

Alas Smith & Jones – *Lolita Chakrabarti*

Glacia Jones was a mother of four teenage boys. She and her husband Desmond, had raised them the best they knew how and they seemed to be doing fine. The odd disagreement here, a bit of a spat there, but essentially she was proud and glad of her brood. Of course her baby was not almost fifteen years old,

‘I’m not a baby, Mum!’ he would shout. ‘Gerroff!’ he squirmed as she tried to hug him. It seemed just yesterday that they couldn’t manage without her, and now between football practice, girlfriends and sleeping, it seemed there was no time for Mum.

Glacia was feeling glum. She was forty-seven years old and she couldn’t remember the last time she’d had a good time. When she was younger, she’d had dreams of being a singer, a successful person in her own right. But now she was just a mum, nothing more, just a mum, and they didn’t even need her anymore and she felt at a loss as to what to do. Desmond tried to be supportive, but really just wanted a quiet life when he came home from the office.

‘You’ve done a top job,’ he would say, patting her fondly. ‘You need to enjoy yourself now. Relax and let them go.’

‘Let them go,’ she had fumed, how did he propose she do that? They had been her life for the best part of twenty years, how do you suddenly ‘let them go’. He didn’t understand her, he’d never understood how she worked. She felt all used up and full of energy at the same time.

It was fortuitous then that as she walked passed Celebrity Flowers on the high street, she spied a sign in the window.

‘Assistant needed. Experience not essential but people skills a must. Apply within.’

Glacia hadn’t worked since her twenties. She didn’t know if she had people skills but she thought she’d give it a try. What did she have to lose? There was no harm in trying was there? She walked into the shop crammed full of flowers of every colour and every scent, there was no one there. But she could hear someone singing in the small room at the back of the premises,

**‘Lavenders blue Dilly, Dilly, Lavenders green.
When I am king Dilly, Dilly. You’ll be my queen.’**

Glacia waited a short while and then called out, ‘Excuse me! I’ve come about the job.’

Through a shimmering plastic beaded curtain came a small woman in her fifties, dressed in a rainbow jumper and flowing pyjama pants.

‘Hello! Hello! Greetings and welcome,’ she said almost bowing. ‘I am Organza, Organza Smith. I own this establishment, and although it’s a modest income, I must say it gives me enormous satisfaction to brighten people’s days with colours and smells of the forest.’

Glacia was quite taken aback. This small woman, with a flow of white hair down the small of her back, seemed ridiculous and magical at the same time. She was bird-like and delicate but mischievous too, like an imp or an elf thought Glacia.

‘The job? The job is that what you were saying?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ said Glacia, finding her voice. ‘I am not at all qualified but.....’

‘It’s yours,’ said Organza with a flourish of her hand and a glint of a grin, ‘I’m a very instinctive person and I can see you are just....lovely. It’s yours.’

Glacia was taken aback and thought this woman might be a little mad to ask for no references or at least to interview her. However, she had a job and she wasn’t about to talk herself out of it. So she left her details and assured her new boss that she would be there first thing in the

morning.

Of course Desmond nearly fell of his chair when she announced that she had a job.

‘Is it the *change?*’ he asked with concern.

‘I think it probably is,’ replied Glacia, ‘the change for the better. Your dinner will be in the oven,’ she said as she left the next morning.

She had been nervous of course but Organza turned out to be a generous soul and it was of little surprise to Glacia that she had once been an actress.

‘Oh, the theatre,’ extolled Organza, with a theatrical waft of her hand, ‘the lights, the smells. Oh, it was so raw,

‘There’s no business like showbusiness, like no business I know.’

I worked you know. Did a couple of regional tours that were minor successes in their own way. But I soon tired of the lack of stability and flowers have always been such a passion of mine. Of course, I think we may be kindred spirits you and I, Glacia, you have a talent I can see that.’

Glacia immediately denied any talents whatsoever.

‘But I can hear it in your voice,’ said Organza, ‘that reverberation, that resonance, you have a voice, am I wrong?’

Glacia looked a little embarrassed but after a little coaxing told Organza that she had wanted to pursue a career in music but that life had taken her elsewhere.

‘I knew it. I could tell. I have an instinct for talent. You still have it you know, it never leaves one’s soul.’

Glacia and Organza became good friends.

One Friday after work, Organza said to Glacia, ‘You and me should go out. I have some friends who own a very quiet bar uptown, you’d love it. What d’you say? Let’s dress up and have a girl’s night out.’

Glacia wasn’t sure, she rarely went out and when she did it was in her role of mother or wife, never as herself.

‘Go on,’ coaxed Organza, starting to sing quietly,

**‘In her hair she wore a yellow ribbon,
She wore it for her lover who was far away, far, far away.’**

So that night, Glacia informed Desmond that she was going out. His response was casual and she was a little irritated by his lack of interest but let it pass. She was going to paint the town red with her friend. When she went to get ready she found a gift box on the bed.

‘What’s this?’ she called down to Desmond.

‘What’s what?’ came Desmond’s all too innocent voice.

She opened the box and inside was a red sequined evening dress.

‘What is going on here?’ she asked Desmond, who now stood coolly by the door.

‘Just a gift. For my wife. Can’t I buy a gift for my wife?’ he said. ‘D’you like it?’

‘Very much,’ she said, a bit suspicious of his sudden attention.

He was so odd sometimes, but she tried the dress on and it looked fantastic.

‘It even flattens my tummy,’ said Glacia.

‘That’s the best part of you,’ said Desmond admiringly. ‘You don’t want to hide that.’

He suddenly burst into song, not really hitting any notes but in the right rhythm,

‘She wears red feathers and a hooly hooly skirt

She wears red feathers and a hooly hooly skirt.'

Glacia burst out laughing, what had got into everyone? Whatever it was, it was infectious. She felt great as she went to meet Organza. The two women hailed a cab and soon found themselves at the Do Drop Inn uptown.

It was a smoky little bar, classy, grown up, not full of youngsters as she'd imagined. There was a piano in the corner and someone played quietly while people chatted over exotic looking drinks. Organza ordered the drinks and they sat and absorbed the atmosphere for a while. Glacia found the alcohol relaxing and she felt younger than she had done for years. Well into the evening, when the music was warming up and the bar was getting busier, the lights dimmed and a man in a black suit made an announcement from the stage.

'Could Glacia Jones please make her way to the stage please, a Mrs Glacia Jones.'

Everyone turned to look round for her. She felt a sudden rush of panic, had something happened to Desmond, the kids? She stumbled to the stage and the man who'd made the announcement took hold of her hand and gave her a reassuring smile.

'This is a little unexpected I'm sure, but I have someone here who wishes to speak to you.'

Suddenly the man was gone and in his place was Desmond, all dressed up in a tuxedo and looking positively dashing. Glacia didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, I beg your attention for a few short moments,' said Desmond. 'I am a man of modest means who has been blessed with a beautiful wife and four healthy sons. Today is my thirtieth wedding anniversary.'

There was a smattering of applause.

'I am not a demonstrative husband but I ask you to celebrate with me the reason for my modest success in this world. Ladies and Gents, I give you, my wife, Glacia Jones.'

Glacia didn't know what to say. There was thunderous applause as the pianist started to play a familiar tune and suddenly, from nowhere, Organza appeared and said, 'Now's your chance, sing!'

She handed Glacia the microphone and before she knew what had hit her, she was singing her heart out,

**'Fly me to the moon and let my play among the stars,
Let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars,
In other words take my hand,
In other words darling kiss me.'**

She had no idea how she sounded, she didn't care if her voice was a good one or not, she was in a red dress on a dark stage, singing with Desmond by her side. It was better than her wildest dreams.

In the taxi on the way home, with Organza on one side and Desmond on the other she felt exhausted, but brimming with happiness.

'I am the luckiest woman alive!' she thought, 'and there's so much more to be done.'