

# Granny Gram!

By

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Lily Banerjee had just had her seventy fifth birthday when she went out and got herself a job. Nobody knew about it. If they had they would have stopped her. She had written in response to an advert in the paper and been terrifically secretive about the whole affair. It was Norah, her younger sister, who found out the truth by accident. She had been waiting in Lily's living room while she got ready for bingo when the phone rang and the message was left on the machine.

'Hey Lily! It's Stuart. Got a gig for you tomorrow. 36, Friars Road and the birthday boy is Harold. See you later doll! Bye!' And he was gone.

Norah's seventy four year old mind was racing. A gig? Was that some sordid slang. Stuart? An over familiar youthful voice. What was Lily up to?

Lily arrived in the living room all ready for bingo but not for the Spanish Inquisition that Norah launched into.

'Are you in trouble? Have you associated yourself with some low moral crowd you felt unable to talk to me about? You can confess to me Lily I am here for you.'

Lily let out a heavy sigh. 'Confess?' she exclaimed. 'I don't have to prostrate myself in front of the gods or anyone. I have done nothing of which I should ever be ashamed.'

'What is it you have done?' asked Norah, her eyes narrowed to thin slits as if she were in a bad Indian soap opera.

'Come and you shall see,' said Lily mysteriously and would give away no more. All through bingo Norah was unable to concentrate on the card at hand. She was concerned. She didn't want to be dragged into a seedy underworld even if it was for her sister.

The next day Norah arrived at Lily's house at the appointed time. Lily was dressed very plainly, frumpy in fact. Gone were her smart colourful clothes replaced by a dark shapeless enormous coat. To top it all Lily put an old tatty headscarf on her head and a handbag that didn't match at all.

'What are you up to you old devil?' she asked. But Lily just shook her head and indicated that it was time to go.

'The only condition I set that you must play your part. I don't want any funny histrionics when we get there.'

'Acting, is that what you're doing?' said Norah.

'Do you agree to play along?' said Lily insistently.

Norah nodded.

'Let's go', said Lily.

They arrived at 36 Friars Road. Lily knocked on the door and a young man of twenty answered.

'Is this Harold's house?' asked Lily in a fragile, cracked voice.

'Yes' nodded the young man.

'He's expecting us,' said Lily weakly. Norah thought her sister was behaving very oddly already but, as agreed, she said nothing.

The young man nodded his head and let them in. He showed them to the front room

where there was a gathering of about twenty people. The two sisters were quite obviously out of place.

‘Can I help you?’ asked an elderly gentleman standing by the sofa.

‘Harold?’ asked Lily sternly and the man nodded that he was Harold. At which point to Norah’s utter consternation Lily threw off her outer dowdy clothes to reveal a gorgeous shimmering salwar kameez and started singing in a loud and tuneful voice

‘Roll out the barrel

We’ll have a barrel of fun

Roll out the barrel

We’ve got the blues on the run

Zing! Boom! Tararrel

Ring out a song of good cheer

Now’s the time to roll the barrel

For the gang’s all here.

Happy birthday Harold from your grandson Jamie and the rest of your family.’

A huge cheer and round of applause went round the room. Norah was speechless.

A few minutes later they were out on the street once more. Norah hadn’t said a word. Lily chuckled to herself.

‘Didn’t expect that huh?’ she said brightly.

‘You’re a singing telegram? My sister is a singing telegram,’ said Norah looking upwards to god for dramatic effect.

‘Granny Gram Norah. What a hoot! I’ve always wanted to use my talents and now the kids are gone, the responsibility is done. I can be outrageous. Know what I mean?’

Norah looked troubled. She sat on a nearby bench and thought of that dry little party, the polite faces and Lily’s shimmering number lighting up the room.

‘Oh my god Lily! You are a terror!’ said Norah starting to laugh despite herself. The two ladies sat on that bench and laughed and laughed and laughed till a policeman stopped to ask ‘Is everything alright ladies?’. They thought they would laugh themselves silly so they collected what they could of themselves and headed home.

They next day the phone rang in Lily’s flat. She picked it up.

‘Norah here, have you another ‘date’?’ she asked.

‘Well as a matter of fact I have one tomorrow. Why? You’re not going to tell Sanjeev are you. He’ll think I’ve lost it. Please don’t spill the beans.’

‘I won’t spill them if...’ Norah paused.

‘Yes?’ asked Lily concerned.

‘You have to let me come with you.’ Said Norah.

‘I don’t need a chaperone,’ said Lily indignant.

‘I haven’t had such a laugh in years.’ Said Norah.

‘You’re kidding! You want to come with me?’ said Lily smiling.

‘I thought perhaps we could be two for the price of one’ suggested Norah gently.

‘Excellent! A partner in crime,’ exclaimed Lily.

‘You mustn’t tell Tara, you know how straight-laced she is,’ said Norah.

The next day the two sisters went out looking positively scruffy. They arrived at the appointed address, gained entrance to a very tidy, cold looking house. They found Malcolm, the octogenarian birthday boy, flung off their drab coats to reveal their true glamorous selves and sang,

'Oh dear what can the matter be?  
Dear Dear what can the matter be?  
Oh dear what can the matter be?  
Malcolm's so long at the fair.'

The younger members of the party called out 'Malcolm you devil! Hurray for uncle malc!'

'He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbons  
He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbons  
He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbons  
To tie up my bonny grey hair.'

There were cheers all round and Malcolm had tears in his eyes, of laughter that is.

When Norah and Lily got home that day they were exhausted and allowed themselves a small sherry to unwind.

'You're crazy,' said Norah affectionately.

'Takes one to know one,' joked Lily.

'I always thought you had such a beautiful voice. All those lessons we had as girls at the music school. D'you think they thought they were training us up for a career in pop?' laughed Norah.

'Pop,' giggled Lily, 'Maybe little Kishore will think we're cool now.'

They both thought of their fourteen year old nephew and realised that he would probably just think them crazier than before. But somehow they both enjoyed the thought and laughed all the more.