

'Blondie'

Charlie was taking a short cut home from Mr. Travis's through a back alley. He was feeling pleased with life, and looking forward to a fun Saturday evening. He saw some boys from school some way down the alley, gathered round a dustbin. He was just about to say hi as he passed when he noticed a guilty look about them. He looked more carefully—they were reading unsold magazines that had been dumped by the high street shops. Charlie could not see what they were about.

Suddenly, Charlie had a strong feeling that he should turn round and walk back up the alley. But that would look strange. Anyway, he wanted to get home.

"Hi," he said, walking on steadily.



"Hey, want to see this?" said one of the guys, holding a magazine out. Charlie recognised him—he was John in Year 9.

Supposing it to be a sports magazine, Charlie glanced at it. In fact, it was showing women with no clothes on.

Confused, Charlie thought fast. "I don't like looking at stuff I haven't paid for," he said lamely.

"Come on—it's been thrown out!"

"These are hot girls, Charlie," said John, grinning slyly and cutting off Charlie's path. "Take a look at 'Blondie'—the one on the right."

Charlie felt surrounded. He was afraid of what they thought of him and he wanted to get past. He took the magazine and looked at a picture. Wow—his eyes nearly popped out. Surely it must be illegal to print that kind of stuff.

"Cool," he said, making as if to pass.

"There's lots here, Charlie—want to look?"

"No thanks, I'm late," said Charlie, managing to slip past.

Charlie found the magazine image stayed with him all the way home. She was blonde and beautiful. Thinking about her made his breathing become harder—in fact, it seemed to set off all kinds of sensations.

Charlie realised that he could go to the alley any time and see any amount of girls he wanted. It would be almost like having a date. Was it wrong, though? He would try to find out.

Later, Charlie went to meet Ron at the gym. Jason, Ron's elder brother, was there too, so Charlie thought he'd see if he could ask him. At the drinks machine during a break, he asked casually, "Do you ever look at pictures of girls with no clothes on, Jason?"

It was almost like having a date. Was it wrong, though?

Not only is it not healthy, it is addictive.

"Sure!" Jason replied. "Lots of guys do. Women are beautiful—so it's natural men want to look at them. Nobody gets hurt."

Hmm, Charlie thought. Nobody gets hurt. So it wouldn't hurt me. And it's just natural...

Then Charlie overheard a conversation his mum and dad were having a few nights later.

"Yes, they're having some trouble with Jason—I hope he's OK for Charlie to hang around with still."

Charlie felt troubled.

Next day, Mr Radigan gave a health talk in class. He ended by asking everyone to write down any questions they might want to ask about sexuality and asked them to fold their pieces of paper before handing them in.

Confident of anonymity, Charlie wrote, "Is looking at pictures of naked girls OK?"

The following week, Mr Radigan organised a class for the boys alone. He was going to address their questions. They had covered a wide spectrum, he said, but "a lot of you want to know if it is healthy to look at pornographic pictures or videos, in print or on the internet, that can stimulate you sexually." He paused. "Well, not only is it not healthy," he said, "it is addictive. It works just like a drug—you have to have more and more to get the same rush you got the first time. In fact, that's a classic feature of addiction."

Charlie kept his eyes fixed steadily on his desk. "Using pornography may start casually in the first place," Mr Radigan continued. "But soon it will start to dominate your thoughts. Eventually, you may even begin to arrange your life around it. It is possible to start preferring it to the company of real people, in which case your relationships suffer. With some people it escalates and they need more or more twisted, even violent, kinds of pornography to become stimulated. They get less and less sensitive to it and to the standards of the community. Then they start seeing all women through the lens of pornography."

"Pornography shows women as sexual objects to be sniggered and salivated over—used and discarded. Often they are given names like 'Cupcake', as though they were something to be consumed. Pornography encourages disrespect for and mistreatment of women—your mothers, your sisters, your class-mates, your friends. The person using pornography just sees them as sexual targets for his fantasies. Do you like the idea of some man thinking those kinds of thoughts about the women you know and love? That's the sort of thinking pornography encourages.

Pornography spoils sexual activity between husband and wife.

"You may not know this, but pornography is strongly linked to organised crime. Rape is when someone forces someone else to do sexual things, and many rapists are pornography addicts who are acting out what they've been looking at. In America, a presidential report found a link between the murder of women and the use of pornography.¹ And serial killers have said that pornography drove them to do what they did.² In fact, many studies show a link between looking at pornography and committing sexual offences."³ Mr Radigan paused and looked round the class. He cleared his throat.

"So who are the people in the pictures? That's a good question, isn't it? Pornography is doing them no harm, you might think—after all, they chose to do it. But that's where you'd be wrong. Many of those people in pictures and in movies do it because they are drug addicts or have run away and they are desperate.

"It's not just the people who are pictured who are exploited by pornography. You are being exploited by it, too. That's because pornography exploits your natural appreciation of the beauty of females (and external beauty is just part of a girl's beauty, of course). Your sexual desire—a wonderful gift given to you for the sake of love and having children—is being used and twisted by people who care only about money.

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1. Attorney General Meese's Commission's Presidential Report on Pornography, 1988.
 2. David Bender, ed., *Is Pornography Harmful?* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1989), p. 142.
 3. Julie A. Attison and Laurence S. Wrightsman, *Rape: The Misunderstood Crime* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1993), pp. 37-44.

"Of course the majority of men don't turn into rapists or killers or child molesters through using pornography. But it does bring something really distasteful into a marriage—into a family. It often means that a man is not mature enough to deal with a real woman—he can only deal with images. So that man will just carry on living in a fantasy-land and never learn how to love unselfishly. He is seriously missing out because, in the end, pornography spoils sexual activity between husband and wife. Because it focuses only on the body, it can never bring total satisfaction, because sexuality involves the mind and heart, too. And then, because the pictures are cut and airbrushed to make the girls look perfect, they set up a comparison that a real woman can't live up to. Even worse, it may not be just the pictures that are altered, but the girls themselves—through surgery.

"So, if someone offers you pornographic material, I hope you will be man enough to say no."

There was silence. They had asked a question—and Mr Radigan had certainly answered it. Suddenly 'Blondie' didn't seem attractive to Charlie. Was she a drug addict? Suppose she was being forced to pose like that. Maybe she had AIDS? Charlie shivered. I'm going to leave those magazines where they belong, he thought—in the bin.

