

# My Cherie Amour

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As the car left Carluke, Brian floored the pedal, glad to be heading into true countryside. Beside him Avril was trying to get a word into the mobile phone conversation. He smiled, pleased it was not being relayed on his new Bluetooth speakers.

'Sorry Tina, this line is breaking up. Avril placed her finger over the red phone symbol:

'I think you should . . . .'

She pressed, disconnecting.

'My God Brian, that was forty-two minutes and she was still going round in circles. Poor girl, she's lost the plot. She's years older than me, of course. Your Archie will need to get his poor sister into a home soon.'

Brian raised an eyebrow. Avril and Tina had been in the same class, two years ahead of him at Langside Primary School.

'Better switch it off before she gets you on redial.'

'Good idea. Brian, can I use your phone? I want to check on Martha, see if she is available.'

Brian stifled a groan. Martha his ex-wife, the third member of the unholy trio, was still chipping away at him, even after five years. She had half his worldly goods including the house in Newton Mearns but he had managed to keep the car, his prized possession. Now he lived in semi-retirement with his friend Archie in his sandstone villa in Newlands, where the car was secured in a huge triple garage beside Archie's two cars, a Porsche and a Mini Cooper soft top. Brian and Archie had been friends from schooldays and had eventually 'found' each other after years of unhappy marriages.

The 1967 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud sped onwards, heading for *Peebles Hydro* where he and Avril would do two forty-minute spots, singing with the *Silvertones Big Band Sound*. It was another forties and fifties dance weekend with the participants all trying to outdo each other, dressed in period clothing.

As they travelled, his sister Avril was trying to finalise a group of singers for a charity event she was calling a "Golden Oldies' Singalong" to be held later in the week at the *Glasgow's City Halls*. This gig was in aid of *St Margaret's Hospice* in memory of her husband Stephen.

'Martha, I'll put you on speaker, Brian's driving, I just . . . .'

***'My Brian? You're in the Roller, right? That car should have been mine, Brian. I looked after it like the child we never had, all those years when Avril and Stephen***

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*took you away from me, on your endless cruise shows with that wee rat, Tommy and his Silvertones. It's mine, Brian. That car is mine. D'you hea. . .'*

Brian hit the recently installed Bluetooth cut-out button hidden under the dashboard. Martha ranted on, into the uncaring ether.

'Avril, switch it totally off, please. Thanks. You do realise this call will generate days of abusive text messages.'

'But Brian, Martha is a brilliant singer. And now she's free of looking after her mother, well . . .'

'OK, Avril. Here's the deal. If you get Martha, you'll need to find a replacement for me.'

'But Brian, the hall's booked and Tommy and his Trio from the Silvertones have booked it into their diary. We need another female voice. I can't do the whole show on my own, can I? Not with my throat!'

'What about the girl from the Jazz Choir, Leela?'

'She's Romanian, Brian. A refugee! No, Brian. She's half our age! What would she know of our repertoire? And she's an amateur!'

'Leela's from Motherwell, actually. Her mother is from Latvia and her father is Scottish. And she is a great singer, yes? We all had to start somewhere, yes? And she stood in for Frank on the piano that time at the Jazz Choir. You have to admit, Avril, Leela is very accomplished.'

'But Brian, she's blind!'

'Yes, so? What about Stevie Wonder? Leela works with Guide Dogs for the Blind, actually. She's a final assessor, before the dogs get assigned.'

'Does she? How do you know so much about her?'

'We had a coffee. Check the glove compartment. I wrote her mobile number on the back of one of my cards.'

'Leela was in this car? With a dog? No wonder my hay fever is acting up. You know I'm allergic to dogs, don't you?'

'Well, yes, Leela was with me but no dog, we leave Marigold at home. Anyway, I used Archie's Mini, not the Roller.'

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'Who's Marigold?'

'The dog under assessment.'

'So, you met her for coffee, did you? You picked her up from her house? Where does she live?'

'Tantallon Road.'

'But Brian, I live in Tantallon Road.'

'Yes, Leela lives two closes along from you. Same close as Lynne and Frank. She's quite pally with them.'

'Brian, how long has this affair been going on, right under my nose?'

'It's not an 'affair', it's a friendship, that's all. She's great fun, actually. And she's a great cook too. She came out to ours and cooked her special lasagne for us. Archie said it was the best food he's eaten in years. No Avril, Leela and I, it's a friendship, yes? She comes round to our place and we eat, then she plays and we sing, just the three of us.'

'Oh, what do you sing?'

'Just the usual stuff, you know. She's brilliant at "Puppy"<sup>1</sup>, actually.'

'But Brian, that's mine! You traitor. You know I love that song.'

'But she *is* good at it, gets all the high notes spot on. Brilliant, actually. She went down a treat at "The Redhurst".'

'You've been singing with her professionally? If you get caught, you'll lose your card.'

'No, no. It was an open mike evening. She won first place.'

'With "Puppy", with my song?'

'No, she did that for her second encore. She won with "Cherie Amour", actually. Quite appropriate, don't you think?'

'Oh, Brian, you know I love that song too. At least she didn't sing "Moonlight", did she?'

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<sup>1</sup> *Puppy Love*, written by Paul Anka, 1960.

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'Ah... well, actually that was her first encore.'

'Brian Silver, you bloody traitor. How could you! My three most favourite songs and you coached her, encouraged her. Martha was right about you all along. *You are a rat, just like Tommy.*'

'Ah, look Avril, here we are, time to gird our loins. *Peebles Hydro, here we come!* How's your throat feeling?

'I'm fine! How many times do I have to answer the same question? My throat is fine.'

'Great. Let's find Tommy and get set up for a rehearsal and sound check.'

'You go on, Brian. Leave me your keys. I'll try Celia for the Hospice gig.'

'Right. But use your own phone, please. And whatever you do, do **not** give Celia my number.'

'Brian, it's not Celia's fault. She's so lonely, now her Alfie has gone to heaven with my Stephen. She said you told her you always fancied her.'

'Fantasy stuff. Did you not explain that Archie and I are living together?'

'Yes, but Celia's a bit old-fashioned. She thinks you're just friends.'