

Bruce Cockburn

"Use Me While You Can"

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There's a black and white crow
on the back of a two-toned sheep
in a field of broken yellow stalks
below looming cliffs.
High above the plains
little grey houses blend
with giant jagged boulders
and pale weathered stumps.
Life in the ghost of the bush.
Wind whips the acacias and strange forked palms
That cluster around the water hole
Suddenly, out of the blowing sand
A milk-white camel appears.
Turbaned rider, blue robe billowing,
bounces with the shambling trot;
wears a sword and a rifle on his back,
and hanging from his neck, a transistor radio...
You blink and like ghosts, they're gone
Under the wan disc of sand-masked sun
A woman grins - spits expertly
Into the path of a struggling black beetle
Six feet away
Hoists her water bucket onto her head
And strides off up the trail...
Sun a steel ball glowing
Behind endless blowing sand
Sun a steel ball glowing
Dust of fallen empires slowly flowing through my hands
Use me while you can
Pearl held in black fingers
Is the moon behind dry trees
Pearl held in black fingers
Bird inside the rib cage is beating to be free
Use me while you can
I've had breakfast in New Orleans
Dinner in Timbuktu
I've lived as a stranger in my own house, too
Dark hand waves in lamplight
Cowrie shell patterns change
And nothing will be the same again
Bullet in a sandstorm
Looking for a place to land

Bullet in a sandstorm
Full heart beats an empty one
In the deck they dealt to man
Use me while you can

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