

## County Line (2009): Lyrics

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### America

**America, what have you come to? America, where have you gone? America, what have you come to? I'm running to America.** Along highways we have gone, loving the grassroot in the ditches, loving the water 'neath the bridges and the markets full of fruit. Into cities we have gone, loving the rivers in their glories, loving the buildings for their stories and their straining down for roots. **America, what have you come to? America, where have you gone? America, what have you come to? I'm looking for America.** From a great distance we've come, hearing the passion of this language, fearing the siren song of anguish, but we learned to sing along. From darkened bedrooms we have come, carrying children on our shoulders, carrying hearts as big as boulders. Oh, the nights can last so long. Run, come, see. Run, come, see. Run, come see the shining, see the shining. Into the desert we have gone, feeling a flatness that embraces, dancing the dance of open spaces and wishing we could stay. Into foothills we have gone, clasping their richness to our faces, living on grass and Queen Anne's laces and kneeling down to pray. **America, what have you come to? America, where have you gone? America, what have you come to? I'm gonna find America before too long.** Oh, oh, oh, oh.

### Katharine Hepburn

Katharine Hepburn, I wish I could learn how you managed to take a man by the hand—hold him close to your side and still speak your mind in vowels so aristocratic and grand. And tell me, Jo March, did you think yourself harsh when you said, “No, I can't go be a wife. I'll just write about dances and late-night romances, but more importantly, piracy, shipwrecks, and strife.” **If I'm crazy for him, am I losing my steel? If I'm not, could it mean I forgot how to feel without thinking I'm shrinking away from the call of a girl who stands tall but still knows how to fall?** Mary Poppins, did you think of stopping for Bert between spoonfuls of sugar and carpetbag spells, or were you surprised by the way that it hurt to lift your umbrella and bid him farewell? **If I'm crazy for him, am I losing my steel? If I'm not, could it mean I forgot how to feel without thinking I'm shrinking away from the call of a girl who stands tall but still knows how to fall?** As, Penelope, you wove Odysseus home, did you sigh and say, “Someday, I, too, want to roam”? When he returned, did you feel your heart burn and say, “Now he's come back, and I have come home”? **If I'm crazy for him, am I losing my steel? If I'm not, could it mean I forgot how to feel without thinking I'm shrinking away from the call of a girl who stands tall but still knows how to fall? Oh, I'm thinking I'm shrinking away from the call of a girl who stands tall but still knows how to fall.**

## County Line

My mother left her cherry orchard home when she was only 18 years old. I hear she grew up with nimble fingers, a piano player and a cherry picker, sifting through the trees for bright red gold. But that day, she left to seek her fortunes, crossed that county line and moved on down the road. **And she said, "There's no line quite as thin as that county line, no sin just like leaving all behind that land of cherry trees and pine, for baby, in my mind I'm always looking back to find I'm just a pillar of salt beyond that line."** She was a pastor's wife, and I am his son. He took us far from my mother's county line. We crossed state lines like criminals, moving boxes full of old hymnals, glanced back at all the sin we'd left behind. But when summer came, my mother brought us back again, and there I found the only home I'll ever find. **Because there's no line quite as thin as that county line, no sin just like leaving all behind that land of cherry trees and pine, for Mama, in my mind I'm always looking back to find I'm just a pillar of salt beyond that line.** Hard to believe that now my mother has been ten years gone. Hard to believe I've got a pulpit of my own. Hard to believe my mother's cherry trees are growing toward the sun, when I feel so far down and far away from home. And now I count the days, like a blind man counting steps on the way back to his chair. Sometimes I wish I could go back again, show my wife and kids where I really am, pick some cherries, send my mom a little prayer. And the first thing I would say to her is, "How'd you ever tear yourself away from there?" **And she'd say, "There's no line quite as thin as that county line, no sin just like leaving all behind that land of cherry trees and pine, for baby, in my mind I'm always looking back to find I'm just a pillar of salt beyond that line." I'm just a pillar of white salt unto a different place and time.**

## Gibraltar Town

By Fred Alley

Here is a song for you. Up by Gibraltar town, there's an old man. He sits by the Bayside. His thoughts are like paper boats; they float in his alcohol. He's a ship in a bottle washed in by the tide. He smokes cheap cigars, swears at the seagulls, laughs at the big boats filled with rich folks on the quay, walks down by the beach in his long pants and Sunday shoes, throws sticks to his dog, Clementine, and breathes in the day. **And they call him the captain, and they claim he's half-crazy. He don't give a damn; people, they'll say what they say. He goes fishing with no bait attached to give them more to talk about, in the fog with his dog on a bench by the bay.** Every morning in his overcoat he goes out in his rowboat. You can smell his cigar halfway across the bay. He drops anchor and a fishing line, speaks his mind to Clementine, and watches the sun rise up to meet the day. Later, when he pulls for shore, you can hear the creaking of his oars. You can hear his voice rise like a foghorn on the waves. "The water is wide," he sings, "can't cross it, got no wings to fly, but this boat, she'll carry two anyway." **And they call him the captain, and they claim he's half-crazy. He don't give a damn; people, they'll say what they say. He goes fishing with no bait attached to give them more to talk about, in the fog with his dog on a bench by the bay.** Here is a song for you. Up by Gibraltar town...

## Ribbons

The sun's riding bareback tonight on top of an old swayback mare. And you drove away, out of sight, with ribbons of my breath in your hair. I tied ribbons of my breath in your hair. The field is calling tonight to my bed through the window ajar—on the sill, all those letters I write to you with the truth from afar, 'cause I can tell you the truth from afar.

**And I will tie ribbons all around you, pretty ribbons, to make you stay. I'll stay awake tying ribbons till the day--until the day breaks.** I dream your car is going nowhere tonight and we're out on the porch, feeling fine. The moon floats ahead like a kite, held aloft by the bottle of wine. Won't you pour me another glass of that wine? **And I will tie ribbons all around you, pretty ribbons, to make you stay. I'll stay awake tying ribbons till the day--until the day breaks.** Well the sun, she rode bareback tonight on top of that old swayback mare. And you drove away, out of sight, with ribbons of my breath in your hair.

## Southern Star

He said all the world's a stage, but I say he was mistaken; at least most men still haven't learned their lines. They don't take to direction, and they don't know their places. An acting man like me must chase the darkness from these times. Within Lincoln's hollow crown there sits a mortal temple. Through this I'll push a pistol-loaded pin. Yes, I will cut him down; he will taste the fatal apple. On him I'll lay the weight of his country's heavy sin. **And this Southern star will shine on the American stage. Yes, this Southern star will make certain that ambition's debt is paid.** I really knocked 'im dead out there; can't wait to read the papers. Can't wait till the reviews come rolling in. I cried when I was born to this stage of fools and traitors, but tonight I paved the way for a new play to begin. Lord, what fools these mortals be, the way that they all mourn him. They cry like they will drown the stage with tears. How can it be that they don't see that, for the tyranny I've broken, it is I who should be remembered through the years? **As the Southern star who shone on the American stage, yes, the Southern star who made certain that ambition's debt was paid.** I see stars through the bars of this barn that's now my prison, glowing like they're on a martyr's grave. What if the fault's not in those stars, but in myself or in my vision, and a tale of sound and fury's all I leave a future age? **Of a Southern star who shone on the American stage, yes, a Southern star who fell when his ambition's debt was paid.**

## Freedom Song

**Don't you know you can't write down a freedom song? It's the right of sound to tell that jailer he's wrong. If your life seems short and your chains seem long, you've got to sing, sing, sing till the chains are gone.** What's a girl to do, walking down the American way, glancing back at all the crooked tracks that led her to this day? Oh, they led her to this day, when the twilight looks that way, all gold and rust and bound to die, like Judas to betray. **Don't you know you can't write down a freedom song? It's the**

**right of sound to tell that jailer he's wrong. If your life seems short and your chains seem long, you've got to sing, sing, sing till the chains are gone.** Who am I to now sit silent, while the war goes on so long? Maybe this machine kills fascists, but it's hard to stop a bomb. Oh, it's hard to stop a bomb when all I do to right that wrong is just hum along to a freedom tune and then shuffle to another song. Now Arizona starts to flood, and Seattle feels the drought. Thomas becomes certain just as Peter starts to doubt. Oh, Peter starts to doubt, and Mary stands to shout, "How long will truth survive the page before you let it out?" **Don't you know you can't write down a freedom song? It's the right of sound to tell that jailer he's wrong. If your life seems short and your chains seem long, you've got to sing, sing, sing till the chains are gone. You've got to sing, sing, sing till the chains are gone.**

### **As Much Light as I Have**

When I die, I'm going home. **I've been such a long time gone.** I've spent a lifetime stacking words like bricks in the hot sun, and I'm tired of trying to understand why we can't all sing our own song in this foreign land. It feels like decades since I've seen a friend—**I've been such a long time gone**—who knows how all my stories end and the places I've gone wrong, where I've fallen, where I've stood up straight and true. It feels like decades since I've seen you, friend, and the good Lord knows I've been missing you. So could you help me find my way? **I've been such a long time gone.** Could you give me just a place to stay, or play me that old song? You know, that one always brings a smile to my face when I am too old for my age or not native to this place. Let's go flying off this porch tonight. **I've been such a long time gone.** It's been years since I've seen the stars or watched this darkness run into daylight. It's been years since I haven't been afraid of the night. I'll go climbing into this old bed. **I've been such a long time gone.** Now I have a place to lay my head and pray the night outruns all those demons that have chased me 'cross the map, and that tomorrow I'll be walking in as much light as I have. Oh, tomorrow I'll be walking in as much light as I have.

### **City in the Morning**

I will lead the one I choose through the city in the morning. I will lead her by the hand through the darkness turning red. Through the early rush of news in the city in the morning, I will lead her by the hand through the city to my bed. As we lie there in my bed in the city in the morning, in a room washed with the honeyed light shining overhead, as we fly that kite of sun through my window in the morning, I'll say, "Look what light has done for the city, for my bed."