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The Perfect Love Song: A Holiday Story

by Patti Callahan Henry



About the Book

Jimmy Sullivan has been living on the road with his brother, Jack, and his band The Unknown Souls. Without a place to call home, Jimmy and Jack lead a nomadic life filled with music and anonymous cities. When they return to a place Jimmy never wants to see again --- their old hometown of Seaboro, South Carolina --- he falls in love with Charlotte Carrington.

With his soul now filled with hope, Jimmy writes his first love song. When he performs it at a holiday concert to a standing ovation, the lyrics are dubbed the ?Perfect Love Song,? so much so that Jimmy finds himself going on tour with famous country music stars, catapulted into a world where the trappings of fame and fortune reign supreme.

All too soon, the hope that had once inspired Jimmy to write such beautiful, genuine lyrics is overshadowed by what the song can do for him and his career. In his thirst for recognition, he agrees to miss Jack?s wedding in Ireland to sing at a Christmas Eve concert. And his ties to Charlotte seem to be ever so quickly slipping away.

Alone in New York City on Christmas Eve, Jimmy finally sees --- with the help of a Christmas miracle or two --- that his material gains are nothing compared to love, that he is losing all that really matters in his life. Is it too late to find his way to Ireland, to his brother, and to love?

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think of the title **The Perfect Love Song**? Do you think such a song can exist? Why do you think the author only gives us the first few lines of the song? Try your hand at writing one and see what you think of the results?and you might even win a prize: check out the details here.

2. In this story, the song that was so ?perfect? had a negative effect on Jimmy?s life. Have you ever had something

?perfect? come into your life, only to understand the negative influence it has on you or your loved ones?

3. Chapter One begins with the traditional Irish storyteller?s opening, ?May stillness be upon your thoughts and silence upon your tongue! For I tell you a tale that was told at the beginning?the one story worth telling?? The Irish have a rich cultural history of story-telling and of myths passed down from generation to generation much the way Maeve tells Kara her love story. Are all stories interconnected in some way? Do you think many modern stories are actually based on far more ancient tales and myths? And if so, what are some examples?

4. Callahan Henry?s fiction is a celebration of Southern low country culture and customs. You can often feel a novel?s setting through the actual words used in telling the tale, the beauty in the language as it captures the spirit or energy of the characters, or the smell of the sea and salty air. What is unique about the setting of this book and how did it enhance the story? How much do you feel that the narrative voice is both affected and informed by place? And how does the use of sea imagery like the small shell Charlotte brings with her to the church in Ireland play into the narrative?

5. At one point in the novel, the narrator says ?There are so many things that work themselves into chance.? How do chance and destiny affect the characters in the novel as they make decisions and live and love? Do you agree that real life is the result of predetermined forces? Or can we affect our fate?

6. The author writes about complex characters finding their place in the world, of the love and heartache in friendship, and of family and home. How do characters change or evolve throughout the course of the story? What events trigger such changes? Where do you see these characters in six months?

7. Jimmy and Jack had very difficult childhoods, and we learn that they were in fact abused by their alcoholic father. How does the past imprint their present day lives and hinder their futures? Are they ever able to escape the effects of the past, and, if so, by what means?

8. When Jimmy tells Jack he will miss the wedding ceremony, Jack remarks ?That?s just great. Jimmy, always in time for the party.? How does the concept of responsibility towards family play into the novel? Weddings are often a time of joy but also of incredible stress for families. What do you think it is about weddings in particular that can bring families closer together, or tear them apart?

9. The Claddagh ring appears throughout the novel. What is it about the ring that symbolizes the themes of love returning, reconciliation, and rebirth? How does this play into Jimmy?s conversation with his father? How does Jimmy?s need for his father?s approval and his reunion with his father influence Jimmy to return to Charlotte?s side?

10. The story outcome is greatly influenced by Maeve Mahoney, her stories and her advice. Do you believe that those who have passed on influence our lives and choices? If so, how?

11. Music is an important theme throughout the novel. Music becomes a father to Jimmy and Jack when their father is not in their lives and in turn, their band also becomes their family. How does involving yourself in art or music help to fill the void of a close personal relationship that is now lost? Do you think that music and art can be viable replacements for lost love? Or are music and art outlets for grief and loss?

12. The holiday season features prominently in **The Perfect Love Song** and it is Christmas that brings everyone back

together in the end. At one point, when Kara and Charlotte visit the nursing home, the narrator says ?Giving means having more.? How do you give back during the holiday season? And are there ways that we can inspire others to remember to visit the elderly in our communities and to truly understand that giving is a gift in and of itself?

Author Bio

Patti Callahan Henry is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of several novels, including SURVIVING SAVANNAH and BECOMING MRS. LEWIS. She is the recipient of the Christy Award, the Harper Lee Award for Alabama?s Distinguished Writer of the Year Award, and the Alabama Library Association Book of the Year. She is the cohost and cocreator of the popular weekly online live web show and podcast "Friends and Fiction." She lives in Alabama and South Carolina with her family.

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Publication Date: August 30, 2011
Mass Market Paperback: 256 pages
Publisher: Vanguard Press
ISBN-10: 1593156731
ISBN-13: 9781593156732