

The Farmer's Carol

[C] 1983 by Howard L. Kaplan

I have often been asked why we've chosen to farm
In this land where the trees grow thick blankets of white
Though the winter is numbing, a fire keeps us warm
Through a cold solstice day half the length of its night.

When the sun is about to our work we must go,
And we've no time for pleasure or sport.
Let us therefore give thanks for the Yule and the snow
And the months when the daylight is short.

In the heat of July there are always more weeds
I might pull from the rows of tomatoes and corn.
By the end of November a tired farmer needs
A long rest from the harvest that leaves him so worn.

I go out to the barn to take care of the stock
That we keep over winter, some cattle and sheep,
Plow the snow or chop wood, and around one o'clock
I am done with my chores and can read or can sleep.

In another six weeks there will come a bright day
When the groundhog and I see our shadows at noon
And we note by their length that is waning away
That the months of hard work will return to us soon.

I've a barrel of maple I boiled last spring.
I've a cellar of vegetables put down this fall.
Take a place at my table and join me to sing
Songs of thanks for the land that provides for us all.

From a trellis of grape I have pressed a red wine.
From a field of barley I've brewed a dark beer.
Fill your glass to the brim, for the sun does not shine
And we have the long evening to toast the new year.

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Howard the songwriter says the following: "Several events converged to inspire me to write this song in December 1983: I had first heard Ian Robb's Song For The New Year a few months earlier, I had heard some traditional solstice music done by a chorus of the local folk community at Fiddler's Green a few days earlier, and for a change I wanted to stop my work for more than the legal minimum of holidays. I do not know how much rest farmers can really get in the winter, but the song seems to have been well received by urban audiences." Howard the editor adds a few performance notes: The song is basically in mixolydian mode (a major scale with a flattened seventh), so the dominant chord (E) becomes minor instead of major, but to complicate matters, there's a flattened third (C natural) in last line of the verse. The key of A major seems to be the only one that allows guitarists with a limited chord repertoire to play all the ones that are required.



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