

‘Paul walked with something screwed up tight inside him . . . yet he chatted away with his mother. He would never have confessed to her how he suffered over these things and she only partly guessed.’

D. H. Lawrence *Sons and Lovers*

## Foreword by David Walliams

‘I blame that Adrian Mole,’ said my sea-scout master Roger. ‘Boys weren’t obsessed with the length of their things before reading that awful book.’

Of course Roger was wrong. Boys have always been obsessed with the length of their things. Somehow, a lady called Sue Townsend understood what it was to be an adolescent boy better than any adolescent boy. That parents and teachers and responsible adults all disapproved of the book, which of course made us kids love it all the more.

I was born in 1971, and it is unthinkable that any boy I knew from school (Reigate Grammar School), or scouts (Second Tadworth Sea Scouts), or from hanging around outside the swimming pool (Merland Rise Leisure Centre) on a Saturday night hadn’t read this book. Even boys who were proud to say they had never read a book in their life read this one. They had to. There was no choice. This was our bible. Perhaps not until Helen Fielding created Bridget Jones had a fictional character connected so intimately with the reader. Townsend’s book was a phenomenon. It spawned a theatre show, an Ian Dury single, a number of television series (why couldn’t I have played Adrian Mole, damn you, Gian Sammarco!), and of course Townsend has written seven sequels to date. J. K. Rowling’s success with Harry Potter has redefined what constitutes a publishing

phenomenon. I asked my publisher recently how many copies of my children's book *Mr Stink* I had sold. They replied confidently, 'It's doing really well; you sold 10,000 copies last week.'

'Wow!' I replied. 'Just out of interest, how many did J. K. Rowling sell in the last seven days?'

'A million.'

However, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* was a genuine phenomenon. It has been translated into numerous languages and sold over ten million copies. It was probably the biggest phenomenon of my youth after *Star Wars*, and *Star Wars* was bigger than God.

How did this rather parochial book become so wildly popular? The answer is quite simple: it's one of the funniest books ever written. I love P. G. Wodehouse, I adore Douglas Adams, I worship Tom Sharpe, I am incredibly fond of Kingsley Amis, but Sue Townsend's books make me laugh out loud more than anyone else's. At the centre of the book you have the character of Adrian Mole: one of the most enduring British comedy characters of all time. He can take his place alongside Bertie Wooster, Toad and Mr Micawber; even Basil Fawlty and Del Boy. My sometime writing partner Matt Lucas and I would agonize over finding the right names for our characters while working on *Little Britain* or *Come Fly With Me*. When we hit on names that sounded real, yet had a slight suggestion of absurdity – Andy Pipkin, Carol Beer, Moses Beacon – we were pleased. However, in over a decade of writing together we never came up with a name as good as Adrian Mole. That name is perfect; you have a strong sense of whom he is before you have read a word of the book. Most impressive of all, Sue Townsend has created a character who is at once an archetype, and yet unique. Like all teenage boys he is obsessed with his spots, a girl (Pandora, of

course) and the size of his thing. Yet he also writes poems about a tap, reads *The Female Eunuch*, and in his spare time visits a communist OAP called Bert Baxter who refuses to die before the death of capitalism.

*The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* has supporting characters that are worthy of their own books. The saga of his mum and dad's unhappy marriage; his dad's advice to his son on boarding a train, 'He said I was not to buy a pork pie from the buffet car'; his grouchy grandma; his mum's Sheffield-based boyfriend Mr Lucas; his long-suffering teacher Miss Elf; all create a sense that this is not a series of great jokes but the patchwork of someone's real life. Pandora is perhaps the most memorable supporting character. She is, of course, forever slightly out of Adrian's reach. Her intellectual superiority, her beauty and her unwillingness to lose her virginity torment our hero: 'We indulged in a bit of light petting but then Pandora developed a headache and went home to rest. I was racked with sexuality but it wore off when I helped my father put manure on our rose bed.'

However, what I love most about this book is that unlike a lot of modern comedy (and yes, I am partly to blame), Townsend's writing is full of warmth. The writers she most reminds me of are Victoria Wood, Alan Bennett and Caroline Aherne. All are absolute favourites of mine, and Caroline is a particular hero and I am proud to also call her a friend. Like Townsend they can all depict ordinary people, the people they grew up with, and laugh with them rather than at them. *The Royle Family* is the most perfect example of this. Like that show, so many of Townsend's laughs are in the small details – after three days of painting his room black over his juvenile wallpaper Adrian writes, 'Third coat. Slight improvement, only Noddy's hat showing through now.'

The boredom of existence is also brilliantly captured. Take this sublime entry from Saturday 22 August: 'Went to see Rob Roy's grave. Saw it, came back.' It makes me think of Galton and Simpson's best writing for Tony Hancock. It's about nothing.

The book also captures the utter absurdity of people's observations. This next entry is worthy of vintage Alan Bennett. Commenting on a misbehaving Barry Kent on a disastrous school coach trip to London, Adrian writes in his diary, 'The sex shop are not pressing charges either because officially Barry Kent is a child. A child! Barry Kent has never been a child.'

Even historical events, such as the royal wedding of 1981 and the declaration of the Falklands War in 1982, are brought into the lives of ordinary people living in middle England, yet the profundity of the occasions are instantly pricked. Of the first event Adrian writes, 'I have seen the Royal Wedding repeats seven times on television . . . Sick to death of the Royal Wedding.' On the second, this particular sequence always makes me laugh out loud: '10am. Woke my father up to tell him Argentina has invaded the Falklands. He shot out of bed because he thought the Falklands lay off the coast of Scotland. When I pointed out that they were eight thousand miles away he got back into bed and pulled the covers over his head.'

I should stop writing now and let you read it. *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is now thirty years old. I have no doubt that someone else will be writing a new foreword in another thirty years. People will want to read this book for ever. The reason is simple: it's really really really funny. Life is pain, and we all need to laugh.

**Winter**



## **Thursday January 1st**

*Bank Holiday in England, Ireland,  
Scotland and Wales*

These are my New Year's resolutions:

1. I will help the blind across the road.
2. I will hang my trousers up.
3. I will put the sleeves back on my records.
4. I will not start smoking.
5. I will stop squeezing my spots.
6. I will be kind to the dog.
7. I will help the poor and ignorant.
8. After hearing the disgusting noises from downstairs last night, I have also vowed never to drink alcohol.

My father got the dog drunk on cherry brandy at the party last night. If the RSPCA hear about it he could get done. Eight days have gone by since Christmas Day but my mother still hasn't worn the green lurex apron I bought her for Christmas! She will get bathcubes next year.

Just my luck, I've got a spot on my chin for the first day of the New Year!



## **Friday January 2nd**

*Bank Holiday in Scotland. Full Moon*

I felt rotten today. It's my mother's fault for singing 'My Way' at two o'clock in the morning at the top of the stairs. Just my luck to have a mother like her. There is a chance my parents could be alcoholics. Next year I could be in a children's home.

The dog got its own back on my father. It jumped up and knocked down his model ship, then ran into the garden with the rigging tangled in its feet. My father kept saying, 'Three months' work down the drain', over and over again.

The spot on my chin is getting bigger. It's my mother's fault for not knowing about vitamins.

## **Saturday January 3rd**

I shall go mad through lack of sleep! My father has banned the dog from the house so it barked outside my window all night. Just my luck! My father shouted a swear-word at it. If he's not careful he will get done by the police for obscene language.

I think the spot is a boil. Just my luck to have it where everybody can see it. I pointed out to my mother that I hadn't had any vitamin C today. She said, 'Go and buy an orange, then'. This is typical.

She still hasn't worn the lurex apron.

I will be glad to get back to school.

## **Sunday January 4th**

*Second after Christmas*

My father has got the flu. I'm not surprised with the diet we get. My mother went out in the rain to get him a vitamin C drink, but as I told her, 'It's too late now'. It's a miracle we don't get scurvy. My mother says she can't see anything on my chin, but this is guilt because of the diet.

The dog has run off because my mother didn't close the gate. I have broken the arm on the stereo. Nobody knows yet, and with a bit of luck my father will be ill for a long time. He is the only one who uses it apart from me. No sign of the apron.

## **Monday January 5th**

The dog hasn't come back yet. It is peaceful without it. My mother rang the police and gave a description of the dog. She made it sound worse than it actually is: straggly hair over its eyes and all that. I really think the police have got better things to do than look for dogs, such as catching murderers. I told my mother this but she still rang them. Serve her right if she was murdered because of the dog.

My father is still lazing about in bed. He is supposed to be ill, but I noticed he is still smoking!

Nigel came round today. He has got a tan from his Christmas holiday. I think Nigel will be ill soon from

the shock of the cold in England. I think Nigel's parents were wrong to take him abroad.

He hasn't got a single spot yet.

## **Tuesday January 6th**

*Epiphany. New Moon*

The dog is in trouble!

It knocked a meter-reader off his bike and messed all the cards up. So now we will all end up in court I expect. A policeman said we must keep the dog under control and asked how long it had been lame. My mother said it wasn't lame, and examined it. There was a tiny model pirate trapped in its left front paw.

The dog was pleased when my mother took the pirate out and it jumped up the policeman's tunic with its muddy paws. My mother fetched a cloth from the kitchen but it had strawberry jam on it where I had wiped the knife, so the tunic was worse than ever. The policeman went then. I'm sure he swore. I could report him for that.

I will look up 'Epiphany' in my new dictionary.

## **Wednesday January 7th**

Nigel came round on his new bike this morning. It has got a water bottle, a milometer, a speedometer, a yellow saddle, and very thin racing wheels. It's wasted on Nigel. He only goes to the shops and back on it. If

I had it, I would go all over the country and have an experience.

My spot or boil has reached its peak. Surely it can't get any bigger!

I found a word in my dictionary that describes my father. It is *malingerer*. He is still in bed guzzling vitamin C.

The dog is locked in the coal shed.

Epiphany is something to do with the three wise men. Big deal!

## Thursday January 8th

Now my mother has got the flu. This means that I have to look after them both. Just my luck!

I have been up and down the stairs all day. I cooked a big dinner for them tonight: two poached eggs with beans, and tinned semolina pudding. (It's a good job I wore the green lurex apron because the poached eggs escaped out of the pan and got all over me.) I nearly said something when I saw they hadn't eaten *any* of it. They can't be that ill. I gave it to the dog in the coal shed. My grandmother is coming tomorrow morning, so I had to clean the burnt saucepans, then take the dog for a walk. It was half-past eleven before I got to bed. No wonder I am short for my age.

I have decided against medicine for a career.

## Friday January 9th

It was cough, cough, cough last night. If it wasn't one it was the other. You'd think they'd show some consideration after the hard day I'd had.

My grandma came and was disgusted with the state of the house. I showed her my room which is always neat and tidy and she gave me fifty pence. I showed her all the empty drink bottles in the dustbin and she was disgusted.

My grandma let the dog out of the coal shed. She said my mother was cruel to lock it up. The dog was sick on the kitchen floor. My grandma locked it up again.

She squeezed the spot on my chin. It has made it worse. I told grandma about the green apron and grandma said that she bought my mother a one hundred per cent acrylic cardigan every Christmas and my mother had *never ever* worn one of them!

## Saturday January 10th

*a.m.* Now the dog is ill! It keeps being sick so the vet has got to come. My father told me not to tell the vet that the dog had been locked in the coal shed for two days.

I have put a plaster over the spot to stop germs getting in it from the dog.

The vet has taken the dog away. He says he thinks

it has got an obstruction and will need an emergency operation.

My grandma has had a row with my mother and gone home. My grandma found the Christmas cardigans all cut up in the duster bag. It is disgusting when people are starving.

Mr Lucas from next door has been in to see my mother and father who are still in bed. He brought a 'get well' card and some flowers for my mother. My mother sat up in bed in a nightie that showed a lot of her chest. She talked to Mr Lucas in a yukky voice. My father pretended to be asleep.

Nigel brought his records round. He is into punk, but I don't see the point if you can't hear the words. Anyway I think I'm turning into an intellectual. It must be all the worry.

*p.m.* I went to see how the dog is. It has had its operation. The vet showed me a plastic bag with lots of yukky things in it. There was a lump of coal, the fir tree from the Christmas cake, and the model pirates from my father's ship. One of the pirates was waving a cutlass which must have been very painful for the dog. The dog looks a lot better. It can come home in two days, worse luck.

My father was having a row with my grandma on the phone about the empty bottles in the dustbin when I got home.

Mr Lucas was upstairs talking to my mother. When Mr Lucas went, my father went upstairs and had an argument with my mother and made her cry. My

father is in a bad mood. This means he is feeling better. I made my mother a cup of tea without her asking. This made her cry as well. You can't please some people!

The spot is still there.

## **Sunday January 11th**

*First after Epiphany*

Now I *know* I am an intellectual. I saw Malcolm Muggeridge on the television last night, and I understood nearly every word. It all adds up. A bad home, poor diet, not liking punk. I think I will join the library and see what happens.

It is a pity there aren't any more intellectuals living round here. Mr Lucas wears corduroy trousers, but he's an insurance man. Just my luck.

The first what after Epiphany?

## **Monday January 12th**

The dog is back. It keeps licking its stitches, so when I am eating I sit with my back to it.

My mother got up this morning to make the dog a bed to sleep in until it's better. It is made out of a cardboard box that used to contain packets of soap powder. My father said this would make the dog sneeze and burst its stitches, and the vet would charge even more to stitch it back up again. They had a row about

the box, then my father went on about Mr Lucas. Though what Mr Lucas has to do with the dog's bed is a mystery to me.

## Tuesday January 13th

My father has gone back to work. Thank God! I don't know how my mother sticks him.

Mr Lucas came in this morning to see if my mother needed any help in the house. He is very kind. Mrs Lucas was next door cleaning the outside windows. The ladder didn't look very safe. I have written to Malcolm Muggeridge, c/o the BBC, asking him what to do about being an intellectual. I hope he writes back soon because I'm getting fed up being one on my own. I have written a poem, and it only took me two minutes. Even the famous poets take longer than that. It is called 'The Tap', but it isn't really about a tap, it's very deep, and about life and stuff like that.

### *The Tap, by Adrian Mole*

The tap drips and keeps me awake,  
In the morning there will be a lake.  
For the want of a washer the carpet will spoil,  
Then for another my father will toil.  
My father could snuff it while he is at work.  
Dad, fit a washer don't be a burk!

I showed it to my mother, but she laughed. She isn't



very bright. She still hasn't washed my PE shorts, and it is school tomorrow. She is not like the mothers on television.

### **Wednesday January 14th**

Joined the library. Got *Care of the Skin*, *Origin of Species*, and a book by a woman my mother is always going on about. It is called *Pride and Prejudice*, by a woman called Jane Austen. I could tell the librarian was impressed. Perhaps she is an intellectual like me. She didn't look at my spot, so perhaps it is getting smaller. About time!

Mr Lucas was in the kitchen drinking coffee with my mother. The room was full of smoke. They were laughing, but when I went in, they stopped.

Mrs Lucas was next door cleaning the drains. She looked as if she was in a bad mood. I think Mr and Mrs Lucas have got an unhappy marriage. Poor Mr Lucas!

None of the teachers at school have noticed that I am an intellectual. They will be sorry when I am famous. There is a new girl in our class. She sits next to me in Geography. She is all right. Her name is Pandora, but she likes being called 'Box'. Don't ask me why. I might fall in love with her. It's time I fell in love, after all I am  $13\frac{3}{4}$  years old.

## Thursday January 15th

Pandora has got hair the colour of treacle, and it's long like girls' hair should be. She has quite a good figure. I saw her playing netball and her chest was wobbling. I felt a bit funny. I think this is it!

The dog has had its stitches out. It bit the vet, but I expect he's used to it. (The vet I mean; I know the dog is.)

My father found out about the arm on the stereo. I told a lie. I said the dog jumped up and broke it. My father said he will wait until the dog is completely cured of its operation then kick it. I hope this is a joke.

Mr Lucas was in the kitchen again when I got home from school. My mother is better now, so why he keeps coming round is a mystery to me. Mrs Lucas was planting trees in the dark. I read a bit of *Pride and Prejudice*, but it was very old-fashioned. I think Jane Austen should write something a bit more modern.

The dog has got the same colour eyes as Pandora. I only noticed because my mother cut the dog's hair. It looks worse than ever. Mr Lucas and my mother were laughing at the dog's new haircut which is not very nice, because dogs can't answer back, just like the Royal Family.

I am going to bed early to think about Pandora and do my back-stretching exercises. I haven't grown for two weeks. If this carries on I will be a midget.

I will go to the doctor's on Saturday if the spot is still there. I can't live like this with everybody staring.

## Friday January 16th

Mr Lucas came round and offered to take my mother shopping in the car. They dropped me off at school. I was glad to get out of the car what with all the laughing and cigarette smoke. We saw Mrs Lucas on the way. She was carrying big bags of shopping. My mother waved, but Mrs Lucas couldn't wave back.

It was Geography today so I sat next to Pandora for a whole hour. She looks better every day. I told her about her eyes being the same as the dog's. She asked what kind of dog it was. I told her it was a mongrel.

I lent Pandora my blue felt-tip pen to colour round the British Isles.

I think she appreciates these small attentions.

I started *Origin of Species* today, but it's not as good as the television series. *Care of the Skin* is dead good. I have left it open on the pages about vitamins. I hope my mother takes the hint. I have left it on the kitchen table near the ashtray, so she is bound to see it.

I have made an appointment about the spot. It has turned purple.

## Saturday January 17th

I was woken up early this morning. Mrs Lucas is concreting the front of their house and the concrete lorry had to keep its engine running while she shov-

elled the concrete round before it set. Mr Lucas made her a cup of tea. He really is kind.

Nigel came round to see if I wanted to go to the pictures but I told him I couldn't, because I was going to the doctor's about the spot. He said he couldn't see a spot, but he was just being polite because the spot is massive today.

Dr Taylor must be one of those overworked GPs you are always reading about. He didn't examine the spot, he just said I mustn't worry and was everything all right at home. I told him about my bad home life and my poor diet, but he said I was well nourished and to go home and count my blessings. So much for the National Health Service.

I will get a paper-round and go private.

## **Sunday January 18th**

*Second after Epiphany. Oxford Hilary Term starts*

Mrs Lucas and my mother have had a row over the dog. Somehow it escaped from the house and trampled on Mrs Lucas's wet concrete. My father offered to have the dog put down, but my mother started to cry so he said he wouldn't. All the neighbours were out in the street washing their cars and listening. Sometimes I really hate that dog!

I remembered my resolution about helping the poor and ignorant today, so I took some of my old *Beano* annuals to a quite poor family who have moved into the next street. I know they are poor because they have

only got a black and white telly. A boy answered the door. I explained why I had come. He looked at the annuals and said, 'I've read 'em', and slammed the door in my face. So much for helping the poor!

## **Monday January 19th**

I have joined a group at school called the Good Samaritans. We go out into the community helping and stuff like that. We miss Maths on Monday afternoons.

Today we had a talk on the sort of things we will be doing. I have been put in the old age pensioners' group. Nigel has got a dead yukky job looking after kids in a playgroup. He is as sick as a parrot.

I can't wait for next Monday. I will get a cassette so I can tape all the old fogies' stories about the war and stuff. I hope I get one with a good memory.

The dog is back at the vet's. It has got concrete stuck on its paws. No wonder it was making such a row on the stairs last night. Pandora smiled at me in school dinner today, but I was choking on a piece of gristle so I couldn't smile back. Just my luck!

## **Tuesday January 20th**

*Full Moon*

My mother is looking for a job!

Now I could end up a delinquent roaming the streets and all that. And what will I do during the holidays?

I expect I will have to sit in a launderette all day to keep warm. I will be a latchkey kid, whatever that is. And who will look after the dog? And what will I have to eat all day? I will be forced to eat crisps and sweets until my skin is ruined and my teeth fall out. I think my mother is being very selfish. She won't be any good in a job anyway. She isn't very bright and she drinks too much at Christmas.

I rang my grandma up and told her, and she says I could stay at her house in the holidays, and go to the Evergreens' meetings in the afternoons and stuff like that. I wish I hadn't rung now. The Samaritans met today during break. The old people were shared out. I got an old man called Bert Baxter. He is eighty-nine so I don't suppose I'll have him for long. I'm going round to see him tomorrow. I hope he hasn't got a dog. I'm fed up with dogs. They are either at the vet's or standing in front of the television.

### **Wednesday January 21st**

Mr and Mrs Lucas are getting a divorce! They are the first down our road. My mother went next door to comfort Mr Lucas. He must have been very upset because she was still there when my father came home from work. Mrs Lucas has gone somewhere in a taxi. I think she has left for ever because she has taken her socket set with her. Poor Mr Lucas, now he will have to do his own washing and stuff.

My father cooked the tea tonight. We had boil-in-