

Paprika Plains

Joni Mitchell

It fell from midnight skies
It drummed on the galvanized
In the washroom women tracked the rain
Up to the make-up mirror
Liquid soap and grass
And Jungle Gardenia crash
On Pine-Sol and beer
It's stifling in here
I've got to get some air
I'm going outside to get some air

Back in my hometown
They would have cleared the floor
Just to watch the rain come down
They're such sky oriented people
Geared to changing weather
I'm floating off in time
I'm floating off
I'm floating off in time

When I was three feet tall
And wide eyed open to it all
With their tasseled teams they came
To McGee's General Store
All in their beaded leathers
I would tie on colored feathers
And I'd beat the drum like war
I would beat the drum like war
I'd beat the drum
I'd beat the drum like war

But when the church got through
They traded their beads for bottles
Smashed on Railway Avenue
And they cut off their braids
And lost some link with nature
I'm floating into dreams
I'm floating off
I'm floating into my dreams

I dream paprika plains
Vast and bleak and God forsaken
Paprika plains
And a turquoise river snaking

(Where crows gaze vigilant on wires
Where cattle graze the grasses
Far from the digits of business hours
The moon clock wanes and waxes
But here all time is stripped away
Nowhere on these plains
Is a sprout or an egg in evidence
To measure loss or gain
Only a little Indian band
Come down from some windy mesa
No women to make them food and child
No expressions on their faces

I'm low in a helicopter
And the wind from whirling blades
Flaps their woven blankets
And flags their raven braids
How came they to this emptiness?
How came they to this dream?
How came I to this view
From a flying machine
Of earth and air and water
And a band of Indian men
Without herds or flocks or crops
Or families or fires to tend?
Like a phoenix up from ashes now
A blanket figure springs
With a fist raised up to turquoise skies
Like liberty
And at the point of vanishing
Where the sky and the earth meet
A bomb blooms
Deadly mushroom
White
Gold
Heat
Like a phoenix up from ashes
Up from violent mysteries
And growing 'till the giant blast
Is to it like a golfer's tee
there comes a child's beach ball
And memory takes me back
to the beach to toss it up
to the garage to get it patched
A pink and yellow beach ball
Rolling
Grand
Detached
Turning the blues and greens of earth
From space probe photographs
I float out of the hovercraft
Naked as infancy
And weightless
And drifting
Horizontally
Like a filing to a magnet
Like the long descent of rain
I am drawn
I fall against the ball
And lose paprika plains
I suckle at my mother's breast
I embrace my mother earth
I remember perforated blinds
Over the crib of my birth
And just as Eve succumbed
To reckless curiosity
I take my sharpest fingernail
And slash the globe to see
Below me
Vast Paprika plains
And the snake the river traces
And a little band of Indian men
With no expressions on their faces)

The rain retreats
Like troops to fall on other fields and streets

Meanwhile they're sweet talking and name calling
And brawling on the fringes of the floor
I spot you through the smoke
With your eyes on fire
From J&B and coke
As I'm coming through the door
I'm coming back
I'm coming back for more!
The band plugs in again
You see that mirrored ball begin to sputter lights
And spin
Dizzy on the dancers
Geared to changing rhythms
No matter what you do
I'm floating back
I'm floating back to you!