

## Bruce

Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away

If you can use some exotic booze

There's a bar in far Bombay

Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away

Come fly with me, let's float down to Peru

In llama-land there's a one-man band

And he'll toot his flute for you

Come fly with me, let's take off in the blue

I

Bruce started his exclusive car hire company in his early twenties. The concept was simple. Hiring exclusive automobiles to exclusive people. Those who had the money to afford for a day or more to drive about in a Porsche, Aston Martine, at the very top end a Bentley. Clients ranged through from the occasional fantasist, those wanting to impress for whatever reason, and individuals whose personal wealth made hiring the marque of car they also owned and drove an easy choice when ensconced on a business trip to the city where Bruce offered his services.

Money was to be made. Plenty of money. Well run high end enterprises do so. He never married. Not an unattractive man. There had been a significant number of relationships. None expanded into the permanent. A large, listed, detached house with ample gardens situated in a rural area some twenty miles out of town was the proof of prosperity. Mrs Davis, who lived nearby in the village, acted as a live out house keeper, taking care of all the things a wife, willingly or unwillingly would be responsible. Bruce was content.

At fifty he decided to put a trustworthy, carefully vetted, and responsibly monitored manager in charge of his business and promptly retired. Bruce had a secret. The dream of standing up centre

stage and sing just like the great performers who delving into 'The Great American Song Book'. His collection of recorded music was extensive. Representing exclusively the acclaimed male vocalists of the twentieth century.

There was one room in the house Mrs Davis was never allowed to enter. A small private cinema. It was furnished with three rows of comfortable chairs, ten in each row. Their function was purely symbolic, the pristine red velvet seats never ever having been sullied by the buttocks of male or female guests. There were no guests. This was Bruce's private domain. A projector. Sound system capable of playing every available type of recorded media. Heaven was entered not through a set of pearly gates but solid oak double doors secured with expensive security locks. Bruce spent a good deal of his endless leisure time sitting in the front row centre watching films from a carefully chosen film library that went back even so far as the cinematic work of Al Jolson. Wrapped in song and dance the masters swaddled him in contentment and yearning.

## II


Bruce was not an unknown face on the local music scene, attending gigs that featured big bands, small groups, any combo that included appearances by the most talented regionally based vocalists. It was at the conclusion of such an evening he asked the piano player for his card. Business plans had made up an integral part of commercial success. The technique was going to be applied to musical fulfilment.

Contacts made over the years car hire to the affluent provided all he needed to commence the action, though sadly minus a clapper board – scene one - first take. Room to be hired on the first floor of a well appointed and discriminating blue tinged political club where double scotches were more apparent than polemical debate. It was an ideal room. Sound proof to a degree and space for an audience of thirty. Next he bought quality microphones. Technically advanced radio mikes. Top of the brands Camcorder and robust tripod. Stage lighting with sufficient reach to illuminate a trio and singer. All was then ready.

Telephone call to the pianist and leader of a very accomplished trio. The day, the starting date, and fee arrived at with some negotiation. This settled, the following day a drive over to the company

who handled all the car hire firms printed requirements. The boss, a stolid gentlemen of advancing years, was slightly surprised at the nature of the commission, but business is in fact business. The posters arrived a week later. Bruce booked and paid for a semi-display advert in the local evening paper. Both the posters and the advertisement announced:

**Bruce**  
Sings



**The Great American Song Book**

With the

**'The Hal Robinson Trio'**

Every Tuesday evening at eight

*Full bar service*

Tuesday evening, the opening night, Bruce arrived early. The motor trade is a mechanical and increasingly electrical and electronic so he encountered no difficulties setting up the sound system, the lights, the camcorder fixed and pointed on its tripod like an all seeing eye. The room also sported a good quality, well tuned piano Hal discovered to his approval, arriving half an hour before the announced commencement of the evening and playing a few exploratory chords and arpeggios. The drummer and the bass player breezed in and set up. Bruce and Hal conferred about The Charts. This was not going to present any problems. Standard melodies, for jobbing musicians are hard wired in the brains and hands of experienced players. The order of tunes to was agreed and listed.

Around fifteen minutes to eight a clutch of the curious drifted in and took their seats clutching glasses of beer, large with handles for the men, smaller without handles for the women, pint with handles glasses for women were not encouraged by the management. Husbands and wives of a

certain age ever seeking to ameliorate the grey boredom of their daily lives. Interested in music. Of course. knowledgeable fanatics – no. The grey dust of ennui clouding any evidence of animation.

Bruce stood behind the camcorder, already sent to record the entire evening without further adjustment, made sure the band and himself would be in focus and clicked on the start button. The new suite, expensive and casual. The new shirt with a knotted tie that would be loosened and may even be discarded as the evenings entertainment progressed.

“ Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen” holding the acoustically balanced microphone just below and near to his bottom lip in homage to the technique he had watched so often within the privacy of his screen room. “Welcome from myself and the Hal Davis trio. The six couples scattered about the room in tandem with three or four middle aged singles clapped more out of expected convention than anticipation. Hal Robinson played a four bar intro.

A foggy day in London Town  
Had me low and had me down  
I viewed the morning with alarm  
The British Museum had lost its charm

How long, I wondered, could this thing last?  
But the age of miracles hadn't passed,  
For, suddenly, I saw you there  
And through foggy London Town  
The sun was shining everywhere.

Nobody left before the last song of the evening. Just the odd foray to replenish hopped beverages at the bar on the ground floor. ‘The Hal Robinson Trio’ did their stuff to a professional standard. Perhaps better not ask some musicians their opinions concerning vocalists. It was paid. The piano a good one and regularly tuned. Running through familiar Standards. It could and often was much less agreeable. Bruce and The Trio began to pack the gear at the end of the evening. The audience drifted out into the night and home.

“Same time next week guys “ Bruce confirmed readjusting his stage managed tie

### III

Weeks ran into months. Months into a couple of years. An evening with Bruce and the Hal Robinson Trio. Mainly the same faces. Not young. An audience never greater than twelve persons.

The bass player asked Hal one evening when they were in the car park. How can he afford it? Hal who knew something about Bruce’s car hire enterprise replied “He can. Believe me. A bit of a drag I must admit. But undemanding. And he pays well. If it makes him happy. Who are we...”.

Indeed it did make Bruce happy. Every Sunday afternoon following on from the Tuesday he would take his seat in his private cinema room and project the entire performance on to the screen, sitting alone, contented, single malt in his hand, in the warm semi-darkness. This routine went on uninterrupted month in month out until a slight niggle suggested to him the Sunday afternoon reprise could be in some way enhanced.

### IV

The Wednesday following. The day Mrs Davis took off from her domestic duties to go into the next valley to visit her sister, a medium sized removal van drove around the circular gravel drive and halted outside of the front porch. Bruce had been expecting it. “Just unload the boxes into the hallway and I will take care of them from there”. The house was an old one dating from the eighteenth century and there was a large rectangular entrance hall with doors leading off and an enviable patinated oak staircase leading up the first floor. The driver was more than happy to comply. Easy offload. Back at the depot in time for lunch. He dutifully stacked the boxes, cardboard, coffin sized, squared not shaped, onto the indicated space place on a large tasselled edged oriental carpet. The driver was fully aware of what the boxes contained and did wonder. Not to be discussed by you or anyone had been his instruction when loading up at the depot “Understood!”. The twenty

nine rectangular boxes were piled up in a loose block. Bruce thrust a high denomination bank note into the hand of the driver and hastily ushered him out through the front door.

When the door was securely closed and pulled at several times to make sure, Bruce felt into the right hand pocket of his jacket and pulled out a cutting knife and with a deft movement of his thumb exposed the blade. He opened the box nearest to him. "Yes" he intoned with satisfaction. Prone within the box a full sized, articulated, widow dresser's mannequin stared blue eyed up at him. Female, fully and fashionably dressed. Bending down Bruce carefully raised her up from the box and almost reverently carried her across the hall in through the already opened door through into the well lit interior of his private cinema. "I'll start here" sitting the avatar down in a seat in the front row of the array of chairs and then returned to the hall to open the remainder of the cardboard boxes. It took less than an hour to unpack and then randomly seat the fully and fashionably attired mannequins, almost but not exactly equal numbers of male and female. Bruce, his back to the open door dimmed the room lights and gazed over the heads to towards the faintly illuminated screen "Most satisfactory". In less than another hour the boxes had been flattened and stacked at the back of the double garage, an area of the house Mrs Davis never ventured into.

Bruce found it difficult to have to wait until the following Sunday afternoon. When it did at last arrive the pleasure of watching on screen his entire Tuesday evening performance was one of added pleasure, twenty nine unseeing bright eyes,, male and female, joining with his own in rapt attention.

## V

Television in general bored him. Sport perhaps. A quiz show now and then. One afternoon idly pressing the remote buttons an American comedy show popped up. About to change channels when a moment of supreme inspiration overwhelmed him. Converting this flash into usable reality was not particularly easy. However, connections, this time with people in the entertainment industry, bemused but unquestioning, gave him a telephone number here and a name there. The packing case containing the solution, and means, arrived by courier service directly from the USA

during the middle of the month following. Assembling and fitting presented Bruce with no major problems.

Bruce sat in his private screening room immured from the Sunday grey and rainy day outside. Remotely started the video of his Tuesday appearance. Bruce looked up approvingly at his e high definition image projected in full colour on to the screen “Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Let me welcome you to another evening of song. Myself and the Hal Robinson Trio”. Hal kicked in the first tune of the evening. Four bars in F. Gently pressing a button fixed to arm of his chair, Bruce with a smile, activated a burst from the applause machine.

Once I had a secret love  
That lived within the heart of me  
All too soon my secret love  
Became impatient to be free

So I told a friendly star  
The way that dreamers often do  
Just how wonderful you are  
And why I'm so in love with you