

Changing of the Guards

Patti Smith

Sixteen years
Sixteen banners united over the field
Where the good shepherd grieves
Desperate men, desperate women divided
Spreading their wings 'neath falling leaves.

Fortune calls
I stepped forth from the shadows to the marketplace
Merchants and thieves, hungry for power, my last deal gone down
She's smelling sweet like the meadows where she was born
On midsummer's eve near the tower.

The cold-blooded moon
The captain waits above the celebration
Sending his thoughts to a beloved maid
Whose ebony face is beyond communication
The captain is down but still believing that his love will be repaid.

They shaved her head
She was torn between Jupiter and Apollo
A messenger arrived with a black nightingale
I seen her on the stairs and I couldn't help but follow
Follow her down past the fountain where they lifted her veil.

I stumbled to my feet
I rode past destruction in the ditches
With the stitches still mending beneath a heart-shaped tattoo
Renegade priests and treacherous young witches
Were handing out the flowers that I'd given to you.

The palace of mirrors
Where dog soldiers are reflected
The endless road and the wailing of chimes
The empty rooms where her memory is protected
Where the angel's voices whisper to the souls of previous times.

She wakes him up
Forty-eight hours later the sun is breaking
Near broken chains, mountain laurel and rolling rocks
She's begging to know what measures he now will be taking
He's pulling her down and she's clutching on to his long golden locks.
Gentlemen, he said I don't need your organization, I've shined your shoes
I've moved your mountains and marked your cards
But Eden is burning either brace yourself for elimination
Or else your hearts must have the courage for the changing of the guards.

Peace will come
With tranquility and splendor on the wheels of fire
But will bring us no reward when her false idols fall
And cruel death surrenders with its pale ghost retreating
Between the King and the Queen of Swords.