

The Songbird Preservation Society

Alex Brianson

Bet you didn't think about this, Mr Wrasse, did you? You with the name of a tropical fish, and the cold blood too by all accounts. It came upon me last month. The girls and I, well, we were playing the songbird's new CD on our first group run through, and then Pete starts blubbing like one of those think-they're-but-ch footballers when they stick that bladder wide of the net thing. Can't handle pressure, any of 'em. 'Listen to them lyrics,' he said. Well actually he snorted through snotty shirt sleeves, but I like to draw a veil. Standards in public life, that's what mum called it. And I see no reason to diverge.

So we did. Listen to the words, hon, keep up. I see you're looking vacant. To be expected I suppose. Anyway, words matter, as by now you'll know. Well, you follow the lyrics anyway when you're learning new material, but I got the sleeve notes out and had another gander. Nice photos, very tasteful. Looking gorgeous, she was, wistful but not subdued. Bless. Still up for another trip to the rodeo.

Where was I? Oh yes. Clear as day, it was. References to how you'd met, to how hurt she'd been when you did the dirty on her, to how she'd struggled through but had nothing left for a repeat, should that ever occur, God bless 'er. Mark went, 'there's not a gay bar in the country he'd get out of alive now, that bastard.' And we all agreed. The first rule of songbird fandom, Mr Wrasse, is you DO NOT mess with the songbird.

Well, of course we knew she'd been upset. But she didn't say much in public, staying classy as she does. But. We. Knew. And then, she said in interviews that the lyrics to the new album are personal, confessional. So that really was the piece de rampance, as Jean at Joe's Barber puts it. It was curtains for you, ducks, and not nice ones neither. We thought about nipping down Dunelm, but then Pete said he's got his bedroom ones from there, and he didn't like to think of you sharing that provenance or destination. So Mark went down the charity shop round the corner. It's not an upmarket one. Not where *he* lives, but don't say I said that. Local hospice, few donations really. But there they were. Threadbare dark brown with orange swirls. Couldn't be further from the songbird's diamond colours for this new album. So he popped them through.

See, we thought it would be funny. Making it literally curtains for you. And so you see, hon, your final curtain. We split us sides, I tell you. Nice for you to know that, eh, before you go?

You don't look so tall now you're flat on the gurney, and strapped down. Oh, they'll never miss it, love. I borrowed it from work last year, they were about to sling it anyway, and I goes, no, 'cos mum collapsed on me hostess trolley, and I said I'd take it home to use instead. It was too big, of course, but I kept it in the extension for plant potting-on. Which is what I really wanted. Oh, don't look surprised, Mr Wrasse. I know a fair few things about geraniums. Anyway, she sent the sponge pud 'n' custard all over the wall, mum did, and I 'ad to give it away when she passed on after 'er fall. Couldn't bear to look at it, could I? No. Nor to clean that wall. Mark 'ad to do it in the end, bless 'im.

So it won't be long now. We're just waiting for Pete and Mark to get here really. Shouldn't take them long. He's no Lewis 'amilton, Pete isn't, but he can parallel park for England. I hope they're quick, though. By the look of you, you've not long left. If you get another go round, like the Hindus think, treat your ladies better. And take more care who you agree to do interviews with. Ever so easy to pour the stuff in yer water, it was. And then the Special K overdose, well we held your hand to the syringe, so it's got your fingerprints on it. Respiratory failure from overdose, that's what the coroner will say. He's called Phil, babe. He's in the Society too.

Oh, here they are. Mwah mwah boys, you're just in time! Now if I push the gurney across the floor, you swish the curtains over 'is 'ead as he goes under, all right? Should just about be enough time. And we can do it again if we 'ave to.

Cheer up, hon, you'll be going out to the sound of singing. Quite mystical when you think about it.

Count us in, Markie. (2,3,4) *We don't want to hear your reasons/we're not giving you another chance/in her kindness you saw weakness/time for us to take a stand...*