

Adrian Mole



The Prostrate Years

'Adrian Mole really is a brilliant comic creation'
The Times



SUE TOWNSEND

Adrian Mole: The Prostrate Years
by
Sue Townsend

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Saturday 2nd June 2007

Black clouds over Mangold Parva. It has been raining since the beginning of time. When will it stop?

MAJOR WORRIES

1. Glenn fighting the Taliban in Helmand Province.
2. The bookshop only took £17.37 today.
3. Up three times last night to urinate.
4. The Middle East.
5. Do my parents have an up-to-date funeral plan?
I can't afford to bury them.
6. My daughter, Gracie, showing alarming Stalinist traits. Is this normal behaviour for the under-fives?
7. It is two months and nineteen days since I last made love to my wife, Daisy.

I sometimes feel that she is less keen on me than she used to be. She hasn't taken the top off my boiled egg for ages. She has still not bought a pair of wellingtons despite living in Mangold Parva for three years. She is the only mother outside the school gate wearing five-inch heels.

This shows her total lack of commitment to me, and to the English countryside. In the first month of our marriage we picked blackberries together and she had a stab at making preserves. Now, four years on, the scars from the boiling jam have almost completely healed, and she is buying raspberry Bonne Maman at £3.50! It is ridiculous when you can buy the Co-op's own brand at 87p.

Yesterday I found her crying over her old briefcase. When I asked her what was wrong, she sobbed, 'I miss Dean Street.'

'Who's Dean Street?' I asked.

She slammed the briefcase down and savagely kicked out at a bag of John Innes.

'Dean *Street*, the place, *idiot*,' she said in that calm sarcastic voice I have come to dread.

But at least she was speaking to me, although she is still avoiding eye contact. Last week, whilst searching for my nostril hair clippers in my wife's handbag, I came across a Paperchase A5-sized notebook with a cover depicting harmless-looking monsters. On opening the notebook I was startled to find, on the first page, a note addressed to me.

ADRIAN, IF YOU HAVE FOUND MY DIARY AND YOU ARE
READING THIS, DO NOT READ ANY FURTHER. THIS DIARY
IS MY ONLY CONFIDANT. PLEASE RESPECT MY WISHES AND
ALLOW ME SOME PRIVACY.

CLOSE THE NOTEBOOK AND REPLACE IT,
NOW!

I read on.

Dear Diary

I intend to write in you every day and I will hold nothing back. I can tell no living person how I feel. Adrian would have a nervous breakdown, my parents and sisters would say we told you not to marry him, and my friends would say we told you so. But the truth is, diary, that I am utterly miserable. I hate living in yokel-land where the populace have never heard of the White Cube Gallery or macchiato coffee and think that Russell Brand is a type of electric kettle. Do I love my husband? Have I ever loved my husband? Can I live with my husband until one or both of us are dead?

I heard the back door slam and Daisy came in from the garden. I quickly replaced the diary in her handbag and for some reason shouted, 'Daisy, when is the Queen's official birthday?'

She came into the living room and said, 'Why do you want to know? You haven't written her one of your poems, have you?'

As she bent her head to light a cigarette, I couldn't help but notice that she now has *three* chins. I have also noticed recently that she has tampered with our 'speak your weight' bathroom scales, so they no longer speak.

I have stopped accompanying her to the shops to buy clothes since she had a temper tantrum in the changing room at Primark, when she got stuck in a size 14 shirt and had to be cut out of it by the manageress. All the way

home she was saying, ‘I can’t understand it, I’m only a size 12.’ Even my friend Nigel, who is blind but can see shapes, said recently, ‘By Christ, Daisy’s piling on the pounds. She came to see me the other day and I thought it was my garden shed on the move.’

When she went into the kitchen, I was tempted to grab her diary and read on, but I daren’t risk it.

After dinner (tinned tuna salad, new potatoes, beetroot salsa, own strawberries, Elmlea cream) I was washing up when Daisy came in and took a packet of chocolate digestives from out of the cupboard. Later, after I’d cleaned the kitchen surfaces and pushed the wheelie bin and the recycling boxes to the end of the drive, I went into the living room to watch Channel Four news and couldn’t help but notice that Daisy had eaten three-quarters of the packet of biscuits. I should not have said anything. I should have kept my mouth firmly shut. The subsequent row was like the eruption of a volcano.

Gracie turned the volume up to full on her DVD of *High School Musical 2* and demanded, ‘Stop shouting or I’ll call the police!’

My mother came round from next door to find out if Daisy had actually killed me. She brought the row to an end by shouting above Daisy and me, ‘Daisy, you are in denial! You are obviously a size 16! Get over it! Evans, Principles and even Dawn French supply clothes for fat women.’

Daisy hurled herself into my mother’s arms, and my mother indicated with an angry gesture of her head that I was to leave the room.

*

This morning Daisy did not stand at the door and watch me mount my bike as I left for work as usual, and when I reached the lane and turned to wave, she was not at the window. Physically I am at a low ebb. I rise from my bed at least three times during the night, more if I allow myself a glass of wine after *Newsnight*. Consequently I am exhausted, and the next morning I have to put up with my parents (with whom I share a party wall) complaining that the constant flushing of our cistern is keeping them awake.

As I was cycling into a headwind it took longer than usual to ride to the bookshop, and when I reached the environs of Leicester I was further delayed. It seemed that every major road had been dug up so that new sewage pipes could be laid. As a reluctant cesspit owner this prompted me to be almost consumed with jealous rage. Is it any wonder my wife is yearning for the metropolis? I have denied her one of life's basic necessities. I blame my father for our primitive sanitary conditions, the money we put aside for mains drainage when we built the Piggeries was frittered away on wheelchair ramps for him. Yet it was his own fault he had a stroke – the only exercise he took for years was wagging his index finger on the remote control. To add insult to injury, he still smokes thirty cigarettes a day and gorges himself on fried bread and chilli-flavoured pork scratchings.

I rue the day my parents bought two dilapidated pigsties and converted them into living units. I was grateful to have a pigsty roof over my head in the early days of my insolvency, but I have certainly paid the price.

Another worry is my failure as a father. Gracie came home from nursery school yesterday with a felt-tip drawing of ‘My family’. Diary, I looked amongst the stick people for the representation of myself but failed to find me. I was deeply hurt by my absence. When I asked Gracie why she hadn’t included me, pointing out that it was the tax extracted from my wages that supplied her school with the felt tips and paid her nursery teacher’s salary, her brow furrowed. To avoid the usual escalation – sobs, screams, snot and recriminations – I diverted her by opening a packet of pink wafer biscuits.

When I asked my wife why she thought Gracie had left me out of the family drawing, Daisy said, ‘She has obviously picked up on your emotional detachment.’ When I protested, she got ridiculously overemotional and shouted, ‘When you come home from work you sit and stare out of the window with your mouth open.’

I defended myself, saying, ‘I never tire of the view, the trees in the distance, the light fading from the sky.’

Daisy said, ‘It’s not fucking *Cornwall*. The view from the front window is of a boggy field and a row of leylandii your father planted to “protect his privacy”. Not that anybody comes *near* the place.’

Sunday 3rd June

1 The Old Pigsty
The Piggeries
Bottom Field
Lower Lane
Mangold Parva
Leicestershire
Sunday 3rd June 2007

The Right Honourable Gordon Brown MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
11 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AB

Dear Mr Brown

I wrote to you at the Treasury recently regarding a great injustice. According to my local tax office, I am still in arrears to the sum of £13,137.11. This 'debt' was incurred during a time when I worked for a duplicitous employer as an offal chef in Soho.

I realise that you are an incredibly busy man, but if you could find the time to cast your eye over my paperwork (sent 1st March 2007 by registered post) and then forward me a note confirming my innocence in this matter, I would be eternally grateful.

Your humble and obedient servant,
A. A. Mole

PS: May I suggest that you sort this out before you take over as prime minister.

PPS: Congratulations on doing so well with only one eye.

You join the ranks of other illustrious one-eyed men: Peter Falk (Columbo), George Melly, Nelson and, of course, Cyclops.

Monday 4th June

What started as a minor disagreement about the correct way to boil potatoes (I cook them from cold, Daisy throws them into boiling water) turned into a tearful and angry denunciation of our marriage.

The list of my marital crimes included eating crisps too loudly, ironing creases down the front of my jeans, refusing to pay more than £5 for a haircut, wearing the same poppy (first purchased in 1998) during the month of November every year, putting too many dried herbs in spag bol, writing mad letters to famous people, failing to earn enough money to enable us to move out of the pigsty.

At the end of her diatribe I said, ‘I don’t know why you married me.’

Daisy looked at me as if seeing me for the first time and said, ‘I honestly don’t know why I married you. I suppose I must have loved you.’

‘Loved?’ I queried. ‘Did you mean to use the past tense?’

Daisy went mad again, shouting, ‘Our marriage is breaking up and all you can do is talk about my grammar.’

‘That’s grossly contrapositional of what I actually said,’ I protested.

‘Listen to yourself,’ she said. ‘Nobody speaks like that, Adrian. Nobody actually says “contrapositional”.’

“‘Contrapositional” almost certainly makes up part of Will Self’s daily intercourse,’ I said. Even to my own ears I sounded like Mr Pooter.

I do not enjoy such confrontations. Am I turning into one of those middle-aged men who think the country has gone to the dogs and that there has been no decent music since Abba?

Tuesday 5th June

Diary, I’ve been thinking about yesterday’s entry and I am a little disturbed to find that I think the country has gone to the dogs and that there is nobody to beat Abba.

Wednesday 6th June

The sun came out today. I do not mean in the metaphorical sense, I mean the actual sun came out from behind the low grey clouds that have been hanging about for months. The smell of hawthorn was thick in the air and most of the water had evaporated from the potholes in our drive. I remarked to Daisy that the sunshine would do us all good, boost our serotonin levels and prevent rickets.

Daisy said, ‘All that sunshine means to me, Adrian, is that I have to shave my legs.’

She is not the woman I married. The old Daisy, who delighted in the sun, would be lying on a towel in a bikini on the flat roof of our pigsty to soak up every last ray.

When I suggested she could sunbathe, her eyes filled with tears. ‘Have you seen the size of me recently?’ she said.

Diary, what has happened to my wife? Did she mean what she wrote about me in her notebook? Will we ever have sex again? Even my parents manage it every other Thursday. I have to wear earplugs because of the disturbing noises through the party wall.

Monday 11th June

Mr Carlton-Hayes is ill. Leslie, his friend, rang me at the bookshop first thing this morning. For years I have been wondering if Leslie is a man or a woman. I am still none the wiser. Leslie could be a deep-voiced woman, à la Ruth Kelly the cabinet minister, or a high-voiced man like Alan Ball the footballer.

All I know about Leslie is that he/she shares a house with Mr Carlton-Hayes, is unsociable and has a liking for Sibelius and the pink coconut and liquorice ones in a box of Bassett’s Allsorts.

I asked Leslie what was wrong with Mr Carlton-Hayes, and he/she said, ‘Did he not mention it? Oh dear,

I'm afraid I'm going to give you rather bad news. Oh dear ...'

I said, hastily, 'I'll wait, shall I, until he's better?'

I could hear Leslie breathing. It sounded as if he/she had a bad chest.

A customer, a woman with one large eyebrow, asked me if we stocked anything on the early surrealists. I directed her towards a Man Ray biography. I was glad of the temporary diversion – I kept Leslie on hold and gave the eyebrow woman the hard sell. Mr Carlton-Hayes had badly misjudged the interest for books about early surrealists in Leicester and the five copies of the Man Ray had been hard to shift. On the other hand, he had severely underestimated the demand for Wayne Rooney's ghosted autobiography.

When I returned to the phone, Leslie had gone. I meant to ring back immediately but the woman came to the till with the Man Ray. When she had left, I dialled Leslie's number but after only two rings I put the phone down and disconnected the call.

Sunday 17th June

Father's Day

Woken up at 6.20 this morning by the smell of burning, and Gracie yelling into my right ear, 'Wake up, Dad, it's Father's Day!'

Rushed into the kitchen to find smoke pouring out of toaster, cornflakes underfoot, milk spilt on table, butter

knife in sugar bowl. Gracie ordered me to sit down at the table and gave me a card she'd made with Daisy's help. Quite frankly, Diary, I was distinctly underwhelmed. A piece of card had been folded in half and the word 'Dad' written in bits of pasta, most of which had fallen off leaving only traces of glue. Inside it said, 'form Gracie'.

I gently pointed out to her that 'from' was misspelled.

She frowned down at the card and said defiantly, 'That's how children spell "from" in America.'

I said, 'I think you might be wrong there, Gracie.'

She said, 'Have you been to America?'

I had to admit that I had, in fact, never been to America.

Gracie said, 'Well, I have. I went with Mummy one day while you were at the bookshop.'

I let it go. She is a formidable opponent.

I am now regretting having volunteered to be the writer/director and producer of the Mangold Parva Players. Rehearsals are not going well, I break into a sweat when I realise we have only got eleven months before the opening night.

1 The Old Pigsty
The Piggeries
Bottom Field
Lower Lane
Mangold Parva
Leicestershire

Dear Sir Trevor Nunn

Your name has been passed to me by Angela Hacker, the author and playwright, who is a neighbour of mine. I have written a play, *Plague!*, set in the medieval countryside. It is an elegiac piece and features sixty human actors and quite a few animals, mostly domestic.

Angela thought you might be able to give me a few tips on handling such a large cast.

As you cannot fail to see, I have enclosed *Plague!* for your perusal. If you would like to get involved, please let me know as soon as possible.

I remain, sir,
A. A. Mole

SCENE I

A storm. A group of monks enter, wearing habits and sandals. A more distinguished monk is carrying a casket. This is ABBOT GODFRIED, a holy monk aged about fifty. [Note to stage management: A vacuum cleaner with the pipe in the blowhole set at the side of the stage can create the wind of the 'storm'.]

ABBOT GODFRIED: Hark, Brother! The wind doth blow very hard, methinks we must take shelter in this cursed place.

A yokel appears. He is called John and is going home for his dinner of maize dumplings in pig's ear broth.

ABBOT GODFRIED: Halt, yokel! Where is't thou goeth with such haste?

YOKEL JOHN: I be going home to my dinner, holy one.

ABBOT GODFRIED: What be this foul place called?

YOKEL JOHN: 'Tain't got no name, 'tis just an 'ill an' a few fields and an 'ovel or two.

ABBOT GODFRIED: In a storm a hovel is as meritorious as a palace, yokel.

They have reached the Village Square, where thirty-five assorted men and women are standing around. A pack of dogs enter from stage left and cross. Chickens peck between the villagers' feet. ABBOT GODFRIED holds the casket aloft. He is followed by a fat monk, BROTHER DUNCAN, who enjoys birdwatching, and

a thin monk, BROTHER ANDREW, who suffers from panic attacks.

YOKEL JOHN: What have you, in the box?

ABBOT GODFRIED: I have the entrails and anus of King John.

The villagers and animals fall to their knees.

ABBOT GODFRIED: His heart was buried at York. And this benighted place, methinks, will serve the King's anus well.

The villagers cheer and the dogs bark.

END OF SCENE I

Monday 18th June

I have just seen a photograph in an old copy of the *Leicester Mercury* of a bloke called Harry Plant who was celebrating his one hundred and ninth birthday. One hundred and nine! He fought at the Battle of Passchendaele in the Great War when he was nineteen.

Mr Plant had a full head of hair, in fact he could have done with a haircut. I wonder what his secret is?

1 The Old Pigsty
The Piggeries
Bottom Field
Lower Lane
Mangold Parva
Leicestershire

The Willows Nursing Home
Bevan Road
Dewsbury
Leeds

Dear Mr Plant

Congratulations on reaching the grand age of 109. I wonder if you would mind letting me in on the secret of your longevity? I am particularly interested in how you managed to retain your hair.

Advice on diet, habits etc. would be most gratefully accepted.

I remain, sir,

Your most humble and obedient servant,

A. A. Mole

A letter (in quivery writing).

Dear Mr Mole

I thank you for your kind interest. I have no dietary habits, I just eat the food of the average Englishman.

As for my hair, I pulverise an onion and apply the juice to my scalp before retiring for the night.

With regards from,
Mr Plant

1 The Old Pigsty
The Piggeries
Bottom Field
Lower Lane
Mangold Parva
Leicestershire

The Willows Nursing Home
Bevan Road
Dewsbury
Leeds

Dear Mr Plant

Thank you very much for your reply to my letter of Monday.

I wonder if you would indulge me further by advising me on the type of onion you use?

I look forward to your reply.

Yours,
A. A. Mole

Tuesday 19th June

Today I asked Daisy if she would consider playing Eliza Hepplethwaite, the village whore, in *Plague!*. I told her that she would have to wear red stockings and a matted hair wig, stick on warts and have her teeth blackened. I said, 'Remember, *Plague!* is set in pre-Colgate days.'

Daisy said, 'Would it surprise you if I said no? Ask Marlene Webb from the boarding kennels, her teeth are positively medieval.'

I said, 'I confess myself bitterly disappointed, Daisy. I had hoped that you would support my theatrical activities. Don't tell me that *Plague!* is no good. It's the best thing I've ever written. I gave a copy to the vicar and he wrote to congratulate me.' I took the note out of my wallet and showed it to Daisy.

Dear Adrian

A short note. I'm stunned. Congratulations on the first draft of Plague!. It is quite an achievement to give over sixty cast members at least two lines each.

I fear a prior commitment prevents me from accepting your kind offer to play Daft Dick.

I have, as you requested, passed the script on to my wife. She says she will read it when she has finished working her way through the complete Iris Murdoch.

Yours in God,

Simon