

Song for Priya – *Lolita Chakrabarti*

Priya Das was feeling blue. She'd been married for twenty-five years but just lately she'd started to feel differently about Kalil and she didn't know why. He was the same old Kalil, came home from work fairly late every night and they would sit and eat their dinner in what seemed like silence. Then he would read the paper, do a little homework and go to bed. The kids were all grown up and though they still lived at home she rarely ever saw them. They had their own lives, were on the cusp of moving out for good. Maybe she was just feeling that slump her friends had talked about when your kids finally leave.

The more she thought about it she realised that actually she had too much time on her hands. Had she always been like this? She spent her days seeing friends, cooking, cleaning and organising the family diary. The problem was that these days nothing seemed to really interest her and when she tried to speak to Kalil about it he was always busy. Finally she spoke properly to him and laid it out on the line, 'I am not happy,' she said.

'What's not to be happy about?' he asked in that infuriating way he had of confusing her from the point.

'I don't feel good about things. I know the kids are fine. I think it's us.'

Kalil gave her that patronising look as he said, 'We don't live the life of a soap opera Priya, too many women's magazines make you look for holes. We're fine. We're always fine. Maybe you just need to take up some sort of a hobby.'

'I am not a child,' shouted Priya. 'You have no time for me any more and even when you do we sit in silence till you can do something else.'

'But that's what 25 years does to you,' he said defensively, surprised by her anger.

'Bores you stiff?' she asked bitterly.

'Makes you extremely comfortable with each other,' he corrected.

'I am not happy,' she said again, wanting him to solve it for her.

'Is that my fault then?' he asked a little too angrily.

The rowed a lot more after that. Bickering, quarrelling, heated discussions, call them what you will, all was not calm in the Das house. Until one day, Priya had had enough and to the shock of her two teenage kids and her middle aged husband, she left. Kalil didn't know what to do. He came home one day and found the house empty and no note. Priya had removed herself for good it seemed. It didn't take him long to track her down to her sister's house. But Priya was adamant that she would not be coming home.

'You are my husband, Kalil, but I need to find out what it is I want and quite frankly it isn't you.'

This hit Kalil very hard but he decided that he would wait, she would come home, that was where she belonged.

Kalil buried himself in his work. But he soon became quite bored. He would come home to an empty house and although there was work to do, he felt lonely, deeply lonely. He spoke to the kids who advised him to win Priya back.

'How?' he had asked them.

They had shrugged in that worldly teenage way and said, 'How did you win her in the first place? You must have done something right, hey dad?!'

And so that was how it began. He went to the shop and bought a small tape recorder and a blank tape. He went to the stationers and bought some special writing paper and

an envelope. Then he sat down at the dining table and started to write.



Priya heard nothing from Kalil. She felt calm in the peace of her sister's house. Here she had none of the depressing feelings she had at home. Here she was part of the family but not holding it together. She missed Kalil but decided that it was only habit that kept them together really. One day as she sat in her room listening to the radio, there was a small knock at the door. It was Suki, her youngest niece.

'Auntie, ma asked me to come up and give you this. It looks important.'

Suki handed her an envelope with nothing but Priya's name written on the front.

'What's this?' Priya asked.

'Someone pushed it through the letterbox this morning,' said Suki before she skipped out of the room with better things to do with her eight year old time.

There was no post mark on it. It had been hand delivered. It was beautiful paper, hand woven and lilac in colour. She looked at it a little while, she recognised Kalil's handwriting on the front. She wondered if he had prettily packaged some divorce papers or a shopping list, some awful joke at her expense.

After a brief while she opened it. Inside was a letter on a single sheet of lemon rice paper and a tape. She went downstairs to ask Suki if she could borrow her walkman and then retreated back up to her room and slipped the tape into the machine.

Intrigued and enjoying the mystery of it all, she opened the letter.

'My dear, darling Priya,

Instruction, please press tape on for first number.'

Priya pressed the walkman on. She listened as she heard Kalil clear his voice and start to sing,

**'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy, when skies are grey,
You'll never know dear, how much I love you,
Please don't take my Priya away.'**

Then he spoke stiffly but very clearly.

'Press off now.'

She did as instructed with a smile on her face and went back to the letter.

'My love, I know I've been awful. Distracted by work, life, everything but you. I am sorry. You are always there and I have been taking you for granted. How disappointing to fit into a stereotype quite so easily. But, let me take you back to where it all began.....Please press tape for the second number.'

She did as she was instructed and heard Kalil's voice singing,

**'In Bombay's fair city, where the girls are so pretty,
I first set my eyes on swet Priya Patel'**

By now Priya's eyes were misting over and she felt her heart start to fill up. She wiped her eyes and went back to the letter.

‘Please come home. I promise to be better. I promise to treat you as you deserve. I love you Priya Das. Can you forgive me.....Please press tape for the third and final number.’

The song made her laugh out loud as she heard Kalil give Elvis a run for his money,

**‘Baby let me be your teddy bear,
Put your finger round my neck and lead me anywhere,
Oh, let me be your teddybear.’**

Unknown to Priya, Suki had sneaked back into the room when she’d heard the laughter. She saw her aunt sitting cross-legged on her bed wearing her walkman and laughing and crying at the same time. Priya soon realised that she had company and carefully folded the letter and put it back in its envelope.

‘What is it, Auntie?’ asked Suki with her wide eyes.

‘Your Uncle sent me a letter,’ said Priya vaguely.

‘Was it good news or bad?’ asked Suki.

Priya considered the question.

‘Just that when I cry I’m sad and when I laugh I’m happy and you were doing both together so I couldn’t tell,’ said Suki.

‘Come here,’ said Priya, indicating Suki come and sit next to her on the bed, which she did. ‘Have you heard of Elvis Presley?’ asked Priya.

Suki shrugged. Priya put the earphones over Suki’s ears and played her Kalil’s version of ‘*Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear*’. Suki laughed her head off and whisking the earphones off said, ‘Now I see why you were laughing and crying at the same time. Poor Uncle,’ and she left the room laughing.

Poor Uncle, thought Priya, and poor Auntie. A match made in heaven and she got up and started to pack her suitcase to go home.