

Person of Interest

By Michael Percy

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WEBSITE SAMPLE 11 OUT OF 18 PAGES

Characters

Mark Hale, husband to Eleanor (early 50s)

Eleanor Hale, wife to Mark (early 50s)

Abigay Lee-Beauvais, police detective sergeant (30s)

Patrick Gibson, detective police constable.

Penny Hughes, Eleanor and Mark's daughter (30s)

Notes: The script mentions a front door and a front window in the scenes set in the Hale family sitting room. These are not shown, only referred to. Exits to and from the front door should be consistent. The window (referenced but not shown) looks out to the front garden so should be consistent with the exits to the front door.

Scene One

Police interview room. Table, chairs. Mark Hale is standing away from the table, waiting, fidgeting, angry.

Enter Sergeant Beauvais carrying a notebook and a folder and two coffees which she puts on the table.

Beauvais is brisk. Mark is contained.

Beauvais: Apologies for the delay Mr Hale.

Mark: I've been here hours.

Beauvais: Yes, nearly two hours. I'm sorry. I got you a coffee. There's some sugar, in case... Take a seat. *(Beauvais sits.)*

Mark: *(Not sitting.)* So, what's going on?

Beauvais: My name is Detective Sergeant Abigay Lee- Beauvais...

Mark: You said, before. Unforgettable name.

Beauvais: Possibly. *(Beat.)* We've been talking to colleagues about you - how we should proceed. That's taken some time.

Mark: Right. So can we get on with it?

Beauvais: You agreed to answer some questions about an incident in Dorset while you were on holiday.

(Mark leans over the table to interrupt.)

Would you allow me to finish please. Thank you. An offence has been committed in Dorset which we are helping our colleagues there to investigate. Certain facts –

(Mark makes to interrupt a second time.)

please let me finish – certain facts indicate you may be able to help with that investigation.

Mark: What ‘facts’?

Beauvais: That will become apparent in due course. I have prepared a series of questions and the sooner you provide the answers... well, can we just get on with it? Would you sit down - please.

Mark: Right. *(Sits.)* Okay.

Beauvais: I need to establish your movements last Friday.

Mark: The whole day?

Beauvais: Best to start at the beginning.

Mark: Why, what are you looking for?

Beauvais: Please... Allow me to lead you through this. It will be quicker.

Mark: Okay. Friday. We went to the beach because it was the last day – we were in Dorset, week’s holiday – a caravan park near Lyme Regis. They call them caravans – more like mobile homes, you know? The kids love the beach, and it was a lovely day.

Beauvais: So you were on the beach all day with your family?

Mark: No, actually. Only in the afternoon. They went to the children’s club in the morning, my grandchildren. Making things, meeting the animals – that’s people dressed as lions, and bears, not real animals.

Beauvais: Were you with them?

Mark: Not in the morning. I joined them on the beach, later.

Beauvais: I see. So where were you in the morning when they were at the children’s club?

Mark: I went for a bike ride. I Always take my bike and the kids’ bikes as well on holiday. We go exploring.

Beauvais: Is it always that way? You go off elsewhere when your grandchildren are at the children’s club?

Mark: No. Look, every year we have this week with the family by the sea – me, my wife, my daughter and her partner plus the grandchildren. We go to these family orientated places – lots of stuff for the kids. Pools, all sorts of rides and activities. it’s great to be with the family by the sea for a week. Especially while the kids are small.

Beauvais: So why weren’t you with them on that particular Friday morning?

Mark: I was – a bit pissed off over something that happened the day before. Nothing to do with the family, I had a run-in with the management.

Beauvais: Of the holiday resort?

Mark: Yes.

Beauvais: What was that about?

Mark: It was ridiculous. I was taking pictures of my grandchildren – they were putting on costumes as part of a little play they were going to perform. You know, kings and queens and witches – our Steven was going to be a troll and Gemma was a princess. Everyone was taking photographs – all the parents.

Beauvais: And?

Mark: Apparently, someone made a complaint. About *me* taking photos. So I stopped.

Beauvais: Did everyone stop?

Mark: No, just me. The manager was a twat.

Beauvais: How did you feel about the complaint?

Mark: It was bloody annoying. I like to make little photo albums of these holidays and give them to the kids.

Beauvais: What happened between you and the manager?

Mark: Ah. I get it now. Is this about our little argument? Has he made a complaint? Ridiculous, nothing happened – nothing violent. Nothing *physical*. Is he saying it did?

(Mark looks for a reaction from Beauvais but gets nothing.)

It was a verbal dispute. Maybe raised voices but no more than that. There were dozens of witnesses. My family included. Not one of them will say it was violent.

Beauvais: Run me through what happened.

Mark: The manager claimed people – other parents – had complained about me taking photographs. That's what the manager claimed but I don't believe him. I think it was all because I was using a big camera, big lens. Photography is a hobby of mine. All the others were using phone cameras. And I may have been a bit ... I don't know... more active than the others, trying to get good shots.

Beauvais: The reason you came to our attention was that the manager made a formal record of both...

Mark: Both!

Beauvais: Yes. When there are incidents of this nature involving children...

Mark: Children! Little kids? Is he saying I'm some sort of paedophile?

Beauvais: He simply recorded the incidents. It's company policy when an incident involves children. The issue appears to be that you were photographing other people's children.

Mark: Yes, well you could hardly avoid it, they were all playing together. Doing the dressing up thing. I don't believe there was a complaint. I think the manager was being a job's worth. All these stupid regulations we have these days.

Beauvais: So the only reason you weren't with your family on Friday morning, at the children's club, was because of the incident with the manager the day before?

Mark: Yes.

Mark: Where did you go on Friday morning?

Mark: I went for a bike ride.

Beauvais: How long was this bike ride?

Mark: I went about ten. Got back about three.

Beauvais: Five hours.

Mark: Yes.

Beauvais: That's a long ride.

Mark: Not really. I thought this was about me and the manager. What's the bike ride got to do with anything?

Beauvais: We simply need to get a picture of your movements. Where did you go on this bike ride?

Mark: The coastal path. Out past Pinhay, West towards Seaton. Get a bit of lunch and come back.

Beauvais: Is it fair to say you could do about ten miles an hour on your bike.

Mark: Yes, ten. Maybe a bit less.

Beauvais: So that's about forty miles in total?

Mark: Maybe, normally. But not that day. I had a puncture. Split the tyre in fact, on some rocks. No way to fix it.

Beauvais: And, of course, you can't just phone the AA.

Mark: No. of course not.

Beauvais: This puncture – what time did it happen?

Mark: Not sure. Just after eleven, thereabouts.

Beauvais: So about ten miles along the coastal path?

Mark: I guess so.

Beauvais: You say you couldn't fix the tyre, so what did you do?

Mark: I locked the bike to a fence and walked over to the coast road. I thought I might call a cab. Then drive back in my car and collect my bike.

Beauvais: So the cab company can confirm this?

Mark: No. Some bloke came along and gave me a lift. What's this got to do with the manager?

Beauvais: Do you have this man's details? His car registration?

Mark: No! He was just a bloke who gave me a lift.

Beauvais: Was he a local or was he on holiday?

Mark: I've no idea. He was on his phone most of the time, so we didn't chat.

Beauvais: Did he have an accent?

Mark: Not that I noticed. Come to think of it he wasn't local, I don't think. At least, I don't remember that sort of Dorset... drawl, twang I suppose you'd call it. So probably on holiday. He dropped me near the caravan site and went on his way.

Beauvais: Age?

Mark: Young – ish. Twenty-five maybe. He had a woolly hat like they wear.

Beauvais: Ethnicity?

Mark: White, white and English, I guess.

Beauvais: Colour of the car?

Mark: Dark? Maybe dark blue.

Beauvais: All this time did you see any other people, any other cars?

Mark: I passed people on the track, you always do. A few.
I suppose there was traffic as we drove back. Didn't take any notice.

Beauvais: Why would he stop if you were just standing there?

Mark: I gave him the thumb, like a hitchhiker. Why not? He thought it was funny – me dressed for cycling - joked about me forgetting my bike.

Beauvais: Did you phone your wife. Tell her what happened?

Mark: No. I just wanted to get it sorted.

Beauvais: Did anybody witness you have this puncture?

Mark: No. I said, you don't see many people up there. I could see straight away there was no chance of fixing it. A puncture is one thing, a rip... no chance.
Why are you so interested in the puncture – my bike ride? This is about the manager – right? Something's happened to him. Somebody give him a good hiding?

Beauvais: No, not the manager. While you were out on your bike ride, a child disappeared from the caravan park. Otley Hill caravan park.

(Mark is shocked.)

Mark: On... on Friday?

Beauvais: Yes.

Mark: When on Friday?

Beauvais: About the time you had your puncture.

I'm very sorry Mr Hale, but so far, you've been unable to give sufficient information to provide an alibi for the time in question... Combined with the incidents the day before involving children I'm afraid...

Mark: What..? You think... God no... No way.

Beauvais: Bearing in mind that, at the moment, you can't satisfactorily account for your whereabouts that morning, you will now be arrested and formally charged so that we can make further investigations. More questions I'm afraid.

(Mark is stunned, this is too much to take in.)

We will be applying for a warrant to search your property.

(Mark can only sit, motionless. Beauvais stands, collecting her papers etc. She does not look at Mark.)

Scene Two

The Hale family sitting room - evening.

Eleanor is slumped in an armchair looking through a sheaf of papers. She hears something outside and gets out of the chair quickly.

Eleanor: Mark?

(Enter Mark wearing his coat, carrying a newspaper. They hug to reassure each other.)

Eleanor: Oh Mark, you've been there all day. What happened? They came here you know, all day, searching, taking stuff. All the computer equipment. All your cameras. Bike. All the dirty clothes from the holiday. They went through everything. These are all receipts.

Is it over? It must be over.

(Mark takes hold of the receipts, flicks through them.)

Mark: I'm released on police bail, while they do further enquiries. Looking for evidence that I'm a... paedophile.

Eleanor: What?

Mark: When they'd finished with me today, they told me what happened, and it's serious. While I was out on my bike, a child was abducted.

Eleanor: So you're a witness?
(Mark shakes his head.)
They can't think you did it? Not you...

Mark: Somebody abducted a child – and I was in the area. Alone, no witnesses.

Eleanor: *(Sudden realisation.)* Oh God Mark.

Mark: What?

Eleanor: I think... I said... something stupid.

Mark: What?

Eleanor: They asked me what you were like on the drive home and if you did anything unusual when we got back.

Mark: And?

Eleanor: I told them, you were fine all the way home – like normal. But I said... this morning... you cleaned the car.

Mark: Oh fuck Eleanor. Why?

Eleanor: I'm sorry, I didn't know what was going on. The policeman – we were just chatting – it just slipped out. I thought it was funny because you never clean the car, you always get it valeted. I didn't know! I told him I always teased you about the cost. It was a joke.

Mark: They probably think I was getting rid of evidence.

Eleanor: God Mark – a child!

Mark: *(He tosses the newspaper to Eleanor who begins to read.)* Look at that – front page news. It talks about *persons of interest*. No names.

Eleanor: *(Reading.)* The poor parents...

Mark: Until they get the bastard that did this, well, I'm in the frame. Suspect number one.
(Eleanor carries on reading.)
I wish you hadn't mentioned cleaning the car. Bound to make it worse.

Elaine: But if they think you abducted a child – they'd search the car anyway? Wouldn't they?

Mark: Not very fucking helpful though. Is it?

Eleanor: But I didn't know what was...

Mark: But telling them! Giving it to them on a plate. Just watch what you say next time.

Eleanor: Next time?

Mark: The next time they question you. This isn't over. They told me not to go anywhere. They've got my passport. I'm on bail... pending enquiries Eleanor!

Eleanor: Should we get a lawyer?

Mark: Why should I do that? I'm innocent. I just went for a bike ride. That's all. I'm only a suspect because I was off the radar for a few hours when I had that puncture. Once they get their act together, they'll realise I'm telling the truth. For fuck's sake EI, I'm not a nonce. A bloody pervert. It was that manager - he made a report, it's *company policy* apparently, anything involving children. He must have given it to the police. I'm not a... paedo EI.

Eleanor: I'd know... if you were like that... You can't hide that stuff from a wife. I'd know. I'd know Mark. Of course I would.

As soon as they've checked your computer and your phone, they'll know you're not... one of those. That's how they always get them. These paedophiles have thousands of images of children on their computers. Filthy images. And that's *not* you.

(She takes Mark in her arms.)

It'll all be over soon. And then they'll have to apologise. You wait and see.

Mark: I've got to go to work tomorrow... it's all over the papers.

Eleanor: Not your name though. Just go in as normal, do your work like you always do. You've got nothing to hide – it's just... bad luck – wrong place, wrong time.

Scene Three

The house, living room, next day.

Mark enters from the front door dressed for the office. He has a shoulder bag and a large cardboard filing, box both of which he dumps on the floor. He pours a glass of whisky and downs it. Then he pours a second glass, downs that and slumps into an armchair.

(Enter Eleanor.)

Eleanor: Mark! What's happened? Why are you home so early?

(Eleanor crouches next to him by the armchair.)

Mark? Talk to me.

(She eases the glass from his hand. He snatches it back.)

What happened?

Mark: I've been suspended.

Eleanor: *(Jumping up.)* What for? They've got no right to do that. They can't get away with it. Mark! This is not right. It can't be legal.

Mark: *(Mumbles.)* Fucking police.

Eleanor: What?

Mark: FUCKING POLICE.

On Sunday, the police got hold of Jonathan, made him open up the office - on a Sunday afternoon Eleanor. Can you believe that? They're still there now, going through the fucking whole system in case I used it to store images... you know. Or look at websites.

(Pause.)

Nobody had the fucking common sense to ring me and tell me to stay at home. So I waltz in like it's a normal day, like we said, and everybody's just sitting around because they can't access the system while the police search it. Jonathan had me in his office to keep me out of the way. Said he was waiting for instructions from head office. I should have fucking walked out then. I had to sit and wait like a naughty schoolkid. When head office rang, they said... they said it was in my best interest to stay away from the office. Because of the stress I'm under - stress - fuck me! The company are going to support me - they say - by granting me indefinite paid leave. *(Scoffs.)*
Compassionate leave!

Eleanor: Oh Mark.

Mark: They wouldn't even talk direct to me - Jonathan passed it on. The worst bit was... *(He breaks down. Cries.)* ...was walking out of the office...with everybody... staring at me. Even the receptionists knew - I could see it in their faces.

Eleanor: Oh Mark, Mark... How could they know?

Mark: It wouldn't take a fucking Hercule Poirot to work it out. I go on holiday to Dorset, the kid goes missing - in Dorset. And then the police are all over the office and I get suspended - keep away until it's proved you're not a paedophile. If it ever gets proved.

(Mark moves to get another drink.)

Eleanor: Easy with the drink, Mark. Please.

(Mark at the sideboard. Pours a large drink which he downs in one - staring all the while at Eleanor, defiantly.)

Mark: What's the point. I haven't got to get up in the morning. They offered me counselling.

(He kicks the cardboard box on its side, spilling his personal items from his desk.)

Fucking brilliant! I don't need counselling. I need my job back. I can't sit at home brooding about it, dodging the fucking neighbours, with fuck-all to take my mind off things.

(Mark slumps into the chair. Eleanor picks an item from the box – it is a family photo.)

Scene Four.

The sitting room, several days later. Eleanor is on the settee, distracted and moody.

(The doorbell sounds.)

(Exit Eleanor to the front door.)

(Enter Eleanor and Beauvais accompanied by Gibson.)

Beauvais: This is my colleague DC Gibson. We have a few more questions for your husband.

Eleanor: He's out back. Gardening. Well he's not... He won't go out where there are people, and he can't bare being in the house all the time.

Beauvais: Can you fetch him please?

Eleanor: *(Makes to leave but stops.)* Can I ask you, how long will it take

Beauvais: Ten minutes maybe.

Elaine: No, I mean all of it. It's killing him, being suspected of... *that*. You know?

Beauvais: I understand. It must be awful - for you both.

Eleanor: So how long will it take to clear his name? Let him get back to work?

Beauvais: It's difficult. Can I just say... It would help him to have somebody to represent him – a lawyer. We've already explained it all to him but...

Elaine: ...He's pig headed.

Beauvais: He refused to see the duty solicitor. Talk to him about a being represented. It could speed things up, you know?

Eleanor: Get his name cleared you mean.

Beauvais: I didn't say that. Our colleagues in Dorset are focussing on finding the driver who gave Mr hale a lift. But you've got to understand here are many lines of enquiry and, if I'm honest, limited resources.

Eleanor: So he's not... not a main suspect – or you'd concentrate on him, wouldn't you?

Beauvais: Don't put words into my mouth – all I'm saying is, encourage Mr Hale to find a lawyer, things might move faster for you. Talk to him...

(Enter Mark from the garden.)

Mark: Talk to me about what?

Elaine: A lawyer, Mark.

Mark: Are you lot going to cover the cost of a *good* lawyer? Are you? They said I could have – what did you call it?

Beauvais: The duty solicitor.

Mark: Fucking useless. I was going to have to wait until he arrived. Very busy he was. I wanted out, Eleanor – OUT!

Beauvais: I was explaining to Mrs Hale...

Mark: ...Is my car back?

Beauvais: Not as far as I know. I'm afraid I have a few more questions for you.

Mark: Oh for fuck's sake...

Eleanor: We really need to have some good news Sergeant.

(Beauvais produces a notebook and glances through the pages.)

Beauvais: Our colleagues in Dorset need some clarification on a couple of points.

Eleanor: Clarification?

Mark: Are you telling me you are just a messenger? You ask me questions, it goes to them, to Dorset, and then it comes back to you to come here and ask for *clarifications*. And meanwhile we wait! Fuck me!

Eleanor: Mark! *(Now to Beauvais.)* You don't seem to realise what we are going through here.

Mark: This could take years to sort out. You're just a... a bloody messenger.

Eleanor: Take it easy Mark please. Let's hear the questions – just listen.

Beauvais: It's mainly about the puncture. They've sent a map - could you mark exactly where it happened. And the time, as best you can.

Mark: *(Snatches the map. Speaks to himself.)* You've been on this a week - now are you asking where it happened.

(Angrily, Mark considers the map, marks it and throws it back at Beauvais.)

Beauvais: Thank you. And where exactly did you reach the road and get picked up.

(Mark marks the map again and throws it back.)

Beauvais: Thank you. We also need to ask you where the punctured tyre is. We didn't find it in our search of your property.

Mark: I threw it away. It was ripped. Not punctured.

Beauvais: So where is it?

Mark: It's at the tip by now, I threw it in the bin.

Beauvais: It wasn't in your bin when we searched it. Your bins weren't emptied until yesterday. So where is it?

Eleanor: Mark?