

Djemma el Fna

I walked through an ornate horseshoe archway and out into the vast, thronged, terracotta-red square of the Djema el Fra as a motorbike began revving up a side street, getting louder as it got closer, but instead of turning into view - it turned into the opening tone of a Muezzin warming up his throat, through a microphone, high up in the Koutoubia Minaret, the tower of the Ben Youssef Mosque, where shoals of Saharan swallows circled and the evening sun filtered through a groomed pelt of cloud.

I walked past the Arabic storytellers animating epics under parasols and freelance dentists sitting stiffly at wooden tables piled with extracted teeth and pairs of pliers, and I came to a guru-looking guy with long grey hair and a Santa-beard sitting cross-legged on the ground playing an instrument - a stringed brush pole attached to a wooden box - through a distorted vox amp. Behind him a fence of percussionists were rapping tablas, and out in front a dervish of dancers spun in ankle-length lime-green kaftans while rattling tin castanets.

From somewhere within the audience a woodpecker's beak began pecking into a tree. A moment later the head of a shoe-shiner emerged, tapping a wooden polish brush against his wooden shoe-shine box as he prowled along the front row. Then, from behind me a klaxon blared out and I looked back to see a tea-seller - clad head-to-toe in gnome-red and armed with a bullet belt of brass beakers and a cauldron of tea harnessed onto his back - threaten a mob of taunting children with the muzzle of his tea dispenser.

I walked on, past morose monkeys and polaroid-pythons, and stopped with a gathering of people watching a snake-charmer playing a Moroccan clarinet while sitting cross-legged in front of an open basket. A moment later he stopped playing and reached into the basket and took out a smooth white stone the size of a duck egg and held it aloft for all to see. As he hurled the rock up into the air all eyes followed it. Like a ridge of sunflowers blown by a breeze we searched the sky, and waited.

Nothing came back down.