

Excuse Me While I Kiss This Guy

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The New Yorker:

My sister has a rare talent for mishearing lyrics. When we were younger, song meanings would often morph into something quite different from their original intent. In one Wallflowers hit, for instance, she somehow turned “me and Cinderella” into “the incinerator.” My favorite, though, remains that classic of the swing age, “Drunk driving, then you wake up”—a garbling of the Louis Prima hit that saw a brief resurgence in the nineties, “Jump, Jive, an’ Wail.”

My sister’s creation of a night of drunk driving from jumping and jiving is actually a common phenomenon, with the curious name mondegreen. “Mondegreen” means a misheard word or phrase that makes sense in your head, but is, in fact, entirely incorrect. The term mondegreen is itself a mondegreen. In November, 1954, Sylvia Wright, an American writer, published a piece in *Harper’s* where she admitted to a gross childhood mishearing. When she was young, her mother would read to her from the “Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,” a 1765 book of popular poems and ballads. Her favorite verse began with the lines, “Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands / Oh, where hae ye been? / They hae slain the Earl Amurray, / And Lady Mondegreen.” Except they hadn’t. They left the poor Earl and “laid him on the green.” He was, alas, all by himself.

Read the whole story: [*The New Yorker*](#)