VOICE SEPTEMBER 4, 1978

Morocco by Moonlight

By David Tipmore

CASABLANCA—I am writing you of Abdellah Boulouyout, the Moroccan, my newest and most exciting friend, whose acquaintance I made while riding a Spanish train through Castile. We shared a compartment with two aging vacationers and a forward-seeming French girl. Under terrible, obscuring sheets of rain, Abdellah slept intermittently, holding his arms tightly against his yellow polyester shirt imprinted with butterflies. He snored delicately every now and then, his head bouncing against the back of the seat—a head composed mainly of two eccentrically large black eyes and a set of dark, artless curls, a head of a certain ethnic stature guaranteed to thrill tired American blood. I took from a green plastic net bag two apples and a loaf of bread. Abdellah awakened. I spoke to him for the first time, offering him some food. He smiled at me curiously and then explained, in the most broken French, that it was August and August was Ramadan, the holy month of the Muslim year, during which devout Moroccans don't eat or drink or smoke or engage in any physical pleasure until after sundown. The French girl giggled at my ignorance. Abdellah asked me where I was going. Tangier, I said. He asked me if I had friends there, to which I explained, in the most broken French, that yes, I did, but that they were not yet back from a trip to Portugal.

"Where will you stay?" he asked.

"At a hotel."

"You will come to Casablanca," he said, in a tone of voice more certain than truth.

At this point the narrative shatters: into a late-night arrival in Casablanca under a crescent moon; into a hair-raising taxi ride from the station through a quiet city of Coca-Cola signs and windblown palms and handsome children playing in the gutter; into narrower and darker and more dangerous streets of dirt and occasional brick, the sounds of the jumping taxi interrupted by guttural shouts in Arabic; and, finally, into the arrival in Cite D'Jamaa, the home of Abdellah and his family.

WES GOODWIN

To be an American in Morocco is to be a European, and to be a European is to be treated with a deference devoid of attached strings. To be me on that midnight in Cite D'Jamaa, upon exiting the taxi, upon waving and shaking hands with the tens of children who greeted me as a splendid curiosity, upon handing over my luggage to Ahmed, Abdellah's youngest brother, was to gain a clearer perspective on the day-to-day joys of visiting dignitaries. Not enough could be done for me, not as I entered, escorted, the center court of Abdellah's home, never, as I was introduced to five of Abdellah's friends in his long, thin room lined with banquettes upon which everyone lounged, smoking kif from two laminated bamboo pipes. An inexpensive stereo played a Barry White tape. I sat down on a banquette and was, in the following order, made comfortable with pillows, offered heavily sugared mint tea in small glasses, discussed excessively in Arabic, and told to make myself at home. I love being told to make myself at home because I am then sure of what to do next—accept the first thing offered me. In the case of Abdellah's I was offered a complete dinner of cous-cous with carrots and onions and lamb; a well-flavored herira; lemon chicken; Fanta grape and orange soda; melons; more cous-cous; and, finally, after I protested too much, some Moroccan pastries, in which sugar, nuts, and almonds seemed to be mixed in equal proportions.

This feast added up to an extravagance for Abdellah's father, who works at a government phosphate plant at Ain Diab outside Casablanca. He makes, perhaps, 400 dirhams, or $100, a week. After dinner Mr. Boulouyout invited me into the kitchen, where I sat on the only chair, next to the only candle in the room. Mr. Boulouyout's wife was washing the dishes in a large pot over the fire. Abdellah, acting as an interpreter, told me how pleased his father was to have an American in the house, how happy he was to do something for an American, because Americans were always doing something for the rest of the world. I remarked upon the rarity of that viewpoint. He sincerely hoped I had gotten enough to eat. Then he said he thought I might be tired. He led me into Abdellah's room and prepared one of the banquettes. While Ahmed arranged my baggage into a neat row on the other side of the room, Abdellah quietly motioned for his friends to leave. One by one, they rose and shook my hand: Abdul, who asked me if I liked Bob Dylan and worked at the university; Rashid, of the playful manner; Hafid, a corpulent electrician who possessed a talent for eating with his fingers; Moustafa, who dressed in the current international Ivy League style and had the best-looking hair I have yet seen on an Arab gentleman; and El-Aoufi, sole speaker of French who called me "David of Morocco." They left. Watched by Abdellah, Ahmed, and their father, I took off my Converse All-Stars and lay back on the banquette. I remember only the dark haze of a woolen blanket coming at me before I fell to sleep.

The next morning I awakened just in time to get to the station and catch a 10 o'clock bus to Tangier. Everybody went outside to wait for the taxi. I am not certain whether it was the sight of Abdellah and his family holding my luggage as they waited under a glaring sun, or Abdellah's enthusiasm as he took a picture of me before the taxi left, or the unmitigated poverty of Cite D'Jamaa in the daylight from behind the windows of a car, or the royal blue jellaba Abdellah presented me with as I climbed into the taxi, or the fact that when I arrived at the station I discovered that the 10 o'clock bus had broken down and there would be no other until three that afternoon. I am certain that, as I sat at the station, waiting, I was afflicted with a severe case of homesickness, which even frequent rereadings of a recent letter from a funny woman I know in New York could not lessen. ■