

“Beulah Land is a well-known gospel song with text by Edgar Page Stites (1836–1921) and music by John R Sweeney (1837–1899). The hymn derives from the King James Version of Isaiah 62:4; “Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah and thy land Beulah; for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.” In the Berean Study Bible, this translates as: “No longer will you be called Forsaken, nor your land named Desolate; but you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be His bride.” So Beulah Land - a reference to Judea - can be inferred to mean “God’s Bride.” The verse is in reference to the return of the Hebrew from their exile in Babylon in which the Hebrew shall no longer be called Forsaken, but Hephzibah (My Delight Is in Her), and Jerusalem shall no longer be called Desolate, but Beulah (Married). This implies that the Hebrews have turned back to the worship of God.” Edgar Stites was a devout Methodist, who planted new churches in and around the New Jersey area.

There is quite a bit of cultural baggage attached to this song. It’s lyricist, Edgar Stites, was descended from pilgrim settlers who had arrived in the Americas from England on the Mayflower. The historical facts regarding interactions between these settlers and the indigenous peoples of the area depend on the perspective from which they are related; the “Thanksgiving” story, in particular, is one that sparks controversy among Native Americans as it demonstrates, what they refer to as, American “Cultural Amnesia” - a glossing over of the atrocities enacted against the Natives by the immigrant English settlers.

Tori would have been very familiar with this song, growing up in the Methodist Church, playing piano for the choir. I believe she has anthropomorphized the concept of Beulah Land so as to confess a missed opportunity because of the constraints of “acceptable behaviour” placed in her by this very personage; she blames the Methodist church culture of her youth and it’s attitude toward, what it would consider, inappropriate relationships for feeling that she must avoid developing a relationship with the young black man at Peabody institute (mentioned in Upside Down). Even though she would have been a child at that time - and likely unaware of the subtleties of segregation in the 60’s - looking back, she laments that that would have been frowned upon by those in “Beulah Land.” I believe that, from that perspective, this song becomes a lament for all such interracial couplings that never happened because of perceived church doctrine - none of which was, or is, actually biblical. It is an indictment of this part of church culture that encourages segregation - an aspect of Puritanism that would have flowed from those original settlers back in the 17th Century. I think, too, by extension, this draws in all of the possible relationships or experiences that could’ve been but were avoided because of a perception of obedience to a religious system.

Beulah Land

Beulah Land was said to lie close to the shores of Heaven such that one could “look away across the sea/ Where mansions are prepared for me/ And view the shining glory shore/ My heaven, my home forever more.” It is also described as “Heaven’s borderland.” So this could be a reference to the song, the land itself or the concept of a “promised land” where those who

enter in are no longer “forsaken.” This could be flipped around to infer that those who are not citizens of Beulah Land are still forsaken; which, of course, is completely undone in the New Testament by both Jesus (“love your neighbour as yourself”) and his disciples (Acts 15:20). But this is an unfortunate skewing of Jesus’ recommendation to his disciples to be “in the world, but not OF the world.” There is an unwritten understanding from this that Christians are “above” or somehow better than non-Christians from whence all kinds of unrighteous judgment (read condemnation) ensues. Another reading of Beulah Land could be a reference to the Christian Church. The church is often described as “the bride of Christ” (notably, Paul, in Ephesians 5:22-24). So, we could infer that Beulah Land, in this context, is The Church (capitals intended).

got a wasted gun

So is she saying that Beulah Land has a wasted gun or is she confessing to Beulah Land that she (Tori) has a wasted gun? This speaks to me of a missed opportunity, a gun that didn’t fire or wasn’t needed. I think this could actually speak to both options. Beulah Land has a “wasted gun” in that pervasive church culture (in general - there definitely are more inclusive denominations out there), which stigmatizes couplings or pairings that fall outside of the status quo, is actually built by mankind (inherently sinful and imperfect, according to Augustine and Calvin - though not actually in the Bible itself) and therefore is based more on tradition than actual biblical doctrine. So many of these pairings may not actually fall outside of Christ’s definition of love but fall short of man’s reconstruction of what Christ revealed to them. Alternatively, Tori has a wasted gun because she (and by extension, women in the church) shies away from these relationships out of a sense of obligation or obedience to the church (“my daddy would scream”). This, however, is all man’s perception and not a true reflection of how God intended us to live.

licorice man

Licorice is a root legume that is used in the making of candy, the sweetening of tobacco and also as a digestive remedy. This could be a reference to the colour Licorice Black; this would then refer to a black man. “Coming out of the African-American religious experience, American gospel music can be traced to the early 17th century, with foundations in the works of Dr. Isaac Watts and others. Gospel music has roots in the black oral tradition, and typically utilizes a great deal of repetition, which allows those who could not read the opportunity to participate in worship. During this time, hymns and spiritual songs were lined and repeated in a call and response fashion, and Negro spirituals and work songs emerged. Repetition and ‘call and response’ are accepted elements in African music, designed to achieve an altered state of consciousness we sometimes refer to as ‘trance’, and strengthen communal bonds.” This further pulls in the segregation of the South with its Black and White churches, and is exemplified in this song with the addition of the Gospel Choir.

I’ll sum you up:
thumbs up

This, when taken with the previous lyric may refer to a fellow student of T's at the Peabody Institute, the eponymous "black boy" she loved in "Upside Down." She is quoted as having been enamoured if this older kid's ability to play and a part of her 5-11yo self (were not sure exactly WHEN this boy was in her class) fell in love with this much older young man. So she "sums him up" as "thumbs up;" back at that time - in the 60's - this would have been a very radical summation for a white person to make, especially a conservative Christian white girl. So this implies a degree of rebellion against the status quo.

Got something in that sand

This may refer to Jesus' writing in the sand during the stoning of the adulterous woman (John 8:6). While Jesus was teaching at the temple, the Pharisees (religious leaders of the time), hoping to trick Him, brought a woman before Him that was caught in the act of adultery; they goaded Him by quoting the law of Moses wherein the punishment for adultery is to be stoned to death. He knelt down and wrote something in the sand and then stood, uttered the now famous idiom, "let any of you who are without sin cast the first stone." It is unknown what he actually wrote in the sand; it has been a matter of much conjecture since the book of John was written. Some believe he wrote "terra terram accusat:" earth by earth accused. Some believe that he enumerated some of the sins of the Pharisees standing there to lend credibility to his statement of admonishment. If T is referencing the latter, it could be an affirmation that we ALL have sins; none of us are perfect. Taken with the above few lines, this almost seems like a confession. Perhaps she's saying here that she is not completely innocent of this kind of separation; this could be a reference to her segregation of the feminine within herself.

Beulah girl
you been hitchin' me up

I think this is a poke at the Hebrew translation of the word "Beulah" itself, which means "married." Reading into the text itself, there may also be a connotation of ownership. The Jews were understood to be God's people, in the passage from Isaiah, they are understood to be his bride (ie. they would not describe God as being THEIR groom). This may be an allusion to conscripting soldiers for God's kingdom, perhaps ignorant of what that will entail; perhaps it is also pulling in the idea that - as a woman - this enforced marriage will mean sacrificing the sacred feminine so as to be the perfect "pure" bride. To get "hitched up" can mean to get married, but it can also mean to get snagged or caught on something; there is the saying "I've got a hitch in the giddy-up" which means that something is keeping you from walking correctly. So to say that Beulah Girl has been "hitching her up" could also mean that BG has been keeping her from moving forward or keeping her from reaching her goal.

got some candy and a sweet saying:
"gimme religion and a lobotomy"

This part makes me think that she is reliving those moments as a child but looking back at that time as an adult. The idea of "give the child some candy and she'll be happy," is juxtaposed with

the idea that all you need to be happy in a religious institution is a lobotomy. This brings forward the idea that, in order to find happiness in faith, you have to shut your brain off and go with the status quo; don't ask questions, don't try to understand anything too deeply. This is an indictment of the institution of the church as a whole and a corruption of what God intended for his "bride," which we see in the next line when Tori says:

Beulah land
you beautiful whore

The whore concept (especially in the context of the bible) speaks to sexual immorality/impurity; the modern church often conflates Mary Magdalene with the "immoral woman" caught in the act of adultery. Mary Magdalene was actually a woman from whom Jesus exorcised 7 demons; so to conflate these two women is to imply that a mental, emotional or psychological "impurity" (possession by demons) is somehow akin to moral/ethical impurity (sexual immorality). This is a topic - the marrying of these two sundered pieces of the feminine psyche - that Tori was definitely exploring in the Pele era (when Beulah Land was written). And she calls this corrupted promised land (corrupted by man's interpretation) "beautiful" so as to reclaim the concept of "the sacred sexual." From the perspective of The Church as Beulah Land, she is referring to The Church as the "beautiful whore," the idea that this concept that should be so beautiful has been corrupted by the machinations of man.

tell me when
I don't need you anymore

T wants to be able to separate herself from this corrupted construct; but she acknowledges that, at the moment, she still "needs" it, for some reason. There is some part of her that still needs this idea of a promised land - married to God - where she is no longer forsaken. This may be a nod to a desire to shed the mantle of victimhood that she had worn since her rape so that she could truly reclaim her own femininity and feel justified in desiring and being desired.

and said that somewhere
you're gonna get something here

From a purely linguistic standpoint, this is a really fun couplet. "Somewhere" and "here" are not necessarily antonyms by definition but they do carry very different meanings; one is very indefinite and nebulous (somewhere) while the other is very finite and explicit (here). There is also the implication that "somewhere" does not include "here;" so it is outside of the common sphere/terrain. I think, in order to make sense of this lyric, we need to pinpoint what T means by "here." Does she mean here as in here on earth (as opposed to in Heaven)? Does she mean here as inside/in the heart (I imagine her putting her hand over her heart at this line)? Does she mean here as in herself - exemplifying the idea that, no matter where you go, you'll realize that what you wanted was here all along? Truthfully, it could be all of these things. This seems to be implying the idea that, should you not take this on - whatever THIS happens to be - you will one day realize that it is all you ever needed; and the reason you originally left it behind (matters of

faith or religious doctrine, prejudice, etc) will someday not matter. It's entirely possible that T is speaking to herself in this moment as well.

so you're right in the middle

This could be a direct reference to the line above, in that this person is right in the middle between "Somewhere" and "Here." It could also be an indication that they are in equilibrium - they have found a way to bring "Somewhere" (life outside of traditional Church doctrine) and "Here" (life within the traditional tenets of the Church) together within their own being; this is like the marriage of the sacred and the profane that T often talks about.

and then I'm you

This, again, seems to speak of a merging of separate parts; this could also be the merging of the self with the actual Devine message called "The Law of Christ:" 1. You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. AND love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27).

something is coming back again, I said

This could be taken to mean that, now that this merge has taken place, she is recalling what has been lost to women for the last 2000 years; it could mean that the true sense of Christ is coming back because of this union, which will undo the man-made legalisms of the church; this could mean both of these things. This could also reference Christ's promise to return - perhaps this union of opposites (like a bride and groom) is the first sign of the returning Christ, or a signal that we are becoming ready for his return.

you...

maybe I don't wanna go
to where you're not,
So, Beulah land
gotta find me a warm
place to bathe this body on down

While the first two lines of this stanza are technically part of the bridge, they are grammatically linked to the next phrase by "so;" when read together, this becomes a form of surrender. She realizes that she doesn't want to be anywhere that whoever the "you" might be is not; if this person is someone who also adheres to these ideals, then she has decided to "follow suit" with Beulah Land for the moment - by word and form only, though - in order to be where this person is. She realizes that - for the moment - she needs to play nice (and play along) so that they can occupy the same space. The bit about finding "a warm place to bathe this body" is a reasonably clear baptism reference, although she's not just going to wade into the river; she's going to look for a warm (safe) place to do this. She's going to do it on her terms. It's as though she's only reluctantly going to go through the motions so that she can be near this person. It occurs to me

that this could be a very oblique reference to Jesus himself; T has often mentioned that she doesn't believe that Jesus would be a Christian if he were alive today (even though the church is supposed to be "his bride" so to speak). But T does love Jesus' message, the problem is with the messengers; so, she may be saying that she wants to be with (near, a part of) Jesus and Jesus is bound up in these man-made trappings at the moment so she will "double-agent" for a while.

got a rubber board
and a crocodile
gonna float
on past your home

This "warm place to bathe" that she has found would appear to be a pool or a lazy river. The rubber board would be a paddle board or flutter board and the crocodile is one of those inflatable rafts used to sunbathe while floating in a lounge pool. She says she's gonna float PAST his home, but not actually go in. So she's just going to hang out and wait for something to change. It's very tongue-in-cheek as well, slightly irreverent; while everyone is going under to wash away their sins, she's floating by, sipping a fruity drink and just doing Tori. She mentions his "home" here as well; since Beulah Land is essentially a stone's throw from Heaven, which is visible across a narrow sea, it seems that T is floating in this sea past Heaven waiting for people to realize that all of these trappings and traditions are not necessary to get in to Heaven - it's literally visible across the causeway - all you really need is a floatation device.

say when
just say when
just say when

This harkens back to "tell me when I don't need you anymore." So she's saying, "I'm waiting this out, Church; let me know when I don't need you anymore." Conversely, "Just say when" is also a phrase used to let someone know that they can let you know when they've got enough of what you are offering them. For example, you can be pouring out a cup of wine for someone and you say to them, "just say 'when'" so that you know when they feel that their cup is full enough. So this could be T telling Jesus, "you tell ME when you've had enough of this."

Cheers, mates!