

“Glue Gen”

Some might say that she's 'a blether'. She might even agree, outwardly, mocking herself to please you. But inwardly she runs a different script, secure in the belief that she is the 'glue' in the myriad lives she joins each to herself and each to each other. She does this by 'sharing', (never maliciously!), the lives of people who do not or barely know each other, and many of whom will never, ever meet.

Her 'Glue Gen' holds our universe together, she believes. To apply it is her imperative.

ooOoo

Even before she crosses our threshold she is already off at a steady canter, already talking rapidly as she slams the car door shut and head for our front door.

Time and space freeze as if in patient, compliant abeyance.

Her accusing glance spears my soul and I try my deep breathing routine, and mentally shake myself into what I hope will pass for attentiveness.

An impromptu U-turn takes her zipping over my shoulder. My psyche is wrenched in pursuit, like a Catherine Wheel fizzing from its pin.

I become aware of "Silence".

Was there a question I have missed?

I decide to ignore this possibility and gallop off down one of my own well-worn trails. But my intervention is brief, smiled at, ignored: she hooks a word from my diatribe and re-launches, onwards and upwards.

But her slight outage glimmers a hope deep in my cortex that she might trot down a conversational cul-de-sac. I prepare, tongue twitching, mentally rehearsing one of my newer tales that is surely so much brighter than hers.

I spot the dead end ahead. I fill my lungs, lick my lips. Now!

But no! How did she do that? Where did that escape route appear from?

Hope expires like the last sad whizz from one of those demented party balloons that shoot across the room to lie dormant, dead. Now that I accept that there can be no escape from her twinkling blue-eyed gaze, tension ebbs away. I see myself as a sun-basking fly awaiting her frog's sticky tongue. It flicks and dollops, fixing me to my very own node on her social inter-web. Now that she knows that I am fully secured, her web spins faster.

Millie, her chocolate lab-collie cross, a veteran listener, yawns loudly from her dream, pulls her front paws up to her chin, blinks to check that we are still here, and closes her eyes to escape again to the oblivion of her canine nirvana.

As in the past, from behind my smile mask, I contemplate transmogrification, an old theme. But to what? A wild brown trout swimming lazily in Loch Obisary on North Uist? But that is a place that she too loves: she might follow me there?

Then comes the flash that blinds and, in my ersatz kindness, I am already upright, moving towards the darkness of the wet winter wildness. Millie leaps to instant wakefulness and beats me to the shuttered door.

'Perhaps I might take her for a widdle walk?'

She smiles, knowingly, with a tiny shake of her head: this is ploy I have used before.

'Yes, let's, John, I need a walk too. Try out my new waterproof jacket. Do you know Ian MacGillvary who works in Tiso? Well, his Aunt, Katherine MacInnes, she's from Islay, I love Islay too, but so desolate at this time of year. Well her cousin in Canada has a real Labrador, you know actually from Labrador. It's called Kent, because of her cousin, Morag McFarlane, who was brought up in Oban although she used to live in Troon. Well, her daughter Siobhan, I think that's such a nice name, don't you, I used to have a wee doll of a girl in my Primary One at Blairdardie who she had a big sister called Siobhan in primary seven, Jean Reilly's class, and they were both just like Shirley Temple, same cheeky wee faces, and they could tap dance too. In fact it was because of them I went to tap dancing myself, and then Siobhan got into a Panto that year and we got four buses and took the whole school to see her, and wee sister got lost. She was called Gertrude but everyone called her Gertie, even her Mum, who was called Angela, but she wasn't there because she'd seen it and was at home with a new baby called Madeline, or was it Melanie? Anyway, I'd had to go looking for Gertie so I missed the bit with Siobhan in it and Jean said she was

really, really good, and she must have been because she went on to Knightswood to the Scottish School of Dance! “Yes she did Millie, COME HERE and SIT, that’s a *good* girl, now let Uncle John get your lead on,” and then she was on Broadway I heard, and even got into some films, but she moved to Sidney and actually married a man called Sidney Sidney. Amazing really Sidney Sidney from Sidney, who was much older, Jewish I think, but maybe he was Romanian, or was it Bulgarian, but of course he could have been Jewish as well? Anyway Ian has a younger brother called Euan who married the wee sister Gertie. And they had been trying for a baby for ages and then they gave up and bought one from a friend, someone from Perth way I think, or maybe Dundee, anyway, guess what she’s called, yes Sidney, now isn’t that a coincidence, and Ian got me his Staff discount on this jacket so this is such a great opportunity to try it out. “Look at that rain Millie! You like rain don’t you?” And it’s got Gortex and Ian said that he agrees that Sidney is a mad name to give a her and that Siobhan will be annoyed if she ever finds out, even if she is a Spaniel, and of course almost as soon as the pup arrived Gertie is expecting at last, just like Annette from Choir, Annette in the Altos, not Annette in the Sops, although she sings Tenor too, and does it beautifully. Well Annette’s hubby, the one in the Altos, he used to be a Taxidermist at the University, until he was rationalised out of a job as well, you know, just like Graham Maharg, you remember, from Busby, or is it East Kilbride, anyway, out that way somewhere. I never go there now because I got lost once for hours, all those roundabouts and all looking the same, anyway, did I tell you that Maharg is Graham spelt backwards, something to do with his family being Covenanters, but awfully clever of his Mum, Sheona, she’s from Troon too, and she will only ever answer to Sheona with an ‘e’ because she goes mad if you miss it out. But clever that, to give him a name that works backwards and forwards, there’s a name for that, I think, but he has this nickname, “Alice”, that everyone calls him because of the Looking Glass, you know, looking at Graham Maharg in a mirror? Anyway, the other Annette, not the Sop, the one from the Altos, with the Taxidermist, well he’s doing really well now and earns twice as much and they have a bigger house and a new car every other year. Did I tell you that his name is Percy Hardon, so rude don’t you think, especially with his job, you know stuffing things all the time. Personally I think he should change it, I mean that’s what the deed poll system is for. Anyway Percy H travels the travels the whole world now repairing exhibits...’

‘No! John, watch out for that Bus!’

“Oh *dear* Millie! Poor John, and I was just getting to the interesting bit too, you know about that time Percy H got stuck inside an elephant for two days in that zoo in Beijing.”

The bus driver leaps from his cab, shines a torch under the bus and shakes his head.

“Well Millie, what will we tell Auntie Margaret? Mmmm, now let me think. *Yes*, Millie, that's it, we'll say he was trying to rescue a wee drookit cat that was sitting on the road, you know, make him out as a hero. Best way, don't want to have it go down as it as a suicide, do we, it affects the insurance, doesn't it? NO Millie, *SIT*, that's a good girl. We'll need to stay until it's all over, get all the details, that's a *good girl*, for Writer's Group, they'll want to know everything.”

'Oh hello Betty, terrible night to be out, “*Hello Rufus!* That's a nice knew coat, did Santa bring it for you?” Yes, poor John, but so brave, and the wee cat just ran away in time. Such a waste, really. And he was a great listener too, and he thought he knew quite a lot about heating controls. *STEP BACK*, Betty, in case you get splashed by the ambulance, although why they need to go mad with their klaxon and flashing lights when he's obviously gone over. I just hope he got his wish, you know to become a fish, a barracuda I think he said. Look, at how big that puddle is! Maybe John's swimming in it already? Eh, Betty, what do you think?'

'And what do think of my new completely waterproof anorak, Betty? I'm as dry as toast in here. It's got *Gortex*. Wait till I tell you about it. Do you know Ian, Ian MacGillvary who works in Tiso? Well his Auntie.....'