

Little Boy Retard

Marrakech, Morocco

by Nick Mistretta

The café overlooks a large parking lot surrounded by narrow roads and lining the roads are shops of all kinds, but not the touristy sort. Metal shops and wood workers, motorcycle repair, tailors, shops that fix widgets and gadgets and another that sells the thingamijiggets that connect the widgets to the gadgets. The city's upper class come in nice cars and wave condescendingly through the mess at a blue-jacketed attendant. Men pushing carriages of scrap and horses pulling carriages of men. Ancient bicycles, mopeds from 1970s' America. Cats nervously jumping across the street like frogs. And in the middle of this pit a little boy retard begs convulsively for his dinner. He never sees the moon. He contorts his broken body up to the shiny elite before the cars even stop, nearly getting sucked under a tire, but he is relentless and pursues the unflappably apathetic with great gusto. He doesn't know any better. A man gets out of a car and ignores with no pity and no money, just gathers up his youngster out the back seat and up into his loving arms. Wifey gets out next, also ignoring, and the three of them go bounding carefree, and what a lovely sight to see the family unit enjoying themselves on a cool Saturday night in Marrakech.

Little Boy Retard wrangles his body next to the parked car frozen and watches them walk away and never wonders why he wasn't born healthy to better circumstance. He doesn't think that way. He's not capable. But somewhere deep inside he feels a twinge of pain and his heart becomes heavy and without knowing why or understanding these feelings he slunches and sags his tortured body into a moment of sadness. It's in his eyes. A car alarm goes off, and his joy is restored and he dances a wild jig, kicking jumping yelling, then spins three times like a top in a clockwise spasm and falls to the ground. Another boy tries to help him back onto his feet, but he just hangs and swings on the boy's arm like a spoiled American child who doesn't want to walk through the shopping mall any longer. Little Boy Retard doesn't want up, he can't face it anymore and he's too dumb to cry out. Who would listen anyway? People walk by and turn away or wiggle an arm to avoid his contact or *shoo* him away like a stupid animal. He is an animal. He gets to his feet and struggles over to the parking lot attendant who says something. "Get lost kid. Get back over there and beg." And with the wave of a hand, "*Shoo!*" Probably his father. He does what he is told. He doesn't know any better. Then the whole miserable cycle repeats itself, including the same damn car alarm and the same idiot dance and tumble. I force my attention away and eventually lose him in the crowd. The next day I left for Essaouira.