

## Harry Chapin "There Only Was One Choice"

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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 milk shake  
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 cog

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 mortise  
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?

Oh B U Y Centennial  
Sell 'em pre-canned laughter  
America 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 never  
did

Dance band on the Titanic  
Singing nearer my God to thee  
The iceberg's on the starboard bow  
Won't you dance with me

The 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

Yeah the 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

Come on  
Yeah the dance band on the Titanic  
Singing nearer my God to thee  
And the iceberg's on the starboard bow

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