

# 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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