

What a Wonderful World – *Lolita Chakrabarti*

Victor Ghosh hadn't seen Deepankar Rai for twenty years. They had stayed in touch by letter and the odd phone call but it was so expensive calling India these days. The two men had been at school together and had travelled to England on the boat, an adventure for them both. They had both worked in England, Victor as a doctor, and Deepankar, Dippy for short, a pharmacist. But Dippy missed home and after twenty years of working, had gone back to Calcutta. He had never married and so he had packed up his belongings and just gone. As soon as he'd settled in India he met a sweet woman called Kamla and he married her and they sounded happy. Dippy missed certain things about England – cream cakes, TV but most of all he missed Victor.

Victor had married Emily Johnson and they had a large family of four children, two dogs, a cat and a goldfish. So there was no question of Victor going back to Calcutta. He wrote regularly to Dippy telling him the news, sending photos of the kids and in return Dippy wrote letters back. But they missed each other. Somehow they were two halves and only together made a whole.

So it was with great excitement that Victor read the letter saying that Dippy was coming to London.

'When?' asked Emily.

'Next week!' said Victor, 'oh my old friend back on English soil and he will get to meet the family. I amecstatic.'

'I can see that,' said Emily, laughing.

'**I see trees of green....**' Victor began to sing.

'Oh my god,' said Emily, 'I haven't heard that for a long time. Finally you'll get to the end of the song.'

'Without Dippy it has been impossible but he will arrive and we will fit together like two old socks,' said Victor proudly.

Emily smiled. She liked Dippy. She knew that the relationship between Victor and Dippy was a unique one and that they had developed a certain ritual greeting that they always fulfilled. Whenever they met they sang at the top of their voices the opening verse of 'What a Wonderful World' to each other as if they were both in a romantic movie. It didn't matter where they were – public or private. They would meet and greet each other with the song and then delighted by it they would embrace.

Emily had not been brought up with such expressive behaviour. So she loved the fact that her husband was so free and affectionate and public, even if she did get a little embarrassed at times.

The day arrived. Victor was buzzing round the house waiting to get in the car and go to the airport to pick up his friend. The flight came in at twelve. Joya, Victor's youngest daughter, who was seventeen, was at home. She watched her father dress smartly and grease back his hair while singing, 'I see trees of green...' to himself again and again in the mirror. After a brief while she went downstairs to find her mum.

'Ma!' she said in a curious tone of voice.

'Yes Joya?' asked Emily.

‘What is dad on?’

‘On?’ asked Emily confused by youth speak, ‘what do you mean ‘on’?’

‘He keeps singing one line over and over again and it’s doing my head in. What is that song – **‘I see trees of green...?’**’

‘That’s his greeting for Dippy, that’s what they do,’ said Emily.

Joya considered this for a moment before speaking. ‘D’you think we’re a bit weird?’

As a family I mean. Dippy? Dippy? What kind of name is that for a person?’

‘Deepankar’s his name. Dippy’s for short,’ said Emily patiently. Joya was going through a phase of questions that had no point. But it was just a phase she was sure. ‘It’s a lovely song that one your dad’s singing. It’s called ‘What a wonderful world’. Nat King Cole sang it – beautiful,’ said Emily dreamily.

‘Nat King who?’ asked Joya blankly.

Emily looked at her daughter, all tall and gangly and fresh and sighed a weary sigh.

‘Never mind my love. Someone who used to sing.’

‘Pop star?’ asked Joya.

‘Sort of dear,’ said Emily, and left the room.

Emily drove Victor to the airport. When he was this excited she didn’t trust him to keep his wits about him. She felt safer taking him there herself.

‘Do I look alright?’ asked Victor smoothing his hair.

‘It’s Dippy you’re meeting,’ said Emily, ‘not some old girlfriend.’

Victor grinned at Emily. ‘Oh-ho you are one hundred percent correct. You are my old girlfriend, he is just a mate.’

Emily glanced at him sitting next to her cheekily grinning from ear to ear. After thirty years he still made her feel so light. She squeezed his knee with affection.

‘No rumpy in the car my love, this is a public thoroughfare,’ Emily looked at him with mock disapproval and Victor burst out laughing. A plane flew overhead and Victor almost popped his head out of the sunroof to wave, ‘Dippy! Dippy! **I see trees of green....!**’ And he sang that one line for the rest of the journey to Heathrow.

Emily and Victor waited at the Arrivals barrier. Crowds of people flooded past from long journeys, none of them familiar. Eventually a small man with greying hair and thick glasses emerged looking expectantly out at the waiting crowd.

Victor almost jumped into the air and sang across the barrier, ‘**I see trees of green!!!**’ The man’s face lit up and without any consideration for his fellow passengers he stopped in the middle of the concourse and focussed completely on Victor and shouted ‘.....**red roses too!...**’

‘**I see them bloom for me and you,**’ Victor continued. People in the crowd were looking a little perturbed at the behaviour of these two respectable elderly Indian gentlemen. Some looked amused, others concerned. Emily stood next to Victor going red as a beetroot.

‘**And I think to myself...**’ said Dippy.

The two men beamed at each other across the space and both flung their arms out in a theatrical manner and sang simultaneously ‘.....**What a wonderful world!**’

There was a smattering of applause from amused spectators but Dippy and Victor were aware of none of it. Dippy pushed his trolley with renewed vigour as Victor edged forward from the crowd. At last, after what seemed like an age, the two men were in each other’s arms and words were no longer necessary.