

Chapin Harry

"There Only Was One Choice"

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There Only Was One Choice

by

Harry Chapin

There's a kid out on my corner -- hear him strumming
like a fool

Shivering in his dungarees -- but still he's going to
school

His cheeks are made of peach fuzz -- his hopes may be
the same

But he's signed up as a soldier out to play the music
game

There are fake patches on his jacket -- he's used
bleach to fade his jeans

With a brand new stay pressed shirt -- and some
creased and wrinkled dreams

His face a blemish garden -- but his eyes are virgin
clear

His voice is Chicken Little's -- But he's hearing Paul
Revere

When he catches himself giggling -- he forces up a
sneer

Though he'd rather have a milkshake -- he keeps
forcing down the beer

Just another folkie -- late in coming down the pike

Riding his guitar -- he left Kid brother with his bike

And he's got Guthrie running in his bones

He's the hobo kid who's left his home
And his Beatles records and the Rolling Stones
This boy is staying acoustic
There's Seeger singing in his heart
He hopes his songs will somehow start
To heal the cracks that split apart
America gone plastic
And now there's Dylan dripping from his mouth
He's hitching himself way down south
To learn a little black and blues
From old street men who paid their dues
'Cause they knew they had nothing to lose
They knew it
So they just got to it
With cracked old Gibsons and red clay shoes
Playing 1-4-5 chords like good news
And cursed with skin that calls for blood
They put their face and feet in mud
But oh they learned the music from way down there
The real ones learn it somewhere
Strum your guitar -- sing it kid
Just write about your feelings -- not the things you
never did
Inexperience -- it once had cursed me
But your youth is no handicap -- it's what makes you
thirsty

Hey, kid you know you can hear your footsteps as
you're kicking up the dust

And the rustling in the shadows tells you secrets you
can trust

The capturing of whispers is the way to write a song

It's when you get to microphones the music can go
wrong

You can't see the audience with spotlights in your eyes

Your feet can't feel the highway from where the Lear jet
flies

When you glide in silent splendor in your padded
limousines

Only you are crying there behind the silver screen

Now you battle dragons -- but they'll all turn into frogs

When you grab the wheel of fortune -- you get caught
up in the cogs

First your art turns into craft -- then the yahoos start to
laugh

Then you'll hear the jackals howl 'cause they love to
watch the fall

They're the lost ones out there feeding on the wounded
and the bleeding

They always are the first to see the cracks upon the
walls

When I started this song I was still thirty-three

The age that Mozart died and sweet Jesus was set free

Keats and Shelley too soon finished, Charley Parker
would be

And I fantasized some tragedy'd be soon curtailing me

Well just today I had my birthday -- I made it thirty-four

Mere mortal, not immortal, not star-crossed anymore

I've got this problem with my aging I no longer can
ignore

A tame and toothless tabby can't produce a lion's roar

And I can't help being frightened on these midnight
afternoons

When I ask the loaded questions -- Why does winter
come so soon?

And where are all the golden girls that I was singing for

The daybreak chorus of my dreams serenades no
more

Yeah the minute man is going soft -- the mirror's on the
shelf

Only when the truth's up there -- can you fool yourself

I am the aged jester -- who won't gracefully retire

A clumsy clown without a net caught staggering on the
high wire

Yesterday's a collar that has settled round my waist

Today keeps slipping by me, it leaves no aftertaste

Tomorrow is a daydream, the future's never true

Am I just a fading fire or a breeze passing through?

Hello my Country

I once came to tell everyone your story

Your passion was my poetry

And your past my most potent glory

Your promise was my prayer

Your hypocrisy my nightmare

And your problems fill my present

Are we both going somewhere?

Step right up young lady -- Your two hundred birthdays

make you

old if not senile

And we see the symptoms there in your rigor mortis
smile

With your old folks eating dog food and your children
eating paint

While the pirates own the flag and sell us sermons on
restraint

And while blood's the only language that your deaf old
ears can hear

And still you will not answer with that message coming
clear

Does it mean there's no more ripples in your tired old
glory stream

And the buzzards own the carcass of your dream?

B*U*Y Centennial

Sell 'em pre-canned laughter

American Perennial

Sing happy ever after

There's a Dance Band on the Titanic

Singing Nearer My God to Thee

And the iceberg's on the starboard bow

Won't you dance with me

Yes I read it in the New York Times

That was on the stands today

It said that dreams were out of fashion

We'll hear no more empty promises

There'll be no more wasted passions

To clutter up our play

It really was a good sign
The words went on to say
It shows that we are growing up
In oh so many healthy ways
And I told myself this is
Exactly where I'm at
But I don't much like thinking about that
Harry -- are you really so naive
You can honestly believe
That the country's getting better
When all you do is let her alone
Harry -- Can you really be surprised
when it's there before your eyes
when you hold the knife that carves her
you live the life that starves her to the bone
Good dreams don't come cheap
You've got to pay for them
If you just dream when you're asleep
There is no way for them
to come alive
to survive
It's not enough to listen -- it's not enough to see
When the hurricane is coming on it's not enough to flee
It's not enough to be in love -- we hide behind that word
It's not enough to be alive when your future's been
deferred

What I've run through my body, what I've run through
my mind

My breath's the only rhythm -- and the tempo is my time

My enemy is hopelessness -- my ally honest doubt

The answer is a question that I never will find out

Is music propaganda -- should I boogie, Rock and Roll

Or just an early warning system hitched up to my soul

Am I observer or participant or huckster of belief

Making too much of a life so mercifully brief?

So I stride down sunny streets and the band plays back
my song

They're applauding at my shadow long after I am gone

Should I hold this wistful notion that the journey is
worthwhile

Or tiptoe cross the chasm with a song and a smile

Well I got up this morning -- I don't need to know no
more

It evaporated nightmares that had boiled the night
before

With every new day's dawning my kid climbs in my bed

And tells the cynics of the board room your language is
dead

And as I wander with my music through the jungles of
despair

My kid will learn guitar and find his street corner
somewhere

There he'll make the silence listen to the dream behind
the voice

And show his minstrel Hamlet daddy that there only
was one choice

Strum your guitar -- sing it kid

Just write about your feelings -- not the things you
never did

Inexperience -- it once had cursed me

But your youth is no handicap -- it's what makes you
thirsty, hey kid

Strum your guitar -- sing it kid

Just write about your feelings -- not the things you
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Dance Band

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