

Life in the country of Perfection

The ideal society with nothing to do and everything to sell is reconstituted from the ruins of dead slag heaps and fossilised chimney stacks, grassed over and crossed by architectural paths with sculptures like giant marbles lined in meandering arrays. As I left the Safeway Superstore and emerged precariously from parked cars to ask an earphoned young lad the directions to Argos for a mobile, on realising I needed more instructions on what I want, I left for lunch.

Finding I had reached the high street, pock-marked with a sparse assorted assemblage of people in transit, I strode past its curvilinear frontages preserved in quaint resemblance of a past era.

I heard a sound but to begin with I could not locate it. Entranced like a mesmerised insect enticed to a web, I sought out the sound of Peruvian pipes, dancing seductive melodies in the cool late morning air. Tossing a million into a plush decorated bucket, another figure beckoned.

‘Big Issue’.

I looked at a tattered bag containing coins.

‘The cost is two million’.

‘I do not read the Big Issue’, I replied, ‘but here’s a million anyway’.

The response was in Arabic, but I was not sure.

A journey to Tesco ended up in the coffee bar with some Columbian bananas. A diversion to Oddies gave a gooseberry tart and some Lancashire Parkin. The Swan Inn was not far away.

At six o’clock I went upstairs in the Swan Inn. The bar had begun to be open and two guys were in conversation over a beer. I introduced myself as Dogshitt. One replied

‘I am Todd Fromm. This is my husband Mark. We have been married for 15 years. I liked some aspects of your Kareoke night last night. Your ideas are quite innovative – you did a piece?’

‘Yes’ I replied.

‘I think we can form a musical relationship. I have enough finance to develop this a lot further. That is a bit forward, but I say what I mean, I mean’.

‘You have an American accent – links with the US?’

‘Yes, I feel an affinity to your work – it is fun. My great grandfather was Erich Fromm. He wrote ‘The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness’ for the US government. He was a Freudian Marxist. It was ideologically correct in the Roosevelt era’.

‘I would like to introduce you to Warren. Warren – this is my friend Tom Ford.’

‘No, that is my after-shave. I am Todd Fromm.’

‘I am quite enthusiastic about this music’, I said, ‘but I need to be more down-to-earth. It is LSD without the acid.’

As rap music night was in delicious mid-fart at the Swan Inn, I, Dogshitt, decided to avoid the moonlight and inspect the smoking dog-butts of shop doorways.

A little man with a cardboard notice saying 'homeless – please help' and a paper cup inhabited one of them.

'Hello Douglas' Dogshitt spoke out.

Douglas looked up, not only for money, but a missing friend. There seemed to be a status attached to who stood up and who sat down. I insisted on sitting down on the cardboard next to him.

We had a conversation with him eating my banana. We had a joke about the Security Service MI5, and called the Social Security Mi1. They had separated him from his wife and family and disposed of him in a neighbouring town where he did not have the bus fare to meet them. He had refused, and thus sat on the doorway from the street to the closed shop door.

I knew of friends who could help, but I was a stranger to the town myself. I could not contact them by mobile, and they did not know me well enough, so there was nothing to do. Next day I promised cheap and nourishing meal at Oregano's restaurant.

I had enough money. More than he would expect went in his cup, but it was not much to me. My regret is that after Oregano's I never saw him again. I wanted to get him a room somewhere after he had left (but later I found this was probably impossible for someone in his state – he would not be allowed accommodation with only me to pay – he would need references I could not give).

The first time we had a conversation, I spoke of my interest in the ancient scientists Newton, Copernicus and Aristotle. He seemed pleased with the talk. Later, he said he did not agree with Einstein, who came much later and is thought to be, and was, rather clever. I said after 54 years I had reached the same conclusion. It was only at the subsequent breakfast next day that he revealed he had read an interesting book on the topic, for which I took a note but I think I have lost it.

I had decided I had had enough. Yes, the funeral parlours in the society of Perfection had closed down and their proprietors had retrained as accountants. But that was not everything.

A society with Eternal Life needs an Eternal Soul. This was distinctly lacking.