

A LONG RAINCOAT

“Yes, it is a very long raincoat, isn’t it?” said Granny, as she stuffed her purse back into her bag.

Mr Macgillivray nodded glumly. He had already watched Granny’s long raincoat knock over his boxes of crisps and had stood by powerless as the Christmas tree which stood near the shop-door had shed several glass-balls. “Aye,” he said wearily, “Very long.”

“I got it for the winter, you know. Came by post yesterday,” continued Granny. “I wasn’t expecting it to be so long. But look - I’ve fastened up the hem with sellotape, and you would hardly know.”

She executed a little twirl for Mr Macgillivray’s benefit, and demolished his display of lemonade bottles. “Oops - well, never mind. I’ll be in to pay my papers on Saturday. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye,” muttered the shop-owner as he leaped after Granny, saving the tree from complete devastation in her wake. “And goodbye,” he added, for good measure.

Outside, it was raining. But Granny was safe: this long long raincoat, which reached to her ankles, would not let any rain in. And she had her plastic hood to keep her dry up top. She set out confidently towards home.

Alas: the problem with dampness is that it makes sellotape come undone. And, barely had Granny walked twenty yards, than the sellotape at the hem slipped down and began to trail on the ground. The further she walked, the more came undone.

After the first lamp-post, the trailing sellotape attached itself to an unsuspecting sparrow. The sticky tape fastened on to the bird's feathers and pulled it along, like a fly on fly-paper. The sparrow chirped and wrestled, but could not get itself free. The sparrow was caught. "Oh," thought Granny to herself, "It's nice to hear the wee birdies singing!" And she walked on blissfully.

At the next lamp-post, Biggles the cat, spying an easy meal in the sparrow, suddenly found his legs caught up in the sticky tape. He panicked then fell over. And was dragged remorselessly away. He miaowed and squealed, but it was no good. The cat and the sparrow were caught.

“Oh dear,” thought Granny, “That’s one of those naughty cats. I hope it doesn’t chase the birds away”. And she walked on worriedly.

Ten yards further on, at the corner of the street, Terror the floppy dog spied the cat and the bird and wondered what they were up to. He came closer, sniffing, interested in an academic sort of way. Zip! - before he knew what had happened, the long twist of sellotape had him by the furry ears and was pulling him along. He yelped and barked, but it was no good. The dog and the cat and the sparrow were caught.

“That’ll be Mr Downie’s bad dog,” thought Granny, leaning heavily on her stick as her legs grew tired. “I wonder what he’s up to now?” And she walked on wonderingly.

Round the corner, a small boy was making the mistake of cycling on the pavement. Before he knew what had hit him, the sellotape had him as an octopus in its tentacles. Shortly afterwards, his big sister made a valiant rescue attempt, but it failed: her pigtails were bound firmly in the tape, which was now about twenty feet long and still unravelling.

The two children shouted and called and struggled. But it was no good. The girl and the boy and the dog and the cat and the sparrow were caught.

“Dear me,” thought Granny, “What noisy children! I don't know what the world is coming to! Why aren't they at school or counting their stamp-collections?” And she walked on disapprovingly.

As she turned into her own street, she met the postman. “Morning, Mrs Wallace,” he said cheerfully, and loudly. “How are we today then?”

Granny graciously acknowledged his presence and passed on. Behind her, the postie suddenly let out a strangled cry and fell to the pavement, his bag and the letters flying everywhere, as the sticky tape grabbed his ankles and trussed him up. The postie and the girl and the boy and the dog and the cat and the sparrow were caught.

“Impertinent fellow,” thought Granny, “And just look at all these letters flying about - I've a good mind to report him to the Post Office for such slovenly service!” And she walked on happily.

She pointed out all the flying litter and letters to the man sweeping the streets, who turned eagerly to pick it all up and shovel it into his barrow. But he had got no

further than bending down than he was seized my the flying sellotape and was bundled up. He struggled and hit out with his brush. But it was to no avail. The road-sweeper and his barrow and the postie and the girl and the boy and the dog and the cat and the sparrow were caught.

She was getting tired now. "Must be rheumatism," she complained, "Haven't had this much trouble walking for ages." She had to pause for breath, it was so difficult moving forward. Every step was a struggle. Behind her was a shouting, a struggling, a wailing, a howling, a yowling and a chirping. "What a dreadful noise!" thought Granny.

She waved her stick and crawled out into the road in front of a bus. Her flat was just over the other side of the street. The bus swerved to avoid her. Luckily it also avoided the sparrow and the cat and the dog and the boy on the bicycle and his big sister and the postie, all caught up in the sellotape. But just - flicked! - the last few inches of the tape and spun the whole daisy-chain round and round a pillar-box. Where the bussweeperpostiegirlboydogcatsparrow stuck tight.

Just then, Granny was standing at the bottom-step leading up to the flats. Gasping for breath, uncertain how she was going to manage the last climb. She

braced herself and pulled forward against the weight which seemed to hold her back. And as the sellotape wrapped itself and its cargo round the pillar-box, it snapped. And Granny careered up the steps like an antelope in Spring.

Slightly surprised, she balanced on the top step. “My goodness,” she said, “Maybe I’m not so old after all!” And she fairly danced into her doorway, with her long long raincoat trailing behind.

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