



Sample Chapter from

Splinters

By

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MORE than a ‘thought-provoking adult thriller/fantasy’; it’s an epic saga of true love, murder, retribution and political intrigue.

Greedy bankers have brought Great Britain to the verge of bankruptcy. Politicians milking expenses have added to the scandal, and the numbers of teenage mothers living off benefits has soared. Fear pervades the deathly vapour terrorists leave behind them on the streets of London and New York. “My God”, people cry with each new revelation and atrocity...

Fame and fortune comes easily to Esther, the most beautiful girl in the world. But powerful men in far-away places, and situations she has no control over put her life at risk. A seemingly never-ending series of tragedies threatens to take away her gains. Even the love of devoted husband, Ricky, cannot ease her emotional torment.

Driven by irrational guilt, Esther needs to be on the road; which does not judge, and makes no demands. But she is not alone: a mystical force leads her to her real destiny; a place at the centre of a final battle between the forces of good and evil.

“Put everything on hold... a real page turner”, Shirley Thompson

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Sample Chapter

Chapter Nine

Esther's Sexual Awakening

Teenage angst came with a rush for Esther just after her 13th birthday, in 1984, as Sheila, her best friend, discovered to her surprise when paying her a visit. Terry answered the door.

“Hi, Mr Clayton. Is Esther about?”

“Come on in, she's still in her bed. You know what she's like on a Saturday.”

“Hello, Sheila,” Joan smiled. “If you're going up to Esther, take her these.”

Sheila looked first at Joan, then the aspirin she had offered, then at Terry. Unwilling to get involved in what he saw as 'women's stuff', he sniffed, then shrugged.

“Has she got a headache?” said Sheila.

“Just take her the aspirin and a glass of water. She'll tell

you all about it,” said Joan.

Sheila tapped Esther's bedroom door. Getting no reply, she put down the glass of water and turned the handle. “Hi,” she said, retrieving the glass and pushing the door open with her foot.

Esther lifted her head from under the sheets. Her eyes were red, and, when she saw Sheila, she disappeared back under the covers.

Sheila put the glass and aspirin down on the bedside table and asked gently, “What's the matter?”

Distraught snuffling filtered through the duvet, “I'm bleeding... down there... And I've got spots on my face.”

Sheila gently pulled the duvet back and pushed her fingers through Esther's hair. “Move over, silly. I'm coming in,” she said.

Sheila slid under the duvet, and cuddled up. “Hey, that's so weird,” she said. “I've just had my first period, too. Your mum gave me some aspirin. D'you want them?”

“Will you just lie with me for a bit? I'm frightened.”

At this moment, a rumble of thunder brought an abrupt end to the conversation. Sheila, eyes widening as the heavens rumbled, snuggled closer to Esther. Then an explosion in the sky, which sounded as if the Earth itself was splitting in two, drowned out all other sounds. On the seafront, the air was cleaved by slashing waves of torrential rain, so many and for so long that roadside drains were quickly overwhelmed by the volume of water. Imitating the feeling Esther had in her brain, swirling pools formed eddies that spun in confused circles, erupted in to the air whenever a passing vehicle splashed through them. The deluge

continued for what seemed like ages, but was probably only a few minutes; long enough, though, for holidaymakers to become drenched. Old people tut-tutted each time a car approached, and walked a little faster, moving further away from gutters, but young women shrieked in delight at the shock and excitement of it all.

The friends giggled and cuddled closer together. Esther thought nothing of the itch in her thigh where the splinter lay. But it was not yet time for the erotic memories inside it to stir. Sheila embraced her. "I'm sorry. I wasn't laughing at you. I love you so much. It's nothing, believe me. Hasn't your mum told you about it?"

Tears misted the blueness of Esther's eyes. "No," she said, wiping away a tear. "I couldn't talk to her. You know what she's like. She just said, 'Now don't get experimenting. Familiarity breeds contempt.' What does she mean?"

"Boys."

Esther shrugged. "Yes. But how experimenting?"

"You know exactly what she means. Sex."

"No. I don't. Nobody's ever told me anything. You and I never had anything to do with boys. It's not like saying 'Here, try this; it's ice cream, you'll like it.'"

"So that's what you're crying about. Well, Mister Lister covered it in class."

"You know Mum wouldn't let me go to that class. She said it was disgusting they were teaching kids them things."

"Well, it's your own fault, you know. I offered to tell you. What about your dad?"

"Oh no, I couldn't."

"Okay. I'll tell you. Come on. We'll go to mine. I've got

some books under the mattress."

The friends got out of bed to watch the rain, which was lashing against the window pane. They smiled at the exited shrieks of holiday-makers who, caught out by the sudden outburst, were hurrying for cover.

"Your mum gave me some aspirin. D'you want them?" said Sheila.

Esther took the aspirin and swallowed them. Then she shook her head and pursed her lips at the taste. "Yuk," she said, handing back the glass. "I hope I don't have to take these for long."

"You'll be okay," said Sheila. "Look, why don't we get fitted for bra's? D'you know what size you are?"

Esther looked at Sheila's chest, and frowned. "I'm not any size. I don't think I want one. You're much bigger than I am, and more pretty."

"Nonsense," said Sheila, running her fingers through Esther's hair. "You're blonde."

"You're brunette, a much nicer colour," said Esther as the girls settled down to a game of comparisons.

"You've got blue eyes," said Sheila.

"Yours are hazel."

"You're tall and slim," said Sheila.

"You're... we're the same age."

Esther could not help but look Sheila up and down while she said this, and was embarrassed by not saying something else nice straight off. But Sheila was not offended. "I know," she said, laughing. "I'm short and fat with boobs like melons. Come on, the rain's stopped. Let's go to mine."

The friends became ever closer as they shared flirting

experiences. Esther enjoyed kissing boys, but hated it when they tried to shove their tongues down her throat. She was horrified at their loutish behaviour and the language they used on Margate seafront. She knew some of them were sniffing glue and trying other drugs, even during the day. She had seen girls older than her doing things in the back row of Margate cinema, and heard them bragging about it afterwards. When one became pregnant, she decided that if that was what experimenting got you, she would not bother.

Esther began to notice the difference between the relationship Sheila's parents had and the one her mother and father had. She realised that she spent most of her time with Terry when she was at home, and that she was closer to him than to her mother.

Esther's brother, Andrew, and her sister, Margaret, now 10, were making plans for their own futures.

Both children had grown up to be almost moronic. Terry had convinced himself that he was doing his best for them, but the fact was that Esther was his favourite. He blamed their lack of academic achievement on Joan, who had always been content to leave the twins watching television. It was via television that Andrew had become hooked on video games when his parents bought him a computer for Christmas.

The education that Andrew and Margaret were receiving was quite different to Esther's. Reading, writing and arithmetic were still top of the agenda at school, but living in

a secular society had taught them three further things: that they had rights; that in any aspect of their lives they were no better and no worse than any other child, and, finally, that no adult could physically punish them.

Andrew, who was beginning to resemble his father in looks, with the exception of his hair, which was as black and straight as his mother's, sat in front of his computer for hours at a time. He reckoned that if he bunked off a bit more each month, in a couple of years' time nobody would miss him and he could stay at home playing his games. After failing for the umpteenth time to reach level two of the video game, he stopped playing and sat, staring accusingly at the screen.

A pet owl, perched in a huge golden cage in the corner, blinked, as if wondering whether the boy had become petrified. The owl was fed one mouse or day-old chick each day. Sometimes it ignored the offering, but on other occasions it pounced and gulped the creature down. If the meal was a mouse, it paused and tilted its head back. The tail would slither down its gullet like a strand of spaghetti. Then it would jump back on its perch and spend the next twenty-three hours and fifty-eight minutes excreting the remains of its meal.

Margaret became plump as she grew up, and any family resemblance to Esther disappeared; although if they were in the same room one would notice the similar way they spoke. Margaret's long blonde hair was matted and unkempt, and she smelled. She did not care. Jealous of her confident elder sister who she thought was much prettier than she was, Margaret knew exactly what she was going to do when she left school: have babies, lots of them, and she did not much

mind how many different fathers they had. The only important thing as far as she was concerned was that she would give birth six times. This was the optimum number of children she would need in order to be given a large council house and about £800 a month: enough, she thought, to feed them and provide her with a social life.

Margaret practised, charging local boys 50p for a look, and £1 for a feel. "Downstairs" had been off limits, but her hormones were raging and she was already wondering which of the spotty-faced, testosterone-flooded youths would be the father of her first offspring. She reasoned that if she gave birth next year the father would be too young to have a maintenance order taken against him. That way he would ignore the child, hopefully, and she would not have to worry about him. She would also qualify for the top range of benefits straight away. The bonus (in her mind) was that if she started now, she would be able to get it all over and done with by the time she was twenty. Then she could relax and enjoy herself.

Esther was different. At around 5'6", blonde and slim, her demure and respectful behaviour meant she was eminently attractive to boys. She was not interested, even after she started to menstruate. The hormones flooding her bloodstream brought spots and painful cramps each month. Her doctor brought the erratic nature of her cycle under control by putting her on the Pill, and things settled down enough for her to concentrate on her school-work.

When Esther was fourteen years old, her body was well into the process that differentiates girls from boys: the bumps erupting on her chest sprouted into perfectly rounded

breasts; her pert nipples thrust out and upwards, looking like a pair of ripening lemons. Her pelvis widened in anticipation of motherhood, and her fat turned to firm flesh. The spots soon disappeared and she blossomed.

One morning she dropped the soap and, in bending down to pick it up, she touched the spot on her inner thigh where the oak splinter lay. Immediately, Esther's skin began to itch as the erotic force of the muse, Erato, seventh daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, took over.

A warm, tingly sensation spread through Esther's entire stomach. Ooh, that feels good, she thought, as warm water ran down her neck, over her breasts and torso before caressing her special place with rippling rivulets. She tilted her head back to let the water stream over her, frothing up the soap at the same time. This movement caused her to catch her breath, and the spot on her inner thigh *demand*ed that she touch it. Esther brushed against herself as she moved her hand downwards.

The reaction was electrifying. She gasped, and almost fainted as intense orgasmic waves swept over her. Prompted by the erotic force inside the splinter, orgiastic scenes involving her and members of her family flooded her brain. Esther quickly banished these thoughts, but gave in to her body's reaction to the stimulation. Then, it was all over.

Esther's outlook changed forever. She noticed boys, and they certainly noticed her. The camera-mad boy in an anorak in her class at school asked if he could take photographs of her. Coy at first, she gave in on the understanding that Sheila could be present.

"Cheeky," said Esther, refusing the offer to have some

more revealing shots taken, but secretly she was glad the anorak had asked. He did a fair job of lighting her, but it would not have mattered if he had not: the camera loved her. Esther was stunning and there wasn't a blemish on her body, except for the dark spot on her inner thigh.

“You're absolutely beautiful,” said Sheila. “You should enter a competition or something.”

Esther did not let this, albeit flattering praise from her friend, or the new-found sexual sensations, interfere with her school-work. But the seed Sheila had planted blossomed two years later. The friends were talking about what they might do now they had passed their exams.

“Go on. Send those photographs off to an agency. Get a job as a model,” said Sheila, her eyes widening as the afterthought brought visions of a glamorous lifestyle for her friend.

“I don't know if I wouldn't rather go to college with you after the summer holidays. I was thinking I might be a nurse.”

“Don't be daft. You've got to do it while you're young. It's not as if you'll be at the other end of the country. There's loads of studios in Margate. I'll come with you, and if it doesn't work then you've lost nothing. But if you don't try, you'll never know.”

Esther knew Sheila was right. “Okay. I'll do it, so long as you come to the agency too,” she said, with a shrug of her shoulders. “You know what Mum will say though.”

Sheila's eyes twinkled, mischievously. “Well, ask your dad then.”

Esther kept the photographs with her, hoping that her

father would ask what she wanted to do now she was leaving school. When he did ask while they were sitting on their favourite bench on the seafront, she showed him the photographs.

“I want to be a model,” she said, adding as a second thought, “and I'd like to get a job on the front this summer: earn my own money.”

God, all of a sudden she's a grown woman, realised Terry, sifting through the photographs.

A vision of Esther sitting on the same bench they were sitting on now while he punched the air and told his stories brought a reality he did not yet want to face. He wanted to hold her close and tell her not to grow up yet. It'll kill me to let her go, he thought. Perhaps she won't leave if she gets a summer job. She might meet a nice lad and settle down in Margate. It'll be a long summer. He smiled, and kissed her on the cheek with a flourish, saying, “I think that's a great idea.”

Esther flung her arms around his neck. “You're great, Dad. Would you do one thing for me?”

“Of course,” said Terry, pinching his nose between his thumb and forefinger.

“Tell Mum for me.”

Encouraged by her father's positive response, Esther began to dream of a glamorous future.

“Humph. Thinks a lot of herself, that one,” said Joan with a scrunching up of her shoulders.

“You've only got yourself to blame. You've ignored her since she was born,” said Terry. “If she wants to, she can do it. She's got guts.”

By mid-August, the cafe Esther worked at was packed every day. After a few dropped plates and rows with the cook, she got into the routine and learned to take care of herself. Her attitude to boys softened too, as youths on holiday and local lads vied for her attention by dropping things on the floor in the hope they would get a look down her cleavage when she bent down to pick them up.

Esther knew exactly what was going on. She enjoyed the attention and flirted a little, but she would not get involved with any of them. She saved as much of her wages as possible, spending her leisure time practising poses. And it was while looking at herself in the mirror that the dream became an expectation. However, at the age of 17 she was just one of hundreds of young hopefuls who tried their luck in model agencies in Margate each year.

The owner of the agency Esther went to – earning handsome profits for little effort – either had no eye for spotting talent or could not be bothered to recommend her to agencies doing commercial work. Esther returned with a portfolio of photographs and no idea of how to pursue her dream. Just as it seemed that she would have to turn her thoughts to training to be a nurse, the opportunity to fulfil her dream came in an unexpected way.

Esther was flustered. The café was busy, with a group of youths huddled round the table in the middle of the room.

They called her over. She licked the tip of her pencil, fixed the youth nearest to her with a steely look, and said, “Right. What would you like?”

The young man stood up and adopted an Elvis Presley pose. Then, strumming an imaginary guitar, he burst into song: “One nighyite with youoo.”

Smiling through her eyes, Esther put him down. “I'd rather stab myself in the eye with a piece of dried dog poo. Now, are you lot going to order or sit twiddling your cheese-sticks all day?”

The lads hooted in unison and banged the table. “Nice one, gorgeous.”

Unable to keep a straight face, Esther glanced away. As she did so, the man sitting on the next table caught her attention. “Could I have the bill, please?” he said.

“Certainly, sir,” she said, putting away her pad and pencil. Then, turning her attention back to the lads, she added, “And hurry up, you lot. I'll be back in a minute.”

Esther walked towards the counter accompanied by a chorus of, “Hurry up. Hurry up.”

Joe, the café owner, winked at her, then looked over her shoulder, saying, “Won't keep you a sec.”

Esther turned to find the man who had asked for his bill had followed her. He ignored Joe, and addressed Esther. “Motti Freedman. Here's my card. I'm staying at the Grosvenor Hotel until Saturday. I'd like to talk to you before I go back to London.”

Esther looked at the card, then back at the man who had offered it. “I don't understand. It says you're a literary agent,” she said.

“Let's say I have other interests, too.”

“Such as?” asked Esther.

“How old are you?”

“Now look here, mister,” said Joe, butting in.

Motti raised both hands in the air. “Please don't be offended. You would have to be eighteen to do the work I have in mind, but it offers exciting prospects.”

“What work?” said Esther.

“I've been watching you. You're obviously beautiful, but I like the way you handled those boys. You seem to work twice as hard as the other waitress, too. There are opportunities in fashion and photography, if the camera likes you. What d'you say?”

Esther caught sight of Motti's shoes, and was impressed. She took the bill from Joe and gave it to Motti. “Thanks. I'll think about it. I've got some waitressing to do before I make my fortune.”

Esther could hardly contain herself when she later told Sheila about meeting Motti: “I can't believe how cool I was. I just said 'I'll think about it,' and went back to work.”

Sheila's hazel eyes opened wide as she gasped “Are you going to phone him?”

“No. I'm gonna see him at the Grosvenor, if you'll come too.”

Sheila drew in a deep breath. “Wow! D'you think he'll buy us dinner?” she said. Then the sudden realisation that her lifelong friend might soon be leaving brought a rush of apprehension. She embraced Esther, and said, “I'm going to miss you.”

Esther was lucky in that Motti Freedman was well connected. He introduced her to a friend who owned an agency in London, and a photo-shoot was organised. “Don't forget to bring your birth certificate when you come. You're eighteen soon, but you'll have to *prove* it,” he said, with a kind knowing smile.

On the appointed day, in January 1989, Esther, dressed in blue jeans and a white blouse, took the train to Waterloo Station where Motti met her. Fifteen minute later, she found herself stepping out of a taxi in front of the agency in London's East End.

“Don't be scared,” said Motti as he took her hand.

She smiled. “Scared? I'm frightened to death, that's why I'm shaking so much.” She wiped her moist right hand on the front of her light-blue Armani jeans.

“Don't worry, you'll be fine. Just be yourself,” chuckled Motti.

The fact that they had to be buzzed in, then descend a flight of twisting stairs leading to a large open space, caused Esther to feel even more apprehensive. For a moment she wished that Sheila had offered to skip a day from college and go with her. This place is underneath the road, she thought when stepping off the bottom step. I feel like I'm in the bowels of the Earth.

People seemed to be hurrying in all directions, carrying clipboards or camera equipment or files, and they all seemed to know what they were doing while Esther did not. A tall, slim, dark haired man dressed in a black shirt and slacks passed, holding what she supposed were camera filters. He

acknowledged her with a nod and a smile and would later be introduced to her as the photographer.

Esther was relieved when, after the preliminaries of being introduced to the agent and producing her birth certificate were over, he said, “Good, that's all in order. Now, I'll introduce you to Eileen. She'll do your make-up and sort you out. Have a cup of coffee or whatever and we'll see you back here in about an hour. We'll take some long-range commercial shots, different angles and all that, and maybe a couple of close-ups. The blouse and jeans will be fine, okay?”

Esther knew instinctively not to get involved in a long and gushing exposition of how grateful she was for the opportunity, etc. She smiled her best smile, and rose from the chair. “I'll be ready,” she said, offering her hand.

Later, Esther sat drinking coffee and talking to Motti while the agent and the photographer discussed the shots he had taken.

“She's a natural,” said the photographer. “She's got a lot to learn about the way she should pose, but there was no sign of nerves and she completely ignored the lights. She's absolutely gorgeous, didn't matter what the angle was. Look.”

“These are great,” said the agent, sifting through a batch of Polaroids. “What about the close-ups?”

“See for yourself. Eileen said all she had to do was apply some mascara, and look what it did for her eyes. In twenty years I've never seen that colour blue in someone's eyes, man or woman. She's a winner. You'd better sign her up before someone else does. Who does she remind you of?”

The agent took the close-ups and studied them through a jeweller's eyeglass. “Hmm. Let's have another look at the long shots.” The photographer gave him the full-length photographs.

“Yep. Monroe,” said the agent. “Esther's taller and less heavy, though. And more elegant.”

The agency not only offered Esther a contract, they taught her how to apply make-up and dress her hair, sometimes with extensions, to show it off to its best advantage. She returned to Margate deliriously happy, and waited eagerly for her first assignment. The news, when it came, almost caused her to change her mind about being a model. Sheila happened to be Esther's house when the phone rang.

“It's for you Esther, and don't be on all day,” said Joan. “Phone calls cost money you know.”

Sheila patted Esther's bottom as they made their way to the hall, where she answered the call.

“Well?” said Sheila, her eyes wide with excitement after Esther put down the phone. Esther did not answer straight away, but lowered her head. “What's the matter?” said Sheila, seeing the look of horror on Esther's face.

“They want me to stand in front of a tractor!... probably with a stalk of wheat in my mouth.”

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