

HARRY CHAPIN VERITIES & BALDERDASH



Harry Chapin

“Cat’s in the Cradle”

Verities & Balderdash

08/1974

Elektra

You Know We’ll Have a Good Time Then

Hannah Cohen

I’ve made being distant an art form. Don’t you know I learned from the best? I’ve ghosted a close friend without making an effort to fix our problems. I can shut down like an electronic device during a thunderstorm. It’s beautiful how I like men I’ve never met. You’d be proud.

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I’ve looked at you beyond that blue mountain range between us for so long that you turned into a mirage. My memory of you and the actual you mesh and tear in different places depending on my mood.

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At twenty-one, I knew you were never coming home.

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I delete three of your voicemails on my phone. Only in our last phone call did you finally say “I love you.” One “I love you” after five years of going to the same three restaurants in the city you left. I’ll give you some credit: you are a man who gets what he wants, no matter what. And I am a woman who gives, no matter what.

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I didn’t cry. Not at first. I stood there in the hallway outside of my bedroom and saw myself in the hallway mirror. I had imagined this scenario hundreds of times over the years, even discussed my plan with my therapist. But the aftermath was anti-climactic. I just looked at myself and walked back into my room, picked up my iPhone, and called my mom.

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Emptiness is a kind of orchestra. Honestly, I don’t know where I was going with that metaphor. But it makes about as much sense as anything else. You won’t read this, so it doesn’t really matter what I make up.

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For years you asked to see me for lunch or dinner when you were in town. Every time I forced out a yes. I’ve gilded over our time together. We were Abraham and Isaac, having a good old time on that mountaintop. Until I started to question why the knife was always in your hand.

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If you knew me at all, you'd know that I avoid conflict like the plagues that passed over our people. I have a difficult time connecting to others. I want what I want, and I can't get it most of the time. We're smashed ink blots on a folded piece of paper. Even our bar and bat mitzvahs were thirty years apart (but that was what you wanted).

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College came and went. I scraped by with a spot on the Dean's List, stumbled through a shitty relationship. The handsome young man in your bar mitzvah photo got a beer belly, and I developed heartburn. You moved in with the other woman, and I moved out of the house you left.

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I got a decent job now. I have bills to pay. You no longer control my bank account, no longer have the deed to a car I own. You still can't spell broccoli—was it with one c, or two l's? I'm forgetting things about you faster than the Elizabeth Bishop poem.

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Someday, you'll be my father. I just don't know when.