
Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction

Sue Townsend

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Rang my solicitor, David Barwell, on the way to work. His secretary, Angela, said, 'Mr Barwell is busy having an asthma attack due to the new carpet that has been fitted over the weekend.'

I advised her to expect a correspondence from Mark B'astard regarding the lease on Unit 4, The Old Battery Factory, Rat Wharf, Grand Union Canal, Leicester.

She said bitterly, 'I shan't bother telling Mr Barwell. It's me that does all the work. All he does is sit behind his desk and fiddle with his inhaler.'

I had to wait ten minutes outside the shop; Mr Carlton-Hayes had trouble finding a parking space. I watched him walk up the High Street. He looked as if he was on his last legs. I don't know how much longer he can carry on with the shop. This is just my luck.

He said, 'Terribly sorry to keep you waiting, my dear.'

I took the keys from him and opened the door. Once inside, he leaned against the recent biographies to catch his breath.

I said to him, 'If we had a few chairs and sofas in here like I suggested, you could sit down and be comfortable.'

He said, 'We're not Habitat, Adrian, my dear, we're booksellers.'

I said, 'Customers expect to be able to sit down in bookshops nowadays, and they also expect a cup of coffee and to be able to visit the lavatory.'

He said, 'A properly brought-up person micturates and defecates and drinks a cup of coffee before they leave their house.'

We had the usual quotient of mad people in during the day. A steam train enthusiast with a ginger beard and sellotaped spectacles asked me if we had a copy of the 1954 Trans-Siberian timetable in Russian. I showed him our Railway section and invited him to search through the mildewed railway ephemera that Mr Carlton-Hayes insists on keeping in stock.

A woman with a crew cut and dangly earrings asked if we were interested in buying a first edition of *The Female Eunuch*. I wouldn't have bought it. It was in very poor condition, missing its dust jacket, and the pages were covered in annotations and exclamation marks in red ink. But Mr Carlton-Hayes intervened and offered the woman £15. Sometimes I feel as though I work in a charity shop rather than Leicester's oldest-established second-hand and antiquarian bookshop.

However, just as we were about to close a young woman came in and asked if we had a copy of *Soft Furnishings for Your Regency Doll's House*. As far as I could make out, she had a passably good figure and a not-bad face. She had the thin wrists and fingers I like in a woman. So I spent some time pretending to search the racks.

I said, 'Are you sure such a title exists?'

She said that she had once owned a copy but had lent it to a fellow doll's house hobbyist who had emigrated to Australia, taking the book with her. I commiserated with her and listed all the books I had loaned over the years and had never seen again. She told me that she had a collection of eighteen doll's houses and that she had made most of the soft furnishings herself, including upholstering the tiny chairs and hanging the tiny curtains. I mentioned that I would need some curtains making when I moved into my new loft apartment and asked her if she would be interested. She said the longest curtains she had ever made were only six inches in length.

Her hair could do with a colour-wash to brighten it up a bit, but her eyes are a pretty blue behind her glasses. I told her that I would search the Internet tonight when I got home and asked her to call back tomorrow.

I asked for a name and telephone contact number.

'My name is M. Flowers,' she said. 'I haven't got a mobile, because of the health risk, but you can contact me on my parents' landline.' And she gave me the number.

Mr Carlton-Hayes said, 'She works in Country Organics, the health food shop in the marketplace.'

We went into the back. I counted the takings; Mr Carlton-Hayes sat behind his desk, smoking his pipe and reading a book entitled *Persia: The Birthplace of Civilization*.

I asked him what had happened to Persia.

He said, 'It turned into Iraq, my dear.'