

The Iron Man

Tom Paxton

The orders came, the midnight rain
Was driving down the window pane
They rose like cattle, mess-kit rattle
Showed them green and new to battle

Out on the road, the mud knee-high
The tortured trucks were slithering by
Toward the ruptured, shattered sky
They strove. It hardly mattered why

We find our hero in the mud
We guess the fever in his blood
We try, as he, to laugh at this
The Iron Man whom bullets

He's right, the song has just begun
We'd never kill a man so young
He's right, the song has just begun
We'd never kill a man so young

The sergeant, how they loathed his guts
He led them down the waggon ruts
One truck is stalled, the drivers curse
It's either ambulance or hearse

The air grows foul, the heavy stench
Is seeping from the ancient trench
He takes his place and laughs at this
The Iron Man whom bullets miss

He's right, no matter how they try
The song's too young for him to die
He's right, no matter how they try
The song's too young for him to die

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Winter came early to the house on the hill, frost, wind and snow
The builders looked at its unfinished frame, then turned to go
A small foundation, a pile of sand, a rusty hammer in a cold, cold hand
It wasn't a big house that they planned, but winter came early and winter came hard

Winter was death to the house on the hill, frost, wind and snow
Warped its timbers and cracked the foundations, then turned to go
The sketch was crumpled in a cold, cold hand. The hammer buried in the pile of sand
The builders' thoughts were of virgin land when winter came early and winter came hard

Spring was puzzled by the house on the hill, last patch of snow
Gave it flowers and climbing vines, then turned to go
Small boys played on the pile of sand, plastic weapons in their eager hands
It wasn't a big house that they planned, but winter came early and winter came hard

me hard

The young lieutenant, new to war
Is sick upon the trench's floor
The sergeant, how they cursed his head
Is suddenly quite cold and dead

The deafening explosions cease
The calm a cruel burlesque of peace
The whistle blows, the charge is made
The Iron Man is unafraid

He's right, he's young and brave and strong
Just the kind to fill a song
He's right, he's young and brave and strong
Just the kind to fill a song

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Frost on the blankets of the strong boys' room
Heat for the sissies, for the prep-school pansies
Ice cold showers for the cool platoon
Once a month a card to mamma

Wipe that smile off and shine your brass
Grab your ankles and I'll give you twenty
Drop that rifle and I'll have your ass
Once a month a card to mamma

Play me the Taps, the quadrangle's sleeping
Here in his rack my roommate is weeping
Someone is weeping. I'll be all right
Goodnight. Goodnight

Town girls love it in the picture shows
Save the dances for the home-town ladies
Save five dollars for the one who knows
Once a month a card to mamma

Grab your ankles for the old cadets
Drop your trousers and you'll get what's coming
Is there more to this than you're quite sure of?
Put it in a card to mamma

Play me the Taps, the quadrangle's sleeping
Here in his rack my roommate is weeping
Someone is weeping. I'll be all right
Goodnight, goodnight!

Play me the Taps, the quadrangle's sleeping

The whistle blows. The charge is made
The Iron Man is unafraid
The young lieutenant screams out loud
The bullets hum like a startled crowd

The young lieutenant screams and falls
The Iron Man runs up the walls
And blows the enemy a kiss
The Iron Man whom bullets miss

He's right, the man whom bullets miss
Is meant for something more than this
He's right, the man whom bullets miss
Is meant for something more than this

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Angie, from where I stand
The water breaks on the spit of sand
How does it survive?
Angie, for all I know
The sand is tired and ready to go
It's less than alive

But you, so ready to leave. The first trembling leaf to break loose in the Fall
Angie, so ready to fly. Is there time to ask why? Is there no time at all?
Or is there nothing hidden I can blame?
Angie, If Angie's your name!

Angie, from where I stand
Your smile is so discretely planned
I'm not sure it's there
Angie, for all I know
You'll notice me, you'll turn and go
You won't even care

That's you, so ready to leave. The first trembling leaf to break loose in the Fall
Angie, so ready to fly. Is there time to ask why? Is there no time at all?
Or is there nothing hidden I can blame?
Angie, If Angie's your name!

Angie, I was getting along
Nothing quite right, but nothing too wrong
I didn't know you existed
I ran my life like a safe machine
Lost myself in a safe routine
But now it's all twisted
With my hand on the knife
For the rest of my life

Angie, from where I stand
You rise and wave an ungloved hand
You smile in the sun
Angie, you smile for him
He calls to you. The light is dim
You break into a run

And you're gone. So ready to leave. The first trembling leaf to break loose in the Fall
Angie, so ready to fly. Is there time to ask why? Is there no time at all?
Or is there nothing hidden I can blame?
Angie, If Angie's your name!

The battered fort is ours again
It only cost ten-thousand men
And when a young lieutenant dies
Some survivor has to rise

So like a humble prayer of thanks
The Iron Man goes up the ranks
The man whom bullets miss goes far
He wins a kiss and wears a star

And he's right - a man who lives through that
Deserves a star upon his hat
He's right - a man who lives through that
Deserves a star upon his hat

And now the nation cheers his name
The politicians play his game
He's coaxed and shrewdly follows fate
Until he's leader of the State

The peace grows dull, the pace too slow
At last he finds convenient foe
The Congress balks, the galleries hiss
The Iron Man whom bullets miss

But he's right, the man whom bullets miss
Is meant for something more than this
He's right, the Generals pat their guns
And Congress turns and Congress runs
He's right, the nation shouts its thanks
The young men run to join the ranks
He's right, his name is in their blood
While huddling in some foreign mud

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Someone is weeping, I'll be all right
Goodnight, goodnight!