

For the Love of Something

By

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MILLIE: Sit. What's your name?

RUKHSANA: Rukshana.

MILLIE: That won't do. Most of these won't get that. Rukhshhan, Shan, Shannon? No, no. How about Roxy? Roxy. That'll do. Where you from?

RUKHSANA: Pakistan. Karachi.

MILLIE: Oh yes. We have a few of you down the road from us. Caused a stir it did back then. But it's the norm now. Just the way it is. Do you have apples in Pakistan?

RUKHSANA: Umm, mangoes.

MILLIE: Not for me, not mangoes - a bit too sweet for my liking. I like a touch of sour in my fruit.

A MAN COMES OVER. MR RICHARDS. HE'S MIDDLE AGED, BALDING AND WEARS GLASSES. HE HAS A STARCHED SLEEVELESS WHITE SHIRT AND A SILVER PEN IN HIS TOP POCKET.

MR RICHARDS: Is this the new girl?

MILLIE: Yeah, Roxy.

MR RICHARDS: Roxy is it. That's easy enough. Millie here will take you through the ins and outs, show you the ropes. Shouldn't be long till you get a handle on things.

RUKHSANA: A handle?

MR RICHARDS: Just so. Carry on.

MILLIE ROLLS HER EYES AND LEANS IN TO WHISPER.

MILLIE: He's not the most charismatic is he? No Cary Grant.

RUKSHANA: Cary Grant?

MILLIE: You know, charming with a bit of a twinkle. I like a bit of twinkle.

RUKHSANA: Twinkle? A shining light?

MILLIE: Exactly. A bit of that in the eyes does nobody any harm. You married I see. Does your man have a twinkle?

RUKHSANA: No. I don't think he does.

MILLIE: Shame. They can get away with blue murder if they have a twinkle.

RUKHSANA: Blue murder...?

MILLIE: Exactly. Look here, it's not a difficult job. It's all set up. You get a piece of material and you have to run it through the sewing machine. Get to the end and throw it in that basket. Dead easy.

RUKHSANA: *[Nods]*

MILLIE: Watch me and then have a go. Dead easy.

RUKHSANA WATCHES FOR A WHILE AND THEN SETS A PIECE OF MATERIAL AND PRESSES DOWN ON THE FOOT. THE MACHINE STARTLES HER, BUT SHE RUNS THE MATERIAL THROUGH. SATISFIED, SHE PLACES IT IN THE BASKET AND TAKES ANOTHER PIECE AND DOES THE SAME.

SCENE 2.

LUNCHTIME. MILLIE TAKES RUKHSANA TO THE CANTEEN. THEY SIT AT A SMALL TABLE NEAR THE BIG WINDOWS LOOKING OUT ONTO A SQUARE.

MILLIE: I bring a packed lunch. Saves a few pennies it does. Oh you have one too. Mine is always the same, pâté. I like a good fishy pâté. What's that you have?

RUKHSANA: Parotha.

MILLIE: Oh yes, what's in it?

RUKHSANA: Potatoes, chillies, coriander powder, cumin powder, cumin seeds, turmeric, red chilli powder.

MILLIE: Looks a bit involved. A bit too involved for me. Anyway tuck in. Oh, you see her coming in now? No, don't look. Yes her. Cindy Smith. She's a right one she is. She won't last long here. The likes of her.

RUKHSANA: Why not?

MILLIE: You can just tell. She's killing time.

RUKHSANA: How do you kill time Meelee?

MILLIE: By working in places like these. She's not proper. Not like us. We work. We don't complain. We want to be here. Not her, she has high hopes.

RUKHSANA: She wants a better job?

MILLIE: That's the least of it! She wants a better job, better life, better this, better that. I mean it's just not realistic is it?

RUKHSANA: Why not?

MILLIE: Well, she is what she is. No use trying to be nothing else. Just be a disappointment. How's your parrot thingy?

RUKHSANA: Good. How's your pat-patty...?

MILLIE: Pâté. *Lovely*. I do like a nice bit of pâté.

SCENE 3.

BACK AT THE MACHINES: RUKHSANA WORKS WITHOUT INTERRUPTION. HER BASKET IS ALMOST FULL - MILLIE TURNS TO HER AND WHISPERS.

MILLIE: Steady *there* girl. Hold your horses. You don't want to get ahead of yourself. There's plenty of work to go round. Do enough, pace yourself. Otherwise he'll come round and give you another job to do. Wouldn't want that.

RUKHSANA: But if we finish, is no good?

MILLIE: Good for who? Not us. We have enough to occupy us. Women like us. No need to overdo it. Slow down, stay even with me. Almost teatime. Do they have fun fairs in Pakistan?

RUKHSANA: I don't know fun fairs...

MILLIE: Pleasure parks. Amusement arcades and the sort.

RUKHSANA: I don't think we do.

MILLIE: Shame. I do like the merry go-round. All those pretty horses, and the lights and the bobbing. Takes me back.

RUKHSANA: You ride horses?

MILLIE: Only at fun fairs and only for fun.

RUKHSANA: My father brought a donkey ride in Pakistan. But the donkey wouldn't move. They hit it with sticks, and that made me cry.

MILLIE: Some creatures just don't listen. Stick to the bobbing horses I say. Do they have planes in Pakistan?

RUKHSANA: Yes, I came here in one.

MILLIE: I've never been on a plane. How does it feel?

RUKHSANA: Scary. You can't leave.

MILLIE: Well, there is that. I think maybe I could fly one day.

RUKHSANA: Maybe you could visit Pakistan?

MILLIE: Oh, I don't think they'd have me would they! I'd be all out of place, asking daft questions. And wearing my C&A skirt and shirt. They'd laugh their heads off.

RUKHSANA: You could wear a shalwar kameez. You'd look pretty.

MILLIE: Well, perhaps. It does feel very soft. But I do like the feel of thick wool and polyester on my skin. That itch lets me know I've got something on.

RUKHSANA: It'd be too hot to wear that there.

MILLIE: Hard to think in the heat. There was a summer here when it was so hot; I sat with a cold towel wrapped around my midriff. Just imagine! I couldn't think. It drove me mad. I like a good think now and again. The good thing here is the cold means you have to move and you have to think. I couldn't be away too long from all of that.

RUKHSANA: *(WISTFULLY)* Yes. It would be hard

MILLIE: You could go dancing. Does he like dancing?

RUKHSANA: No. He won't dance.

MILLIE: What's he like doing then?

RUKHSANA: He likes watching those films. Those spaghetti films.

MILLIE: Spaghetti films. I've never heard of them. Are they Italian?

RUKHSANA: I don't think, no. They're American. There's a man and he's very good with gun. And he wears blanket over his shoulders.

MILLIE: Spaghetti films ... No, doesn't ring a bell.

RUKHSANA: They're like films we watch in Pakistan, but no singing.

MILLIE: Singing films? Like musicals you mean?

RUKHSANA: All our films have singing.

MILLIE: Can't go wrong with a little sing-along.

SCENE 4.

TEATIME: BACK IN THE CANTEEN. THEY SIT IN THE SAME PLACE LOOKING OUT ONTO A SQUARE.

MILLIE: My favourite time of day. Time for a scone. Fancy one?

RUKHSANA: No thank you.

MILLIE: They must have good tea in India.

RUKHSANA: Pakistan.

MILLIE: Ah yes, sorry. I've never quite known the difference.

RUKHSANA: A line on a map. Religion. And now most definitely we hate each other.

MILLIE: Shame. It's the same with us and the Scots, Welsh and Irish, but I don't think we hate each other. Not really. I mean we are the *United Kingdom* after all. Give it time. It's the similarities see. That's what makes us even. Look at us! You with your sari and me with my polyester.

RUKHSANA: Are you married?

MILLIE: Me married? Oh no, no! Don't be daft. I have my career to think of. [*LEANS IN TO WHISPER*] But I do have a few offers on the table...

RUKHSANA: Offers?

MILLIE: You know, *proposals*. But for a career girl like me, it has to be right. I could be supervisor here one day. But it has to be right. I've got a plan. And with the right man, well it could come to fruition.

RUKHSANA: Frut-it-chun? Fruit?

MILLIE: Yes, yes you know seeds, growing and all that.

RUKHSANA: Taste sweet?

MILLIE: Well, I don't like it too sweet, but you get the idea.

RUKHSANA: You will marry for love?

MILLIE: Well for the love of something, yes of course.

SCENE 5.

**DAY 2. MID-MORNING AT ROWLEY'S. GENTLE HUM OF THE LOOMS BUZZING IN THE AIR.
MILLIE AND RUKHSANA TALK AS THEY WORK.**

MILLIE: You look a bit peaky girl, are you coming down with something?

RUKHSANA: I'm not coming down. I'm very up.

MILLIE: Ah well, you have to eat more vegetables. The greener the better.

RUKHSANA: I ate porridge today. To keep warm. It feels like eating big bowl of nothing.

MILLIE: Well, I'd take a big bowl of nothing over a big bowl of something if it keeps me warm.

RUKHSANA: Do you have family here Meelee?

MILLIE: Family, of course. They're all mad as hatters. I have uncles and aunts and cousins, but I don't see them nowadays. Me Mam is still around. She looks after . . . umm she lives nearby.

RUKHSANA: Does she look after the house when you here?

MILLIE SHIFTS UNCOMFORTABLY IN HER SEAT AND LEANS IN CONSPIRATORIALLY.

MILLIE: Look here, I can trust you can't I Roxy. Me Mam is at my house, looking after me little one. Little Toby.

RUKHSANA: You have a child!

MILLIE: Shh. There's no need for any of that hullabaloo! I try to keep it quiet. I'm a career girl remember.

RUKHSANA: But, it's good news no? A child. You must be so proud.

MILLIE: Pfft. He's a little monster most days - grazing knees, stealing apples and pinching pennies from my purse. I'd be prouder of a cocker spaniel if I had the choice.

RUKHSANA: His father must be proud?

MILLIE SITS UP IN HER CHAIR STIFFLY, BUSYING HERSELF WITH SOME MATERIAL.

MILLIE: He might well be, I wouldn't know. He's out of the picture nowadays . . .

RUKHSANA: You don't have photograph of family together?

MILLIE: Not even a snapshot. Not even that.

RUKHSANA NOTICES THE LOOK ON MILLIE'S FACE AND DECIDES NOT TO SAY MORE.

RUKHSANA: I have secret too.

MILLIE BRIGHTENS AND LEANS IN ONCE MORE.

MILLIE: Oh yes? Secrets and lies me duck. It's what makes us even.

RUKHSANA: I'm going to run away - back to Pakistan.

MILLIE: Oh dear! But why? You just got here.

RUKHSANA: I miss my family, my friends. People understand me there.

MILLIE: How will I cope? We have an understanding here!

RUKHSANA: I have to go back. Too difficult here.

MILLIE: But how will you get there? It's too far, what with bobbing horses and stubborn donkeys and jail planes and all that palaver.

RUKHSANA: I save little money, I sell wedding gold . . .

THE CONVERSATION IS INTERRUPTED BY MR RICHARDS WHO COUGHS TO SIGNAL HE IS STANDING THERE. MILLIE GLANCES AT HIM AND CONTINUES WORKING.

Mr Richards: Hello ladies. Millicent, I was wondering if I could have a word? In private like.

MILLIE: Well as you can see, I'm a little busy here Mr Richards. Work to do and all that.

Mr Richards: Ah yes, I'm sorry about that, but it's about the *position* you see.

MILLIE: Well, why didn't you say so Mr Richards. I can spare a moment for that now can't I!

MILLIE DEPARTS WITH MR RICHARDS. RUKHSANA CONTINUES TO WORK UNTIL SHE FEELS A TUG ON HER SLEEVE. CINDY IS STANDING THERE AND SITS IN MILLIE'S CHAIR. RUKHSANA LOOKS UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING.

CINDY: How's it going Roxy?

RUKHSANA: Going well Miss Cindy.

CINDY: I just saw MILLIE leave with Mr Richards. What she gone to talk about then?

RUKHSANA: About the position.

CINDY: Oh is that right. Seems like MILLIE's got her eyes on the prize alright.

RUKHSANA: A prize for work?

CINDY: A prize for life more like.

RUKHSANA: Don't understand ...

CINDY: Never mind. Don't tell here I came around. She can be a bit overly sensitive. Way I see it, us girls have to stick together don't we?

CINDY SAUNTERS OFF TO TALK TO ANOTHER OF THE LADIES, AND LOOKS OVER AT RUKHSANA AND WINKS. MILLIE RETURNS AND TAKES HER CHAIR, LOOKING BRIGHTLY AT RUKHSANA.

RUKHSANA: Do you have prize?

MILLIE: Well, maybe not a prize, but definitely a bonus.

RUKHSANA: A position?

MILLIE: Well exactly. *Yes.* Mr Richards has informed me of a vacant position. And asked whether I would like to fill it.

RUKHSANA: You have been offered a new job?

MILLIE: Well sort of me duck. It's definitely a new role.

RUKHSANA: You will be supervisor?

MILLIE: That goes without saying, yes, that was part of the deal. I will be supervising from now on.

RUKHSANA: Deal?

MILLIE: Why of course. Supervisor here and at home. He'll have to get his affairs in order. He's asked me to marry him after all ...

SCENE 6.

DAY 3. RUKHSANA IS SITTING AT HER STATION. SHE IS IN WORK EARLY AND WAITING FOR THE MACHINES TO GO ON. BESIDE HER TUCKED AWAY SITS A BIG SUITCASE, A SMALLER BAG AND HER HANDBAG. SHE IS FIDGETY AND LOOKS OVER AT THE DOOR FREQUENTLY. MILLIE APPROACHES.

MILLIE: You're a bit early love, and what's all this? You've got your baggage with you?

RUKHSANA: Yes. I'm leaving today.

MILLIE: You can't leave! How will *I* manage? This is your home now. I know we can be a bit slow on the uptake like, but we don't mean no harm.

RUKHSANA: Meelee, I miss Pakistan. My Abba, he told me I could be anything, and then he sent me here. And here I'm nothing.

MILLIE: No nothing. You could be supervisor one day – just look at me! I have a job and a man who wants to marry me. I know he's got no twinkle, but he's got some good old spit and polish shine to him. Sometimes you have to work at it to get that old leather looking like new.

RUKHSANA: Mr Reecharde is good man Meelee. My husband is good man too, but I'm homelost.

MILLIE: You mean homesick?

RUKHSANA: Yes. I'm sick for home Meelee. Every day, I feel sick.

RUKHSANA SWAYS IN HER CHAIR. MILLIE MOVES TOWARDS HER TO HOLD HER UP AS RUKHSANA FAINTS. THERE'S THE SOUND OF MILLIE SHOUTING AND RUSHING FEET AS SOMEBODY CALLS FOR AN AMBULANCE AND RUKHSANA IS HURRIED TO HOSPITAL.

SCENE 7.

AFTERNOON. LEICESTER ROYAL INFIRMARY. RUKHSANA WAKES TO FIND MILLIE SITTING AT THE END OF HER BED.

MILLIE: You gave us a right fright Roxy.

RUKHSANA: Where am I?

MILLIE: At the Infirmary. You fainted right in my arms. Without warning too! Lucky I had my wits about me or else ...

RUKHSANA: I want to go home.

MILLIE: I know you do love. But the doctor is doing some tests and then we'll see you home don't worry.

RUKHSANA: My home.

MILLIE SIGHS AND TAKES RUKHSANA'S HAND.

MILLIE: I know what you meant Roxy. I ain't ever been the sharpest, but the way I see it, it's best to plough on regardless.

RUKHSANA: Plough? To dig?

MILLIE: Yes, to dig, but ploughing leaves the soil ready for planting love.

RUKHSANA: To grow things?

MILLIE: Exactly.

THE DOCTOR ENTERS WITH A CLIPBOARD TO STAND BESIDE THE BED.

Doctor: Well Mrs Maqsood, you arrived in quite a state. How are you feeling now?

RUKHSANA: I feel ok. Better, but still have sickly feeling.

Doctor: Ah well, yes there'll be some of that certainly.

MILLIE: What's wrong with her Doctor? Is it stress?

Doctor: Yes, stress could bring on dizzy spells.

RUKHSANA: But, I can't stay here. I have to go home.

Doctor: Oh, you can go home, that's no problem.

MILLIE: She means the other home, Doctor. Pakistan.

Doctor: Ah. Well, of course, but I wouldn't recommend travelling in *your* state.

RUKHSANA: Pakistan isn't a state. It's a country.

Doctor: No no, that's not what I meant ...

MILLIE: What state is that Doctor?

Doctor: Why, she's pregnant of course. Almost three months now. Congratulations are in order. The nurse will come in and talk to you about the necessary arrangements regarding your midwife, but you can go home any time you like.

THE DOCTOR LEAVES. RUKHSANA SIGHS AND LOOKS DOWNCAST.

MILLIE: What's the matter? You've got a bun in the oven!

RUKHSANA: I'm cooking bun inside me?

MILLIE: Well sort of. It has to plump up and rise, and when it's out, you can sprinkle a bit of icing on top.

RUKHSANA: A baby is a gift.

MILLIE: Then why the long face?

RUKHSANA: My face isn't long. It has round shape.

MILLIE: You're sad.

RUKHSANA: Now I will always stay here.

MILLIE: Do you have Christmas in Pakistan?

RUKHSANA: No Christmas. We have Eid.

MILLIE: Well, there's that to look forward to isn't there? You have to have something to look forward to Roxy. Lets get you back into those silks and get you fixed up.

RUKHSANA: I need fixing?

MILLIE: Just a little spilt milk love. Nothing to worry about.

RUKHSANA: But we haven't spil -

MILLIE: Yes me duck?

RUKHSANA: Nothing Meelee. I understand (**SLIGHT PAUSE**), I understand.

THE END