

Where everyone turns to Scarlett

20th August 2008

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River City BBC1, 8.30pm

Praise be for Scarlett Mullen, currently bringing a welcome air of zestful comic determination to River City.

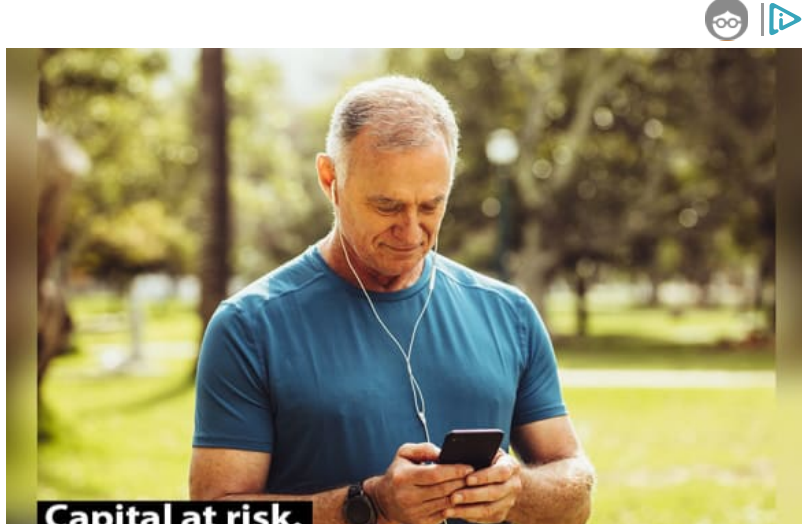
Played with deft gusto by Sally Howitt, Scarlett is Shieldinch's gallus busybody.

Scarlett's a timeless natural force of female Glaswegian vitality in a fuschia leather jaiket, too. She bustles with relentless certainty, therefore she jist pure is.

She's like Coronation Street bar-room legend Bet Lynch, only with less brains and tinier, shinier, beadier eyes which are devoid of self-doubt. Evoking a more unstoppable Lorraine Kelly, Scarlett also witters in fluent demotic - "Ah thunk the hale thung goat outty haun" - tempering her good-time fervour with well-intentioned scepticism.

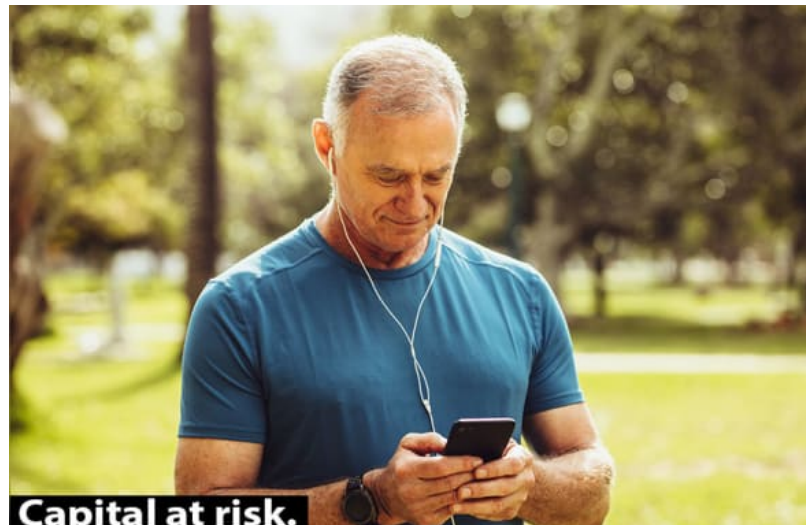
Or, as another character summarised her, their admiration mixed 50-50 with exasperation: "Scarlett? She's possessed!"

Scarlett's benign devilry was focused on providing downcast Gina with a glitterball-equipped, vodka-jelly-fuelled D-I-S-C-O party for her 50th birthday (Scarlett would probably reckon a funeral should be best staged as a glitterball-equipped, vodka-jelly-fuelled D-I-S-C-O party).



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Naturally, downcast Gina didn't want such lavish jollifications, not having had her problems to seek with yon evil amnesiac lawyer git of a husband of hers, Archie.

An uneasy birthday compromise was thus reached in the form of a quieter, more civilised demi-knees-up in the Tall Ship's saloon bar. Somehow, though, a measure of Scarlett's muscular joie de vivre had worked its magic on Gina.

For when evil lawyer git Archie showed up and began heckling cruelly from the sidelines, Gina stepped forward and lamped him a right sair wan tae the jaw. Yaay, Gina!

As satisfying as this vengeful moment felt, it was eclipsed by one of high comedy involving Scarlett (who else?). It arose during her flying visit to douce Liz's hoose for the inaugural meeting of the latter's writers' group.

Liz, in addition to being evil lawyer git Archie's long-suffering mother, is a woman on a doomed cultural mission: to bring highbrow literature to the plebs of Shieldinch. Scarlett alone showed up for the writers' group's ground-breaking get-together, and by mistake at that.

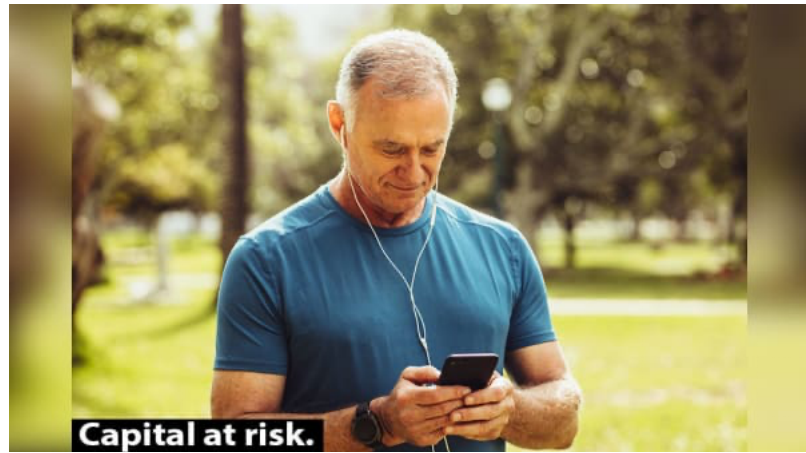
Douce Liz offered Scarlett a plate of spring rolls, deathlessly inquiring "Lumpias?" as Scarlett wriggled around in her seat before replying: "No, quite comfortable, thanks." Comedy gold.

As douce Liz, the age-defying Eileen McCallum flutes and trills her lines impeccably. Playing her vintage foil, Malcolm, Johnny Beattie is pleasingly droll, too.

There was much joy when Malcolm unwisely surrendered to a gentlemanly impulse, asking Liz to read him her own hellish story wot she'd wrote, no-one else being on hand to hear it.

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