

The Names of Trees

Tom Paxton

He's forgotten the names of trees
Familiar faces have no names
He's returned from alien seas
To find our father's house in flames
He tries to read the signs
They're in an unfamiliar tongue
Some half-remembered lines
He read when he was young
But there are days when he'll recall
The forest in the fall
When we can walk together, and he's fine
There are precious days like that
When he can name them all
The ash, the elm, the beech, the oak, the pine
He's forgotten the names of trees
His thoughts are like the chattering birds
They flutter as they please
And they build their nests with scattered words
The children stop and smile
They offer him their candy bar
They sometimes stay a while
And remind him of who they are
But there are days when he'll recall
The forest in the fall
When we can walk together, and he's fine
There are precious days like that
When he can name them all
The ash, the elm, the beech, the oak, the pine
He's forgotten the names of trees
He smells the land to his surprise
He's lost in the Hebrides
A stranger to our sunny skies