

6: Que sera, sera

The actor, Paul Eddington, who appeared in *The Good Life* and *Yes, Prime Minister*, to name two of his famous TV appearances, once told a story about getting into a black London cab. The driver, on recognising Eddington, smiled knowingly to himself.

“Ere,” the driver said, “You’re that geezer off telly, aren’t ya?”

“Yes,” said Eddington, a little wearily.

“Yeahhh, I’ve had ‘em all in ‘ere. You know who I ‘ad the ovva day; sat right there?”

Eddington nodded his head politely, and glanced forlornly at the newspaper in his hand.

“Bertrand Russell,” announced the man in the driving seat.

Eddington became almost interested.

“Really?”

The driver’s pace changed as he approached the denouement of his story.

“So, he’s a philosopher right? So, I asks him, “What’s it all about, then?” And he didn’t fucking know!”

There is only one thing we can know for sure, and that is this; we will all die. But the sometimes scary, though possibly inspiring truth, is that most individuals do not know when. However, you may be surprised to hear that although my father didn’t know when, all of my family knew exactly; date and, pretty much, time as well. No, we didn’t murder him. Many of us may have wanted to at various times in his life. In fact I’m sure I heard my mum tell him so, several times, but the truth is we all loved him, and his passing, although in some way at our hands, was an act of love not criminality.

My father never took life too seriously. If I had to guess as to why this was the case, I would say that he saw no need to burden himself with responsibility, when so many people around him seemed willing to do this for him. He had discovered that, unlike himself, most people find it hard to let things slip, so, he encouraged their natural willingness to pick up the debris he left in his wake.

He was a big man who drifted through life in a hedonistic coma that pushed him nearer and nearer to the cliff edge of instant happiness, but inevitable self-destruction. His mother had slowed his self-annihilation a little, but was too busy with her own weaknesses to have much effect. And so it fell to his wife, my mother, to grab this leviathan by the horns and hold him, more or less, on a righteous path. And that, sadly, was the fate of so many women of my parents’ generation.

In many ways he was an eternal child, and this, in an adult body, gave him a neurotic sense of life, which we children adored. I remember driving past some local shops, with a friend. Suddenly, he pointed to a particular store shouting,

“My god, look at that bloke in the window!”

There was indeed a bloke in the baker's shop window who appeared to be demolishing the display. Rolls, bread and cakes were being shot into the air like fireworks in a frenzy of self-expression.

Apparently, my dad had been arguing about a loaf of bread with the bakery's owner. My dad insisted that the loaf, bought earlier, was stale. The baker, unwisely, disagreed. My dad's frustration grew until it tumbled over his low threshold of reasonability and engaged him in diplomacy by other means. After tearing up the disputed loaf, and scattering the pieces Hansel and Gretel-like onto the floor; much to the shocked amazement of the other shoppers, he found himself less satisfied than he had hoped. Therefore, in my dad's child-like logic, it became necessary to make a definite point and annihilate the window display; a performance witnessed by my friend and I as we sailed past in my car.

"Ah, yes," I said casually to my passenger, "That'll be my dad."

I rarely felt embarrassed by my dad's antics. For me, he was my very own Tommy Cooper. A big bulk of a man with a large red face on which was a naughty smile that he had stolen from his childhood and refused to give back.