

Off Key

“Remember, it’s only supposed to be a bit of lock down fun” Mark smiled at Cheryl as she started setting up her laptop for the evening’s choir session, muttering furiously to herself.

“Well, it would be fun if ‘certain people’ didn’t monopolise the proceedings. She huffed, “I’m sure he’s got himself one of those professional microphones attached to his computer – no-one’s that loud over Zoom!”

Mark knew exactly who the *certain person* related to, and he also knew better than to try to appease his wife when she was on one of her tirades against one of the more trying members of the community choir.

The particular focus of her ire was Barry Newsome – or “Barry the Belter” as he had come to be known.

He was not only loud but spectacularly off-key drowning out the other members of the choir, not matter how much he was tactfully implored to dial it down a little.

It would have been slightly more bearable if he knew the lyrics and didn’t just shout out whatever came into his mind.

“To skew the words of the great Eric Morcombe: he sang all the right notes but not in the right order”, one of the more generous choristers, had remarked after a particularly ear-splitting session.

The final straw had come the previous week when his wife insisted on accompanying him on the piano and played everything in C major which was completely wrong for the arrangement.

“If I try to mute him that makes him cross. I can’t win”, Cheryl said miserably, “I wouldn’t normally moan but it’s just that tonight is important – we have guests this week.”

“Look” Mark said finally, “I found this trick out at work – you remember the guy I told you about who is always eating and just wears a hoody and nothing else on calls?”

Cheryl nodded.

“Well, there is something you can do just to teach him a little lesson and you don’t have to mute him or kick him out altogether. You can send him to the ‘Zoom Waiting Room’”

“He will end up in virtual purgatory, until you are ready to have him re-join. It's like a virtual time out.”

He leaned over and pointed to the top of her screen and continued "Here – see where it says, ‘put in Waiting Room’? and when you're ready to bring them back, tap on the blue "Admit" button next to his name”.

“Oooh sounds interesting!” Cheryl said.

“Well, I’d only use it as a last resort” Mark cautioned, slightly unnerved by the alarming glint which had appeared in her eyes as she tapped the keys enthusiastically.

“I’ll use my power wisely” she grinned patting his arm.

She turned her attention to her screen as it began to fill up with the familiar faces and sounds of vocal exercises. *“Right Barry!”* she thought with relish, *“you get two strikes and then you’re out! I hope you like the magazines in the waiting room!”*