

# When It Comes, He Cannot Sleep, ...

Fairport Convention

The time is near for things to pass, the time for me to leave  
But as I lie here all alone, I really can't believe  
The twenty years I've spent on earth could end in so much grief  
That the many friendly faces should now stare hatefully

A letter home to mother and a letter home to dad  
Another for my sweetheart, for whom I feel so sad  
A lock of hair to cling to is all that will remain  
And the grave inside this prison yard, a stone that bears no name

My trials and tribulations are nearly now all gone  
A murderer I never was and my spirit will live on  
Jesus, help me in this troubled time, this hour of trouble deep  
Help me find my peace of mind, help me Lord, to sleep  
...

Sleep has surprised Mr Lee  
We'll creep in behind his eyes and, with his eyes, we will see  
Wherever he goes to, we'll be close behind  
We'll follow his dreams and we'll stroll in his mind  
Dream, dream

John's in the garden all green  
With uniforms round him, the hound and the fox can be seen  
A willow tree leaving its branches to ground  
Is breathing in time to a bell's hollow sound  
Dream, dream  
Dream, dream

Nature, their numbers have swelled  
The sun in the east is the lord of the feast to be held  
The doomed and the dutiful tread on the dew  
With frost on their faces and shine on their shoes  
Dream, dream

Looking to earth and to sky  
John stares at John walking slowly along with a sigh  
The hand of a stranger takes hold of his arm  
And a voice in his ear says "They'll do you no harm"  
Dream, dream  
Dream, dream  
Dream, dream  
...

Wake up John, it's time to go  
Come along John, don't be slow  
Wake up John, it's time to go

A priest joins the procession just to help me kneel  
With a warder at my elbow and another at my heel  
Marching in the morning down a path I've lately seen  
I was sleeping in this garden, am I still within my dream?  
The echo of my heartbeat is the beating of a drum  
And all the earth is singing with life's sweet hum  
We filed in solemn silence, shuffled through a door  
The place where life is taken for the letter of the law

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard  
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

A rope was hanging from the roof, a sight which puzzles me  
I thought a gibbet and a guard would make a gallows tree  
But now all is revealed, standing there is just a man  
My feet are on the trapdoor with a rope around my hand  
And now the executioner is shaking hands with me  
"My duty I must carry out, you poor fellow," says he  
A strap is tied around my feet and a bag upon my head  
And then the noose which separates the living from the dead

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard  
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

There he whispers to me "Have you anything to say?"  
My mouth is dry, my throat is tight, I answer "Drop away"  
Silence now surrounds me, my heart is beating on  
The trapdoor hardly moves at all, my life is still my own

They stand me in a corner with my hands and feet still bound  
While a carpenter is called for and an explanation found  
"The rain has warped the timbers," I hear the hangman say  
"It's funny but it worked well, I tried it yesterday"  
"All is ended now," they say, "your ordeal's nearly over  
Your life's as good as ended," but I hear their voices waver  
Once more the boat is shaken and again I hang in limbo  
With the guardians on the trapdoor and my body stands on tip-toe

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard  
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

They stand me in a corner with my hands and feet still tied  
A warder holds onto the noose, the trapdoor opens wide  
Is it magic or coincidence that keeps me on the brink?  
It seems to work without me, "Will it kill me now?" I think  
"Please, I'm tired of living and I really want to die"  
I was taken to the scaffold and I heard the hangman cry  
"Lee, I'm truly sorry, forgive these hands of mine"  
He drew the bolt and I felt the jolt the third and final time  
My life was spared that morning 'cause it wasn't theirs to take  
Three's the most the law requires, a man could feel the stake

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard  
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

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