

PAUL · SIMON
GRACELAND



Paul Simon

Graceland

08/1996

Warner Bros.

On *Graceland* by Paul Simon

Keri Smith

And I see losing love

Is like a window in your heart

Everybody sees you're blown apart

Everybody sees the wind blow

I was born in South Africa. My parents sailed around the world and as a result, missed almost a whole decade of music. Growing up we just had tapes from artists from the 1970s in one of those wooden tape holders where the top rolled back with a satisfying sliding whoosh. Since I was born in South Africa my mom also had stocked up on tapes from there, my favorite when I was very little being Ladysmith Black Mambazo's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling stories. I would listen to the story and their singing of how the leopard got his spots, how the elephant's trunk got so long...all about that imagined country that I've never been back to. So it was probably natural that I ended up loving Paul Simon's tape of Graceland. It was the grown up version of the tapes I was listening to when I was very young, and it was catchy, and I always associated it with happy memories of my parents, even now, twenty some odd years after their divorce.

At twelve and thirteen my dad became obsessed with his idea of being a cowboy. We had horses and I spent my summers with him driving through Tennessee and Kentucky and the Carolinas. We would find places to camp or rugged bed and breakfasts and ride all day in bright green country and then drive all night to the next spot. My dad exclusively then and now only listens to country music. Anyone who's ever seen me very drunk in a dive bar can attest that I inexplicably know the words to almost every country song written before 1997. The only music I could get my dad to listen to that wasn't country radio was my Graceland tape. I wonder what it meant to him then, listening to the title song on it, about traveling to Graceland, with a young companion? I didn't know then that the song was about loss, it would take years of heartbreak for me to really understand those lines, and I'm still not sure if he even liked the tape. We never went to church so any religious references were lost to me. I just sang the song and felt like we were going somewhere, driving on together, and that eventually we must be "home." That never happened for us. We traveled together in the summers until I became an unruly teenager, and then I wanted to hitchhike across the country, and tour in punk bands, and go to other countries I had only read about in books. My dad and I didn't talk to each other for four years. Even now, while I write this in Paris where I'm living for a month, he doesn't know I'm here. So I've been his passenger in the song, his young companion, but I haven't been the narrator of the song yet.

*There is a girl in New York City...*I remember listening to Graceland alone in bar I was working in the East Village. Still heartbroken from a breakup back where I thought was my home, in Gainesville Florida. *She calls herself the human trampoline...*I understood it. I hated being able to understand the other side of the song. It wasn't a happy song for me anymore. No longer just a song about traveling and even my memories of it were clouded by my confusion relationship with my parents and the past. Now I had experienced my big heartbreak, I only what I could hope would be my last. I understood something more

when I listened alone in the bar. That the song was about loss but eventually finding yourself absolved of it.

Maybe I've a reason to believe we all will be received in Graceland... I think I knew it then but after three years in New York I know I'll never go back to that home, in the south. Those green years are behind me. No more road trips, with bands or horses. I'm sitting in a bright kitchen in Paris listening to the song and singing along with it, since they're words I know by heart. I'll return home to my apartment in Brooklyn, and even though it might be snowing, it's where I'm in love, and so it's Graceland