

Tom Paxton, The Iron Man

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 miss.

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.

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.

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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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