

# THE ELECTRICIAN

## By Mike Hopper

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# CHAPTER 1

## Five Years Ago

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From the day he was born Charlie Jones was ordinary. His name was ordinary; his character ordinary; his looks ordinary.

He was a chubby little child and even adolescence failed to change that same rotund appearance.

Yet for all of these drawbacks, Charlie was a lovely person and just about everybody liked him.

He never came across as one for the ladies and right throughout his teens, while his pals would be regularly seen with a regular procession of women on their arms, Charlie had no attachments. That said, he was popular and welcome in their company no matter what the occasion.

He qualified as an electrician through sheer hard graft and thereafter, because he had so many friends — men and women — he was one of the first names on their lips if they were ever in need of an electrical job fix.

He was self-employed, totally reliable and worked his socks off. His wider skills were limited but he was a very good 'spark' and there was never a day went by when his work diary was not full. Always, he did his level best never to let a customer down, even if it meant working into the evenings.

If a job was for a stranger, he knew the chances were it was one of his own friends who had passed on his name, so he would always do his utmost and never rip anyone off. In fact, some said his charges were too low!

He'd never courted a single girl throughout the whole of his teens until the day of his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, when, completely to his surprise, he was ambushed and dragged unceremoniously into a function room, where it transpired, the guest of honour was himself.

There were a couple of hundred people in attendance and truth be told, he really didn't know how to fully handle the situation. But, having such a gregarious personality, he coped readily.

That also was the night he met Kathy Hogan, a diminutive young woman three years older than him. She

was a headteacher's personal secretary in a local primary school in Sefton, Merseyside. Demure; unassuming; insignificant; but on closer observation, extremely attractive, not least because of her simple charms.

In many respects, for all the contrast in appearances, she was very much like Charlie and the two hit it off instantly. For at least the last hour, the pair danced together, only occasionally pausing to return to their tables for no more than a quick gulp. Unbelievably, at last orders, there were six full pints of beer lined up on Charlie's table.

Truth was, Charlie had become instantly smitten by his floor partner and was enjoying every joyful moment as they danced to the live music. They were the most conspicuous couple on the floor, not least because of the complete contrast in size — he was six foot and round; she a mere five foot nothing and petite.

Finally, the party ended as the clock struck twelve. Yet, for all the enjoyment, his lack of experience, indeed expertise, left him short. It was obvious they had to follow up; to see each other again, only Charlie didn't have the wherewithal to ask Kathy for a date.

Not that she was any more experienced in going out with men, but she certainly knew the protocol and how to conduct herself. So that it was Kathy who retrieved the situation.

"There's a parents' dance next week at school," she said as everyone showed signs of breaking up. "You might know some of them. (It was almost certain he wouldn't, but it was a good line!) Would you like to be my guest?"

And that's how it all began.

Kathy took the lead in just about everything and even began putting his business accounts in order. For weeks and weeks the relationship was basically a friendship. They would go to the theatre together, occasionally to the pictures if there was something worth seeing.

The first time they held hands was when they found themselves caught in a torrential downpour emerging from the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool and ran for shelter. They stayed like that as they waited several minutes in a doorway for the rain to cease. Then, as they walked to the car park, Kathy linked his arm. The togetherness simply evolved.

Their first kiss, a gentle peck, followed that same night as he dropped Kathy off at her house, which she shared with her elderly widowed mother.

On the next occasion, she invited him in and he sat and chatted almost dutifully as her mother was nearby in her armchair.

Kathy had experienced tentative sexual relations with an earlier boyfriend, but, like Charlie, she was awaiting the first time for the real thing to happen.

That moment came when they decided mutually to spend a weekend strolling in the countryside around Rossendale in East Lancashire. It was the Spring Bank Holiday at the end of May and the weather was kind. They had no pre-conceived ideas where to go, but Charlie drove to a gorgeous, remote village he'd come across once before when he'd attended a nearby rally-cross.

They were literally passing a bed and breakfast house and decided to stay overnight. Straight away, Charlie was unsure what sort of a room to book, but Kathy took the initiative and simply asked for a double room.

And that was it. That night, they basically found each other under the sheets and, having done it once, they discovered the enjoyment and from then on, kept on doing it whenever they got the chance.

With Charlie being so much bigger than Kathy, at first there were some contortions, but they soon came to realise these made everything all the more pleasurable.

Suddenly, Charlie was a fresh man. His whole demeanour changed after that weekend in Rossendale and his new-found confidence had no limits.

Kathy took everything in her stride and they made a terrific couple because they complimented each other perfectly. Indeed further to this, Kathy herself took on a new lease of life and as they attended functions, she became inclined, from time to time, to show off her attributes with the aid of figure hugging dresses, much to Charlie's delight. He was as proud as punch of his partner. To him she was as attractive as any model in the social magazines.

The wedding was only a matter of time and once again, the popularity of the couple was evident with the numbers

who turned out for the evening reception. Kathy's headteacher, Philip Crawley, made a belting speech. He was in his late thirties, married, though rumour had it he was something of a ladies' man.

When the decision was made over where to live, Charlie had no qualms about moving into Kathy's house, specifically to make sure that her mother's special needs could be catered for.

As circumstances would have it, the old lady passed away some six months into their marriage.

Within a few months, the couple decided to try and start a family and all their friends were unanimous in believing that the pair would make wonderful parents. However, for whatever reason, the months passed and then the years, but Mother Nature was not being kind to them.

Still, they refused to let it get them down. Kathy continued to work as Phil Crawley's personal secretary, while Charlie was still the self-employed electrician. The only difference was that, as a married man, he could now be relied upon to arrive home on the hour of six every

night. He had a small base-cum-lock-up a couple of miles away in Bootle and he ensured his appointments were timed so that he could drop off all his clobber before heading home.

The couple would eat together at seven and took it in turns to do the cooking.

Basically their existence was blissful, with just the one missing ingredient of a family.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Present Day

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In view of the happy state of the couple's existence, there was no explanation for what happened next.

Their birthdays were only two days apart and in this particular instance, these were falling on a Sunday and Tuesday.

The Friday before, one of Charlie's customers cried off, which left him with a free afternoon, so he called into the market to both the butcher's and the flower shop. In the latter, he bought a gorgeous multicoloured flower arrangement for his wife.

It was only three o'clock, so he thought he'd surprise her and set up the flowers in the centre of the dining table and have a surprise meal ready for when she arrived home from work.

He waltzed through the front door, not a care in the world and was surprised to hear music playing. Then he heard other noises above. He was about to shout, but then wandered up the stairs instead.

What he witnessed was going to change his life forever. The door to the master-bedroom was wide open and there on the marriage bed, was a male backside heaving up and down, with his wife Kathy underneath screaming in apparent ecstasy.

The scene was devastating. The pair on the bed were completely engrossed in their antics and Charlie stood transfixed. He took a couple of paces forward, at which he was able to recognise the man as Philip Crawley. Kathy, for her part, had her eyes closed but was yelling with obvious pleasure as her headteacher pumped away with tremendous vigour.

Charlie had no idea how long he was standing there, but, when the penny eventually dropped, he roared at the top of his voice.

"Nooooo, nooooo, noooo!" he cried. "Noooo, noooo, nooooo!"

Everything in the room seemed to freeze. Kathy was first to register her husband's presence, while Crawley's testosterone levels must have diminished from 100 percent to zero in a single second.

Charlie had no idea where to put himself. He could feel the nausea building in his throat and he dropped the flowers on the floor before jumping three flights at a time down the staircase.

He flung open the front door and fell in a heap on the garden lawn. Then the vomit came up and the next he was rolled up in a ball, not easy for a man of his size.

All the time, he was screaming hurt and continuing to cry out the same word "Nooooo!" repeatedly.

He was totally oblivious to a tall man rushing hurriedly through the gate and racing across the road to a parked car.

Kathy appeared from the front door, now clad in a dressing gown. When Charlie saw her, the realisation that she had nothing on underneath, only served to exacerbate the whole situation.

He turned over into the crawl position and was still gagging, but in reality had nothing left to bring up. His forehead was touching the grass, but he couldn't turn to look his wife in the face.

There was nothing rational about this situation. Theirs was the perfect marriage. Nothing made sense.

Finally he turned to stare at Kathy who was standing close by, looking totally forlorn. What could she say? Even 'sorry' would be inappropriate.

They stayed in the same positions for some considerable time even though they were still out on the garden lawn. The likelihood was that the noise would have had whole neighbourhood peering through their blinds.

Charlie finally screamed at her:

"He was knobbing you! Fucking Crawley! I could actually see him inside you and you were loving every minute of it. His fucking arse was going ten to the dozen!"

Charlie stood up and placed both his arms across his middle as if he was having terrible stomach cramps. His

knees threatened to buckle again but, without as much as a second glance, he forced himself past his wife, back inside the house and up the stairs.

The first thing he did was heave every one of the sheets off the bed. He rubbed his hands as if they were contaminated. Then he opened up the top of the wardrobe and dragged out a suitcase. Within minutes it was full of clothes of every type; nothing specifically selected, just anything half-appropriate which he managed to lay his hands on.

He strode into the bathroom and picked up everything of his that was on show. He raided the cabinets and, with his arms fully laden, returned to the bedroom and threw everything into his suitcase.

He went to the dressing-table drawer and lifted every single money-note he could see and stuffed it into his pocket. He grabbed his passport which was always kept there and, without waiting to see if he'd forgotten anything, he was down the stairs.

He could half-see Kathy sitting all desolate in the armchair. But he wasn't about to say anything. He was

straight out of the door. He threw the suitcase in the car boot and started the engine.

As he drove down the avenue, he had no idea where he was heading. Truth was, he was in no fit state to drive.

## CHAPTER 3

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Kathy heard the car reverse out of the drive and fade away down the avenue. Her body position in the armchair had been still for several minutes and that was not about to change.

She was utterly sick inside and then the bile began to rise as she realised that her body was still defiled by the residue of Philip Crawley.

Why in God's name had she allowed that to happen? She'd worked with the man for years and knew his reputation well. She was more than used to his smarmy charms and had become immune to them. Until, it seems, now.

He'd been asked to attend a somewhat political function on behalf of school and he'd requested Kathy to accompany him. It had turned out so boring that they'd compensated by swilling back sparkling white wine. They'd

escaped at lunchtime, but since they'd both had so much to drink and her house was close, Philip decided to take a chance driving the short distance in order to sober up there.

She'd felt very full of herself and her body was tingling with the effects of the alcohol. When Crawley sat next to her on the settee, she didn't protest and neither did she resist when his arms began wandering. In fact, when his hand slipped inside her blouse, it felt nice. She couldn't resist the urges and, before she knew it, he was carrying her up the stairs.

Charlie wouldn't be home for ages yet, and when Crawley got on top of her, she felt herself having an orgasm. Basically her self-control had dissipated; she was up in the clouds and once naked she couldn't help herself — that is, until she heard Charlie's screams and saw him standing in the bedroom doorway

Kathy had no explanation because it was all so out of character. She was a very straightforward, good-living person and very morally inclined. Yet she'd allowed

somebody whose antics she was well aware of, to take advantage of her.

The worst thing was that she'd not resisted. She'd given in totally and even climaxed for his benefit. No, she contradicted herself. She was the one who'd used Crawley to climax for her own benefit. And that was where the guilty feeling came into its own.

She raced up the stairs and threw off her dressing gown. The shower spray hosed down on her nakedness and though it might have made her skin feel less dirty, when she stepped out and dried herself, instinctively she placed her hands on herself and attempted to eradicate the filth she perceived internally.

Kathy felt contaminated and wanted to do everything she could to destroy all remains of Crawley's bodily fluids.

She dressed only partially and went back to sitting in the same position as before in the armchair. She must have dozed off, because the next thing was, the sun was setting outside.

As her senses were restored, she looked in hope that Charlie had returned. But the darkness in the room told its own story.

She wanted so much to see his face and ask his forgiveness. She'd get on her hands and knees and beg if necessary. She rang his mobile, but wondered if feelings were still far too painful. It went to voice mail anyway.

"Oh Charlie, I'm so very sorry," she said out loud. "Please come back and talk to me."

There was nobody around to hear her pleas and repeated sobs as she cried herself out. She raised herself from the seat and climbed the stairs before entering the bedroom. Straight away, she saw the sheets where Charlie had dumped them and then turned to lie on the bed in the other bedroom.

She slept intermittently. At least it was the weekend and she wouldn't have to face her headteacher.

The phone rang and she raced downstairs. She longed to hear Charlie's voice but unbelievably, it was Philip Crawley

"Kathy, we have to talk," was all she heard. She had never said a word out of place in all her life, but almost out of instinct, she screamed; "Fuck off!" and slammed down the receiver."

After a few minutes, some semblance of reality hit her with the realisation she would have to face the man on Monday. Or would she?

Perhaps Charlie would be back by then. Indeed he might even go into school and smack Crawley in the mouth. But then, what purpose would that serve and anyway, whose fault was it all in the first place?

Adrenalin had lifted her spirits a touch and she refrained from going back to bed. However, she still couldn't bring herself to get dressed in a way that could suggest normality.

Then she considered how she ought to be dressed if Charlie were to walk through the door. She decided for now to stay in her dressing gown.

Kathy's thoughts were so wayward that she wondered if she should be prepared to immediately give herself to her

husband if he did return. But all that did was have her reflecting dejectedly on the good times — the first time; the best times; the attempts to make a baby; to be a complete family.

But before she knew it, she was recalling lying underneath Crawley with the feelings of self-vilification that now came with the vision and memory of it all.

It wouldn't leave her mind. Why did she do it?

Kathy returned to bed without changing her clothes. The forlorn hope that her husband might suddenly appear from nowhere and slip in beside her during the night, was all that kept her going.

## CHAPTER 4

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Charlie just drove. He was in a complete trance and it was only as he sped way over the limit down the M58 past the Skelmersdale slip-road, that he seemed to partially come round.

The trouble was that every time he did so, all he could remember was the sight of Philip Crawley's backside arched in the air and him pumping vigorously into his wife.

What really hurt though, were the sounds — nay, the groans of pleasure and ecstasy — emanating from his wife, her mouth wide open and her eyes tight shut.

His marriage was so secure; every day was there to be lived. He loved Kathy for all she was worth and he was sure that was reciprocated. He could have been the biggest simpleton in the world — and given what had happened perhaps he was — yet he felt sure he'd have sensed if something in the marriage wasn't right.

He thought back to when they'd last made love. It was only a couple of days ago and afterwards they swore their everlasting love to each other. It was utopia, which was why this was such a crushing blow.

It was late afternoon Friday, so that there was the double whammy of rush-hour traffic and people looking to escape early for weekend. It was not a time for any driver to have his mind wandering like Charley's.

He had no idea where he was heading and indeed, wasn't even minded to start planning a route. He just kept on driving.

He soon hit the junction with the M6 and opted to head north by following the sign for Preston. And so, on and on he drove...

For the first time genuine fatigue was beginning to affect Charlie and he reckoned he was going to have to find a place to stay. At the next junction he turned east and drove down whichever main road or country lane came along.

And so, as the sun was setting and twilight was in evidence, he arrived at a small village called Wannley. The deciding factor was a glorious public house called *The Pheasant*. It was willing him to stop, especially since he was now not only tired, but also famished. The sign that stated 'Pub Food' hit home immediately

All of sudden, it was as if the events of the day had temporarily vanished. He sat in the car for a few seconds to collect his mind. His mobile phone rang and startled him; he was still very much on edge. He didn't even look to see who the caller was and, for sure, couldn't bear the thought of speaking to his wife, of all people. He switched it off.

Since it was Friday evening, the place was busy and it was clear many of them were regulars. He ordered an appropriate meal and sat at a table amongst several set out for those people eating. He sought some solitude and found a small place hidden away almost under a small flight of stairs.

He drank a pint and waited for his homemade steak pie. The events of the day were quickly returning. He was in no

mood for conversation, but when a teenage girl arrived with the plate of steaming food, he asked if the pub did bed and breakfast.

"I'll ask the boss," she replied politely.

Soon afterwards, a tall gent with grey hair came over and answered Charlie's question with an affirmative.

By the time he'd finished his meal and added three more pints to his tally, the pub was thinning out rapidly. He sat there only to be joined by the landlord holding a key.

"Room 3, just at the top of the stairs here," he said pointing to the staircase immediately behind the table. "Breakfast is between 8 and 9am. Just come down and sit where you are now." he added.

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Not surprisingly Charlie didn't sleep especially well. It's always difficult the first time in a different bed, but with so much on his mind in addition, circumstances were hardly conducive to slumber.

Next morning he was showered and sitting at his table soon after eight and the same young waitress as he'd spoken to the previous night served him a full breakfast — basically it was as much as he could eat.

He was the only person taking a morning meal and the landlord came over. They chatted informally for a few minutes, then Charlie invited him to sit down in the seat opposite.

"I'm Ralph Webb and that's my daughter, Maddie," he said, pointing to the waitress. "She's just finished her first year at university — Central Lancs — which is just up the road, as they say, near Preston. She's studying English & History and hopes to go into journalism.

"It doesn't half change them. She seemed to grow up almost overnight when she started. I dare say they get up to plenty which has that affect on them.

Anyway, what brings you to this neck of the woods?"

Charlie held back. "Let's just say domestic reasons. I needed to get away to be on my own a while."

Ralph paused then nodded as if with some understanding.

So, are you turning the break into a vacation then? I mean, how did you end up in this place?

"It was literally accidental. I'd been driving a lot and it was getting dark. I was also hungry and I'm really glad I saw this place. Terrific food."

"Thanks," said Ralph.

"My missus walked out on me a few years ago but Maddie decided to stay on here because she was happy at school. She's a godsend when it comes to the holidays.

"Did you just take time out of work?" he asked Charlie.

"No, I'm self employed," came the reply. "I'm an electrician and I reckon a lot of regular customers are going to be disappointed when I don't turn up in the next few days."

Ralph smiled. "It must have been some bust-up for a man to do that," he said.

"You could say that," said Charlie.

"So where next?" asked Ralph.

"You know, I might just stay here for at least another night," said Charlie. "I can't think where I'll get food as good as this."

The pair laughed and Ralph left his guest to himself as he wandered away. A few minutes later he was back.

"Am I to take it that's a booking for tomorrow night?" asked Ralph. "We don't have oodles of visitors but at least I know not to rent your room."

It was a nice morning and Charlie set off for a stroll. The length of the village was such it took a mere twenty minutes to go there and back, but there was an all-purpose store which sold newspapers, so he bought a couple. He rarely bothered at home, so it spoke volumes about his present situation.

There was beautiful rolling countryside all around and when he saw a signpost indicating a footpath, he set off in that direction. "Kathy would have loved this," he thought,

before realising how inappropriate the consideration was. He admonished himself as his mind reverted back to the previous afternoon.

It was midday by the time Charlie returned to the village and, with nothing else to do, he wandered into the pub and ordered a pint from Maddie. He was the only customer, though he assumed the doors had not been opened for long.

Ralph came through to the bar and wandered over to where Charlie was perched on his bar stool.

"You said you're a qualified electrician," he said searchingly. "Could I interest you in helping me out with a couple of jobs," he said. "If you're determined to enjoy your holiday, then I'll understand. But I'll pay you the going rate."

Charlie didn't commit himself one way or the other but nevertheless, asked what the problem was.

Ralph explained:

"This is a very old pub and indeed a listed building, so that, having even minor repairs done is fraught with anxiety because of the red tape. But that doesn't stop the buggers from poking their noses in on a regular basis to ensure everything is in strict accordance with health and safety regulations.

"It seems that much of the place needs rewiring. I wouldn't have a clue, but electricians are in short supply and not only do they want sky-high fees because of their travelling, but also try to take advantage of my desperation."

The landlord looked at Charlie who could be seen pondering.

Ralph continued: "Look, I've no idea how long you're intending to be away from home and I don't know how big the job is, but on top of your rates, I'll throw in free accommodation for the time of the work."

Charlie smiled. "Does that include these delicious meals?" he asked cheekily. "Okay, I'll decide after I've determined what's needed. Then we can talk again."

Then Charlie suddenly had a thought. "I'm just realising that I'll have to drive back to Sefton to pick up all my kit from my base, but we'll discuss it all again when you've shown me the extent of the work."

A little later, Ralph took Charlie on a tour of the whole of the pub and it didn't take the electrician long to recognise why the health & safety people had insisted work had to be done. He couldn't be sure, but at first sight it certainly looked as if the whole place needed rewiring and fresh plugs placed in more accessible and worker friendly locations.

"Gee-whizz!" exclaimed Charlie. "I'm certainly not a person to rip you off, but I have to tell you there's a minimum of two weeks' work required on this place." And he laid out his rates.

"Considering the extent of the work you've described, that's an incredibly decent figure," said Ralph.

"But it does included free board and lodging," Charlie reminded him.

A couple of hours later, that same Saturday afternoon, the electrician was setting off in his car towards Sefton and the lock-up where he stored everything he needed to do his work.