



Joni Mitchell in concert at Universal Amphitheater in 1974 (Wikimedia Commons/Paul C. Babin)



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Editor's note: Contributor Ray Levy Uyeda uses poetry to explore the love and ache in Joni Mitchell's 1972 album "For The Roses."

how does a breakup happen? / what is broken / split down the center / newly defined space between you and another / not the love that's broken, but everything that holds the love together: the time, the words, the attention / everything real and unholdable / unlike their body / everything you can't get back / all the wreckage /

she is in love / still / [Joni Mitchell with James Taylor](#) / as of the writing of "[For The Roses](#)" / her fifth studio album / 1972, written in the months after / you get the sense he wanted the breaking / you get the sense she didn't /

breakups are all backward / and backward looking / "[Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire](#)" / "[Lesson in Survival](#)" / "[Let the Wind Carry Me](#)" / "[Electricity](#)" (input output electricity) / "[Blonde in the Bleachers](#)" (you can't hold the hand of a rock 'n' roll man very long)

breakups are all questioning what life looks like for that person without you / "Blonde in the Bleachers" (it seems like you've gotta give up such a piece of your soul when you give up the chase) / "[See You Sometime](#)" / "[Woman of Heart and Mind](#)" / "[You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio](#)" (I know you don't like weak women, you get bored so quick, and you don't like strong women, 'cause they're hip to your tricks)

12 songs / 12 breakups / 12 perfect songs / one breakup / the arrangements in "For The Roses" are more complex than those in her previous album / the one everyone says is her best / the one that sounds like a whisper / "[Blue](#)" / "For The Roses" has more woodwind and reed instruments, [jazz](#) melodies, interludes and a hit track

1971 / she / Joni / went away / away / away / back to the [woods](#) to read / philosophy and write / the songs for her next album / she was / down / depressed blue / in love and trying not to be /

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the love is everywhere in / "[For the Roses](#)" / in the care Joni takes to describe Taylor's heroin addiction / *Some turn to Jesus and some turn to heroin*, [Joni says](#) / "Come with me / I know the way" / [the song's siren, Lady Release, says](#) / she says

"It's down, down, down the dark ladder"

or the love in "[Lesson in Survival](#)" / with its lyrics that fall into each other / or the heavy / pauses that precede / *You and me / Deep kisses / And the sun going down /* later, in the second verse: *I'm gonna get a boat / And we can row it / If you ever get the notion / To be needed by me and / to close / the words that comfort the breaking / I will always love you*

with the breaking up / there is a wrestling with the wanting / and trying to not want / how not to want / when all you can do / is want / allows the wanting to eat within you / and there's / wanting for answers / wanting for love / or for the past to pull herself into the present / for the present not to ache so strongly / but the ache is strong / *I will always love you* / wanting can be / a fast way to lose yourself

or wind can bring you elsewhere / if you want / in "[Let the Wind Carry Me](#)" / she / Joni / sings *And I want to settle / And raise a child up with somebody / only that the want / passes like the summer / I'm a wild seed again*

did you become a lover / and how / and / where did you learn to love / from your parents / from your mother / from your father / what they did and did not do to each other / what they would not let you see / what they demanded you witness / how did you learn to talk

Joni sings through a character in / "Blonde in the Bleachers" / a figure who *tapes her regrets / To the microphone stand /* and sings / *"You can't hold the hand / Of a rock 'n' roll man / Very long"* / who is the man / who is "she" / [she wants us to](#) / *Show 'em you won't expire / Not till you burn up every passion / Not even when you die /* (how to be so alive that death will not come for you?)

after all / all words / in song and poetry / are just a way of making different sounds / with the body / what is the sound of breaking up /

"[Woman of Heart and Mind](#)" / she is coming out of the breakup / she is finally broken / enough / to see things / her past / her self / clearly / *you don't even try* / Joni sings / to us

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