

Polar Opposites

I must admit that I am becoming fed up with the worsening financial condition of the UK. The news on the television is simply appalling and there are millions of people lurching into poverty due to rising inflation, food prices and heating costs. There seems no end to it and it reminds me of the many times I have experienced such periods during my long life. It got me thinking.

Peter Balls had the largest belly of any drinker; he consumed copious amounts of beer on a daily basis after he had finished his work of cleaning the streets. On his way home, he would adjourn to his favourite pub and sit there until closing time; sometime with as many as 3 pints of ale on the bar in front of him. His wife had long ago abandoned him because she felt he was a fat slob and, in any case, she had found a younger man to do the business. Fortunately, and mainly to his 'brewer's droop' he had not managed to sire any children; probably most fortunate, under the circumstances.

Every Saturday he headed down to the bookies, met up with his mates and gambled on the horses. Afterwards, they all retired to the pub to play darts, drink themselves into a drunken state, tell dirty jokes amid ruckus laughter; before being thrown out at closing time. During the evening, he would often be seen standing at the front door of the pub smoking a cigarette in a cloud of smoke. He often held court at the bar and addressed his mates in the usual manner, *"these politicians are all wankers; we are paying over the odds for our petrol and diesel, Shell is making shit loads of money from us and the government is planning to hit Shell with a 'windfall tax' and all our money will go to the government to help pay for the debt they created. It is a form of tax on all of us. And what about the poverty, the foodbanks and the cost of living?"* His mates would cheer him on; Jackie Smith shouted, *"fucking right Pete, those bastard politicians are all wankers."*

When Peter was not down at the pub, he was either cleaning the streets or lounging on a worn-out sofa in his sitting-room, scoffing beer and crisps, while watching the television. He would order in a pizza, perhaps a KFC chicken bucket and when the news or a politician on the TV angered him, he would throw empty beer cans at the screen. Many would wonder if Peter Balls was happy and the answer was, yes, he was not only happy, he was very happy. He enjoyed a grand life, free from any responsibility; his job was simple and he made quite a bit of side money from the coins he often found lying in the gutters.

Johnathon Smethurst had just returned from climbing Mount Everest and his friends cheered him as he entered his private club in Bond Street, London. Sitting down, the waiter brought over his brandy and said, *"jolly well-done Mr Johnathon, quite an achievement, if you don't mind me saying so?"* Johnathon nodded his approval and sipped his drink. His friends gathered around and they all sat down on chairs beside him. Cary Carruthers opened up, *"quite a lot been happening old bean, since you have been away. Inflation is going through the roof, the Bank of England is raising interest rates*

and the blasted government is preparing to hit Shell's huge oil profits with a windfall tax, so we can say goodbye to our shared dividend in Shell. I guess the CEO of Shell is having a fit right now? On the other hand, the overall share prices in our portfolios are going up, so I guess it is a win, win?"

Justin Cromwell piped in, *"I filled the Range Rover up with petrol the other day and it cost me well over a hundred pounds. It forced me to rethink my overall strategy of my business. I held a meeting and the board all agreed that we would have to raise our prices on our goods and pay ourselves more to make up for the shortfall."* Edward Popplewaite chimed in, *"quite bloody right old sport, let the plebs suffer in their poverty. I have shifted most of my dosh abroad. I am all for the government but there is only so much that a fellow can stand. The politicians have got themselves in a right old mess with catastrophic government debt and are caught between a rock and a hard place. They can raise interest rates and create a depression with massive repossessions of cars and houses or borrow and print more money which raises inflation and creates a higher cost of living."* Johnny Ross-Homes commented, *"hah, hah, let them eat cake, who the fuck cares, I am alright. Mine is sitting in a bank in Monte Carlo; I am heading over there to my flat for a few months, even a few years; especially, the way things are developing in the UK."*

Johnathon Smethurst smiled and looking around at his friends he said, *"I think I will head off tomorrow and enjoy partying and scuba diving in the Bahamas for a year. I must get away from it all to more pleasant surroundings. There is not much point in living in a country that is depressed both financially and in spirit. I think I will take Samantha Snickerless with me; after all, a man has to keep on top and she is a top-notch mare."* His pals burst into ruckus laughter much to the disapproval of the club chairman, who gave them a dirty look.

In the end and for all his financial wealth, Johnathon Smethurst fell off a mountain in Tibet and when he hit the ground his guts burst open like a ripe blood red melon; he was only 35 years old. As for Peter Balls, he was found lying dead on his sofa at 65 years of age. His mates had missed him at the pub and the bookies, and after 3 weeks, they decided to investigate by breaking down his front door. Jackie Smith threw up all over Pete's body when he saw the magots, the bones sticking out through rotten flesh, and the smell was just awful.

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