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Adolescing, Chapter 19, March 1999, Chapter 20, April 1999

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March 1999

## Slugs and snails

Girls' trousers just lie flat between their legs but with men there are loose folds of cloth. That's what gets me going. I pinched the cloth and felt a firm little shape rolling under my fingers. He backed up against the tumble dryer. Got him! Zips and tucks, Y fronts, dig and delve,

'Seen bigger than yours!'

Now I'll peel back the skin but (oh rats!) I can't hold it still, it curls up like string. Both hands, rolling a cigarette. No problemo. Ease out the little damp morsel inside and the skin rolling up all crinkled behind it.

'Men are disgusting. Slugs and snails and puppy dogs' tails!'

Slowly. Pull flap tug! I've not yet got the hang of this. How can I make it slide and not keep snagging?

'Is this right?'

That's better, up and down, lap lap lap lap much better. Oh mega! Point it down and then let go, boing! 'Faster now?'

Plaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplap.

The look on his face, cool! 'Not hurting?'

Laplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplap.

'Someone's coming!'

'Quick then.' Plaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplaplap!

Here it comes! No, bugger, there isn't time but just a sec yes! Hot slush don't stop now pulps squish grease my palm.

Any more? Squit. Squit yes blob but quick, bend it down (ouch!) Tuck it away still leaking.

'Dawn? Hurry up! What's taking you so long?'

'I'll be with you in a minute.'

Wipe hands, where? The back of my shirt. Don't take my jacket off now whatever happens.

'Coming.'

## **Adoption leave**

I signed the adoption papers because I am a catholic. When it was over I left the hospital. They wanted me to make appointments and all that crap. So long.

Well, you know how it is, I was swollen and throbbing, I couldn't move my arm, and torn up below. I started coughing, ah that hurts. Then it was, Look, that girl is falling over. Look, she must be drunk. She must be drugged up, disgusting! I thought, I'm going to die. I woke up in a puddle of bloody piss. One day I noticed that I was back to normal. I thought, I am going to stay alive.

There was one town I stayed away from. When it was warmer again I thought, Okay, he is three months old now, I won't even recognise him. So I came back here again and started looking around for somewhere to stay.

It was funny, there were a lot of people I recognised but I was invisible, they all passed me by until old Miss Baker.

'Violet!'

'Hallo Miss Baker.'

She looked me over and I felt ashamed of myself as usual.

'If you don't mind me saying Violet, you're a mess.'

'Yes Miss Baker. How are you Miss Baker? Still teaching at

Cuthbert Mayne's?

'No, I am on maternity leave.'

'REALLY?' I grabbed her hands and danced around her in circles and she had to turn round and round with me. When I was out of breath, I looked her over. How old is she really?

'Thank you Violet. Not everyone was so enthusiastic.'

'Did you get married too?'

She smiled and shook her head. 'What have you been doing Violet, since I last saw you?'

'This and that.' I started to fidget. It had come to me suddenly then, I want a bloke too! The way it was for the last year, I still had the flick knife that Vince gave me in exchange for losing his virginity, and if a bloke took an interest, he saw that knife flicking closer than he could focus on it.

'Where are you living now?'

I want a bloke too! 'Oh,' I waved my hand, 'I've got a flat up,' where? 'Chelston.'

'I have a spare room. You can stay with me and. The baby till you sort yourself out.'

'It's okay, Miss Baker. Like I said I've got a flat' I want a bloke!

'Well, you'll come and see me anyway.'

Does she have a death wish? Imagine the scandal. Miss Baker is seeing Vi Perkins out of school. Vi Perkins has moved in with her! So long Miss Baker, I've got things to do. Down at the harbour, I set myself up busking for all the clubbers passing by. There were police men and women walking up and down in pairs. I sang to them too. I am not prejudiced.

Mud and blood and scab and crust  
Cheesy crumbs between my toes

I can't satisfy your lust  
Don't come too close. Don't come too close

Creepy crawlies in my hair  
And I'm sitting in a puddle  
I need a fag. You got one spare?  
I need a friend. I need a cuddle

I'm dirt! I'm sin! Don't let me in!

I bunked off school, I bunked off work  
They stopped my dole (that's so unfair!)  
I bunked off from the dentist all  
My life. Now kissing hurts, take care

Why don't you bunk off life with me  
Out in the open air?  
I think I've got the hots for you  
My love. Watch out! Take care!

You sleep all cosy and secure  
But I break windows in the night  
I can't be locked up by the law  
Because my lawyer sees me right

I'm not cheap. I won't be bought  
But I'm going to make you pay  
Now you can stay with your own sort  
Or follow me and lose your way

I jeer! I shout! You're in! I'm out!

I have no home. I have no name  
I have your credit card! All right, we'll share  
I hold you in my arms my love  
You'd better watch your back! Take care

But come away with me my love  
Do you want to? Do you dare?  
Perhaps I'll follow you back home  
One night. Watch out! Take care!

## **Adolescing**

Am I boring you? I am so bored of myself! I need a way  
out of my mind. Your madness is my hope and sanity.

## **Two heels kicking**

'All right Danny.' Slip slip. 'Now, come on, I'm ready now if  
you want. It's all right, come on.'

Lying down flat on the floor, she lifted up her knees, come  
on! I knelt in the middle and poked at her but I missed. And  
missed again. I reached down and pointed it at her with my  
hand. I hope I can manage.

'It's all right Danny love, don't rush. You'll be all right.  
Come on.'

She pulled me down on her so we were cuddling very  
close. Hands down there, hers and mine, hers very gentle,  
feeding it in. Wow, yes, this is Alice, Danny and Alice, Danny  
right down inside Alice, in the warmth. Wowee she goes  
deep, she turns corners. This is so dead sexy, no, this is  
LOVE! For a gorgeous happy moment I thought of Alice

having my baby but of course she must be on the pill or have a coil, a girl like her.

'That's right Danny. Come on then. Come on, come on. Oh shit! Shi shi hit! That's right.'

She wrapped her legs around me and I felt her two heels kicking me in the bum. That's right, come on, come on. My weedy little chest squashed up against her big squashy one. It didn't last long.

You know how it is at the end. You open your eyes and everything is normal, nothing is exciting any more. All the thoughts going through my head a minute ago, now they just seem silly. Get real Dan.

'Is that what you wanted Danny?'

'I'm sorry Alice.'

'Rubbish Danny, absolute rubbish! It's all right.'

## **God and the devil fight for a human soul**

After I left home I started having a lie in some Sundays. Once I skived off mass three Sundays in a row but it felt terrible doing that. I do not think that I am very religious but you have to go somewhere on a Sunday morning.

This was a difficult time. I got a job at Clarendon House but there were three other young people working in the same office. I wish they had all been old! I felt scared every day when I got up for work. I had to get a flat because I couldn't come in from the village every day. Not that I wanted to carry on living with Dad. My flat was okay but it didn't have a television and there is no point in cooking a meal for one. I hadn't any friends. In the evenings I talked out loud to nobody and the flat became dirty and smelly.

Then one Sunday I saw a notice on the church notice board advertising an Easter retreat at Saint David's, five days. On impulse I filled in the form and arranged my annual leave so that I could go.

After a day I knew that I had done the right thing. There was an old house where you could hear the sea, and eighteen of us, not including the priests and nuns. I expected to be the youngest but we were all different ages. Even two of the nuns were just young girls. None of the women was wearing any make up and everyone wore just quiet comfortable clothes, me too of course. It was such a relief after being at work. Sometimes there was an hour of silence. We sat or walked together in silence. The men didn't look at you the way men do, or talk in that loud way. We talked quietly when we talked. Before I arrived I thought, What have I let myself in for? It will be mass every day! but it was nothing like ordinary mass. Ordinary mass is bored Father Dominic saying the words in a sing song voice. Here there were different priests so we split up into three groups. Six of us and two of the nuns sat in a circle in just an ordinary room with chairs. It didn't even have a crucifix. We talked with the priest and laughed together. The priest encouraged us to talk about the things you usually keep to yourself. I felt that we were friends. I even said something to them about Violet Perkins in year ten who was expelled when they let me stay. Then after nearly an hour, the priest took a chalice and things out of his case. He quickly said the offertory and went straight on to the consecration and the communion. All our conversation had been part of a mass. We shared the bread and the wine like real friends at a meal.

## April 1999

On the second day there was going to be a mass for all of us together in the little chapel. I had been to confession but I was getting distracted. I came in from the garden and went back to my bedroom. I shared it with two sisters from Port Talbot but no one was around. I thought, I can't not do it for a whole week. It will just keep distracting me. Indecisive, I unbuttoned my white jeans. Then I shook my head and did them up again. I went across the hall to the wash room and locked the door. I took my jeans right off and my knickers too. I knelt down with my hands out of sight, one from the back and one from the front and emptied my mind. It wasn't as if I was being dirty minded or anything but perhaps I shouldn't have knelt that time. There was nowhere comfortable to sit in there. I just hunched down on my hands until I sobbed and it was gushing.

Then of course I found I had to get to the chapel in a hurry. I had only a little time to clean myself and I didn't want to leave any signs on my flannel or the towels. I arrived at the chapel out of breath and thinking I might have spoiled it a bit but everyone smiled and they made a space for me and, again, it wasn't like an ordinary mass. It was the same priest that our group had yesterday. During the homily he sat down with us. I will write down the bits I can remember.

'What sins did you all confess yesterday? Has any of you stolen something? A Bic from the office, a can of baked beans?' We giggled. 'Or have you been using contraceptives?

Who cares?' Then we really laughed. 'Do any of these sins matter? What is sin really?

Well, sin is turning away from God. Sin is turning away from our neighbour. So forget your other sins; when have you turned away from your neighbour?' He looked around the chapel, from one face to another.

'He'll only spend it on drugs.

Cross the road quick or he'll tell you his life history.'

Then he turned to look at me.

'It's for her own good. There is no helping some people!'

I thought, Everyone is looking at me; but then he let me off and turned to either Sean or Peter, I don't know which because they were sitting just behind me.

'Or perhaps, She's a good ride if you can put up with all the wingeing.'

Lots of people were shocked but we were laughing too, except Sean, I think. Then he was serious again.

'And when have I turned away from my neighbour? As a priest I meet people at the worst times in their lives. That is what they pay me for. I would be too ashamed to say how many times I have turned away from my neighbour and that is the same as turning away from God.'

He put his face in his hands for a moment, then looked up again. He was not a young man but his eyes and his way of looking at you were very like a young man, appealing and intense.

'Now the worst thing I could do would be to talk down to you as if I was anyone special; but we need to help each other to fight sin—'

He smiled,

'—and to fight the devil. Do you mind me talking about the devil? I am talking like an old fashioned priest now; but have you ever met the devil? I have. He's charming, he's

good company, or she is; it is the same devil whether it is a he or a she. A nudge and a whisper, this is what clever people do, this is what clever people think and we fall. It is easy. The ways of the devil are the ways of the world; we all do what she says.

Only one day—Now I'm not talking about hell. I am a priest but I don't know anything about hell, or heaven. I only know the same things that you know, the world we all live in. One day we will be weak and in need; and then, instead of help, the cruelty and heartlessness and selfishness of the world will be turned on us, you and me. We will understand what kind of world we have helped the devil to create.

But the devil is so strong. We cannot fight her by ourselves, only with the grace of God. We do not know how strong the devil is because she makes friends with us. Try disagreeing with her sometimes and find out what it is like when she turns on you,' he stopped and looked at us one at a time, 'and when everyone joins in.'

'Sin is so easy, just as easy as shutting people out on a cold night or shouting a slogan in a crowd; and it is so difficult not to sin. I do not know how; but Jesus died to redeem us from sin. Perhaps he can show us how,' he smiled again, 'or she. May I have just a minute?'

He stood up and one of the nuns handed him a chalice. He busied himself with that for a minute, looking over his shoulder at us, apologetically. Then he turned to us again.

'I think that most of you will manage to do some real good in the world. You will struggle in an evil world, not perfect yourselves but managing to do some good. I honour you for it. You will be able to do this through the grace of Jesus. If we let Jesus into our hearts, perhaps we can do something together to show God's love to those in need, to weaken the grip of the devil on the world, to let some light

into the darkness. God bless you all.' He held up the chalice.

'Let us pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father!'

We left the chapel, filled with a sense of common purpose. There were several speakers that afternoon, a speaker from a Christian project for rough sleepers in Swansea, from a Christian Aid project in Angola. Far from our jobs and our families, we young people had an inspired sense of purpose. We would purify our hearts and put out all our youthful energy to the service of the needy. I talked about it with the quiet boy, Sean. He had been crying, I could tell. We made plans.

I thought, I will give my new friends a surprise tomorrow when I tell them what day it is.

On the second night I dreamt of Vicky Churchill at school. I think it is wrong to have dreams like that about a person when she only meant to be friendly. Once I went to her house and she was getting out of the bath but she opened the door to talk about her cousin's wedding. I looked at her then turned away again quickly. She thought it didn't matter if girls saw you, only boys. I dreamt of her like that, waving arms and legs, the towel sliding up her thigh when she was drying under her arm, giggling and sometimes hair. Just a glimpse, she didn't do it deliberately. I looked out of the window but concentrated out of the corner of my eye so hard that I forgot to breathe. The towel slipping over her sharp spiky hip, my heart jumped when I saw it again, hair, wrinkles and damp and more hair. I woke up with a knot in my stomach. The two Welsh ladies were asleep so I carried on thinking about Vicky. One day at school she came very close to me, giggling, her eyes enormous behind those glasses. Yes, she is going to whisper in my ear. Something lovely, something filthy. NO! Something friendly, something

sweet. It is only me who is filthy. Nobody else has a mind like mine. I was about to start crying, no but let's pretend let's pretend! Careful not to make a noise, I rummaged with my fingers, brushed and tickled and meddled, melted into hot water.

Then I had to stop, it didn't feel right. I struggled with myself.

'No. That's not what he meant, not this kind of sin. This isn't even a real sin any more.'

I spread my knees wide apart and squeezed my eyes shut, shutting those voices out. One finger, two, three. Her thin bony thighs and—Pretending, I stuck out my tongue and wrinkled up my nose no DON'T!

Vicky never did anything to deserve this. No wonder nobody wants to be friends with me. They don't realise about me here yet but they'll soon find out.

My fingers were still going like wriggly eels even then, 'NO!' I yanked my hand away and held it up to the dim light from the window, staring at my clawing fingers. I rolled onto my side, clutching my tummy with a screaming hurt child down there. She could not understand why I refused to pet her any more. I said,

'I'm sorry! I can't be this person if I'm that person!'

I tried to go to sleep but it happened again! I thought about two of the girls on retreat, Colette and Geraldine; they had made friends, they whispered to each other even in chapel so I pretended, you can guess what. I rolled onto my back again and lay there pretending. I made little contented noises but how can I treat my friends like this? I turned on my side again, trying to get back to sleep. It's no good. I couldn't be bothered to wash but sat on my bed until it was time for the passion service. Afterwards I went back to my room and found a letter on my pillow. Annabel was younger

than me, I think. She had come with her parents. I never spoke to her, we had nothing to talk about but she wouldn't leave me alone.

2nd April 99

Dear Amy,

You are always going off by yourself you should have finished telling us about Violet because you got yourself into a tizz about sinning but back then I was like what can they do with two of these? You could have put me right about that Amy! So I read the problem page instead and wrote them a letter but they're just ignorant because you have to sort of stretch things back until it sort of pops out in the mirror and I was like oh is that all it is? So then I was like hey you go snap crackle pop like fireworks all over and they were like ew that's gross but you don't think so and all the boys were like wow yeah me too but I wasn't talking to them do you Amy? I can't stand any of them except you I was waiting for you and I'd have let you see but you haven't had a shower all week don't you wash and then me and Sean were kneeling behind you at mass and he was like don't look down Amy's in good shape today and I couldn't help laughing in your white jeans not the blue ones! You haven't let Sean do it have you? I can't wait for us to get together even if we just talk but most girls talk about hair and relationships not I want to put my finger in someone's that sort of thing we ought to have counselling or something. I have to do the stations of the cross now but no one goes into the green room after tea if we keep the lights off and there wasn't even a crucifix there remember? Jesus won't be watching! I'll be

guttled if you don't show up because they all have boyfriends except you.

Yours ever,  
Annabel

At first I couldn't read this then I couldn't make out what she was saying then I couldn't understand what she meant. What a load of crap! She's trying to trap me, in the green room, or he, is it some filthy boy pretending to be Annabel with a girl's handwriting like my handwriting did I write it? I stared at the letter again, which room is green? Without a crucifix, kneeling at mass! I felt round the back of my jeans (blue? No, white.) I looked at the letter again and slid my hand down the waistband. I've lost weight. Perhaps I need a belt, a two, three inch gap, fuck! Kneeling behind me, don't look down FUCK YOU SEAN! I was trembling with anger but perhaps she's lying. It's the second of April, not the first. Good Friday. It's my birthday! I'm twenty. Still reading the letter in one hand, I undid a button of my blouse with the other and fingered my armpit. I touched my nose and smelled, yeah, Annabel, so I don't wash. Grease, yeah, blackheads and you're all so scrubbed and golden.

So what? She still wants me, apparently. What's the time? No lunch, after tea? It's dark already! I ran downstairs and outside into the rain, and looked up at the house and all the windows. I ran back inside. Nobody will know so long as we leave the lights off.

End