

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Lament

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(John McCutcheon)

I'm so glad you came to see me, and you brought the baby, too.
God, it gets so lonesome in this place, there's nothing here to do.
Yes, I know I've caused you trouble and I know I've brought you pain,
But if I could roll back time, you know, I'd do it all again.

Tom and I, we met in high school. Yes, it was love at first sight.
He was, oh, so kind and gentle, and our young love seemed so right.
At 16 I was a mother, 17, became a wife.
Tom found some work. We bought a trailer, settled to a happy life.

In '69, there came a letter, such a shock brought by the mail!
We both understood its meaning: go to war or go to jail.
Tom he said, "I ain't no killer, but I love my country, Nan.
I've got to prove it to myself and to my family I'm a man!"

Lord, we loved all night the day before he left for Vietnam.
Every day there was a letter from my brave, young soldier Tom,
Filled with dreams about our future: a big yard, a house, and such.
Oh, I know the war would change him, but I never guessed how much.

Those two years seemed an eternity till Tom came home from war.
There was something hard about him that I'd never seen before.
And he never once spoke to me all about the things he'd seen.
Though at night he'd wake up screaming from some ugly, constant dream.

And he never seemed to notice the new things the baby did,
And when he'd cry out, Tom would yell, "Come here and take care of this kid!"
Well, he took to drinking heavy and staying out for days,
And when I'd ask, he'd say, "I just need time to settle into ways."

One year passed. We sold the trailer, 'cause no job my Tom could find.
We just roamed from town to town in search of work of any kind.
I took a part-time job at waitressing and found some homes to clean.
Though I had no skills, I paid the bills, but Tom was getting mean.

For the nightmares grew more frequent and the sober times were few,
And it's when he took
I was living with some stranger, an angry broken man.
It seemed the gentle boy I'd known and loved had died in Vietnam.

And it's two more years he searched in vain for work at any pay.

And I never will forget the look he gave me on that day.
"This is all your fault!" he screamed, and then he lashed out one more time,
But it's when he struck the baby, that's when I drew the line.

Oh, how he beat upon the bedroom door that I had locked so tight.
Little Tommy in the corner was trembling in fright.
For though he'd grown up with my beatings, a house in a state of war,
Neither one of us had every seen our Tom this way before.

The door, it splintered open and he started in on me.
First, he struck me, and the blood, it filled my eyes. I could not see.
He threw me back upon the pillows and my hand fell on his gun.
I fired out into my darkness and the awful deed was done.

Oh, they took my baby from me and they took me to the jail.
There the word I heard was murder, and no one to go my bail,
Till some women came to see me. They told me I was not alone.
They warned me that the court's abuse would match what I had known back home.

Sometimes at night, I dream of loving with my young and gentle Tom,
Long before he brought the war back home with him from Vietnam,
And the hard luck and the liquor cut our young lives to the bone,
And we knew that something bigger than ourselves brought down our home.

I guess some things are best forgotten, but I never can forget,
And some things best left unspoken, but I ain't done talking yet.
For, unless you open up your eyes, your arms, your hearts, your ears,
I guarantee that you'll be hearing more sad tales like mine for years.

As sung by John McCutcheon on "Signs of the Times."

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