

## Leaving Beirut

Roger Waters

So we left Beirut Willa and I  
He headed East to Baghdad and the rest of it  
I set out North  
I walked the five or six miles to the last of the street lamps  
And hunkered in the curb side dusk  
Holding out my thumb  
In no great hope at the ramshackle procession of home bound traffic  
Success!  
An ancient Mercedes 'dolmus '  
The ubiquitous, Arab, shared taxi drew up  
I turned out my pockets and shrugged at the driver  
" J'ai pas de l'argent "  
" Venez! " A soft voice from the back seat  
The driver lent wearily across and pushed open the back door  
I stooped to look inside at the two men there  
One besuited, bespectacled, moustached, irritated, distant, late  
The other, the one who had spoken,  
Frail, fifty five-  
ish, bald, sallow, in a short sleeved pale blue cotton shirt  
With one biro in the breast pocket  
A clerk maybe, slightly sunken in the seat  
"Venez!" He said again, and smiled  
"Mais j'ai pas de l'argent"  
"Oui, Oui, d'accord, Venez!"

Are these the people that we should bomb  
Are we so sure they mean us harm  
Is this our pleasure, punishment or crime  
Is this a mountain that we really want to climb  
The road is hard, hard and long  
Put down that two by four  
This man would never turn you from his door  
Oh George! Oh George!  
That Texas education must have fucked you up when you were very small

He beckoned with a small arthritic motion of his hand  
Fingers together like a child waving goodbye  
The driver put my old Hofner guitar in the boot with my rucksack  
And off we went  
" Vous etes Francais, monsieur? "  
" Non, Anglais "  
" Ah! Anglais "  
" Est-ce que vous parlais Anglais, Monsieur? "  
"Non, je regrette"  
And so on  
In small talk between strangers, his French alien but correct  
Mine halting but eager to please  
A lift, after all, is a lift  
Late moustache left us brusquely  
And some miles later the dolmus slowed at a crossroads lit by a single light  
bulb  
Swung through a U-turn and stopped in a cloud of dust  
I opened the door and got out  
But my benefactor made no move to follow  
The driver dumped my guitar and rucksack at my feet  
And waving away my thanks returned to the boot  
Only to reappear with a pair of alloy crutches

Which he leaned against the rear wing of the Mercedes.  
He reached into the car and lifted my companion out  
Only one leg, the second trouser leg neatly pinned beneath a vacant hip  
" Monsieur, si vous voulez, ca sera un honneur pour nous  
Si vous venez avec moi a la maison pour manger avec ma femme "

When I was 17 my mother, bless her heart, fulfilled my summer dream  
She handed me the keys to the car  
We motored down to Paris, fuelled with Dexedrine and booze  
Got bust in Antibes by the cops  
And fleeced in Naples by the wops  
But everyone was kind to us, we were the English dudes  
Our dads had helped them win the war  
When we all knew what we were fighting for  
But now an Englishman abroad is just a US stooge  
The bulldog is a poodle snapping round the scoundrel's last refuge

"Ma femme", thank God! Monopod but not queer  
The taxi drove off leaving us in the dim light of the swinging bulb  
No building in sight  
What the hell

"Merci monsieur"

"Bon, Venez!"

His faced creased in pleasure, he set off in front of me  
Swinging his leg between the crutches with agonising care  
Up the dusty side road into the darkness  
After half an hour we'd gone maybe half a mile  
When on the right I made out the low profile of a building  
He called out in Arabic to announce our arrival  
And after some scuffling inside a lamp was lit  
And the changing angle of light in the wide crack under the door  
Signalled the approach of someone within  
The door creaked open and there, holding a biblical looking oil lamp  
Stood a squat, moustached woman, stooped smiling up at us  
She stood aside to let us in and as she turned  
I saw the reason for her stoop  
She carried on her back a shocking hump  
I nodded and smiled back at her in greeting, fighting for control  
The gentleness between the one-legged man and his monstrous wife  
Almost too much for me

Is gentleness too much for us  
Should gentleness be filed along with empathy  
We feel for someone else's child  
Every time a smart bomb does its sums and gets it wrong  
Someone else's child dies and equities in defence rise  
America, America, please hear us when we call  
You got hip-hop, be-bop, hustle and bustle  
You got Atticus Finch  
You got Jane Russell  
You got freedom of speech  
You got great beaches, wildernesses and malls  
Don't let the might, the Christian right, fuck it all up  
For you and the rest of the world

They talked excitedly  
She went to take his crutches in routine of care  
He chiding, gestured  
We have a guest  
She embarrassed by her faux pas  
Took my things and laid them gently in the corner  
"Du the?"  
We sat on meagre cushions in one corner of the single room

The floor was earth packed hard and by one wall a raised platform  
Some six foot by four covered by a simple sheet, the bed  
The hunchback busied herself with small copper pots over an open hearth  
And brought us tea, hot and sweet  
And so to dinner  
Flat, unleavened bread, + thin  
Cooked in an iron skillet over the open hearth  
Then folded and dipped into the soft insides of female sea urchins  
My hostess did not eat, I ate her dinner  
She would hear of nothing else, I was their guest  
And then she retired behind a curtain  
And left the men to sit drinking thimbles full of Arak  
Carefully poured from a small bottle with a faded label  
Soon she reappeared, radiant  
Carrying in her arms their pride and joy, their child.  
I'd never seen a squint like that  
So severe that as one eye looked out the other disappeared behind its nose

Not in my name, Tony, you great war leader you  
Terror is still terror, whosoever gets to frame the rules  
History's not written by the vanquished or the damned  
Now we are Genghis Khan, Lucretia Borghia, Son of Sam  
In 1961 they took this child into their home  
I wonder what became of them  
In the cauldron that was Lebanon  
If I could find them now, could I make amends?  
How does the story end?

And so to bed, me that is, not them  
Of course they slept on the floor behind a curtain  
Whilst I lay awake all night on their earthen bed  
Then came the dawn and then their quiet stirrings  
Careful not to wake the guest  
I yawned in great pretence  
And took the proffered bowl of water heated up and washed  
And sipped my coffee in its tiny cup  
And then with much "merci-ing" and bowing and shaking of hands  
We left the woman to her chores  
And we men made our way back to the crossroads  
The painful slowness of our progress accentuated by the brilliant morning light  
The dolmus duly reappeared  
My host gave me one crutch and leaning on the other  
Shook my hand and smiled  
"Merci, monsieur," I said  
" De rien "  
" And merci a votre femme, elle est tres gentille "  
Giving up his other crutch  
He allowed himself to be folded into the back seat again  
"Bon voyage, monsieur," he said  
And half bowed as the taxi headed south towards the city  
I turned North, my guitar over my shoulder  
And the first hot gust of wind  
Quickly dried the salt tears from my young cheeks.