

Your Song

by Sue Pickard

'We should have a song.'

Linda frowned. 'I'm sorry, I'm not with you.'

'You know, a song that has meaning for us, one that we can call our own.'

'Oh I see. But doesn't that just happen spontaneously as a result of a shared experience, a romantic moment? You can't nominate something like you're choosing a Eurovision song contest entry.'

'Oh I don't know,' said Barry, smiling archly. 'How about "Making your mind up"?''

They hadn't been going out long but he'd already asked her several times. So far she'd said no. 'Followed by "Congratulations," hopefully,' added Barry and he got up and started to sing, doing that little jiggy dance that Cliff used to do. *'Con -grat -u-la-tions!'*

He sang it all the way through, word perfect. They were both old enough to remember those 60s Eurovision winners the first time round. Linda watched Barry as he danced across the dining room without any discernible rhythm. He was a cheerful chap, given to breaking into song at the slightest provocation. She did her best not to provoke him.

'Barry, I'm not terribly keen on "Congratulations."

'No, not my favourite either. And the tempo's a bit quick. You know, for the big day.'

He hooked his thumbs into imaginary lapels, pumped his knees back and forth like a set of bellows, doing his best Stanley Holloway impression, *'I'm getting married in the morning.'*

The words of another song came unbidden into Linda's head. D-I-V-O-R-C-E.

Marriage wasn't something she was keen to repeat. But companionship would be nice. She was lonely and so, she suspected, was Barry.

He spent the rest of the evening suggesting songs. They hadn't been together long enough to have reached a stage where they could share comfortable silences. But Linda was beginning to wonder if Barry did silence. She hadn't known his late wife, Elaine very well but she remembered a woman with a slightly dazed expression as though she'd been brainwashed. That may have been the drugs though.

'Perhaps we could google, "love songs." suggested Barry.

Linda sighed. He couldn't help it. He was a practical man, reliable, good round the house. He even cooked for her. 'Yes, another time perhaps.'

So far she hadn't stayed over but she submitted to a kiss before she headed home which set him off again. '*Kisses for me, save all your kisses for me.*'

She left him on the doorstep bobbing up and down, paying homage to Brotherhood of Man's rather awkward dance routine. With any luck he'd forget all about this song business. No chance. Over the following days Linda came to dread the words, 'How about...?' followed by some mawkish suggestion and a strangled, pub singer version of the song. And their musical tastes didn't really coincide. Linda wouldn't have called herself high brow. Classic FM's Greatest Hits was about as refined as she got. But she found Barry's predilection for Seventies glam rock, Euro pop and flabby ballads rather depressing. She didn't think they could ever agree on anything. But he was so keen to have a song they could dance to at their wedding reception. And would that really be so bad? Barry was a nice man, dependable, loyal, given to charitable gestures, helping harassed mums with their supermarket shopping, assisting an elderly man across the road to a tuneless rendition of, '*He ain't heavy, he's my brother.*' And if Linda saw a certain ostentation in all this and suspected that Barry remembered these small acts of kindness long

after the recipients had forgotten all about them she was prepared to admit that it was probably more down to her own rather jaundiced outlook than any failing on Barry's part. If only he wouldn't keep breaking into song. Odd word that, 'breaking,' when used in relation to song, with its connotations of breaking up and breaking down. My Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown. Elaine had had a breakdown, a year or so before she'd committed suicide. No one could understand it of course. She had everything to live for, beautiful home, loyal and loving husband. But some people just can't cope, no matter what.

When Barry suggested a weekend away Linda hesitated. They hadn't got past saving all their kisses for each other. She wasn't sure she was ready for Boom Bang a Bang yet. But spending some concentrated time with Barry might not be a bad idea, a chance to see whether or not they could get along together. A make or break mini break. So she said yes. 'Where shall we go?'

Barry tapped the side of his nose. 'My little secret.'

Which was, of course, a cue for another song because as soon as they set off for their romantic break he started to serenade her. '*The Magical Mystery tour is coming to take you away, coming to take you away.*'

'What? Like the men in white coats,' quipped Linda and then bit her lip, remembering Elaine. But Barry seemed oblivious. He leaned forward, turned on the car radio. 'You never know, we might find something in the song department straightaway.'

He made it sound as if they were going shopping for one.

'Highway to Hell,' was playing. 'Perhaps not,' said Barry turning over to an easy listening channel. 'Now what about this?'

It was a record Linda particularly disliked. Whitney Houston hooting away about always loving someone, with a glass shattering finale.

'Don't like it,' she said sulkily.

Undeterred, Barry went on to identify about a dozen more songs which could be exclusively theirs. At the thirteenth suggestion Linda snapped. 'And what's it supposed to remind us of?' she said irritably, looking out of the car window, 'Sitting in a traffic jam on the M25?'

'No,' smiled Barry, reaching for her hand, 'Of being together.' He put his head to one side, listening. 'I think it's ideal. "My heart will go on".'

And on and on, thought Linda. She turned to him. 'Barry, how about the Sound of Silence?'

He tried it out. '*Hello, darkness my old friend.*' It's a bit downbeat, isn't it?'

She smiled sweetly at him. 'Then how about Alanis Morissette, 'Isn't it ironic?'

He considered this. 'I don't think I know that one.'

'No Barry, you don't.'

Perhaps she needed to get more literal. Joe Dolce's Shuddupa yer face might do the trick. But Barry didn't ask her for any suggestions. Linda had no prior experience of sharing a song with someone. Her ex-husband had probably shared several but none, unfortunately, with her. But she'd naively assumed that something which is shared is mutually agreed. Apparently not.

After a couple of hours on the road they arrived at the surprise location. 'Hotel California,' was playing on the radio. Wrong on both counts. It wasn't California or indeed a hotel, little more than a B&B. If Barry was into romantic gestures they obviously weren't extravagant ones. 'You can check out any time you like but you can never leave,' threatened the Eagles as Barry parked the car.

They went into a tiny cramped reception area. Piped music was playing in the background. Barry seized Linda's arm. 'This is it!'

Linda listened, frowning. 'But it's awfully twee, not to mention hackneyed.'

'No,' beamed Barry, 'It's ideal. The sentiments are spot on. And it's true, your eyes are greenish blue.'

He made her sound a bit wishy washy.

Linda put down the bag she was carrying. 'Barry, tell me something. Did you and Elaine have a song?

'Oh yes. "The Real Thing". That was ours. *'I'd like to teach the world to sing in...'*

Linda cut him short. 'And was that her choice or yours?'

'Mine. But she liked it as well. To start with.'

Linda eyed him suspiciously. 'What do you mean, to start with?'

'Well, as time went by, she seemed to want to change it but the suggestions she made really weren't very suitable.'

'Like what?'

'Daft novelty songs by Joe Dolce, that sort of thing. And then later on she went through a Roberta Flack phase. "Killing me softly with his song." I think it was. Highly inappropriate.'

'I see.' Linda picked up her bag. 'Barry, I'm not quite sure how to say this but anyway the thing is, what I really mean is that I'm leaving on a jet plane, I'm getting the last train to Clarkesville.'

She had, in fact, no idea how she was getting back but she'd cross that Bridge over Troubled Water when she got to it.

Barry twigged straightaway. She was talking his language now. 'You mean you're Homeward Bound.'

'Got it in one.'

'But why? Things were going so well. And what about our song?'

'It's not our song. It's Your Song and you're welcome to it.'

Linda turned to go, 'But look on the bright side, Barry. *It's a little bit funny...*'