

AN INVENTED HISTORY OF JOAN BAEZ

I know nothing about Joan Baez,
including whether or not her name is spelled like that
nor do I want to.
She is famous, but for what?
No, don't tell me.

I've got it.
She grew up poor in Connecticut
but after seeing a professional performance of Annie,
decided it was her calling to tap dance
just like Annie.
Unfortunately, as it turned out, Joan Baez is shit at tap dance
and after years of step-ball-changing through bitter disappointment
she gave it up and picked up wax carving.
This got her through some dark times around the age of twelve
including the untimely death of a childhood playmate
and the growing awareness that her parents were starting
to honestly despise each other.
She particularly enjoyed carving families of penguins.

At the age of seventeen she got a job
at a law firm
at which she answered phones.
She often had dreams where she was supposed
to haul an enormous phone receiver down a long narrow hallway
as fast as she could.
Thing was, the phone always began melting
like slowly warming wax
almost as soon as she started out.
It would dribble onto the floor behind her
and she was never sure
whether or not she should go back
and pick up the missing bits.
The phone grew lopsided
and she would have to stumble around
trying to compensate for the uneven weight distribution,
banging into the walls
and sliding against them for balance
as she hurdled along.

In her dream
she never reached the end of the hallway
so she quit the job.

Then sometime after that she got famous or something.

EIDOLON

Vibrating bodies hum
 Through golden shores of sludge
 Vomiting up flashes of brilliance
 And colliding head on
 With stampeding buffaloes that trample and destroy
 Everything they pass
 Without so much as a glance back.

Not love, no not quite,
 But something like it drives
 Into stupor
 Into despair of writhing
 Loathing and desire
 Grubs of fleshy pink carnal beauty
 Covered over by caramel brown beetle shells,
 Bone and cartilage as a shield
 To protect the guilty
 And leaving the innocent naked
 As they day they were born.

Kneecaps and elbows grating and grinding
 Against jawbones in
 Lusty, anxious self loathing and self absorption
 Soaring through tweed and denim
 By way of flesh and tissue and
 Momentum
 Pushing pushing till it falls
 Off the edge of insanity
 And lands with a sickening crunch
 In the pit of my stomach
 Not through pink and ruby and orange of a sunset
 But through lima bean green and mud brown
 We finally roll to a stop at the bottom
 See
 Right there
 I'm pointing right at us
 Way at the bottom, small as amoeba
 Wrapped all in white-hot seething shame
 Caged in by icy waters and orbs of neon light
 Glowing from nowhere and everywhere
 And now we roll further down
 Because it never ends
 Only goes deeper
 Only goes worse
 Only goes.

(stanza break)

Celestial bodies orbit
Around translucent moons
And swinging moods
And hair follicles that pick up
Even the most delicate of brushing strokes
From fingers and toes
And we lounge in the gray slush
Revel in it
And don't you dare pretend any different.

So why don't you just quit dancing around?
Stop jumping with antsy toes
Begging to get stepped on
With raised hairs and toothy grins
And fingers that tickle no,
I'm done, no more joking.
It's not enough and more than I can handle.

Heads as high as kites
Until they crash to the ground
Tearing and splintered
I've got that on my own

When I get to the end I'll let you know.

AS SEEN ON TV

We tried to escape
those pulling waves above
so you would always be here
within me without me withthrough me.

But we know and always knew
we cannot carry on this way
this way of carrying on will
not suffice for we
are not those slick and sweating forms
as seen on TV

we are not a we at all.
We are a you and a me
and you are not as I thought you to be

but rather just another
another you after all.

So we will not carry on this way
this way of carrying on will
not suffice not
because we are better
because we are not
because we can
not be on this boat
we must go over the side
and let the waves
have their ways
and work with what we've got.

LIMITED TIME OFFER

Somewhere in the swell,
 Children and college freshman fly on sleds
 Forged from cardboard boxes,
 Sliding down
 And climbing up and
 Sliding down.

The wind forces down my
 Throat with barbed fire and
 When I shield my mouth with
 My glove, its smell folds me back
 Into my first love's bed. Back then,
 His moldy, unwashed bedsheets repulsed me —
 The smell reminded me of my great uncle
 Who, was born on a farm in the 1920s
 and is not accustomed to bathing.
 I later learned that my love's sheets smelled
 This way because he had no mother
 To do his laundry regularly.
 Now, breathing in the stale musk,
 Thick streams of erotic nostalgia
 Emerge and escape in the form
 Of metered smoked breath.

If snow counts as a form of water, would this be
 What Jesus' footprints would look like if he had
 Stepped here – marked, but just barely?

Next door a tiny flag
 Sputters half-frozen in a drift
 A blue utility flag
 Just like the orange ones which
 Fifteen years ago I bent and twisted
 Downward in fuming defiance when I thought men
 Were planning to destroy my mother's immaculate front yard.
 To children, everything is immaculate, everything is sacred.
 The bottoms of your shoes
 Contain a life force which cannot possibly be
 Contained. The contents of your Stuff Box

(no stanza break)

Belong in museums, studied
And appreciated by Stuff Box connoisseurs.
The souls of your stuffed animals
Haunt you at night, threatening the question, "Do you love us all equally?"
And of course the tortured answer is always, "No."

Earlier this winter, in a minor forest
Nestled behind subdivisions we
Discovered the three-story hollow tree where you panicked
At the thought of rotting inside.
We perched on the rim of its gaping portal
And listened to woodpeckers through the fog.
I heard three, but you only heard two.
At the time I assumed it was because I was more attuned to nature,
But now I wonder if one was just an echo.

When I pull upward, the snow holds fast,
Cradling me in itself, so I relent and stay a while.
A few blocks away, a man whistles to his dog, calling,
"C'mon." The call is snatched up and the stretching
Field bounces his beckon along. C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. C'mon.