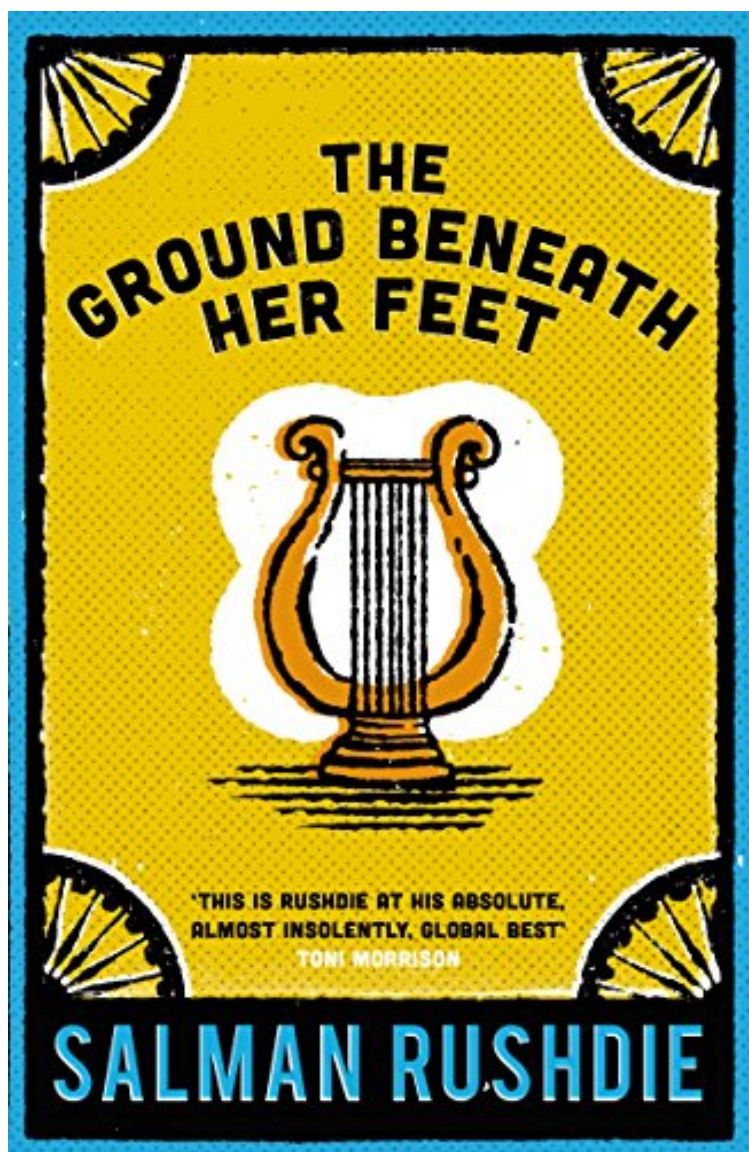


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The Ground Beneath Her Feet



Par Salman Rushdie

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOn Valentines Day, 1989, Vina Apsara, a famous and much-loved singer, disappears in a devastating earthquake. Her lover, the singer Ormus Cama, cannot accept that he has lost her, and so begins his eternal quest to find her and bring her back. His journey takes him across the globe and through cities pulsating with the power of rock n roll, to Bombay, London and New York. But around the star-crossed lover and his quest, the uncertain world itself is beginning to tremble and break. Cracks and tears are appearing in the very fabric of reality, and exposing the abyss beyond. And Ormus has to confront just how far he is willing to go for love..comThe ground shifts repeatedly beneath the reader's feet during the course of Salman Rushdie's sixth novel, a riff on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the high-octane world of

rock roll. Readers get their first clues early on that the universe Rushdie is creating here is not quite the one we know: Jesse Aron Parker, for example, wrote "Heartbreak Hotel"; Carly Simon and Guinevere Garfunkel sang "Bridge over Troubled Water"; and Shirley Jones and Gordon McRae starred in "South Pacific." And as the novel progresses, Rushdie adds unmistakable elements of science fiction to his already patented magical realism, with occasionally uneven results. Rushdie's cunning musician is Ormus Cana, the Bombay-born founder of the most popular group in the world. Ormus's Eurydice (and lead singer) is Vina Apsara, the daughter of a Greek American woman and an Indian father who abandoned the family. What these two share, besides amazing musical talent, is a decidedly twisted family life: Ormus's twin brother died at birth and communicates to him from "the other side"; his older brothers, also twins, are, respectively, brain-damaged and a serial killer. Vina, on the other hand, grew up in rural West Virginia where she returned home one day to find her stepfather and sisters shot to death and her mother hanging from a rafter in the barn. No wonder these two believe they were made for each other. Narrated by Rai Merchant, a childhood friend of both Vina and Ormus, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* begins with a terrible earthquake in 1989 that swallows Vina whole, then moves back in time to chronicle the tangled histories of all the main characters and a host of minor ones as well. Rushdie's canvas is huge, stretching from India to London to New York and beyond--and there's plenty of room for him to punctuate this epic tale with pointed commentary on his own situation: Muslim-born Rai, for example, remarks that "my parents gave me the gift of irreligion, of growing up without bothering to ask people what gods they held dear.... You may argue that the gift was a poisoned chalice, but even if so, that's a cup from which I'd happily drink again." Despite earthquakes, heartbreaks, and a rip in the time-space continuum, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* may be the most optimistic, accessible novel Rushdie has yet written. --Alix Wilber

Extrait The Keeper of Bees On St. Valentine's Day, 1989, the last day of her life, the legendary popular singer Vina Apsara woke sobbing from a dream of human sacrifice in which she had been the intended victim. Bare-torsoed men resembling the actor Christopher Plummer had been gripping her by the wrists and ankles. Her body was splayed out, naked and writhing, over a polished stone bearing the graven image of the snakebird Quetzalcoatl. The open mouth of the plumed serpent surrounded a dark hollow scooped out of the stone, and although her own mouth was stretched wide by her screams the only noise she could hear was the popping of flashbulbs; but before they could slit her throat, before her lifeblood could bubble into that terrible cup, she awoke at noon in the city of Guadalajara, Mexico, in an unfamiliar bed with a half-dead stranger by her side, a naked mestizo male in his early twenties, identified in the interminable press coverage that followed the catastrophe as Razl Paramo, the playboy heir of a well-known local construction baron, one of whose corporations owned the hotel. She had been perspiring heavily and the sodden bedsheets stank of the meaningless misery of the nocturnal encounter. Razl Paramo was unconscious, white-lipped, and his body was galvanized, every few moments, by spasms which Vina recognized as being identical to her own dream writhings. After a few moments he began to make frightful noises deep in his windpipe, as if someone were slitting his throat, as if his blood were flowing out through the scarlet smile of an invisible wound into a phantom goblet. Vina, panicking, leapt from the bed, snatched up her clothes, the leather pants and gold-sequined bustier in which she had made her final exit, the night before, from the stage of the city's convention centre. Contemptuously, despairingly, she had surrendered herself to this nobody, this boy less than half her age, she had selected him more or less at random from the backstage throng, the lounge lizards, the slick, flower-bearing suitors, the industrial magnates, the aristottrash, the drug underlords, the tequila princes, all with limousines and champagne and cocaine and maybe even diamonds to bestow upon the evening's star. The man had begun to introduce himself, to preen and fawn, but she didn't want to know his name or the size of his bank balance. She had picked him like a flower and now she wanted him between her teeth, she had ordered him like a take-home meal and now she alarmed him by the ferocity of her appetites, because she began to feast upon him the moment the door of the limo was closed, before the chauffeur had time to raise the partition that gave the passengers their privacy. Afterwards he, the chauffeur, spoke with reverence of her naked body, while the newspapermen plied him with tequila he whispered about her swarming and predatory nudity as if it were a miracle, who'd have thought she was way the wrong side of forty, I guess somebody upstairs wanted to keep her just the way she was. I would have done anything for such a woman, the chauffeur moaned, I would have driven at two hundred kilometres per hour for her if it were speed she wanted, I would have crashed into a concrete wall for her if it had been her desire to die. Only when she lurched into the eleventh-floor corridor of the hotel, half dressed and confused, stumbling over the unclaimed newspapers, whose headlines about French nuclear tests in the Pacific and political

unrest in the southern province of Chiapas smudged the bare soles of her feet with their shrieking ink, only then did she understand that the suite of rooms she had abandoned was her own, she had slammed the door and didn't have the key, and it was lucky for her in that moment of vulnerability that the person she bumped into was me, Mr. Umeed Merchant, photographer, a.k.a. "Rai," her so to speak chum ever since the old days

in Bombay and the only shutterbug within one thousand and one miles who would not dream of photographing her in such delicious and scandalous disarray, her whole self momentarily out of focus and worst of all looking her age, the only image-stealer who would never have stolen from her that frayed and hunted look, that bleary and unarguably bag-eyed helplessness, her tangled fountain of wiry dyed red hair quivering above her head in a woodpeckerish topknot, her lovely mouth trembling an uncertain, with the tiny fjords of the pitiless years deepening at the edges of her lips, the very archetype of the wild rock goddess halfway down the road to desolation and ruin. She had decided to become a redhead for this tour because at the age of forty-four she was making a new start, a solo career without Him, for the first time in years she was on the road without Ormus, so it wasn't really surprising that she was disoriented and off balance most of the time. And lonely. It has to be admitted. Public life or private life, makes no difference, that's the truth: when she wasn't with him, it didn't matter who she was with, she was always alone. Disorientation: loss of the East. And of Ormus Cama, her sun. And it wasn't just dumb luck, her bumping into me. I was always there for her. Always looking out for her, always waiting for her call. If she'd wanted it, there could have been dozens of us, hundreds, thousands. But I believe there was only me. And the last time she called for help, I couldn't give it, and she died. She ended in the middle of the story of her life, she was an unfinished song abandoned at the bridge, deprived of the right to follow her life's verses to their final, fulfilling rhyme.

Two hours after I rescued her from the unfathomable chasm of her hotel corridor, a helicopter flew us to Tequila, where Don Angel Cruz, the owner of one of the largest plantations of blue agave cactus and of the celebrated Angel distillery, a gentleman fabled for the sweet amplitude of his countertenor voice, the great rotunda of his belly and the lavishness of his hospitality, was scheduled to hold a banquet in her honour.

Meanwhile, Vina's playboy lover had been taken to hospital, in the grip of drug-induced seizures so extreme that they eventually proved fatal, and for days afterwards, because of what happened to Vina, the world was treated to detailed analyses of the contents of the dead man's bloodstream, his stomach, his intestines, his scrotum, his eye sockets, his appendix, his hair, in fact everything except his brain, which was not thought to

contain anything of interest, and had been so thoroughly scrambled by narcotics that nobody could understand his last words, spoken during his final, comatose delirium. Some days later, however, when the information had found its way on to the Internet, a fantasy-fiction wonk hailing from the Castro district of San Francisco and nicknamed explained that Razl Paramo had been speaking Orcish, the infernal speech devised for the servants of the Dark Lord Sauron by the writer Tolkien: Ash nazg durbatul{k, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatul{k agh burzum-ishi krimpatul. After that, rumours of Satanic, or perhaps Sauronic, practices spread unstoppably across the Web. The idea was put about that the mestizo lover had been a devil worshipper, a blood servant of the Underworld, and had given Vina Apsara a priceless but malignant ring, which had caused the subsequent catastrophe and dragged her down to Hell. But by then Vina was already passing into myth, becoming a vessel into which any moron could pour his stupidities, or let us say a mirror of the culture, and we can best understand the nature of this culture if we say that it found its truest mirror in a corpse. One ring to rule them all, one ring to find them, one ring to bring them all and in

the darkness bind them. I sat next to Vina Apsara in the helicopter to Tequila, and I saw no ring on her finger, except for the talismanic moonstone she always wore, her link to Ormus Cama, her reminder of his love. She had sent her entourage by road, selecting me as her only aerial companion, "of all of you bastards he's the only one I can trust," she'd snarled. They had set off an hour ahead of us, the whole damn zoo, her serpentine tour manager, her hyena of a personal assistant, the security gorillas, the peacock of a hairdresser,

the publicity dragon, but now, as the chopper swooped over their motorcade, the darkness that had enveloped her since our departure seemed to lift, and she ordered the pilot to make a series of low passes over the cars below, lower and lower, I saw his eyes widen with fear, the pupils were black pinpricks, but he was under her spell like all of us, and did her bidding. I was the one yelling higher, get higher into the microphone attached to our ear-defender headsets, while her laughter clattered in my ears like a door banging in the wind, and when I looked across at her to tell her I was scared I saw that she was weeping. The police had been surprisingly gentle with her when they arrived at the scene of Razl Paramo's overdose, contenting themselves with cautioning her that she might become the subject of an investigation herself. Her lawyers had terminated the encounter at that point, but afterwards she looked stretched, unstable, too bright,

as if she were on the point of flying apart like an exploding lightbulb, like a supernova, like the universe.

Then we were past the vehicles and flying over the hills and valleys turned smoky blue by the agave plantations, and her mood swung again, she began to giggle into her microphone and to insist that we were taking her to a place that did not exist, a fantasy location, a wonderland, because how was it possible that there could be a place called Tequila, "it's like saying that whisky comes from whisky, or gin is made in Gin," she cried. "Is the Vodka a river in Russia? Do they make rum in Rzm?" And then a sudden darkening, her voice dropping low, becoming almost inaudible beneath the noise of the rotors, "And heroin comes from heroes, and crack from the Crack of Doom." It was possible that I was hearing the birth of a song.

Afterwards, when the captain and copilot were interviewed about he...