

BOOK
SAMPLE

FISH

Operation
Electric Man

KELVIN RUSH
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Also By Kelvin Rush

Psycho Sid

Jimmy Spence - 8th Of June 1974

Mr Clops & Mr Balls - Silverstone

A World Full Of Zombies

Sweat Bombs Charlie

Crazy World

The Slow Destruction Of Man

The Slow Destruction Of Life

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OUR SHARON'S 18TH

I was sat about halfway up the stairs feeling physically sick. I was also sweating like a pig. 'Guilt Sweat' is what Gran would call it. I was about to be hung, drawn and quartered. That's slightly over the top, but I think you get the picture. It was the moment I'd been dreading for weeks. I'd not slept properly for ages, waking up several times during the night. I'd just be laid there worried sick, my mind racing in all directions. I knew this moment would eventually arrive, and here it was, staring me right smack in the face. But that certainly didn't lessen the blow.

It seemed like only yesterday when I was saying to myself: 'Don't worry, there's plenty of time to get it sorted, something will turn up.' But something didn't turn up, and there

was no more time to get anything sorted. Time had most definitely run out and I was minutes away from disaster.

The second I heard the table legs drag across the kitchen floor, my heart literally skipped a beat, several beats to be precise.

For the moment, time had stood still for Martin Fisher, (that's me). Known to everyone as Fish. Fish was about to be drowned. Up shit creek without a paddle. In fact, I don't even have a canoe let alone a paddle. The electric man is in our kitchen. He's come to empty the electric meter, or so he thinks. We have a slot meter that takes fifty pence coins. When the electricity runs out, we put fifty pence in the slot, turn the handle, and then the electricity comes back on. The fifty pence drops into a box, and the electric man comes to empty it every three months. Everyone on our street has a slot meter. We're always knocking

on each other's doors, trying to cadge money.

'Hello Mr Swift.'

'What do you want Fish?'

'Oh, have ya got a fifty pence coin for the meter please? Dad can pay ya back at the end of the week.'

'No, sorry pal, I had to borrow a quid from Jean next door.'

'Oh, ok Mr Swift, thanks anyway, see ya.'

'Yeah, see ya Fish.'

'Hello Mrs Bannon.'

'Hello Fish, what can I do for you?'

'Have ya got a fifty pence coin for the meter please? Dad can pay ya back at the end of the week.'

'Yeah, no worries Fish, I'll just go and get it for ya. How is ya dad by the way? and how's ya mum? has she still got the flu?'

'Dad's fine Mrs Bannon thanks. Yeah mum's still got the flu, she's been in bed for

the past few days.'

'Oh I'm sorry to hear that Fish, tell her I said hello, I hope she gets better soon.'

'Yeah, will do Mrs Bannon, thanks Mrs Bannon.'

— Mum seems to get the flu a lot these days, and she always looks tired and run-down. Mind you, that's not surprising considering all the work she does. She's always the first up every morning, getting the breakfasts ready for all the mouths that need feeding. She does the packed lunches, and makes sure we all get to school and work on time, and that's just the mornings. She also does all the cooking, the washing and ironing, and keeps the house clean and tidy. We all help out as much as we can, but it's mum who does most of the work. I don't help matters much, when I get into trouble. For some reason trouble always seems to follow me around. I can't think why. Slot

meters may be a convenient way to pay for the electricity, but it's not nice when you're laid in a hot bubble bath, or eating your favourite tea, and all the lights go out. And what if you're watching an exciting episode of Coronation Street, and the telly suddenly goes off? When it eventually comes back on, the programme has finished, and you've no idea who stole Albert Tatlock's carrots from his allotment, or if Annie Walker gave Fred Gee, Betty Turpin, and Bet Lynch a pay rise.

Also in the kitchen with the electric man is my dad. He's sat in his armchair reading the Daily Mirror newspaper. He's smoking a Benson and Hedges cigarette, and drinking his usual pint mug of very strong tea with three sugars. What dad and the electric man don't realise, is that very soon, a large dollop of smelly shit will hit the fan big time. And unfortunately for yours truly, it's heading for

the fan quicker than a Chinese Space Station crashing down to earth.

On this day, the 3rd of September 1978, in approximately one minute from now, (that's how long it will take for the electric man to empty the meter), all hell will break loose in the Fisher household. The electric man and my dad will soon discover, that very little money is in the meter. No more than a few quid I would guess. There should be at least thirty quid in there, which pays for all the electricity we've used.

The electric meter is in the small cupboard in the kitchen. To get to it, you need to pull out the dining table, which is pushed up against the cupboard door. You then get on your hands and knees and crawl in carefully, so you don't crack your head on the concrete ceiling, which we've all done on numerous occasions. We only go in there to put money in

the meter, or when the electric man comes to empty it every three months. To make it even more hazardous, it's also where we keep all our old shoes, boots and slippers, which is quite substantial, considering there are ten of us that live here.

There's me, my two brothers Billy and Robert. My five sisters Julie, Tracey, Sharon, Debra and Brenda. My mum Kathy and dad Ken. I'm 10 years old, the baby of the family and our Robert is the eldest, he's 24. The others are somewhere in between. We're all crammed into a three bedroom council house. Five girls in the first bedroom, three boys in the second, mum and dad in the third.

That's ten people under one roof. Now there's a melting pot, if ever there was one. Living in a crowded house does have its advantages. For one thing, there's always lots of birthdays, and that means birthday cake, and

the possibility of a party. However, there's not much chance of a party anytime soon, as the last one was a right disaster.

— It was our Sharon's 18th, and when she told everyone, it was going to be the biggest and best party ever seen on our council estate, I don't think even she was prepared for what actually happened. As it turned out she was half right. It may have been the biggest party ever seen, but it most definitely wasn't the best. Not only did she invite all of her friends, she also invited just about anyone who knew her. The problem was, they in turn invited their friends. The party started at 7.00pm and by 8.00pm our house and street was swarming with partygoers. By 9.00pm it was absolute mayhem. There were drunken fights, people being sick, teenagers urinating in the streets, and in neighbour's gardens. Screaming and shouting, loud music, and a very strong smell

of cannabis consumed the air. One of the very angry neighbours rang the police, who arrived ten minutes later, mob-handed. Five police cars and two police vans screeched outside our house, just like *The Sweeney*. They quickly rounded up the drunken louts, and made several arrests for drunk and disorderly and drug offences. The police reckon there were at least 150 partygoers, most of which scattered like turkeys on Christmas Eve, just as the police arrived.

Mum and dad weren't even invited to the party. They went to the pictures in town, at the insistence of our Sharon, who didn't want them anywhere near the house. She was eighteen now and a proper adult, she certainly didn't want mum and dad cramping her style. Even the siblings weren't invited. Mum and dad went to *The Roxy* to see the film *Grease*, starring the heart-throb John Travolta and the

gorgeous Olivia Newton-John. They'd already seen the film a few weeks before, but they both enjoyed it so much, they decided to go again. I think the truth was dad fancied Olivia and mum definitely fancied John.

When mum and dad drove onto our street around 10.15pm, the last thing they expected to see were police cars and vans, and officers taking statements from the angry neighbours. However, that was nothing compared to the utter shock they got, as they walked through the front door. The first thing to hit them, like a frying pan in the face, was a nauseating, revolting stench. It was a mixture of urine, vomit and cannabis. Dad was close to being sick himself. He gipped a few times, almost bringing up the hot dog he'd eaten at the pictures. The house looked like it had been hit by an earthquake. Admittedly, it was nothing like the Great Chilean earthquake in 1960.

That earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded, with a 9.5 magnitude. Looking on the bright side, our house wasn't that bad, and at least it was still standing.

Mum and dad were in a trance-like state, as they slowly walked around the house in total disbelief. The house had been well and truly trashed. Dad compared it to the taproom at The Red Lion pub on a Saturday night, only a million times worse. Thick cigarette smoke lingered in the air with no escape, as all the windows were closed. In the living room and kitchen, there were tab ends, beer and wine glasses (some smashed), pickled onions, half-eaten sandwiches, crisps, sausage rolls, pork pies and slices of quiche, strewn all over the floors and furniture. The sofa and chairs had been tipped over, and stood on several times. The glass coffee table had a large crack down the middle. The kitchen sink was full of urine,

with faeces floating on the top. Wine and beer had been spilt over the record player, and all over the units. Vinyl records, including singles and albums, had been used as frisbees and were scattered all over the place. Some had also been smashed into tiny pieces. Even mum's favourite Cliff Richard album had been damaged. She was absolutely livid.

'Bloody Hell!' she screamed. 'They've even had a go at our Cliff!'

All the bedrooms were just as bad. Someone had been rummaging through the wardrobes and drawers, no doubt searching for money. (They'll be lucky, no one has any money in our house.) Clothes, coats, handbags and personal belongings, had all been riffled through, and thrown willy-nilly on the beds and the floor.

They'd also nicked a box of Terry's All Gold milk chocolates, belonging to our Grace. She'd bought them as a surprise present for mum, to

thank her for all the work she does. It took Grace ages to save up for those chocolates.

Mum and dad found our Sharon sprawled out on top of her bed fully clothed, snoring away, dead to the world. There was a large pile of disgusting smelly sick on the floor nearby. She'd obviously had too much to drink, puked up and then crashed out.

'Leave her where she is. There's no point waking her up now. We'll sort all this out in the morning,' said mum.

The next day Sharon woke up with the worst hangover ever. After a real good ear bashing from mum and dad, she spent the whole day cleaning up the mess. All the family helped out, and eventually the house was back to normal. However, the damage had been done, and suffice to say we haven't had a party since.

TIME HAS RUN OUT

Some of the shoes in the cupboard must be at least fifteen years old. There's also my very first pair of football boots, with all the rubber studs worn down to nothing. There's umpteen pairs of slippers, wellies, and even an odd looking pair of ski boots belonging to our Debra, which is slightly confusing as she's never been skiing. I've no idea where she got them from. At the side of the electric meter is the main fuse box and the red power switch.

When the switch is pushed down to the off position, all the power to our house is cut off. I'm familiar with this switch, as I've used it somewhat sneakily in the past to my advantage. I would wait patiently until the kitchen was empty. Then I would quietly pull out the table and crawl into the cupboard. I'd push the

switch down to turn off the power, so all the lights and TV would go off. I would then rush to dad to get fifty pence, pretending the electricity had run out. Finally I would crawl back in the cupboard, and pretend to put the money in the meter, while at the same time pushing the red switch back up. All the lights and TV would then come back on, and I would keep the fifty pence. Mission accomplished. Quite sneaky aren't I?

However, as with most deceptions it had its flaws. Firstly, I had to make sure that I was the one who got the fifty pence from dad. If any of my siblings got there before me, the plan would be ruined. Secondly, I had to time it just right. If I turned off the power using the red switch, and then shortly after the power genuinely went off, I would have some serious explaining to do.

That's exactly what happened recently,

which is why I can't do it anymore. I got the fifty pence from dad, quickly crawled into the cupboard, and pretended to put the fifty pence into the meter. I then turned the power back on using the red switch. Unfortunately for me however, the power genuinely went off thirty minutes later. By which time I'd left the scene quick as a flash, and scarpered up the street.

When I returned to face the music several hours later, dad was furious. I got no pocket money for a month, not to mention a good old whack around the left ear'ole, which left my ear ringing for a good few hours after.



The electric man removed the money box and emptied the contents onto the kitchen table. 'This doesn't look right,' he said to dad, sounding rather concerned. Dad peered over the top of his newspaper, a little anxious.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

‘Well, there’s only a couple of quid in here. That can’t be right for three months worth of electricity. According to your meter readings, there should be well over twenty quid in here.’ I didn’t wait for dad’s response. At that split second, I would have been quite happy to be swallowed up by a black hole, and never seen again. However, there wasn’t much chance of that happening, so I did the next best thing. I legged it. I shot up from the stairs, flew into my bedroom, and quickly pushed open the window as far as it would go.

I climbed onto the windowsill and crouched down, tucking my knees tightly into my chest. I took a deep breath and leapt into the air like a mad monkey, before desperately grabbing hold of the drainpipe. I’d done this a few times before, when I’d sneaked out of the house after being grounded, but it was still quite scary. I knew that if I missed the drainpipe, I would

end up crash-landing on the concrete ground below, and I certainly didn't want that to happen. I clambered down the drainpipe, jumped over next door's privet hedge, sprinted up the garden path, and then straight across Mrs Place's allotment, trampling all over her cabbages in the process. I then ran as fast as I could to the local park. You may be wondering where all the electric money had gone. Here's what happened.....

I've got this mate called Peter Goodwin, everyone calls him Goody. Goody is a bit of a character to say the least. He's been nicked a few times for shoplifting, and selling stolen goods, and he's well known around our estate for all the wrong reasons. That being said, he's a good mate of mine, even though mum and dad hates me knocking around with him, and won't have him anywhere near our house.

Goody was the one who taught me how to

break into our electric meter. He'd been stealing money from his own meter, and had never been caught. I went to his house a few months ago on a Thursday night, for a demonstration. I know it was a Thursday night, because that's when his mum and dad go to the Ring O' Bells pub, for a few drinks and a go on the tote. They go every Thursday night without fail, leaving Goody all on his own in the house. The electric meter was on the back wall, in the small cupboard underneath the stairs. I eagerly watched with amazement, as he removed the money box from the electric meter, and began extracting fifty pence coins.

He started off by removing the two screws on either side of the meter. Each screw had a tightly twisted piece of security wire sealed around it.

He carefully untwisted and then broke each wire, using a pair of electrical pliers. He then

used a screwdriver to remove the screws. To get to the money box, he had to remove the black steel casing around the meter. The money box was attached to the steel casing with rivets, so it all had to be removed. He did this by pulling and twisting the steel casing vigorously several times to loosen it, before finally yanking it away from the meter. To get the money out, he turned it upside down and shook it like mad, until the money fell out of the slot. He also used a small butter knife, which he poked into the slot to release the money. After he'd removed a few coins, he then meticulously put everything back in its place. On close inspection of the meter, I could clearly see that the screws and wire had been tampered with. But according to Goody no one ever noticed, and he'd never been caught, so who was I to argue?

He eagerly picked up the coins off the floor,

shoving them firmly into his jean pocket.

‘I never get too greedy,’ he said. ‘If you get too greedy you’ll get caught. I never take more than a couple of quid out each month. That’s why I’ve never been caught. Even when the electric man comes to empty the meter, he never suspects anything.’

I left Goody’s house full of excitement, and was already working out a plan of action. If I could get a few quid from our electric meter each month, that would be brilliant. Despite the possibility of getting caught and suffering the consequences, the temptation was too hard to resist. This would be one of my biggest challengers to date, and needed some careful planning. It also needed a name. I would call it ‘Operation Electric Man.’

I’d already gotten into mischief in the Fisher household on numerous occasions, but I’d never done anything as big as this before.

One of my tricks was to steal a cigarette from dad's packet without him knowing. He would often send me to the local shops to buy his cigarettes. He always had 20 Benson and Hedges. The packet was wrapped in cellophane and had two flaps stuck down at the top. I would carefully open up the flaps, shove the top of the packet through, open the lid and take out a cigarette from the back row.

I would then rearrange the remaining cigarettes to try and hide the small gap, where the stolen cigarette had been. Finally, I would close the lid, gently push the packet back down, and stick the flaps down with spit. The spit lasted just long enough for me to get back home, and for dad to open up the packet, unaware of the deceit.

Unfortunately for me however, I got greedy one time, and took out two cigarettes. I got rumbled when dad removed the cellophane,

opened up the packet, and noticed a small gap near the back. He then proceeded to count eighteen cigarettes, wondering where the other two were. I tried to plead my innocence, but it didn't work. I lost two week's pocket money for that little stunt. Suffice to say from that moment on, the trick was obsolete as dad meticulously counted the cigarettes every time.

One of my other tricks was actually quite skilful. When I was younger, mum and dad would always get lots of chocolate decorations for the Christmas tree. They were usually chocolate santas, chocolate bells, or chocolate snowmen. I could steal a chocolate from the tree, without anyone knowing. There were enough chocolates on the tree, for each sibling to get two each, (although for some reason that never seemed to happen). Considering there were eight excitable siblings in our

house, it was a miracle that any of the chocolates made it through to Christmas day.

Mum and dad always put the tree up on the first Sunday in December. That Sunday was one of the most exciting days of the year. Not quite as exciting as Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day, or even a birthday, but it wasn't far behind. Even normal Sundays were kind of special in our house. We always had a traditional Sunday dinner, with roast beef, Yorkshire puddings, roast potatoes, two or three veg, and thick gravy. Mum cooked the best Sunday dinner ever. Her roast beef melted in the mouth, and her Yorkshire puddings rose higher than Blackpool Tower. On the odd occasion when mum couldn't cook the dinner, (like when she spent time in hospital, having her thyroid seen to), dear old Nan stepped in to do the honours. I'm not being funny, but our Nan's cooking wasn't a patch

on mums. Her roast beef was as tough as leather. You could have easily got lockjaw after chewing Nan's roast beef. Our Billy said you could make a pair of football boots with it. And her Yorkshire puddings weren't much better either. They were as flat as a nun's fart, and they tasted like one as well.

Sunday dinner was always dished up at 1.00pm on the dot. Some of us would be sat at the dinner table from 12 o'clock onwards, just in case it was served early. By 12.50pm everyone would be in their positions. We all had our own places at the table. Mum sat at the top, dad was at the bottom, and four siblings were on either side. It was always the same routine. We'd all have an empty dinner plate in front of us, and in turn we'd pass the plate to mum, who would fill it with all the delicious grub, before returning it to the hungry recipient.

Dad always got served first, then it was the

eldest sibling, right down to the youngest, (that was me). By the time I got my dinner, dad had nearly finished his. Mum always made sure that everyone got plenty of food on their plate. On many occasions there wasn't much food left, by the time she served herself.

That's what mum was like. She was always thinking of other people, and we sometimes took advantage of her good nature, and we also took her for granted. I remember on one occasion, we were all sat at the table waiting for our Sunday dinner. Because it wasn't ready by 1.00pm, all eight siblings started banging on the table with knives and forks, singing: 'Why are we waiting!?' Why are we waiting!?' It was like a scene from Oliver Twist. Mum wasn't impressed, although she did see the funny side..... eventually.

So when the first Sunday in December finally arrived, it was a double celebration. A

lovely Sunday dinner, followed by an exciting afternoon of sitting on the settee, watching mum and dad putting the Christmas tree up, and all the decorations. Life just doesn't get much better than that. The tree was stood on the coffee table in front of the window, next to the telly. We'd had the same tree for years.

When it was removed from the box, it always looked a bit old and shabby. But by the time mum and dad had finished with it, it was a work of art. They meticulously decorated the tree with a selection of baubles, silver and gold tinsel, flickering red and yellow lights, chocolate decorations, and finally, the icing on the cake, dear old Matilda, our loyal and trusted fairy. She'd been sat on the top of our tree for as long as I can remember. According to dad, Matilda was over a hundred years old.

She'd been passed down from generation to generation, along with the Christmas lights.

Dad said not one of the Christmas lights had ever blown or packed in, and they'd never stopped flickering once. He said they don't make lights like that anymore.

Our tree was easily the best one on the street. We couldn't wait for it to get dark outside each night, so we could turn the lights on. You could see the tree through the window when you walked past our house, and I often saw people standing there admiring it. We even left the curtains open until mum and dad went to bed around midnight.

One of the best things about the tree, was the chocolate decorations. You'd be watching the telly, then all of a sudden, your eyes would glance over at all the tasty chocolates dangling from the branches. The colourful wrappers would sparkle against the black and white television screen. Inevitably one of the siblings would get all excited. 'Mum, can I have a

chocolate santa from the tree please?’ Mum would shake her head. ‘No you can’t, you can have one on Christmas day.’ The sibling tried again. ‘Dad can I have a chocolate santa from the tree please?’ Dad would shake his head.

‘What’s ya mother just said? You can have one on Christmas day.’ Minutes later someone else would have a go. ‘Mum can I have a chocolate snowman from the tree please?’ Mum would get annoyed. ‘How many more times!?! No! You can have one on Christmas day!’

The temptation to nick a chocolate from the tree was overwhelming. We didn’t have a lot of chocolate throughout the year, so Christmas, Birthdays and Easter, were always special occasions. Of course you couldn’t simply nick a chocolate from the tree, you’d be found out straight away. That’s because we all counted the chocolates on a regular basis, (three or

four times a day on some days). We protected our two chocolates like they were the crown jewels, and woe betide anybody who tried to nick one. There were also countless arguments and fights about who was getting what.

‘I’m having a chocolate snowman, and a chocolate bell,’ announced our Brenda.

‘No ya not!’ snapped our Robert. ‘There’s not enough snowmen for everyone, and you had one last year.’ Our Brenda was having none of that. ‘No I didn’t, you liar! I’ve never had a chocolate snowman, that’s why I’m having one this year!’

‘No ya not! and I’m not a liar, cos you did av one last year!’

‘No I didn’t!’

‘Yes ya did!’ And so it went on.....

You had to really think outside the box, if you wanted to nick a chocolate from the tree, without getting caught. That’s just what I did.

I could easily remove a chocolate from the tree without anyone knowing, no problem. Here's how I did it.....

To successfully carry out the deception, I needed the living room to be empty. The only time that happened was when everyone was in bed. The last television programme finished around midnight. Soon after, mum and dad would be the last ones to go to bed. I would then sneak downstairs when I was certain everyone was asleep.

Sometimes I would lie awake until two or three in the morning, just to be on the safe side. Once I was in the living room the fun would begin. I would remove a chocolate santa from the back of the tree, and then carefully undo the wrapper, to release the scrumptious chocolate inside. I would then take a small piece of toilet paper, and spit on it to make it moist, before manoeuvring it into the empty

wrapper. Although it wasn't perfect, after a slight adjustment here and there, santa didn't look too bad, (albeit a little out of shape). Once it was placed back on the tree it looked perfect, (from a distance that is). With the chocolate santa in hand, I would then go back to bed and snuggle under the bed sheets, savouring each bite of delicious creamy milk chocolate. In the end, I only took two chocolates from the tree, which I would have been getting on Christmas day anyway. So it wasn't really stealing was it?

When Christmas day finally arrived, and I was allowed to take my two chocolates from the tree, I knew exactly which two to take. I'd positioned them right at the back of the tree next to each other. I'd take off the wrapper and pretend to eat the chocolate, before discarding the wrapper and the toilet paper in the bin. I'm sure I saw our Sharon do the same

one year, although she always denied it.

Another trick of mine, was to take a can of pears from the pantry, and pierce a tiny hole in the bottom, using a screwdriver and hammer. I would then drink all the sweet sugary juice, before returning the can back to the pantry. When mum opened up the can several weeks later, the pears didn't smell right and the can had started to rust. Mum was confused to say the least.

'Well that's funny,' she said. 'There's no juice in these pears. I've never known that before. There's always things happening in this house.'

Then there was the time when dad made a load of mince pies for Christmas. — Dad's mince pies were the best, far better than the ones you got in the shops. Dad's had a lot more filling inside, and the pastry was tastier too. In fact, dad's mince pies were famous on our

street. All the neighbours got at least one at Christmas, and I never heard anyone ever complaining.

Dad put all the mince pies in a plastic tupperware container, and put it on the top shelf of the pantry, ready for Christmas. He told us he'd put a sixpence in a few of them as a treat. Thinking there was money to be made, one night when the kitchen was empty, I sneaked into the pantry, and opened up the tupperware container. I proceeded to remove all the lids from the mince pies, trying to find the sixpences.

Having removed all the lids, with not a sixpence in site, I left the crime scene confused and disappointed. When the container was opened up on Christmas eve, all the mince pies had dried up, thanks to me not putting the tupperware lid on tightly enough.

As it turned out, our Debra had got to the

mince pies before I did, and nicked all the sixpences. She was caught out, when mum found the money in her trouser pocket, while she was doing the weekly wash. Dad got his sixpences back, and our Debra got a stern telling off. Had it not been Christmas eve, I'm sure the punishment would have been much more severe.

As you can clearly see, there was always something going off in the Fisher household. And with eight siblings to control, mum and dad certainly had their work cut out.

END OF BOOK SAMPLE