

Roger Waters - Leaving Beirut

Leaving Beirut

"Leaving Beirut" (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 " (I have no money).
"Venez! " A soft voice from the back seat (Come on).
The driver lent wearily across and pushed open the back door.
I stooped to look inside at the two men there,
One be-suited, 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 (Come on).
"Mais j'ai pas de l'argent" (But I have no money).
"Oui, Oui, d'accord, Venez!" (Yes, yes, okay, come on!)
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? " (Are you French, sir?)

" Non, Anglais " (No, English)

" Ah! Anglais " (Ah, English)

" Est-ce que vous parlais Anglais, Monsieur? " (Do you speak English sir)

"Non, je regrette" (No, I' m sorry)

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, (Sir, if you please).

ca sera un honneur pour nous (we would be honoured to have you).

Si vous venez avec moi a la maison (as a guest to share).

pour manger avec ma femme " (my wife and I' s meal).

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" (Thank you sir).

"Bon, Venez!" (Right come on).

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, wafer 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.
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?

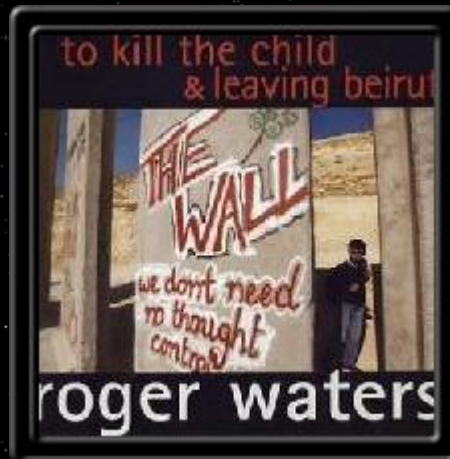
And so to bed, me that is, not them.
Of course, they slept on the floor behind a curtain,
Whilst I lay awake all night on their earthen bed.
Then came the dawn, and then their quiet stirrings,
Careful not to wake the guest.
I yawned in great pretence,
And took the proffered bowl of water heated up, and 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 (Thank you sir).
" De rien" (You' re welcome).
" And merci a votre femme, (And thanks to your wife) .
elle est tre gentille" (She is very kind).

Giving up his other crutch,
He allowed himself to be folded into the back seat again.

" Bon voyage, monsieur," he said (Have a nice trip, sir).

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.



This song was released by Columbia (US) & Sony (Japan) in 2004. It was one of 2 tracks on a single.

