When you travel, people inevitably bug you to see pictures. That always strikes me as odd. Looking at travel photos is just a boring afternoon with slides and a monotonous second cousin droning on about scenery. A picture doesn’t really capture a moment unless you know what you’re doing with the camera, and I certainly don’t. So instead of relying on my subpar photography skills to tell people about the world I saw on Semester at Sea, I write stories. I write moments.

One moment no picture could explain what happened in Morocco, a predominantly Muslim country, on September 11th. This was just days after the scandal involving some nutjob wanting to burn Qurans in Florida. A Moroccan man accosted me, demanding to know if I was American. Trapped. I nodded, ready to duck into a store or find a friend lest anything happen. But instead of a spate of hatred or fire, the man looked at me with eyes of understanding. He said, “You know, we are all one people.” He left on that, moving into a murmuring crowd that suddenly felt much more inviting. So I embrace his words.

“The Price of Soap” is about trust and the collaboration of people. The old saying is that we fear what we don’t understand, and that holds true culturally. But to me, fear is just a part of travelling and life. Without it, there’s no reward. We can be comfortable all our life, but that doesn’t breed passion or growth. That’s what I tell everyone who is undecided on whether or not they want to travel.

Sometimes we take for granted the everyday paradise and comfort of being at home. What we have to realize, though, is that home is only a starting point, and maybe an end. The middle, the adventure, is out there on the horizon.
Despite the distinctive eagle of patriotism emblazoned across the inside of his passport, Derrick Goodwin told most shopkeepers in Morocco that he hailed from Canada. A furtive glance from the accuser under a patchwork awning in the middle of the marketplace maze caused Derrick to swallow hard. But the accusatory hardness of the ruddy, wrinkled face gave way to a yellowed smile that matched the stained teapots on display. Ever since his adventure to Marrakesh, Derrick resorted to dodging his nationality. Not because he was a bad American or embarrassed but, rather, it simply made life easier. It meant people asked fewer questions, children gave fewer stares, and products came priced at fewer dirhams.

Evening crept over the walls of the Old Medina of Casablanca. Walkways no wider than two shoulder widths weaved in and out of the marketplace where Derrick looked at the teapots. An occasional bustle of men moving products made him look over his shoulders instinctively. A string of lights flickered on, stretching back behind him. Derrick ran his right hand over the scratchy surface of one of the teapots. Little specks of yellow dust floated up in front of him.

"Maybe later," he said, turning away from the vendor. The wrinkled man started chattering after him, lowering his price and talking about the quality of the pots. Derrick just mumbled "la" over and over until the teapots receded from view.

The walls of the medina sprang up instead. A white surface inlaid with various designs from brown stones curled its way around the medina, with a few keyhole-like entrances dotting the perimeter. Newer construction stood in the distance, a contrast on the horizon. Strange smells filled the air: a mix of jasmine and standing, putrid water. One
scent would mask another at times, but the overpowering combination was unlike anything Derrick had encountered, even back in Marrakesh. Every city here had its own smell.

The black outline of a palm tree caught his eye. Rick's Café. He imagined Humphrey Bogart just inside the walls, playing out classic American cinema. This would never exist without tourists or the film background, Derrick thought. With a shrug of his shoulders, Derrick walked over to the white building with the inconspicuous sign, hardly even visible from a distance. Before he entered, he turned back to see the medina resting behind him, the energy of the shopkeepers bottled up for the next day. The ocean was not far either, lightly lapping against the shore and sending a fishy smell to the entrance of the café.

Once inside, Derrick glanced around for the bar. Curved arches broke the room into several sections, with light glancing off brass lamps, creating shadows of hanging plants on every white wall. The inner courtyard let in shimmering stars, sparkling over tablecloths and fancy cutlery. This establishment clearly catered to tourists and the more affluent Moroccans, judging from the décor. Past the courtyard and several casually dining patrons stood a sculpted bar reminiscent of that in Casablanca. Palm tree sculptures lined the back of the bar, giving a border to the elaborate glass shelves holding alcohol of every type. Derrick walked over to it just as notes from a piano playing “As Time Goes By” filled the air. A few customers bobbed and hummed to the tune. Derrick sat down and immediately ordered brandy, feeling like a patron from the classic film.

As the barkeep filled his glass, another man sat down next to Derrick and ordered. He towered above Derrick who, granted, was only about 5'7”. The massive man looked over and down at Derrick and gave a warm smile. He looked American, with a white polo shirt that strained against a rotund belly and
khaki shorts. Sweat beaded on the brow of his reddened face, occasionally slipping down his full cheeks and onto the polo collar.

"You look exhausted, kid," the man said with a slight snort. Derrick nodded a little and saw the huge man put out a hand. Derrick shook it. "The name’s Daniel Gilbert. I’m from Texas, you know." The southern twang resonated with Derrick as he took a sip from his brandy. He coughed a little from the strength of the alcohol.

"Derrick. Derrick Goodwin." The big man grinned. After only interacting with Moroccans for the past week, Derrick felt almost clumsy with his social niceties.

"We’ve done got good initials, huh?" the man chuckled. Derrick gave him a confused look, but the simple coincidence quickly flooded over him. Derrick laughed nervously.

Derrick felt a little weight released from his shoulders, as if his nationality was a ball and chain pulling him into the sand dunes outside of Marrakesh.

"Yeah. Best ones around." Another gulp of brandy. The piano stopped playing, leaving the air buzzing with light chatter. One of the waiters moved the lamp off a table, casting light across Derrick’s face, forcing him to blink. The Texan seemed interested in continuing the conversation as he ordered another drink. Derrick casually mentioned his backpacking trip across Europe, which had eventually led to crossing into Africa.

"So where you originally from, Mr. Goodwin?" the giant asked as the piano came back to life. Derrick shifted a bit, still a little uncomfortable. But this hulk of a man seemed genuine. He wasn’t out for money or a trade. He didn’t need Derrick’s dirham to buy bread; carried no trinkets that he claimed to have made by hand.
“Seattle, actually,” Derrick managed. The large man nodded and threw back some of his drink. Derrick felt a little weight released from his shoulders, as if his nationality was a ball and chain pulling him into the sand dunes outside of Marrakesh. Talking to another American snapped the tether.

“You travelin’ alone, friend?” the man asked. Derrick nodded with the sound of the piano growing louder every second. The pair moved in a little closer to hear each other. Derrick could feel the radiating heat from the man’s heaving chest. The booming voice dropped a few levels in volume.

“That’s not terribly safe around here with these Moslems.” Derrick fought the urge to roll his eyes.

“I’m not too worried. After Marrakesh, I can handle just about anything.” They both chuckled a bit as the bartender came back to freshen their drinks.

“Well, I’ve got nowhere to be. Why don’t you tell me about it?” The big man leaned back a bit and grinned, teeth browned from soda. It was strikingly different from the pearly white teeth of the children in Spain, and the yellow stain of the Moroccan shop vendors.

“It all started with a train ride…”

Sitting there was like being in a tiny, cylindrical oven, surrounded by hundreds of other people, cooking, melting into the background. The smell of sweaty bodies hung in the air, suffocating. Many of the Moroccans huddled in around me seemed impervious to it all. A pair of women sat across from me, never looking me in the eye and shifting uncomfortably every few minutes. The train screeched to a halt in the middle of an endless field.

A couple of men walked up the side of the train, looking under the carriage, stopping every few feet to chatter at each other. No one else on the train seemed alarmed or confused, so I settled back into my pool of sweat and tried to
close my eyes. The heat was so uncomfortable that I couldn't even sleep it off. The businessman sitting next to me had such thick cologne on that I couldn't keep a clear head. I felt trapped, in a way, and the train sat in the field for over an hour.

I awoke with a start. The train lurched forward as I realized I had finally drifted off to sleep. So much for that, anyway. My friend the businessman was now gone, replaced by a teenager fiddling with an ancient tape player covered in dust. He noticed my awakening and motioned toward my feet and shook his head, pointing out the back of the train car. It took a second for me to shake off the sleep but, once I came around, I realized what the teenager was saying. My travel bag was gone. I had placed it at my feet at the beginning of the train ride. All that remained were my dusty hiking boots. My heart dropped to my stomach.

"Goddamn, where did..." I realized mid-sentence that my outburst had startled everyone around me. The teenager pointed at the back of the car again and I stood up, shirt sticking to my back. I grabbed my backpack, which I had kept on my lap, and started moving back down the aisles of the train.

Eyes followed me as I went. Most were curious. What is this small white guy doing, pushing past everyone in such a hurry? Children pulled at their parents to try to follow me. Women averted their glances just enough to not be overtly conspicuous. Row after row of torn, fabric-cushioned chairs stretched back until I came to the final car. I peered through the windows between cars to see only two men in the compartment.

A rush of air as I changed between cars. Clouds of burnt coal swirled above me. The constant rhythm of the track undulated below. I pulled open the final door and shut it behind me, my ears still buzzing from the outside wind.

Both men looked up at me, puzzled. One had a finely trimmed goatee against his sweating face. The other was large,
with broad shoulders concealed under a sweat stained white
dress shirt. They both stood, as if to greet me. My travel bag
sat on the seat next to the smaller man.

"That's mine," I said firmly, pointing at the khaki pouch.
Both men looked me in the eyes and grinned knowingly.

"La, mine," the small man returned, putting his hand
on his chest. I shook my head, but the large man lumbered
toward me. I shrugged it off and reached for my bag. The
two men grabbed for it as well, spilling some of its contents
to the ground. My bottle of shampoo exploded on the floor,
leaving a trail of liquid down the aisle. The larger man slipped
on it and cracked his face on the arm of one of the seats. The
small man put his hand on my face, still tugging at the bag, and
started digging his nails into my forehead. I fell back, surprised
by the sudden jabbing pain. The small man gathered up the
fallen articles and crossed his arms over the bag.

"La, la afham inglizi!" he shouted. Of course he didn't
speak English. That much was obvious.

I stood, and was about to go for my bag again when
the large man smacked me across the face. A buzzing in my
temple left me sprawled out in the adjacent train seat. The
men looked down at me nervously and quickly made their way
out of the train car, back toward the front. I attempted picking
myself up but was still too dizzy. I drifted off as I felt a little
trickle of blood run down my forehead and sting my eye.

"What a story, kid!" the Texan exclaimed, throwing
his hand against his knee. "You done fought with those
Moslems." Derrick laughed a bit with him and ordered
another drink. Many of the patrons were now filing out of
the restaurant. The night quieted, but the Texan was more
and more boisterous every time he opened his mouth.

"Well, there's a whole lot more..."

"Oh, I bet. Let me tell you about Fes, though," the big
man interrupted. “The lady and I were up there just last week and had to chase around this guy named Sa’id.”

I woke up early in the morning while the missus tried to scrape out just a little more shut-eye. The hotel we stayed in, Ibis I think it was, stood only a few blocks away from the medina. I knew I had to go there to pick up tickets for a camel trek that would take us to Marrakesh. We were supposed to be traveling through the Dades Valley or something like that.

A couple of boys followed me up the road into the medina. I think they like watching a big old white man stroll through with a cowboy hat or something. Oh, yeah, I’m not wearing that hat now, but I’ll get to that. Anyway, I done found the entrance with the guides milling around and one of them took my arm and asked where I was heading. Now, I’m no fool, but I didn’t know where this camel trek place was so, against my better judgment, I took him with me.

This guy had on those long, flowing white robe things, the whole getup. A thick black unibrow, too, poor guy. But he had good English and seemed an okay sort. Took me straight to the little stand advertising the camel treks me and my wife had found the day before. The business was built right into the white outer wall of the medina, with little red flags and posters of the desert all around. Another Moroccan sat at the booth with a wide grin while I paid my guide some ungodly amount of dirham. The guide wandered off with a spring in his step, ducking through all those tents and such.

The sun was damn hot that day, and even my hat didn’t seem enough to keep it out of my eyes. The market sure was busy for the morning, and it seemed like these guys fed off the energy of the sun. The man now sitting in front of me wore one of them white collared shirts you was talking about. Trying to look all official and whatnot. He wasn’t the one I booked the tour with, but I assured myself it made no
difference. I just needed to pick up the tickets.

"Howdy," I said. "I bought tickets for the camel ride to Marrakech here yesterday." The man pulled out a little box and started rifling through some pieces of paper.

"Your name, sir," he asked. Or at least I think that's what he said. All these Moroccans just mumble and so forth. Can't hardly understand them.

"Should be under Gilbert, from Texas," I boomed. "Best place in the world," I assured him. He smiled and shut the little box of papers.

"Oh, you're American? I thought so." He nodded and started scribbling on a notepad with a tiny pencil. He handed the paper to me. "Sa'id has your tickets. He will find you in the market square."

"What's that now?" I was all sorts of confused. How is this Sa'id going to find me? Why does he have my tickets? Why did it matter that I was American? These Moroccans made no sense. The guy at the stall assured me this is how business sometimes worked here, and that the tickets were still being processed. He held out his hand expectantly. I gave him ten dirham and huffed a bit. Everyone here is just out for our money, you know?

The marketplace in the medina is crazy. Guys running around with snakes and monkeys lined the stores...

So I walked back to the hotel and woke up my wife. She wasn't real happy about that. When I tried to explain the situation, she was even more heated. Threw a pillow at me, even! She also complained about the air conditioner in the room dripping on her feet in the middle of the night. I couldn't even tell if the darned thing was on. So she changed into one of her big old sundresses and we checked out of the hotel.
The marketplace in the medina is crazy. Guys running around with snakes and monkeys lined the stores and attracted all the less savvy tourists. We sat in a little open air café that bordered the market, sipping on water and eating kebabs. I know, kebabs for breakfast? It was the only thing I could understand on the menu. Our little metal chairs were already warming in the morning heat, and my wife complained about it every chance she could.

After sitting there for about half an hour, some guy walked up to us like we’re best pals. He patted me on the back and put the tickets on the table.

“You Sa’id?” I asked, turning the tickets over in with my fingers. And by tickets, these were really just scraps of paper with Arabic scrawled over them in pencil. The man looked down at me and laughed a little.

“La. I am Sa’ids brother, Jawad.” I put out my hand to shake his but he didn’t seem to notice. None of these guys seems to notice. That’s how I knew you were American. But anyway, I stood up with tickets in hand and motioned for my wife to do the same. “If you follow me, I will take you to Sa’id. He will take you to the camels.”

“Oh, no thanks. I know where the place is,” I said, sliding him a little money to get off my back. He gave me a suspicious look and wandered off. I watched as he weaved back into the crowd, the sun flying high above us. My wife tugged at my shirt and gave me an angry look.

“What do you mean you know where the place is?”

“Hun, you don’t let strangers take you anywhere around here. He could have robbed us blind.” My wife rolled her eyes and sighed while I looked around for a store with some kind of map. One storekeeper watched as I scoured his shack and moved over.

He didn’t really know much English. I think he was asking about what I wanted to find. I tried explaining a map
to him, with a lot of hand gestures and miming. It was all lost on him. He ended up showing me a bunch of paintings of sand dunes. I left the shop empty-handed, my wife milling around the next store’s teapots. She tapped her foot in the dirt and looked at me with her usually exasperated expression. My advice: never get married, kid.

Anyways, we walked around for another hour or so, lost to no end. I couldn’t even remember which way we entered that medina. It’s got so many mazes of streets and buildings that you would have to have GPS with you to not get lost. Well, we ended up back at the market café, my wife in a huff and more kebabs on the table. Then that kid Jawad showed up again, waving at me and walking right up to us.

“You still here? Camels leave soon.” He motioned for us to come with him. “I show you, come.” My wife jumped up, so I really had no choice. We followed the Moroccan past spices and snails boiling in pots. We walked under a number of blanket awnings and through the tangle of pathways. Eventually we came to the door of a little shop with a bunch of soaps and incense. He shuffled us in and told us to look around.

I wandered around for a bit and noticed the entrance was the only way out. Two angry-looking guys blocked the door. My wife seemed oblivious to the trap, but I was on to the ruse. They wanted me to buy something, probably at twice the actual value, just to get out. The owner of the shop showed my wife a number of bath salts, chattering to her half in Arabic, half in French. She just nodded and rolled her eyes.

Jawad came over to me and asked if I wanted to buy anything. I said something about a chunk of soap on one of the shelves. He told me the price. Eighty dirham for an ugly square piece of soap. That’s ridiculous. But I didn’t say anything about it. My wife had picked out some incense and brought them to me since she knew I was the one who did all
the haggling. I grabbed those and the soap and brought out two hundred dirham.

“What are you doing, Dan?” My wife exclaimed, almost laughing at the outrageous amount of money I was willing to spend. I pulled her in close and whispered about the men at the door. For the first time that day she shut up, overtaken with the danger of the situation. The smell of the incense seemed to make the room even tenser. I held the money out for a moment, and the shopkeeper grinned. He swiped it quickly, his brown fingers rough against my palms. Jawad nodded to the men at the door, who stepped aside.

“Now, let me take you to my brother,” he exclaimed. And you know what, he did. Jawad walked us back through the maze and into a little plaza with a bunch of other tourists. Sa’id greeted us and took our tickets, not even bothering to look at them for confirmation. By golly, we were in Marrakesh two days later after riding those uncomfortable excuses for horses everywhere. We stopped in here for our flight back to the states.

Derrick and Dan sat around a small table now, eating lamb kebabs. The story had whetted their appetites. A new rush of patrons filled the establishment with dancing and dining, gin and good times. A waiter filled Derrick’s sparkling crystal glass with water from a brand new Pellegrino bottle. He thought about the terrible fights with brackish water in Marrakesh. Worse still were the resulting visits to the hole in the ground many Moroccans used for a toilet. Derrick shook off the memory of paying two dirham to use a public bathroom and turned back to the Texan.

“Well, as I said before, the train was only the beginning.”

I woke with a damp cloth over my forehead. Everything appeared wavy and distant. Someone spoke above
me, whispering sounds I couldn't comprehend. The light bent over my eyes and eventually evened out, an elaborate copper ceiling reflecting down on me. My legs hung down off an opulent couch with pillows everywhere. My backpack stood on another pillow that sat on the floor. Before I could do anything, a young man entered and knelt beside me.

“Oh, you’re awake. Are you all right?” I blinked at him questioningly and stumbled over my words.

“I, umm... what happened? Where am I?” The man dabbed my face with the cloth and I saw it was soaked with blood. Memories from the train flushed my body into a panic. “I have to go,” I proclaimed as I got up and grabbed for my bag.

“You really shouldn’t be out in this heat with a head wound,” the man said with a look of concern. The sea of magenta and gold couches made me dizzy. I steadied myself on a round table with raised edges where a teapot sat in waiting. The steam from the pot rose up, releasing a minty scent. My hands grasped at the wood of the little table and drew my fingers across the fine grains. The sensory overload was too much for my mind to handle and I stumbled to the floor.

The man pleaded with me to stay, but I tuned him out. I didn't trust any of them anymore. I patted my pocket to make sure my wallet and passport were still in place, and stumbled out of the room with my backpack. The man followed me as far as the front door, where I tripped out into the afternoon sun, world spinning.

I found myself wandering in no particular direction. The sights and sounds of the medina in the distance beckoned me further. A few people looked at me with concerned faces, a large gash still running up the side of my face and forehead. Time passed without notice, as one second I was a mile from the striking walls of the marketplace, and the next I was staring at the souks across the Djemaa el Fna. Koutobia Mosque rose
in the distance, the falling sun glancing around it with rays of brilliance. Somehow the evening hours had crept in already.

Activity everywhere. Men scrambled around the market to take down day stalls. Giant pots rolled in, along with tables and chairs. Snake charmers disappeared, and came back with new attractions. Henna artists gave way to glow-in-the-dark jewelry sellers. Dust kicked up from the whole of the square, making everything fuzzy. Lamps glowed into the now darkening sky. Men and women sat down to dinner at the new stalls. Tourists gagged through bowls of snails that had boiled in the giant pots. Slaughtered animal carcasses hung from restaurant awnings. A person didn’t need a menu here. You simply pointed at what you wanted to eat.

My head started to clear out with the tiny bit of cool air provided by the retreating sun. I felt the bruise on my face and winced a little. One man stared right at me, probably wondering how I ended up in the middle of this torrent of activity. I wondered that as well. My hotel reservation had been in my travel bag. I still had my wallet and passport, but no change of clothes, and only a little food and water in my backpack.

“You look lost. You American?” a man asked from behind me. He didn’t grin like most of the men. He just looked inquisitive. His English was fairly easily discernible. With those facts combined, I let my guard down for a moment.

“Umm, yeah... I... don’t know where I’m going.”

“Ah, eternally lost? Like a metaphor.” He tilted his head as I smiled a bit.

“Not quite.” I stumbled in a circle and he followed, gently nudging me away from the crowds and off to the side of the square.

“Well, I don’t understand. Would you like directions?” He stood there, the mosque towering up behind him. His eyes...
had a little light in them. He was curious. It felt different from the people on the train or the shopkeepers when haggling.

"Umm, sure. Train station?" I decided I could try and retrace what had happened from the station. My hotel was in that area as well. The man nodded and took my hand. That startled me at first. I had never held a man's hand before. Something totally effeminate in the U.S. stood for something different in Morocco. I began seeing several other men walking hand in hand. A little detail I will never forget. His hand was impossibly soft. The act only bothered me for a short while. It eventually felt safe and almost natural.

We shot past the souks, twisting through little alleys and heading out toward a large street. A bent old sign with "Avenue Mohammed V" pointed down the street covered with cars and people. Carriages drawn by old, white, sickly horses trudged along with tourists in tow. Crowds moved in and out, closing in on the market square. My guide and I moved the opposite direction, large gates for the medina in the distance.

We took a turn into another little maze with hundreds of doors. Many of them had large brass knockers in the shape of hands. Pink and blue paints dominated the winding walls as we went deeper. I could see the large outer wall rise up as we got closer to the gates. The tiny walkways gave way to a long path that ended at the wall in a T. We headed down the path to the intersection just as the sun disappeared completely.

Blocked in. The two paths branching from the T both had locked gates. My guide let go of my hand and tried opening both of them. He banged on one loudly and looked back at me.

"Sorry, friend." I smiled and said it was okay, motioning back down the path. We could easily go another way on the main road. That's when the realization hit me. The loud bangs on the gate attracted attention. Three men exited doors
in the alley. My guide joined them in forming a wall in front of my one direction of escape. The buildings seemed to grow around me, cutting off any connection I had to the outside world. A light flickered on above the group of men in front of me, revealing shiny little blades in their hands.

“Okay, what do you want?” I said slowly, raising my hands in surrender. The other men looked to the guide, who spoke in Arabic back at them. The men exchanged a few words before returning their gaze to me.

“Your money, your watch, your shoes, and your passport.” I rifled through my pockets to pull out everything. I then stepped out of my shoes and kicked them over to the men.

“Do you really need my passport? I... I really can’t.” I dropped six hundred dirham in front of the men, who almost salivated at the sight of my hotel fees, taxi, and train money. I stripped off my watch and dropped it in the pile.

“Yes, your passport, too.” The little navy blue book plopped down on the pile and one of the men gathered it all up. The guide waved at me and motioned for his men to follow him. They disappeared into one of the many houses, the easiest escape for any criminal in history. My face flushed and blood pounded up to my wound. I gingerly stepped over stones and dirt back down the path, back into the main street of the medina.

Around midnight — and I’m guessing since my watch now hung around the wrist of some criminal — I finally found the train station. A huge glass entrance greeted me. A bronze star adorned the front façade along the glass. Above it all, the words “Gare de Marrakech” could be found etched into the top face of the building. Tiny tiles covered the walls in a mosaic of color subdued by darkness. I tugged open the glass doors, my eyelids growing heavier with every step.
The building was mostly empty. Trains didn’t run at night, though there were a few workers milling about. One man sat inside the little glass box where the tickets were sold. The high vaulted ceiling of the station echoed with the scratching of a cleaning lady’s shuffling shoes on the tiled floor. My bare feet seemed silent in comparison. I stopped in front of the glass box and realized it was no use. My pockets were empty. My debit card had been in my travel bag. I had no way of getting back to my comfortable hotel room in Casablanca.

The man in the glass booth stared at me with inquisitive eyes. I shrugged and headed back into the wide expanse of the train station. Darkened shops lined the outside edge of the building. There was even a McDonald’s in one corner, advertising a burger with egg on it. Green, contoured benches lined a few columns near the edges of the room. I sat down on one and stared at the floor. Colors started to mix as I drifted in and out. Before I could make any more decisions or come up with a plan, I slipped into dreams.

Commotion. I jumped at the noise of the early morning train station. People bustled past me and announcements came over an intercom. A woman sat on the bench across from me, sending me an occasional glance.

“Hey, it’s you.” I turned to see an unfamiliar man peering down at me.

“Give me? You don’t have to give me anything. Don’t you trust any of us?”

“Sorry, I think you have the wrong guy.” I turned away, clutching my backpack and rocking back and forth a bit. My whole body stung and my head was still throbbing from the previous day.

“Here. I think this is yours.” The man put something down next to me on the bench. I glanced over my shoulder
slowly and couldn't believe my eyes. A passport. I opened it quickly and found my familiar picture. The man nodded knowingly and smiled.

"Thanks. I umm, well I don't have anything to give you."

"Give me? You don't have to give me anything. Don't you trust any of us?" He chuckled a bit and walked off. Still bewildered, I sat up and continued to rifle through the passport. Stuck between the last few pages I found about thirty Euros. Easily enough to exchange for dirham and a ticket back to Casablanca. I picked up a new wallet on the way back.

The Texan sat in awe and raised his glass, finishing it off with a flourish. "What a story, kid. Damn, you lucked out." They both laughed a bit.

"I sure did."

"Hard to tell who you can trust around here, huh?" The Texan dropped some money on the table for the waiter and stood up. "The missus will probably be looking for me."

"It was a pleasure," Derrick said, standing as well. The men shook hands and the Texan walked off. Derrick sat back down as another waiter took away the glasses, plates, and tip. Derrick sighed and looked around the room. Most everyone had left once more as the bar began to shut down. Ten minutes until closing. The piano sat dormant in the corner. Workers stripped cloths from tables and folded them into tiny, cream-colored squares.

Derrick closed his eyes for a second. The sound of a waiter running up to him brought him back around. It was a little man with big, white eyes. He shook a little as he pointed toward the door of the café. Then he tried his best to talk.

"Sir, did he take your wallet?" Derrick looked at him dumbfounded and patted his pocket. The familiar bulge jutted
out reassuringly. He laughed nervously.

“Nope. Right here in my pocket. He’s my friend.”

“Well, I tried to stop him. I could have swore he took your wallet.” The man lingered, and Derrick smirked a bit.

“Here, I’ll show you.” Derrick reached into his pocket and pulled something out, dropping it on the table with a thud. The blood rushed out of Derrick’s face. There was no wallet, just a square chunk of ugly, Moroccan soap.