

Joni Mitchell Over on a Sunday Night

I can see their side now.

But back then we had one den,
One television, one
Stereo and their lousy lone mode of control,
Their big remote hands.

“No Joni.”

We would cry.

“Please, Dad.”

But he would take the record out of its sleeve
And put it down like a baby,
And when he picked up the needle
It started to roll, and there was no
Stopping it, that needle
Rolled over the entire record,
Found every groove, around, around
From the outside on in.
That record had as many rings as a mature tree.

“Joni, no!”

But she would play and play anyway,
And smile, miles away with blue eyes
Closed, content with her too sweet
Voice, that strict sugary point of view.

And he would play and play songs
And smile, miles away with brown eyes
Closed, overjoyed by her sweetness,
That voice that held him like a baby,
That bemused him to the end.

“Please Mom!”

With that sweet stereo sound blaring,
And all our moaning and plaintive

(Joni pg. 2. Continue stanza)

Wailing, the police were inevitable.
A newer neighbor called it in.

One holstered the shining, black revolver
And another quickly put us in three rooms,
To get the straight story, to get the story
Straighter; we had straightjackets on
Wanting to laugh about the whole thing,
But the officers were not laughing.

I can see their side now too.

Joni, with her outright sweet voice:

Help me, I think I'm falling, in love again.

When I think of my parents back then
And how smart they were to like what they liked,
And how smart they were not to despise,
Despite their kids.

Little Brother

We'd tickle torture him
until he cried or peed,
then, as he was getting in trouble
for peeing his pants, we'd
laugh at his little puddle in the plants.

We'd hang him on the doorknob
by his underpants until he
hung like an old scrotum, then
we'd close the door and share
his sandwich when he didn't come for lunch.

Until he took the jump on his bmx
bike and his hand grips slipped
off and he slipped off in the air.
Crucial boy on a crosswind right there.
We said Jesus to his face as he fell.

The landings went awfully well.
Him on his back, then the belts
on ours left gracious marks. We
wheeled him park side, an apostle
pushed by our nefarious appetites.

Actually, we pulled wheelies
around the park, and spun, and sped,
and his smile was that fine line
everyone said we walked on,
the thin red one we were good with.

Refrigerator Mother

Never cold or unfeeling
But you were the biggest thing in the kitchen
Wall to wall
Floor to ceiling.

Sun warm and comforting
You were the chicken coop, a vegetable garden
Blue sky all
Grass to galaxy.

Yet after school I declared
Any *junk food* to you the border guard/customs agent.
Taller and taller
Fences squared the yard.

Sugar-free you allowed,
But who ate that way anyway, and you weren't there when I went
For normal, or normal,er.
I never wanted to be bad.

Faith I didn't hear,
Nor *trust*. I was a fire eater without feeling, without seeing
Your bulb, when open,
Lighting up the kitchen floor.

The light I went for.
It's on as we dolly you awkwardly out, holding, balancing.
Likely on and on
As I close your door.

An Overnight Nest

appeared like a package above the front porch.
I would think it best to avoid the porch light.
A back-up incubator, I guess, in case of intruder,
or flighty mother, or a bald-eagle-like talon fight
where they're locked in, spinning, falling to earth.
The world at its worst when you're big eyes
and a wide open mouth, before you can fly.

I turned on the porch light to admire the architecture:
long, thick under-sticks for support, breadth,
then thinner sticks, a mix, a bowl of softer stuff.
I'm sure those blue strands were pulled off our carpet.
The world at its best when you're sitting soft,
squished between brother and sister, singing for
mother, who returns with a story, dinner on her breath.

Syrian Swimmer

"I was thinking it would be a real shame if we drowned, because we are swimmers."-

Yusra Mardini

I hate the sea and the sea hates me.
My country is a rubber dinghy
with a broken motor,
so I swim it to shore.

In the rain, they dropped a hole
in our roof so I crawled
from room to room, meanwhile
there was nowhere to do freestyle.

That spring, they dropped a hole
in our swimming pool, concrete
ceiling chunks cannonballing. I walked
back and forth over black tile lines.

My country came to shore in Greece.
We traveled unruly over borders
as we rose and fell like swells
I got seasick crossing mountains,

and tired staring down cross border
guards, spilling up and out of camps,
especially tired being human
with my need to feel and to feed myself

and a hope war would turn civil.
We'll remain here, I guess,
avoid refugee status, hopelessness.
Become rebuilt Germans.