

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Oh Death (2)

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What is this that I can see
With icy hands taking hold of me
I am death and none can tell
I open the door to heaven and hell
Oh Death, O Death, please spare me over till another year

Death oh Death, consider my age
please don't take me in this stage
my wealth is all at your command
if you would move your icy hand
Oh Death, O Death, please spare me over till another year

No wealth no land
No silver nor gold
Nothing satisfies me but your soul
Oh Death, O Death, please spare me over till another year

Mother come now to my bed
Put a cold towel upon my head
My head is warm my feet is cold
Death put his shackles on my soul
Oh Death, O Death, please spare me over till another year

Death oh Death please let me see
If christ has turned his back on me
God's children pray, His preachers preach
The time of hope is out of reach
Oh Death, O Death, please spare me over till another year

Sarah Ogan Gunning recorded a version on her 1965 Folk Legacy album, "A Girl of Constant

Sorrow":

The sleeve notes (UK release on Topic Records) say: " Oh Death is found in white and Negro

tradition from Texas to the Georgia Sea Islands and is available today in widely contrasting

settings: unaccompanied vocal solo, hillbilly duet (with guitars), bluegrass band. This stark

conversational piece has attracted a number of short stylized explanations which place the song

on the lips of a dying slave beaten by a cruel plantation mistress, or on the lips of a Kentucky

hill-preacher stricken by the Lord for ignoring His call. Sarah adds an excellent narrative of her own: Elizabeth, her mother, used to sing this sad song while gathering herbs in the woods. One day she wandered near a concealed underground still. The moonshiners took Aunt Lizzie to be a ghost and in terrible fright abandoned the still (but only temporarily)."

A similar dialogue with Death turns up in the traditional English song "Death and the Lady", which may be 16th century in origin.

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