

This song is a chronicle of social and racial prejudice and injustice. It is about a wealthy, young, Southern white man who attacks and kills a poor African American serving a woman with a cane at a society event. Dylan never spells out their racial identity, but he **implies** it, and, as such, we can **infer** that she is African America. He builds up the story in each of the four stanzas. Each verse is sadder than the last, building to the song's tragic ending. In the first stanza, we learn that William Zanzinger killed Hattie Carroll with his cane and that the police arrested him. In the second stanza, we find out that he got out of jail on bail because of his family and political connections. In the third stanza, Dylan describes Hattie's innocent and subservient life. She is a poor maid who spent her life serving people wealthier than those who abused her. Interestingly, Dylan misspells Zanzinger's name in the song, perhaps deliberately and out of contempt.

Bob Dylan

"The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll"

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll

With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger

At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'

And the cops were called in and his weapon took from him

As they rode him in custody down to the station

And booked William Zanzinger for first-degree murder

But you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears

Take the rag away from your face

Now ain't the time for your tears.

William Zanzinger who at twenty-four years

Owns a tobacco farm of six hundred acres

With rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him

And high office relations in the politics of Maryland  
Reacted to his deed with a shrug of his shoulders  
And swear words and sneering and his tongue it was snarling  
In a matter of minutes on bail was out walking  
But you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears  
Take the rag away from your face  
Now ain't the time for your tears.

Hattie Carroll was a maid in the kitchen  
She was fifty-one years old and gave birth to ten children  
Who carried the dishes and took out the garbage  
And never sat once at the head of the table  
And didn't even talk to the people at the table  
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table  
And emptied the ashtrays on a whole other level  
Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane  
That sailed through the air and came down through the room  
Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle  
And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger  
And you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears  
Take the rag away from your face  
Now ain't the time for your tears.

In the courtroom of honor, the judge pounded his gavel  
To show that all's equal and that the courts are on the level  
And that the strings in the books ain't pulled and persuaded  
And that even the nobles get properly handled  
Once that the cops have chased after and caught 'em  
And that ladder of law has no top and no bottom

Stared at the person who killed for no reason

Who just happened to be feelin' that way without warnin'

And he spoke through his cloak, most deep and distinguished

And handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance

William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence

Oh, but you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears

Bury the rag deep in your face

For now's the time for your tears.