

Harry Chapin, Stranger With The Melodies

It was my first night in that rooming house.
In the last room down the hall
I heard a hoarse voice and an old guitar
Coming through the paper thin walls.
A crazy nonsense nursery rhyme
that did not mean a thing.
But for the first of what was to be a thousand times,
This is what I hear him sing. . .
Hold that D chord on the old guitar,
'Til I found the G.
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around to D.
I had to lay there listening.
It seemed he was in the room.
This stranger with his melody,
Singing there in the gloom.
And he repeated it over and over again,
Such a soft and sinkin' sound.
It was kind of like a music box that was slowly winding down.
You see, he sang it, he hummed it,
Whistled it, and he strummed it,
He laughed it and he cried it,
He did everything but hide it.
And he sang . . .
Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around for me
So I lay there in that lumpy bed,
Countin' choruses instead of sheep.
'Til I banged on the wall and out I called,
"Hey bub I need some sleep."
The sudden void of silence, then I heard that hoarse voice say,
"It weren't so long ago boy, they paid me to play "
I said, "It's kind of late for music sir,
Two hours til it's daylight"
He answered, "I need my music most
In these dark hours of the night.
You see I've tried gettin' high on something son,
But it only brings me down.
Staying dry don't work out better boy,
'Cause my eyes get wet and I drown.
Won't you please let me continue
And I'll be in your debt.
You see I'm not singing to remember son,
I'm just singing to forget"
And he sang . . .
Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around for me.
That's when I said,
"If I'm supposed to listen to you sir,
Just one quick question then.
Why in the hell do you sing one song
Over and over again?"
And this is what he said. . .
He said, "I gave her the music son,
She gave me the words.
Together we'd write the kind of songs
The angels must have heard.
Of course we'd fight like cats and dogs,
But life ain't no rosebud dream.
Still whatever we'd do everybody knew

We truly were a team.
I can't remember now if I done her wrong
Or if she done wrong to me
But all I know that when I let her go
That it did not set me free"
That's when I said, "You sound like what's-his-name"
He said, "That's who I am.
But you can't wrap a name around you boy,
'Cause it really don't mean a damn.
You see, a song don't have much meaning
When it don't have nothing to say.
What she could do was magic son,
All I could do was play"

He started singing again.
That's when I drifted off
Maybe I dreamed what I heard
'Bout this stranger with his melody
Who'd gone and lost the words.
Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around to D