

GRIM AFTERMATH

By Mike Hopper

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Prologue Summer 1992

Michelle and Alan Pyrer married within weeks of leaving Green Lane Teacher Training College in Liverpool.

It was June 1992 when they bade farewell to the campus. The two of them were the same age, having just celebrated their twenty-firsts earlier in the year.

They'd been to the same secondary school in north Liverpool and that was where their romance began to flourish. They sat in the same class in second year and started to notice each other physically some twelve months later.

They enjoyed the fruits of love for the first time at the end of their fourth year, not in school, but on a day-out together when they went to sunbathe in the sand dunes at Freshfield, a few miles north of Liverpool. Their scant bathing attire proved too much a temptation!

Throughout the months and years which followed, they were an item which all their friends regarded as unbreakable. They spent sixth form together and then both applied to the Green Lane Higher Education College in Liverpool-16.

Everybody knew they would marry and indeed Michelle was wearing an engagement ring all through their three years at college. They qualified as teachers and began looking for jobs, though this was one occasion when they realised they'd have to apply separately. On that basis a decision was made to marry straight away — during that first summer holiday, in fact.

The wedding was quite incredible, not so much for its flamboyance, but more for the hundreds who turned out; a church so full that the street outside was packed with the overspill. They were undoubtedly a very popular couple.

It was ironic therefore, when, after scrupulously avoiding any 'accidents' ever since their first memorable moment in Freshfield, Michelle had no sooner accepted a teaching appointment in a Huyton primary school, than she discovered she was pregnant.

Neither could figure precisely when it had happened so they were slightly unsure of the baby's due-date. Realistically however, there seemed little point in Michelle accepting a teaching post if she would only be there for a couple of months at most.

In any event, little Simon emerged in early January, clearly conceived out of wedlock, but who cared? It was, after all, 1993!

Alan meanwhile, started work at the large Stoneycroft Comprehensive in September and was well settled into his mainly

humanities' role by the time son Simon, his absolute pride and joy, had come along.

Neither parent could recall going that long without making love and the moment Michelle indicated she felt comfortable at the thought, they were well into catching-up on lost time. The result was that Victoria came into the world in March 1994.

It was the perfect young family. To their friends, since the couple had been an item since their early teens, everything fitted neatly into place. They were proverbial childhood sweethearts; a role-model for intendeds.

They were the Golden Couple.

Chapter 1

Fifteen Years Later: January 2007

The Golden Couple had emerged intact through fifteen years of marriage. In fact, more than that, their love seemed every bit as strong as it had been from the first day they'd gone out together.

They lived in a very comfortable semi-detached family house in West Derby, Liverpool. Both their children attended separate single-sex Church of England high schools in the city and were perfectly settled.

Of course, life was different. The presence of two teenage children made sure of that, but their mutual love was so unconditional that it was never threatened. In fact it was further enhanced by the brother and sister — Simon and Vicky — who had become best friends, not only with each other, but also with their parents.

Simon would readily follow many of his dad's interests, while it was increasingly rare for Michelle to consider a day-out shopping without being accompanied by her daughter. She would ask Vicky's opinions when it came to the fashion-stakes and, more to the point, would seriously consider them.

"Oh mother, that dress is far too young for you!"

Such a savage comment might hurt the pride of a woman of thirty-something, but it was the kind which only a daughter could deliver, get away with and even see heeded.

Conversations between Alan and Simon were no longer like father and son, but more two close pals. They'd swap jokes — even vulgar ones — and think nothing of swearing in each other's company; the son had even reached the stage of occasionally calling his dad by his first name.

When the whole family was together, nobody would cramp the other's style. They were four people who felt comfortable in each other's company.

For 'Golden Couple', read 'Golden Family'.

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On the face of it, there was no logical explanation for what was to happen next.

Michelle was teaching and felt comfortable as a well-respected senior member of staff at Windy Arbor Primary School in neighbouring Knowsley Borough, while Alan was a pastoral Head of Year at Stoneycroft Comprehensive, the Liverpool school in which he'd first started teaching.

The pair would often turn up for social events at each other's schools, especially at Christmas time or even end of school-year, so they were well-acquainted with fellow colleagues.

Michelle was the school's union representative and in January she requested five days' leave to attend a conference in Blackpool to explore a government proposal into teachers' pay and increments. Since it involved the whole of the profession, the union had requested as large a representation as possible.

Along with a large number of fellow representatives, Michelle was booked into the Hilton Hotel on the North Promenade, where all the conferences and seminars would take place. Business was conducted during the daytime, but in the evening, after dinner, delegates had time to themselves.

It was during the first evening that a man approached Michelle. Immediately she recognised him as Kevin Southwell, a PE teacher from her husband's school.

Since people she knew seemed thin on the ground, when Kevin offered to buy her a drink, Michelle readily accepted.

To start with, they sat on stools beside the bar and engaged in polite conversation. They had plenty to talk about with regard their own schools and the debate which had gone on that afternoon.

Michelle had met Kevin briefly on several occasions, but this was the first time she'd had a lengthy chat. And after the first drink had turned into a couple and then to several, she noticed how she felt attracted to him.

She reproached herself and self-guilt became evident. Yet she could feel a tingle inside. She looked at her watch and, seeing it was approaching half-ten, she had enough wit about her to bid Kevin goodnight and retire to bed.

As if to offset the guilty conscience, she phoned Alan and gave him a résumé of the day's events, but carefully avoided making anything other than a passing reference to Kevin, saying only that she'd noticed him there.

Once in bed, Michelle picked up the novel she'd brought with her, but found herself struggling to get the vision of Kevin Southwell out of her head. He was a handsome man, single, with terrific charm to go with his looks.

She'd never been with anyone other than Alan in all her life. In fact, her husband was the only man with whom she'd ever been intimate. What was happening to her?

The next evening was almost a carbon copy of the first. They sat on the same stools, perhaps a tad closer this time and as the evening progressed, a degree of touchy-feely began to creep in.

Michelle knew exactly how dangerous the situation was, but found she couldn't help herself, and increasingly realised she didn't want to. When Kevin offered to walk her to her room, she accepted. She'd had several vodkas and was probably a touch light-headed, but then she took the plunge and invited him in.

They'd hardly got into the bedroom before they were ravaging each other. In all her life with just the one man, Michelle had never experienced a sexual sensation like this. And, what's more, they did it all again a few hours later.

As they lay there panting, she wondered how she would feel in the morning. She didn't have that long to wait for the answer. What's more, she wanted to repeat the performance the next night. In fact, throughout the day, as she attempted to keep track of the debates and discussions, her body was once more tingling at the thought of what was in store after dinner.

On Thursday night, the pair indulged themselves yet again, though she had remembered to ring Alan this time and attempt a mundane conversation about the day.

"Did you see Kevin again?" asked her husband in all innocence. Luckily, he couldn't witness her blushes as she batted away the question nonchalantly.

The conference came to a conclusion at lunchtime on Friday, but before the pair left, they once more engaged in a torrid half-hour of

love-making. Michelle, in all the years of her marriage, had never experienced the whole host of techniques which Kevin had introduced to her.

"What had she been missing out on?" she asked herself.

The pair sat for a while and ensured that their stories tallied for the separate occasions when Alan would be talking to them. Not that they expected him to have any suspicions.

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When Michelle arrived home, Alan was already waiting, having got in early from school so that he could be there to greet her; the kids likewise. They each made a fuss of her and at bedtime her husband was ready to express his delight at her return with a show of love.

Michelle responded but it was more as the dutiful wife. Immediately comparisons with Kevin became inevitable as she went through the motions of love-making. In truth she couldn't wait to find an opportunity to lie next to her new-found lover.

From now on, life was going to be one of ongoing deceit.

Chapter 2

Normality was restored the following Monday, or at least Michelle was back in school. For Alan and the two children, nothing had changed from the previous week.

When Alan arrived in the staffroom, he was convivial as he spotted Kevin and shared a few mundane comments about him seeing Michelle at the union conference in Blackpool.

Kevin went with the flow of conversation and, besides, there was very little to say. Alan had never been one to show much interest in union matters, while he and Kevin were in different ones anyway.

After school, Alan came home around his usual time. Michelle had arrived before him with Simon and Vicky already pottering around in their rooms. The routine of the day was back to normal. But for how long?

Earlier, during the lunch-break, Michelle had sent a text to her new man. She implied her incessant need for his body, though she hadn't reached the stage of declaring her undying love.

"Strange," she thought as she pressed the digits on the phone. "I'm not sure if I do love him!"

"Tomorrow, straight after school," came the immediate instruction. And he told her how to reach his house. So began the ritual.

To start with, it was just Tuesdays and Thursdays, but then she concocted a story for Wednesday evenings. She couldn't get enough of Kevin; sex with Alan had never been like this!

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How much could Michelle get away? On Tuesday, for the first time, she arrived home after her husband, which in itself was no big deal. The fact that this would become a regular feature of Tuesdays and Thursdays would surely become noticeable but as long as she showed a degree of nonchalance, Alan would have no real reason to query it.

She'd think of a casual excuse. Keep it low key.

But what about Wednesday evenings?

Michelle decided that her cover would be an aerobics / keep-fit session at a gym in Garston. She already knew that some of her colleagues from school went there occasionally and she'd heard enough about it to be able to wax lyrical if Alan asked any questions. Furthermore, since her colleagues didn't attend every week, that would be a further aid to covering her deceit.

And sure enough, her ploy worked. Alan soon got used to the idea of her being home a bit later on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and he was very supportive of her taking part in aerobics.

On Wednesdays, she'd be out of the house by 7pm, and if she arrived back about 9.30pm looking decidedly flushed, that was only to be expected after all the exercises she'd supposed to have been doing!

In terms of her relationship with Kevin, nothing had changed. She'd got increasingly used to the routine and she never tired of the satisfaction her lover was bringing her.

It was difficult faking things with Alan, but he was a gentle, conservative soul when it came to love-making and he was content to be sharing the marital bed as a symbol of their apparent togetherness.

The two children were the same as ever and apart from the huge deception, which Michelle was carrying off with some aplomb, everything in the Pyrer household was moving along swimmingly.

With no tryst, the Easter break would be frustrating for Michelle. But, even with her insatiable appetite for Kevin, she was canny enough to recognise that a couple of week's abstinence would pay dividends when they got back into things after the holidays.

Chapter 3

Michelle's luck couldn't last forever and it didn't!

On a couple of occasions, she and her lover had ridden their luck, but since Alan was hardly on the lookout for his wife cheating, he remained oblivious to what was going on.

But, as the saying goes, things happen in threes and that was exactly how the house of cards came tumbling down for Michelle.

It started with an innocent call a couple of weeks into the summer term.

It was a Wednesday evening when Pauline, one of Michelle's school colleagues, phoned the landline and Alan answered. When he replied that his wife was out at keep-fit with some of the school staff, her friend inadvertently gave the game away by declaring that she thought those aerobic sessions had finished at the end of the previous term.

That had Alan thinking and a suspicious mind suddenly began looking out for anything else that wasn't quite right.

As he sat there, he considered a few subtle changes, both in his wife's behaviour and wardrobe. Michelle had always been a neat dresser, but now he thought about it, she'd been a touch more tasteful in her choice of outfits of late.

He wasn't going to tackle Michelle straight away; he'd simply play it cool and keep a watchful eye.

The third inkling came about when Michelle was upstairs and her mobile phone began ringing in the living-room. In the past, Alan thought nothing of picking it up and answering on her behalf and when he did the same this time, he was surprised to find a lock had been placed on the set, with a password required.

"Strange," he thought. "That's never been the case before."

Michelle was clearly flustered when she rushed down the stairs. Her excuse was that a couple of kids had recently tried to use her phone and while in the past, Alan would have thought nothing of it, now it added another tier of suspicion. What should he do?

He could confront her, but she'd probably come up with plausible reasons. No, he wanted to be sure of his ground.

Alan was hardly an expert in subterfuge and he checked through the Yellow Pages before phoning a private detective agency. The cost was hardly cheap; indeed for an ordinary person like Alan, it was decidedly expensive. But this was a case of needs-must! He had to know what was going on with his wife!

He went into town and spoke to a youthful-looking fellow at the agency. So young, in fact, he wondered if the guy was really up to it, but

he was probably being charged a lower price on account of the inexperience.

Alan provided the background to his suspicions and the detective assured him that a huge percentage of their cases involved suspected infidelity. He promised to be in touch by means of a discreet and carefully-timed phone call.

On Thursday, the detective made contact and immediately told Alan his worst fears. His wife had not gone to a Garston gymnasium but instead to a large terraced house in Walton. She'd let herself in and when she'd come out a couple of hours later, a tall guy had come to the door with her. He described Kevin, though that in itself wasn't obvious to Alan.

However when the detective told him the type of car and its registration number, the feeling in the pit of Alan's stomach nearly made him retch.

"Kevin fucking Southwell!" he mouthed. There followed the most horrible sensation.

And suddenly it all fell into place — the Blackpool Union conference, where Michelle had mentioned they'd met.

For the next couple of weeks, Alan kept his own counsel, but everything the detective had told him fitted perfectly his wife's comings and goings.

There was a side of him which wondered what would happen if he put Michelle to the test by seeking sex after her so-called aerobics session, but then he simply couldn't bring himself to go through with it when he considered where she'd just been.

The tension within Alan was growing daily. He really didn't know how he should raise the issue, but he knew there was going to come a moment when something sparked off the whole case and he'd let it all out.

And that's how it transpired. One Wednesday night, Michelle arrived home and looked decidedly flushed — even more than usual. Alan made a comment knowing full-well the implications and, as he anticipated, his wife brushed it aside and declared her intention to get in the shower.

Left alone downstairs, Alan was now simmering with anger. He was so irate that he could feel himself ready to turn violent and he disappeared into his study under the pretext of doing some schoolwork. He avoided all conversation, but throughout the evening, the anger inside him was festering.

Next morning, he read the newspaper over breakfast and went off to school. He was a tad earlier than normal and he sat in his usual place at the staffroom table. By now, his rage knew no limits.

The staffroom was long with several tables laid out together at one end forming a rectangle. In the mornings, staff entered through the door at the opposite end.

As Kevin Southwell appeared a few minutes later, Alan rose from his seat and casually wandered towards the new arrival.

"Good Morning, Alan," said Kevin.

At which, Alan stood before the PE teacher and almost simultaneously butted him straight across the nose and brought his right knee directly into his private parts with all the strength he could muster.

Kevin Southwell collapsed into a heap holding his testicles, whilst blood was oozing from his nose.

For what seemed an age, the rest of the staff were frozen in shock, before a couple of them went to tend to their stricken colleague.

Alan, meanwhile, calmly walked off and out of the door.

The deputy-head rushed from the room and quickly reappeared with headteacher, Geoff Forshaw.

A few minutes later, the two of them entered Alan Pyrer's classroom to find him sitting at his desk with his head in his hands. A teacher had been despatched onto the schoolyard to keep the pupils outside until some kind of decorum had been established.

Mr Forshaw turned to his deputy and asked that he leave Alan and him alone for a while.

"What in God's name was all that about?" asked the beleaguered Head.

"He's been shagging my wife!" replied Alan, his language showing no respect for the status of his boss. "I gave him what he deserves!"

"I think you should go home," said Mr Forshaw. "You go straight to your car and I'll get your coat and briefcase."

Alan made no effort to resist and without a word, walked along the corridor, down the stairwell and out to his car. As he was sitting there waiting, an ambulance was speeding along the road opposite before pulling into the school gates.

Mr Forshaw appeared with Alan's belongings and told him to drive home. "I'll be phoning you Alan, but in the meantime, you should consider yourself suspended!" he said.

Alan started the engine and drove home pretty much on autopilot. Having let himself through the front door, he collapsed in his armchair. He was in a complete daze. He reflected on the events of the past hour and questioned his actions. He realised he didn't have a moment's regret.

"So what happens next?" he wondered.

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