

Ballad of the Harp Weaver

Johnny Cash

Son said my mother when I was knee high
You need of clothes to cover you and not a rag have I
There's nothing in the house to make a boy's britches
Nor shears to cut a cloth with nor thread to take stitches
There's nothing in the house but a leaf end of rye
And the harp with a with the woman's head nobody will by and she began to cry
That was in the early fall and when came the late fall
Son she said the sight of you makes your mother's blood crawl
Little skinny shoulder blades stickin' through your clothes
And where you get a jacket from God above knows
It's lucky for me lad your daddy's in the ground
And can't see the way I let his son go around and she made a queer sound
That was in the late fall when the winter came
I'd not a pair of bridges nor a shirt to my name
I couldn't go to school or out of doors to play
And all the other little boys passed our way
Son said my mother come climb into my lap
And I'll chafe your little knees while you take a nap
And oh but we were silly for half an hour or more
Me with my long legs draggin' on the floor
I rocked rocked rocked to a mother goose rhyme
Oh but we were happy for half an hour's time
But there was I a great boy and what would folks say
To hear my mother singin' me to sleep all day in such a daft way
Men say the winter was bad that year fuel was scarce and food was dear
A wind with a wolf's head howled about our door
And we burned up the chairs and sat upon the floor
All that was left us was a chair we couldn't break
And the harp with the woman's head nobody would take for song or pity sake
The night before Christmas I cried with the cold
I cried myself to sleep like a two year old
And in the deep night I felt my mother rise
And stare down upon me with love in her eyes
I saw my mother sitting on the one good chair
A light falling on her face from I couldn't tell where
Looking nineteen and not a day older
And the harp with the woman's head leaned against her shoulder
Her thin fingers moving in the thin tall strings
Were weave weave weaving wonderful things
Many bright threads from where I couldn't see
Were running through the harp strings rapidly
And gold threads whistlin' through my mother's hands
I saw the web grow and the pattern expand
She wove a child's jacket and when it was done
She laid it on the floor and wove another one
She wove a red cloak so regal to see
She's made it for a king's son I said and not for me but I knew it was for me
She wove a pair of bridges and quicker than that
She wove a pair of boots a little cocked hat
She wove a pair of mittens she wove a little blouse
She wove all night in the still cold house
She sang as she worked and the harp strings spoke
But her voice never faltered and the thread never broke
But when I awoke there sat my mother
With the harp against her shoulder lookin' nineteen and not a day older

A smile about her lips and a light about her head
And her hands in the harp strings frozen dead
And piled up beside her toppling to the skies
Were the clothes of a king's son just my size