



## The Pedestrians

By Paul Eccentric

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'Course they're all dead now'

'Murder?'

Well now hold on a minute. Let's not be hasty. Have you never heard of extenuating circumstances?

From the beginning?

Well...I don't know. Where did it start? Like anything else, I suppose. One thing leads to another, you know? You don't think about things starting at the time, you only see that later, in retrospect. You see - they were always there. Even before I knew them, I was aware of them. I must have seen them even then, just glimpsed them out of the corner of my eye. Like road signs on a route that you travel everyday. You know they're there, but you don't actually see them every time you pass them. You wouldn't notice if they suddenly weren't there. Furniture? Yeah, that's probably a good analogy. They were just a part of the background scenery. They'd have had to be bouncing off my bonnet for me to have noticed them. When did I first see them? You mean actually see them, don't you; recognise them; realise that I knew them, yeah?

Well... I suppose it would have to have been the time when the captain got hit by the airport express. I saw him go down. 'First time I'd seen him without his cap - I'd never thought of him as a baldie before. Odd, really.

But that was the first thing that struck me. There he was sprawled across by the bypass in a tangle of splattered fruit and veg and I all could think about was 'where's his hair?' I'd kind of built up a picture of him in my mind, standing on deck behind one of those big steering wheels, one hand guiding the boat, the other holding a brass telescope to his one good eye.

Did he? Did he really? Well that just shows you how much I hadn't noticed him, doesn't it. Two

eyes, you say. Ha! So no eye patch, then. Hmm. Suppose not. That would be silly. No, I know that now. But he did look like a captain, didn't he. He had that weather beaten, leathered skin look, and the beard. You must have noticed the beard?

He lived on one of those old house boats down on the canal. Well no. I know he doesn't actually live there, I know that now, but at the time: the time of his accident, that's where I thought he lived and that was where I thought he was going. Yes, that was what I told the police. I didn't know his name at the time, but I'd seen him about so often that I felt I knew him. I was only trying to help.

And the librarian?

Well, again, I always passed him in the same spot on the same day. Very punctual he was. No more than five minutes walk from the library, and only seven minutes before opening up time. Give him a minute to unlock, switch off the alarm and collect the post; a minute to hang his duffel coat and his bag in the cloak room and he's ready to serve.

No, that wasn't the only reason I thought he was a librarian . I told you. I never really looked at these people, I just kind of took them in, you know: subliminally. He had this hair - almost to his belt. Wiry, smelly and grey. He tied it back in a ponytail. And a beard. Yes another beardie. But unlike the captain's muffler, this one was like...Jesus'. And he wore clogs as well. Wooden clogs. Tie die t-shirts in the summer and a scarf like Doctor Who's in winter. What else could he have been? What other job would've employed him?

No. But then I never went in the library, did I. He played the guitar too. No, I never actually heard him play it,... but it was obvious wasn't it?

I always wanted to be able to play the guitar. I thought maybe he might teach me. Her? You mean the witch? Nah, I never liked her. I didn't like that look she always gave me. That supercilious: 'I've got your number' look. Contemptuous. Like she held me personally responsible for her life of pain and misery.

Yeah. She noticed me alright. No, she never spoke to me. She didn't have to. That dismissive sneer of hers said it all. She had a flat somewhere; a council flat. I was paying for it, of course, well: we all are really. She liked that. It was a kind of punishment for all these things she thought I'd done to her. She pulled out in front of me on that rusty old bike of hers.

That's right, the one with the wicker basket and the kiddie seat, no indication, she just looked at me. Like she was putting a hex on me. Like I'm supposed to just realise the extent of her

powers and just let her in!

No. Emphatically no! I do not hate women! I only followed her because...well you know why I followed her! For the same reason I followed The Assassin.

Well, no, of course they didn't find a gun. He's a professional! He may have fooled you, but remember - I saw him every day. I notice things. That nonchalance - it was just a façade! He was furtive. Yeah. That's what struck me about the assassin. He thought he was a master of disguise; thought he could just blend into the crowd, but I had his number! He always wore just the right things and they were always new, but I've seen plain-clothes policemen looking more natural. A classical musician?

You know your problem, don't you: you're too damn trusting! No, that's what we're supposed to think. That was his cover. It was the classic double bluff.

There was no strad' in that box, y'know.

Well, no. I didn't see his gun either, I told you, this bloke's good! I mean, how many self respecting hit men walk around with an Uzi inside a violin case these days, I expect it's all done with mirrors.

Hate them? No I didn't hate them. I looked upon them as my friends. Well, except for the witch. I didn't like the witch. I even felt sorry for some of them. Hmm? Well the roadie for a start. Poor guy. He just looked so aimless. But you can see it in his eyes. I've got a sixth sense for that stuff, you know. I see someone and I just know where they've been; what they've done - who they are. The roadie had really lived. In the seventies. He'd been into everything. He was a real pleasure seeker. Then one day he just took too much. He woke up late and the circus had left town. They'd gone without him. All he had were the clothes he stood up in. so he sobered up there and then. He's spent the last thirty years waiting for them to come back. Poor guy. Ready meal dinners for one. He lost his mind. He couldn't quite believe they'd do that to him. He still wears that same tour shirt. He's got the same haircut and cut off denim jacket. I feel for him. They're never coming back, you know. The band split up in '74. Nobody told him.

Nobody made me follow them. They intrigued me. I saw these people on a daily basis, like I said. I felt I'd got to know them. You know, like they were old friends. I waved to the captain the next time I saw him - 'was a while later, mind. He had a bit of a limp by then. Ha! I dunno, I think they might've taken his leg off; given him a wooden one. Yeah, I waved at him. I tooted and waved. And 'you know what he did? Two fingered salute, that's what!

I don't know. Did he recognise me from the incident? Maybe I just shook him up with my air horn. Who can tell? So you've said. So they said at the time, but I suppose that's why I decided to follow him. I wanted to explain. I hadn't run him over. I'd helped pick him up! And I'd told the police everything I knew.

Well who was to say? He could have been lying. Maybe he hasn't got a mooring license, maybe he smuggles stuff - I don't know why he gave them a false identity. So I followed him. I didn't stalk him like the papers said. I just followed him one day, to see where he went.

I was practically a mate! I saw him everyday of the week - had done for longer than I could remember.

No, I didn't know his name!

Is it relevant?

I followed him home. I just wanted to see where he lived. That was all.

Nothing sinister. I didn't break in, no.

He didn't invite me in either.

I sort of...*fell* in, I suppose. No, I didn't hit him: I *blocked* him.

Yes. That was when he hit his head, yeah.

I caught him as he fell, sort of, overbalanced and found myself inside.

I didn't take anything. Yeah. I had a bit of a look 'round. Just tat, really : bric-a-brac. A bit chintzy. Not the sort of stuff I'd expect of a sailor. No, I didn't report it to the police. Well, I hadn't realised he was...you know. I thought he'd just knocked himself out. Well, because he was a liar, wasn't he. He'd have blamed me! He already had them convinced he was a retired chemist!

And the librarian?

Hmm. Well that was just stupid. I asked him to teach me to play the guitar. He didn't have to react like that. We were mates. Well...sort of. No I didn't know his name!

He was a civil engineer? Well I don't know how well that pays, but he looked like he could have done with a bit of extra cash. I was offering to pay him. I know he said I was trying to mug him,

but I offered him money. He could've just said no. He didn't have to swing that bloody rope bag at me. No, he fell. It was those clogs of his. He'd have made it to the other side if it hadn't been for those stupid wooden shoes. No. I don't think he saw the lorry. Wouldn't have made much difference if he had.

Alright, so maybe the witch was deliberate. She was always doing it, stepping out on crossings or pulling out in front of me on that bloody old bike! It wasn't murder. I hadn't planned to run her over. She just didn't look where she was going. Alright, well I'll admit I might've made a slight miscalculation when I tried to pay the assassin to kill the roadie. I'm not a killer, alright! I just wanted to help him: to put him out of his misery. No, look! You've asked me that before and I told you then. I'm not a serial killer. There's no link between these people. They were just always there. They got on my nerves!

They were just...pedestrians!