

# We Are All Made of Glue

Marina Lewycka

This Large Print edition published 2009 by  
RNIB by arrangement with Penguin Books Ltd  
and BBC Audiobooks.

Extract

All text is copyright © of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

## **About the Author**

**Marina Lewycka was born in Kiel, Germany at the end of the war and grew up in England. She is married with a grown-up daughter and lives in Sheffield. Her two previous novels, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* and *Two Caravans*, are available in Penguin now.**

## **Note for Large Print edition**

**Words in square brackets represent words that have been crossed out in the original text.**

# **We Are All Made of Glue**

**Marina Lewycka**

**Copyright © Marina Lewycka, 2009**

**First published by Fig Tree, Penguin Books Ltd, London.**

**This Large Print edition published 2009 by RNIB by arrangement with Penguin Books Ltd and BBC Audiobooks.**

**ISBN 9781444501285**

**‘I Will Survive’ words and music by Dino Fekaris and Freddie Perren © copyright 1978 Perren-Vibes Music Company/ PolyGram International Publishing Incorporated, USA. Universal Music Publishing Limited. Used by permission of Music Sales Limited. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.**

**Design and illustration: gray318**

**Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.**



**supporting blind and  
partially sighted people**

# **1. Adhesives in the Modern World**

## **1**

### **The gluey smell**

The first time I met Wonder Boy, he pissed on me. I suppose he was trying to warn me off, which was quite prescient when you consider how things turned out.

One afternoon in late October, somewhere between Stoke Newington and Highbury, I'd ventured into an unfamiliar street, and come upon the entrance of a cobbled lane that led in between two high garden walls. After about fifty metres the lane opened out into a grassy circle and I found myself standing in front of a big double-fronted house, half derelict and smothered in ivy, so completely tucked away behind the gardens of the neighbouring houses that you'd never have guessed it was there, crouched behind a straggly privet hedge and a thicket of self-seeded ash and maple saplings. I assumed it was uninhabited – who could live in a place like this? Something was carved on the gatepost.

**I pulled the ivy aside and read: Canaan House. Canaan – even the name exuded a musty whiff of holiness.**

**A cloud shifted and a low shaft of sunshine made the windows light up momentarily like a magic show. Then the sun slipped away and the flat dusky light exposed the crumbling stucco, the bare wood where the paint had peeled away, rag-patched windows, sagging gutters, and a spiny monkey puzzle tree that had been planted far too close to the house. Behind me, the gate closed with a clack.**

**Suddenly a long wailing sob, like the sound of a child crying, uncoiled in the silence. It seemed to be coming from the thicket. I shivered and drew back towards the gate, half expecting Christopher Lee to appear with blood on his fangs. But it was only a cat, a great white bruiser of a tomcat, with three black socks and an ugly face, who emerged from the bushes, tail held high, and came towards me with a purposeful glint in his eye.**

**‘Hello, cat. Do you live here?’**

**He sidled up, as though to rub himself against my legs, but just as I reached down to stroke him, his tail went up, his whole**

body quivered, and a strong squirt of eau-de-tomcat suffused the air. I aimed a kick, but he'd already melted into the shadows. As I picked my way back through the brambles I could smell it on my jeans – it had a pungent, faintly gluey smell.

\* \* \*

Our second encounter was about a week later, and this time I met his owner, too. One evening at about eleven o'clock, I heard a noise in the street, a scraping and scuffling followed by a smash of glass. I looked out of the window. Someone was pulling stuff out of the skip in front of my house.

At first I thought it was just a boy, a slight sparrowy figure wearing a cap pulled down low over his face; then he moved into the light and I saw it was an old woman, scrawny as an alley cat, tugging at some burgundy velour curtains to get at the box of my husband's old vinyls half buried under the other junk. I waved from the window. She waved back gaily and carried on tugging. Suddenly the box came free and she fell backwards on to the ground, scattering the records all over the road, smashing a few of them. I opened the door and rushed out to help her.

**‘Are you okay?’**

**Scrambling to her feet, she shook herself like a cat. Her face was half hidden under the peak of the cap – it was one of those big jaunty baker boy caps that Twiggy used to wear, with a diamanté brooch pinned on one side.**

**‘I don’t know what type of persons is throwing away such music. Great Russian composers.’ A rich brown voice, crumbly like fruitcake. I couldn’t place the accent. ‘Must be some barbarian types living around here, isn’t it?’**

**She stood chin out, feet apart, as if sizing me up for a fight.**

**‘Look! Tchaikovsky. Shostakovich. Prokofiev. And they throw all in a bin!’**

**‘Please take the records,’ I said apologetically. ‘I don’t have a record player.’**

**I didn’t want her to think I was a barbarian type.**

**‘Thank you. I adore especially the Prokofiev piano sonatas.’**

**Now I saw that behind the skip was an old-fashioned pram with big curly springs into**



which she'd already loaded some of my husband's books.

'You can have the books, too.'

'You heff read them all?' she asked, as though quizzing me for barbarian tendencies.

'All of them.'

'Good. Thank you.'

'My name's Georgie. Georgie Sinclair.'

She tipped her head in a stiff nod but said nothing.

'I've not lived here long. We moved down from Leeds a year ago.'

She extended a gloved hand – the gloves were splitting apart on the thumbs – like a slightly dotty monarch acknowledging a subject.

'Mrs Naomi Shapiro.'

I helped her gather the scattered records and stow them on top of the books. Poor old thing, I was thinking, one of life's casualties, carting her worldly possessions around in a pram. She pushed it off down the road, swaying a little on her high heels as she went. Even in the cold outside air

I could smell her, pungent and tangy like ripe cheese. After she'd gone a few yards I spotted the white tomcat, the same shaggy bruiser with three black socks, leeching out of the undergrowth of next door's garden and trailing her down the pavement, ducking for cover from time to time. Then I saw there was a whole cohort of shadowy cats slipping off walls and out of bushes, slinking along behind her. I stood and watched her go until she turned a corner and disappeared from sight, the Queen of the Cats. And I forgot about her instantly. I had other things to worry about.

From the pavement I could see the light still on in Ben's bedroom window and the computer monitor winking away as he surfed the worldwide waves. Ben, my baby boy, now sixteen, a paid-up citizen of the web-wide world. 'I'm a cyber-child, Mum. I grew up with hypertext,' he'd once told me, when I complained about the time he was spending online. The square of light blinked from blue to red to green. What seas was he travelling tonight? What sights did he see? Up so late. On his own. My heart pinched – my gentle, slightly-too-serious Ben. How is it that children of the same parents turn out so differently? His sister Stella, at twenty, had already

grabbed life by the horns, wrestled it to the ground, and was training it to eat out of the palm of her hand (along with a changing ménage of hopeful young men) in a shared rented house near Durham University which, whenever I phoned, seemed always to have a party going on or a rock band practising in the background.

In the upstairs window the coloured square winked and disappeared. Bedtime. I went in and wrote my husband a curt note asking him to come and remove his junk, and I put it in an envelope with a second-class stamp. First thing next day, I telephoned the skip hire company.

\* \* \*

So let me explain why I was putting my husband's stuff on a skip – then you can decide for yourself whose fault it was. We're in the kitchen one morning – the usual rush of Rip getting off to work and Ben getting off to school. Rip's fiddling with his BlackBerry. I'm making coffee and frothing milk and burning toast. The air is full of smoke and steam and early-morning bustle. The news is on the radio. Ben is thumping around upstairs.

**Me: I've bought a new toothbrush holder for the bathroom. Do you think you might find a moment to fix it on the wall?**

**Him: (Silence.)**

**Me: It's really nice. White porcelain. Sort of Scandinavian style.**

**Him: What?**

**Me: The toothbrush holder.**

**Him: What the fuck are you talking about, Georgie?**

**Me: The toothbrush holder. It needs fixing on to the wall. In the bathroom. (A helpless little simper in my voice.) I think it's a rawplug job.**

**Him: (Deep manly sigh.) Some of us are trying to do something really worthwhile in the world, Georgie. You know, something that will contribute to human progress and shape the destiny of future generations. And you witter on about a toothbrush.**

**I can't explain what came over me next. My arm jerked and suddenly there were flecks of milky froth everywhere – on the walls, on him, all over his BlackBerry. A gob of**

froth had caught in the blond hairs of his left eyebrow and hung there, quivering goopily with his rage.

**Him: (Furious.) What's got into you, Georgie?**

**Me: (A shriek.) You don't care, do you? All you care about is your bloody world-changing destiny-shaping bloody work!**

**Him: (Shaking his head in disbelief.) As it happens, I do care very much. I care about what happens in the world. Though I can't say I care deeply about a toothbrush.**

**Me: (Watching, fascinated, as the gob of froth works itself loose and starts to slide.) A toothbrush holder.**

**Him: What the fuck's a toothbrush holder?**

**Me: It's ... ah! (There she goes ... Splat!)**

**Him: (Self-righteously rubbing his eye.) I don't see why I should put up with this.**

**Me: (Flushed with achievement.) No one's asking you to put up with it.**

**Why don't you just go? And take your bloody BlackBerry with you. (Not that there was the slightest chance that he'd have left that behind.)**

**Him: (Hoity-toity.) Your outbursts of hysteria are not very attractive, Georgie.**

**Me: (Lippy.) No, and you're not attractive either, you big self-inflated fart.**

**But he was attractive. That's the trouble – he was. And now I've well and truly blown it, I thought, as I pictured Mrs Shapiro pootling away up the street with his precious collection of great Russian composers tucked away in her pram.**