

# 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!