like an immense waste of time to spend this life doing things we don't want to be doing unless they are somehow contributing to the life that we may or may not have after this one is over. Somehow I think that staring at a stream or looking up at the clouds is a better way to spend my time than shuffling papers for a brokerage or playing music on the radio that doesn't speak to me. If you can find a career that you love as much as I love looking at clouds, I'm happy for you. Go for it. So far though, I can't really say that I have.

I've found things that were pretty good though. Writing and making films both feel like time well spent, unless I am writing sales copy and making films that don't speak to my soul. Unfortunately, you can't be a DJ that simply plays the music he likes and if you are leading a tour group you can't simply stop the group and say, "This is a pretty spot and I think we should stay here for a few hours". Well, I take that back, you can if you are the person who owns the tour company or programs the radio station. At least I think you can. I've never been in those positions though because they are usually filled by guys who wasted the best 20 years of their lives getting into those positions or unappreciative children of rich people who haven't lived enough life to know how to enjoy it. Somehow though, I think those people are harnessed by their experience or upbringing and don't take advantage of their situations as they should for full enjoyment.

Are you following me here? Is this worth your time to read or would it be better if I went out and invited the Gnawa guys inside? I haven't really learned what the Gnawa guys are all about yet. It's a form of music that is supposed, I think to ward off evil spirits, djinn and to protect you from the influence of beings such as Aisha Kondisha. The Gnawa guys wear colorful robes with cowrie shells and brass thingamagigs on them. They are blacker than most Moroccans. I'm not sure why. They carry and beat their drums and ask for coins in the Medinas sometimes.

Jess told me that one day she was leaving Fes and she met them and invited them to come up to her house for a party or something. So she paid for them to play, brought them to Sefrou, had her party and now they just come back on their own once in a while. She said that when she comes home sometimes people say to her "Hey, the Gnawa guys were here today." I guess I'll say it to her tomorrow. Or tonight. It depends on if she stands outside my door and screams "Vago!" when she gets back home.

Djinn are beings that Moroccans believe to be like something between angels, demons, and ghosts. Essentially they are a separate species of intelligent beings that Allah created that aren't visible to us. They have free will like we do and will be judged just as we are at the big end of the world courtroom. As a result, they can be good, bad, or indifferent. I haven't quite worked out the details on them. There are lots of stories of them having societies just as we do with marriages, kings, and entertainment. It would seem that we are visible to them, but certainly that must get distracting and then there are the stories that they live in empty houses, drain pipes, and water places. My little apartment must be full of them.

I don't mind a bit. I feel like the sound of the water soothes my soul and if there are any spirits here, they seem to be pretty good. I've resisted the suggestion that I slaughter a sheep, goat, or black chicken and pour the blood down the drains to clear out the djinn. After all, they were here before I was and as I said, I'm not feeling any negativity. Every time I say my house is full of djinn though it makes me want a gin and tonic, or twenty of them. Morocco is a Muslim country and as such, it isn't exactly a drinking place.

This is probably a good thing for me as I've had a real love/hate relationship with myself because of booze in the past, but I do miss being able to have a few drinks with new friends and sort of get over ourselves and just have a good time. I've noticed that here people often find themselves simply at a loss of how to interact with others. I've been to big parties where the men just sat and looked at each other. It's made me realize that social lubricant can be a very good thing. Of course, every time I see some Arab staggering down the street after having visited the one bar in town, I realize that good things can go bad quickly. Unlike more fundamentalist countries, there is drinking allowed in Morocco, but it's not something that is really acceptable to most people.

Of course, if I were having a few beers, I probably would have invited the Gnawa guys in to join me and then gone carousing with them in the Medina and who knows...the worst mistakes I've made in this life have been involved with alcohol and also some of my favorite experiences too. It's probably better to be here writing this. At least until I have enough Derrija to get myself out of any trouble I might get into.

Coming to Morocco

How I ended up here was easy enough. I borrowed enough money to survive while I got an education about people and culture and then I skipped out of my country without paying the bill. In this case that would involve getting some sort of job that would earn enough to pay back my loans that would probably make me more miserable than sitting in this house full of djinn and listening to the waterfalls outside my window.

I got tired of working so I went to Hawaii and borrowed government money to live there while I got my education with borrowed government money and meanwhile my government spent trillions on a couple of wars that didn't make anyone happy. I don't feel a bit bad about not intending to pay them back unless it works out to be convenient for me. In fact, I feel like they could have made a lot more people happy by paying for them to live in Hawaii and take classes than by building bases, starting wars, and occupying foreign countries. Now my country is spending trillions to buy insurance and automotive companies that go bankrupt and pay the money to people who already have more money than they need. It's incredibly stupid. Even I am a better investment than wars and corporate bailouts. At least I might pay back the money someday. But then again, maybe I won't since I know where it will be spent anyway.

That's it. I milked the system for a while and then decided to split. I visited a few cities I was curious about in America, said my goodbyes to friends and family, and then bought the cheapest ticket to Europe I could find. I intended to do the classic self-exiled writer thing (actually Turkey was where I wanted to go) but then somehow I ended up here, in Morocco, sitting in a sky blue apartment listening to persistent Gnawa musicians who don't seem like they will go away even though they've been drumming for over an hour in an empty alleyway.

In Europe, I drank, fucked, and bummed around. I came here for a week or two and somehow nine months later, I'm in this apartment listening to the Gnawa guys as I write this. I've learned that Morocco is the haven of the true exile and somehow it has become my home. I am starting to think that falling in love was just a trick of the universe to get me to establish myself here. I'm not entirely happy to be here as this country seems at times to be entirely fucked, but then, the country I left was entirely fucked in a completely different way. At least here I can afford to live without spending 40 or more hours a week doing something I hate. And on top of that, there is always something interesting happening in the casbah.

The bus from La Linea, Spain to Tarifa was a very reasonable 3.80 Euros. The only problem was that I had become accustomed to big metro stations and so I missed my stop. The asshole driver wouldn't let me out nearby but insisted I go to the next stop in the middle of nowhere. Around me were cows and the beauty of Andalucia. With no bus in sight I pulled out my sharpie and wrote Tarifa on a slab of marble that looked like it had once been in some Moorish fortress. "Tarifa, por favor" and then I began to stick out my thumb. I had heard hitch hiking is pointless in Spain and this was shown to be true. Drivers would wave or gesture in the direction I was going but only continue to drive. Finally, a bus came and for another 1.5 Euros I made it back to Tarifa.

Tarifa is reportedly the Hawaii of Spain, but in February it is cold and rainy and the guest house I'd looked up was closed for the season. As I walked around looking for someplace to stay I came near the port and saw a ticket agency open which was advertising the next ferry to Morocco. It was 4:45 pm and the ferry was leaving at 5 pm. I bought a ticket for 37 Euros and knew that I must be crazy.

The high speed ferry was nice and took just 35 minutes to bring me to Africa. On board, a customs agent stamped my passport and then we debarked with no real formality. As I walked off in my brown fedora dozens of taxi drivers and touts swarmed me. I didn't have any money so I walked in the direction I thought the ATM s might be in and found one. I figured out that the exchange was about \$11

per 100 and got 300 Dirhams. I didn't know what that would get me.

A persistent taxi driver followed me and then took me to the train station. I didn't understand the amount he requested and being tired and used to the ever so honest Spaniards who seem to never even consider cheating you, I handed him 100. He handed back 50. I knew I was being gouged, but I let it be. Having no idea of Morocco and realizing that the language is totally different, I didn't want to start with an argument over five bucks.

At the train station I had four hours to wait for the train to Fez where I had decided to go to get away from the port city. I changed my last 10 Gibraltar Pounds for another 130 dirham and sat studying my new phrasebook. I met a heavy, middle-aged Moroccan woman in a hijab who was married to a Spaniard and we spoke in semi-fluent vagonese for about an hour, part Arabic, part Spanish, part French, part English. We were joined by a slightly arrogant Moroccan man from Rabat who conversed with us in stiff English. He seemed to have plenty of money and as such was absolutely no threat. I used the restroom and a beggar-like woman demanded a dirham when I came out, she was sitting there like an attendant, so I gave her one. I hate being so obviously a foreigner and already I was beginning to miss the noble and honest Spaniards I had come to love, despite the bus driver refusing to let me off near my destination in Tarifa.

When the train arrived, my two companions went to first class and I went to second. They suggested I join them in first, but I've always felt that taking the cheap seats before I ride the expensive ones is a good way to experience a country (it was a difference of about \$4). On the train, I met a man named Mohammad from Sidi Kacim where I had to change trains at 12:10 am. He was a gentle old farmer with a snake charmer's voice and he suggested I be very careful in Fez because I was such an obvious foreigner. He also gave me his number and said I should come visit him in Sidi Kacim to see what non-tourist Morocco is like and told me that he had four daughters who weren't married that I would enjoy meeting. I'm sure he sees money when he looks at me, but I found him to be the sort of crafty guy that would not only make money off me, but also end up saving me money but not until he married me off to one of his daughters.

Moroccan trains are confusing and the stations are not clearly marked with signage so I dared not go to sleep even though I had hours ahead of me. The speakers didn't work for the station announcements and the signs seemed to be in the dark areas where you couldn't read them at night. So I sat and watched the darkness roll by occasionally broken up by run down Arab tenements and distant blue and white lights of houses. I wondered what it could possibly look like in the daytime.

Arriving in Fes, it was well past 2 am and I was exhausted. As I walked out the gate I saw the guard motion to a young man in a yellow jacket as I walked past the closed train station and into a busy parking lot. He bee-lined towards me and started speaking English. I blamed it on the hat, but I'm sure even without it, I looked like fresh meat.

I tried to be polite, but he wouldn't give up so I disengaged. He had mentioned a guesthouse in trying to guess where I was staying (impossible since I didn't know) and so I told the first taxi driver I encountered to take me there. Maison Bleu. It was one of the most expensive places in Fes and was closed for the low season. Shit. The taxi driver dumped me off and drove away as I looked around the deserted streets of Batha where he had dropped me. Welcome to Morocco.

Imagine yourself in a very foreign environment, sketchy looking men moving through the shadows, and no idea really how to communicate and then you might have an idea of what I was feeling. Thoughts of terrorism, beheadings, and holy war filled my mind. I was certain that a gang of mujaheddin would jump out of some abandoned riad, grab me, and then the next anyone would hear of me was when CNN was showing the tape of a foolish American who was being used as a sacrifice to make a point in the conflicts my country has made manifest.

A car pulled up slowly to where I stood trying to figure out my next course of action. A friendly voice said in English "Wow, that's really a coincidence to see you again. What are you doing in this neighborhood, it's very dangerous at this time of the night." I couldn't help thinking of the Cheech and

Chong movie where a guy says to them “Hey, you need to buy a watch.” To which they reply, “No man, we have watches.” And then the guy says “Well your watches must be broken cause you don't know the time. It's night time and night time ain't no time to be in this here neighborhood.”

It was Driss, the English speaking guy from the train station and I suddenly felt like I had been set up. Despite this, I got in his car and then he led me to ‘his father’s’ guest house, an amazing palace of a place, showed me a incredible room and then told me it was 7000 dirham for the night. I would have paid it if I were a rich guy, but at this point I only had about 250 left and I hadn’t been to an ATM, besides it seemed like too much luxury for me by myself with the fountains and plaster and decorations. Silk pillows and king sized bed. I told him my financial situation. I was exhausted and making stupid travel moves.

He took me to his friend’s guesthouse which, by the way also seemed to be closed for the season, we climbed in through a window and had me fill out a registration card, then I paid the modest price of 250 dirhams for what was actually a pretty decent place where I was the sole guest. Driss tried to win me over with ideas about making businesses and buying carpets and reselling them.

“You can buy twenty carpets tomorrow and then go back to Spain and sell them for 500% profit,” he told me. Yes, it was probably true, but at this point I told him of my need to sleep and then shortly after I closed the door, I heard Driss leave. I was alone in an empty guest house in Morocco that was probably closed for the season. I was sleeping somewhere illegally. I started thinking that when I didn’t want to participate in his business ideas, things might go from bad to worse with Driss.

Then I had to sleep, the morning call to prayer was blasting by this time but that didn’t stop me from catching a very necessary three hours of shut eye. I woke at 8 am, brushed my teeth, jammed my hat into my bag, put on my black robber beanie and black shirt, and beat feet from what was probably an expensive night of illegal habitation. I wanted nothing more to do with Driss even if he had been telling the truth.

In hindsight, I think he was just a regular guy trying to make a few bucks off a tourist, but at that time and in the state I was in, I felt incredibly vulnerable and in terrible danger. He was probably 20 years old and spoke English well enough that he must have spent considerable time with foreigners, most likely not killing them but only hoping to profit from their ignorance or to get them to create some sort of enterprise with them. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if he studied at the American English School where I would later work.

In any event, I never found out because by 8 am I was out the window with my two bags and walking up towards where I knew the train station was. Having no money for taxis, it took me nearly an hour and a half of walking to find an ATM, then I found an internet cafe in which I learned as much as I could about Fes. I determined that if I went to the main gate of the Medina, the so called “Blue Gate” (which I might add, I had intended to go to, not Maison Bleu, but I had been tired and harried) that I would find plenty of cheap guesthouses catering to backpacking foreigners and the safety that comes from being in a tourist area.

At the bank machine, I withdrew five hundred dirhams and then found an honest taxi driver who actually used the meter and told me what the minimum fares for day and night are 4 dirhams by day, 6 dirhams by night. He offered to get me some very high quality hashish which I politely declined and then he dropped me at the youth hostel. I was stoked, online I had seen that they scheduled tours, had maps, made excursions to other areas, and even did safaris in the Sahara...unfortunately, they were booked full. The manager suggested I look at the hotels on the next street. I found one dingy place for 70 dirhams and most were around 200-500 per night. I wanted to pay less. I chanced upon an expensive café that boasted wifi, but my plug didn’t fit in the outlet and I ran out of battery power. I thought I needed a new adapter, but later I was to discover that in fact, it was just a strange outlet. In the short time I had before my battery died, I found the name of a Pension I liked, the Hotel Cascade which had some good reviews and sat just inside the famous Blue Gate, Bab Bou Jeloud.

Several cab drivers refused to take me there for reasons I couldn't really understand, but finally I

found one who agreed for 15 dirhams which it turns out is just about twice the fare using the meter. Arriving, I saw lots of non-Moroccan guests and figured that this was alright, but they too were full. I thought this was the low season? Next door I found another box room hotel called the Hotel Mauritania. The room was 80 dirhams a night, I booked for one night, dropped off my things, and then wandered around the narrow alleys and crowded souks of the Medina. I got lost and then found my way back. I can't tell you how nice it was to not be dragging around my bags. I only had a shoulder bag and a carry on size wheelie bag, but it was still too much to be wandering around with all my possessions on me.

The souks were and still are filled with craftsmen making leather, metal goods, rugs, and more. Donkeys crowd the narrow ways as they are the sole means of moving goods from one area to the next. The sight of donkeys carrying cases of Coke is something that never begins to look commonplace. Shops selling pirated CD's sit next to shops selling live chickens, camel heads or still bloody lambs. I was too freaked out to take any pictures since I was sure I would be exposed again as a lost tourist, but in fact, the beanie, 7 days of beard growth, and my overall state of dirtiness helped to mask me a little from the touts. One aggressive fellow got in my face and said 'Donne moi l'argent since French is the second language here... I stared at him and said no, things seemed to be progressing since he was screaming and seemed on the way to becoming violent but then an older man shoed him off. I sat and ate couscous and chicken and fruit salad and tea and a coke and paid ninety dirhams for it. The normal price for tourists at Bab Bou Jeloud, but about twice what any Moroccan would pay.

My Moroccan “Wife”

My wife is Moroccan. Even though I'm not really married yet as I write this, not according to any sort of official or religious documentation but it certainly feels like I'm married – owned, obligated, indentured. We wear rings, we introduce each other as my husband or my wife and just about everyone we know thinks that we are officially married. Sometimes it troubles me and other times it is a comfort.

Because of the narrow minded views of most Moroccan people, we aren't able to live together and again, sometimes this troubles me and others it is a comfort. I like having the time to be myself in my casbah cCrashpad, but like I said before, it's nice to have a cute Arab woman who wants to snuggle with me all the time too. There are always plusses and minuses.

How did we meet? Well, in Europe and the U.S.A, I was using a website called Couchsurfing to meet strangers and sleep in their homes. I found couchsurfing to be more than just a way to save money but also a way to make great new friends and learn about the places I was staying from an insider's perspective. I decided to give it a shot in Morocco. I sent out several couch surfing requests to hosts that were listed as being in Fes and got back one reply from a girl who was listed as living in Fes-Sefrou. I didn't realize that Fes is actually a state as well as a city and that Sefrou was about 30 kilometers away. She told me to meet her at the Sefrou bus station, I'd seen a bus station near the Fes Medina and went there thinking it was the one she was speaking of, after all, how many could there be?. When I called her, she asked me to put any Moroccan near me on the phone. I was standing next to a guy selling fish fresh from the coast, so I handed the fish monger the payphone and she told him to send me off to the Sefrou taxi.

I'd come to Morocco in part hoping to escape the blistering cold I'd found in Europe and North America, but here too it was incredibly cold. In fact, I later found out that it was the coldest winter in about 35 years. Lucky me. Sefrou is up in the Middle Atlas Mountains and when I finally arrived in about an hour and a half later, I found a telephone shop, bought a SIM card, called my host and she told me she would meet me at the gate of the Medina. I watched for someone who fit the picture on her profile, which looked a bit like a Hindi princess. Nobody like that came. Finally a tiny little Muslim girl, less than five feet tall in big black boots and a brightly colored hijab walked up to me and with a huge smile said “Hi Man, I've been waiting to meet you!” It was raining, but her smile contained enough sunshine to brighten any day.

As she had walked across the street towards me, I didn't recognize her but I thought to myself “God, I hope that cute little Muslim chick is her.” I should point out that Couchsurfing isn't a dating site, but it often leads to romance because guests will pick hosts that they share interests with and I admit it, I tended to pick hosts that I found attractive if given a choice. I'd never actually hooked up with a host or couchsurfer, but I knew that it sometimes happened. Of course the chances of a cute little Muslim chick in a hijab and me hooking up were about zero.

There was another couch surfer we were looking for, an Italian man named Claudio but since we couldn't find him, my host, Hanane, took me to her family's house, introduced me to her sisters and mother, and then went back to find him by herself. I was shocked to be greeted by her sisters Fatima and Zahira with European style kisses on the cheeks and then to be snuggled with as we all tried to stay warm in the family's salon. Her mother was a round Berber woman who smiled and welcomed me in Darija, Moroccan Arabic. Her sister's spoke French. Fatima was sort of earthy and rustic and Zahira was a 20-year old beauty decked out in a European haircut and stylish clothes.

The Souidi family lived in Rfaif, the industrial district on the south side of Sefrou. Their house stands alone in a field surrounded by textile manufacturing plants. It's a block concrete building with a sheep pen made of rusted old box springs and it has a squat toilet with no running water. Zahira snuggled against me and charmed me with her funny French accent until Hanane came back with

Claudio, a tall dark and handsome Italian man. At this point, all of Zahira's attentions were for him. I was relieved but also a bit jealous since Zahira was the real beauty of the family. Their mother, Khadija, made us a huge plate of stewed vegetables and chicken with couscous which we all shared in a communal dish with the girls, their father Selim, Khadija, their eldest brother Mohammad who had a wandering eye, the youngest brother Fouad who wore a red Marlboro racing jacket, and Mohammad's six year old son Amin. We all washed our hands and then ate the food using only the right hand since the left is used to clean yourself after using the toilet and then we drank incredibly sweet mint tea.

Claudio and I learned how to eat couscous with vegetables and chicken (djaj) Moroccan style. Everyone eats from the same big tray and one picks up the couscous and sort of bounces it in the hand until it forms a ball and then you plop it into your mouth. The vegetables are eaten with the main couscous and underneath, the djaj sits like a special treat which is broken into bits after it is exposed and shared around.

After eating, there was more tea and then the mess was cleared. As an American, it is hard for me to sit when people are cleaning, especially when I am the subject of such hospitality, but I understood it was proper for me to remain seated and so I did so after Fatima shoved me back down into my seat when I tried to take the plates to the kitchen. Hanane sat across from me, Fatima sat next to me and we shared a blanket, Zahira now shared a blanket with Claudio. I was quite surprised by the affection of these girls and especially since it is in front of their parents. I hadn't expected that. I didn't even think we were allowed to talk to single Muslim girls in Morocco.

Hanane taught us a song in Arabic. Something like "Hanane tahalouise, Hanane dour a ley." Claudio refused to learn Arabic since he is studying French but for me it is very nice to learn new things and learning them I certainly am. The song, which I found out later, is a marriage song and means something like "This girl is the treasure and I am going to take the treasure."

I only intended to stay for three days but because of the rain, the insistence of the family, and the ease and comfort of being there Claudio stayed for a week and I stayed for nine days. During the time we were there, Claudio and Zahira were often under a blanket together while Hanane and I studied Derrija or had conversations in English about life in Morocco. I've no idea what was happening under those blankets, but certainly even if nothing was going on, I never would have thought it to be acceptable in an Arab household. Zahira had been previously married to a 'bad man' and was in the process of a divorce while Hanane and Fatima were both unmarried. So, like I said, I've no idea what was happening. Whatever it was, I admit I was slightly envious it wasn't happening to me.

We were all sad when Claudio "made his escape" from the Souidi house. He and I had become good friends and both been given Arabic names by Khadija. They say in Morocco that if you stay for three days you are a guest but after that you are part of the family. Claudio said to me "Come on, we have to escape, this family is crazy!" He was right, but I didn't listen.

Before Claudio left, I was sitting one day in Hanane's room and working on her computer. We had talked a lot and the more I came to know her, the more I found myself appreciating this tiny twenty-five year old shepherd's daughter for her ambition, drive, intelligence, and wit. As we talked that day, I told her that if she knew what I was thinking of doing she would be shocked and she told me that if I was thinking of doing something I should just do it and not worry about what anyone thought. So I kissed her. She hadn't expected that!

To my surprise, she didn't slap me or yell at me. Instead, she kissed me back. We both knew that I was leaving, that a relationship was impossible, and yet, through all of our conversations, I had begun to love this little woman. I loved that she was the first in her family to gain a University degree, that she fended off the attacks of men as she walked home in the dark, and the way she would laugh and make jokes about things that any western woman I had known would have been offended by.

That night, I barely slept for thinking of her and a possibility of a future with her. I told her that I was leaving but that there is definitely a part of me that wanted to stay or to take her with me. I told her that I could spend the rest of my life with her and be very happy... One problem that immediately

occurred to me was that it is very difficult to get a visa for Moroccan people to leave Morocco and I knew I didn't want to stay in Morocco forever, even though it almost perfectly fit what I had wanted. I could live on less than \$300 a month, there are olive trees, there is no alcohol which is a good thing, and the people here are wonderful once you get past them seeing you as an opportunity to start a carpet business.

At the moment that we kissed, the call to prayer had sounded. In fact, three times when we kissed through the day, the call to prayer sounded and Hanane told me that this was a sign of God's blessing. I knew that I shouldn't be kissing her neck, her stomach, her lips, but my body was powerless to resist this beautiful woman. And so I was torn between a very sudden opportunity to spend the rest of my life with a beautiful woman who was willing to be everything to me and the desire to run from the responsibilities that all of this would bring with it. My fear was that I would not be able to meet the expectations that she and her family must have, how would it be for them to discover that I had barely enough to survive with even just myself to take care of.

When it was time for me to leave, she looked into my eyes and said "Love is now or never. You may never get a second chance. When you get in that taxi and are riding away, you will know that you are leaving something precious behind." And as I went to get in the taxi, I knew she was right and so I stayed, for a few more days even after Claudio was gone.

A part of me calls me a fool for not leaving when I was packed and ready. Silly emotional man. A part of me still looks at Hanane and sees the woman of my dreams. Regardless of how this works out, I was not a fool for staying. If I had left I would have spent the rest of my life confirmed in the knowledge that I had left treasure in the desert and wondering how I might be able to get it back. It was the wisdom of her words that kept me with her until a few days later when I realized she had been quoting a pop song. After that, I decided I really did need to leave even though I really was falling for this girl very hard. After Claudio had left, it was she and I under the blankets cuddling and I can tell you that it was totally innocent aside from a little kissing. I felt like I'd lost my mind. What was I doing in Morocco cuddling and kissing a shepherd's daughter who quoted sappy love songs to me as if the words were her own? I needed to hit the road again. So I did.

Leaving Love or Giving Up the World?

I voyaged to Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakesh. I met travelers from many countries who were doing the kinds of exciting things I had thought I would be doing. Biking across Africa, hitching around Morocco, or simply having a Morocco experience in the exotic Jmma al Fna square in Marrakesh. I visited ancient ruins, stayed in hostels, drank a beer in Rick's Cafe in Casablanca and wandered around medinas that still seemed to be living in the 7th century. None of it was really very enjoyable. The only joy I felt was when I would get a text message from Hanane or when I would call her to tell her I was thinking of her. And so I left the circus of Marrakesh and returned to Sefrou.

As I get older, I've realized that I am a bit obsessive-compulsive. Once I get something in my mind, it just stays there and doesn't go away. It explains away my teenage years when I would pick one girl and pine over her until she was either mine or so freaked out she would stop talking to me. Somewhere, I got this idea of romance in my head and even more than obsessing about the details of a conversation or the idea of a kiss – I obsessed over one thing more than any other. Love. In Hanane, I had found someone who was my match in this. Every second I spent obsessed over the future of this life with a girl I'd known for nine days, she spent two on. We were made for each other. Made flawed, but a matched set.

It was insane. I had no job, very little money, and no idea what I was doing. My family and friends were all convinced that I had lost my mind. They were right. Within a week of returning to her, I asked her if she would marry me. I spent 2500 dirhams on a ring for her and another 500 on the necessities for a 'small' engagement party. It was more like what I had pictured my wedding being like. I paid 600 dirhams to get her a passport and never mind that the money was flying out of my bank account and there was no source to replenish it. We started to look online to see what it would take for us to marry and at this point, I started to have some regrets about what I had done. The intricacies of international marriage go way beyond cultural misunderstandings. The biggest barrier is really government. How in the world did the people of our world ever give up such simple things as the right to marry who they want without having to wade through a quagmire of bureaucratic red tape?

Moroccan bureaucracy is a dark sticky swamp of endless stamps, translations, and official permissions. Add to this the challenges of a foreigner from the United States marrying a Muslim Moroccan girl and what you get is a horrifying mess. I would need to officially convert to Islam, get police clearance from the United States and Morocco, prove my residence, prove my work and income, prove my singleness, and prove it all in Arabic, French and English. I would need to travel to Rabat, Casablanca, and Fes – not to mention a trip back to the United States to get the things I needed there. I would need to provide photos, birth certificates, identity cards, and more. And that was just me. Hanane would have to prove as much as me plus she would need to prove that she was still virgin with a doctor's exam. Yes, not only does the Moroccan government want to know that you are filling out all the forms, they also want to ensure that the bride still has her hymen. I have no idea what they would do if she didn't have it. That was one thing we didn't need to worry about.

As we looked on the internet, it was littered with horror stories of failed attempts between Western men and Moroccan women. While the process between Western women and Moroccan men also looked difficult, it was far easier. The woman didn't have to convert, prove her virginity, or prove that she could support her husband. Not to mention that Moroccan men seemed to think I was taking something that should belong to them, like redneck racists objecting to a white woman marrying a black man. Add to this that everywhere we went she was verbally abused by the shiftless Moroccan youth who fill the streets because she was walking with me and it all suddenly started to seem to me like a big, expensive, impossible mistake. I felt like I should have just kept moving on and I would have found someone else, somewhere else, where there wasn't as much bureaucracy involved in the

process of loving someone and wanting to have a life with them.

I needed documents I had left in the United States. I needed documents I couldn't provide since I was essentially a homeless, jobless, vagabond on his way to somewhere where he didn't know and wasn't known. I had decided to be a person who existed moving from place to place without visible means of income and here I was in one place in a situation where I was expected to provide visible means of everything. I felt like I was fucked, our relationship was fucked, and my vagabonding plans were fucked because I had spent so much and falling in love had taken the joy out of free booting.

So I packed up my things and I left telling Hanane I would be back, but not really sure of it at all. In fact, even though she and I had done some nice day trips together, made friends together, and really had fallen in love, I wasn't too sure at all that I wanted to come back at all. At this point I had convinced most of my family and friends that I had made the right decision, I wasn't too sure if I had at all. I think I was hoping to leave and find some sort of little fling or love affair that would make me forget her or at least numb my feelings enough so that I could find a life in a place that wasn't so incredibly difficult to adjust to just as I'd done with girlfriends in Washington, Hawaii, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Alaska. Leave one life behind and reinvent myself for another.

Carrying my two bags again, I took the train back to Tangier, took the ferry back to Tarifa and at least partially intended to never return. I went to Valencia, I went to Portugal, I went to Paris, Bordeaux, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Milan. I was looking for something to take my little fiance off my brain, something to numb my love, something to save me from this fate I had started to prepare for myself. I panhandled in Paris, got drunk in Porto, walked the streets of Milan, and visited a beautiful friend I had traveled with in Southeast Asia. I had nice experiences, I made new friends, I spent half of the money I had left and yet, I couldn't get her out of my mind. The women I met never measured up to the memory of my Hanane. Frankly, it pissed me off. All the joy and excitement I'd felt before going to Morocco was gone from my travels. One place was really not too different from another. And all along the way, even though I tried to forget her, I really couldn't. I was lonely in crowds, sad amidst revelry, and when I perhaps could have screwed some European girl or North American traveler, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. A month into it, I gave up and flew back to Fes where Hanane met me at the airport. I felt defeated and happy at the same time. How the fuck could I do this? Especially since now I had spent so much of what I had hoarded for my travels?

I got back in time for her birthday and we decided to take a small trip around Morocco. While I hadn't had any affairs while I was gone, I wasn't at all sure that she hadn't. Heavy in my mind was my last relationship when my fiance went to do foreign aid in Africa after we were engaged and then had a romance with a Lebanese trader in Sierra Leone. It had destroyed me when I found out. I was a child and it was the first time I had been cheated on. All those obsessive-compulsive feelings of love in me turned to rage, hate and confusion. It had destroyed our relationship over the next two years as I sought to fill the void she had left in my soul with drugs, booze, a stupid affair, and plenty of fighting. Was this a repeat?

These thoughts consumed me as we drummed with Hanane's Berber friends in the Sahara. Was she just using me to get papers and money? Was I simply the tool which she planned to use to escape the hellish life of a woman in Morocco? Had she had an affair with any of these men? Had she hosted other couch surfers while I was away and attempted to woo them? For that matter, was couchsurfing just a way to land a husband for her? I actually started to wonder if she and her sisters brought couch surfers to their bedroom for money and thrills...even though I had lived with them and knew for certain that they were good, decent women. I was losing my mind.

Our trip was a disaster of me being jealous, she getting sick, and then as a coup-de-gras realizing that even though we were engaged, we were not allowed by law to stay in the same hotel room in Ouarzazate, Marrakesh, or anywhere else. When we tried, the clerks would insinuate that she was a prostitute and bring her to tears. It was a miserable time. We came back to Sefrou early. A friend from Hawaii told me that he had a kayaking job for me in Alaska and that I could earn \$10,000 working over

the summer. Like the desperate idiot I was, I told him I would take it and spent the rest of my money to buy a discount round trip ticket from Ireland to Quebec City thinking I would hitchhike to Alaska across Canada. Then I found a discounted ticket from Casablanca to Madrid. I didn't know how to get from Madrid to Ireland but thought a discount ticket would appear or I would hitchhike. Fool.

Back to Europe and North America

I ended up overdrawing my bank account to buy a round trip ticket from Madrid to Frankfurt and then a cheap fare from Frankfurt to Dublin via Ryan Air. I had a disastrous couchsurfing experience in Madrid with a homosexual flight attendant who spent the whole night trying to get me drunk enough to join him in his bed until finally I came out of the bathroom and found him masturbating to a gay porn tape. I grabbed my bags and left his flat to go to a nearby hotel. In all of my couchsurfing, this was the only bad experience.

In Frankfurt, I stayed with an English girl who took me on nice walks through the forest and shared her flat with me until my flight to Dublin. In Dublin, I spent two days in a quaint hostel populated by belligerent lesbians and a very drunk Czech ex-secret policeman who tried to borrow my non-existent money to start an import business in Ireland. There are carpet sellers everywhere.

Landing in Quebec, Canadian Customs ran me through the ringer. I found out that the job in Alaska had been taken by someone else and there was no need for me to go there and I stayed with a nice Canadian girl for a few days in Quebec City who didn't mind sharing her wine and feeding me while I tried to figure out what to do next. By the time I left, I had \$4 Canadian to travel across the entire North American continent. I made it in 10 days sleeping in piles of dirt and abandoned campers as I went. My rides were generous and often fed me. In Sudbury, Ontario my ride turned into my host as I stayed for three days, made friends, and got drunk. They said they only picked me up because they liked my fedora, so the hat isn't all bad juju.

One day, I helped the two girls I was staying with to take all their empty beer cans and bottles to the recycler and we made enough to fund the whole three days of drinking I was there.. Part of the reason I made it across Canada so quickly is because my host Dawn, agreed to drive me from Sudbury to Winnipeg. Actually, I drove most of the way with her playing DJ and navigator.

From Winnipeg I caught a ride with a nurse to Calgary and then a retired forest ranger drove me through the Canadian Rockies and took the time to take me to his favorite spots for hikes and looking at the wildlife. Bears, coyotes, Banff, Lake Louise, and the magnificent wilds of North America. My homeland sings to my soul.

He dropped me at a truck stop, bought me dinner and then I slept in a ditch outside until first light when a meth head who wanted company picked me up and drove the rest of the way to Vancouver and bought me breakfast along the way. Once in Vancouver, I caught the bus to the Peace Arch border crossing, walked across the US/Canadian border and gave my friend Dave in Bellingham, Washington a call. Dave came and picked me up and for the next couple of days we barbecued, played guitars, and caught up on old times.

It was during this time that I found out that my father was remodeling some apartments he had previously sold but gotten back through foreclosure. He told me that I could spend the summer working for him and living on the job site in Southern California in the small town of Big Bear Lake where I had spent most of my young childhood. . I knew it was a mistake, but with no other option, I agreed.

I managed to earn enough with my blog to buy a Virgin America flight to San Diego where my father picked me up. For the next month we worked side by side. My dad is a perfectionist and since I was his crew, it was on me that his perfectionism fell. We had already been through a number of conflicts over the past few years when he had told me that my writing had disgraced the name Damitio and called me trash and once the subject of my writing came up, I figured things were going to get ugly. I was right.

To be fair, I'm not an easy person to have as an employee. There's a reason why I was a complete fuck up until I made corporal in the Marines and it's because I'm pretty good at leading, but not the best of followers. I don't respond to criticism very well and I like to do things my own way. I knew

things were not going great with my dad, but was surprised when he showed up at 7 am one morning, gave me a final paycheck and told me to get out. That day. No notice. No time to arrange transport, no time to figure out where I was going, and really, no real reason why he would boot me out on the street either. He said I was making he and my step-mother uncomfortable. Seriously, what kind of an idiot brings his wife to live at a construction site anyway? Personally, I think he didn't want to pay me for the whole summer and decided it was better to end our relationship than to spend the money he would have had to spend on my wages. After all, this is the rich guy who always told me that I would never inherit anything from him because he planned to spend it all on himself. I never actually wanted anything but his love – but his selfish heart never seemed to get that.

I was hurt, offended, and really screwed. This had been my last best chance to earn enough money to grease the wheels so that Hanane and I could have a life together. It was also the last effort I was going to make to have any sort of relationship with my father. Strangers treated me better than he had and I had never been so abused by any employer, let alone kicked out of where I was staying. In one blow he ended the relationship between he and I and took away my chances of easily building a life in Morocco.

Going Back to Morocco

I packed my clothes in my bag, got on my \$10 bicycle, threw the rest of my things in my father's dumpster and coasted down the 7000 foot mountains to the desert below. I bounced from a childhood friend's house, to my uncle's, to friend's in San Diego, and then caught a flight to my brother's in Utah where I spent the rest of my time trying to earn money through blogging and website development. I was able to put together another \$1500 to go with the \$1800 I had earned working for my Dad over the next few months.

I spent most of the summer living in a tent in my brother's backyard. By the time of my return flight to Dublin, I had booked a flight from Dublin to Brussels and from Brussels to Fes for about \$35. But then I had to book a flight to New York City and find a way to get from there back to Quebec City for the flight to Dublin. I ended up catching a Greyhound Bus to Boston, another to Portland, Maine. Then I took a ferry to Nova Scotia, hitchhiked to Halifax, and then took a train to Quebec City.

I arrived back in Morocco with about \$2000. The weak dollar was worth far less than when I'd left so that made my money worth about the same I'd had when I left. I'd promised Hanane I would bring her a camera so we bought one for 900 dirhams in Sefrou. Fatima had gotten engaged to a Belgian man while I was away and Mohammad's wife was ready to give birth. And here I was, the indigent future son-in-law staying in the hectic Souidi house. It made me insane. I rented a small apartment in the casbah of Sefrou, managed to get Hanane and I both jobs at the American English School in Fes, officially converted to Islam for 300 dirham, and had both of my debit cards canceled even though I had told both banks I would be in Morocco. Banks don't like seeing activity from Africa on your statement.

And here I am, with somewhere around five hundred dollars left, an apartment that costs about \$100 a month to rent, a job that takes a 10 dirham/ 1 hour each way commute, and a lot of uncertainties still. I am hosting a blogging workshop on Thursdays that will yield about 1000 dhm. I don't know when (or really if) I will get paid because I don't have the proper paperwork at my job yet, and as to marriage, it seems as impossible at the moment as it ever has. But as they say here in Morocco, it will happen Inchallah – if God wills it.

As I lay on my old ratty double mattress and try to go to sleep, I can't help feeling like maybe something is wrong. The medina is quiet at midnight and the sound of the water is as soothing as usual and yet, I feel something that I can't quite understand. Maybe it's just the coffee I drank at 9 pm, cooked on my blue bottle butigas burner. When I screwed the burner into the top of the bottle it leaked noticeably but when I put some soap on the threads, the leak was almost stopped, then when I tweaked the cheap aluminum thing a bit even my lighter could find no escaping gas. The problem isn't the butigas. Nor is it my squat toilet and the open hole that leads to the sewer in it with no water filled bowl to act as a buffer to the stench in my tiny, unventilated bathroom. And the fact that I don't have a shower or bathtub and instead wash myself with hot water from a broken aluminum kettle has nothing to do with it either. This is something else.

It's a feeling in my guts. Not a hunch because I've no clue what it means. Not a specific worry or concern because all of my worries and concerns weep out as I walk down streets crowded with olive skinned youth in sporty pirated Dolce & Gabbana clothing. My worries sit with me as I smoke cigarettes looking out my window at the shadow of a thousand years of nights that came before this one in this place. Somehow, I'm not concerned that I have less money than the average illiterate street vendor and that all of my plastic access to cash has been cut off by paranoid American banks.

These concerns can only be one thing. Woman trouble rising like a downstream creek after a mountain flash flood. I sense it coming. I feel it near. I don't have any sort of life preserver to keep me above the branches and detritus that is about to come washing over me. It's nothing I know yet, but I

recognize it like a river guide knows that when all the water suddenly stops in a stream it means that something up the river has created a temporary dam that is going to come smashing down any moment and bring a wall of unstoppable liquid force with it.

Hanane is about to explode like a 20 kiloton nuclear device and I'm stuck like Polynesian villagers on a U.S. Navy ship who are forced to watch helplessly while their world is lit up in a ball of fire and destruction. The Bikini Island Effect.

I hope I'm wrong. I haven't heard from her since early afternoon when she was on her way to go teach Hassan. Then around 7 pm, I met with Yassine, Hassan's brother and he told me that Hanane was still at his house and that she had gone crazy on him over a minor incident. I sent her a text and got no reply. I sent another and got no reply. And I wonder if she was still there when Yassine went back home and if he told her that I was drinking a beer at Jessica's when he came by to teach us Arabic script. And I wonder why she is there for so long. And I wonder how I will feel if all of this ends because she decides to end it instead of me?

I've thought about ending it a lot. There are certain incompatibilities between she and I that make me think more and more that all of this is a mistake. She drives me a little bit crazy with her desire to be the center of attention, her constant need for affection, and her inability to listen half as much as she talks. I've put things off until January or February. I've enjoyed not being around her during my days more than being around her. I grow incredibly tired of being on constant alert when I am with her and I see how easily she was persuaded to have a sip of whiskey by an irresponsible female Peace Corps Volunteer and I wonder what else she could be persuaded into doing?

It would be a relief if she were to find someone else and end things with me, but it would also break my heart. I would suddenly feel much more lonely in this place and at the same time have much more access to broadening my circle of friends. I would be relieved of far more responsibility than I want in a place where I don't even speak the language very well and I would also be devastated. I do love her, I just don't think I love her as much as she needs to be loved. I don't think I'm capable of it.

But all of this is probably just midnight anxiety caused by coffee too late in the evening. I should smoke another cigarette and let the white noise of the Oued Aggai lul me into whatever sleep I can find in my ancient concrete crash pad on my ancient box spring mattress.

Casbah Life

Things are still odd, but perhaps it is only the fear of marriage and commitment which strike me and make me look for reasons to escape this relationship. I am led by dual fears, the fear of losing her and finding myself essentially with no holds in this strange society and the fear of keeping her and being held in this strange society. Like a charioteer controlling two wild horses, I seek to make these fears pull me in opposite directions and thus pull me straight ahead. I don't know where I am going just as I don't really know what I am writing about as I write this book. Yes, I am writing about Morocco just as I am creating a life for myself in Morocco, I'm just not sure what the outcome of either situation is.

As I look, I begin to notice strange things about this place. Despite the male dominated culture here, there seem to be more female ex-patriots than male. Many of them are women who have married Moroccan men, but a good number, like my neighbor Jessica, are ultra liberated single women who have chosen to live in a society where men dominate. This is odd in itself, but I am more curious as to why there are not more ex-patriot men. There are a few. Paul, an Englishman who moved here with his English wife, a few Peace Corps volunteers, but then, since they are here for only a two year stint, I am not sure that they count, and then there are the male teachers at the American English School.

One of them is obviously gay, a little American guy. Then there are the two Phils, both English, lanky, and tall. Then there is another American, Eric, who seems to be a nice, normal guy. And finally, the director of the Center, David Gerbil, an American from Chicago who reminds me a lot of a gay pedophile John Malkovich and from what I hear, lives alone, never eats at home, and whom everyone thinks is probably gay but no one knows for sure. I'm not convinced of this as his femininity is like that of Malkovich and not necessarily gay at all. But then who knows?

I've met a fair number of the Fez expats and they all seem to be a little older than I expected. Late 40's to 60's, well enough off to have bought riads in the Medina and be in the process of restoring them, and still firmly rooted in their Englishness, Australianness, or what have you. My circles don't exactly cross with French or Spanish speakers and so I've not met any of them. Here in Sefrou, there is Jessica, me, and I've heard that there are a few French, some Egyptians, and an older American Jewish woman married to a Moroccan.

I've only been back a month and have found a job, started the blogging workshops, met a lot of people, found a house, furnished it, and am continuing to find my place in this society. What really interests me are the older Moroccans though...I want to dig into who they are and their histories. I want to record the stories of this place, the people here, the folklore, legends, and mythology. It seems a worthy goal since from what I can find, no one has really paid much attention to Sefrou since the middle of the last century when the anthropologist Clifford Geertz was here.

I've not read much of the anthropology about Morocco yet with the exception of *Tuhami, Portrait of a Moroccan* by Vincent Crapanzano. It was interesting and at the same time disappointing in that it didn't really give me the insight I was hoping to find about these people or this place. Essentially it was the life history of an illiterate tile worker in Meknes who was wrapped up in a world of saints and djinn. He believed himself to be possessed by Aisha Kondisha, a Djinness who won't allow her followers to marry. I did find the following passage to be illuminating:

This mode of social organization gives the individual more flexibility, more freedom even, in the management of his social relations than he might have in a more corporate organization. It renders his social life more personable- cloying, even to the Westerner- and subject to greater scheming, intriguing, and manipulation. Each and every individual one encounters is of potential benefit, either directly or as an intermediary (wasita) and must be bound into a relationship through an act- a gift, a

favor, a gesture of hospitality, a greeting even, or the expression of concern- that demands reciprocation.

The mode of social organization is essentially that people are bound together by degrees of separation. That is, I do you a favor and you are more likely to do someone I know a favor or the obverse, someone who knows someone you know is more likely to do you a favor. It explains a lot even so much as the seemingly pointless greetings that go on for ever. They translate to more or less as

Hi, I wish you well.

Hi. I wish you well too.

No problems.

No problems.

No problems with your mom.

No problems with my mom. You no problems.

Nope, no problems.

Your Mom and family are okay.

Yes, no problems. Your uncle is well.

Yes he is well, how is your wife?

She is well, and how is your husband.

He is well and how are your children.

They are well, and yours....

And this can go on for five minutes and no one really feels comfortable to give any real information because most Moroccans are generally distrustful of what other Moroccans will do with any information they are given. Hanane summed this up by a story from her high school where the teacher told how Napoleon came to Egypt, studied the people, and then he left because they were powerful. Then he came back and converted to Islam so he could learn how to control them. Then when he had the information, he conquered Egypt and the Arab world. Knowledge is power. I don't know if the story is true or not though I've never heard that Napoleon became Muslim, but it provides an interesting glimpse into Moroccan thought. The fact that a teacher would even tell the story and that Hanane would use it to explain to me why people never actually say "My father is ill" or "I'm unemployed and worried about money" or "My niece just won the American lottery and is going to move to Florida" reveals quite a bit about the psychology of these people.

A part of this is a strong belief in 'The Evil Eye'. Despite Hanane being intelligent and educated, I've been unable to convince her that people being jealous or envious can't actually cause you physical harm in itself. The Evil Eye more or less is the belief that when good things are happening for you, some will be jealous and envious and their jealousy and envy will cause you misfortune because it will draw efrites and djinn who like to cause mischief and trouble for people.

In Hawaii people refer to it as crabs in a bucket. If you put crabs in a bucket, those at the bottom will latch onto those at the top in an effort to pull themselves up and thus pull others down, so in Hawaii, when you are doing well, you hide it. In Morocco, this is taken further by giving superstitious powers to the envy and jealousy of those below. It's in the Q'uran, is an argument that is hard to argue against and when I try to explain that yes, it is true but it is metaphor, I run into walls. Walls as thick as the gray concrete walls of the Medina.

There is more than a little bit of analogy there as traditionally, one keeps the outside of the house dingy, drab, and in a state of general disrepair while the inside can be decked out in a rich and luxurious fashion of a nobleman or rich Pasha. So it is a society where the only people you see flaunting their wealth are those who are succeeding big enough to not worry about those below. I think another reason for this is that if you show that you have something, everyone will want a piece of it and the notion of Arab hospitality and charity sort of requires that you share it if someone asks. I am thankful to be free

of this particular compulsion, though in fact, I am deluding myself because I, like everyone else who has something, prefer to not flaunt it so that I don't have to say no when I am asked to give it, lend it, or let someone handle it. Certainly I will build big ugly walls around my palace if I ever have one.

And this perhaps is a good tack for me to take on writing this. Not making this a purely personal narrative of my journey to build a life here but also thinking of this as field work. To use my two main informants, Yassine and Hanane as windows into the past history of this place while I also read and learn to navigate this society. To make this a sort of anthropological study combined with a personal narrative of my own journey of discovery. The society I am looking at after all is a real melting pot of Berber, Arab, French, and ex-patriot cultures. My own expat experience is no less relevant than those of the other expats I encounter.

Wikipedia while not being the most authoritative source, offers a nice bit about Moroccan culture which is certainly true:

Morocco is a country of multi-ethnic groups with a rich culture and civilization. Through Moroccan history, Morocco hosted many people in addition to the indigenous Berbers, coming from both East (Phoenicians, Jews, and Arabs), South (Moors and Sub-Saharan Africans) and North (Romans and Vandals). All of which have had an impact on the social structure of Morocco. It conceived many forms of beliefs, from paganism, Judaism, Christianity, to Islam.

According to the *CIA fact book*, about 42% of the population acknowledge a Berber identity while the truth seems to be that the number is closer to 80% with the other 20% being strictly Arabs. Most of the population is Muslim, though Moroccan Islam is different from mainstream Islam in that it has a high emphasis on saints who act as intermediaries to God. There is an element of paganism that exists in Moroccan Islam, though Moroccans would most likely deny this, but as one walks through the forest one sees pieces of cloth tied to trees which are an effort to bind the assistance of saints or djinn in helping to overcome illness, bad fortune, or love issues. The saints are apparently not nomadic and take up residence in specific locales where they then stay for long periods if not forever.

Aside from the street/sport chic fashions that I've previously mentioned, Morocco does have a typical style of its own. These range from the djallaba, the hooded gown worn by both men and women to the kaftan, a non hooded and slightly fancier gown worn by the women alone. Footwear consists of heelless slippers (traditionally in yellow for men and sometimes with curled upward toes.) Lower class men tend to wear worn, second or third hand suit coats and trousers. The men sometimes wear small knit hats which I think are called kufi, and the more traditional women often wear hijabs though in the younger women, the hijab is often absent. I have heard from several women that wearing a hijab prevents one from being hired for the better jobs and limits one to a sub-servant roles. As a result of this, I have tried to convince Hanane to discard her hijab with only a small measure of success. She is resilient and adaptable though in some things she is intractable, such as her belief in the evil eye and her desire to 'tease' women and girls who see us together.

Of course, to me, these things fly in each others face since she is 'inviting' the evil eye through creating jealousy and envy (and while it amazes me that anyone would be envious of a fiance such as I who has no money and is not exactly stunning in his looks, it is the case.)

The uneducated women and housewives typically wear brightly colored pajamas and an apron. Since they would not usually be leaving the house two decades ago, this was sufficient and comfortable but today, they do leave the house so it is not uncommon to go to the market and see loads of older women in their pajamas walking around. This seems to be a local adaptation of a foreign introduction. I've grown used to it, but still, seeing a 50 year old housewife in clown like pajamas walking through a vegetable souk sometimes strikes me as incredibly bizarre though in fact it is actually quite normal here. Even more bizarre perhaps is that often it seems to be quite normal to me.

Of course, I suppose that is the process of acculturation in action. I walk through thousand year old archways and think nothing of it, buy eggs from a farmer who pushes them there on a cart for 80 centimes each and think nothing of it, and ride in a 1970s Mercedes with five other passengers and the

driver, all of whom have varying degrees of sweaty/stinkiness and think nothing of it as Gnawa music blares on a tinny stereo and we all sweat more because the taxi drivers typically hide the handles to the windows if they have them because the windows are either broken or the passengers will steal the handles. It all starts to seem normal. Just as living in a concentration camp eventually started to feel normal to those who survived them and prison becomes home to habitual offenders, often leading them to commit more crimes once they are out so that they can return 'home'.

Born Again Virgin

My wife to be is a virgin and that means that until marriage, I'm a born again virgin and to tell the truth, I'm not all that excited about it. In fact, it sucks. Marrying a virgin was never something that was important to me – in fact, I never even thought it was really possible, but for Hanane, anything else would be hshuma – shame filled.

Lately I've had dreams of a lot of different women. A few nights ago it was a blond white woman who I felt I was incredibly in love with. I don't remember much more. Last night it was a more complex dream in which there was an Asian woman who was the partner of my friend Skye (in the dream, not in real life), she was beautiful and there was no doubt that I loved her. She was also virgin and while there was some complication in my attempt to steal her from my friend, I knew that I had to do this and so I did. I don't remember all the details but there was a white dog which was somehow connected with her virginity and also a smaller white dog. I am reminded of the Goddess Madame Pele who is said to have two white dogs and also of Aisha Kondisha who is said to appear to men in their dreams. Somehow I managed to steal this woman and as a result, where she lay on a sort of stone slab of a bed, I turned her around so that she faced the other direction and at some point we walked with the dogs and I thought to myself “Crap, how did I end up with two dogs?” Obviously this last is a result of spending time with my neighbor Jessica who has two dogs that are quite sweet but still royal pains in the ass.

Certainly there is no shortage of interpretations of these dreams and feelings, but essentially they indicate that I am having serious second thoughts about committing myself to a life with Hanane. I've been in the process of distancing myself from her since I came back into her proximity. She will have none of it though and won't let go. I'm certain that I could even tell her that I was sleeping with other women and she would simply be hurt but consent to forgive me. If I want out, there is no easy way aside from leaving.

My toilet has been an interesting journey in itself. It is a 'Turkish' toilet. In other words, it is an open hole in the ground with two raised places where you place your feet. To use it you simply squat, drop your business in the hole, fill up a bucket, and dump it in to flush. The problem is that since my bathroom is in the center of the house, there is no ventilation for it so the open hole to the sewer simply sits there and no matter how many buckets you drop down the hole, you still get a stench. I keep the door closed, but would prefer not to smell the sewer every time I use the toilet. Jess also pointed out that the hole creates a place where rats can come up into your house. The solution is to get a plug that goes in the hole. Berbers usually just use a liter water bottle filled up that they place inverted in the hole. Also there are concrete plugs that one can buy that have a handle so you simply remove it to use the toilet and put it back on when you are done. I intended to buy one of these, but at the little do it yourself store, I was unable to describe it to the man, I think he thought I wanted a plunger and so I left empty handed. I asked Jess and her friend Robin who I met at the American English School yesterday what the plug is called and neither knew. Robin suggested that I simply buy some plaster of paris and then put some plastic bags in the hole, fill it with plaster of paris, and put a handle in. It was a good idea, I decided to do it. But when I went to the DIY store, I realized I didn't know what to call plaster of paris and the clerk didn't know what the hell I was talking about. Miming plaster of paris is not easy in a language where it is called something totally different and you don't know the name. So I came home, feeling a bit defeated again.

Then I remembered that in my wet room there was a bag of something or other that might be concrete left over from repairs the landlord made before I moved in. I had no idea if it was or not but figured I would give it a try. There was a brown powder, a red powder, and a grey powder. I mixed all

three in a plastic bag and then realized that if I just set it in the toilet it would fall into the toilet, so I pushed a piece of cardboard (the box of Tide laundry detergent) into the hole and then set the plastic bag on top of that. I put a bent piece of metal into it for a handle and let it sit all night. It's hardened up but still seems crumbly, I'm hoping that it will harden more in the next few days and become usable, but my suspicion is that when I use it it will simply break apart like a dirt clod and I will have to go buy a Sidi Ali water bottle to plug up the hole.

Amazingly enough, the toilet plug seems to be working. It is crumbly and I doubt that it will last very long, but for the moment at least, I do have a plug. I've started to tell Hanane stories about an efrite who lives in my house. He is blue, like my walls, has seven heads, has lived here for seven hundred years and has a girlfriend named Llala Mella. His name is Malik. I told her that he asked me to make the plug for him because there is another efrite who lives in the toilet and a red plug was the only way to get rid of him.

Malik doesn't like this other efrite and is surprised and fascinated by me because he has never met anyone like me before. Safe to say that I am the first foreigner to live in this particular spot and I have some quirky beliefs, not the which of least is that all efrites aren't necessarily bad. Malik seems to be alright to me, so I won't be killing any chickens and pouring their blood down the drains to get rid of him, he tells me that in fact, that method doesn't work anyway, it simply makes him invisible to those who don't wish to see him. It's hard enough to see him anyway because he blends into the walls so well. Seven heads that all speak different languages and ten hands and feet that are constantly doing their own thing and fidgeting madly.

I've had to set my foot down about the classes that Hanane and I are teaching on Friday evenings. We have two classes each and finish at about 9 pm then have about an hour commute back to Sefrou. That in itself is no problem. The problem arises in that the taxi stand near the school closes at about 7 pm. After that time we have to catch a petit taxi to the 'Atlas' neighborhood gas station known as Bomba. This costs us between 10 and 15 dirham. Also not the issue, though I would prefer not to spend it.

The problem is that Bomba is controlled by some mafia type illegal cab drivers who use unsafe vehicles and make things difficult. It's a bit of a rough neighborhood to begin with. Up to this point, it has only been a minor problem as we would simply wait for a regular grand taxi to arrive, pay the 10 dirhams each and then go. Usually a 10 minute to 30 minute wait. This hasn't been a problem though we have had to deal with a fair number of rude comments since we are a mixed couple, lots of stares, and telling the cowboy taxi men that we don't want to get in their illegal taxis or pay more than 10 dirhams.

This changed this Friday though. We arrived at Bomba at about 9:15 and were told that any regular taxis would now be 15 dirhams each. I refused since the price should be set at 10. The price often goes up later in the night but at this time, it shouldn't. The regular taxi left and a large number of illegal taxis then occupied the spots where regular taxis could pull up. We were harassed by the cowboys and told to pay 15 to ride in illegal cabs but I refused again and again. We stood there for two hours and in the process a number of private vehicles pulled up to offer rides to us and the other 14 or so passengers waiting but were immediately surrounded by eight big guys and told to move off, a couple of times the cars were loaded and then the big guys made everyone get out and the drivers leave.

This happened again when a man that knows Hanane's brother pulled up and did the same. Rashid seemed to me to be a little bit connected with these guys as he got out of his car, smoked with some of the big guys, and then proceeded to load his car with passengers. Hanane wanted to get in but I decided we should wait and sure enough, as soon as Rashid's car was full, the big guys made everyone get out and told him that he could only take two or he had to wait until all the cars ahead of him left.

About 20 minutes after this a regular taxi pulled up and a number of us began to load up and this time the big guys chased off the legal taxi driver and he made us all get out and then drove off with his car empty. At this point I was calling more than a few people mother fuckers which I am sure they

understood. We had been there two hours. One of the big guys asked if we wanted to ride in Rashid's car and I decided it was time to get out of there. We and one other man loaded up and then we left. It was actually the most comfortable ride I've had from Fez so far. Rashid asked if I was scared and I said no because the music was good and his car was a sayara azim.

What I had intended to say was that his car was an amazing car, it was a bit broken down, older and not too remarkable, but good enough. Instead what I said was it was an amazingly strange car. Everyone laughed and it wasn't until later that Hanane told me my mistake, everyone had thought I meant it and I suppose that is a good thing as it was actually pretty funny and true. We ended up paying 25 dirham for both and he drove us all the way to Hanane's parent's house so we actually ended up saving 2 dirham from the ride.

The petit taxi in Fes had also insisted on 12 dirham and refused when I offered him 9 and a half. Then Hanane gave him 20 and he gave me, mistakenly I think, 11 in change, thus charging us only 9 dirham. Incorrect change seems to happen quite a bit and usually I take it since I am overcharged even more often, it's a nice way for the universe to sort of even things out I think. Maybe I shouldn't but I don't feel any moral compunction to correct the situation.

So, I've told the director of the American English School that we won't work the second class on Friday's unless we are provided with some sort of accommodation in Fez. I'm willing to do it alone, but with Hanane it's just too much to deal with. As for our relationship, I continue to have my doubts, she has sensed it and asked me if I still want to marry her and I told her the truth, I'm not sure it's a good idea. So, we'll see what happens in that realm.

I told one of the teachers about the taxi situation, a Moroccan man named Hamid. He was livid. He said that Moroccans have lost any sense of moral responsibility and decency and told a story about how he waited at taxi stand the day before with a young pregnant woman and how he became enraged as people showed up and would push ahead of her even though she had been waiting longer and was pregnant. Finally, he got in a shouting match with a driver and another young woman and he ended up getting the woman into a cab.

Hamid is one of a number of very well educated, cultivated, and very likable Moroccans I have met at the American English School. He is a university professor and was actually one of Hanane's teachers when she attended University. At the breaks we have great conversations about politics, history, mythology, anthropology, and contemporary Moroccan society and issues. I like this guy a lot and imagine that it is possible we will become great friends.

Another teacher that I really like is Touific, whom I am co-teaching an intermediate class with this semester. I'm glad that I find him to be such an incredible guy as it is a bit of a healing experience for me since a Lebanese man of the same name contributed to destroying my last relationship. I've been carrying a hatred, fear, and anger towards the name since that time because I never had the chance to see the man it was attached to. It was sort of a hard thing to get over. It feels good to be finally able to put all of the negative feelings associated with Touific behind me.

The other teachers in the center fall into a couple of categories. Foreigners from England, Australia, Canada, and the USA, Moroccan women, and Moroccan men. The Moroccan men smoke, wear suits to work, and seem to range from arrogant to progressive and friendly. The Moroccan women fall into two categories, very Muslim and not very Muslim. The very Muslim can be typified in Khadija, another teacher I am co-teaching with. She was also one of Hanane's teachers. She is friendly, doesn't seem interested in controlling her classes, speaks with a sort of intolerable British accent, and maintains her distance. When I offered to shake her hand, she said "I'm sorry, but I touch no man but my husband, instead I put my hand to my heart when we meet and part." Fair enough, but still somewhat disturbing to have this level of orthodoxy from a woman who is a University professor and who has lived in Scotland. The not very Muslim women wear Western clothes, no hijab, and seem much more open to ideas and conversations.

The foreigners are a mixed lot. English guys, a Canadian Hindi man, a friendly Australian woman, a

sort of uptight American woman, a middle aged Canadian behemoth of a woman with bleach blond hair, a young American couple, a couple of mid life American guys, and most recently a British-Pakistani woman named Najma. She's 30 years old, wandered into the school wearing her backpack, smokes, is Muslim, wears no hijab, and has one of the more enjoyable English accents I've heard here. Hanane is quite jealous of her. When I asked how she came here she said she was simply following her destiny. No doubt an agent of Aisha Kandisha.

I continue to blog and work on making money online. My latest project "MoroccoBlogs.com" has climbed to the first page of the Google search results in just a few weeks for my chosen keyword "Morocco Blogs". I'm not entirely sure how I will monetize it, but I suspect that advertising and perhaps this book will play a part, but then again, who knows what the future holds?

I'm down to 1400 dirham and \$260 in cash, plus about \$100 in my Paypal account and about \$450 in the other accounts I still can't touch. My pay from the school will be less than I expected, I think, if I manage to get paid at all. It's enough to live on and pay my rent anyway, in theory. So we will see. The adventure continues.

Tales of the Jews in Old Sefrou

Yesterday I invited Hanane and her sister over for lunch. Then I invited my neighbors Jess and Ahmed and our friend Yassine as well. Hanane and Zahira came and cooked a beautiful fish tajine and we all sat around and had nice discussions, food, and tea. It was really sweet of Hanane and Zahira to cook lunch and they did a magnificent job. After lunch I asked Ahmed to tell us a bit about Sefrou and the casbah since he has been here his whole life.

Hanane interrupted quite a lot and side tracked the story quite a bit until Ahmed got up and left. The bits I was able to glean before Yassine and Zahira left were that there used to be ten water wheels on the Oued Aggai and the population of Sefrou was about 50% Jewish.

Ahmed said that when he was a boy only about a quarter of the population was Muslim, very different from now when it is closer to 99.9%. Back then it was still French North Africa and so there were about 25% Christians, 25% Muslim and 50% Jewish. He said that the Jews and Muslims used to all dress the same at that time and it was actually pretty hard to tell the difference between them since everyone wore djellabas, slippers, and kaftans all the time. The French wore European clothes and were easy to tell apart. He started to tell about how the Jews would all take walks on Saturdays and then was when Hanane interjected with the fact that back then it was okay for Muslims to eat with Jews because they have the same prohibition on pork and things must be kosher which is basically halal, but that it was not okay to eat from the same dishes as the Christians.

This sort of led to a diversion that was interesting but not what I was hoping for, since I was hoping to hear some interesting stories of the casbah. Jess, it turns out lived in Israel for some time and has Jewish friends and family so what came next was highly offensive to her. Hanane explained that the word yahoudi, or Jewish in Derrija came from the word dead because Moroccans believe that at one point all the Jewish men were dead and the women begged the prophet to sleep with their dead husbands and he allowed them to and then the next morning they were all pregnant which is why the Jews trace their ancestry through the women. She said that Jews were rich and white because they were allowed to see the prophets face and that Muslims were brown and poor because Muslims had only seen below the neck of the prophet.

This wasn't the offensive part though. Hanane went on to explain that because the yahoudi women slept with dead men that all Jews now have a very offensive odor that they can't cover up even if they use creams or perfumes. Jess was outraged. "Oh, come on, you can't be serious..." she said.

At this point Yassine piped in with the unbelievably innocent and completely serious "No, it's true, my mom told me." At which point Jess's indignation turned to a sort of disbelief that a grown man could say such a thing with complete and utter seriousness. I pointed out that Hanane and Yassine had both recently met some Jews from Israel and both admitted that they had noticed no smell of death about them. At this point I made up a story about my boyhood in a small Oregon town and told them that the people there had believed that the Jews have horns and that's why they wear yalmalkas and that Muslims are always covered in clothing because they have tails. It was a lie, but a lie meant to show that folk beliefs are often misinformed and even ignorant.

Yassine and Zahira were the next to leave and that left me, Jess, and Hanane. I started to become more and more annoyed with my little woman as she got incredibly jealous that I had helped a woman in the casbah carry water to her home earlier in the day and she said "I know these Moroccan women better than anyone. First they will get you to carry water and then things will lead to other things and then you will have sex with them." She was unable to believe that I can control myself or that I wouldn't end up in the bed of some casbah woman over my willingness to help carry a bucket that had a handle on only one side. Jess and I started to tease her a bit and that's when the hshuma kicked in, the sense of Moroccan shame, that I admit I don't understand but that I am learning comes when you tease

someone in front of other people. Hanane went in the bedroom and refused to join us for quite a while and finally she came back out and I tried to explain that in Western cultures we tease those we have affection for, but it took her a while to forgive me. She is so often like a petulant child and frankly, it's those times that I have the biggest doubts about whether our relationship can ever work out.

Jess stayed for a while before leaving and inviting us to coffee, but we both declined. I walked her home and then came back here and I got to thinking that maybe her insatiable desire to cuddle had found other outlets while I was gone for the summer. I came up with a dozen things that could indicate that in fact she was no longer is a virgin and in an act of callousness that should shock even me more than it does, I decided to text her about it. She took it as a complete betrayal and let it break her heart and after a dozen messages we were both out of recharge on our mobiles and had to end the conversation.

By this point I was convinced that I was wrong but to be honest about it, not entirely repentant of my actions. In fact, I still think using text messages to broach this was a better way to do so than to have such a conversation face to face as it eliminated the face to face emotions and allowed us to actually communicate rather than simply emote. It was callous yes, but I'm glad it happened because I realized that those suspicions had been there since I returned and they needed to be put to rest. Now they are, I believe her, and if we marry the proof will present itself on our wedding night in whichever way it goes.

So I went to sleep, knowing I had hurt her and at the same time feeling a satisfaction because I now knew she was telling the truth. However, even with that, I know that the sense of hshuma would never allow a Moroccan Arab to admit adultery even if it had happened. They would die before admitting it. I think it's the same with Hanane and for some reason that comforts me more than it disturbs me and allows me to simply accept what is for what is. Can that possibly make any sense?

In any event, I woke up at 3 am with a huge hemorrhoid that had appeared on my anus as if an instant punishment from God for doubting my woman's fidelity. I knew in no uncertain terms that I deserved the discomfort I felt through the rest of the night and even until now, the next night. I've never had a hemorrhoid before. I have much more sympathy for those people who get them now, I hope this is the only one I ever get. It kept me awake the rest of the night.

In the morning, smited by God for my fears, I set off to Hanane's house to apologize and hopefully explain to her. She was really very hurt. I told her that in my country virgins are harder to find than the unicorns they ride on because most girls lose their virginity when they are 16 or younger and so there are a handful of young men that have had virgins and the rest of us have only heard of them. It's not a lie. Among my friends, I only know a couple who have ever deflowered a girl. I've heard plenty of stories of guys who almost had a virgin, but like Bigfoot, somehow it just doesn't happen. Especially when you consider that once you pass the age of 18 in the USA, almost all the virgins are then illegal.

I told her that I don't think I know anyone in my country who has not cheated on at least one spouse or significant other, which is also true. And I also tried to explain a few of the other things that had raised my suspicions to the point where I felt compelled to text her.

She cried, she offered to go be examined by any doctor I chose and I told her that I had only come to apologize and hopefully make her understand why I had felt the way I had. I told her I trusted her, believed her, and that I love her and I think I healed a little bit of the huge wound I had put in her heart. I told her about my hemorrhoid and that I was certain it was punishment and that I knew it wouldn't heal until she forgave me. And it seems to have started to heal. She will it seems, forgive me.

And I'm left wondering if I should have left the hurt alone and ended things. I don't think so. She's not perfect, and certainly neither am I. I just wonder if we can actually co-exist in a good way. Can I deal with her boundless energy and at the same time with her infinite desire to sleep and rest? Can she deal with all the pain that I'm bound to cause? Because ultimately, that's one thing that I've learned from all my relationships is that I manage to hurt the women who love me a lot. I manage to hurt them with my words, my actions, and my emotions. If they could read my mind or know my thoughts or

absent actions, it would hurt them even more. I don't know why they let me do it, actually. I'm not a particularly gifted lover, not the nicest, not the most rational, certainly not even close to being comfortable let alone well off or rich, and there are plenty of other flaws surrounding and within me and yet, I always seem to have these incredibly sweet and loving, beautiful, intelligent women who are willing to put up with even the worst of what I can dish out, and that's some pretty nasty dishing. There must be something about me that I am unable to see. Or maybe there is something that I don't value that women put a higher value on...in any event, I'm grateful and at the same time bothered that they put up with it, it being me at my worst.

Reading Morocco

Jess lent me a couple of books yesterday and I am tearing through them. I read my first Paul Bowles book. *The Sheltering Sky*. It's the story of a young American couple who come to French North Africa with their friend to build a new life post World War II. Their marriage is falling apart. He sleeps with an Arab prostitute, she sleeps with their friend, they head to far flung Sahara towns, he dies, she becomes the almost stereotypical white captive and loses her mind living in a harem as the fifth wife of a camel trader.

Of course, five wives are too many. The Qur'an says only four. One will drive you mad, two will fight each other, three will all attack you, and four will divide into teams who fight each other and thus keep each other occupied so that you can spend your time in the cafe. Something like that.

Anyway, Bowles' writing is brilliant. He uses words in a way that awes me. His anthropomorphous descriptions of the desert, the sky, the buildings, and everyday objects while objectifying people who are not central to the story in such a way that the only humans you are actually concerned with are the two protagonists. Supporting characters are fleshed out just enough to be ever so slightly multi-dimensional. It is the landscape and the sense of place that is perhaps most captivating in *The Sheltering Sky*.

Bowles manages to avoid the extreme orientalist mode of many writers as he writes about North Africa. The natives are people like any other people and it is the foreigners that are actually the oddities. In a way he makes them more oriental, meaning different, than those who live in the vast landscape he brings to life. As a cook pins a bug under his knife before taking his earnings to a whore house and a hotel owner becomes understandably outraged when he is accused of theft there is a rhythm to the place that these things fit into. Not so the Australian thief who is fucking his mother or the French commander who unwittingly kills a young woman guilty of infanticide, these people jar against the grain of the place, they are so completely foreign as to make one wince. Of course, maybe this is simply because I am here and the different has become the normal for me.

Almost anyway, or at least more so than it ever was before. Enough so that I recognized every Arabic or Darija word used in the novel which in fact delighted me to no end. Somehow I read this dense 350 page novel in less than 24 hours despite going to the internet cafe, visiting Hanane's, and watching a film on my laptop.

Of course, I'm not entirely comfortable here. I went into the pharmacy to hopefully find some hemorrhoid relief medicine and was all set to say to the pharmacist "Andi habooba ft3asik" which translates roughly as "I have a pimple on my asshole" but as soon as the attractive young woman working there moved to the counter, I couldn't do it and I left without anything, so my ass is still bringing me some intense discomfort.

One thing about being a stranger in a strange land is that I often have no idea what is going on. At the moment there is bedlam coming from upstairs and I can't tell if it is grief, joy, a football match on the TV, or just the normal sounds of people. One guy is yelling in a somewhat regular way and there seems to be the sobbing of children and perhaps the wailing of women, the wails of at least one child sound as if they are hurt or being punished but the regular shouts of the man continue and I have no idea what it is all about. Frankly, I don't want to be dragged into anything. My immediate suspicion based on the number of unattended children and incredibly ancient looking women who congregate down in this small corner of the casbah is that someone is dead, but just as likely is that someone is telling a story or that the young guys in the alley are playing cards again and simultaneously a child has been punished or skinned their knee. There is no way to tell short of stepping out into the madness and frankly, even if I do that, it is likely that I won't be able to find out what is really going on. That's the way it is here.

The young guys were starting up their card game again today and as I passed I asked if I could

watch what they were doing, they tried to show it to me. Essentially, it seemed like they called out the name of a card and then flipped the rest rapidly until the named card appeared. There was a dirham on the ground and I had no idea how they could tell who won or who lost. Since I had my computer on my back and a couple of dirham in my pocket, I thought that getting out of there was the best bet even though they were quite friendly. Somehow I've never forgotten about the time in Memphis when a friendly pool hustler somehow managed to get my entire paycheck before I even knew what was happening. I'm not even positive I agreed to bet, but his big white smile in that big black face always kept the same easy-going expression and when I left I had the strange feeling that he had helped me even as I knew that he had just ripped me off. In any event, when it is time to gamble with those that seem innocent, I now know that it is time for me to hit the road.

A few steps further and I ran into the sweet young girl of about five who always greets me with a big smile. Noura. Apparently she felt it was time to put the vice on because she quickly spilled out the word falooz, Moroccan for money, as she pulled my hand. To me it shattered the vision of innocence I had laid on her and I pushed her hand away and said goodbye. I'm a lot like a hollow watermelon in that no matter how hard the locals suck, they won't be able to get any juice. Once they realize it, I suspect that a lot of doors will close and the sugary smiles will cease. That's fine with me.

My sole journey out of the casbah today was to the cyber-cafe where I sat in the uncomfortable chairs and tried to figure out how the hell I am going to get any money. Still no word from David Gerbil, the director of the school and I am trying hard not to make it a showdown situation where we simply don't go to the late class, because I suspect I'll win and then have no work at all. It's easy to win when you have the hanged man's perspective and the world appears upside down to you. Not having a job always is a winning proposition to me but at the moment, I want to get the foreign residency card and to get some money as well so we can move forward with this marriage thing.

I've released *Liminal Travel*, the book I thought might make me famous to a sort of universal silence. No one cares. I sent out some spammish email today, created a few press releases online, and made some twitter and Facebook announcements. So far it has been downloaded by five people. Apparently an email address is more than people are willing to pay for my travel secrets. Meanwhile I continue to make less than a dollar on most days but actually it probably averages out to making 3-4 dollars even if I don't do much. Between AdSense, my disabled Vet benefits of \$120 a month, and the money I make with the blogging workshops and teaching, it comes out to that. If my figures are right I am making 50% of 142 dirhams an hour and working 27 hours for the month so that should be 1890 dirhams that will come to me which is enough to pay my rent and survive here, plus with the blogging workshop I have made another 250 dirhams and my disability is another 800 or so which should bring me to a grand total of 2940 dirhams for the month of November or roughly \$420 U.S. It's a good thing I live firmly in the third world of the 7th century because that's actually enough to have a pretty decent life here. Of course I've got to subtract the 240 dirhams for the commute, the 700 for rent, about a hundred for utilities and that leaves me with a little less than 2000 dirham to survive on for the month. There won't be any luxurious spending going on in Dar al Djinn, the name I've given my casbah crashpad. I just came up with it, the house of spirits. I should really turn it into a speak easy. Now there is a way to make life interesting and dangerous. I wonder if I would end up dead or in prison first...

It's amazing that I can live on so little money and really have just about everything I need. I have my own space, electricity, food, and the sound of running water going by outside to lull me to sleep.

Dar el Djinn

Just finished another Morocco related book. This one was called *The Caliph's House* by Tahir Shah, an Afghan Brit who bought an ancient house in Casablanca and spent a year remodeling it while he learned to deal with Moroccans, Moroccan Culture, and a house full of djinn that wanted him to leave.

The book confirmed that I have successfully observed many of the ins and outs of this land and it's people. Never pay anyone before the job is done, things that are started never get finished before a dozen other things are started that never get finished, Moroccans are the most gifted craftsmen in the world but would prefer to do shoddy work and drink tea than actually create something magnificent, and that there is no getting around the world of the spirits, the intense superstition that goes along with Islam here, and that I am better adapted to all of this than most foreigners can ever be.

It also made no small point of the fact that when you open the door once you have to close it a thousand times. It's a shame really. I'd like to make friends here, become part of this community and neighborhood, do things for the people I see every day; but I most likely won't because I don't want them to know that they can ever get anything from me because if they learn that, it will never stop and I will put myself in the position of having to say no ten thousand times to their desperate pleading and the fact is, I'm lousy at that. I start to feel cheap and miserly and soon I have given away what I can't rightly afford to give away in the first place.

There was one particularly nice section of the book where he sees a beggar being given the choicest pieces of fruit and vegetables by the vendors in a souk and he asks why they give her the best they have. The merchant replies "Just because a person is begging doesn't mean that they don't deserve the best." It's something that I see again and again here in Morocco, that the poorest often give away the best they have to those even more poor than themselves. Or that families impoverish themselves hosting and entertaining family and friends who have come to visit. Another section of the book had Tahir giving some of his workers space in his house when their own houses were destroyed by development.

Within a short time, his workers beg him to let them move back into the shantytown because their families and friends are making them poorer than ever by visiting their upgraded new digs and eating and drinking them out of house and home. From my experience living with the Soudis, I know this is true. Guests have to be entertained lavishly. Lucky for me I am not trapped by that particular cultural observance. I go by the Ben Franklin adage, guests and fish begin to smell horrid after three days.

It was a fun book, obviously written from a bit of a tongue in cheek distance that allowed Shah to make fun not only of Moroccans that fall in love over the internet or in the frozen pea section of a grocery store or who drop chickens down a well for Aisha Kondisha and poison everyone who drinks the water, but also of American dreamers who come to Morocco to fall in love with women they danced with for five minutes or who travel around the world to watch Casablanca in every country it plays in with dreams of creating a Casablanca theme park someday, and even of British Afghan writers who move to Morocco and get run over by the passive aggressive Moroccan culture dozens of times before finally realizing that sometimes you have to kill a goat to prove you are the man in charge. Along the way he demonstrates that in fact he has been learning and paying attention to what is going on around him and the story is interwoven with the fabric of life in Morocco in all of it's tragedy and glory.

Morocco is a mess. There is no doubt about it. I don't think this country can be saved from consuming itself in about 20 years. Lately, I am so conscious of the fact that I live in a Kingdom. I see the billboards with pictures of the King. I see his portraits in the shops. I see his face on the money. I'm an admirer of what he is trying to do as huge infrastructure projects carve new highways across the landscape and schools and hospitals are built. The King is trying to fix things, but I'm not sure they can be fixed. The problem is the misunderstanding of Inshallah. If God Wills It. People here in Morocco

have allowed this to supplant their will, to take away their drive, to destroy their internal fortitude. They are like pieces of paper lying on the street waiting for a wind storm to come and raise them up in clouds of dust. And worst of all, they don't like to read. I think this is what I don't like about the cafes. There is never someone sitting in the cafes by themselves enjoying a book. Instead, they sit and they watch life pass by on the streets as if the streets are a television connected to one of the thousands of satellite dishes that sit atop every building in the country. While reading might seem a passive activity, it is not, television on the other hand is the ultimate in passivity.

Books provide experience because it happens inside of one. These past few days I've drunk in the lessons of *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Caliph's House*. The experience of these books have caused me to see the hijabbed girls in the cyber cafe chatting on MSN with the men they hope to marry from other countries with new eyes. Each *Bonjour, Monsieur* I hear in the streets takes me back to French occupied North Africa and a time when any European here would likely be French. My own experience in hearing about djinn, the evil eye, and the trials of trying to get anything done here suddenly fit into a wider body of work and understanding. I am no longer learning in a vacuum that contains only me. Instead I am one of a handful who not only come here but attempt to internalize this place and make it a part of ourselves.

Someone once told me that the test of knowledge is whether or not you can pass it to someone else. If you cannot, then you don't know it. I suppose, in some way, that is what this book and writing in general are to me. A self test to see if I really do know what I think I know.

Sidi Blogs

It's amazing that I've become the go to guy for blogging in this part of Morocco. Sidi means essentially Sir or Mr and is a term of respect. It's funny to be called Sidi Blog. Today was the last day of the first blogging workshop series. There were two attendees since Jess was sick, Alice was on a tour, Pippa was working, and Paul is busy with his other projects. It went okay but we didn't cover nearly enough of the information I wanted to cover since the majority was focused on fixing issues with Gail's blog. Both she and Michelle seemed satisfied though and so that is that. With any luck it will lead to me making some money consulting in the future and hopefully there will be future blogging workshops.

I've had two blogs submitted to MoroccoBlogs.com and am getting a steady amount of traffic. At the moment between 30-50 hits per day. Better than expected and growing. It's progress. Liminal Travel meanwhile has been downloaded by just 20 people, mostly family and friends and it is too early to tell if even they like it or not. Vagobond.com has been getting between 20-90 visits per day and is also growing in the search rankings. My email list is growing as well. So that is some measure of success.

In terms of actual employment, my job at the American English School is secure though I did not succeed in getting the director to provide us with a place to stay in Fez on Friday nights. After blog class we agreed to meet for lunch and he took me to the nicest place in Fez, Maison Blanche. Of course it was on the American English School expense account, but still, it was appreciated. I don't get to go to nice restaurants that often anymore. He suggested we buy a car and I responded honestly that I don't have any money. I attempted to get a place to stay or to get us out of classes but he told me in fairly certain terms that if we don't teach the classes, it will seriously hamper our future employment and so I agreed to find a different solution. Prick.

We'll see what happens. His suggestion was to either hire a car or hire a taxi specifically to pick us up and take us home. It's a good suggestion if you have even that much extra money. Beyond that he suggested we get a hotel, which I think if he would have considered the fact that we are a mixed couple and not yet married, he would have realized is an impossibility and even if it were not, financially, it won't really work for us. So we will have to find some other solution. At worst, we ride in illegal taxis and pay the extra fare and as he pointed out, we still come out ahead since we are getting paid for the teaching more than the taxis will cost – that's boss logic coming from an expense account point of view. So, that was a minor failure.

Lunch however was quite good. It was the only meal I ate today and it cost more than everything I have eaten in the past two weeks. It was about 300 dirham or \$45 per person which isn't astronomical in dollars, but for me was way more extravagant than I've enjoyed since Hawaii. It was a very modern place with ice cold delicious water, wonderful bread, and an attentive staff. We both had the lunch special which was sauteed vegetables, fillet of sole, and an extraordinary salad. The fish was tender though to my eye a little undercooked, but the flavor more than made up for the raw bits which were still stuck to the bone. The vegetables were cooked in a little too much oil, but again, were very flavorful. The salad was a perfect salad. A 10 out of 10. Broccoli florets steamed just enough to bring out the best in flavor but not enough so that they lost their crispness. For dessert, David Gerbil had a fruit plate and I had the crème brulee. It was not a perfect crème brulee. The custard was a little too curdled and the caramelized top was not as thick as I have had in other places. None the less, the flavor was quite nice. The bonus though was that it was served in true Moroccan sweet tooth style. It came with a small cup of lychee and kiwi fruit salad on one side, a cup of vanilla ice cream on the other, and peanut brittle in plenty. As it should have for an 80 dirham dessert. Afterwards, the coffee was quite nice and it was served with fresh out of the oven, miniature chocolate chip muffins. So that is

apparently how Morocco's elite eat. Somehow, I always end up eating in the nicest restaurants everywhere I go but it's a good boss tactic to give something at the same time you refuse to give something else.

He also asked me to take over the school's blog which I insisted I be paid for and so the situation changed to me training the school's tech team how to create a website, how to maintain it, and how to make it work as a sort of 'community service'. It's interesting to note that they are not looking for a successful website or a way to generate more income, though I think there is a lot of potential there to do so. I've installed the school's blog on a MoroccoBlogs.com sub-domain and that might work out to my favor as well. I'm not sure that one will fly, but we'll see.

Finally, he asked me to set up and organize a film club at the school. David Gerbil has a 'we'll see' approach, but since it was he that brought this up, I think this is likely to happen, and again, it is something that I would be paid for, so that would be quite a nice situation since I would be getting paid to organize a film club and this might allow me to eventually create a film making class or possibly even recruit people for films. The long term potential of me becoming the top English speaking film critic in Fez is certainly there, not an overly lofty goal.

After lunch, we returned to the school and I turned in my paperwork yet again, although this time with the word that it will be sufficient to get my carte de sejour, or one year residency identity card. Also I was given the forms for selecting what classes Hanane and I want to teach next semester and it seems certain that we will actually get paid, though I'm not sure how much or exactly when. Soon though, next week is what I am hoping.

Upon returning to Sefrou, I was pleased that my original birth certificate and diploma have turned up in the mail, unnecessary though it is and with it my reissued bank cards. Customs apparently had no problem sniffing through the papers and finding the cards inexpertly hidden behind the diploma and left them out to show they had found them, but everything was there. After this I came back home, met with Jess for a few minutes to tell her how things went, and prepared lesson plans for my classes on tomorrow and Saturday.

If it wasn't the best crème brulee I've ever had, it was certainly the best I've had in Morocco and perhaps actually the best crème brulee in Morocco.

The teaching this week went good. The American English School is in a beautiful building and the gardens are incredible. It's a nice place to sit and as I look out I see all the Moroccan students and it feels good. They're good kids. Mostly from upper class families that actually give a shit about them and that's why they are in a private school where they are learning to speak English in addition to the French and Arabic most of them already speak. These kids mostly have a shot to do great things. Many of them have been to five or six countries already, some of them have cars, and most if not all of them will go to college and have professional careers.

Their lives couldn't be more different than the kids who live here in the casbah. The kids here run around and their parents don't give a rat's ass about most of them. They play in sewage, probably don't go to school at all, and if they are lucky they can look forward to one of two lives, being a laborer or a criminal if they are boys and being the wives of laborers or criminals if they are girls. I would guess that almost none of them have ever left Sefrou, certainly not the country and none of them have cars though one or two of the smarter criminal boys might have scooters or bicycles. I would think that if one kid in a hundred goes to University from here, it will be a miracle.

Just a little while ago, a pack of young kids got a hold of some styrofoam packing and they were breaking it up noisily outside. It was like someone beating on drums, which, as you might recall, I know the sound of quite well. I went outside and chased them away from the little cul de sac I live in and of course, there were no parents anywhere. Probably a case of the parents saying "Go outside and get out of here, won't you?"

After the weekend of working at the school, I agreed against my better judgment to go stay the night at Hanane's family's house. It was against my better judgment because I never sleep well there. The

workers start loading rocks into metal truck beds next door at 3 am and Hanane's wool stuffed bed is lumpy and incredibly uncomfortable. Plus, there are always people coming in and out, there is perpetual noise, Hanane likes to cuddle and when I cuddle I start to feel like I'm not allowed to move and then when I do, I feel bad for sleeping with my back to her. Fouad asked if I would be willing to wake at 5 am and drive Mohammad's jalopy to the agricultural souk, then drive back and pick up sheep and Khadija and drive back to the Souk again. Of course I said yes, but frankly, I was pretty tired after working Friday night, waking up early Saturday morning, working Saturday and then coming back.

We met up briefly with some Polish guys who were supposed to couchsurf with me on Sunday night. Apparently they had a bad experience couch surfing in Marrakech and they decided to come to Fez on Saturday instead and skip Sefrou. I had told them I don't live in Fez and can't tell them much, but they showed up a day early and wanted to know a cheap hotel, where to catch the bus, where to go at night and so I did my best to help them. I sent them to Bab Bou Jeloud and recommended the Cascade and Evergreen hotels just inside the gate. Hanane and I managed to get them into a taxi even though there were more people crowded around the McDonalds where we met them than I have ever seen there before.

I think it's because the King has taken up his summer residence in Fez. It was actually pretty funny because when we walked up, they were sitting on the bench with the Ronald McDonald statue and the Polish man's Russian friend looked quite a bit like a clown himself. He was about 50, round faced, smiling, missing some teeth, and wore jeans held up by suspenders. Aside from that, we weren't able to help them much but I told them to ask around the Cascade or Evergreen since those are popular backpacker spots and there will be more information about getting the bus to the airport, nightlife, and more. These guys seemed incredibly inept at travel as they didn't even have any dirhams on them, just Euros. They had no map or guide, which I of course admired, and somehow they were wondering around Morocco and found me to ask advice in a city I don't live in.

So, by the time we got back to Hanane's family house, ate couscous with raisins – it was already midnight. I had agreed to wake up at 5 am, and then managed to sneak into the bedroom to try to go to sleep and of course, I couldn't fall asleep and if I had, she would have woke me when she came in anyway and then I would have had a harder time falling asleep but then we were up for another hour or so and then I couldn't really sleep because I kept thinking it was time for me to wake up and then at 3 am the rocks started to go into the truck bed and then at 5:00 am I got up and by the time I got on my shoes and went to the door at 5:04 am, Mohammad was driving away without me since without telling me, they'd decided it would be better if I were to sleep! It would have been nice to know.

So then I was told to go back to sleep which is usually nearly impossible for me but since I was exhausted, I managed and woke next to Khadija rattling away about something in Derrija and Hanane refusing to translate or get up and when I asked for some help, it turns out her Mom was telling her to help in Mohammad's hanut and so she snapped at me that she is tired of helping and this pissed me off to no end since I was suffering from no sleep because I was willing to help and I thought she was saying she was tired of helping me understand Darija not that she was tired of helping in the hanut and in the house. So then I was pissed and got up and told her I would never stay there again, got my shoes on again, and told her that if I was going to wake up to help at 5 am or 7 am, then somebody better be willing to make me some god damn coffee since if I were at my own house I would be making it for myself.

Then we loaded the sheep. Four plump dirty yellow sheep. Two big rams and two fat ewes in the back of Mohammad's car and I drove us to the sheep market.

The biggest holiday of the Muslim year is coming up al-Eid. It's the holiday that commemorates Ibrahim (Abraham to Christians and Jews) being asked to slaughter his son Ishmael (but Issac to the Jews and Christians) and God then letting him off the hook by letting him slaughter a ram instead of his son. Eid will happen on Saturday the 26th. It's a time of family and food and every family in Morocco (and in most of the Arab world) will slaughter a sheep. It will be a mother fucking blood-bath.

Everyone in Morocco will wait until the King kills his sheep and then the blood letting and Bismillah's will begin.

The sheep have been fattened and given a special diet. In the market, some of the sheep had been cleaned, but most were the same dirty yellow or brown as the Souidi family's. There were thousands of sheep in the market and probably through the day, thousands of Arab and Berber men buying or selling sheep. The sheep we took to the market were about 1500 dirhams each, which translates to about \$200. That seems like a lot of money for a sheep to me. I'm guessing that they were neither the most expensive nor the cheapest. They didn't sell. However, that's not to say that the Souidi family didn't make any money. Hanane's dad has a small coffee and tea business set up in a roll door warehouse space. Essentially, he sets up four burners and ten low tables and he slings tea, coffee, bread, boiled eggs, pastries, fried fish, and cigarettes to everyone that is there to either buy or sell. I've no idea how many cups or how many cigarettes or how many fish they sold today, but I'm guessing they made at least the price of a sheep. Maybe two. I don't know.

There was at least one fist fight during the day. A little guy punched a big guy in the head over 50 dirhams in negotiating. Tempers flare. There were plenty of goats for sale as well as sheep. I have heard that goats are cheaper and that poorer families slaughter them instead of sheep. Personally, I'd rather eat goat, it tastes better. It's pretty funny to watch people trying to drag their sheep home. The sheep don't want to help. One way Arab men do it, that is disturbing and funny at the same time, is to lift up the rear legs and put them around their waste and walk the sheep ahead of them like a wheel barrow. Like everywhere there are sheep, there are plenty of stories of men fucking sheep in Morocco and like everywhere, some of them here are certainly true too.

I got back to the Souidi house around 1:30, had a small continuation fight with Hanane then she massaged my head and we had lunch. Food and the massage made things better. Then I left and went back to my house so I could sleep. I could feel in my throat that I was getting sick, though I hoped it was just the sheep shit dust and the too many cheap cigarettes I smoked at the big sheep fair.

The Problem is Me

Hanane's not stupid. She knows there are problems. She came tonight and it took a while to get her to say it, but she said "I know that if there is a problem with this relationship, it is you." She's right of course. The problem is me. She said that she knows I think about what it would be like to marry a girl from a country where the visa was not such a problem, where marriage was not such a problem, where things aren't so difficult and different as they are between she and I. She said there are lots of men who look at her and wish she were theirs. I told her that she is right. I told her that she is with me because those men are mechanics, laborers, or men who aren't really going anywhere. If she is thinking of Yassine or his brother Hassan, then I would understand, but she won't leave me for some Moroccan guy with no education. She might out of spite, but not because it's what she wants.

She told me that Yassine's Dad asked her if she trusts me and that 'people' have asked her if she thinks I will toss her aside now that I am on my own two feet, that people think I am unstable and unsatisfied, this is again from Yassine's family and no doubt from her family too, though perhaps to a lesser extent. Personally, I think Yassine's family has designs on her as a daughter in law and that would probably be a good fit. She asked me what is wrong with me and really poured her heart out and I told her that in every relationship, one person always loves the other more but that the relationship changes and the roles switch. I told her that she loves me more than I love her right now. She gave me the chance to end things, but I didn't want to end things, but I'm also tired of this marriage or nothing situation. What happened to dating first? Not in an Islamic country.

I need time to stabilize my life, time to figure things out, and I told her that. She started to get up and I said "Well then, it's best that you take your things and go then." To which she fell down in my arms. I didn't really think she was bluffing, but was relieved she was. It's true, I don't want to end things, but if they should end, I'll be fine. I know that. I would drink, fuck a few chicks, eventually find someone that fit nicely with whatever my life turns out to be, and then eventually I would die. I don't feel really compelled to have children at this point, I don't feel compelled to be married, I don't feel compelled to do much of anything. I want to write, read books, find ways to make money, do some fun things with the money, including making more money, and just sort of exist. If she can't be a part of that, then so be it.

Seriously, I don't actually know what is wrong with me. I have a sweet little woman who loves me, wants to marry me, have my children, and share her life with me and I'm not sure I want her. I don't know what I do want. I'm almost 38 years old, that's old in this country to be single and unmarried. Of course in my country, it's getting up there too, but not as uncommon. I've been engaged three times, but never married. No children that anyone has told me about and probably none that no one has told me about either.

At the moment, I'm simply happy to have a house that I can lock the door in and to have a job that actually paid me enough to double my net worth today. Fairly pitiful that 3400 dirhams would double my net worth, but it did. That's about \$453 for a month's worth of working about 8 hours a week and not really doing very much. That comes out to about \$15 an hour in a place where my rent is only about \$100. Of course there was a 1000 dirham bonus for al Eid, but still, that's top notch. I'm earning more buying power than I've ever had anywhere. I earned 5 months rent in a month and only working one day a week. So it really comes down to earning a months rent in a single day's work. It's the equivalent of earning \$1000 in an eight hour day in Hawaii. Of course, I'm not in Hawaii, but this place has it's own wonders and advantages even though I miss seeing the beach, swimming, surfing, and hiking in the rainforest. In terms of economic survival, I've put myself in a much better situation.

And, I've also put Hanane in a better situation. I think today was the single largest paycheck she has ever received. She has a passport, laptop, a camera, a nice engagement ring, and a job at the prestigious American English School and I pointed those things out to her as well. Not to mention the possibility to

travel the world, get American Citizenship, and meet more people she never would have met because of her relationship with me. Maybe it's naive, but I don't think those things have anything to do with her love for me, but I pointed them out because all of those 'people' seem to be conveniently ignoring that I've given her quite a lot in material improvement.

Not to mention starting a rabbit breeding project for her mom and paying for food while I was staying with the Souidis through giving her mom money and bringing groceries. And I attempted to take Hanane on a tour of some of the highlights of her country with disastrous results to our psyches and my wallet. So, essentially, in a material sense, I don't feel as if I have taken more than I've given. In an emotional sense, perhaps I have, but I'm not sure I can do anything about that. I'm a man who has decided that he doesn't need his father. I wasn't happy with the relationship with my mother and so I broke it and rebuilt it into something that works. I've left relationships with my other family members behind because they were relationships of inequality. I don't like those kinds of relationships.

So with all that being said. I love Hanane and think it is possible that she and I can have a life together, so long as she provides me the space to develop the other relationships I need which she seems ill suited to fulfill. I need intellectual stimulation, I need a certain degree of reckless danger, I need passionate kissing in front of strangers, I need the ability to periodically pick up and go. I'm not an easy man to be in a relationship with. I've told her that. I've often wondered why these wonderful women like Hanane develop such a passionate love for me. I can only think that it must be something about my brain and my spirit.

I don't know this for certain, but I think if one were to ask all the people that know me what my life will be like they would suggest that I will live in many places, have an exciting life, and ultimately find some level of fame and fortune. If you were to ask them where I rank in terms of intelligence, I think most of them would put me in the top 10% of people they know. If you were to ask them other things, well, I'm not sure I even want to consider what they might say or suggest as it might not be very good. I might not rank too highly as a loyal friend, I might not rank too highly as a sensitive person (that is sensitive to the needs and feelings of others), certainly I wouldn't rank highly as a physically attractive man, and perhaps I wouldn't rank very high in the fun department either.

But then again, maybe I would. Anyway, I think it is those positive things that make women want to adore me. Maybe that and that they see so much potential and so little being done with it that they all think they can harness this impressive beast and make it into something that will give them everything they desire. Or maybe I'm just attractive enough that they let me kiss them and then my cock knows how to hit some spots that trigger it. I've never figured any of this out. I don't think they have either.

So, with Hanane. Time will tell. Frankly, part of the problem is the lack of sex. I see nice looking women and think about fucking them, but it's a little like seeing delicious food when you aren't allowed to eat. You think it looks or smells good, but you know you can't have it. That's sort of how I feel. Hanane puts herself on a platter in front of me and I think wow, I'm starving, but that sure looks good enough to wait for. I don't know if it is diet, mental, or what. My suspicion is that it is mental. The invisible pilot is now engaged in the process of creating security of home, employment, and health and unfortunately has to ignore my sexual desires. Maybe this happens to lots of guys at this age. I hope that's what is happening. I want to start seeing some big money progress in my life. I'm tired of having nothing. I'm tired of being sexless.

The Journey is about the People

It's Thanksgiving and I think I'm starting to see what the overall theme of this book is. It's difficult because I am living it as I write it but essentially this book is about the journey towards marriage to my Hanane and whether it will happen or not. Ultimately, that determines whether I stay in Morocco or whether I go. Along the way, I am learning about this country and its people. Natives, expats, Berbers, Arabs, and tourists. One thing is for certain, however this book turns out, I won't call it *My Morocco*. I refuse to take ownership.

The past few days have been fun even though I am again sick with the Belgian flu, which is probably H1N1, though I don't want to actually admit that (although a part of me is sort of twisted and hopes that it is.)

Two days ago, my first casbah couch surfers arrived. Two sisters from Australia. I would guess they are in their late 40's to early 50's since the older of the two has two grandchildren. Cindy and Lyn are the kind of travelers I admire and love. They arrived in Sefrou with one carry on size bag between them, big smiles, no Derrija, and a willingness to experience everything. They left Australia in March and have been traveling since. They've been through Malaysia, Turkey, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Russia, Holland, England, and probably a dozen other countries I've neglected to mention. They have no set itinerary and are going by the seat of their pants. Their favorite place thus far was Mongolia where they happened to arrive during the annual National Games which consist of archery, horse racing across the steppes, and wrestling. Their stories of watching ponies die meters from the finish line of a 30 kilometer race and seeing wrestlers doing strange little dances before and after matches are the kind of tales that make one want to travel and see more of the world.

They were lovely guests and during their time here didn't once complain about my lack of hot water, the dark squat toilet, or the fact that they were virtually trapped in my house unless I went out with them. Of course, we went out a lot. On the first night we had the meatball sandwiches at Sakaya Cafe and then wandered home through the dark medina. We had lots of laughs and Hanane forgave me for all my doubts when I bought her a small cactus as a present.

The next day I woke up early and they slept until about 9 am so I was able to make myself coffee, sit on the roof and write in my journal, and prepare a simple breakfast of scrambled eggs and bread. After that Hanane joined us and we went for a grand tour of Sefrou, visiting the artisan house where one of the carvers has made a bicycle complete with working gears out of wood. The whole thing including the knobby tires, the spokes, and the derailleur are carved from wood. He is even going to carve a chain for it. Amazing.

From there we walked to the Cascade where I was surprised to find American tourists who had come on a small tour from Fez. Sefrou has been discovered. No doubt about it. On the way to the cascade we stopped and wandered into a small fortified village that neither Hanane or I had ever been in. It was essentially a miniature medina probably dating from sometime around the year 800. Life inside is about as authentic as Moroccan life gets and it was not noticeably different from the casbah where I live. Pretty cool though that it is all self contained. I wouldn't be surprised if Cindy and Lyn were the first tourists to ever venture inside of it. I should probably say Cindy, Lyn, and I were the first tourists to venture inside it. I live here, but essentially I'm like a resident tourist, though people are starting to know me. That feels good since this is home, after all.

From the Cascade we went to what I think was probably a Roman aqueduct and hiked through the area of the troglodytes, or cave dwellers. Most of the caves were bulldozed and filled in after the last king became angry at Sefrou for some reason. I've not yet discovered what Sefrou did to deserve it, but people tell me that he put a curse on Sefrou, closed the Army base which was the main source of revenue for the town since the Jews all left in the 1950's, and then proceeded to force all the troglodytes

to move from their caves to Sefrou town. This is probably part of the forced relocation of the Berber people which has been underway since the French left. Historically, it is the nomadic and free thinking Berbers who have rebelled in Morocco and so getting these people to move into towns and become Arabized with standardized Islam and the poverty of city life is a good way to eliminate this threat. There has been a lot of controversy over recent legislation which has made it illegal for Amazigh to name their children non-Muslim names. It's a shame since it was the blossom of Berber culture which conquered much of Europe, ushered in the enlightenment, and created some of the greatest artistic ages the world has ever known. I like the stories which claim that Berbers, who after all are a blue eyed and light skinned people, are the long lost descendents of the survivors of Atlantis along with the Basques of Spain. Essentially, this means that there was a land mass that sat outside the Mediterranean in the Atlantic. It makes total sense to me. Someday I will write a book about it.

So, in any event, most of the cave dwellers have been forced into Sefrou along with nomads from throughout the mountainous countryside. Forced to leave their traditional skills and way of life behind, they have become the urban poor who live in the meanest of conditions. In other words, they are my neighbors. The tattoo faced old women slugging buckets of water, the thin faced men, and the young women that live near me who I've heard are prostitutes, though I've seen no evidence of that.

Still, there are still some who live in caves and as we passed through their regions yesterday, most of them were engaged in spinning silk thread into thicker silk thread in order to make the silk buttons for fancy djellabas. This process involves stretching long lines of thread for fifty feet or so and then using a machine to twist it together. The machines are either electric or hand cranked. Again, this is the main occupation of the people in my neighborhood and as I walk through the casbah, I usually have to be careful not to walk into their working webs of many colors.

At this point we trespassed onto the former army base and Hanane showed us the non-descript graves of Jewish and Christian soldiers. She was very nervous at visiting the graveyards, not just because of ghosts, but also because of the danger of being chased off by the caretakers. I insisted on walking along the road through the old army base but she insisted she would not go, so I suggested she cut across a ravine and meet us on the other side. It wasn't just meanness that motivated me but also that we had made these sweet Australian ladies hike more than I think they would have preferred already. So she cut through the ravine and we walked towards the seemingly abandoned army barracks where two scurvy looking dogs began to bark at us in an aggressive manner. For some reason, I wasn't bothered by this in the least and kept walking forward and it was only then that an equally scurvy Moroccan man in dirty Army fatigues came out of one of the ramshackle buildings and insisted on knowing what we were doing there. I indicated that we were heading to the saint's monument a short distance away and he seemed satisfied by this, threw a pinecone at the diseased looking dogs and expressed his displeasure at our disturbing him at whatever it was he was doing in the half collapsed, broken windowed, no doored, old building he had emerged from. When I asked if he was in the army he said yes and smiled with both his teeth before shoing us away. I was glad he hadn't noticed Hanane running across the ravine in a bright white scarf until we were a fair pace down the road. I saw him notice and when he called out to us, I just waved back in a friendly way and kept walking and after a couple of minutes he retreated back into his makeshift guard shack with his gruesome dogs.

The monument was the next stop. Like just about everywhere else in Morocco, I haven't been able to get a single cohesive story about what this place is, who is buried there, or why people make pilgrimages there. It's safe to say that it's an important place since it sits in the highest point in Sefrou, is meticulously maintained, and has a steady stream of visitors. It is the grave of Sidi Ibrahim Bin Something or Other and he is the patron saint of the Insane in Moroccan Sufism, which sees saints as a sort of intermediary between man and Allah. The saints seem to be in the same world as the djinn and efrite, but there is a distinction though as of yet, I don't particularly grasp it. In any event, we climbed to the monument, rested, took in the view of Sefrou below and when I went to go see if my friend Adil was working in his uncle's hanut around the corner, one young man from a group of three Arab boys

that seemed up to anything but good followed me while the other two triangulated themselves around Hanane, Lyn, and Cindy. He was probably surprised when I was greeted as a friend by Adil's mother, uncle, and the other two men who have shops there. I saw the look on his face as he lit a smoke and I spoke with people I knew in Derrija. I wasn't particularly worried about leaving the girls alone with the two guys since Hanane is small but fierce with words and Cindy and Lyn are strapping Australian women who would probably have thrashed the two skinny Arabs to within an inch of their lives. When I came back from the hanut, the guy who had followed me gave a signal to his friends that looked something like a panicked "Abort, Abort, Abort!" and his friends moved away from their triangulated spots with looks of relief on their faces.

Hanane had never let me go into the saints tomb before since she has a real aversion to djinn and things of the other worlds, but this time I insisted and I was surprised and a bit dismayed when her tune quickly changed to "Then we'll all go in together!" It wasn't exactly what I had wanted and I pointed out that since Cindy and Lyn weren't Muslim they might not be allowed but she vetoed that suggestion and dragged them along, somewhat against their will and mine. So we all lumbered into the tomb and it felt like a violation all the way through to me but I alone ventured into the actual burial place where I snapped one quick picture of the beautiful carved ceiling. The people there were none too happy about a bunch of infidels coming in and started to complain to Hanane about it and I saw a shit storm about to come lashing out of her so I started speaking in Darija, told them I'm Muslim, apologized for the intrusion, put some coins in the donation box and everything got better in a hurry. Most people here are so amazed that a white guy can be a Muslim that just about anything can be forgiven. Hanane however was not happy about it and cussed all the way down the hill about 'those fucking hypocrite people begging for coins' and then laughed as she said 'but you gave them their three fucking dirhams and now they're happy.'

At this point, I should confess, that while Hanane has certainly altered me, I too, have altered her. I am unapologetic about the fact that I have a filthy mouth. I cuss like a homeless hobo, a Marine, a fisherman, a trucker's son, and a tramp. I am all of those things. Well, since I've arrived, Hanane has rapidly picked up on my speech patterns and my sweet, virginal, devout Muslim fiance can cuss like nobody's business. It worries me sometimes because she hasn't necessarily learned discretion, but then she is so sweet that everyone forgives her transgressions beyond good taste.

From there we went to the market, bought a chicken, had it slaughtered and then bought the vegetables and ingredients for a nice tagine. We returned to my house and while Lyn and I sat and read, Cindy and Hanane made a very delicious late lunch for us. The rest of the night was a relaxing one of tea, hot chocolate, mandarin oranges, and pomegranates while we talked and watched *Slumdog Millionaire* on my netbook. Hanane told her mom that two foreign women were staying at my house and that made it okay for her to stay the night for the first time. It was nice to sleep with her in my bed for once. I've been teasing her with stories of djinn and efrites since my house was empty, I'm a single guy, and water is plentiful nearby. She fell asleep as I told her a the story of a a miller on a water wheel in the Oued Aggai and found a silver bug with blue wings and it granted his wish of a child and then he was supposed to sacrifice it and when his will was not strong enough, the child demanded it and then because of the child's faith they were able to slaughter a sheep instead. Of course, the implication was that the blue winged bug was my house djinn, Malik.

In the night, Hanane had a dream that she woke up and she saw a young woman djinni sitting in the corner of my room looking at her intently. Hanane was very frightened by this and when the djinni noticed this, she caused herself to disappear since she didn't have any sort of bad intention. This told Hanane that it wasn't a bad djinni and she told me about the dream in the morning.

After another scrambled egg and bread breakfast, we all went to Fez since I had been invited by the director of the American English School to an American only Thanksgiving lunch, Hanane wanted to cash her paycheck and bonus check, and Lyn and Cindy were returning to the riad they stayed in before coming to Sefrou where they had been invited to stay for al-Eid. After a round of ice cream cones at

McDonalds we all went our separate ways.

To be honest, I'd been looking forward to this lunch since I knew it would be sort of posh, I intended to drink a little wine, and I anticipated getting to know my fellow Americans from the American English School a little better. Things started out pretty good. David Gerbil took us to Maison Blanche again and he ordered a nice dry white wine as the soup was served. It was a luscious pumpkin cream soup with tiny bits of cured duck in it. There were eight of us there and midway through the first course my phone rang and as I grabbed it to silence the ringer, I instead refused the call and simultaneously noticed it was Hanane calling. Immediately I imagined her being dragged into a dark alley and raped, being robbed, desperately using her last seconds to call me.

I got up, excused myself, tried to call her, texted her, tried to call her again, and again and again, and got nothing in reply. The rest of the meal was me trying to remain calm, realizing I could do nothing since I didn't know where she was, and gulping a bit too much wine in my extremely nervous state. The food was good. Roast duck done to perfection. A strange purple rice dish. Tempura vegetables. Green beans. And a bizarre giant prawn stuck in two roasted slices of eggplant that frankly didn't work for me at all. Then there was a nice ice cream and little chocolate cake filled with melted chocolate. I noticed the food and tried to notice the conversation, but my mind was mostly wondering if I had hung up on my woman as she called me for help. I felt myself getting tipsy even as I heard David Gerbil admit that his mom had robbed a bank- with a gun- and served time, as I talked with Ricky about how he was never going back to the United States,, as I started to feel a bit drunk and condemned the racist immigration policies of the United States, as Evelyn called me to have a cigarette and mentioned that things with her Moroccan husband were probably not going to work out- and then asked me if I was prepared to teach for our class tomorrow- and I admitted I wasn't-yet, and as Eric, Sam, Sarah, and the oddball Canadian behemoth with us were shocked by my anti-American tone, my admission that I had once accidentally been an accomplice in a liquor store robbery, and a few other not so terrible to me but probably shocking to others tales. It was an odd assortment of odd-balls. Ricky for instance used to be a dancer on M-TV and Eric helps write dictionaries for Houghton-Mifflan and his thesis advisor was Noam Chomsky.

Finally, after most had left, I got a text from Hanane that she was home and fine and her phone battery had died. It was a relief but of course, I was a little annoyed that she had managed to sort of ruin the dinner for me. Granted, I gulped the wine down which loosened my tongue but the sense of preoccupation was an unwelcome guest in my consciousness. Not her fault of course but certainly I think that she wouldn't have been displeased about it since when I told her about the 'American only' Thanksgiving she had denounced it as racism and went on a tirade about what a fucker the director of the center was.

I went to get a taxi and refused a 15 dirham one then crowded into a regular 10 dirham ride acutely aware of the fact that I probably smelled of booze. The ride home was hot and crowded. I decided to pick up a bottle of the decent red table wine from the bottle shop in Sefrou, meandered through the crowded Medina watching respectable people secure their valuables before venturing into the asshole to bellybutton crowd, stopped and talked with the ragged guy who I bought a used rug from the other day and met his friend Aziz. I told them I was a little sick and the rug merchant said that when he is sick he gets a pack of smokes and some booze and holes up in his house where no one can see or condemn him. I wandered if they had figured out that I had a bottle of wine in my bag and a pack of smokes in my pocket. Then I came home and did just as he suggested.

Sick of and Sick in Morocco

Of course this is probably something that can't and won't ever make it into any book, but just when I start to feel like things are good with Hanane, something happens that makes me doubt it, and who knows, maybe I am just looking for reasons why it won't work. Last night after work, I was very sick. We got lucky and caught a bus home rather than dealing with the god damn taxis. It was a nice ride. Her mom had given her permission to stay at my house for some reason that I really can't imagine. All I can think is that Hanane had invited Najma to Al-Eid and so her mom thought there would be another woman staying here, as it turns out, Najma didn't come.

Hanane and I came back and went to bed. I got up to get a drink of water and I realized that in her usual Hanane fashion she had managed to make every dish dirty in the house. So I washed them all, made coffee, and sat down to study Derrija and hopefully find some sort of a zen state and then she called me back to the bedroom, thus leaving me in an unreasonable state of agitation with her. So at that point I was feeling like maybe things won't work out anyway.

But it was al-Eid and the Oued Aggai was running red with the blood of all the sheep that had already been killed upstream and we had to get ready to go to her parents place where I met her two older brothers for the first time. To my surprise, I liked them both. Driss and Isau are nice guys and it's hard to mesh that with the stories of Hanane's youth where they stole her money, stole her phone, and beat her. Given those stories, I wouldn't have been surprised if they would have been a couple of thugs who wanted to kill me for violating their sister. They were mellow though. Driss is married to a jumbo sized Arab woman and they have a four month old son. Isau works in textiles and is married to Fatima-Zahira, who is pregnant with their first child.

Together with their father, we killed three sheep. Then we dressed them out by skinning and pulling all the organs out. Then the women cleaned the organs and we all sat down to eat sheep liver, sheep lungs, sheep heart, and sheep intestines on the roof where Khadija cooked everything. Of course the rest of the family was there. Fouad, Samira, Amin, Fatima, Zahira, Mohammad, and Miriam, Mohammad's cute cousin and by the way also his sister in law.

Fouad had a blowout for some reason and probably ran away from home again. Stupid boy, he ran away before eating. Eat first, then go. I joined the family in the living room for tea and cookies and then I left. Isau decided to walk with me to my house in the casbah. I'm not entirely certain why. Maybe it was because he wants to be friends, maybe it was because he wanted to see where I live, maybe it was because he wanted to sort of feel me out and get a gist of my intentions. Probably all of the above. He borrowed eleven dirhams to buy a pack of smokes but then passed my invisible test by paying me back when we managed to get change for a hundred dirham note he had because Hanane asked me to buy some djellaba fabric from him earlier, since he works in high quality textiles.

When he came to my house, I was acutely aware that there were no blankets on any bed but the one Hanane and I both slept in last night. I didn't offer to show him my room and he didn't ask, but still, there is nowhere else that Hanane might have slept except with me.

Honor killing is of course still alive, but relatively rare in Morocco, so that thought occurred to me as well, but didn't really concern me at all. I think I could either take him or not and the outcome either way wouldn't really concern me.

Winter has come. No rain, but there is a difference in the cold. It will be interesting to see how this autumn drought affects life here. I'm feeling better today, but of course it is not just me that is sick. Amin, Zahira, Hanane (though I tend to think she dramatizes it since I've seen no sign of her being sick), and many others. No doubt it is H1N1. Amin is the big worry as he is very sick, but being a tough little Arab, he will no doubt pull through it.

I completed reading *Dreams of Trespass*. It was more or less vignettes of life growing up in the 1940s in a harem in Fez. In this case, harem is more a group of related women who live in the same

house under the authority of men and who don't have the freedom to go out and about however they may wish. Very few cases of plural wives and none of the fabulousness of slaves and concubines as one would find in stories of Turkey or Arabia. Not too terribly different from the Souidi household when the men go to the Souk on Wednesday nights. Women telling stories, singing, and dreaming of becoming independent. It provided me some insight into the historical significance of the hamman to women in Morocco and also into the modern day version. Of course, things are considerably different now since women are free to discard the hijab, take jobs, and in most cases are no longer confined to their homes. Though, I am certain there is still a certain amount of all of that that still occurs.

I gave the book to Hanane to read since I think she needs to gain more of a historical perspective on women's liberation and was surprised when she told me that since she has discarded her hijab, she has found a sense of liberation that was missing from her life before. She said when she was wearing the hijab, she felt confined and unable to go certain places, to laugh in the streets, or to express her opinions freely. It wasn't easy to get her to stop wearing it every time she went in public, but with a little pressure from me, Yassine, and probably most influentially from Jessica, she is almost always without it now. It helped that we got the jobs at the American English School, since most of the women there are hijabless and I told her at the beginning that if she wore the hijab that she probably wouldn't get the job.

Job or hijab. I think it was a lie, but I hated to see her locked into being a subservient person in this society. Frankly, it has made things easier in terms of our going out and about together too as Muslim men who see us are less likely to think I am stealing a pure woman and more likely to think that I am with a liberated woman whom I am sure most of them think of as 'bitches'. The meaning of 'bitch' here in Morocco is another fascinating story. In Morocco, if a woman is a bitch it means that she is someone who engages freely in sex, is flirtatious, probably smokes, maybe drinks, and overall leads a sort of scandalous life. It's roughly equivalent to slut. That is not a prostitute, but not far from one.

I asked Hanane why it is that a woman shouldn't smoke and her answer was confused. Honestly, I don't think she has ever actually considered the why. Her answer was that only men smoked and if a woman smokes than she is a 'bitch'. She said it was haram and I asked her if it was forbidden in the Koran and she said, no except for the edict saying that we should not use intoxicating substances or harm our bodies. Then I asked if it wasn't haram for men and she thought for a moment and then sort of avoided the question. I'm not trying to get her to smoke, but I'm trying to encourage the process of asking why in her and at the same time attempting to instill a sense of justice in her. Certainly, I am a corrupting influence as I have encouraged her to lie to her family about how much money we make at the American English School. She told me that she told them she only made 1100 dirhams. We actually made about 3000 each and I'm not entirely sure I believe her since lying to her family or shirking responsibility is totally against her nature. I've tried to explain that if they know she has it, they will find a reason to borrow it and if they don't know, they will find a reason to borrow what they know about. It is true. Arab nature is really that way. I hate to sound like a colonialist, but if you have something an Arab can use, they will find a reason to borrow it. This is especially true with money but crosses over in just about every other way, even to your name as a situation with Yassine recently illustrated. Without my knowledge, he was emailing people to promote his tourist business using my name! It was innocent as when he got a response he forwarded it to me proudly and asked me to continue to keep in contact with them. I didn't quite flip, but I put a stop to it (I think) and told him that if it continued it would be the end of our friendship.

I am now reading *The Wilder Shores of Love* by Lesley Branch. It is composed of four essays about women who came to the Arab world in pursuit of freedom from Victorian England and fell in love with men and Arab lands. The first essay has me thinking a lot. The woman in question doesn't fall in love with an Arab but with a man who typified the Arab world to Victorian England. Sir Richard Francis Burton, the greatest explorer of his age. He was more or less an Arab in his thinking, many say, and to be his wife, Elizabeth had to take on a curiously subservient and docile role. She had to endure long

separations, offer support from afar and when he returned often sick and broken. She is far less interesting to me than Burton himself who undoubtedly engaged in sexual escapades everywhere he went probably with both women and men. This book tends to discount that, but it is all speculation since when he died, his wife burned all of his journals and papers. Being of a similar type, I expect that he lived to travel and escape from the confines of his society and that even after marrying he still had a need to escape from the micro society of his wife's company. I can only hope that I can be as successful in my explorations and in my escapes. It gives me hope that perhaps a life with Hanane is possible after all though we live in a very different age than the one that the Burtons were in.

Of course in reading of someone who resonates so clearly in my soul, it is exhilarating to find parallels. Burton was inspired by Sufism and was actually a Sufi master. He was the first westerner to perform the Hajj as a Muslim, and certainly he was a Muslim though he was prevented from claiming such clearly by the confines of his time. He found the headwaters of the Nile, explored the Great Lakes of Africa, ventured into South America, and even penetrated Salt Lake City as a Mormon! He developed a method for learning language in two months, spoke 42 languages, studied primates and primate language, and was a fellow of the British Anthropological Society. I've not read any of his works yet and prior to this had only encountered him as a footnote in history and more thoroughly as a character on another world in Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld* series. I was a great admirer of his character at 12 years old when I read the books, but had no clue that he was a real man that actually eclipsed the fabulous stories that Farmer spun him into. So the parallels are few, but a fascination with language, a need to escape, a fascination with primates and Anthropology, finding truth in Islam and Sufism (but without claiming them as the sole truth), and travels to Arab lands and Salt Lake City. They are few, but still, they are thrilling. Especially since he was also a writer whose output was gigantic. I am but a shadow of such a man, but even to be a shadow is an honor.

I had a dream in which I was transported to a magical city that was an exact replica of a city in this world. With me were two women. Perhaps I loved one of them, but I don't remember being with her in the dream very much. We entered the city and were given a carpet-like vehicle which transported us into the heart of the city. With me was the second woman who lived in the magical city's replica. She was amazed and told me of this neighborhood or that street or a park that existed in her city that she was amazed to see in the city we were in. I didn't love her. But I grew fond of her company as she was a pleasant and charming companion. With us was a man who I don't remember very well now that the dream has passed. We were going to a grand building where we were to meet the woman that perhaps I loved but when we arrived we were informed by the doorman, who was not of this world, that we couldn't park our carpet in front of it because we didn't have the proper authorization. After much insistence on my part, the doorman, if man he was, agreed to take the vehicle back to the gate and get the proper permits during which time we could stroll in the city and see the sights of it. We climbed a series of steps onto a large flat terrace that looked out over a massive lake in which all number of boats and nautical craft could be seen from merchant ships to working vessels. Off to the East, I could see no end to the lake and no land in sight. It was obvious that we were on an island or at least at the end of a great peninsula. I asked about the end of the lake to the East and was told that it had no end for a great while for it met with the Baltic Sea. I believe it was the man whom I do not clearly recall that gave this information. While we waited I found that my arm was around the shoulders of my short haired, blonde companion and I found myself not at all sad to not be in the company of the woman whom I perhaps loved as I had found myself instead in the very pleasant company of a woman whom I was beginning to love.

It was a nice dream. In this waking world I find that more and more the philosophy of Islam meshes overly well with my own peculiar set of beliefs. At some point, before I knew the origins of Djinn, I explained to friends that coexisting with this world was another which was filled with people who were great in size and it was their movements and decisions that often pushed us to go in one direction or another. I described them as the marshmallow people since their pushes were not necessarily hard or

felt, more like gentle nudges that caused us to choose one thing over another without our really being aware of it. I am both surprised and not to learn that this is nearly the exact explanation of the Djinn and that they act as these forces in our world without really knowing it. And as I have become aware of them and am but a novice in realms of the spiritual world, it is not unlikely to my way of thinking that there exist those amongst the djinn who are unaware of us, and those who are aware and that there are sometimes beings who seek to gain something from either side who utilize their knowledge for their own ends and that those ends can have the intent of both good and bad.

I found some nice bits of Islamic philosophy today. One is that the shahada: La ila ha illaha, translates as there is no one worthy of obedience and worship but Allah, and the second part Mohamadar Rasoolullah is and Mohamad is his prophet. I love this so much. I love it because I believe it, of course I believe it in a way that is perhaps troublesome to others who believe it in a different way. I see God, Allah as the sum totality of all of reality. Is. The Qur'an says that Allah split asunder and created all life from water. I also believe that Mohammad was a prophet from God and that the Qur'an is a message from God to us. I just don't believe that Mohammad was the last prophet and I don't believe that the Qur'an is not distorted by man, be it Mohammad or those who have followed. However, I do believe that we can find the truth if we refuse to worship or obey religious authorities and instead make our own hearts the only authority on recognizing Allah's truth. In the Qur'an it says that Judgement Day will be the day that reality is revealed in it's totality to us and this says to me that on that day, all of the many worlds will be gone and only God will remain, since in fact all is God, so all that is not God is nothing but illusion to begin with. Also, and this was perhaps the most pleasing to me, was to find that in Islam, to seek after religious knowledge is beneficial to the soul and to the life after this one. In a nutshell, Allah likes those who are seeking the truth. Of course, I like this, because I am of course a seeker.

Sometimes I feel so completely out of sync with when I am. I am after all an explorer and adventurer and I seem to be constantly looking for new adventures and experience and more importantly, I want to write about these things, but sometimes it seems like there really isn't anything left to write about. Others have firmly detailed the ethnography, the language, the peculiarities of social functions, the inner lives, the sex lives. It's not like all of these things haven't been thoroughly explored and documented before. Of course, when I think about it, I realize that culture is not static, that is, it changes over time and that I'm not certain that the culture around me today is the same one that others have described. Things are changing rapidly and while I would have loved to be able to live in Morocco at a time when there weren't mounds of plastic rubbish everywhere one looks, when the men and women wore traditional clothing rather than cast off Western clothes, and when handicrafts and artisan-ship were given more respect and priority, those times are gone. Today's Morocco is a very different place.

Traditional clothes, if they are worn at all are worn only at times when one is celebrating or on special occasions. Djellabas and slippers have become costumes for the antiquated in the society where they originated. Hand made rugs have been replaced by plastic, Chinese mats which are mass produced and imported, and wooden furniture is considered less desirable than plastic or particle board pre-fabricated garbage which breaks and can't be repaired like the old wooden stuff and so ends up in the ever growing piles of plastic rubbish which no one can use.

The place I live in should be and probably once was the very definition of a Muslim paradise since that description as I have read it in English translations of the Qur'an is a garden under which many rivers flow. Certainly that is a description of the Sefrou of the past, described by Moulay Idriss II as 'The Garden of Morocco' and where numerous rivers bubble from under the limestone mountains and run under the streets providing bounteous irrigation from an invisible source. A place that once was home to thousands of cherry trees, olive trees, fig trees, and more. Most of which have been cut down to make room for badly constructed concrete block houses and then incinerated to heat water for the many hammams. I could almost forgive the cutting of the cherry trees if they were used to make

furniture, but they are not. Instead, they are used to heat water, a process that could easily be handled in the summer time by solar water heaters on the thousands of flat rooftop terraces here in Sefrou. The garbage which fills the streams is no doubt mostly manufactured in the United States, Germany, and China. It's a garden which has been ruined and continues to be degraded further as the pine forests are cleared from the mountains and the mountains themselves are graded and shipped away as gravel. The end result if this continues will be the exposure of the underground streams, the sullyng of them, the drying up of the land as it is covered with concrete and pavement, and the onset of extreme poverty, disease, and pollution as the only employers that will come here will be industrial manufacturers looking for a place with lax environmental regulation and a population so desperate for work that they will sacrifice health and prosperity to slave away in unsafe factories.

So maybe this place hasn't been written about after all. Not only do most people here (including me) not have hot water, in fact, most people don't have water in their homes at all. In terms of industry, I don't see much potential here in Sefrou at the present time. Since the land around Sefrou is all being cleared and built upon, the days of the shepherd being here are drastically limited. I don't think there will be more than one generation to follow the present one, meaning men like Selim, Hanane's father. None of his sons are interested in being shepherds. It must be the same elsewhere though it was encouraging in the Souk to see a handful of men in their 20's who were in charge of sheep. Perhaps ten out of a hundred. Thus dies a way of life. It is not just the shepherds either. In the medina there are men who make wooden plows, they are old, they have no apprentices. The same is true for the solderers who make tin teapots, the blacksmiths, and other artisans. The young men work as auto mechanics, they work in restaurants, they sell modern western clothes or cellphones, or they work in tourism. Or they don't work at all and simply hustle and loaf. The middle aged men fill in the ranks of tailors, furniture makers, hanuts, vegetable sellers, taxi drivers, plumbers, electricians, and plasterers. There are also quite a few young men in these last building trades though they are not learning a craft so much as how to labor and slap a building or project together. I would guess that even though the quality of general work one finds is fairly low, that in the next generation, it will be even lower as a result of shoddier building materials and more haphazard training and craftsmanship. I would think that a natural consequence of all of the above will be the loss of about half the jobs that are now filled, whether they will be replaced with other jobs is doubtful at best. Even if they are replaced with other jobs in tourism, industrial production, or the trades the end result is that the current way of life is going to disappear. The sad thing is that it is not being replaced by anything which carries any sort of cultural substance.

As to the women, the old ones are housewives, the middle aged are teachers or housewives, the young ones work in teleboutiques or cyber cafes, at least until they become housewives. This is the life cycle for the vast majority. The young are students who probably dream more of becoming wives and mothers than of becoming anything else. They wear hijabs until they are teens at which point they either shrug them off and begin wearing western fashions or they continue to be the subservient women of the past who probably find husbands among the uneducated lower classes more quickly and then begat more children to follow the same cycle. Those who are more educated, such as Hanane, look for husbands from other countries and thus if they do break free of the cycle also break free of this culture and leave it to those who are unable to leave or break free of the cycle.

The role of the internet and cellphones is an interesting one. Hopeful young women chat in cyber cafes via MSN and Skype with men they hope will rescue them. They text message these men after a relationship is established at a certain point and if they are like Zahira, they sneak away from their families and take trips to Tetuan, Marrakech, and Casablanca on the dimes of the successful young men that are wooing them. It remains to be seen if the young men are looking for wives or simply for sexual playthings. My inclination would be the second, though I am sure there are quite a few that are looking for wives as well. One thing that I wonder about with Zahira is whether or not she discloses the fact that she was married previously and thus is not a virgin. I am certain that even if the young men

themselves didn't care, their mother's would and thus marriage would be an impossibility because of the shame or hshuma it would bring to the family by the mother's of the young men not being able to proudly show the blood stained rag of the nuptials which not only indicates the pureness of the woman but also the hyper masculinity of the man.

The cellphone is a mark of adulthood in this society. It is a virtual requirement for courtship and the building of a relationship. If cellphones were to disappear, there would have to be a drastic shift in the ways that young people come to know one another since it would then require the involvement of parents in the young couples being able to come face to face to get to know one another.

I have become aware of a sense within myself of holding back from making myself comfortable or at home so that if I need to I can flee. Despite my furniture and necessities, I find myself unwilling to spend the required amounts to make myself more comfortable in my house. There are certain things that I need if I am to be confined here on days such as today when the weather is unpleasant. The weather has changed. First came a strong wind from the west which brought a cold chill with it on the day of al-Eid. While the skies were still blue during al-Eid, I could feel that things were about to change. On the morning following al-Eid I did my laundry in my sink and hung it to dry on my rooftop terrace before heading to Hanane's house for lunch. She had invited me the day before and texted me several reminders. I pulled my laundry down before I left since the winds had picked up considerably and I was afraid my laundry would blow free of the lines and disappear. It was mostly dry, a benefit of the winds blowing through it.

On the way to Hanane's house I noticed that most of the shops were still closed for the holiday but that a certain type of street vendor was present in plenty. I could not tell if they were buying or selling, but on every corner there were men with piles of inside out sheepskins still holding the dried flesh of the sheep that had died the day before. I should note here that the way the sheep are killed and dressed must be fairly universal since the skins were all in the same format.

The sheep is led to the place where it dies. It is held down and the head of the household or another qualified individual says the small prayer "Bismillah," and then a sharp knife is used to sever the head halfway in one or two cuts at which point the sheep is let go, flops around a bit, and bleeds to death in a few minutes. In the case of the Souidi sheep, the first one was filled with life and managed to stand up three times and fall back down even with most of it's head severed from it's body. It took a good five minutes for it to finally expire. The second and third sheep died much faster.

After this, we dragged the sheep (one at a time) into the courtyard where the rest of the head and the two front legs(at the knees) were severed from the body. A hole was cut on the inside of the right rear leg and a sharp stick was poked in separating the skin from the flesh. At this point a tire pump or the mouth is used to fill the animal with air. The air separates the skin from the flesh further. Two of us then held the rear legs up while a knife was used to cut the skin away from the anus and then to bisect the skin around the rear legs up to the knee. The skin is then peeled back and using fairly dull knives, pulled from the flesh so that a tube of flesh on the outside and sheep wool on the inside is finally pulled free of the body using pushing with the fist, pushing with the feet, and pulling with the hands as the sheep is hung up from the rear legs.

It was these flesh tubes of wool that I saw in abundance piled up like so much firewood on the street corners. My guess is that the men were buyers who will then take the skins to tanneries.

After the animals were skinned we carefully removed the stomachs, intestines, hearts, livers, lungs, and other organs. Inside the gut cavity was also a sort of cowl of fat which was carefully removed and hung to dry on the clothes line. This thin layer of fat was later cut with scissors and wrapped around the organ meats and barbecued on the rooftop. The heads and forefeet were immediately tossed on the fire and roasted to be eaten as delicacies later. The horns of the sheep were removed with a big dull cleaver and I was surprised to see that there is actually an outer casing or shell made up of a material not dissimilar to that of fingernails which covers the inner bone of the horns. I'm not entirely certain what became of the testicles and cocks of the animals, though I suspect we either ate them or they will be

saved and eaten later.

After the chest cavity was empty, the dogs were fed the bits the humans didn't want. The chickens ate the contents of the stomachs, and disturbingly, Isau washed the anus of the sheep and then blew into it, thus ejecting the fecal matter that remained. In a moment of not thinking, I laughed loudly at this since it actually made a sort of farting sound. For the second and third sheep, I contained myself.

Back to yesterday, I arrived at the Souidi house and was quickly dragged away by Mohammad to help him with his car, when we returned I was asked to sit and drink tea by Selim and his two friends, and finally I went in the house to see if Hanane was there. She had told me earlier that she was going to go to hammam, but since that was four hours before, I was surprised that she wasn't back yet since it was she who had insisted that I come for lunch.

I went upstairs and found the rabbits with no water, no food, and desperately thirsty. I am certain that they will die before too long. The rabbits could be a thriving enterprise but their cage has not been cleaned since I last cleaned it and they do not merit enough importance to be given water or food, even though there is a hose on the roof and I've bought the food for them. I fed and watered them and then lunch was ready. Hanane was still not back. I was surprised by this since she and I have had problems before involving her not being where she says she will be.

My mind suggested that she had perhaps been there with a lover when I arrived and so Mohammad had spirited me away for a task which I was not needed for, then she had rushed out to the hammam, and I was then distracted by her family to cover for her. I rejected the idea as coming from a bored writer's imagination, though in my disturbed state, it sounded as if it could be plausible. Frankly, I was more bothered by being invited to lunch and then her not bothering to be there. Because I am 'new' to her brothers, I was subjected to the incessant 'kul, kul, kul' or 'eat, eat, eat' even when my mouth was full and I was taught things that I have long since learned. It was not an enjoyable lunch though the organ meat was well prepared and the second course of mutton shank was quite tasty as well.

Following lunch, I was thinking of leaving but was sort of cornered by Isau and then we all began to harvest the plentiful olives from the tree in the courtyard. After about twenty minutes Hanane reappeared and asked me if I had missed her as if everything in the world was fine. I said "No, not really." And I kept picking olives. After a few minutes, I climbed down from the tree, noted that the winds had increased and the sky had turned grey and I decided to leave. First I went to see Hanane. I didn't yell or bluster. I simply told her that I was disappointed that she still knows me so little that she would invite me to lunch and not be there, I told her of the suspicion which had come to my mind and that I had rejected it, I told her that since she continues to do the same things which cause frustration and disappointment that I will still marry her but that I will leave her behind when I travel and she can do as she wishes without me, rather than ending the engagement, I will go through with the marriage and I will neglect her needs as she neglects mine.

I told her that if she hadn't figured out that this would annoy me than she was really setting herself up for a miserable life. She offered all the excuses of why it had taken longer to leave, why hammam had taken longer, and everything else and I cut her off and offered them for her since I have heard them all before. I asked her if she had bothered to read any of the books I've written, knowing the answer was no and then I asked her if she didn't think that was a little bit fucked up. She agreed. Then I told her I was going to leave and head to the Sahara for a few days and that she wasn't welcome to come along and that that was the life we were in store for.

I suggested that she spend some time reading my books and trying to figure out who I am before she actually go through with any marriage plans and also volunteered to take the blame if she decided she didn't want to go through with it so that she could avoid any hshuma which might come from her ending things. I told her that each time she told me something and then did the opposite it was like killing a little bit of love that I have for her and that if she wants me to love her, she really needs to figure me out. I told her I love her, that I still want to marry her, then I refused to tell her I forgave her,

and finally I left.

It was starting to rain. The long awaited storm has perhaps finally arrived. I made it home before it got heavy and spent the evening studying and drinking tea. In the night I was a little cold despite my two blankets.

Winter Comes

Today the Oued Aggai flows brown rather than red with sheep blood and it is almost as if the sacrifice of all those sheep opened up the floodgates of heaven to bring the much needed rain to this dry and dusty land.

Hanane has again invited me for lunch with her family but this time I have refused the invitation. I've no desire to be told to eat more or more rapidly than I desire nor to venture out in the cold rains which are coming from the ashen skies. Instead, I am quite content to sit in my cold apartment and look at what I need to do to make it more comfortable and fulfilling a place for myself to while away the days of this winter which has just arrived.

I need another rug or carpet, another blanket or two, more pillows, some sort of heater perhaps, sketchbook, paints, glue, scissors. I want more books, speakers, a nice chair, candles and incense, and a guitar or fiddle. Maybe both.

I am fed up with my Moroccan relationship, obviously, and chose to just stay in the casbah today and not do much of anything. Around 3 pm, I got a text from Jess inviting me for tea and pie and gladly accepted. I joined Jess and her friend Miriam, a PCV from the countryside. We watched *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe* while Miriam went and bought wine and then cooked a nice dinner.

The English speaking company of women was certainly a nice change from my usual and we spent a nice evening comparing notes on life for us in Morocco. It's nice to share frustrations with people who actually understand them.

Today started out nice enough. I made it my mission to get a sweater and a blanket and probably overpaid for both. Stupid mistakes, but at least I got what I wanted for the equivalent of about \$20. When I opened my door, I realized it was the first of the month because my landlord, Ali was standing there in his Sunday best. I brought him in and gave him the rent and the deposit that I had put him off for last month. In hindsight, I realize that I probably could have put him off indefinitely for the deposit since he had no idea why I was giving it to him. Hopefully he thought it was an extra month's rent, which is what I guess it is after all. In any event, I subtracted the 100 dirham that I had to pay in back utilities and tried to make that clear and he was just happy to have me give him 1300 dirham, I think. I'm 99% certain it was my landlord, but not quite 100%.

I've been avoiding Hanane. She knows it too. She offered to bring me soup today and I declined saying that I had a lot of work to do and that she was very sick and needed to rest. I was fairly content to just have the day to wander around Sefrou and find the things I wanted to buy but then near Bab al Makam, I passed a guy who seemed to have just sniffed some glue and he latched onto me as a foreigner, Mounir, a real slimy sort of illegal guide who wouldn't leave me alone. In what has become fairly typical stupidity for me, I told him where I am from, where I live and more and then just about shook him when his other junkie buddy came up and joined us, Mustapha, I think.

Normally I wouldn't have been too bothered but since I had my laptop on my back and 400 dirham in my pocket, I was slightly edgy and disturbed and so when I broke away I made a beeline to the Macadam office and made sure to make very pleasant with the secret police guys. I definitely prefer the secret police to the junkies. They're always very friendly and since I gave one of them an English primer, I think I am on pretty good terms with them.

The glue sniffers made me leave the area where I had thought I might buy a sweater and instead I headed down to see what was for sale in the garage sale square, but it was vacant. The holiday continues and two out of every three shops were still closed today. This country is a fucking mess. I said hello to my carpet selling friend who has a stall there and he said I should come to his house and

hang out with him some evening since he lives alone, and that was a bit creepy as well, but I realize that having friends is a nice thing.

I dropped off my computer at home and headed outside the Medina to the shops and visited a couple of second hand clothing shops. I found an Italian wool sweater, mint green and no holes for 30 dirham. I'm sure Hanane will tell me I should have paid ten, but they didn't bargain with me much. I asked the price, they said 40, I said 20, they dropped it to 30. Good enough. It's a good sweater for \$4.50. And God knows I need it, even though the weather cleared today, it is still cold, colder in fact.

Next I wanted a blanket and had been pricing them all around during the day. Starting price ranged from 100-250 for the big minky synthetic ones. One vendor dropped his price to 80 when I left but when I came back his shop was closed for afternoon prayers so I went to a nearby one and managed to get the price from 250 down to 100. I thought I had the price to 80 but then I made the mistake of pulling out a 200 dirham note and the price went to 100 unless I bought two. I wanted two, but I resented the hike and so I ended up getting it for 100. I was pissed at being out-bargained again, and the idiocy of pulling out a 200 dirham note, and so I only bought one. I'm glad I bought it as it is getting cold and I think I will be glad of it tonight.

Later I took another walk and once again near Bab al Makam I ran into Muneer and this time he was with Mohammad, the illegal guide I've been running into a lot lately. All of those guys put out dangerous creepy vibes but Mohammad at least seems to not be a junkie though when I offered to send him tourists he quoted the outrageous price of 400 dirham for an illegal tour. I didn't want to hang out with those guys at all, but stood and talked for a while until they started suggesting we all go in on a bottle of whiskey for 40 dirhams each. I told them that I don't drink because I'm Muslim, a flat out lie, but I'd rather not start drinking with the junkies here. The only drinking I've done in Sefrou has been with Jess and alone in my house, I can only hope that Ahmed, Jess's old man Friday can keep his mouth shut about me having some wine on occasion.

With all of that, this place, Sefrou, started to feel fairly oppressive. I broke away finally and almost immediately ran into Fouad and his friend, he suggested we all go to my house, but I didn't really want to have company. It may have been rude since he is almost my brother in law, but so be it. I didn't want company.

From there, since I said I wasn't going to my house, I visited the set price food store outside the side gate and picked up some mozzarella and tuna, then I got some bread in the Medina and came home to make a pot of tea and have a grilled tuna, mozzarella, and tomato sandwich for dinner. It was delicious. The rest of my day was spent making lesson plans for the weekend classes, studying Derrija, and trying to figure out what it is exactly I am doing here.

It's Not Only Me

Hanane is no doubt as confused as I am, judging by the slightly accusatory and cryptic text messages she is periodically sending to me. And in the alleys of the casbah, the youth are gambling and making lots of noise tonight. I have exactly zero desire to spend any time among them, just as I have zero desire to spend any time with any of the people I know or see here, with the exception of foreigners, who I have a slight desire to spend time with, unless they are just visiting, in which case it would be just fine to spend time with them. Sadly, this includes Hanane, the girl I am supposed to marry and all of her family and friends, with the exception of Zahira who I would be delighted to spend some time with far too delighted in fact.

I wonder if my world is falling apart or if it is just a case of culture shock? Hard to say.

It was a strange day. I met with Hanane and she looked beautiful. She was wearing the dress I bought her in Italy, had on nice makeup, and was wearing the boots and coat she wore on the first day we met. We met at the fruit salad shop and I started to tell her my fears and concerns. She listened. We talked a little about how fucked up I think Islam as it is practiced in Morocco is. She listened, she talked, she had a conversation with me about it. It was nice.

Then we walked into the mountains and we talked more. She asked if I loved her and I told her that I love the potential of what I see in her. It's true. Shortly before this she was telling me her hopes, what she wants to be, what she sees herself as, and what is holding her back. Mostly it was her country and her family and her culture. And that was when she asked if I love her.

I was brutally honest. I told her that I've had enough women to know what I like and what I don't. I told her that I don't love that she doesn't read books and so doesn't have new ideas to discuss, I told her that I don't love that she can't seem to travel without getting sick. I told her that the woman I want to spend my life with is part secretary, part dirty lover, part cheerleader to encourage me in my endeavors, part independent and artistic, and open minded enough to have conversations about anything including the fact that Islam might be fucked up, the Qur'an might be wrong, and that family might not have the best interests of people at heart. And then I told her that I see the potential for all those things in her, and have since I met her and that is the reason I wanted to marry her in the first place but that I don't know if I have the strength to be the sole agent of change in making her that, that I sometimes wonder if she is simply telling me what I want to hear so that she can make the attempt, and that the idea of marrying her before she is that woman freaks me the fuck out since if she doesn't become who I need her to be and who she tells me she wants to be, then I am married to a woman that doesn't give me what I need and it leaves me in a position where I spend the rest of my life punishing her for not being what she told me she is and being miserable because I can't leave.

Then in some strange sort of inspiration, I told her that I would be willing to marry her for five years and then to reevaluate and if we aren't making each other happy that we should then part. I feel like I can do that, I can commit to five years, until she is 31 and I'm 43. Not too much after that she looked into my face and told me that she hates me said 'fuck you' over and over to me and called me a fat man. And she was letting loose, she was more attractive than I've seen her in a long time. And while she was saying these things she was kissing me and calling me crazy and not too much after that we were sitting on the hillside talking about how fucked up religion is, okay, I was on the side of religion is fucked up and she was on the side of religion deserves respect and in the process as I said fucking god and fucking prophets and brought up how the Qur'an says it is okay for a man to beat his wife, she slapped me in the face. And then she kissed me. And then she asked if I wanted to marry her and I asked her if she was the right woman and I said I want to marry the right woman, if that can be her and then we

went back to her house where all the women in her family were having henna and she forgot that Asma, the henna girl speaks pretty good English and said some things in front of her that weren't exactly things to be said in front of someone who speaks English, especially if she really is worried about some Moroccan woman conniving to steal me from her since Asma is attractive and flirty and seemingly even keeled and normal.

And I wonder, was that woman who hates me in her all along? Because that hatred felt more like love than all the sappy sweetness I usually get, it made me think that maybe there really is a chance that she can become the woman she has always told me she is, deep down inside but oppressed by her family and culture. She's right, I'm a crazy man. I've never tried to hide that from her anyway.

And this crazy man suddenly feels like a five year commitment is much more reasonable than a lifetime with a girl who hasn't yet become who she thinks she is. And in the process I realize that if things should not work out how we both dream, life together is miserable, and nothing is making us happy, or really I should say, making me happy, that I can leave, divorce, separate, or abandon her. I've told her my fears and what I am willing to do. She's accepted this proposal from this crazy fat man because of whatever it is she thinks this marriage and relationship will bring her, love, citizenship, sophistication, freedom, whatever. I've told her I'm not a good man and will probably hurt her and make her miserable. I've bared it all. So, sure, why not. Let's bring it on.

The Cobbler of Sefrou and other Stories

I haven't been writing much for the past week or so and as such I may have missed out on some interesting observations of the life that goes on all the time around me. A few things, however, do come to mind.

Yesterday I was walking through the casbah when a familiar face caught my eye. It was Mohammad the Cobbler, whom I met back in March of 2009 when I needed my shoes fixed.

Italian Shoes meet Mohammad the Cobbler

I set out on this journey with just one pair of shoes. A pair of Johnston and Murphy, Italian leather, hand-made brown dress shoes that I picked up in Hawaii for \$5 at the goodwill but that retail for about \$600 new. They were in perfectly new condition when I got them. Damn nice shoes.

In the USA, I had my shoes shined in various cities. Boston, New York, San Francisco, and without a doubt, the best shoe shine in the USA came from San Francisco. Boston ranked second and New York came in a distant third. In Spain and Gibraltar, I didn't find a shoe shine, and though I took care of my shoes on my own, the wear and tear of about 5000 miles started to show on them. By the time I arrived in Morocco, the upper had started to separate from the soul and I was using epoxy I had bought in Granada to hold them together, then the heel started to come off and the epoxy again saved the day. While there are numerous shoe shine guys in Morocco and lots of cobblers, I opted to go it alone with the epoxy.

Then I met Hanane and ended up buying a pair of nice leather loafers for around 100 dirham. When I left Sefrou, I left my trusty shoes behind and Hanane told me she would drop them at a cobbler for me to be repaired. Her family makes a fuss over many things and one of them was me not having slippers to walk around in so I bought a pair of slippers in Marrakesh too. When I came back after a week, Hanane told me the shoes were at the cobbler and had been there five days.

We went there and nothing had been done. Hanane then told me that to get the shoes repaired, we would have to stand there and harass Mohammad the cobbler for the entire time. Indeed there was a crowd around his stall that was doing just that. And this sort of explained why my shoes had been ignored. We had no time and while he said it would take a half hour, I didn't want to stand there for a half hour. So we left.

A week later, we went back, and there was a larger crowd around the stall than before. Mohammad explained that he had been sick and closed his shop for four days. After working our way to the front, we managed to get Mohammad and his oafish son to start doing something to my shoes, but then a very huge Moroccan man came up and threatened to become very angry if his shoes weren't worked on. So his shoes were moved up the line. Then a shrewish woman came and began harping so much that no one minded that he move her shoes to the front of the line just so she would go away. The big man had had his shoes there for a month, so even without his size, I was understanding of his wanting his shoes done first and as to the shrew, well, she was absolutely awful and no price was too high to get her to leave..

So we stood there in the rain for an hour with a constantly changing cast of Moroccan characters coming and going, berating and joking and despite the fact that we were both cold and both have colds and that we would have preferred to be somewhere else, it was actually impossible to be upset with Mohammad who is quite the comedian.

His jokes kept everyone who stood there laughing enough so that we didn't form a lynch mob. There are a huge collection of shoes sitting on shelves in his shop, presumably from customers who have either died before having their shoes fixed or just given up on them. In the hour we were there, I learned quite a bit about how to fix shoes, by the time my shoes are done, I may know enough to open

up a competing business across the street. At the least, I could open a cafe for his customers to sit, eat, and wait in, though, unless they stand at the door and constantly harangue, the work wouldn't get done, so maybe it isn't a reasonable idea.

At the end of an hour, we had to leave, but by this point the cobbler had undone my work with the epoxy on the front of the shoes, sort of badly glued the fronts back on with what I presume to be actual shoe glue, and that is about it. I suggested to Hanane that we take the shoes to somewhere else but she insists that they stay there.

Actually, I didn't mind so much as it is the closest thing to local entertainment I have seen here in Morocco. I'm actually looking forward to going back tomorrow and going through it all again. It's funny, Moroccans don't go to bars, most don't go to restaurants because they would rather eat at home and hence there aren't really many restaurants, especially of the types we have in the west where you go in, sit, order, hang out with friends, etc. The cafe's aren't really equivalent to coffee shops since they are mostly places where men sit by themselves staring outward at the world and the choice of coffee is a single shot espresso or espresso with milk. Movie theaters are few and far between. There are some arcades and pool halls, but these are places you find trouble. The hammam seems to be a social gathering place, but how often can you really go without being weird. There aren't stores with aisles you can wander down or through, instead you go to the door and tell the shop owner what you want and they retrieve it for you. You can wander in the souks and in the old medina's, but essentially, it is a matter of taking a walk through a crowded street unless you want to buy something.

So, yes, I felt anticipation to go watch Mohammad the Cobbler work on frustrated Moroccan's shoes, bags, and leather goods again.

Two days later, it was Hanane's brother Mohammad and I who went to see the cobbler and my shoes were in exactly the same spot they were in when Hanane and I left two days ago. As soon as we left, the work stopped. Amazingly predictable but still astounding.

Mohammad speaks some bastardized French, and I speak just a little regular French and so when he and I wander around together we have conversations that are probably about two entirely different things, but he seems like a good guy. One thing to get used to is the affection between people of the same sex here, much different than in the USA. Mohammad who is one year older than I, happily married with a son and another child on the way, likes to hold my hand while we stroll or to stroll arm in arm with me. This is fairly normal in the Arab world, but though I try to deal with it, I just can't and so I've tried to explain the reasons I don't like holding hands with him and my best approach has been that it distracts me from seeing stray autos that might run me down or nabbing thieves that are trying to pick my pockets.

While I am sure there is crime aplenty in Morocco, I think the average Moroccan is much more concerned with being stolen from than the odds warrant. Nearly all of the Moroccans I have met (with a few notable exceptions) are more likely to add a few dirhams to your pocket when you aren't looking than to take them. So it is a people who are always expecting to be robbed, but are not likely to rob you themselves. When I first arrived in Sefrou, the warnings of Hanane and her family made me almost neurotic, but at this point, I am still aware, but not quite as paranoid as they are.

So in any event, Mohammad, my perhaps soon to be brother in law, and I visited Mohammad the cobbler, and what I think the cobbler said to me was that he was terrified of Hanane and thought she was a homicidal maniac who would kill him. He was joking of course, but the truth is already today she has said she will kill me five times and we have only been awake for a half hour or so. In an average day she says she will kill me at least 30 times, so no doubt she also told the cobbler that she would kill him. I know she said if my shoes weren't like new, she would destroy his shop, so he was joking, but yeah, the girl I love is a bit insane...just as she has to be for me to love her.

It took about 15 minutes to finish my shoes. Not perfect, but pretty good and when I asked how much, the cobbler said, whatever you think is best! I offered him 20 dirhams expecting him to ask for more but instead he asked me for less and the grand total was about \$2.

Nine months later when I ran into him in the casbah, Mohammad the cobbler was seemingly overjoyed to see me and I must admit, I feel much more enthusiasm in these re-meetings than I would if I were to run into someone I had met in a shop in say Seattle or Honolulu. Mohammad and his big oafish son asked what I was doing in the casbah and my Arabic is getting good enough that I understood the question and was able to explain that I live there. I asked in turn, after the usual five minutes of formal greetings in which we asked about family, asked about health, asked about the weather, gave God credit for all that is both good and bad.

It turned out that his grandparents live in the narrow alleys of the casbah, not too far from me. This is not exactly extraordinary as Jess and I have been contemplating just how many people live here and the numbers are bizarrely huge. Of course there are me and Jess, then there is Ahmed who lives in a house with about fifteen people. Upstairs from him are about fifteen others. Upstairs from me are two men, two women, and about six kids. The doorway to the left of mine leads to a series of apartments which Ahmed told us is inhabited by at least eight women with at least four children each and probably eight husbands, so that's another forty-eight. Keep in mind that this tally so far, at a staggering ninety people is represented by only four doors at the end of an alley that is less than six feet wide. Our section of the casbah is about thirty feet long and there is another section at the end of that thirty feet which is roughly fifty feet. So, counting Said, the hanut-man, and all the kids and families there are at least another one hundred and thirty odd people in that section. It explains why there are always new faces that we haven't seen in walking this eighty feet of alley which is home to at least two hundred and twenty people.

As it turns out, Mohammad the Cobbler is not one of them, but his grandmother and grandfather are. He insisted that I come with him to see his grandparents and since I had nothing else to do, I agreed. He knocked on a door which a dour middle aged woman opened and we walked past at least six closed doors inside to a corner apartment that is roughly the size of my salon, about twenty by fifteen feet. There was a part of me that was horrified that two such ancient people are left to lead this sort of existence and another part of me that has become a sort of neutral observer of all that I see in this far away land.

The apartment was cold and furnished with two low pongs, the sofa like pallets that are the norm for a Moroccan household. The mattresses were about six inches high and piled high with blankets. A butigas bottle with cooking attachment sat in one corner. The only other piece of furnishing was a battered old green painted wooden cabinet with glass doors. There were assorted pots, cooking utensils, and plastic tubs, buckets, etc around.

His grand-mother, Rajia, looked to be about three hundred years old and was bent over almost double from severely advanced scoliosis of the spine and no doubt a huge amount of degeneration and calcium deficiency. She was literally bent double and I never had the opportunity to see her face since it was about a foot off the ground and facing downward. She insisted that Mohammad help her to drag a big plastic tub out to the central courtyard shared by all the inhabitants of the place so that she could do laundry. My Derrija is not good enough to follow all that went between them, but it seemed to me that the cobbler was apologizing to me and saying that this is the way with old people in Morocco.

He then pointed my attention to one of the pallets where a similarly ancient man was lying under six or seven blankets and breathing coarsely. The old man seemed to be knocking on death's door with his ragged breathing and didn't seem to have the energy to open his eyes. Mohammad shook him a little and then gave him a tender kiss on the forehead before covering him back up. It had seemed to me that I was being invited to lunch by Mohammad, but despite the neutral observer side of my brain, I was more than a little disturbed to stay there and force this old woman to cook for us so I made the excuse that I needed to prepare lessons and then made my escape.

One can suppose that something like one in every four of the apartments in the casbah is similarly occupied. Perhaps it is owned by the people or perhaps they simply don't pay rent as Jess and I recently discovered is pretty much the norm here. A good number of casbah residents haven't paid rent in at

least six months and utilities are always on the verge of being shut down. When I moved in, my utilities hadn't been paid for seven months and I was surprised at the high bills until I realized that they were backed up.

More and more, I have these small encounters with people who are increasingly becoming aware that I am not just a tourist or visitor but someone who lives here. I am not actively seeking friendships partly because I want to have as good a command of the language as possible before I start interacting with people on a regular basis. I am studying a lot and my vocabulary is becoming larger but now I need to start focusing on sentence building and pronunciation.

On the same day I ran into Mohammad the cobbler, I also ran into Mohammad the kid smoker and was greeted like a long lost old friend or relative by him as well. Just this evening I was walking home from Hanane's and ran into the sister of my friend Adil, Fatima-Zahira. She was very happy to see me and insisted that I come to visit her house soon. She's a nice girl and I'd like to, but the problem is that tongues wag and the last thing I want is a scandal just because I want to make friends with a Moroccan girl.

A few days ago I paid a visit to the garage sale corner and sat talking with the carpet man who now has a small women's clothing stall there. He had a sheet of paper on which he was picking horses to bet on, presumably on the internet and we talked about what we would do if we won a lot of money. He would buy a house...and a wife. I think he's a bit unbalanced but he seems to be a pretty good guy. He introduced me to his friend who he told me is a bum that sleeps in alleys, eats garbage, and is completely crazy, but that everyone likes. I forgot the man's name, but indeed, he seemed to be a likable sort of bum.

Jess invited Hanane and I over to eat some steamed goat that Ahmed was making. It's an odd relationship between those two. He really is her old man Friday as he cooks her breakfast, walks her dogs, makes her evening meals, and cleans her house. In return, she pays his rent, gives him some spending money, gives him the run of her house, and does things for him like buying him a goat for Eid. Essentially, he is a domestic servant, but the relationship is more complex than that. They are sort of best friends in a symbiotic relationship and a bit like an old married couple. I asked her whether it is intrusive to have Ahmed show up when her not quite a boyfriend stays overnight and she said that Ahmed usually figures it out and she will sometimes find breakfast in a state of started but then left all of a sudden.

Anyway, we went to her place around 6 and found Yassine there too. A few other guests had not been able to make it, but before too long we were joined by Jess's friend Zeros, who is a oud player and from what I understood manages to play Jimi Hendrix on the ancient instrument. Seemed like a pretty nice guy. Jess said later that he is a bit of a slimeball but she has had no issues with him. Then she mentioned that he is a macadam! I wouldn't have guessed it since he was drinking wine with us all. Of course, it's not illegal to drink wine, but for most people, it's considered immoral. He, Jess, and I were the only ones drinking. It was the first time I've drank in front of Hanane. She didn't freak out but was surprised by it and perhaps it made her a little nervous.

The six of us ate the apricot and goat tajine Ahmed made. It was delicious. Then Hanane and Ahmed sang and that was nice since they both love the old Arabic songs. The rest of us joined in, but they were the main act. Hanane has an incredible voice when she sings in Arabic. I love to listen to her, for a while. The problem, as usual though, is that when she starts, she has a hard time knowing when to stop. I saw Jess becoming annoyed and finally managed to get her to stop by asking a lot of questions about her and Yassine's families.

First Yassine. He has thirty cousins. When his grandfather married his grandmother, she was only twelve. When he would go to work, she would sneak out of the house to play with the other little girls. I think that's all I got from him about his family.

Now, if I can remember right. Hanane's dad had one brother and two sisters. I think they were all from the same mother but she had three husbands who she either survived or killed. One son from each

of two of them and the two daughters from the others. Selim's brother was married to a woman and they had a son, Jamal, whom I know and is a really nice guy. Then, Jamal's mom died and his father married her sister and had two more sons. So, Jamal's brothers are his cousins too. Then his father died and the mother of Jamal's brothers ran away leaving all three boys with the two aunts who had been each married three times, as their mother had been, but had begat no children. So the two aunts had the brother's estate and children and then one of them suddenly produced a child, without ever having been pregnant. No one is certain where her 'daughter' came from, but the girl was introduced as the new 'sister' to the three orphaned boys and is to be given an equal share of whatever it is they will get and apparently, this is a source of some bitterness within the family.

Now, on Hanane's mother's side things are more confusing and my recall is more hazy. There were eight brothers and sisters. One brother had ten children, went to Spain, got rich, got passports for all his kids, bought a car, and then died in an accident. Then there is Aisha, who is the mother of Samira, Mohammad's wife (his cousin) and her sister's Hanane, Miriam, and some brothers. There is another sister with a bunch of kids, and another uncle with two wives and something like twenty children, Hanane said that this uncle is good for nothing but fucking, and then a bunch of other people since that only accounts for five of the eight children. I'm happy to report that Selim and Khadija are not related so the genetics of Hanane are probably not too clustered with problems. Whew. I need to chart out Hanane's family tree. I think we figured out she has forty-eight cousins.

As for me, if you count step-cousins, I have fifteen total. If you don't count the steps, I have twelve. If I were to have a child they would have five cousins so far on my side and after Fatima -Zahira gives birth, four on Hanane's side, so far. Somehow I don't think they will have anywhere near as many as Hanane or Yassine have.

The night wound down, I walked Hanane and Yassine out of the dangerous casbah and oddly, it did feel quite dangerous with lots of young guys giving glowering looks over their slicked back hair and leather jackets as we walked the gauntlet of them in the narrow alleys. Like 1950's greasers. I came back and since Xeros had left, it was Jess and Ahmed and I drinking some wine but then we were joined by the funny lady from the casbah who I one day helped carry a bucket of water. She is a round, toothless thing of probably around twenty eight years old who has a nice spirit. Fatima, I think her name is...not surprisingly.

The Evil Eye Strikes

Teaching has been going well though the Friday nights have not gotten any better. Since we were able to catch the bus last week, we waited for it this week and of course, it never came. Then we went to the taxi mafia spot at Atlas and found it deserted. No legal or illegal taxis. We ended up hitching a ride home and paying the driver twenty-five dirham. It was more comfortable than a taxi.

As to the American English School itself. I like it but am bothered more and more by the *masa* like attitude of the director and the colonial behavior of the long established teachers. I've been fairly obsequious up to this point with the lead teachers I am co-teaching with but this week I really reached my limit. Both women I have been teaching with Evelyn the American and Khadija the Moroccan drive me insane. I think Evelyn is going through a breakup and taking out her animosity towards her husband on me. I taught a great session and she pulled out this comment about how I need to take more time to learn the grammar and how she will tell David Gerbil that and recommend that I co-teach more and thus only get paid at half rate for another term. This from a woman who answers questions about grammar with "Because that is the way it is done". I can answer like that without more training thank you.

The fact is that aside from Tauific, I haven't really learned anything from these two teachers. They've simply gotten in the way of me learning more from the students, because after all, it is the students I need to learn from: what questions they ask, what behaviors I need to learn to control, and what things they have problems with. So when Tauific said that I may have to co-teach next semester, I nearly flipped and then the next day told him that if that is the case, the school may need to find a few more teachers since I wouldn't terribly mind escaping to Indonesia anyway.

A short while later, he told me that I probably won't be co-teaching again after all and not to worry about it. I do worry about it because Khadija told students that ghosts 'inhibit' a house and then argued with me when I pointed out during a break that they 'inhabit' a house and Evelyn is both smug and condescending with her students and everyone else. Not to mention, co-teachers earn half salary and that sucks donkey balls.

I found a used book souq near the American English School. It sits under a bridge and is crammed with old used books, mostly in French but a couple hundred hidden here and there in English. It was a nice diversion even though I didn't really find any great treasures. I did however find a Philip K. Dick novel called *Galactic Pot Healer* and a couple of books that cover some Moroccan cultural history. The book souq is in a tin roofed shantytown and there are probably at most a couple thousand books in English with most of them being textbooks or photocopies cast off by university students studying English. I wish I read French or Arabic. In the future maybe. The book dealers charge too much, a minimum of a dollar each for books missing pages, photocopied, or with broken spines and the guy with the best selection won't haggle at all. At least not until I go there with five hundred dirham and ask him if I can fill my bag with books for it, I don't know when I will possibly have \$75 to blow on books though.

I finished *The Wilder Shores of Love*. Essentially it was the stories of four nineteenth century European women who loved Arab cocks. No particularly great insights into Arab thought or the Arab world. More like romanticizing of experience by a another woman that probably loves Arab cock. I did though enjoy the story of Sir Richard Francis Burton who probably loved Arab cocks as much as the women did..

Hanane and I still squabble a bit. Zahira wants me to teach her to speak better English and Hanane gave the okay as long as I don't try to marry her as a second wife, and Khadija gave me throws and pillows to cover my pongs.

On Saturday, I met with a good number of ex-pats to have Japanese food. Ended up spending about \$40 but it was worth it as the food and the wine were great. The attendees were Michelle the Australian, and a lot of English folks. Jess, Alice, a girl named Maya, David and Sally the old English couple with a nice riad, and a Moroccan woman named Raja. We ate and told stories. The highlight of the day was David telling me a story over after lunch coffee and opening a packet of sugar then putting the torn packet top in the ashtray, then probably because of the wine, he poured all the sugar in the ashtray too. He's a funny guy with some funny stories. Though at the moment, I can recall none of them except that once he got on a plane and was seated next to a man with the same name as him and none of the flight crew could figure out why there weren't enough seats until he and the same named guy pointed out that they were both booked for the same seat. Aside from that, most of the talk was about furniture, Moroccan house restoration, and other things that interest me very little.

The string of bad luck that Hanane has suffered lately is enough to at least make me consider the possibility of the evil eye being a real phenomenon. The other day, on one of our rare days of not having to go to Fes, I was having a work at home day and she was also staying home. As usual, her brother Mohammad wasn't anywhere near his hanut and so the task fell to his mother to mind the shop. She, in turn, needed to go to the souk and so she tried to pawn the task off on Hanane. Hanane and I have often discussed the fact that Mohammad uses his whole family to run the hanut but then does nothing to help the family, including paying them for their time with money or food and so, and I'm quite proud of her for it, Hanane said no. Then, when the thousands of people that seem to live in her neighborhood yelling out Mohammad or a-Khadija, she yelled back that there was no one there to cover the shop and that they should go elsewhere. The problem though, began when she decided she would like to have some hot chocolate.

First she went out to get chocolate and while there she assisted one woman, then she realized there was no milk and went back out to get milk. At this point, a neighborhood no good asked her to get him a cigarette, she told him that he should pay and he said to give it to him on credit. When she said no, he began verbally abusing her, God only knows what foul things came out of his mouth. Next he threatened to kill her and her sisters and probably to rape them too and began groping himself.

Her sister Fatima, who is quite fierce came out and began heaping abuse back on him and this took his glue sniffing rage to new levels. As, I've previously pointed out, the drug of choice for the no goods is usually huffing aerosol and it causes serious mental problems. During this whole thing, Hanane's 17 year old brother stood by saying and doing nothing. I've completely lost respect for Fouad over this. The girls managed to escape without physical violence and Fatima berated Fouad who well after the fact picked up a knife in the kitchen and said he was going after the glue head. It was all bluff and they stopped him easily. About this time Khadija returned from the market and when she heard about the situation she decided to go tell the boy's mother.

Along the way, she encountered the boy who completely freaked out. He said that he would kill Fatima, Zahira, or Hanane if he found them and then he picked up a large rock and smashed it into Khadija's head. Somehow she made it home and Mohammad then took her to the hospital while her head gushed blood. She had a lump bigger than a fist coming from her head, then they filed a police report and the police found the boy but then let him go with a warning, probably because he has no money to pay bribes anyway.

I found out about all of this well after the fact. A week later, Khadija still has a huge lump on her noggin and seems to be slightly more addled than she was before. She said no one has ever assaulted her like that before.

So that's the first bad luck thing. A death threat. Next in line was problems getting home from the American English School on Friday nights. Each time we tried there was no transport. No bus, no cars, no taxis, and once we had to hitch hike. After two weeks of this, I got in a minor scuffle when we tried cramming into a taxi with all the other human beings become animals fighting over limited seats in those few taxis that were actually working without overcharging. No blood, no fists, just a lot of Fuck

you! and a bit of shoving- though I wanted to smash the guys face. I still do, but I haven't seen him again. In any event, we got the taxi and left him behind and even though I waited for the next taxi, he wasn't in it.

Two days ago Hanane came to stay at my house for the night when we returned from Fez and while she was here, someone stole 600 dirhams from her room. That's a lot of money in Morocco. Basically, before she had a job at the American English School it was a month's salary for her. It's nearly my rent. Hanane thinks it is her cousin Miriam who stole it since Miriam had previously stolen a scarf from Hanane at some distant point in the past. Maybe she's right since Zahira said that Miriam was there next to where the money was. I tend to think, however, that it was someone closer to home. The list of suspects is large since there are lots of people in and out of her house. I don't think her father, Selim, stole the money. I think he has too much pride to steal, he might take it and refuse to give it back, but he would let it be known that he took it. Same goes for her mom. In my mind though, everyone else is suspect, regardless of how much I love them as people. At the top of my list is Mohammad. According to Hanane, he has stolen from her in the past, probably her sim card from her phone, her headphones, and other things. Mohammad has a lot of money, certainly he doesn't need it, but I think he is an opportunist and would take it without a second thought. Adding to my suspicion is the fact that I saw a big wad of cash in his wallet yesterday that looked suspiciously like 600 dirhams. Next on my list is the person Hanane suspects least, Zahira. Zahira is a divorced woman, she has no money, she is constantly is spending money on nice new things, and her boyfriend whom she was going to visit soon just got ratted out to Khadija by Fatima. Without her man-source, she needs money to buy new things and oddly enough, she bought new pajamas on the very day Hanane's money was stolen and out of sympathy (or a sense of guilt) she also bought a pair of pajamas for Hanane. Hanane loves Zahira, but I don't think Zahira would pass up an opportunity to grab the money if it came.

In some ways, I wish it were Zahira I were going to marry because she is a bit rotten, like I am. But in terms of character or morals, she can't even stand next to Hanane. Hanane is by far the sweetest woman I've known. And yes, I am convinced.

Next on the suspects come those who are just there. Fatima, who's fiance from Belgium has just returned and who is desperate to marry and escape Morocco. I'm not sure, but I suspect she has paid all of their marriage expenses from her own pocket and thus, she needs money. Fouad, of course, would take it. Fatima-Zahira, the pregnant wife of Hanane's brother Isau. She is a pregnant woman who has a husband with no money. It would be understandable if she stole it, but again, I don't think it very likely.

And of course there is Amin, the son of Mohammad. Amin is small but I think he is devious. He is sweet but has an evil side as well. Amin would take it and he goes everywhere in the house. So at the top of my list are Zahira, Mohammad, and Amin. But as can be seen, it could have been anyone. She left it in a book next to her bed, inside an envelope sticking out of the book. Or, and it is possible, she has lost it and it will turn up. I find it much more likely though that it was stolen. Funny how much I love these people but I don't put it past any of them but Selim and Khadija...and even they could have.

The next event in Hanane's string of bad luck came the next day. The completely ball-less director of the center, called me a few days ago and said he wanted to meet with us both to 'touch bases'. I asked what it was about and he was quite obviously vague, which is his ball-less way. On our way to the center, a black cat ran across the street and even though I attempted to avoid letting it cross our path, it ducked into a hedge and there was no way to avoid it.

We showed up on time, he showed up nearly an hour late because a teacher had gone crazy and needed to be taken to the hospital. As we sat, he refused to come to any point despite my repeated attempts to get him to say anything. Finally, I cornered him and asked "Should we plan on working at the center next semester?" This brought him to point a little bit, but not enough.

He beat around the bush talking about the lack of precision in Hanane's English and my own less than perfect understanding of how to teach grammar. Essentially, he was saying that we wouldn't be needed. I understood it, but I refused to take it at that without him coming out and saying it. If you want

to fire me, fire me. Don't just expect me to intuit it.

So, I launched into condemning the two female teachers I'd been working with. I had suspected something like this would come from the slutty Maryland broad who when she figured out she was becoming older and uglier in San Francisco moved to Morocco and married a younger Moroccan man and is now going through the process of divorce for the foolish yearnings of her graying cunt. She is a man hater if I ever met one, as most sluts past their prime become when they realize that the truth really is that men appreciate and women depreciate in terms of desirability. If a woman wants to keep her man, she needs to be a damn good wife, friend, and companion because the looks won't get far when you reach fifty. Of course, I didn't say any of this, but talked about her condescension towards students and me, her co-teacher and gave several nice examples of how inept a teacher she really is. Since I was already seething I also let out the dirty laundry on the Moroccan teacher who even after I told her the director wanted me to teach half the class only let me teach fifteen minutes or so and who throws a healthy dose of Islam into her lessons.

He indicated that he had talked with her and in turn I indicated that his talk had done little good. To contrast this, I spoke highly of Si Touific as a person who taught me and the students and allowed me to teach. I think my high regard for him contrasted the lack of skill of the other two quite well. In fact, my regard was not feigned though I was disappointed to hear David Gerbil say the Touific had also expressed hesitations about my ability to teach (which I later found out was a blatant lie).

When I was through crucifying those who had attempted to crucify me, David Gerbil's tune changed a bit and he began to back peddle and say that for me, he thought, since I had obviously not been totally to blame for the problems I encountered in the women's classes that he would speak with Touific and Omar to see if me having a class next semester and a co-teaching class with a solid teacher would be a possibility. Still though, the man has no balls and finally I said "Look, I hate to put you in a corner, but since we are trying to plan our lives, we need to know and since you are the director, what I am understanding is that there is a possibility that there is a job for me next semester if I choose to take it, but there isn't one for Hanane. Is that what you are saying?" He hemmed and hawed in that annoying Midwest/Canadian way but finally said yes, that was what he was saying.

Hanane was totally heart-broken. I saw it and felt it but she stayed stoic in his presence. Certainly more than me, this job has been the greatest thing in her life and to be told that she wasn't good enough must have been shattering. The fact of the matter is that she was as good as any of the other Moroccan teachers I've spoken with, excepting Touific and Hamid, but I think the issue is more one of her not having a Master's Degree like all of the other teachers. In this deeply hierarchical society, she poses a threat to those who have higher degrees if she achieves the same level as they without the degree. It degrades their position and I think that played a part. To be sure, her language is as imprecise as just about every other non-native speakers, but let's be honest here, English is imprecise by region and if she makes errors such as 'imaginating' she is not alone. Far worse, in my opinion is the self righteous hijab wearing cunt's misuse of inhibit for inhabit.

After a brief consultation with Touific and Omar, David Gerbil told me that I will be given one regular class and one co-teaching class next semester and that in addition, I can host a movie discussion group and a culture discussion group and be paid regular wages for everything but the co-teaching class. Nice perks that I am certain he knew would appeal to me. Frankly, I just wanted to tell him to shove the job up his pedophilic asshole, but in his absence, Hanane had reminded me that if I quit, I wouldn't get the residence permit or the attestation du travail we needed for our marriage. In fact, quitting was high in my mind. It was why I emphasized, if I choose to take it. As a bonus, I asked about whether we needed to go to our classes tomorrow since Hanane's teachers had thrown her under the bus and I had just thrown mine under the one they intended for me. Thankfully, he said that he would understand if we didn't attend.

I felt like I'd just been forced to watch someone beat my wife and then thank them for their generosity. My intention was to keep my eyes open for other opportunities and to get my residency

card. After that we would see. Hanane showed herself to be strong and to use subtle words to get me to think sensibly and thus showed me that she really does have what I need in the way of a wife. Even if she did throw up under a tree when we reached Sefrou.

Driving Ms. Fatima

Tuesday night I stayed at the Souidi house because Wednesday I needed to drive Mohammad's car to Casablanca to pick up Khalil/Lionell, Fatima's fiance. At 5 a.m. the next morning, Mohammad, Fatima, and I set out. I should point out again that Mohammad speaks that bastardized French that I sometimes pretend to understand and Fatima has no English skills to speak of. Mohammad is a terrible driver and scared the hell out of me from Sefrou to Fez. It was nice to take the driver seat. Neither of them knew how to get to the highway that leads to Casablanca, and of course, neither did I. Mohammad paid a taxi driver to lead us. My driving skills were the match of the taxi driver who used all of his skills to make it the fastest possible twenty dirham he'd earned in a week.

Once on the highway, all my experience as a chauffeur came to the fore and I bobbed and weaved through traffic on the way to Rabat like it was 3 pm in Honolulu. In other words, there was a lot of traffic and I beat it. At about 8 a.m. I wanted some coffee and asked Fatima for some. She brushed me off, but I knew there was a basket of food and a thermos of coffee in the back with her and I wanted some coffee. There are no drive throughs on the road to Casablanca or I would have just bought a cup. "I want coffee now, right now. Give me some coffee, NOW." After that, the coffee was poured and we had slices of a nice cake Khadija sent with us too. It drives me crazy but with Arabs, sometimes it seems that you have to really demand things and do it in a loud voice. There is no such thing as just being nice or you will be forced to wait for whenever it is convenient for them. I was sitting in the driver seat and I'm tired of being nice and run over. Totally tired of it. No pun intended.

Driving in Morocco is crazy but American drivers are a lot more aggressive than Moroccans probably due to the inchallah factor, Moroccans are used to being shit on and Americans each think they are God's chosen ones. So, I was the only one flipping the bird to people and hoping for a chance to exercise my road rage. All that being said, I was amazed to see no accidents since safe following is only a meter here, not three car lengths like they teach you in driver's ed.

Upon reaching Casa I tried to explain that the airport lies about 50 km beyond Casa so they wouldn't freak out when I drove past Casablanca. They seemed to understand but I noticed that reading road signs, even in Arabic wasn't a skill they were good at. As we passed the main Casa exit they freaked out saying that I was taking them to Marrakech. Fatima demanded I stop, on the busiest freeway in Morocco or that I pull an illegal U-turn in the median, which had a big ditch in it anyway. I refused and tried my best to point to the signs that said Mohammad V Airport. No luck, only "Hada trek a Marrakech" Of course I didn't imagine that we had woken up at 5 am so that we could watch T.V. at their brother Driss' house in Ain Saruda, a slum of Mohammadia. Finally, they made it clear that we weren't going straight to the airport. I understood but still I wouldn't pull over or do an illegal U-turn on the freeway and my caution was justified by the may cops I saw sitting in the median as we went, but my Derrija skills failed in explaining this and so I had to endure Fatima's caterwauling from the back seat until we reached a pull-out where I forced Mohammad, against his will, to drive. How the hell do they expect me to go to their brother's house if I've never been there and they tell me we are going to the airport?

I don't know if Mohammad driving in Casablanca was as terrifying for them as it was for me, but it was beyond frightening. He missed the turn-off and Fatima made him pull over and go in reverse down the busy highway for at least 500 yards to go back to the exit. I knew we were going to die, but thanks to the flexibility of other Moroccan drivers, we didn't.

We found Driss' house in a trash filled slum. Per usual, the insides of the shanty town were incredibly nice, but the slum. Wow. It was, and I mean this literally, a dump. The surrounding three acres contained enough trash to fill an entire Hawai'i landfill. No exaggeration there. Once again, Driss showed himself to be a nice guy that I would happily sit around a bum fire with. He talks about money

incessantly and did his best to pressure me to spending mine...on him, but I didn't. They convinced me to drive again but I only did it because if it were Mohammad, all the passengers would surely be dead very soon.

Driss and the others seemed not to notice the trash. This is a latent Moroccan talent. I did, but kept quiet about it and I doubt the sarcasm in saying 'blasa zweena' or 'beautiful place' was noted. We met the grandmother of the slum who was the loveliest old crone I've met yet. And then I tried to take a nap in Driss' and his wife's bed which I was forced to by the very insistent Moroccan hospitality. For some reason I was certain I was about to be murdered, not an uncommon feeling for me here, but as is usual, I wasn't. Needless to say, I slept about 15 minutes during which I heard lots of prayers being said which didn't help me sleep since I also kept hearing 'Mirikan' about every twenty or thirty words. It also didn't help that I thought Driss introduced me to the crone as "Yahoudi" which means Jew but later found out he was saying Xuydi which is my brother...at least I think that's what he said.

After watching yet another terrible Steven Baldwin movie on Driss' TV, walking into the medina of Ain Haruda, and lots of discussion I took part in without understanding we set out to the airport. Just in case you forgot, I never knew we were coming to Driss' house in the first place. They say in Morocco that the camel driver has his plans and the camel has his, well in this case I was the camel, for future reference that's 'jamal' in Derrija.

Thankfully, I was driving again. I am fairly certain that none of my three passengers Driss, Fatima, or Mohammad had ever been to an airport. Driss waited outside, probably because he had a big knife in his coat. We went in, early. I tried to explain that international customs can take a while but Fatima was increasingly worried that her big man wasn't coming. Mohammad was, well, he was Mohammad. For the first time in an airport I ran into someone I knew, Abdul, the ALIF student from Colorado. I was glad because I really thought Fatima's fat fiance' might not come. I hadn't met him yet, but had heard he was a very big man.

Arrive he did though and then I understood and suddenly had compassion for Fatima because he brought his daughter. She is ten and must way two-hundred pounds. I figured him for a four hundred pounder at least.

When I was ten to thirteen I lived in hell. It was called Myrtle Creek, Oregon and for some reason there were more retarded and autistic people on that school bus than there had a right to be. As I think about it, there was a 'home' they all lived in, so they were probably abandoned retarded kids. The funny thing was they always had a smell that was like soap but wasn't. Coralee, Khalil/Lionel's daughter had the same smell. I'm probably a fucker for even admitting it, but I don't want to be around retarded people. It makes me uncomfortable. Like crazy people or people with drug addled brains, they are unpredictable.

And now, it suddenly made sense why Lionel fell in love on the internet with an earthy Moroccan girl from a poor family. It wasn't that he is a fattie, it was that he has a retarded daughter that will need to be taken care of for as long as she lives. And thus, the source of my sudden sympathy. I hope Fatima gets what she needs and wants from this plumber that I discovered just quit his job and is thinking of living here in Morocco. Frankly, I don't like the guy and while he seems to treat her well now, I've had my concerns about Fatima paying for so much and now it all makes sense. His kid is retarded.

From the airport we made one brief stop at a gas station where we added Isau to our overweight posse. He was bringing some of his textile products to take back to Mama Khadija. Then we all went back to the shantytown at Ain Haruda where the grandmother of the slum had made some of the best mutton and prunes I have tasted. Driss and Isau hit Lionel up for cigarettes and since I was smoking his too, I bought him a pack. Of course, I'm the rich American.

On the drive from the airport we encountered one traffic jam and I would guess at least one was dead at the scene. I saw the guy lying in a bloody pool on the road where he had flown out of the grand taxi. On the drive back to Sefrou the conditions were terrible and we saw one accident where at least another two had died. The road from Fez to Sefrou was the worst and we saw no accidents, but then

entering Sefrou we hydroplaned at least 50 yards and then arrived back at the Souidi house where we ate and then slept. On this night, Hanane's bed was for the retarded girl and Zahira. Hanane and I slept in the salon. So, yeah...I gave in and slept at her parent's house yet again.

I am the Curse

As for me, I'm a curse on the sad women that love me, as is obviously apparent. I know it, they can't believe it but it's true. As my ex told me "The good parts are really good." Yes, I Know. At least I'm not looking for a cheap full time nanny and nurse. I really do love her. At least as much as I am capable of loving any one woman. On the subject of my ex, Hanane is jealous of her (needlessly I might add) and of course, the ex who I still care about and am friends with tells me she is jealous of Hanane since she is essentially the woman I left her for even though I didn't know her yet.

The first visit from a friend from outside of Morocco went off like a bunch of glass mixed in with a dog's food. Nothing pretty about it. My first friend to visit was an old friend from travels in 2001 in Southeast Asia. I was really looking forward to it. At the time, L was one of the most independent, sexy, and confident women I had ever met in my life. She was cool, savvy, and intelligent. Not to mention liberal and open minded. Earlier in 2009 I visited her for three days in Rotterdam and it was a nice reunion though she was very stressed out from relationships and work and seemed sort of lost and adrift in life. Not to mention that she seemed to be aging rather badly, smoked a lot, and drank like a fish. Of course, she was doing that back in 2001 when we were both 29 years old too, somehow it just didn't seem to be as cool now that we were both 37.

She arrived at Fes Sais airport and I managed to get Mohammad to let me take his car down to pick her up. She was terrified of Morocco and in part due to Lonely Planet's stern warnings to solo female travelers, she was more than a little freaked out. Hanane was having some trouble accepting that I could have a female friend who was nothing more than that coming to Morocco, but when I assured her that L was not my type, too tall, too big an ass, and too emotionally fucked up she seemed more willing to accept it. She had intended to accompany me to the airport but since Jess was having a henna party at her house and she wanted to have her hair done by Fatima due to a bit of insecurity on my female friend coming, she opted to meet us there. So Mohammad, his friend Amine, and I went to get L.

We got there without incident. We picked her up and made our way back. That's when things started to get out of control. When Hanane saw L, a fit of Moroccan jealousy of epic proportions broke out. In L's hearing she said to me "What the fuck? You told me she was old and had a big ass and I'm not letting you have one solitary second alone with her!" L posed for Playboy once. She's gorgeous even at her worst moment. There was also an extreme reaction of cattiness that went on between the two with barely sheathed claws flashing. L did look better than she had when I visited her, but more than anything Hanane's reaction seemed to push me towards L and away from Hanane.

Finally, I pulled Hanane aside and warned her that this was my friend and if she continued to be catty towards her it might create problems where none existed. And so the girls got henna on their hands and eight days of hell began for me.

Jess had suggested that we all go to the Medina in Fes the next day so in the morning we woke up and I started to feel like an unwelcome person in my own house. I don't know if it's just a Dutch rudeness in general or if L was simply venting more of that aging western woman hatred for men, but she made nothing simple over the next eight days. Hanane meanwhile went through intolerable bouts of insecurity and Moroccan female nastiness towards L which, since I was in the position of being the host and in general feeling responsible for the well being of my friend not to mention ensuring that she had a good time, put me in a difficult position.

This was not made easier when we went to the Medina and L began spending money like it was free and everything in the Medina was cheap, which in comparison to Holland was the case. Where I bought a small coin purse for five dirhams she bought twenty and then she insisted on buying a leather poof cushion and then Hanane was looking at them longingly though she had never expressed an interest for one before and so I bought her one. Jess was the only person that wasn't making me insane. So we wandered around until it got dark, bought things I never would have bought, and the whole time

I was trying to keep Hanane safe and also keep L from getting into trouble.

The weather was turning shitty and as such, I decided that L and I should leave the next day for Tangier, then for Sebta, a city that belongs to Spain but is in Morocco, then to Tetuan, then to Chefchauen, and then back to Fes. I needed to renew my visa so that was an excuse for the trip. And if I wanted to have a travel adventure with my favorite Playboy bunny instead of being celibate with my virgin wife to be, who can really blame me? Since Hanane was being a royal pain in my ass and making hosting a woman who turned out to be a pain in the ass guest even more of a pain in my ass, that it would be just L and I who would go. The weather provided a nice excuse since Hanane doesn't travel particularly well anyway.

In the morning as I tried to get ready, tried to assist L in her demands to help her get ready, and tried to soothe Hanane's savage bouts of jealousy and self pity, I knew it would be a total pain in my ass week. Hanane wouldn't listen as I suggested we go one direction towards the taxi stands and get some food for the train, L started buying kilos of fruit and bottles of water and kilos of figs as well and then asked me to carry her bottled water which caused Hanane to remind me that I always made her carry her own bag, even though I usually end up carrying it part of the way for her and finally, I managed to get Hanane in a taxi to her house and L to stop buying things and managed to get us both in a taxi to Fes which it turned out took us right to the train station for an extra ten dirham.

The taxi ride was just the beginning of five days of L demanding that I tell her everything that everyone was saying even though I was struggling just to understand and be understood. The greatest positive thing about this trip though was being able to see and experience that my Derrija has improved enough that I can actually converse with strangers a bit beyond just the essentials. Frankly, from the start I just wanted to tell her to shut up but since I was the host, guide, and one feeling responsible for her enjoying herself, I bit my tongue over and over and over until it was covered in blisters.

I got us to the train station in Fes, then I got us tickets, then I got us on the train, and then we had the most pleasant part of the trip. Six hours of shooting the shit with an old friend in first class on a northbound train. There were sparks of attraction, great conversation, and a part of me thought, maybe this was the girl I should have pursued all along.

That was on the train, after that, I soon realized that I didn't want to spend any time with her since she was proving to be argumentative, belligerent, and bellicose. My knowledge of Morocco, Islam, and Arab Culture was constantly challenged, denied, and refused from a person who has a total knowledge that comes from having a few immigrant friends from Morocco in Holland. Arriving in Tangier a new annoyance rose as she started to interfere in my attempts to communicate in a mixed language that was mostly bad elementary Spanish with a 'merci' thrown in and lots of forceful Italian "Scussee" in a tone that belied the meaning completely.

When I did start to speak with people she would interrupt or force the hated Lonely Planet under their noses while asking directions in Spanish that I can only describe as bad American first year with a strong Dutch accent. After attempting to talk with the first cab driver, I simply gave up and let her use her flashlight and lonely planet to make demands. A hoodlum with gold teeth got in the front of the taxi and started joking with the driver about how he would like to fuck her and meanwhile the car started to go past the hotel I was looking for and so I made the driver stop and we got out. I kept the conversation between the hoodlum and the driver to myself as the driver at first refused payment from embarrassment and then accepted ten dirhams from me when I insisted.

No reason to let L know the full extent of how disrespectful and horrid Moroccan men can be, I thought, and then I had to listen to her go on all night about how the hoodlum was just the kind of guy she admired and was attracted to because he was tough, confident, and "nice". I wonder what she would have thought if she would have known he was talking about raping her?

The Biarritz Hotel was a run down old place with a beautiful grand staircase and a great view of the muddy shore and the collapsing customs house. Tangier had a great crusty feel to it that even though the Moroccan government has spent billions trying to get away from that which lingers on from the

days when the likes of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin bought drugs and sexual favors from teenage boys in the 1950's and 1960's. Sure, now there is a tourist strip and a tourist medina and everything else that comes with trying to lure budget travelers from Europe and America, but there is something utterly seedy about the place that lingers. Tangier abides and I must admit I love it.

We took a stroll through the Medina and past the open air seafood joints and in the process I met several of the locals and managed to have some interesting conversations in Derrija about the history of the old city walls, the dangers of the night, and the days when we would have been targets where we were.

I would have picked a small stall in the Medina from which to get food, but L insisted on getting a nice seafood dish at one of the port side restaurants and so we each ended up spending about seventy dirham for the hands down worst tajines I've tasted in Morocco. It was a bland fish with a tasteless sauce and so many bones that it was a miracle we didn't choke on them. The upside was that the young guys running the place were thrilled to be talking with a foreigner who spoke Derrija and then a burnt out African guy of forty-two came along and since he was not a native Arabic speaker and neither was I, the guys at the place got a huge hoot out of us conversing in our mutually bad Derrija. And of course, all along they were wondering if they could steal this gorgeous chick from this unlikely looking dude with her. By all means, they were welcome to.

Finally we switched to his equally bad English and he told us about how when he came to Morocco twenty-five years before he had been a shoe shine boy and he would ask the clients to take off their shoes and then run with them "If they don't shine their shoes themselves before they leave home, then I will shine them at my home and sell them to someone else." These days the African makes his livelihood selling hashish instead, though it looked as if most of his profits probably go to the pockets of his own dealer.

L was shocked when a beggar came and asked her if she was finished and then took her half finished dish to a nearby bench to finish it. That's just the way it is in Morocco.

In the morning, we woke up ready to explore Tangier and see some interesting sights. Little did I know that the rain would be coming down in buckets nor that L would turn that into a priority mission to find her a pair of Crocs. Of course since it was flooding, literally flooding so much that the lids to the sewers lifted off, the water was flowing six inches deep down every street, and I saw a drowned rat nearly a foot long, the Moroccan shopkeepers were smart enough to just stay home rather than opening their shops. Already, I had figured out that the hardy female traveler I had known in Laos and Thailand was now little more than a construct of my imagination.

Instead I found myself with an demanding woman who was desperately trying to fill the void in her soul with one material thing after another. I had caught a glimpse of her g-string underwear in the morning as she changed and felt my stomach turn. L is still beautiful, but in truth, I found myself completely repulsed by something about her. Each time she opened her mouth, I found myself further repulsed. There was just something rotting inside her.

I feel a certain guilt in writing these awful things about her, but the truth is, for each day I spent with her I desperately resisted the urge to punch her in the face and beat her with words that would tear worse than knife blows. So, while I write these truths, I also am proud of the fact that I restrained myself in the face of so much temptation to irrevocably destroy what has been mostly a friendship by email over the past nine years. Maybe it was her combined with my own sexual frustration, maybe a good fuck would have cleared us both up, but that just wasn't going to happen. Over dinner she had said "I'm not attracted to you, at all!" as we sat talking with the Moroccan guys and the African shoe shine guy. "Well, that's good," I responded and continued trying not to choke on bones or punch her in the face.

After being dragged hither and thither through the pouring rain and meeting at least one madman whom I would have loved to befriend but who scared the crap out of L, we dragged our swamped selves into a cafe. The madman was walking through the rain screaming out "Allah Akbar" and when

he saw L he said to her “Don't be scared, God has brought you here for a reason and we are blessed because we finally have rain. Don't worry. Allah Akbar.” I instantly loved the raving lunatic, but a sense of keeping L happy made me leave him behind.

The cafe we ducked into was run by an Englishman and his Syrian wife. Davood and Fatima. Great middle eastern food. Expensive but delicious and the one meal in all our travels that was actually worth the price we paid for it. I had tabouli that Davood made to order and L had a falaffal sandwich. Plus, two real life lattes! Davood and Fatima, told how tourism has changed and how tourists now come in and regularly ask for half a sandwich, complain about the prices, and don't tip. All of this in the past year or so.

They bought the building, restored it to beauty, and now can't find a buyer for it at any price. They may close it. Morocco is eating them up and they dream of returning to Damascus. Davood said he had bought antiques to decorate that he was told were priceless and now the same dealers will offer nothing for them. He recommended that we visit the American Legation which I had wanted to see anyway because of it's room dedicated to the writer Paul Bowles, Tangier's most celebrated American ex-pat.

Actually, the most famous ex-pat American in Moroccan history. It was a nice thing to be able to touch his suitcases and to sit in a dry place with warm heaters. It's a beautiful old building filled with beautiful things but neither of us had much interest since we were both soaked to the bone and I literally was walking around with shoes that were completely filled with water on expensive Moroccan rugs. We spent time in the Bowles Room and another room with dioramas of famous Moroccan victories in battle, one against an invading Portuguese Army and another 12 years later using the seized Portuguese weapons against an Army from the south of black Africans. We each took lots of pictures of the dioramas though for some reason I didn't take a picture of the suitcases. I should have.

Leaving there we caught a taxi to Fnidiq near Sebta and then a twenty dirham taxi to the Spanish Frontier. The taxi ride to Fnidiq via Casa Saghira was thanks to Davood who suggested it was the best way to get to Sebta from Tangier which many others (including L's Lonely Planet) had said was not likely or possible. Crossing into Sebta was easy and it was stunning as well since it was December 21st and suddenly we were no longer in Muslim Country but firmly in the realm of Jesus lovers near the blessed commercial holiday. We took a bus into the city, sat in a tapas bar and drank beers. I would have been fine sitting there all evening but L was wet and bitchy and so we got a room in a nearby cheap hotel, Pension La Bohemia and then she started fixating on finding a cyber cafe and so we walked around for an hour so she could email some thug she works with in Rotterdam.

L is a social worker and works with scumbag youth and then becomes fixated on them. It's a problem and she knows it, I'll give her credit for that anyway. I wasn't against finding a cyber either since I'd forgotten to bring my new pin number for the only account with money in it and couldn't withdraw any Euros. The prices in Sebta were shocking after Morocco. 35 Euros for a double room instead of 120 dirham (12 Euros) and food equally expensive. She wanted a nice meal and to be fair so did I so she paid for the room and for the first beers and then I was able to use my card to get us a pretty nice dinner in an over priced tourist restaurant. I had truffle fed pork chops and a beer. Hardly a Muslim dinner, but really, that was the point.

Midway through dinner, I rather tactlessly asked her about how it was different to be an aging woman rather than an aging man and I think due to the beers I'd been drinking I referred to it being harder for 'an older woman like her'. Keep in mind that I'm actually a few months older than her but when I think of a normal woman, I think of Hanane at 26 so in fact, in my mind, I was being accurate, she is an older woman. To my surprise, her reaction was something along the lines of “You're sick. You're a curse.”

I did it on purpose. I admit it. Along the way I certainly made some hidden bombs to explode in her consciousness suggesting that she was over the hill, that she was rapidly becoming undesirable, and that she would be lucky to get in any relationship at this point but that it would probably be with some abusive scumbag. Her words had stung me and I was trying to sting her back. At this point just looking

at her was starting to make me nauseous. I think I scored some direct hits but certainly it didn't feel nice to be told I was a curse either so I don't know that I escaped mental/verbal Battleship without any damage of our own. We returned to the hotel on forced civil terms and both tossed and turned in our beds while assessing what damage had been done. The damage to my wallet was about \$75.

In the morning I didn't want to see her face so I woke up early and escaped to explore Sebta (Ceuta to the Spanish). It's a charming Spanish City on a beautiful Mediterranean Peninsula jutting towards Europe from Africa. The streets are hilly and curved and the place feels more Spanish than many parts of Spain. I managed to milk twenty Euros from my Paypal account and enjoyed a coffee and got a pack of cigarettes before going back to face L. She was only just starting to wake upon my return so I sat in the lobby reading so as to avoid her, having to see her change, or her asking me to leave so she could fart in private. By the time she was ready we were both trying to pretend everything was alright.

We found a cafe where she ordered the most expensive thing on the menu and I ordered the cheapest. I was quite happy to have gotten money and put my portion down on the table before she could insist we split the bill or lord over me that she was paying. Frankly when I had realized I had no access to money, I felt like the bitch factor increased by a thousand fold. It felt good to have some money. It felt good to let her see that I did. I really don't know how much of all of this was in my head.

We left the cafe and had a walk through Sebta. Nowhere near as enjoyable as the one I took on my own, but I did enjoy the portions of it where I didn't see her. Then we checked out and went back to the border. Not before she'd bought more food for the road though. My impression of L these days is that she eats, buys, and uses the toilet. Always one of these things needed to be done. Always one of them was being complained about. At the border we needed to get stamps and checked for flu and while that was happening she found a Dutch man whose wife had been videotaping the border and got arrested several hours before. L tried to get me involved but I could really care less, in fact, I sort of wished she would get arrested too.

We also saw a young Moroccan guy trying to sneak across and get thrown in jail, get beat a little bit, and she was upset about this and that made me a little glad. Morocco is not an easy nice place and I was tired of being taken for granted because I was shielding her from its ugliness and horrors. Without me, she would have been accosted, harassed, and bothered without stop. She wouldn't have found the taxis, she wouldn't have gotten the prices I got, and she would have seen a different Morocco. A beautiful woman on her own in Morocco has a life of hell ahead of her. As it was, I was taking most of the hell and shielding her from it. That's what friends are for.

Upon reentering Morocco, we went to the grand taxi stand and of course the first guy to see us tried to usher us into the taxi. For twenty Euros each to Tetuan, about 34 Euro too much. I argued with him a bit and would have probably found us a safer and better ride but almost immediately L began with her harsh commentary and questioning. "How much does he want? Where is he going? Are we going with him? What's the price? Should I get in? Let's find another. Let's get in this one. He seems nice." ad nauseum. Mentally I just said "Fuck it" and then I did some harsh bargaining actually getting a price that was ten dirhams lower each than the standard fare.

I knew there would be trouble though, especially when he started to kick his other passengers out of the car and then I saw he and his friend shoving another man onto the ground. L, of course was demanding to know in a loud voice what was happening as the man was thrown to the ground and kicked while our taximan and his henchman laughed and then shoved him away. "Oh, they're just playing," she told me, but in fact they weren't. Again, I said 'Fuck it'.

All the way to Tetuan I listened to the taximan brag about his exploits with foreign women and hoped L would just shut the fuck up. Of course, she couldn't and she started asking me what the guy was saying while simultaneously telling me her opinion that he was a nice and funny man and she had a good feeling about him.

Arriving in Tetuan, I asked him where the bus station was and he started to demand that we give him more money and hire him to take us to Chefchauen, where, thanks to L's constant talking, he had

figured out we were going. I refused since he was asking for fifty Euros to do it. I tried to be good natured and joking and confident at the same time and each sentence the bitch beside me demanded to know what was being said.

He began to berate me in Riffian Berber. I berated him back in Swahili which caused everyone to start to look a little concerned since suddenly no one knew what the hell I was saying. I asked to be let out several times and he refused but then another passenger needed to stop and so I leapt out of the cab, said 'Come on' to L and grabbed our things from the trunk. She wanted to argue about it but I didn't give her time and was crossing the street but not before the driver was demanding more money for actually bringing us to the bus station, which was the destination of the other passenger.

I didn't answer but just walked into the safety of the CTM station. Once again, L was off to the toilet and so I bought the bus tickets. We were fortunate since the bus was leaving in 15 minutes. On the bus she was sullen and moody and I was happy to not have to talk to her. Spoiled, rude bitch.

The ride to Chefchauen was the nicest part of the trip since the train but mainly because she refused to talk to me and fell asleep and I was able to see the vast and uncommon beauty of the Rif Mountains. The flooding had not spared the mountainous regions of the Rif and along the way I saw roads washed out, cars washed into streams, and a land so beautiful and raw that I now fully understood why all of the travelers I had met who had made this trek were so astounded by the beauty. After a journey of some four hours we arrived in Chefchauen.

While L had slept I consulted the hated Lonely Planet and found two guest houses which seemed suitable. One was more highly recommended but I chose instead to go to another which the book boasted of having a fireplace and a book exchange. I was beyond tolerating L and when she carped because I wanted to go to the bank to exchange my ten Euros for dirhams, I ignored her and walked where I chose, she had a choice to not follow me, which I hoped she would take, but instead she came along sullenly.

On the way to the bank we were offered hashish and other drugs at least a dozen times and it was only with perseverance that I managed to shake the least friendly and seemingly most dangerous of our pursuers. Having gotten some small bit of money and discovered as well that my ATM cards were no more functional in Morocco than in Sebta, I set out with her trailing behind. At this point, I was truly hoping that she would get abducted or decide to wander off on her own. She did neither.

After some time, I managed to find the Hotel Andalus, which was the guest house I had chosen. The clerk, Youssef was a young man with a twisted limp and a scraggly beard. With his round John Lennon glasses, he reminded me of my friends from Bellingham, Washington. In fact, Chefchauen itself had much of the same feel as Bellingham despite the notable outward differences. Chefchauen was a haven for Jewish refugees from Spain after the reconquest by the Spanish and later for Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis in Europe. In honor of those refugees, virtually the entire city is painted blue, the traditional color of the Jews. This happened in the 1930s and has become the trademark of the place. It has a feel of outdoorsyness, hippy ethic, and back to earth that made me feel refreshed and at home despite the company I was burdened with.

Once again, L wanted to eat so I inquired from Youssef as to where we should go and he recommended a deep medina restaurant where I had a tasty tajine and L had kifta. She treated me to the meal, which was a sort of peace offering I think, and then we headed back to the Hotel Andalous. For her part, she headed to the hammam which I was thankful I was unable to go to with her since it wasn't a mixed hammam.. Despite Youssef and my advice as to how much she should pay, she payed double that. Meanwhile I wandered the Medina, met several new Moroccan friends, found a cyber cafe, managed to use Skype to text my sister who then called my mother in California who then gave my sister the pin number for my card, who in turn gave it to me. I once again had access to money. Thank God.

With cash in hand I set out into the Medina to find one of my new friends, Abdul Karim. I was unsuccessful but instead was found by his brother Yassine who had heard I was a green sweated

foreigner who spoke Arabic and lived in Sefrou. Yassine led me to their family's artisanal shop where I bargained as hard as possible to buy a thick wooly Chefchauen sweater. My final price was about 130 dirhams. Then we watched television before I set off for the hotel.

Despite all my complaining about L, I still felt responsible for her and wanted to make sure she was okay. Since she wasn't back yet, I went out and got a shave and haircut from a sweet gay barber named Abdel Kadr. In any event, gay barbers always give the best haircuts so I was happy to find him. A funny thing though, there is no act of trust so great as to be shaved by a stranger with a straight razor. While the blade was on my throat, I became aware of it, but Abdel Kadr was of such a sweet nature that I wasn't worried.

Back to the hotel and I found L, Youssef and several other people lounging in front of the fire. They were Aziz, the friend and coworker of Youssef; Simon a warden (ranger) from Wales, and Allison a foreign aid worker from Australia who has spent the past ten years working in Southeast Asia. These were great companions and we spent the remainder of the evening talking of books, travels, stories, and Simon and I played a game of chess which I won by the skin of my teeth. We were well matched. I went to bed and slept quite well after a hot shower. The only distraction was L's snoring and tossing and turning which occasionally woke me.

It was nice to have other company so that I wasn't obligated to talk to L and in the morning we four went to a small cafe in the square where we ate eggs, toast, pancakes, and juice. After this a short walk to look for a merchant Simon called 'Hatman' who made custom knit hats, but we were unsuccessful. We attempted to take a hike to a cascade but since it was still flooding the trail was closed. I blissfully ignored L and let everyone else answer her questions. At one point, as she walked with Allison she was groped and propositioned by a random Moroccan. I didn't see it but I was glad it happened as I hoped she would start to realize that I had been more than just someone making things hard for her. Quite the opposite in fact. I was also glad to expose her to what life in Morocco would have been like without me. She didn't tell me that this guy was being 'nice.'

We sat in a small cafe for mint tea and happened upon a Frenchman named Jeremy whom I felt an instant bond with. He was slightly older than me, smelled of patchouli, and had been wandering in the mountains for some time. It was his twenty-fifth trip to Morocco over the past twenty years. Of course he was attracted to L and she to him and I did my best to encourage them in this though I felt a pang of guilt for pushing my pain in the ass upon him. For his part, he mocked her every time she said 'Niiice' or 'Mer-ci!' and actually seemed to be more interested in talking with me than in making time with her.

On our way from the cafe the two women went inside because L had to use the toilet again and this time a Moroccan man, presumably angry that women were in a men's cafe, pounded on the door and when L opened it, he shoved her out of the way and went inside. Simon returned to the hotel and the four of us went to get bus tickets. Jeremy was leaving that evening, Allison was leaving on Christmas, and L and I got tickets for the next morning at 9 am. We then went and collected Simon and the five of us had dinner in another cafe. There was something odd about Jeremy, perhaps he is a criminal, but I felt no threat from him and think we both felt a strong bond of kinship and brotherhood. After all, we found we both share O-negative blood type.

At this point we took leave of Jeremy and returned to another night of stories, fire, and chess. Once again, I won by the skin of my teeth. Simon was disappointed but gracious about it. I retired early and listened as they told riddles down by the fireplace. Sometime in the evening the power failed and I was disappointed to realize this probably meant no hot shower in the morning.

Imagine my surprise when I woke at 7 am and found the power restored and my disappointment at finding the water cut off completely. L was once again being a total and complete bitch as if I were at fault for every negative thing that occurred. As we went to the station she complained and stopped to buy more food. We stopped for a coffee and a croissant was enough for me, but she bought a good thirty dirhams worth of food despite still having a bag overflowing with food. At the station we found that due to flooding the road from Tetuan to Chefchauen was closed and flooded out. This in turn meant

that our bus would be severely delayed or not coming at all, since it was from thence it came. Knowing that the stationmaster was simply telling us later later or later later later, when a third party bus was offered for fifty dirhams each I bought tickets over her protests and suggested that a tourist couple also thus stranded do the same. They took my sound advice but L carped all the way to the bus and once on the bus....

The bus was half soaking wet and fully stinky. I saw it as our only option. Bear in mind that Hanane had faithfully waited in Sefrou for us to return and had been quite understanding of my choice to stay and relax one additional day in Chefchauen. She called and texted and by this point I was fully aware of the treasure I have in her. Our misadventure in the Sahara was as nothing compared with the horrors I was experiencing with L whom I had thought to be a hardy and adventurous companion. Compared with her Hanane shone like the sun after a dark night of storms and death. I was desperate to get back to her and if nothing else, this experience showed me that indeed I do love her and that the alternatives are incredibly grim.

Once on the bus, I was not getting off before Fes or Meknes and I steeled myself for L to have temper tantrums and to storm off the bus. I saw her becoming more agitated and out of control as the bus filled and then made its way slowly through the Rif. I decided that I would not flip out though I wanted to and prepared my words carefully discarding those that I knew would only make the situation I saw coming worse. Finally, I settled on “ Look. I can navigate this country better than 90% of the foreigners you will meet here. It's my opinion that this bus is perhaps the only option we have of getting to Fes or Meknes and if you want to get off the bus, you are more than welcome to. When you get to Fes, go to McDonalds and then text me and we will figure out how to get you to Sefrou.”

Discarded were all of the anger at being second guessed, pointing out the disrespect she had repeatedly showed me, pointing out all of the situations I had shielded her from, and telling her firmly to go fuck herself. The other tourists were relaxed and making the best of things as was I. L on the other hand sat and listened to her MP3 player on blaring volume and became further and further agitated. Finally at a stop where a number of people (most of whom were a foreign tour group taking the best and only option out of Chefchauen) disembarked and a slew of desperately poor Moroccans boarded, one of whom, quite reasonably demanded the empty seat next to L and then after she refused I watched as a child beggar began to kiss her hand and beg for money to see her reaction.

She reacted with a violent “No” and the waif scampered away. Shortly after this she turned to me and I was ready. To my surprise, she was calm as she said “I don't think I can stay on this bus very much longer, I want to get off at the next stop.” I gave her my prepared speech and to my surprise, at this point, she began to cry and for the first time in our journey, I began to feel a bit of sympathy for her. Morocco is one hell of a hard country to navigate and while she was indeed being a complete and total bitch to me, I empathized with what she was feeling as a stranger in a stranger land than she had ever before journeyed in. I toned myself down and tried to ignore the adrenaline coursing through me in preparation for this awaited battle.

“Look,” I said “When we get to Meknes, we will get off the bus and take the train to Fes.” This soothed her a bit and though I wasn't in the least sure we were going to Meknes, I stuck with it. The tourist couple who had joined us on the bus decided to follow suit and began consulting their guidebooks. L went back into headphone land. I was glad because a few minutes later the tourist girl pointed out that it was not likely we were going to Meknes at all. I decided to wait to tell L.

The rest of the trip was me lying to her to keep her from storming off the bus into some worse situation. After eight hours we finally arrived in Fes, I got us a taxi after forcing her not to accept a well overpriced offer from a hustler and we went to McDonalds where she insisted on having a burger to calm down. I smoked two cigarettes in three puffs each and then guided her to the Sefrou taxi stand just in time to avoid missing the last taxi before the stand moves to Atlas in the evening. When we got to the taxi two glue sniffers were fighting over the snack stand and I got her to get in the taxi before they could approach her since I immediately noticed their tourist radar go off when they saw her. Our driver

climbed in and I smelled wine on his breath then we had the scariest ride to Sefrou I've yet had. He was an awful drunk driver.

Getting home I had a frantic call from Hanane and then I refused to come to her house where the fat Belgian and his retarded daughter plus Fatima-Zahira and her new baby daughter were staying. L was demanding beer to calm down and I put her in my house and then took a brisk walk to the bottle shop where I bought her beers. Along the way I called Hanane, explained that I had been traveling with the devil herself and asked her to please come over as another night alone with L was less appealing than being gang raped in a prison cell. Thankfully, Hanane is sweet, tender, and jealous so she came over, made a tajine, and helped us to decompress.

At this point, L completely broke down and began to weep and I came to understand that her bitchiness, gruffness, and in general pain in the assness is almost completely a shell which covers a scared, lonely, and miserable woman who has no friends, hates her work, and is in general, not living a life that brings her any joy.

I felt a huge compassion, but never the less remained counting the minutes until she would no longer be my responsibility. Hanane suggested that in the morning L and she go to hammam since Hanane had been waiting all week to take L there. I seconded that suggestion and looked forward to having my house for a few hours so that I could wash my clothes, relax in my home, and in general repair the mental damage that this hellish trip had bequeathed to me. I woke up feeling relieved at the thought.

Of course it was a sunny day and so L selfishly made other plans disregarding everything both Hanane and I had said the night before. I had to leave and since it was Christmas, I made the excuse of needing to contact family and left to go to a cyber cafe, get a cup of coffee in a blissfully all men's cafe, and then had a nice stroll before returning and finding that Hanane had cleaned my entire house, done my laundry, and L had taken herself up to my roof to read in the sun. Upon coming down, the first thing she did was open a candy bar and drop large crumbs onto Hanane's newly washed floor. No apology and I don't think she picked them up either. My compassion disappeared.

We went to Friday couscous at the Souidi house and then since L insisted on going back to Fes to get souvenirs and gifts in the Medina we went there. Even though I made a point of the fact that Hanane ran the risk of being arrested as a false guide, she made no effort to change the plans. I also made a point of the fact that the trip back on Fridays was always a hassle but in the course of our wanderings through the Medina, she made no effort to hurry. I kept us to a set path in well lit and crowded portions of the Medina where I knew I wouldn't get lost but Hanane decided to make other plans and said she knew where she was going. I allowed her to take us where she wanted and she promptly had us lost in the darkest, least populated parts of the Medina. Finally, pointing out that there was no shame in it, I asked if she was lost and she admitted it, hesitantly. From this point we backtracked and to her credit she managed to get us back to where I knew the way.

From here, not to my surprise, L was demanding that we get food. I suggested Cafe Clock since it was close to where we needed to exit the Medina. I thought a quick bite, a cup of tea, and back to Sefrou. It was not to be. Mike, the owner was hosting a sort of ex-pat/foreigner Christmas dinner. Hanane ordered fries, I ordered tea, L ordered three courses and insisted we share and eat. She gabbed with a couple of Dutch people and finding my compassion again and knowing it must be comforting to speak her language, I didn't press her to leave.

As we left, L paid and then told me that from then on I would have to pay for everything else. She also didn't tip, I did. Luckily it was early enough we found a regular taxi at Atlas and as we came home, I looked forward to her leaving the next day with great relief. I suggested she go to the airport very early because of traffic, etc. She wanted to buy more things so even though Hanane was sick, I walked her through Sefrou's medina. Hanane had given L her favorite scarf when L said she wanted it which L then tactlessly accepted without a bit of argument. She had said she would buy Hanane another and send her a pair of tennis shoes, but in fact, that neither thing did happen.

We went to the Souidi house, ate a beautiful lunch, and then Mohammad, Amine, Hanane, L, and me piled into the Mohammad mobile and I drove her to the airport. On the way I was stopped by the police once and then let go with a warning. At the airport, I pulled into the drop off point, pulled out her bag, mumbled something about hating good byes and prepared to leave. Amine carried her bag up to the terminal for her and thus earned me a 100 dirham fine for parking in a no parking zone. The fine was meant to be 400 but Mohammad talked with the cop and got it reduced to a 100 bribe instead. I made sure that L put in 100 dirhams in gas before we left Sefrou since on her pickup it had cost me 50 dirhams.

Leaving the airport we went to Marjane, the Moroccan Walmart, where I was happily going to buy Hanane more presents (in the course of the visit I bought her a leather cushion, new Adidas, muck-lucks, a scarf, nail polish, a wallet, and a hat) but she started to pull this greedy child behavior and I instead ditched her and bought myself some chocolate cereal and peanut butter. The greedy child behavior comes when you buy the greedy child one thing and then they begin piling other things they want in the cart. I can't stand it.

I ended up buying her a bottle of shampoo but offered to buy nothing more when instead of picking out the small bottle she quickly grabbed the biggest and most expensive one. She kept trying to drag me to things she wanted and in the course, ruined what I had thought would be a fun time. Of course I was just coming down from eight days of hell, two police stops, a ticket, and no one had bothered to buy me any presents despite Christmas, hosting, and my birthday and I'd just been fined 100 dirhams on top of that. So, I bought a small semi automatic washing machine since I had felt an incredible guilt over Hanane hand washing my clothes the day before. So in a sense, it was for her, but also for me.

Returning to Sefrou, Hanane opted to stay with me and I didn't complain though I sorely needed some time to myself. My 38th year started with me in the arms of a girl I hope that I can spend the rest of my life with, though I still wonder if we can make each other happy. In the morning though, I simply wanted her to leave and since I had no presents or desire for a party of any sort, I requested that the best gift for me would be to provide me with some time alone.

She managed to drag her feet until I finally exploded. I punched a door, vented about how every time she comes over all the dishes are clean but every time she leaves they are all dirty, vented about how she moves things from the places I put them, vented about how every time I buy her something she demands something more and takes the joy out of it for me, and then I felt like a real asshole and attempted to tell her how much I really do love her.

Finally, after she had washed all the dishes and put things where they needed to be to make me happy, I walked her to get a taxi. Then I went out and bought a violin for myself for 500 dirham after bargaining from an initial price of 650. I'm happy with it. Violin, bow, resin, and case. It sounds nice too. Then I figured out how to use my new semi automatic washing machine.

Next time friends come to visit, I will suggest three days and then a hotel and guide. One last note to add. Despite having a lighter of her own in her bag the entire time she was here, L constantly insisted on using mine, then when she left, she stole it. It was just a lighter but it was one I bought in Ireland and had planned to refill and use for a long time. I had requested that she buy me some queen size sheets since good ones are hard to in Morocco. She showed up with pillow cases and a duvet cover for a single bed. I guess it's the thought that counts though. Frankly, I'd rather just have my lighter back.

I played the violin while imagining I was Nero fiddling while Rome burned around him. There is something magical about the violin with its association with an insane Roman Emperor, magical gypsy vardos, and hobo peddlers playing for their supper. To my own ear, the music I made was surprisingly good but I can't vouch for the ears of any others. I am the curse.

Aasura

After eating some candy, reading, and fiddling as much as I could, I decided to go to bed at 8 pm. That's when the noise started. As I walked Hanane to a taxi in the morning, she had said something about it being a holiday, but it seems that every day is a holiday in Morocco of either the religious, historical, Western, or a family event. I was yearning to spend time alone and so I barely registered as she said it was Aasura, the tenth day of the Muslim New Year and a day that involves bonfires, magic, giving toys to children, and more. I only wanted to get her into the taxi and then to spend my day blissfully alone.

The violin set me back just 500 dirham, about 150 less than the initial price. This comes out to just about \$75 U.S. I would have probably paid more if I knew the bough, the case, the rosin, and the violin were all included in the package. I had to bargain hard and I think the price may have been a set price, but I've become (I think) fairly good at bargaining and sometimes I am certain that my stubbornness and inability to effectively understand really work in my favor. Not to mention being friendly and letting people know that I live here, that helps a lot.

So anyway, I went to bed and suddenly the noise began. First it was just kids with cheap drums in the stairwell. I didn't want to go out and tell them to shut up, I figured their dad should do that, so I got up, picked up the violin and started to make the most annoying and loud sounds possible. Soon, I heard him yelling at the kids to go elsewhere since he couldn't really yell at me since I would only pretend to not understand even if he did or simply not open my door to engage him. It worked and then I started to hear a more adult drumming. It came from out my window, next to the river, drums and singing and I scoured my books to find what this holiday might be about and found that it was perhaps the most interesting holiday of all.

The tenth day of the Muslim New Year is an extremely magical and holy day. Some people fast voluntarily. In the past, in Morocco, it was a time when people wore costumes and masks and spoke in disguised whispers so as not to be recognized. It was a night of abandon and excess where fire rituals and dark magic were practiced. As I listened to the drums and heard the singing, I wanted to go out, but at the same time, I didn't want to at all since it would mean I became a spectacle. So I listened from my bedroom and imagined all sorts of things.

The day after Aasura, it is a time for magic and ritual involving water. It is called Zamzam. It is the day that Hagar and Ishmael find water in the desert after being deserted by Ibrahim. I woke and bathed and talked with Hanane to find out if she had done anything interesting. She told me that though it had been celebrated heavily when she was a child, now there was nothing done by her family for these holidays. Aside from fires and drumming (which ended at 10 pm) I heard little about anything happening anywhere. A few days later I spoke with Peace Corps Volunteers from out in the country who told me that there had been nothing apparent at all where they were. In fact, of everyone I spoke with, it seems that it was only in my very poor neighborhood that anything happened. I take it as quite an auspicious sign that my birthday was on such a day and the first day after was one where I could wash and begin my 38th year with a bathing ritual and to be honest, I engaged in some small fire rituals during the night as well since I was pulled from my fuddy duddy bedtime of 8 pm.

The next few days were blissful both with Hanane and in the time I was able to spend alone. Her house is no longer an enjoyable place for me to visit since it is filled with French speaking Belgians who grunt while they eat and crying newborn babies and their frantic new moms. She and I took a short walk one day to the forest nearby and we found pieces of a large earthenware urn which I put into my bag and later glued together. The next day we went back and found more pieces. All told I was able to reconstruct about 80% of it using super glue.

One major annoyance was to find that when I went to pick up our paychecks from the American English School, that the secretary was the only one with access to the checks and that she was on

vacation until the 2nd of January. I had some money but hate using my debit cards here since Morocco currency is like monopoly money and can't really be used to buy anything outside of Morocco.

New Years Eve, there was a strange party as Jess got back from England and invited us and many others to celebrate with her. Among those who came were quite a few Moroccan prostitutes and a Sefrou band of young guys who played incredible music and slammed gin shots rather than drinking gin and tonics. They were slightly out of control and while the PCVs, Yassine, me, Jess, and a few of her lady friends were all well under control, Hanane was quite freaked out. She'd never been in a situation like that before and asked me if we could leave at 10 pm, when I asked her why she said "All of these women are bitches (prostitutes) and all these people are drinking and smoking and everyone will think I am one of them." I think it was a bit traumatizing for her. I asked her to just stay until midnight and reminded her that I know her and she knows her and everyone else who matters knows her and that we know she is good, doesn't drink, is chaste, and that she is my fiance and I love her. I stayed with my arm wrapped around her for the next hour and a half making sure to display both our rings so that she could see that other people could see. At midnight though, she was incredibly cute in announcing "Just two minutes to go" to everyone and then "One more minute" and then "Happy New Year." It was the sweetest New Years kiss I've ever had. I really do love the girl more than I've ever loved anyone. She deserves it. We left before it was 12:01.

A few days later, I picked up our checks from the American English School only to discover that not only was there no Christmas bonus (which another teacher had said there always was) but in fact that Hanane and I had both been given a pay cut without anyone bothering to tell us about it. Then my taxi broke down on the way back to Sefrou and while I thought I might walk, another taxi came to pick us up. So instead of getting the same amount as before, instead I got a check for 1700 dirham and Hanane got one for 1400 dirham. David Gerbil, the weasel dick director is certainly a mother fucker.

I had thought I might be getting a similar 3400 as the month before (with the bonus added in) but no, not even close. So instead of buying a carpet for my bedroom I paid Mohammad the tailor 20 dirham for fixing my shoulder bag so that it is better than new and then bought an old Moroccan knife from Marwan at the edge of the casbah for 50 dirham. Both want to speak better English and I am thinking that doing a bit of volunteer English teaching for them might be a really good thing. Fuck the American English School...

Some time has passed since L's visit and I find myself thinking of her with pity. She is a woman who lives in her own country and yet suffers from loneliness. My guess is that she really has no friends and that her own harsh personality makes it difficult for others to be around her and so she exists in a sort of isolation that to her is unbearable. I feel both empathy and a small measure of scorn, though I confess that this is probably not entirely fair.

I too, suffer from some loneliness though it is of an entirely different sort. On the one hand, I am quite content to sit in my house and enjoy my time alone writing, watching films, working on various projects such as the rug I have begun to weave from old plastic bags; however, I do suffer from a certain kind of loneliness, that of having friends from my own culture who can sympathize, advise, scheme with, have intellectual discussions with about cause and effect, future and past, culture and behavior. Jess is really it though I do have some great conversations with Eric from the American English School, but as to the rest of them – we are from different planets.

I am not isolated by any means. In fact, I often have to find ways to have time away from people, but the people around me are not people who I want or feel a great need to spend time with. Jess, of course, is a great friend though I have to constantly remind myself that there are things that I shouldn't allow her to be privy too such as my feud with a female teacher from the American English School with whom she is friends, my relationship stresses with Hanane, and some of my own fears, doubts, and other considerations. It's not that Jess has shown herself to be untrustworthy in any way, but that I am old enough to recognize that one should keep secrets which could possibly cause damage to one's self.

Also there is Hanane whom I love and adore but on the other hand who drives me a little insane and sometimes makes it impossible for me to focus on anything other than her. We fight sometimes, mostly as a result of cultural misunderstandings or because of my own jealousy and the occasional lack of trust which springs up in my soul. A few examples will suffice though to be honest they paint me in a bad light. Hanane had told me that she wears her wedding ring whenever she goes out. Being Moroccan, what she really meant was that she wears it almost all of the time, since this is mostly true, it was no problem for her to say all the time. The other day, I was at her house before she was leaving to teach a student at his home and she hesitatingly told me that she usually didn't wear the ring for fear that someone would steal it if she would be coming back at night. This is reasonable but to me it was a sudden knife twist which said 'She's lied to you' and 'See, you can't trust her'. It hurt. It made me suddenly question everything she has ever told me and wonder what else is not entirely true. I didn't flip out, but I just became sad and when she asked, I tried to explain which in turn made her feel bad and at this I began to feel even worse because now I had made her cry and I suspected that she didn't understand exactly why I was upset in the first place.

The next day she came to my house and brought food. A wall had gone up between us because I no longer felt that I could trust her nor could I try to explain why things that don't bother a Moroccan bother me enormously. Moroccans lie all the time. It is completely acceptable to lie. It's shameful to be caught in a lie though. More than the lie or the act that was lied about to begin with. Hshuma. To me though, this sort of lie is indicative of greater lies, bigger deceptions, and ultimately of betrayal. All of that being said, I understood why she didn't want to wear the ring, and yet it broke my heart a little bit.

Another incident involved the way that her family (and perhaps all Moroccans) think about housework and chores. Essentially, they will let all the dishes pile up in the kitchen and not bother washing anything until everything is dirty. Same goes for laundry which accounts for the massive heaps of laundry at the Souidi house at all times, since it is much more difficult to find the time to do a room full of laundry than a small basket full. I've seen this pattern repeated with all chores, with the work of artisans and craftsmen, and with just about every facet of daily life that I've observed in Morocco. It's an impossible way to live for me since I have accustomed myself to living in cars, living in tiny apartments, living from a backpack, and essentially living on a boat. When a dish is dirty, you make that the dish you use. You wash it, use it, and ideally you wash it and put it away. When you cook, you clean up as you go along. When there is a load of laundry, you wash it. You don't spit on the floor so that you don't have to clean the floor sooner than otherwise.

You can imagine the clash of cultures as Hanane tries to make my house her own. Every time she visited every dish would be made dirty. There was no sense of maybe I shouldn't make these clothes dirty so I don't have to wash them, no sense of 'if I keep the floor clean I won't have to wash it'. Finally, I exploded. I told her that if she makes something dirty she should clean it, if she takes something from a specific place, she should put it back in that place when she is done with it, etc. She took it well and has made progress for the next three days and then it was as if I had never said anything at all. I'm not entirely sure she understands the concept of why I do things the way I do them so much as that if she doesn't do things that way, it makes me crazy, but then being Moroccan, she will only do things the way I want her to until she thinks I have forgotten about it.

Other friends and Hanane's family I both see and avoid seeing. In truth, I would much rather have no conversation than to have the same conversation I have in Derrija over and over and over again. My vocabulary is growing, my listening comprehension is growing, my ability to speak and be understood is growing, but I'm not even close to the point that I can have actual meaningful conversation and while this sounds terrible as I write it, I'm not certain that there really is such a thing as meaningful conversation in Derrija. It's not as if you can really question Islam or the Koran, you can't really talk about politics because the King is not questionable, you can't really discuss books since not very many people read, and you can't really discuss the future since Moroccan Muslims for the most part have an acceptance of the present and the future is 'maktub' that is 'it is written' and will either happen or not

happen according to the wishes of God, Inshahallah. As for everything else, well it comes down to water cooler talk, gossip, jokes, and maybe a certain level of geek talk for those who have computers which isn't really all that many people aside from my spoiled students at the center.

So, in that sense, I find myself lonely. I also find myself very poor and wandering if there is a way out of poverty for me. My internet dreams have yielded little. Perhaps it will just take time and perhaps it's that not having a connection in my home, I find myself always rushing to use the internet and not taking the time to write articles, read about new ways to make money, or actively promote my books and sites. The American English School is a dream deferred. There is always something that is coming, later, later, later. As much as I hate that she was fired, it's a relief not to have Hanane working with me as I am now able to have conversations with other teachers, use the internet there, and getting home is much easier without having to worry about her being harassed or bothered. I had to hitch to work the other day and met a nice young guy named Monsaf who refused my offer of money for gas. So far I have managed to catch a ride home one day and a ride to work another plus a couple of rides to Atlas when I had to catch taxis. In both cases I went ahead and paid 15 dirhams for the illegal taxi since it was available and ready to go and there was nothing else. My taxi expenses for the week were 70 dirhams as opposed to 120-150 or more which they easily could have been.

The father of one of my students, Moad, gave me a ride back to Sefrou one night. His name is Mustapha and he is a nice man and a good Muslim. He spent a lot of time talking about how being a good Muslim means making life better for all other people. I really liked this. He owns the hanut where I bought a prayer rug last week. Small world.

Also a teacher at the American English School, Abdel Rahim, teaches in Sefrou on Tuesday and Thursday and so gave me a ride to the American English School one day too. He is a very nice man. He grew up in Fes in the 1970's and as we drove told me about playing soccer in the streets, the orchards that have been replaced by concrete blockhouses, stealing fruit from the orchards of the rich Europeans, and the one Moroccan who lived among the Europeans who was a constable named Ali. I asked him if Morocco was better then or now and he said that people were more sincere, helpful, and there was a certain quality of life back then that is gone today. He described the fields, the bakery where his family used to take their loaves, the local hammam, and football matches between neighborhoods in a stadium that is now long gone. He pointed out a park that used to be a European cemetery and when I asked what happened to all the bodies he looked puzzled and said "I don't know." He must have been college age in the 1970s because while I am getting older, I was a child in the 1970s and he is at least 15-20 years older than I am.

As to the school itself, I have a bitterness towards the teachers who led to Hanane being fired though I am being forced to co-teach with one of them Mohammad Johari. He's a nice man, a good teacher, and I endeavor not to allow any of the bitterness about her being fired to leak out. Of course, I wouldn't be co-teaching at all if it weren't for Evelyn and Khadija having stabbed me in the back and my relations with them are icy. With Evelyn I have to be friendly since she is American and friends with Jess, I actually feel less bitter about her because at least she told me that she was going to say I had problems with grammar. As for the other, we say hello and that is enough. She is an awful teacher and a horrid person under her hijab and holier than thouness....I would bet that many of this type of woman became 'more Muslim than you' when they realized that they were whores. It's a nice protection. Don't touch a man or you will suck his cock, slut.

It's cold in Sefrou. Really cold. I think it will snow soon. I have no hot water and no heat. Interesting. I recently read another Paul Bowles book "*The Spider's House*" which is all about Fez during the time when Moroccans rose against the French. It was a good book though Bowles pretty evenhandedly hates everyone but himself. Maybe that was part of its charm for me. Bowles obviously thinks women are the cause of most problems for men and that they are so confused about what they want that they don't know it themselves but have to be shown. He mocks the rich, the English, tourists, and definitely the French. He is disdainful to the Nationalists and to the peasants who are caught in the

struggle. He looks down his nose at the poor and at the bourgeoisie among Moroccans. And yet, he manages to capture what it is that makes Morocco what it is. He reflects not only the landscape of the land but that of the people as well. His two protagonists, a Moroccan boy and an American expat writer are both sympathetic but in entirely different ways. Bowles wants Morocco to be a place that doesn't change and yet, that is a part of what makes this country what it is. The fusion of Berber and Arab, then the fusion of Moroccan and French, then the fusion of East and West. It's a country of people who talk on their cellphones while riding their donkeys or drive their BMW with a witches charm hanging from the rear view mirror. They lie to your face and then give you the shirt from their backs. They smile and then they kill you. Bowles captures it and how maddening it can be to think you finally understand it only to have something brand new invalidate everything you thought you suddenly understood.

The Riffian by Carlton Coon, an anthropologist who was here before the first world war made friends with a Rif Berber and then later wrote this book about him and his culture. It was a fun read with a little bit of anthropological detail thrown in. Nothing I hadn't seen or read of before and so it probably didn't strike me as exotic as it might have struck one completely unfamiliar with Moroccan culture. In particular though, what did strike me was the antagonism between Berbers and Arabs. It was written in a somewhat light hearted tone as the Riffian joins the French army to steal rifles from the French for a Berber blood feud and then ends up going to France to fight the Germans but instead kills the French and then returns to Fez where he kills an Arab who is sleeping with a prostitute whom he loves. A large part of the story has to do with the fact that the Rif Berber are blue eyed and blonde haired and so he is often not recognized as a Moroccan. I often see what look like European kids with blonde hair and blue eyes and this story has really pointed out that what I am most likely seeing are Berbers though they may be children of mixed ancestry as well. The French as well as the Arabs have left lasting changes in not just the culture of Morocco but also in the blood of the Moroccan people. Funny to think that the original Moroccans would probably be indistinguishable from Americans or British.

As to Arab culture in general, I grow weary of it. I don't particularly want to be here, but then I don't particularly want to be anywhere. I think that I like Asian cultures but when I once again live among them, will I still feel that way? Certainly there is a civilized quality to Japanese culture which seems to be inherent and desirable to me, though when and if I find myself living in Japan I may find it just as unpalatable as I find American, Spanish, and Arab cultures. Arab culture though is particularly wearisome as the constant attention to God and Islam make the blasphemy which takes place just as constantly that much more intolerable. The lying, the cheating, the petty feuding, and the constant self deception which living amidst Islam requires if one is to actually live one's life grate upon me.

Hypocrisy that can only be matched by the capitalism of the communist Chinese or the affected concern of the self-concerned Americans. Certainly, I show myself to be a lover of just about no one, but still Japan seems to me a culture which has some inherent value to it. Of course, just as certainly, it holds its own hypocrisy.

As to my own life here, I find myself really loving Hanane more and more and realizing that I don't want to have a life without her, rather, that I want to have a life with her. There is a difference. She came over yesterday and stayed last night and even though she was sick and not in the best of moods, I find myself missing her this evening when she is not here. I found myself thinking these past few days of how nice it would be to take her away and go somewhere where we could have some sort of a private and enjoyable life together. Of course in my thoughts, this doesn't really include other people though it would be fun if it could include my brother and his family without the rest of the family that surrounds them in Utah. When I fantasize about this ideal life it includes both snow covered mountains and warm ocean beaches, so I don't know if there is a shred of possibility to my dreams unless somehow I manage to become well enough situated to have two homes. Truthfully, the idea of returning to the United States still strikes a huge distaste in my mouth. The attempted bomber on Christmas Day was enough to set the venom running in American veins again and they are quickly

tightening borders, making immigration harder, and the fear inducing rhetoric is coming hard and strong from the television talking heads.

Ideally I could have the forests and wilderness of Washington and the beaches and rainforest of Hawaii. A beautiful piece of land far enough away from neighbors that they wouldn't come over and ask to borrow anything but close enough to all the comforts of Western Civilization that buying a blanket or getting a high speed internet connection wasn't impossible. A place with plentiful raw materials and space to garden and farm animals. Maybe Indonesia is the best bet, though I think when I get there I will find it too crowded and difficult in ways that I can't imagine. For the moment, the best bet really is to stay in Morocco and keep working at the American English School, get my teaching credentials up to speed, get married, and start working on getting Hanane a visa to the USA and eventually citizenship. From that the chance for us to go work in Japan will probably be most likely and in Japan there are snow covered mountains and warm beaches both and the Philippines, Hawaii, and the USA are not as far away as from anywhere else. Not to mention Canada, China, Indonesia, and everything else.

Life is going to be like that though. I've recently come to terms with the fact that every American is conditioned to think they are the greatest and most important person in the world and I am no exception. Knowing that I am programmed to think myself so important helps to humble me a little bit and makes it easier to remind myself that in fact, I'm not as important as that childhood conditioned ego tries to make me out to be. I'm probably not the greatest writer of my generation, an important spiritual or social innovator, or anything other than a guy who is living just like the six and a half billion other people who are trying to figure out why the hell they are here. Certainly I'm not the next great scientist, philosopher, or entrepreneur. I won't ever be the President of a country or the father of a nation, I'll never be a war hero kids read about in books, I'm not the greatest surfer to ever learn at the age of thirty, not the greatest adventurer, nor anything else -est for that matter. I'm just 'a'.

I'm a guy who is 38 years old, smarter than the average person, not terrible to look at, not horrible at many things and not great at many others, I'm fit without being really coordinated or athletic, I can write better than a lot of people and not as well as a lot of others. I'm adaptable, don't like too much responsibility, and at the same time don't like anyone to have any sort of authority over me. That makes me not a very good business owner and not a very good employee. Perhaps it also makes me not a very good partner, boyfriend, husband, etc though with any luck I can get over that part of my particular personality. It seems that I've wanted so desperately to figure out what I am the -est at that I've jumped from one thing to another without ever really giving myself the chance to be better than just good at anything and less than good at most things. Not easy to write, but important.

Hell, I'm not even the American-est person in Sefrou since all the PCVs are much more American than me, etc etc etc. I really need to get over this compulsion, it's why Americans are ruining the world. Of course, I'm not really sure what to do with all of this. I suppose the thing to do is to keep teaching, keep blogging, keep writing, keep learning Derrija and Arabic, keep playing my violin, keep working on marrying Hanane, and keep trying to become better than I currently am. That's enough of this for a while.

Cold Morocco

It's cold in Sefrou now. My feet are cold. I have neither hot water nor heat. I went to Fez today for Marion's birthday gathering at Cafe Clock. It was worth the hour or so I spent there. Four Peace Corps Volunteers including Marion, Marion's boyfriend who is visiting and seemed to be a bit of a lost guy, nice enough but really just lost. He works temp jobs in San Francisco and didn't seem to have very much to say about anything. I tried to start a couple of debates by throwing out the Americans all think they are the most important person in the world argument which none of the American's argued with...which told me that it is really right. They didn't argue because they all feel inside that they might actually be. And then the Debbs quote that behind every great fortune lies a great crime which really pissed Lynn off, of course she is a retired American business woman who joined the Peace Corps to give back some of what she'd taken, so I sort of knew it would set her off. She was nice in her arguing though and didn't let it reach the personal stage I may have been shooting for, bastard that I am.

Aside from that it was Jess and Maya, the English woman I've met once before. She seems quite nice. I stayed, argued, ate an over priced tart and left. That place really isn't my cup of tea at all. I wandered into the Medina and was totally unmolested, not even 'bonjouré'. I must really look Berber these days. I bought a replacement coin purse for the one that fell apart when it got wet and the glue melted and then bought some speakers for my computer before coming back to Sefrou where I ate my leftover Spaghetti, read the rest of the Riffian, listened to music, started missing Hanane, and now have allowed my feet to become far too cold. It's time to crawl under my six blankets.

I paid a months rent yesterday to buy an internet connection and it is slow as dirt. Suddenly, I realize that I didn't need the connection at all and in fact, it makes downloading a more frustrating process since every download stops half way and can't be restarted because the connection is so slow. I don't know why I care about anything at all. Hanane is sweet and I should treasure her for giving me at least one reason to stay alive. The fact of the matter is that I'm bored and everything seems incredibly pointless. I only want money because it will help to while away the time until I actually die. I shouldn't fear death at all as it is life that is the true torture. I exist...and so what? Big fucking deal. Flies exist too and we kill them all the time and guess what, it doesn't matter. That's the big secret...it doesn't matter. None of it. Jesus, I hope I can keep that secret from Hanane. Thank God she has her faith. It's the only thing that can possibly make this life bearable.

The drums are going outside again. I stepped out to see what was happening and it's basically just a bunch of young guys banging drums and singing. Looks like fun, but since I'm a guy who never even felt comfortable in hippie drum circles, the idea of joining them when I can't drum very well and don't know the songs they are singing doesn't really appeal to me that much. All evening I've been feeling that same fatalism I described above and it's nice. Nothing really matters at all. Fuck it all. It's just a matter of dying and when it happens, I can be thankful for it. In the meantime, there is no reason to be concerned about the taxi, about the street food, about the guy who seemed to be following me through the medina, or about anything at all. I taught my class today, the co-teacher said it was fine and frankly, I don't give a flying fuck one way or the other. It really is only when we want things that we suffer.

I sold a blog that I was about to let expire for \$50 today. Considering that I bought it and another blog for \$24 and then sold the other for \$25, I did pretty good, but I did put quite a few hours of work into it, so in that regard, I lost. Money is tight, but not really any tighter than it always is for me and so things are actually about normal. It was a nice weekend with some burrs in it.

I finished out last week feeling good about my classes and also had six people show up for the movie club I've set up. Since whether it stays a paid gig or not depends on people showing up, that's a good thing. Life at the American English School is decent. I've got rides mostly to and from and am going to go to Agadir for the big American English School conference in the beginning of February in Agadir. Free trips rule.

Life in Sefrou and the casbah is incredibly dull. Hanane is great, worst part about her is me. We had a nice weekend. Went to Sanhaja, a small mountain town near Sefrou with her mom. A nice trip. We hiked, talked with people, and had a very nice time. Later we watched a movie where a wife caught her husband masturbating and she got very serious and said "Promise me you'll never do that" and of course, I told her I do it all the time. That didn't go over well. It's haram in Islam. No beating your meat if you're a Muslim. Hell is going to be very full if we all have to answer to the Muslim God.

But we got over it. Then today, I tried to escape from the Souidi house about noon, got held up til two, put Hanane in a taxi and sent her to a workshop on English, but then it was canceled so we ended up going back to my house after going to a cafe with Yassine. I felt somewhat upset over the loss of all daylight to do my wash, read, write, etc and then we had a fight where I broke things and she cried. I'm a dick. She said she was scared I was going to beat her and I told her I never will. Then I put her in a cab to go teach English, I bought five beers, and now I'm too drunk to write anything. Probably better. Yeah, hell is going to be crowded.

Life here continues to amaze me. Not because it is amazing but because I have become so incredibly used to it. I cram into a grand taxi with five other passengers and ride thirty kilometers to Fez usually sitting on the lap, or nearly so, of some stranger who may stink, be covered in filth, or seem like some incredibly clean holy person in a perfectly white djellaba. I walk here and there, down streets where I am gazed at and looked at as if I am from another planet. And it all seems so normal. And it's not. Only rarely do I pause to think "Wow, this is strange. I'm sitting in a shepherd's house in the Middle Atlas mountains eating couscous with a half dozen people who I can hardly talk to," or "I'm sitting in a classroom discussing feminism with a bunch of Muslim teenagers." For that matter even that I am walking to a house that is probably at least 500 years old past a fountain where all of my neighbors get their water. It's all so bizarre when I stop to think about it. I live in a kingdom. That's an odd one too. I mean, there is one guy who was born in the right place to the right parents and he has absolute authority over just about everything in everyone around me. I live in a place where there is a king who can do whatever he wants to do. Bizarre.

And yet, despite all of that, I carry on sometimes as if there is nothing strange in my life at all. I continue to make progress towards getting married to Hanane. I continue to make pots of tea on my bomb-like stove and to wear the same clothes for sometimes up to a week at a time because it isn't sunny and I only have three pairs of pants and don't want to take them out of commission by washing them. I have lost track of what is normal as the bizarre has become normal for me. My feet are almost continuously cold, and I don't mean that as a metaphor. It's not true anyway, as a metaphor that is. When the going gets weird the weird turn pro. I'm a fucking pro.

Hanane is great. I'm lucky to have her. My doubts and fears are withering away, though they continue to linger as I wonder if she is possibly too good to be true after all. I don't think so though. She has problems. She's not perfect. And yet, for me, she might just be. I love her for certain. She makes me happy and I do my best to make her happy with pretty good success, I think. We fight, we have misunderstandings, and we sometimes hurt each other's feelings, but we come through it all okay and end up being happy together. More and more I think about the future we will have and I want to be a provider. I want to be able to give her everything she wants, but I'm not sure I will be able to. I think she knows that. I hope so.

But I try. I've been working on my blogging projects day and night for about a week now and have turned MoroccoBlogs.com from a website that only a handful of people knew about into one that everyone who spends any time on the net looking at anything Morocco knows about. I am currently running the Best of Morocco Blogs contest and as a result, I am running what is perhaps the most visited site in English speaking Morocco. I made sure to nominate every blog that I thought would get any traffic and then left comments telling them. Next I put up polls in five categories leaving some room for new nominations. A handful came in. Every blog in English speaking Morocco then started to send me as much of their traffic as they could. I made it to Lonely Planet, some international news, and

plenty of Facebook and Twitter mentions. I'm amazed that no one bothered to ask "Who is this guy to be doing this?" It was vanity I think. They all want to be the best. And in the process, they've possibly made me the best.

Of course none of this puts any money in my pocket, but I am working on that. I'm trying to use every angle I have learned to monetize this traffic. I've put in plenty of advertising ops, sponsorship ops, amazon books, a donation button, and more. I'm really pushing it. I'm using every online monetization source I can find. I've had business cards made up and am sort of planning in my head a blogging camp/workshop which I can charge some decent amount for. I'm getting between 200-400 visits a day. It's good traffic. Not great, but it will get better. I'm going to start covering Moroccan blogs in French and Arabic.

In the meantime, I am working as much as I can at the American English School. I am teaching one and a half classes plus doing a Friday film discussion and a conversation class once a week. I'm spending very little except to buy the internet access and to get the cards. I also bought business cards for Hanane's tutoring "Best English" and have been helping her to set up English classes at the dar shabab (youth house) and the Sefrou Orphanage. I have high hopes and moderate expectations.

Yesterday, Hanane competed in a singing competition at the local conservatory. She didn't win, but I was still proud to see her up there. I've put her to work translating and finding the blogs in French and Arabic so I can start to review them as well as the English language ones. It's pretty cool.

All of that and I am also still studying Darija and trying to weave a rug out of plastic garbage bags. I smoke more than I want to and don't exactly eat the way I like. I need to exercise but I'm not fat anyway. Things are happening. I'm stoked to be hosting one of the top English language blogs in Morocco only three months after starting it. Now, I just need to keep this momentum going.

The Moroccan Teachers Conference

Have just returned from the annual American Language Conference. This year it was held in Agadir, a strangely western beach town where you don't hear the call to prayer and you are more likely to see fat German tourists drinking beer than to see Moroccans praying. I didn't know what to expect but am pleased with what went on there.

Last week Hanane and I took a day trip to Meknes on the day before I left for Agadir. Nice to have some travel paid for by my employer. Meknes was fun although there is still a certain something unpleasant in traveling with Hanane. She says it is a result of our not being married and her being worried about us getting into trouble, but what if it remains the same after we are married? It was a nice day mostly. We took a taxi to Fes, took the train to Meknes, walked through the streets, got coffee, then wanted to go to Volubulis but as soon as some asshole told her it would be difficult, she no longer wanted to go.

We went to Moulay Idriss and visited a Sufi tomb where we put coins in a box to get some of the saints Baraka and wandered around a bit. We did some minor shopping and then back to Meknes where we ate chicken at the 'Chicken Palace'. It was delicious, roasted with a ginger sauce that made my taste buds quite happy. After this, we found there was a circus in Meknes and I insisted we go even though she was worried about the price. I was footing the bill for the whole day and didn't mind paying in order to show her her first circus. It was fun but not very good. The balancing act fell off his balance, the elephant was old and miserable and when a bratty little French kid made it lie down and then danced on it wearing his white sneakers I wanted to go down and smash him. The clowns were annoying, the plate spinner broke as many as he spun, and the tigers weren't too terribly impressive with their gummy mouths.

Hanane's favorite moment was when the plates began to break, she decided to start counting loudly to see how long they took to fall off. I'm not sure what her thought process on how long was success was, but she laughed loudly. The train was delayed on the way back and she began to be a little too imperative in her language and a little too tired to be good company in what could have been a perfectly fine situation with a participating companion. I started to progressively feel annoyed. By the time we reached Fez it was almost midnight and I was on the verge of being fully annoyed with her. We got the only illegal taxi but not without her attempting to start an argument with the only ride in town.

We made it home and I decided to just go to sleep rather than expressing my pent up anger and resentment but when she asked, I let loose and I was far harsher in my words than she deserved. When she threatened to go sleep in the other room a sudden rush of 'Fuck offs' spilled from me and in those moments, oddly I wanted nothing so much as to hold her and love her at the same moment. We sort of resolved and went to sleep and so another day of travel with the girl I'm engaged to turned from enjoyable to miserable by the time it was through.

In the morning we both apologized and then I left. I was spending the night at the Dar of Najma and her roommates in the Fez medina. Najma is a crazy woman with more issues than I ever want to have within my realm of possibilities but we had become friends of a sort. It was pretty nice to arrive at their place and find everyone speaking English and a steady cast of young foreigners coming in and out all the time. Najma made a delicious curry for dinner and I met all of her roommates. One roommate in particular worked some kind of magic on me, but that's not so hard to do after all.

Early the next morning, Najma and I walked to Batha where we caught a bus, joined the other teachers, caught a plane, and then arrived at the big conference in Agadir. The conference itself was really not overly informative. The presentations were soft and dull, most of the Moroccan teachers speak worse English than Hanane (which raises the question of why she was really fired again), and there wasn't really a time built in to explore the place. It was however a good time to get to know colleagues from the Fez American English School and the other centers. I did some not too covert

promotion of MoroccoBlogs. It gave me a small chance to heal the blistering wounds from my first semester and Hanane's subsequent firing with Evelyn, Khadija, and English Phillip. Phillip is an uptight missionary Sunday school type with a posh accent, he told me he had nothing to do with Hanane being fired. He recommended her highly. As for Evelyn and Khadija, my judgments stand about the same but the important part is that I no longer feel any need to tell them all to go fuck themselves and there is a modicum of decorum built into our relationships now. I mean, it must be hard to be an aging woman. Given the frequency with which we see one another, I'm glad that I don't feel such a desire to spit on them any longer. I was one of only a few teachers that made any effort to get to know teachers from other centers. I made a few friends, but mostly realized that I don't particularly like most people at all, in particular foreigners.

A few notable exceptions are Eric who wrote his thesis under the tutelage of Noam Chomsky, an English/Canadian very white Muslim who dresses more Muslim than anyone else except Khadija, and a couple of friendly Moroccan teachers. The Moroccan girl teachers and I shared many nice smiles and one night after the American English School paid dinners we all had a short walk with during which we talked a lot. It's funny how the hijabbed girls and women all travel in a cluster and never really give the chance for one on one interaction. Probably for the best. I'm always so amazed to find the innocence of these Muslim girls. One of them told me that her great joy in life is tickling her brothers and teasing her father with her cold hands on his neck while he works on his computer.

I met a few more foreigners that I tried to like and a few Moroccans that I did like but didn't really form any relationships that felt like they were long term with the exception of having some incredible intellectual discussions with Eric. As to David Gerbil, well, he is creepy and weird and if I had small children I wouldn't let them sit on his lap. There was more than a little bit of boozing it up in Agadir and while I didn't get the chance to surf or swim in the ocean, there were a couple of swims in the pool and some sunbathing on the last day. It was nice to drink some beers, eat some decent western food, and share some conversation that went beyond weather, family, and gossip. Still, the truth is that most of the teachers could disappear and I wouldn't notice.

The return to Fez was far too late and long. Najma told me I could crash on her couch and I admit part of my reason was because it was late but mostly it was because I wanted to see her beautiful Canadian Bengali roommate again. On the way back to her house at 1am, Najma scolded me for not carrying her bag down the stairs, I laughed and told her that I probably would have if I hadn't of been exhausted, but then she cussed at me started moving incredibly fast through the medina and since I needed to keep up with her to find my way to her house, I had no chance to say goodbye to those colleagues we soon left behind.

At her house, Najma and her roommate had a little spat regarding a Moroccan boy who they both obviously fancy but who, since he came to their house every day we were gone, probably doesn't fancy Najma but instead is after the hot Bengali mama. I saw neither of them in the morning though because they had workers come and the house was intolerable to stay in any longer. The noise and three hours sleep and I was gone..

On the first night I was back in Sefrou, Hanane had a dream that she was at a pool and a woman she described as "Indian maybe, or from Najma's place with a long braid of hair, skinny, and beautiful" who said "You are my enemy" and then tried to drown her in the pool. She heard me say in my sleep "I love you" and wondered who I was talking to. I wonder who I was talking to as well and can't help wondering if it was the Bengali girl who came into Hanane's dreams. I, however, never saw her again.

And in the meantime, I spend time with Hanane and see an incredibly sweet and loving girl who certainly deserves better than me. Maybe this is the way it always is though. I've never been so good at keeping things internal as other people are. Hanane has noticed my far off looks and commented on them. I feigned ignorance as to the cause.

Onward to the Future

I've managed to make a few hundred dollars with my blogs and blog consulting since the start of the year. This will hopefully only improve with time. The big mistake I've made in the past is to scrap everything when I should have kept it all live and active. I won't do that again. Money came from a few sources I didn't expect but from none of the sources I was previously banking on. The consulting depends so much on me acting as if I know more than I do and feeding people's fears in a way that makes them happy to have me take on what it turns out are pretty simple jobs. I'm getting pretty good at it. My reputation shocks me as I hear it.

Marriage is supposed to happen sometime soon. I'm all she has ever had and all she thinks she could ever want. I think that it is possible that I could set up a business that makes a lot of money in the coming year if all these threads I'm weaving together come to fruition. I hope so. I'll need it. If only to escape when Hanane decides that she has no choice but to kill me!

My Morocco Blog awards have wrapped up and while I didn't really make any money through them, certainly they were successful. They brought more than 30,000 visitors to my site, got international press attention, and have established me as a top blogger- at least in Morocco.

As to life in general. It starts to seem more and more normal to be here. I walk through the medina in the dark and feel safe. Hanane and I have signed a peace accord that hopefully will hold. Ideally we will manage to get married in March and then the adventure really begins. The only real doubts I have are a result of me being a fucker with a little bit of concern about how it will be for us to live together all the time. She still drives me a little crazy but there is no doubt that I love her more than anyone else I've ever known. I really want her to be happy.

I've been making a few purchases lately to make my life more comfortable and soothe my consumer boredom here in Morocco. I bought a big beautiful old teapot and a nice little one, plus a brass hammam bowl and a brass plate for 100 dirhams the other day. A small Belgian runner rug for 50 dirhams and today a small desk since the huge one I have didn't fit my chair and made working on the computer next to impossible. It's a nice improvement. The small desk isn't a work of genius craftsmanship but it is pretty perfect for what I wanted to do and 100 dirhams for a new one vs. 50 dirhams for an old piece of garbage seemed like the better choice. The seller of the old one at the garage sale corner tried to sell me on it being a beautiful ancient antique, I may have offended him when I said that it was really just old garbage and offered him 15 dirhams instead of the 50 he wanted. I might have bargained more but the idea of buying garbage didn't really appeal to me at all.

As it stands, the things I will want to take with me when I (inchallah) leave Morocco will fit in a pillow case. A dagger, a couple of teapots, a few pillows, a piece of wood, and a couple of dishes. I'm sure I will buy and acquire more as time goes on, but the plan is definitely to leave at some point after marriage. I feel as if I have seen enough to understand this country. While it is a beautiful place, I'm not crazy about the religiosity, the power structure, the bureaucracy, or the general 7th century way of life. I'd like to be somewhere where I can at least buy maple syrup, drink a beer, and have a swim at the beach without feeling like I'm from another planet. Of course, I'll be bringing Hanane with me and she will be bringing her culture, but she learns quick and adapts faster than she knows.

In terms of Islam, I am of course evolving and making Islam my own. I find the Q'uran to be an incredible source of inspiration. Mohammad did his work well. The first command of the Qur'an is "Read" and then it goes into the fact that unless a man travels and sees the people of the world, he won't be able to understand the words of God. The commands of the Q'uran are reasonable and good. Remember God at least five times a day, treat each other well, and respect your relationships with family and neighbors. Don't be a racist, accept that you can't understand God, and take care of those less fortunate than you. While I'm no Q'uranic scholar, it doesn't take a genius to see that the way Islam is practiced today is a far cry from what the prophet intended. He and his descendents are worshiped as near deities and ignorant men the world over use this book of wisdom to oppress those less fortunate

than they. To me, most of this problem can be eliminated by getting rid of the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet as recorded by those who claim to have known him, or reported by those who claim to have known those who claim to have known him.

Like all religion, it is a muddled up mess. Every time Hanane wraps herself up in a blanket to pray, I'm bothered. God invented neither blankets or clothes and we all came into this world naked and will leave it the same way. Of course, these are the kinds of things that if I say publicly will get me in heaps of trouble. So I say them here for now and maybe later I'll say them publicly.

A Vagobond Valentines

Just before Valentines, Hanane and I woke up and grabbed our overnight bags to set out for a further exploration of Moulay Idriss, Volubulis, and Meknes. Since our previous expedition had been so incredibly enjoyable, I decided to surprise her with a weekend trip so that we could really dig into this incredible region.

After scouring the web and various guide books, I decided that the best place to stay would be Dar Powerhouse in Moulay Idriss. While all the guest houses looked good, there was an indefinable magic about Dar Zerhoune that led me to contact them. I am incredibly glad that I did.

I sent an email off to the owner, Rose on Thursday and had a fast reply and confirmation complete with a map, directions, and information on how to contact the manager Faisal, a local guy who lives in Moulay Idriss. And, I managed to trade advertisements on Morocco Blogs for the entire stay and as a bonus, managed to secure permission for us to stay even though we don't have the required marriage certificate yet . Not bad.

It was an approximately two hour journey to Moulay Idriss. 40 dirhams each got us to the taxi stand and then Rose's easy to follow map and directions got us to the door of Dar Zerhoune taking us through the main square, past the mausoleum, and then through a friendly and scenic Medina. Faisal met us at the door. He asked if we were married and then looked at us with disapproval when I told him we weren't yet married, but since his boss had told him we were to be allowed to stay, he could say nothing. He already knew we weren't married when he asked. Self righteous prick. I found out later he had a foreign girlfriend who he had traveled and stayed with in Morocco but complained to Rose about the fact that we weren't married!

Happily for us, no one else had thought to book a Valentines getaway and so we had this entire beautiful Dar to ourselves except for Faisal watching us closely as if his job were to make sure there were no pre-marriage hanky pansy. The Dar itself is gorgeous, the product of three years of intensive renovation and decorating. Hot showers, gorgeous lighting, and a feeling of warmth and home that I often find missing from guesthouses in Morocco. A rooftop terrace offers a stunning view of Moulay Idriss and Volubulis. The salon was well stocked with comfy chairs and sofas and plenty of English language reading material, including books and up to date copies of Newsweek and Time which as a reader, I found to be comforting even if I didn't get the chance to read much while we were there. Free wifi but I had decided to leave my laptop at home since I knew if I had it, I would feel compelled to work.

We walked through the Medina with a guide who shared with us the history, festivals, and traditions of Moulay Idriss. In addition to knowing virtually everything about his town, he told us of Volubulis and the lesser known Roman ruins, scenic views, beautiful cascades, and even horseback trips. Inchallah, Hanane and I will return when we have even more time and explore some of these places with him. As it was, he showed us the only round minaret in Morocco, explored some of the history of Moulay Idriss, showed us where to get sandwiches for a picnic lunch, and then set us off on a back route to Volubulis where we saw beautiful nature, pastoral scenes, and epic views of the Roman ruins as we approached.

Since coming to Morocco a year before, I'd wanted to visit Volubulis, but, each time I'd planned to go, something had kept me from it, until this trip. It turned out that Hanane had also never gone there. As a young girl, she was supposed to go there on a school trip, but had been unable to. So, because we had the time and the desire, we vacated the loveliness of Dar Zerhoune to trek to this amazing historical site. Volubilis features the best preserved ruins in this part of northern Africa. In 1997 the site was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

In antiquity, Volubilis was an important Roman town situated near the westernmost border of Roman conquests. It was built on the site of a previous Carthaginian settlement from (at the latest) the

third century BC, but that settlement overlies an earlier neolithic habitation. Volubilis was the administrative center of the province in Roman Africa called Mauritania Tingitana. The fertile lands of the province produced many commodities such as grain and olive oil, which were exported to Rome, contributing to the province's wealth and prosperity. Archaeology has documented the presence of a Jewish community in the Roman period.

The Romans evacuated most of Morocco at the end of the 3rd century AD but, unlike some other Roman cities, Volubilis was not abandoned. However, it appears to have been destroyed by an earthquake in the late fourth century AD. It was reoccupied in the sixth century, when a small group of tombstones written in Latin shows the existence of a community that still dated its foundation by the year of the Roman province. Coins show that it was occupied under the Abbasids: a number of these simply bear the name Walila.

The texts referring to the arrival of Idris I in 788 show that the town was at that point in the control of the Awraba tribe, who welcomed the descendant of Ali, and declared him imam shortly thereafter. Within three years he had consolidated his hold on much of the area, founded the first settlement at Fez, and started minting coins. He died in 791, leaving a pregnant Awraba wife, Kenza, and his faithful slave, Rashid, who acted as regent until the majority of Idris II. At this point the court departed for Fez, leaving the Awraba in control of the town.

Volubilis' structures were damaged by the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, while in the 18th century part of the marble was taken for constructions in nearby Meknes.

In 1915, archaeological excavation was begun there by the French and it continued through into the 1920s. Extensive remains of the Roman town have been uncovered. From 2000 excavations carried out by University College London and the Moroccan Institut National des Sciences de l'Archéologie et du Patrimoine under the direction of Elizabeth Fentress, Gaetano Palumbo and Hassan Limane revealed what should probably be interpreted as the headquarters of Idris I just below the walls of the Roman town to the west. Excavations within the walls also revealed a section of the early medieval town. Today, a high percentage of artifacts found at Volubilis are on display in the Rabat Archaeological Museum.

Our trek took us along a rural mountain road where we encountered fascinating rock structures, caves, and numerous sheep and shepherds. Coming down from the mountain, we were pleased to find that because the day was advanced to about 3 pm, there were not many tourists there. Though there was a bus full of Chinese tourists. Whenever Hanane hears Chinese language she goes into a fit of giggles but I don't think they knew it was the reason.

The ruins themselves are remarkable. Amazing that after 2000 years they should still be so well preserved. The excavated mosaic floors looked like they were no more than 20 years old. As you can see from the photos, numerous columns, arches, and walls are still standing.

As we wandered amongst the ruins we tried to imagine what life had been like for those who had lived there. There was no security other than the occasional rope blocking access to those who wished to walk on the mosaic floors which didn't deter those who wanted to in the least. It's amazing to me that such an important site should be so laxly guarded. If we had wanted to we could have pulled up an entire mosaic and left with it. I wonder how many times that has happened. Outside the ancient city, local vendors sell artifacts to those who wish to buy them. Again, we didn't partake. I'm sure some of them are real and equally sure that many of them are fakes.

We wandered through the ruins until dark, the entrance fee was only 10 dirhams each. As the light of the sunset bathed the ruins, we both had an eerie sense that we were somehow transported back to those ancient times. But then we realized that we had a long walk back since any taxis that had been there, had long since vanished.

After exploring, we returned to Dar Zerhoune and sat on the patio drinking hot chocolate and trying to enjoy our time together - with Faisal who seemed intent on keeping an eye on us until it was time to

go to bed. Another prick Moroccan man who was worried about me stealing a Muslim girl.

We slept soundly in Dar Zerhoune. The beds were comfortable and the heater in our room kept us toasty and warm. In the morning we went upstairs for coffee and found a beautiful Moroccan breakfast waiting for us. Fresh coffee, extraordinary tea (not your usual mint tea but including fresh herbs from the surrounding countryside!) breads, pastries, fresh butter straight from the cow, and the most delicious goat cheese I'd had yet in Morocco.

On this trip we didn't get the chance to trek to Paragliders point or take a thermal dip in the ancient Roman baths of Mount Zerhoune, but as we said goodbye we knew that we would be back to enjoy more of what this wonderful place has to offer.

Meknes – Built on the Backs of Imperial Slavery

We were having a great time all weekend in Moulay Idriss and Volubulis but one subject had come up again and again since our last visit to Meknes. The Chicken Palace. Hanane absolutely loved the place the first time we visited and she told me on Saturday evening that she was thinking of not eating until the next day when we had lunch there so she could eat more. Sadly, this time I suggested that we sit inside and the waiter was a bit of an asshole when we said that we didn't want to sit next to the toilet. We got up and moved out of his section, but the truth is, his rude comments ruined the meal for us and even though the food was still good, we won't be going back.

The rest of our time in Meknes was wonderful though. We arrived at about noon and immediately took a taxi to the Medina qadima (ancient Medina) so that we could have a wander around and compare it with the medina's of Fez, Sefrou, and other cities we've visited.

Here is a bit about Meknes and its history from Wikipedia:

The original community from which Meknes can be traced was an 8th century casbah. A Berber tribe called the Miknasa settled there in the 9th century, and a town consequently grew around the previous borough. The Almoravids founded here a fortress in the 9th century. It resisted to the Almohads rise, and was thus destroyed by them, only to be rebuilt in larger size with mosques and large fortifications. Under the Merinids it received further madrasas, casbahs and mosques in the early 14th century, and continued to thrive under the Wattasid dynasty. Meknes saw its golden age as the imperial capital of Moulay Ismail following his accession to the Sultanate of Morocco (1672-1727). He installed under the old city a large prison to house Christian sailors captured on the sea, and also constructed numerous edifices, gardens, monumental gates, mosques (whence the city's nickname of "City of the Hundred Minarets") and the large line of wall, having a length of 40 km.)

The taxi dropped us off in the Place Hedim which reminded me a lot of Jmma el Fna in Marrakesh but without the circus atmosphere or the touts. There were the usual merchants selling hats, fake Adidas, djellabas, blankets, and trinkets. The square itself is beautiful and we were approached by exactly zero touts!

From there we wandered into the Dar Jamai museum. This old riad has seen a lot of history and now houses a beautiful collection of Moroccan handicrafts. The architecture, gardens, and displays were beautiful, but sadly it looked as if some of the restoration work was done by second rate apprentices. concrete patches slapped on beautiful zellij and mosaic floors unevenly re-tiled. Hopefully in the future, all of this will be restored to the quality of work it deserves.

Leaving the museum I informed Hanane that it was time for us to get lost in the Medina. She didn't like the idea but when I explained that we could catch a taxi from wherever we ended up back to the train station so that it really didn't matter, she willingly set out with me. She likes to know where she is and what time it is at all times. Quite the opposite of me. Entering the medina we saw a French family being told by a shop keeper that what they were looking for was closed today at which point they started to shop. Leaving them behind, we ten minutes later found what they had been looking for, the Mederasa Bou Ininia...and it was open. Nice shop keeper trick, that one!

It was a beautiful Quranic school once but now is a sight to see. I'm sure there are young men who are very thankful they aren't being locked in the tiny cubicles each day so that they can memorize suras. The locks on the outside of the doors tell the story clearly. From the roof of the school we had great views of the medina and the mosque. Leaving, we took this turn and that turn and encountered lots of daily Moroccan medina activity. Donkeys, woodworking, and my favorite, an entire rummage sale street souk.

After a good long wander we emerged just about where we had entered the medina from. When Hanane expressed her surprise about not being lost, I winked at her. I was starting to feel hungry but we

hadn't worked up our appetites enough yet so I suggested that we take a carriage ride through Imperial Meknes to see the sights. It was Valentines Day and I figured my princess deserved the treatment.

Our first stop was the tomb of Moulay Ismail. it was filled with Chinese tourists who certainly didn't understand why Hanane giggled every time they spoke. Funny to be laughing in a tomb. Moulay Ismail was the father of today's Morocco and had 500 wives, a thousand children, 60,000 slaves, and 20,000 horses. Suffice to say that he is probably represented in the genes of nearly every living Moroccan...if the kids were actually his.

All of that aside, the tomb was beautiful. Back to the carriage and our next stop was the granaries and stables of Moulay Ismail. Heri es-Souani. Big, grand, impressive, and despite the funny stories and picture taking of the guide who assigned himself to us, it was boring. To me anyway...a big stone barn. From the barn the carriage took us past the slave quarters, the very beautiful Agdal Basin, past the Mellah, or Jewish quarter of Meknes where our guide pointed to an old woman and said, "Look, she is a real Jew!" and back to the very impressive (and built with part of Volubulis) Bab Mansour, the main gate across from the entrance to the old Medina.

After this we visited the Chicken Palace then we went to the Ice Cream Palace and then we got to the train station just in time to catch the train, then the taxi, then the walk across the road, into the medina, through the narrow derbs, over the Oued Aggai and finally arrived safely back in the casbah.

Bruce Lee in Morocco

What does couchsurfing have to do with Bruce Lee being in Morocco? Well, it's simple. My favorite couchsurfer was a Canadian Chinese man named Bruce Lee.

Bruce contacted me through couchsurfing and told me he would be taking a journey through Europe and North Africa. Aside from his name, there was something that immediately told me Bruce was the kind of couch surfer I enjoy hosting: he had actually read my couchsurfing profile, knew that I was in Sefrou and not in Fez, and kindly offered to scour some used book stores in Canada for a couple of books I had been wanting to read since in my profile, I said that English language books are sometimes hard to come by in Morocco. Don't get me wrong, you can find books in English, but if you are looking for specific titles, you are looking for a needle in a French and Arabic haystack.

Bruce arrived during a week when I was particularly busy with consulting projects, teaching, and life in general. To top things off, the taxis were striking so I had been couchsurfing with teaching colleagues in Fez all week since the grand taxis to Sefrou were not running. As luck would have it though, the strike ended when he arrived. Bruce brings good luck with him.

We met up at Cafe Clock in the Fez Medina and then set off to the American English School where Bruce waited while I taught my classes. Bruce is one of those guys who immediately sets you at ease and I wasn't surprised to come out of class and find that he had already made friends with several people while he waited. By the way, he followed through on his offer and brought me two thick toms, *Plexus* by Henry Miller and the second book of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series (I'd found the first volume in the book souq but there was no way I would find another).

He was glad to get the extra weight out of his bag and I was glad to get two books I'd been wanting to read. We set off for Sefrou, giving Bruce his first experience of being crammed into a grand taxi with six other people and arrived in the casbah a little after dark. We rustled together a vegetable stew and some sub-standard tea in my place and sat up talking for the next few hours.

In the morning we trekked up to the Souidi house and dragged Hanane and Zahira out of bed to take a hike through the mountains near Sefrou. It was our usual route to the monument, past the cascade, up to the water source and then back to the Medina. I had to go back to Fez to host the Friday movie club and Bruce joined the Souidis for Friday couscous. When I returned I found Bruce relaxing in the casbah. Of course he was stoked to have enjoyed Mama Khadija's world class couscous. My neighbor Jess and PCV Marion invited us over for dinner next door.

We sat up shooting the shit until way too late. In that process we found that Bruce's next host was our friend Hassan down in the Sahara and that Bruce had met up with a girl Hanane had met in Fez down in Tangier just a few days before.

Bruce told us that when he was walking in the Sefrou Medina, a shop keeper noticed he was Chinese and asked him if his name was Jackie Chan...Bruce coolly answered him "Dude, you have no idea!"

In the morning we all set off our separate ways, but I'm sure that we'll meet again Bruce Lee.

American English School Films

I decided to show an absolutely terrible movie to the students at the American English School Fez. I admit that part of it may have been that they are spoiled rich kids, but there was more to it than that. The movie *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* is a parody of the black exploitation films of the 1970s. From the get go, this film had no chance to be good. There is something compelling about the black exploitation films themselves, but to make a parody of them? Not a chance. Add to that that the writer and director, Keenan Wayans, decided to cast himself as the star, and also decided to make the film campy...and what you have is a disaster. In fact, it's more than a disaster, it's offensive.

However, the film does have a few redeeming qualities. One of them is the scene where Chris Rock quibbles to buy one rib and a sip of soda in a soul food joint and then asks the proprietor if he has change for a hundred dollar bill. Rock is a genius. The other is that racism is presented in such an over the top overt way that sensitive issues can be talked about without needing to resort to the type of coded language that Americans in particular usually use. For example, when neighborhood Olympics take place one of the events is a race where the boys and girls carry televisions while running from dogs. Frankly, what this is saying is that white Americans have a perspective that all young black men who live in the ghetto are thieves, criminals, and worse. So, in a sense, this film opens up a discussion.

And that was the point of showing it at the American English School. I wanted to get Moroccan students discussing racism in Morocco. One unexpected comment came up right after the film when a female student said,

"I don't think this film is fair to black people." She was under the impression that the film had been made by a white director and missed the idea that it was a spoof. It wasn't the first time I'd run into this kind of totally unexpected understanding. My wife's father asked me if Avatar was a real planet and when we watched science fiction films on the Moroccan networks I had become used to the family saying with disgust "That's not real!". Most of the students understood this, but it spawned a discussion about ways to broach sensitive topics.

The students were polarized into two groups: those who claimed racism does not exist in Morocco and those who asserted that it does. It was interesting to see that it was the more affluent students who claimed that racism doesn't exist. Their argument was essentially that since all Moroccans are Muslims, there can be no racism because the Qur'an says that all Muslims should be treated the same. Never mind the non-Muslims in Morocco, because they don't count.

The other camp pointed out that African immigrants from Senegal are discriminated against, that those who live in the Sahara and are darker find it harder to get work when they leave the desert areas, and that in Morocco, light skin is considered a sign of beauty and affluence.

They didn't come to any definitive conclusions, but essentially they almost all finally agreed that racism is not as severe in Morocco as in the United States, that Islam forbids racism but that humans are flawed and still practice it, and that in Morocco, discrimination tends more towards linguistic discrimination with language being a major focus of class and privilege in roughly the following order from those with the most privilege to the least: French and English, Arabic, Amazigh languages, and finally African tribal tongues.

Next, I decided to address two issues that are prevalent in Moroccan society: Piracy (of goods) and Magic. To get at these subjects, I showed *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Harry Potter*. Morocco has a long history of piracy, both the swashbuckling kind which used to take place from the Barbary Pirate lairs in Sale to the modern kind where you see Moroccan kids walking around in pirated Diesel, Dolce and Gabbana, and other high end labels.

The students weren't too interested in talking about piracy on the ocean though they did enjoy the film, however, they did want to talk about pirated goods. I asked how they could recognize if goods were real or pirated and the answer was the price. If it was expensive, it was real, if not, it was not. I

tried to argue that maybe the pirates simply made some more expensive but they were sure that there was no difference in the quality. If it has a tag and is expensive, it is real, they assured me. If it doesn't, it isn't. We talked about DVDs and the fact that you can find the latest movies in Morocco for only a Euro each (10 dirhams) and they didn't seem bothered by the piracy, in fact, they like it. I do too.

For Harry Potter we had a large turnout. To my surprise though, the students weren't too impressed by the film or the story. One of the big complaints was that it wasn't very realistic. This is a strange complaint that I have heard from Moroccans quite a bit in the past when watching films that require a suspension of disbelief. In general, the Moroccan's I've spoken with about films tend to like things that fit into their worldview. To that end, I started the discussion about magic in Morocco.

This was a great discussion. Morocco is a place steeped in magic and mystery. From worries about the evil eye to stories of djinn and demons to neighborhood witches who dole out expensive potions to those who are seeking love or fortune. When I asked about magic such as that in the film, some of the students pointed out that there was no mention of God in the film and thus there really couldn't be any magic by 'good guys'. They pointed out that the kind of magic Harry and his friends do is considered black magic and in Morocco is usually associated with those who have 'sold their souls' or are working with Djinn. Only one student among 20 said that he didn't believe in magic and the rest laid into him mercilessly over the fact that magic is mentioned in the Qur'an. One student pointed out that the miracles of Moses were magic, but another said that since the miracles came from God this was not possible, i.e. magic is bad and God is good.

When I asked what a wizard or magician is most of the students said that today it is usually a man who charges women money to fix their relationship problems, inwardly I giggled as I thought that it sounds like a psychologist or shrink to me. The amazing part to me, as always, in Morocco is that a people can be so incredibly pragmatic and realistic (that film was too fake) and at the same time so superstitious and ruled by supernatural belief (the lady down the street gave me the evil eye, there's a djinn in your drain, Aisha Kondisha possesses him, don't whistle indoors because it draws djinn, and don't imitate donkey sounds ...)

Overall, they liked the film, but they just wished it would have been more realistic. I'm sure if Harry and his friends had simply been shown praying or reciting sura, it would have made a very different impact.

The Ugliest Rug in Morocco

I started looking at all the garbage piled up in various places and seeing that I had accumulated about a thousand plastic grocery bags that were filling the area under my kitchen sink. You get plastic bags with everything in Morocco and then they go to the garbage and then they blow all over the place and then, well, a beautiful country starts to look like a multicolored plastic garbage dump.

So I decided to start playing with plastic bags. I braided them into some pretty good cordage, I started weaving with them and then I figured, what the hell, I'll weave a rug out of them. I cobbled together a loom from some broken wood, bought some twine to thread it with, and started experimenting with weaving a rug. My loom was about 2x3 feet. I ran 20 pieces of twine up and down it and I started crumbling bags, tearing bags into strips, and just doing whatever I could think to do to see what works.

The aim was to figure out a way to turn trash into treasure and to clear the landscape of the plastic bags. I figured if people could make useful things from garbage, then it would cease being garbage, it would get collected, and nature would start to look natural again.

It's possible.

I finally finished my first try. Certainly I'm not a weaver and I have no training or knowledge of how to do this, I just did it, as I do most things. The result, which I proudly presented to Hanane's mom, is without a doubt the ugliest rug to ever be made in Morocco. My skills and technique improved as I went, but it is a monstrosity. However, it seems to be appreciated as something to wash things on outside. So, I call it success. The next one will be better. I might even ask someone to tell me how it is really done instead of just bumbling through it as I did with this one.

Marriage Papers in Morocco

The term ended and it was with surprise that I realized that I only had a few days to get all the marriage paperwork I needed so that we can finally get the pashas, viziers, and petty sultans that work in the Moroccan bureaucracy to let us finally be married.

I'd planned on getting all the paperwork done during the term but since I was teaching a class every day, there was no chance to take the necessary trips to Casablanca and Rabat to get what we needed.

A ton of unexpected blockages have kept us from getting married thus far:

- the Alaska job hiring someone else when I was on the way
- the unexpected firing and evicting from my father for no apparent reason
- not having a valid ID card
- and even though I was working only 10 hours a week, the fact that I had to work every day

I'd been feeling like a bum for continually telling my sweetheart and her family that we would do it soon, later, after, etc. So, even though the break was only a few days between terms, I was determined we would get all the documents.

The list of documents I needed in order to marry Hanane was (approximately because no one can say for sure)

- U.S. certified copy of passport
 - U.S. certified capacity to marry
 - U.S. certified birth certificate
 - Declaration of Employment
 - Copy of Work Contract
 - Certified copy of rental contract
 - Medical certificate
 - American Police Record
 - Moroccan Police Record
 - Notarized statement of my conversion to Islam
 - Resume indicating my intent to marry
 - An unidentified number of passport photos
- Plus certified copies of everything in French and Arabic.

Keep in mind, these documents aren't free. Everyone gets something with the U.S. Consulate taking the lions share charging \$30 per copy for certified copies of passport, \$30 per copy for a sheet that says I've never married, etc. Hawaii charged \$15 for a police record which may or may not be accepted because it has no stamps on it and Moroccan officials love stamps. So, since Friday is a holy day, the weekends are weekends, and class assignments will happen Tuesday, that didn't leave much time.

I'd been slowly making copies and certifying things through the term. I needed the 'capacity to marry', certified copy of my passport, and notarization through the ministry of foreigners (in French by the way, Bureau of Strangers- I'm a stranger...stranger than most, probably)

So, Wednesday night I graded final exams and handed them off to my friend Jess who promised to deliver them for me the next day, then Hanane and I woke at 3 am to catch a 4 am bus to Casablanca which got us there at about 10 am. We went to the U.S. consulate and were told to come back at 1:30 even though the website said 10 am and the guy I called (who answered with a simple "Hello") said 2:30. So we napped in a park in polluted Casa, looked at the amazing disparity of wealth, and drank expensive orange juice with hair in it (no lie! but actually once we found the hair we stopped drinking

it) at a cafe near the consulate.

At the consulate, I filled out the form, then paid the fee with an inflated dollar to dirham rate (8.7 to 1 vs 7.4 to 1) and then we caught the train to Rabat to get my U.S. certified documents certified by Moroccan officials. We got there twenty minutes too late so we booked into the Hosteling International Hostel and (I think) caught bedbugs while all the hostellers went out drinking. We ate a terrible dinner, but both fell in love with Rabat and it's cosmopolitan airs. Later we were both awakened by the drunk travelers, but hey, isn't that what hostels are about?

The next day we went to the Bureau of Strangers, they took my documents and told us to come back at noon, so we went to the Chellah and enjoyed all the plants and old beautiful stuff there. But actually, first we went to the Ministry of Stamping Papers and waded past about 30 guys who offered to do us big services that we refused but once we were inside we found that a sign said they weren't responsible for people that were ripped off by the guys outside offering to do big favors, since they were all crooks. Of course, I ignore everyone who offers anything until they sit behind a desk, so no problem.

Getting our papers stamped was 20 dirhams for each, though the guys outside were offering to help for just a few hundred...good racket I guess. Then back to the Roman Necropolis they call Chellah. Just as lovely as I remembered it and Hanane enjoyed it too. Plus, as a bonus, Friday is free for Moroccans! So it was half price for us.

From there back to the Bureau of Strangers (I can't say that enough) where they had my paperwork, thankfully we arrived just before everyone leaves for couscous. And with that, we had all the necessary papers (we think, because no one knows for sure) and so we caught the train back to Fes, but not before eating some pizza and salad at Cafe Italia. Delicious. There aren't really restaurants in Sefrou, we also ate a couple of ice cream cones while in Rabat and I have to admit that Hanane eating pink ice cream while wearing pink shoes, a pink sweatshirt, and pink earrings, was more than a little bit cute. There aren't ice cream parlors in Sefrou either, so this was a nice treat, both seeing the cuteness and eating the ice cream.

On the train we met an Italian guy who looked just like every man in my family. He told me I look like every other person in Northern Italy and seeing him, I have to think that maybe I really am Italian by descent, if not by nature, although I probably am that too. And then we got to Fes, caught the 45 minute taxi to Sefrou, and basked in the glory of having all our papers.

Next step?

Translation. The translator was closed for the weekend. After translation we will have to go to the family court where they usually tell people to go get other papers from some distant place, after that, the adul (like an Islamic judge I think) will certify that we are married Muslim people, and after that, well, we'll see...won't we? While there are many things I love about Morocco, the bureaucracy is not one of them.

Check out the initial list we had been given a year before when we first decided to get married. It consisted of about thirty-five documents of which I had zero and made Hanane cry.

The list was roughly:

Identity card - my Hawaii drivers license had expired several months earlier

Passport and most recent entry visa - okay I had this

Proof of income - I had no job

Original Certified birth certificate less than 90 days old

Attestation de travail - proof of a job

Work contract - more proof of a job

police record less than 90 days old from state most recently resided in

police record from the Ministry of strangers in Rabat
proof of residence - I had no residence
rental contract signed and notarized - again, I had no residence
9 passport photos
Medical certificate by Sefrou doctor
Affidavit of eligibility to marry- consul certified
Affidavit of nationality - consul certified
Consul certified copy of passport
Police check and validation by Sefrou police
Conversion to Islam, signed, stamped, and paid.

For Hanane
medical certificate proving virginity
Sworn affidavit of consent and eligibility to marry by two adult male family members
Identity card
Police check and validation by Sefrou police
Character reference from local constabulary
9 photos

Yeah...it was hell and seemed impossible. The problem is that in Morocco, you can't just live together. There isn't any boyfriend and girlfriend situations. You can be single or you can be engaged in which case you are allowed to see each other and you can be married in which case you are allowed the rights of marriage such as travel, staying in the same house or hotel, and not being judged by every person who sees you. Otherwise, a woman in Morocco is considered nearly universally to be a whore. It's a fucked up, judgmental, and ignorant viewpoint which pervades nearly the entire society.

I admit it, I dragged my feet a bit because I wanted a year to decide if I really wanted to marry or not, but honestly, I'm not sure I could have gotten things any quicker than I did if I had been going at it gangbusters. In the process of getting the documents I was required more than once to stretch the truth, throw tantrums, beg, and plead.

The translator took four trips to Fez and nearly two weeks because of holidays and the fact that he refused to translate the paper from Hawaii that said I had no criminal record because it had no stamp on it. I finally bribed him enough to translate it anyway and then we took the papers to the family court judge who pointed out that the translator had transcribed Damitio into Arabic differently than the adul who affirmed that I had become Muslim. Back to the translator.

The judge too wanted a stamp on my Hawaii criminal record but after three visits where I explained that the number on the paper was an electronic stamp to be checked on the internet so the paper could be verified, he finally accepted it. This process took literally 30 hours of sitting in the courthouse waiting to see the judge over four days. The visits with him took no more than 15 minutes each. We needed another translation of the declaration of my being a Muslim. Back to Fes, back to the translator, back to Sefrou, back to the courthouse, back to the family court judge.

We returned to the judge and waited four hours to see him again and then he read the translation and said the criminal record wouldn't work after all. Hanane begged and he told us to wait four more hours, finally he came back and said, okay, he'd accept it. With a signature we were able to submit the papers to the clerk who told us to wait another day, after this day we submitted the file to a separate clerk who wrote sealed letters to the constabulary and the police. We delivered these to the officials with again about 7 hours of waiting and were told the papers would be ready the next day, four days later the papers were delivered with us spending about three hours each day waiting to be told they weren't ready yet.

With these papers we could finally go back to the family court and deliver them to another clerk. The process should be about done, except that the adults had gone on strike so we had to wait four more days for their strike to end so that they could give us the certified folder to deliver to the judge again. Lots of waiting in the court house and the adult's office to make this process work and finally the fuckers came off strike and we got the folder, took it to the court waited three more hours to pay 565 dirhams for a necessary receipt, then waited for the judge to sign off on the papers, the judge came after about two hours and told us to wait. Finally we got impatient and went to his office and he told us that we would need to come back the next day since by the time he had gotten around to our file, everyone in the courthouse had gone home.

This process was causing us to fight like a couple of cats with their tails tied together and strung over a clothesline. I wanted to push for everything but Hanane wanted to be patient, to wait, to let them walk all over us and usually what happened was I had to fight and cuss and push her in order to get her to fight and push them even a little. Over a year of preparation and since gathering all the necessary papers, nearly three weeks of waiting. I think of all the people who have probably just given up on love and marriage in Morocco because of how fucked up the system is. I know people who just gave up, some who had the resources went to other countries to be married, some relationships died under the pressure, and some...well, this one at least, seems to still be moving forward.

We went back to see the judge but he had gone on vacation and we needed to wait for three days for him to get back. I wanted to shoot myself in the head, but not until I'd gone postal and killed every person in the family courthouse. I'm lucky I didn't have a gun.

On April 6th, 2010 - Hanane and I went to the court, asked the clerk about the file, he told us the judge had signed it, so we went to the registrar and got the file and permission slip. After this we went to her parents house, gathered up her father from the fields where he was tending the sheep and then took a taxi ride to the adult where he filled out the forms, asked us if we had any conditions (Hanane's was that we remain Muslim and mine was that she be nice, she asked if that included not killing me and I pointed out that nice people don't kill! - she sort of agreed, but hesitantly....) It's okay, I can't think of a better way to die than that anyway and no matter what, I'm convinced that death is relief from suffering so who better to release you than your wife.

The adult filled out the forms and at 12:12 he pronounced us husband and wife. At this point, since her father was there and it was hshuma (shame) for him to see affection so there was no, "You may now kiss the bride", instead, I kissed her father's hand and both cheeks and then we went to the family house to celebrate with a lunch of chicken and potatoes. "You may now kiss the father of the bride!"

I'm sure we will have some sort of wedding, but this is the administrative bit anyway....next we wait for the marriage certificate, go back to the translator, then file that with the court...so the nightmare of bureaucracy isn't over yet...but the good news is we're married!

Just for the record, I did make sure to kiss the bride once we were out of everyone's sight. Not really how I'd pictured it.

I Hate Moroccan Weddings

I have to say, it's still a little odd to think "I'm married." Hanane is my wife! I don't know exactly what I expected from this thing called marriage, but what I've found is certainly better than whatever it was I thought marriage might be. It's a little hard to describe, but there isn't really a big change, our relationship is the same, our friendship is the same. I haven't changed the way I dress, I didn't get taller, and my hair didn't suddenly all turn grey. No big earth shaking things.

But maybe it is earth shaking after all. Maybe it is life changing. Maybe things actually are completely different. I just know that it's nice to wake up and have her there. It's nice to know that no one can say that she can't be. It's nice to let people judge and not worry about them being right or wrong. It's nice to find myself being a bit more patient as I come to realize that Hanane really is my wife and we'll spend a long long time together.

It's odd to suddenly need to think of someone else to include in my almost constant escape plans from wherever I might be (luckily she is tiny and almost fits in my pocket), it's odd to need to think about providing food and shelter for someone else (but she is tiny and doesn't eat much or need a big house), and it's odd to think of being responsible for the material, emotional, and overall happiness of someone else (but she does the same for me and that really makes it worth it.)

It's all so odd and yet, it's comforting, it's good. It feels so much better than I've felt in such a long time. When I see her tiny flower covered shoes, it makes me happy. When she giggles and laughs, it makes me happy. When she holds up a big fucking knife and threatens to kill me, it makes me happy.

Yup, I've found the right girl for me. We both got lucky....

I've never liked weddings. I skipped my best friend's wedding, I tried to get out of going to my sister's wedding, I've avoided weddings nearly as much as I've avoided funerals. I just hate them. I don't like the music, I don't like the food, I don't like most of the people at them, and I don't like the expense, the expectation of gifts, or the non-personal nature of them in general.

I can say without a doubt, that the only thing I hate more than weddings are Moroccan weddings. This presents a slight problem as I've just recently become married to a Moroccan. We're working through that, as I will explain in a second, but first let me give an example of a Moroccan wedding, since I've just attended one and it reaffirmed everything for me.

Hanane's sister just had her wedding to her jumbo sized husband. The Moroccan wedding is a painfully drawn out affair of at least three days or more. In this case, in the weeks before the wedding there was a flurry of activity as Hanane's parents and siblings prepared thousands of cookies and sweets, bought dresses, and did all the rest. Thankfully, I was able to shield Hanane from becoming a kitchen slave thanks to our own recent marriage. Her sisters and mother were upset with her over it, but she was relieved to be able to escape from it. So, that's all the attention I will give to that particular aspect of hell. Except to say that on Thursday night we stayed with her parents so that Hanane could work with everyone else and help prepare for the wedding. This was actually okay as I am fond of her parents and the siblings that live at their house, although, coming straight from an hour long cramped grand taxi ride and then catching another taxi to their house, having a late dinner after no lunch, and being tired from work and sleeping in an uncomfortable wool stuffed bed instead of our own was just the start of this infernal weekend.

In the morning I had to go to Fes and so I woke up and headed to the grand taxi again with no change of clothes and the usual no shower but without the benefit of my usual couple of hours of waking and adjusting with coffee, a morning shit, and not having to talk to anyone but Hanane. I'm a grumpy fucker without some time to let my bowels relax and not jibber jabber uselessly with people in the constant salaam a leycum, leycum a salaam, la bas, la bas la basalik, hamdilah, hnya shweeya, blah blah jibber jabber that is utterly pointless and only serves to interrupt every conversation, project, or bit of work you attempt to do here.

That night I came back and repeated the big taxi ride followed by the small taxi accompanied by edgy hunger as we were staying at the parental house again because it was the henna night for the women. Again with a very late (midnight dinner) and no chance to grade papers. Not only is there the application of henna but also the stereo is expected to be turned up to the highest level so that the sounds are distorted. As with an engagement, the bride is immobilized and everyone else dances and has fun. It's for the women, but since I'm a member of the family and a foreigner, I somehow got forced to be there and dance and have fun too. This part was actually the most fun part. I loved dancing with Hanane's mom, dad, and all the kids though the music started to really hurt my head, I was incredibly hungry, and I knew that I had to wake up early for my 12 hour hell day teaching Moroccan pre-teens and yet another commute to Fez by cramped grand taxi. Since some cousins and her brother and his wife had all come to visit, we slept in the salon where we got to hear the sounds of all humping all night, the baby crying, and the usual yelling from neighbors, loud demands that Hanane help find things (after we've gone to sleep, mind you), and more, total sleep time for me....about an hour.

Back to the cramped grand taxi and back to Fez where I had a fairly fun time teaching my classes. After 12 hours, a small taxi to a big taxi to a small taxi to Sefrou where I arrived at about 9:30 hoping I had missed most of the wedding. No such luck. The bride hadn't even returned from the beauty salon yet. I was hungry and starting to feel really tired and you won't be surprised to know I was incredibly grumpy too. Most of the guests were sitting in the olive press warehouse next door, but even so I tried to find a place to take a catnap and each time I started to doze a relative or new guest would wander in and wake me up in order to salaam a leykum and ask me questions I either didn't understand or pretended not to understand. Hanane was in full slave mode making candy sachets, doing every woman's makeup, and in general getting treated like a scullery maid in addition to getting called every time Fatima's gargantuan 12-year old retarded step daughter would run amuk of something.

Three hours after this hellish waiting period, the bride finally arrived and after a short time we were all told to go to the warehouse for dinner, but a problem developed, in that the requisite bride kaftan dress rentals never showed up since they were booked for another wedding and were running late. Let me explain. The party requires a few things, a huge dinner hall, rented plastic tables and chairs, rented decorations, a big pair of thrones, blaring music, gargantuan amounts of food, and secondary to all of this are the bride and groom. The bride changes into four different kaftans through the evening, most families rent the dresses along with the hall, the tables, chairs, table covers, chair covers, thrones, wall coverings, sound equipment, and ornaments. This particular event took place in a big concrete olive press warehouse that is something straight out of a slasher movie or a Soviet torture drama. They did do a nice job of sprucing it up though with all the same materials that every Sefroui wedding uses.

During the time I was trying to nap, the guests, mostly old women in their nicest kaftans who had been invited by other old women that were in turn actually invited by the bride, sat at tables as the music blared too loud for anyone to talk. The dress renter wasn't answering her phone and the bride was freaking out. Meanwhile, half the people at the tables got to eat, while those of us on the other side sat and thought about running across the room to snatch a chicken to gnaw on. Finally around 12:30 the food appeared on our side of the room, but as is usual with mass produced dinners, it wasn't the most delicious versions of olive roast chicken or prune roasted mutton I've had in Morocco. It's hard to make things perfect when you are making a hundred of them.

Almost right after eating, the dresses showed up and I admit, the entrance of the bride was pretty spectacular. Certainly the most beautiful part of the whole day. She arrived in a car and six guys in big white cloaks surrounded the car and opened their capes so no one could see her. She got out and got into a palanquin which four of the guys carried while they did an amazing amount of dancing at the same time. A band with six foot bugles and awesome percussion followed the procession. Poor Fatima managed to look serene and beautiful as a princess (which she did pretty well considering that the guys carrying her were doing this amazing dance) and everyone crowded around. From the crown to the palanquin to the escort to the music, she was a princess. This wonderful and really spectacular part

lasted about ten minutes and then they lowered her so she and her Belgian man could ascend the big thrones set up overlooking the olive press warehouse dance floor.

From this point on, the bride and groom were forced to sit with stony faces and observe everyone else have fun dancing and getting pictures with them. For four hours the only movement was of Fatima getting down once in a while to change kaftans. Meanwhile everyone else danced (or really, mostly they sat on the sides watching the young dancers) while the sound system blared all the contemporary Moroccan music at mega decibel volume, groups of young men smoked kif outside, women stared and resented each other for beauty, husbands, or what have you, and I got more and more and more tired of having my ears forced to ring more than they do naturally. I suffer from tinnitus, but this was worse.

Young guys brought cookies, the Belgian daughter kept getting into mischief and dragging Hanane (the only person there who speaks English, I might add, other than me) away to help her, and finally after trying to get Hanane to escape with me for hours, I dragged her away just before dawn so that we could get at least a moment's sleep. The house was crowded with people, many of them were having loud conversations, and Hanane's brother had the nerve to demand that she wash his babies dirty diapers while his wife stood right next to him. I was ready to smack him, but Hanane gave him more than a piece of her mind. She's a married woman now and doesn't have to be anyone's slave...thank God she knows it. Sometimes.

I told Hanane that I hated that the bride and groom don't get to have a good time and I got her to dream with me about a fantasy wedding in the Sahara with just a few people and where we would get to enjoy it too....of course every old woman there demanded that we invite them to our wedding and protested when she told them that we were thinking of going to Turkey or elsewhere, they all love the party and want the next girl to suffer being the bride just as they had to suffer.

As I said though, the bride did get her ten minutes. I want Hanane to get that too, except I want her to enjoy the rest of the night too. I've refused to go to another olive warehouse party even if it is our wedding and I think Hanane is growing on the idea of the Sahara, nomad tents, and moonlight kisses while the camels groan and grunt.

Really, I don't want to hate my own wedding. I don't want to remember it as a day of hell. Maybe I am a bit of a selfish prick for not appreciating the traditional wedding customs of my beautiful Moroccan bride. After all, one has to honor the community that one lives in right, and one needs to respect and honor the customs that have been handed down through the ages right? I suppose it would be selfish of me to not insist upon the following customs:

- 1) I should encourage Hanane to work her ass off for every female relative or friend who gets married and spend days making herself exhausted and miserable and then tell her to shut up about it when she complains to me about it, that's the traditional way a Moroccan husband would deal with it.
- 2) I should force her to wear the veil again since she is a married woman now and showing any sort of skin or hair is just encouragement to her being harassed and pestered, besides it will bring shame upon me, according to tradition and custom. In fact, custom and tradition demand that if I catch her looking at, talking to, or god forbid touching a man who is not her brother or father, I should beat her and possibly publicly humiliate or kill her.
- 3) Speaking of beating, a Moroccan friend of mine told me that according to custom I should really give her a good beating on our wedding night just to set things straight about how our life will be together. Sounds like a good idea, right? I mean, if I don't follow the custom, she might not think that I love her enough.
- 4) And, also on the wedding night, we mustn't ignore the time honored tradition of my mother and uncle waiting outside the nuptial chambers for me to finish 'deflowering her', I'll be sure to give the rag

with her virginal blood on it to my mother so that she can parade it around amongst the relatives and show what a stallion her son is. Of course, if there's no blood than the marriage will be null and void according to custom and she and her family will have to endure a lifetime of shame and disdain from the loving community that wouldn't want them to feel that they were being left out of all the fun.(And besides which – we are already married, we just haven't had a wedding.)

5) Since the wedding is women's work, I will be sure to just sit back as my new brother-in-law did and watch as all the women work themselves into exhaustion. As he so nicely put it "It's women's work, so no problem. For me, it's easy." Also I appreciate the fact that he made his bride foot most of the bill for the wedding too and since it was all her show he didn't bother to bring any friends or family with him.

6) Speaking of expenses, since we are a multi-cultural family now, I suppose I can insist that my father-in-law pay for all of the expenses of the wedding as happens in the west, sure, he's a shepherd and as a teacher, I make a decent living, but it's his responsibility as a person to honor the customs of my country.

7) So, in keeping with that, we'll be sure to have plenty of booze in the western tradition so that all the guests can get good and liquored up, those who choose to honor Islam can abstain.

8) Since it's shameful to display any sort of affection there will be no kissing the bride (this is truly the custom, what a shame if someone were to see you expressing love with a kiss in public on your wedding day!)

9) Also, I realize that by not honoring the time honored tradition of having a blaring stereo or having our wedding reception in a warehouse with garbage in the corners, I will be depriving my bride of a sense of community she desires. Also we will be sure to have the customary kif smokers and to have all the leeching neighbors from 300 miles come and make demands upon her mother's hospitality. They deserve it after all. Truly, when guests come to visit in Morocco, they don't bring gifts, they don't contribute to the household, and they don't help out, they just sit around making demands for the most part. Ask any Moroccan and they will tell you and it's a time honored tradition that everyone looks forward to reciprocating (of course there are exceptions, but not many.)

10) We'll be sure to invite all the people in the neighborhood and who I've heard so many nasty things about since coming here, to not invite them would be shameful and of course they will bring their relatives too. Seriously, if you don't invite everyone you know to the wedding, it's a public shame for the entire family.

Sounds great right? Why don't we re-institute the time tested tradition of female circumcision while we are at it! What a bunch of horse crap. Every woman and every man should be able to feel special on their wedding day. For me, I've always dreamed of going alone into the woods with my bride, laying down a broomstick and jumping over it while holding hands. No guests, no priest, no cake, no \$1000 wedding gowns, no tuxedos, no guest list, no gift index, no nothing but me and my sweetheart.

Hanane has always dreamed of something more than that and she's going to get it.

Marriage is a constant state of compromise and multi-cultural marriage is even more so. I want my lady to feel like she is the most special person in the world. I want her to remember the moments of our wedding as some of the most joyful of our life. Note, I said our life. That means me too, the selfish guy. The selfish guy that's paying, the selfish guy that's planning, the selfish guy that's trying to find the sweetest compromise that adds up to something more than the utterly common, the selfish guy that hates to see his mother in law exhausted, the selfish guy that listens to his wife complain about things

that she shouldn't have to complain about but is forced to because of custom, the selfish guy that encouraged his wife to take off the veil, the selfish guy that doesn't want to take away her father's cigarette money, the selfish guy who is working his ass off each day so that we can have a special wedding, take a trip to Turkey, and have a standard of living that is far beyond what my bride expects or has ever had. Yes, poor fucking me, the selfish bastard that has been lying, jumping through hoops, traveling during every free moment, and paying to get all the necessary papers for marriage for the past year. Yes, poor fucking me that didn't even get to find out that the small dinner to announce the engagement was a full on party, who paid a dowry, who put on a big marriage papers are signed lunch party, who constantly deals with living in a culture that is still so foreign that it seems at times to be completely retarded. Although, maybe I understand it well enough now to know that it really is.

Every Moroccan bride looks miserable at her wedding, or so I've been told. From my observations of the other night, I can see why. Every Moroccan groom looks pretty miserable too, I'm sure. In fact, if you are shuffled into the men's section at a Moroccan wedding or engagement party, you will find that all the male guests are pretty miserable and that's why everyone but the young kif smokers disappears promptly after the food is served. It's no secret. My wife knows, you know, and I know. I'm a big fucking jerk.

And, as a big fucking jerk, I'm going to make sure that Hanane and I have a beautiful, magical, and utterly romantic and wonderful wedding. It's my right as a selfish jerk. The thing is, I don't want to just be some nobody teacher in a nobody town. I don't want to be some childless guy who always wonders whether he would have been a good dad. I don't want to be in this position of being the foreigner with no friends.

I want to swim in the ocean, lie on the beach, hike in the jungle, eat spicy noodles, and curl up with the love of my life each night. I want to ride camels through the desert, sit around fires with nomads, and learn to play traditional songs on drums and guitar. I want to build a cabin and a windmill and a waterwheel and watch my kids play in streams. I want to write a book or two that actually sell, kayak on smooth waters, and change the lives of people in person and not in person.

I don't want to be a failure. I'm afraid that I already am.

And then it was Fatima's last day in Morocco. She and the fat man were going to Casablanca and then if the Icelandic volcano allowed their flight they will fly to Belgium to begin whatever their life is. I'm relieved to have them leaving. To sit with the fat man and hear his labored breathing, to hear the pig sounds as he eats, to see his big jolly daughter, all of it has made me sick. All of it contributed to the first 10 days of my married life not being all that great. In fact, their marriage itself sort of stole some of the specialness from that of ours.

I am afraid that I really fucked up. I was wrong. I thought Hanane was a girl who hated her family and wanted to leave it behind. I thought she was a girl who loved to read books. I thought she was a girl who would be able to become nomadic with me and create a family and traditions of our own. I was wrong. She's really none of those things. She never will be free of her family and never wants to be. In the year I've known her, I haven't seen her read an entire book. She most likely won't be able to handle being nomadic or departing from her family, traditions, and culture. Yeah, I really fucked up. Oh well, it's too late to cry over it. Besides, I do love her. She really is the sweetest. All my fantasies of rescuing Cinderella were just that though, fantasies. My fantasies of moving from place to place to place with not much in the way of possessions or responsibilities were fantasies too. Ah well, this is real life. This is really my wife. I'm really in it now, ha ha ha.

Wedding More Moroccan than a Moroccan Wedding

Two months after the official marriage, we finally had our wedding. The whole idea of having a wedding like her sister's was simply repulsive to me so from the get-go I was lobbying to do things differently. A wedding in Turkey, a wedding in the Sahara, a wedding in Fes, anywhere but in that damn ugly olive press warehouse surrounded by garbage and having to see those same kiffed out boys ogling my bride.

I was able to convince Hanane that she deserved something more and better and altogether more exquisite, but I didn't reckon on the power of her family over her. What the fairy tales don't tell you is that Cinderella had spent her life defending her ugly and wicked step-sisters and step-mother. Cinderella was convinced that her step-mother only loved her and that was why she always came to her to do the chores. She always tried to think of them first...and of course, that's the problem.

Our wedding turned out to be a battle over control of Hanane with me fighting for her to be in control and her family to maintain their hold on her. Through the course of this relationship it has been such and I think this might explain a lot of the times I get angry with Hanane, I find myself fighting her entire family to liberate her and I find her fighting against me on their side, and yet, when she is away from them, she realizes what she wants and it's not to be under their control.

So, our wedding was a battle from start to finish. First there was the battle of the bureaucracy then came the wedding war. Hanane wanted a wedding. I told her she could have one someplace other than Sefrou. She told me that it was for her family more than anything. I caved and said okay and agreed to give her the money to make a small wedding party. We were happy. Then her mom and aunts started telling her that what I gave her wasn't enough and so she decided to use the money that her mom has borrowed and never repaid but always promises to repay when Hanane asks about it. I sensed that suddenly Hanane wasn't planning her wedding anymore but instead her mom and her aunts were planning an expensive party for themselves and their friends.

I asked her questions, I asked her to close her eyes and visualize her wedding, who was there, what did it look like, what had she dreamed of? The answer I got was the beach and no one there, then the sea and no one there (except me of course), and finally, she said in a tent near her families house was what she had dreamed of as a little girl. Not a lot of people, delicious food, a band, dancing, and beautiful clothes. In short, not really what her family was pressuring her to have. They wanted us to have something for them that neither of us wanted. It was clear.

We spent the morning talking and we decided that we would get a big Berber tent and have the wedding on the roof of her parents house. We would invite a maximum of 30-50 people. Her family and neighbors that she likes and some of my friends and colleagues from the American English School and of course if any of my family wanted to come from North America (which I doubted would be possible). I forced her to accept the idea of live music instead of Mohammad and his warped out stereo speakers. Suddenly we were both happy and excited about our wedding again.

Of course her family rejected it outright. Her mom said it was hshuma to not invite every person within a mile and allow them all to bring their friends. She said the neighbors would throw rocks at us. She refused. She told Hanane that if Hanane wanted to have that kind of a wedding than she could do it somewhere else and expect no help from anyone. She would be willing to come as a guest but not to help her daughter with her wedding. I wasn't there when this was happening. When we had previously decided to go ahead and have our wedding in the Sahara, her aunts and family had mocked her for wanting to do something different. That was when I had relented and we had decided on the tent plan. Now they rejected that plan too.

Hanane came back to Fes a messed up bundle of tears and emotions. She was convinced that we had to have the wedding their way or to have no wedding at all and she was crying and angry and confused. It was at this point that I realized what I had to do. This was our wedding, not her family's.

“Hanane,” I said “I’m through with this bullshit. We’re having our wedding in the Sahara. We’re having our wedding in the Sahara and if they don’t like it, too bad. I will pay for your parents, your sisters and your younger brother to come and if anyone else wants to come, they are welcome if you want them to, but they have to pay their own way.”

She was an emotional wreck and told me that she would do nothing for the wedding now. Just like her mom had told her. I said that was fine and I set about calling our nomad friends Hassan and Assou to make arrangements. I managed to arrange food, accommodation, a camel trek, and a Berber wedding with live music for ten people. I told Hanane that we were doing it this way and that was the end of the discussion. It needed to be my decision. Otherwise it was neither of our decision.

She told me her parents would refuse and so I told her to get her things and we went to Sefrou where I told them all what we were doing. She was half right, her father refused because he was scared to leave his sheep with his irresponsible sons, but her mom agreed to go. Somehow during the week before we went the guest list who I was responsible for grew to include Mohammad’s wife and kids and her sister’s boyfriend. Since none of my family had been able to make it, I invited a young American couple from the American English School so there would be a grooms side.

So, the Sefrouias came down from Sefrou and invaded our house for a few hours and then we met up with the boyfriend at the bus station at around 8:30 for our 9 PM bus. Zahira and the boyfriend, Faydeel disappeared just about the time the bus started boarding and when I asked where they had gone, I was told they went to get chicken for the trip. Zahira is a selfish girl and while I like her, she drives me nuts by always being the last one on the bus, disappearing when it’s time to go, and being in general a selfish and self centered princess kind of girl. Since I had her ticket, Hanane and I couldn’t board the bus until they got back and everyone on the bus was forced to wait while I held the bus from leaving. Eventually, they came back and the rest of us got on the bus but since I hadn’t been there to explain that there were assigned seats on this kind of bus, everyone had just sat where they wanted to and this of course left me and Hanane sitting in seats that weren’t ours and sort of dreading that we would have to argue with whomever got on the bus at the next stop and held the tickets for our seats. Since Faydeel had joined us at the last minute, we had an uneven number of people and one seat was separate from the rest (because Taha is still just a baby and shares his mother’s seat). Of course, Zahira was going to sit next to her boyfriend no matter what, so that added another bit of stress since our seats were all in the front and his assigned one was in the back. It made me wonder who she thought should have to sit alone in the back of the bus. Probably me or Hanane.

There was some arguing over seats at the next stop but we managed to work it all out and we arrived in al-Rissani at about 7 am. The Berber man who was supposed to meet us was a no show. Her family began to bitch at Hanane as if it was all her fault. Her sister, sister-in-law, and mother all acted like they had been dumped in the center of the Sahara with no food or water. Already they were making demands and treating her with disrespect. Finally the Berber, Slimane, arrived and led us to the taxis. Even though we had been waiting an hour, it was on the trek to the taxi that sister-in-law decided to just stop and wander into a cafe and use the toilet without telling anyone. Poof, she just disappeared. I had to go back and find her and then find our way back to the taxis. Not even enough decency to say, “Can you wait just a minute while I pop in here to use the toilet?” Later she demanded forty dirhams from Hanane for the taxi fare from Sefrou to Fez which everyone else had paid themselves – this after we had paid for all of her food, transport, accommodation, camels, etc.

In any event we got to the desert hotel of Assou’s family and we were welcomed with warmth and generosity. We sat in the shade of his mother’s yard drinking camel milk and eating dates. No one bothered to make space for me to sit next to Hanane and so I was forced to sit across the table from her. Sometimes I don’t know if it’s intentional rudeness or just that they don’t notice. I tend to think it’s the first.

The house we were staying in was a beautiful mud and straw brick house filled with Berber rugs, cushions, and the all the amenities we could desire. We relaxed, had tea, and all went to our respective

rooms to have a small rest after the ten hour overnight bus ride and the oppressive heat of the desert. Thankfully, Hanane insisted we take the best room for ourselves so we had a window, large shower, and big comfortable bed. All of the rooms were nice, but we had the nicest, as we should have, but if we had offered it to anyone other than Sam-Omar and Sarah, they would have taken it and not even wondered if we were sleeping in a dung pile. Sam-Omar and Sarah, seconded Hanane that we should have the nicest and I am so glad I listened to them all.

Sam-Omar and I took a small walk in the desert and ended up befriending a couple of Berber boys, looking at the incredible fossils all boys carry and try to sell to tourists, and drinking water from a desert well. Then we played soccer for about 10 minutes against the boys. There was no score, but I would say the Moroccan kids defeated the American men soundly.

In the afternoon, Slimane offered to take us to a souvenir shop in the village. Since tickets to the Sahara had been a bit pricey, we'd paid for everyone's rooms, and I wasn't sure if I would need to pay extra to Assou for the camel trek, food, musicians etc, Hanane and I didn't have a lot of money to spend, but I told her to pick out a pair of earrings and she found a pink scarf she liked. Meanwhile, Samira was shopping for expensive carpets and Faydeel bought two expensive presents for Zahira. Samira then demanded that Hanane buy her kids some souvenirs. Hanane refused and Samira responded by telling her son "Hanane is too cheap to buy you something Amine. Just go outside." Then she continued shopping for carpets. Hanane was getting more and more upset.

Samira was constantly handing her baby to anyone around and demanding they watch it. I began to refuse. Since Faydeel was trying to impress the family, he was forced to hold the baby a lot. I should point out that no one offered to buy Hanane anything and in case you think I'm forgetting the wedding gifts, I'm not. There were no wedding gifts. Meanwhile all the gifts they gave Fatima and her big boy Belgian sit piled in the salon of the Souidi house. Not only did no one offer to help with expenses, they didn't even have the courtesy to offer a gift, not even something as simple as a bag of dates. This was true not only for Hanane's family but also for the American's we brought along and supplemented.

In the evening Assou's sisters came with the traditional Nomad wedding garments and they dressed Hanane and I. Hanane's garb was a white gown with heavy jewelry that could easily be used to kill. Her hair and makeup were done with care. A final touch was a Berber woven cloth bag which they placed over her entire head and tied with a ribbon. As for me, I fared better, I was wrapped up in Djellaba and turban so that only my eyes were still showing. None of our 'guests' bothered to change out of their pajamas or street clothes and Samira sat and mocked Hanane while she was made up. We were led outside to the courtyard where we sat in on comfortable cushions while Berber musicians played desert music for our pleasure.

In a traditional Berber wedding, the bride has her head covered for three days and the bride and groom sit in desert tents during this time while there is henna, music, dancing, and feasting. Thankfully, our bagged time was reduced to about 45 minutes at which point Hanane had the bag removed from her head, I was un-cowled, and then we danced and sang. The music and dancing were spectacular and all the Berber's treated us as their own family while Hanane's family acted like they were someplace they didn't want to be. When we moved inside and were set behind a table lit with candles, I thought that perhaps the gifts would then be presented, but as I said before, no one had bothered to buy gifts. Hanane and I had brought cookies which are usually made and distributed by the family in both Arab and Berber weddings, no one lifted a finger to help and so we distributed tea and cookies to all the guests. Sam-Omar offered to distribute the tea and I told him that as the groom it was my responsibility since I sort of liked the idea of Hanane and I doing everything since her family was doing nothing. At one point, as we sat for pictures, Zahira came with two bottles of water and glasses. I was touched by at least a small gesture, since we were wearing hot clothes and couldn't move, but then of course she poured water for herself and her boyfriend and ignored us.

The music and dancing were blissfully limited to about an hour and then Hanane and I retired to our room. We'd had the first part of our wedding and it was beautiful and wonderful, exotic and

exciting....despite the fact that her family hadn't appreciated it or participated in any way at all except for letting us pay to get them there and bitching about everything. In our room, we laughed at the fact that we would have enjoyed it more if none of them had been there.

In the morning, Assou took us to a Gnawa village to enjoy more music and dancing. Since his car would only carry five at a time, he took the Souidi family first and then returned to get Sam-Omar, Sarah, Hanane, and myself. Along the way we saw Berber boys with their pet foxes standing beside the road and holding them up for tourists to stop and take pictures of. Hanane was in love with the cute little desert foxes and wanted one to take home, but I suspected and Assou confirmed that they make lousy pets. None the less it was nice to stop and take pictures and pet the beautiful little things.

When we arrived at the Gnawa village, the Souidis were already looking bored but thanks to the beautiful music and great rhythms, we managed to get them all to get up and dance with us. The Gnawa are the descendents of black African slaves who brought their own traditions with them and evolved their music into that for which Morocco is most famous. It is the original trance music and often used for ecstatic ritual and dance because of it's heavy bass and rhythm.

Assou then took the Souidis to al-Rissani to see the medina, wander the souks, and have lunch. It was a forty minute drive from the Gnawa village so Sam-Omar, Sarah, Hanane, and I waited in the Gnawa house while he shuttled between for about an hour and a half. We played the instruments, rested on the cushions, talked with the Gnawa musicians and soaked in the amazing ambiance and culture.

When Assou returned, he asked that I drive. I was glad to speed through the desert in his little car. I miss driving sometimes. Hanane wanted to buy some silver jewelry so Assou took us to a tourist shop called Maison Taureg. The owner, named Mohammad of course, asked Hanane if she wanted to see carpets. She said no, but of course, she had just come in with three Americans so he insisted. She said she would see one, he said he would show three, she agreed and he proceeded to show us about fifty. Being ex-pat Americans, the three of us knew that we needed to show no interest, Hanane had not yet learned that by company she is going to be treated as a stupid American tourist and as she heard the ridiculous prices she became angrier and angrier. The rug merchant wouldn't stop of course and finally when I saw that she had had enough, I pulled out the best tool in my tool box and began grilling the rug merchant with every question I could think of about himself, his family, life in the desert, where he has traveled, music, and more. He tried to continue selling, but of course, my time as a stock broker and a journalist has made me an unstoppable force in dominating a conversation. As long as I am asking someone questions, I am in control. Soon he gave up and suggested we look at the jewelry.

This went fine until Assou showed up with Hanane's family who were all pissed off and proceeded to attack Hanane for leaving them stranded in al-Rissani. They actually demanded that we buy them lunch somewhere. With this attack, Hanane could no longer focus on shopping. Her mom, her sister in law, and her sister all accused her of leaving them hungry and waiting and she just imploded and went outside. I wasn't sure what happened and went outside to talk to her and when she told me what they had said to her, I was livid. I went inside asked Assou to please take them back to the hotel and feed them. Like hell I was going to spend another minute letting them attack Hanane. They left, but not before Samira and Zahira had bought more expensive presents for themselves.

Back at the hotel, I found myself feeling incredibly hostile towards her family. I asked Assou about henna for Hanane and he told me his sisters would come and make henna for her in the afternoon and then in the late afternoon we would mount camels and ride to the oasis for the night. For a number of reasons, they got started later than expected and by the time we were on the camels it was approaching dark. Samira put herself on the lead camel, everyone else scrambled for theirs and Hanane and I ended up in separate caravans because the only two camels left were in different groups.

Even worse, instead of listening to the beautiful silence of the desert I got to hear Faydeel playing music on his cellphone while I rode with he, Samira, and Khadija. Arriving at the oasis, I found Hanane and she demanded I go get her bag since no one else had bothered helping her.

I walked into the oasis camp and told Faydeel to shut off the music but at first he refused and soon I

had Samira and Zahira both yelling at me. Sometimes it seems to me that Arabs are just loud and noisy people and they want as much noise as possible where they go. I much more relate to the Berber's who simply want the quiet of the desert unless it is replace with the music they make themselves.

As we sat drinking tea, Samira complained in a loud enough voice to be audible that Hanane and I should have done a traditional Arab wedding while Hanane's sister and mom made snide remarks, some of which Hanane translated for me and some of which she didn't. Zahira and Faydeel had already set themselves up in the most comfortable tent which had been reserved for us and so we were left a little bit homeless. The guides brought out small tables in a short while and at this point we began to enjoy the stars, the tajines the nomad guides made for us, and the serenity of being away from civilization. If we had only not had the malignant presence of those at the table beside ours, all would have been well and good.

After dinner, Hanane and I found an empty tent and crawled in to go to sleep. I woke before anyone and left the camp to enjoy some solitude with the sunrise. Upon climbing the nearest dune I saw that there were a number of bivouac camps scattered around in the distance. I saw two large dunes and knew that they were the best places to see the sunrise. Since I'd already spotted some other tourist camps, I chose the smaller of the two dunes knowing that the tourists would all come out and flock up the biggest dune. At this point there was no one stirring except me and a solitary figure who had just begun climbing the biggest dune. I felt sympathy that his solitude would soon be destroyed and prayed that my own would not.

Soon there were about twenty figures from the other camps who came out, pissed, stretched, looked around, and set off for the biggest dune. To my horror I looked at our camp and saw Samira and her son come out. She looked around, shouted my name and waved and in response I moved myself to the far side of the dune out of her vision and doubled my pace to discourage her. Soon she was closer to the other climbers than to me and I saw her go inside, grab one of our Nomad guides from sleep, and make him carry her baby up the dune while she dragged Amine by the hand behind her. I thanked God that she had decided to go up the bigger one rather than follow me.

I now had a great vantage point for the sunrise and I could see the Sahara stretching for miles all around me. I watched my solitary companion on the bigger dune be overtaken, surrounded, and distracted from the moment of the sun's birth. I chanted and meditated and prayed. I heard nothing but the wind and the sand. My travel sarong was wrapped around my face to protect it from the sand. I let all the pieces of my emotion fall into their proper places. I watched as the sun shyly placed it's fingers on the tops of the distant dunes and then slowly pulled her head into the day. The sun to me is female, I don't know exactly why. Shadows began to form and the desert came alive. As I began down, I saw Hanane emerge from the tent. I called to her. She wanted to go to the biggest dune, but I had already found my place and so we went back up to my retreat and kissed as the warmth of the morning replaced the cool of the night in preparation for the heat of the day. We ran down the dunes with my sarong flying between us like a banner and laughed like children while looking at each other with love.

Back in the camp we ignored the others and put on our final set of wedding clothes. A white western wedding gown my mother had sent for her and a black and grey striped Djellaba and slippers that Hanane had bought for me. Sam-Omar and Sarah agreed once again to be our photographers and we posed in the desert. My dream of seeing my bride in her gown sitting astride a camel had come true. We quietly exchanged vows in the sand dunes, smiled into each others eyes and kissed in front of the world. This, was the wedding we had dreamed about together.

For the trek back to Merzouga, we insisted on being together. The ride back was beautiful as the dunes awoke and the desert life prepared for the scorching hot temperatures that would soon arrive. It was wonderful to turn and share smiles with the love of my life as we rode sure footed camels through the sands of the Sahara led by our trusted nomad friends. I am certain that God forgives me for wishing that a bottomless sand pit would open underneath the other train, though sadly, that didn't happen.

Back at the hotel I made arrangements for transport back to al-Rissani and made it clear to

everyone that we needed to be ready at 6 pm. Most of the day was spent in our respective rooms though since it was Friday, our friends had prepared couscous for us. Hanane's mom and Samira went to have a therapeutic Berber treatment where they were buried in the hot sand and when they returned they both looked ready to die from heat stroke. Shortly after this, Hanane disappeared for a while and when I went to find her, I found that her mom had demanded that she do her mother's washing before we left! To say that I was pissed would be a remarkable understatement. I attacked. I demanded to know how she could possibly think this was okay while Zahira and Samira both lay sleeping in bed that she demand that her host and more than that, the new bride should wash her dirty underclothes.

I told her that she should be ashamed of herself, which is no small thing for a new son in law to do in Arab culture and I demanded an apology which she only gave when it looked like I was going to keep yelling.

By five o'clock I was packed and ready. I kept telling Hanane to get ready so we could herd the rest of them together and have them ready too. At 6:05 pm, Hanane was still brushing her hair and once again, I lost it. Samira was still in her pajamas with her things scattered in her room, her mom and sister were preparing tea, Sam-Omar and Sarah were both packed and ready to go but as to the rest of them- they didn't look like they were going anywhere! I told her mother to put down her tea and pack her bag. The truck I had ordered for transport arrived and only because Hanane woke up to the fact that I wasn't just joking, we managed to have everyone on board 15 minutes later.

There was now open hostility from all of them. At the bus station, I gave them their tickets and when Zahira demanded a seat next to her boyfriend, I berated her for having no respect and asked her who she thought should sit by themselves in his seat in the back of the bus. Me? Hanane? Her mom? Sam-Omar? The baby? It was the last straw as she paraded all the things she had bought for herself in front of Hanane whom she hadn't even given a scarf to..

I bought snacks for me and Hanane, but Hanane offered to share our chips with Zahira at which point, she didn't say thank you, she said "You should give me more." Samira had forgotten her babies slippers and sipper cup and demanded that we call Assou and have him drive 60 miles to bring them to her. I called Assou and apologized to him, he said no problem and then he actually brought the kid's slippers.

Arriving in Fes, there were some very minimal congratulations and no thank you's from our horrid guests. Samira said nothing but only glared at us, she was pissed that we hadn't invited her to eat with us at the midnight snack stop, and keep in mind that she and her husband Mohammad have more money than any of us.

Arriving home, Hanane and I kissed, smiled and went to sleep. Just a few hours later, the behemoth Canadian teacher knocked on the door and told me she had been fired from the American English School. She told me that they wanted to fire me too, but they hadn't been able to reach me on the phone.

Later that day, I took Hanane to her first concert at the Fes Festival of Sacred Music. It was supposed to be Ben Harper, but instead turned out to be Malian musicians because Ben Harper had dislocated his shoulder skateboarding. The first act was Djelimady String Theory and the lead act was Amadou and Miriam. It was wonderful and fun. The only problem was that we saw one of my worst students from last term and she said "I wrote on the evaluation that they should fire you!"

To me, the two messages from the teacher and the student were a clear a message from the universe that I had lost my job. To be honest, it didn't bother me a too much except that I hadn't done anything worthy of being fired and that it was coming on the heels of my wedding. I wrote in my journal that I would make demands for fair compensation and if they weren't met, I would do everything I could to destroy the reputation of the American English School and it's director David Gerbil. It seemed like a good opportunity to move to somewhere farther from Hanane's family and closer to the sea.

Leaving the American English School

The funny thing is that I didn't lose my job. I went to work and everything was fine. I blogged about the wedding and met with David Gerbil and started to feel very good about everything. I actually had one of my best semester's yet. The only problem was that because I felt rushed about getting ready for classes, spending time with Hanane, and everything else that instead of writing new material for my blog....I cut and pasted about the wedding from my journal...and forgot to take out the part where I said I would do everything I could to destroy the American English School and David Gerbil. My memory of it came when I saw that someone had searched for American English School+Vago+Gerbil. I could picture David Gerbil on his iPhone.

Who knew that so many people read my blog? I'm a victim of my own success.

It turns out my blog is more widely read in Morocco than I expected. He got calls from students, parents, his boss, and teachers. The Moroccan teachers in particular were awful, they stopped returning my salaam a leycums and spread the news of the site like wildfire. It went viral, but not in a way that I had wanted. David Gerbil called me for a meeting and I was fairly unrepentant, since I had said it and I knew the likely consequences, I figured I should go ahead and do what I had said I would and make my demands. In point of fact, I'd meant it. I pointed out that the American English School websites were on my domains and hosting, I pointed out how widely read my blog is, I pointed out that I should receive a compensation package if I were asked to leave, since it had been an accident on my part in the first place.

I wasn't offered a really sweet package, but I was told that if I resigned, I would get a 6000 dirham bonus and David Gerbil wrote me a letter that while not a recommendation, was at least a listing of what I had done while at the American English School. I considered roasting him over the fire, but the fact that the whole thing had really upset Hanane and caused her hshuma to go through the roof plus David Gerbil's veiled threats about future jobs and my status in the country convinced me that it would be simplest and best for our new marriage if I simply agreed. As it was, Hanane and I had some massive fights in the following week, partly because I was ashamed of her shame and partly because I was ashamed of my own stupidity. As soon as I had noticed the blogging error, I tried to delete it and minimize the damage, but since I was now syndicated on Lonely Planet, Facebook, and a couple other places, it was too late. When I saw the American English School secretaries showing each other the pages, I knew it was over and began looking for new teaching jobs in Turkey and Indonesia.

The fact is, I was well over being in Morocco and the American English School in the first place so I can't say I was terribly disappointed. I started asking for freelance writing work online and managed to find a half dozen small scale writing gigs and turn a couple of them into ongoing work so I suddenly didn't have to feel completely stressed out about not having a regular income.

In fact, the 'bonus' from the American English School nearly matched my income so that I was actually put in the position of having an extra month off with pay. Not a bad way to plot out the future. Since we already had our tickets to Turkey on the 23rd of July, we would still go and while we were there, we would scout the country as a place to work and live. In fact, I had a couple of interviews, while we were there. Not certain, but at least something.

We had the time to take a trip Tangiers, staying in a beach house at Playa Blanca. A client of mine had me build a website for the house a few months before and had invited me and Hanane to come and hang out in it with him. We had communal dinners and lots of beach time and the price was certainly right at about 1000 dirhams with food and transport from Fez by train. After that it was back to Fes, back to writing work, and then to Turkey.

In any event, Hanane asked me to stop blogging about her family and it seemed prudent. After all, I'm not alone in this world any longer and it seems my indiscriminately open prose has caused us enough trouble lately. In any event, I stopped blogging about her family, but of course, when you marry

a writer...

Leaving Morocco

It's funny. I thought once I could become a millionaire by 2010. I was barely a thousandaire. I am earning my living writing as a freelancer. It's a lot of work. My eyes and my fingers hurt. Hanane doesn't seem to understand that I have to work to pay our bills. She went to Sefrou for four days. Just took a couple hundred dirhams and went to hang out at her mom's house. We weren't fighting or anything, she just missed her mom. When I told her that I'm thinking of taking a job in either Turkey or Indonesia and will need to go for three months or so without her, she didn't seem particularly fazed.

She just said she'd stay at her mom's house. I was kind of hoping for something, but no, she seemed almost happy about it. I guess I should feel lucky about it. I'm trying to think about this and do the best thing for both of us. I mean of course I want to travel. I want to experience new things. I want to get out of Morocco. I also want to make some money. I want to do better than hiding from my student loans. I want to succeed. I'm almost the same age my friend, Jeff Sugarman was when he had a heart attack and died. I smoke too much even if it's only 10 cigarettes or so a day. I eat too much. I don't exercise. I'm unhappy. I bought some beer and wine when Hanane left, it was totally unenjoyable.

I need to figure out what to do. I'd love to be able to talk about things with Hanane, but it doesn't really work like that. I just have to decide on my own and do it. I guess the point is - where will I enjoy my time more. An Indonesian school wants me to decide right away on a job they've offered, but I want to go to Turkey first. I suppose I could say yes and then make an excuse as to why it won't work. Since I don't know how much we'll spend in Turkey, that's problematic. Will I have enough money left? Shit. I wish it were somehow more clear than it is.

We leave for Turkey on the 24th of July and will be gone until August 9th. I've arranged a job interview in the city of Manisa, Turkey and I think we will be okay for money. We'll see what happens.

Back in Morocco

The decision is made. I took the job in Manisa and Hanane landed a job with the same school. We're back in Morocco now and we've moved out of our apartment in Fez and are spending the last few days I am here at her parents house where I am getting eaten alive by fleas from the sheep. It's Ramadan and I don't feel like it's all that difficult to fast though I find myself thirsty towards the end of the day. A maple syrup cleansing fast is difficult, this fasting from sunup to sunrise is easy.

I will leave for Turkey in two days and Hanane will follow a month later. She wants to spend the rest of Ramadan with her family and I can't wait to get away from the enforced fasting since my spirit isn't really in it. I think that Ramadan needs to be revised and Muslims should have to shut the television and stereos off for the entire month. As it is, the evening break-fast is followed by television which I think causes everyone to miss the point of community that Ramadan should be about. That's just me though.

At the Souidi house the whole family talks to Fatima in Belgium every day on the laptop computer I gave Hanane. Fatima is miserable and her fat husband is mistreating her, no big surprise there. That's what you get when you marry a stranger for a visa. We all get what we deserve. As for me, I'm not sure what I've got or what I deserve. I've bought Hanane's plane tickets and most of our possessions have fallen into the eager hands of her family. I'm slightly bitter about this as we have still been given no wedding presents. It's not the presents I want, it's the idea and the fact that Fatima and the Belgian were given loads of them.

We still fight but not as much though I seem to suffer from intermittent explosive disorder. I'm looking forward to a month apart and a month in Turkey by myself. Ramadan in Morocco is even more boring than Morocco at other times. I think Hanane is probably looking forward to being on her own in Sefrou for a month too, but I'm sure that I'll have to deal with lots of crying over the internet while we

are apart. Not me, but her. There is a small part of me that wonders if she will manage not to come. We'll have to see.

On a funny note, my residence card came through the day before we left for Turkey. It took six months to get processed so it is only good for another six months that I won't be here for. I can't conceive of me ever wanting to stay longer than three months in Morocco in the future, so I probably won't have to go through the process again. In terms of dealing with Moroccan bureaucracy, I do have one last experience to document.

When we filed our marriage papers, they kept my original birth certificate. I wanted it back so a few days before we left for Turkey we went to get it. We had been told that we only needed to ask for it, but the three men and bitchy old woman in the clerks office didn't want to make things simple for us. They sent us to sit and wait for a judge to approve it and they were, quite simply, rude and lazy about it. As we sat, I began to fall into a rage and I went down to harangue them. For some reason, I figured that since they wouldn't understand my insults I would just give them each centime pieces which are the lowest denomination of money in Morocco. Even beggars won't accept them. I handed one to each of them and said, thank you, you work very hard, thank you for your help. The insult was understood loud and clear.

They tried to make me take them back. I refused, they threw them at me, they called security, they called the judge who Hanane was sitting with at this point and the security took me up. Hanane being there always makes things worse. The judge insulted her and me and told me that if I went and apologized he would give me the paper we needed. So I went and apologized, way over the top but not to the main guy who hadn't helped us. The judge had wanted Hanane to go apologize with me, but I refused to let her and told him that she had done nothing. I could see that her annoying sense of hshuma was already battered. So I came back and then the judge said more insulting things and then said he couldn't help me!

Wouldn't it be more like it. I'd known he wouldn't from the start just looking at him. He kept asking Hanane if we had met in a chat room, which to her was a massive insult. We left and went to Turkey and then today, I went back and tried again, this time without Hanane to confuse things by not translating what I say, telling me things are impossible, and in general letting them pull their superiority crap on her. The main man I'd insulted burst out laughing when I walked in, he held out his hand and we shook and said salaams to each other. He asked what I wanted, asked where my wife was, I lied and said she was in Turkey and I needed the birth certificate for my work there.

With peace declared he did what he could have easily done the first time and pulled the paper out of the folder and gave it to me. He also handed me the 20 centime coin I'd insulted him with. He'd been keeping it on his desk for the entire month! I took it back, took my paper, we both laughed, and said goodbye. I found myself actually liking the guy, but man, what an unnecessary bunch of bullshit. Typical of Morocco. Since Hanane wasn't there to become insulted and to not translate what I said, things went much easier. Sometimes I wonder what the hell I've gotten myself into. All the time actually.

I'm not sorry to be leaving Morocco at all. I don't quite understand why anyone would willingly stay here if they don't have to. Those foreigners who choose to live in the medina in Fez are an even bigger mystery to me. I'm most definitely not in love with this place. I suppose me leaving Morocco is a good place to end this particular narrative.

Postscript

Of course, that wouldn't be quite right since it wasn't really the end. Hanane came to Turkey, we both worked at a different American Center and then we found out she was pregnant just about the time her visa was set to expire.

Ultimately, she wanted to have our daughter near her mom and her family. She wanted to be someplace where she understood what the doctors were saying to her and she wanted to learn to be a mother in her own mother country. So we returned.

We named our daughter after the Aya Sofya in Istanbul. The name means saint of wisdom in Greek, but the Moroccan authorities wouldn't let us name our daughter after a church even if it was a mosque and now is a secular monument. So we named her the Moroccan approved Sophia. But, just as my name isn't Vago on any birth certificate, I'm happy that my daughter has an unofficial option. No middle name. I got her American citizenship, but for Hanane, it's much more difficult.

I miss Turkey. I want to go back, but here we are in an apartment filled with furniture not too far from the Souidi house in Sefrou. What in the world have I gotten myself into and am I ever going to manage to escape this country?

Seriously- it's not my Morocco.

Sefrou, Morocco

December 15, 2011