

## When In Rome

Phil Ochs

In the fire blue forests, faded and forgotten  
I crawled through the cotton fields, picking for cotton  
The overseer sneered, his whipping was rotten  
With ecstasy.

I'm child-like terror I tore out the tap roots  
Cards of the lash were calling to follow suit  
I dashed for the swamps, the hounds in hot pursuit  
Jealously.

All through the night a figure of fright, as I hid my head  
And the buried their nose in a cut of my cloths, now torn in shreds  
And they never would leave until they believed that I was dead  
But I'd never curse their names

Oh, who am I to blame  
I know I'd do the same  
Endlessly.  
And all the high-born ladies

So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers  
When in Rome do as the Romans do.  
Frail and afraid in the mists of the morning

The snakes and the spiders were sadly performing  
The bark of the dogs kept up the warning  
Inside the wood.  
Sweating and swearing I crawled from the manger

The highway appeared to take me from danger  
Is there anyone here who would pick up a stranger?  
Oh I wish you could.  
Then someone replied "would you like a ride?"

"Come in" he said.  
We drove for a while, he gave me a smile and a piece of bread  
The hammer was hard in the chrome of the car as I cracked his head  
Then we took off in a spin

Oh I smashed his skull again  
Oh thank you my good friend,  
I feel so good.  
And all the high-born ladies

So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers  
When in Rome do as the Romans do.  
Late in the evening I came to the city

I fell to the sidewalks sighing for pity  
A diamond was dropped from the hands of the pretty  
To be so kind.  
Cowards and corpses were busy competing

The rhymes of the riots were busy repeating  
I raced to the corner and sped(?) from the speeding

To save my mind.  
Latches and locks, companies of cops ran from the rain

There was silk in the stores for the whims of the whores  
That shone with shame.  
I asked for a light from a priest in the night  
Then I fanned the flames.

And the traffic all stood still  
To see if someone had been killed  
I was glad to leave a thrill  
So far behind.

And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers  
When in Rome do as the Romans do.

A monk and his mother were dancing so dandy  
A topless nun was handing out candy  
The beautiful bishop broke out the brandy  
The kiss we crave.

They stuttered and stammered, would I feel like staying  
We fell to our knees, feverishly praying  
The salt in the salt-peter seemed to be saying  
Be brave, be brave.

I reached reached for a robe, I preached and I probed  
And I taught the tune.  
And the greed for the gills was played to the hilt  
As I promised doom

I toyed with their fears, until coins and tears filled the room  
Then I took off down the road  
Laughing madly like a toad  
God bless every soulless soul

That would be saved.  
And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers

When in Rome do as the Romans do.  
A chorus of children were passing the hours  
I joined in their fun and gave them my flowers  
Covered with kisses and showered with showers

That they repaid.  
Taken and trusting, would I be their teacher?  
She looked so appealing, I wanted to touch her  
Just out of reach, unable to reach her

Their hands were raised.  
Charmed by the chalk, the lessons were taught, inside the class  
They studied the rules of the samurai schools, they had to pass  
The room was adjourned, the lessons were learned,

I turned on the gas  
And I watched them make their pleas  
They passed the test with ease  
I gave them their degrees,

They made the grade.  
And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers

When in Rome do as the Romans do.  
Feeling my weakness, a coward for company  
I joined the ranks of the hot and hungry  
To teach what it means to have love for your country

We marched away.  
We lowered our lives for the lines of a border  
We danced with the mothers, played with the daughters  
We followed our fantasies, following orders

It was child's play.  
After the war the bullets were bored so we capped the game  
With cynical smiles we put them on trial to place the blame  
Now what kind of beast would love such a feast

Have you no shame?  
So we hung them by the feet  
Oh, we shot them in the street  
Oh, the victory was sweet

on victory day.  
And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers

When in Rome do as the Romans do.  
The bread and the circuses came to be nearing  
The Saviour or somebody must be appearing  
Pagans and pageants were all disappearing

Inside my head.  
The stones on the statues were staring and stalling  
Caesar and Cassius were cursing and calling  
The empire had risen and now it was falling

Or so it seemed.  
The crown and the cross seemed empty and lost in dark despair  
And luminous lies, death in disguise were everywhere  
The canvas was cold, the story was old, I said my prayers

Then I crowned him on the head  
Oh, I blessed him as he bled  
Oh At last, the king is dead  
God save the queen.

And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,  
Have been handed to the soldiers  
When in Rome do as the Romans do.

Now nothing remained for building or burning  
The losing of lovers was all I was learning  
A time for escape and a time for returning had come to me  
Back through the ashes and back through the embers

Back through the roads and the ruins I remembered  
My hands at my side I sadly surrendered  
Do as you please.

The hero was home, proven and grown, I fell on the floor

Mad with romance they started to dance, their star was born  
I bled like the rain, exploded in pain, then I screamed for more  
Oh, make me feel sublime  
Release me from my mind

Oh, Kill me one more time  
And set me free.  
And all the high-born ladies  
So lovely and so true,

Have been handed to the soldiers  
When in Rome do as the Romans do.